

Virjerab Sar 2022 Expedition Report

By Murilo Lessa

Once upon a time in a far far away corner of Pakistan, Philip De-Berger and I made the first (integral) ascent of P5880*** (36.031132, 75.693247) in the Sim Gang Glacier.

Our initial plan was the first ascent of Virjerab Sar (6497m) but extreme heat, bad snow conditions and severe crevasses blocked our access to the peak on the two occasions we attempted its North (Virjerab Pass) and East cols.

Peter Thompson (expedition leader), Philip and myself arrived in Askoli on Jun 18th. We started our approach late morning of the following day after severe issues in recruiting enough porters - we ended up with a "hybrid" team made of porters and mules.

We reached Baintha on the 2nd day where we spent 2 days sitting the weather and allowing porters to rest (from a previous carry up to Broad Peak). On our 5th hiking day, we planned to arrive in Carpogoro but a sudden turn in the weather stopped us a good hour short, in Marfogoro. It became obvious that the porters - and mules - would only take us one more day ahead, in Carpogoro, still 16km far from our planned BC, and around 26km from Virjerab Sar's ABC.

Due to the long hikes and heavy loads involved in reaching Virjerab Sar from Carpogoro, Peter decided to leave the expedition the following morning. (I felt I would be unable to make the carry and would hold them back, but I encouraged them to proceed. PT) Me and Philip pressed ahead and reached Carpogoro that same day. We had to wait another day for the rest of our gear to be delivered by the porters, who had to do another carry between Marfogoro and Carpogoro since the mules were unable to come all the way.

On the 27thm with rucksacks weighing over 30kg and food for 7 days we left towards Virjerab Sar's ABC. Soft snow and intense heat made snow shoes essential. We reached ABC 2 days later. On 29th we made our first attempt in reaching the North col separating Virjerab Sar and P6443. After a few hours it became obvious that the glacier was too broken and the snow bridges too unstable to allow us to reach the initial slope that gives access to the col.

The following day we tried again, this time by the West col. We again realise that the lack of stable snow and large crevasses made that also an unviable option.

Because of the heat we were doing 11pm starts and climbing through the night so navigating the crevasses took a long time and our window to find our way through them was very limited. By 10am we would be in the tent sitting in the heat with temperatures up to 30°C inside for most of the day.

Believing the easier peak South of us (P5880) was still unclimbed we decided to pack our tent and head 6km down the glacier, camping right at the bottom of the basin which gives access to it. On Jul 1st, at midnight, we started towards the summit. My thermometer was registering 14°C! We used snow shoes from the basin all the way to the rim and then switched to crampons and axes, simul climbing all the way to the top. My GPS recorded an altitude of 5905m.

By 3rd of July, we were back at BC and on the 5th, we met the porters who helped us back to Askoli.

*** The only mention of P5880 dates from 2011/2, when it was first climbed by Pierre Neyet. He climbed it again in 2012 with clients but on both occasions, he stopped on its pre summit, still a long way from its original summit. I believe we took the same line as Pierre but from our research it looks that we are likely the first people at its top. Ref:

<http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/13201212922/Dom-Brakk-5830m-and-Panoramas>

Photo Descriptions

A: Initial approach up the Biafo Glacier

B: Half a way through the crossing of Snow Lake towards Virjerab Sar

C: Approaching Virjerab Sar heavily loaded. Virjerab Sar is the peak in the middle and both its North and East col are visible.

D: Virjerab Sar

E: View of our route up P5880. The pre summit it's on the far right and the main summit right at the back.

F: View of P5880 North Face. It is the peak on the left

G: At the top of P5800

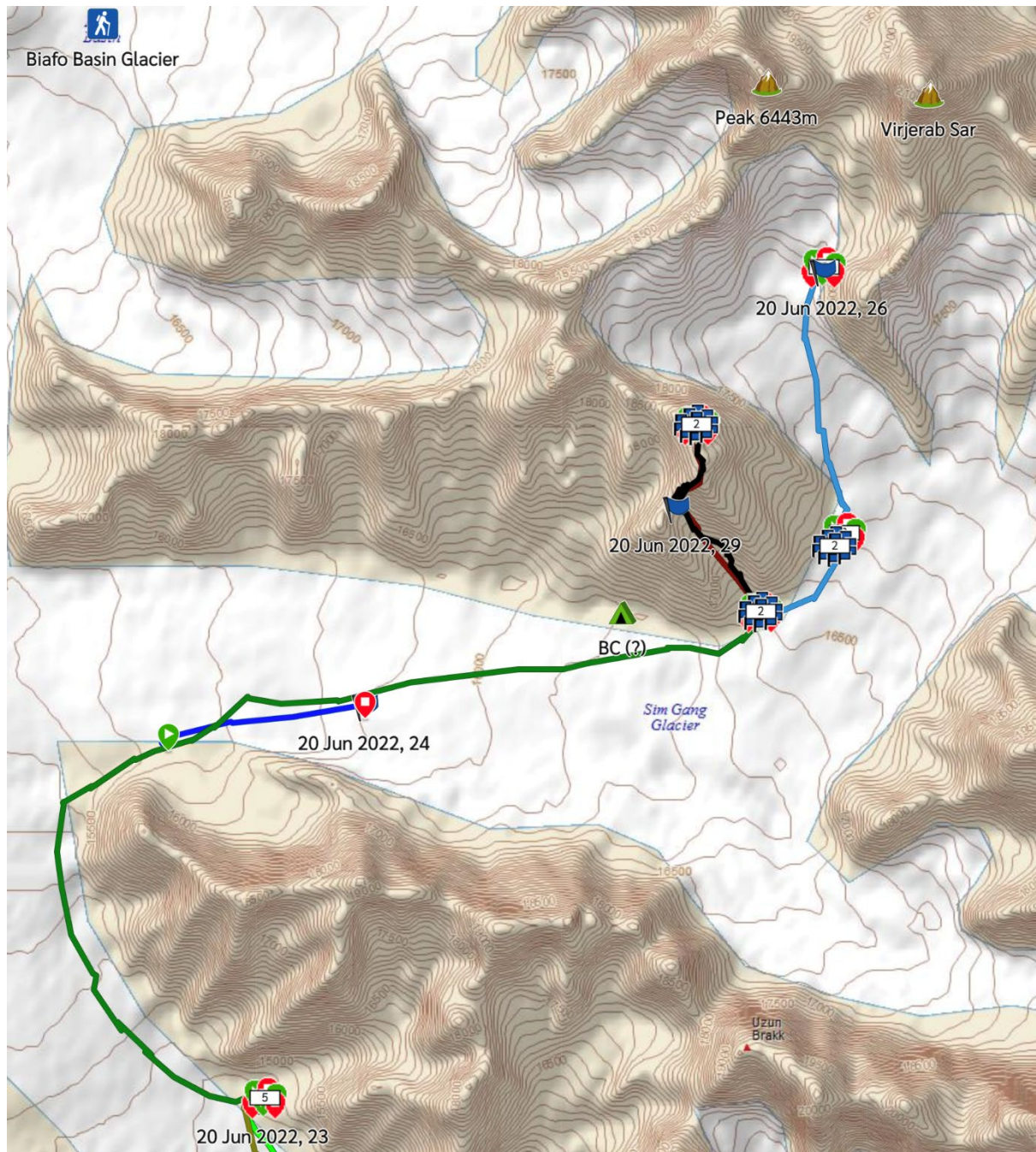
H: Map of our progress











Further information from the grant application

By Peter Thompson

Objectives:

To make the first ascent of Virjerab Sar 6,601m by the southern slopes to the Virjerab Pass (North Col in Murilo's report) and then by the west ridge, climbing alpine style.

To make the first ascent of peak 6,443m by the southern slopes to the Virjerab Pass and then by the east ridge, climbing alpine style.

Google Earth coordinates:

Virjerab Sar 36.070169° 75.726702°

Peak 6443m 36.071534° 75.703330°

Planned base camp 36.009860° 75.682574°

Background Information

The expedition will be exploratory as our two objectives have not been climbed or even attempted as far as I can ascertain. Our main objective, Virjerab Sar, is a significant peak as it is the highest peak in the extensive Virjerab Glacier watershed area. There are about thirty-two 6,000m peaks in this area and only two of them have been climbed. Virjerab Sar has a prominence of about 1,160m with Baintha Brakk being its parent peak.

The first recorded ascent of a Virjerab peak I can find is in 1991 when John Nankervis' New Zealand expedition crossed the Khurdopin Pass from the Lukpe Lawo Glacier (Snow Lake) onto the East Khurdopin Glacier and climbed the highest peak above the Second West Virjerab Glacier, peak 6,410m on the Soviet map. In 2012 a Polish team made the first ascent of a 5,900m peak they named Khushrui Sar, approaching from Shimshal. In 2015 an Anglo/Irish expedition made the first ascent of the Harjoldur Sar 6,104m, approaching from Shimshal.

Our objectives are 6,601m and 6,443m on the Soviet map. Virjerab Sar is also 6,601m in the Himalayan Index. On Jerzy Wala's 2017 Virjerab Muztagh map Virjerab Sar is 6,601m and is called High Peak. On the www.himalaya-info.org website Virjerab Sar is recorded as 6,590m. This is the first place where I have seen the peak named as Virjerab Sar. Google Earth heights of our peaks are 6,563m and 6,403m.

The first time the Virjerab Pass was visited was probably in 1991 by Duncan Tunstall and a British team who approached from the Sim Gang Glacier (Snow Lake). It wasn't until 2019 when Mobeen Mazhar and a Pakistani/Shimshali team walked up the full length of the Virjerab Glacier and made the first crossing of the Virjerab Pass 5,945m, and went down the Sim Gang and Biafo glaciers.

Budget

Expedition Costs £		Expedition Income £	
International travel	2600	Number of members	3
Domestic flights and transport	1050	Amount of personal contributions	Balance
Permits and peak fees	800	Details of grants already approved	MEF 5550 Alpine Club/Montane 1150 BMC 2800
Guide, cook and sirdar	800	Other sources including sponsors	Members
Expedition member's insurance	1600		
Porter and staff insurance	400		
Food and fuel (base camp and above)	870		
Agency fees if applicable	815		
Porters and pack animals	2250		
Hotels, food	600		
Total	£11,785	Total	£11,785

Acknowledgements

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