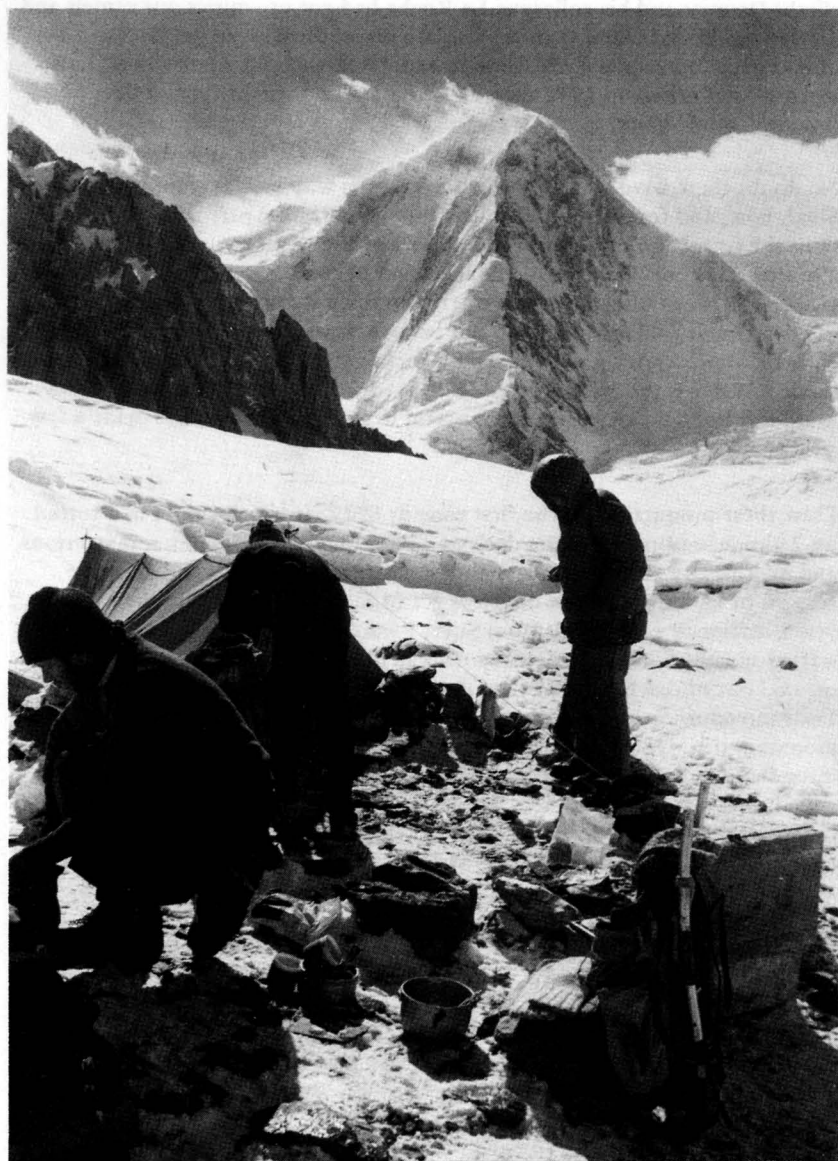




49 Sia Kangri from Base Camp. This and next photo: W. Stefan

Sia Kangri (7422 m) 1974 Diary

Wolfgang Stefan

On 14 July my Swiss comrade Peter Liechti and I met Heidi and Albin Schelbert, who had just arrived from Switzerland, in Rawalpindi. Due to bad weather the next day we decided to leave by road for Balakot. From there we reached Skardu with a rented Jeep via the Babusar pass and Gilgit in $3\frac{1}{2}$ days.

20/7 After settling the formalities of police registration and purchasing porter provisions we were again on the move. A Jeep brought us 4 miles short of Dusso where the Braldo river had flooded the road. After $2\frac{1}{2}$ days' hard walking we reached Askole with 11 porters.

23/7 We had to exchange our Dusso porters for new men from Askole. Two more were required to carry the additional 100 pounds of ata (local rye flour). We left the same afternoon and arrived at the end of the main Baltoro glacier (named 'Concordia') after 7 days.

30/7 On the first sight of K2 our porters wanted to return. We paid them off and kept only 2 whom we provided with boots and some warm clothing. Now we had to carry the equipment ourselves following the Upper Baltoro and the Duke of the Abruzzi glacier.

2/8 The Base Camp was established at around 4950 m. The 2 porters went only to an intermediate camp on the moraine of the Abruzzi glacier where we released them the same day.

3/8 Albin, Peter and I started for a first reconnaissance on the SW ridge of Urdok 1. After 2 days' snow-fall and with the weather still looking unpromising we decided to change our plans and to climb Sia Kangri from the SW. The weather remained bad till 7/8 with a lot of snow-fall.

8/8 For the second time we plodded through deep snow towards the Conway Saddle and established Camp 1 at around 6100 m about 650 ft below the saddle.

9/9 ('The lost day'). We made an unsuccessful attempt traversing above the Conway Saddle on the S slopes of Sia Kangri S peak. A 150 ft high partly overhanging ice-wall stopped our attempt at about 6550 m. In spite of the spectacular view of the peaks of the Siachen glacier we returned discouraged and shifted Camp 1 to a small plateau, 300 ft above the original site. Now everybody agreed on a route up an open couloir which I had already proposed earlier.

10/8 At 6.30am we left for the couloir starting some 1000 ft above our camp. The steps prepared by Albin and Heidi the day before helped us a lot but soon

the hard work of plodding in deep snow started again. Higher up the route seemed without difficulty. However we had to climb a steep slope covered with 'schwimmschnee' (very loose snow with a hard crust) before we reached an ideal site for Camp 2 protected by a solid sérac at approximately 6850 m. Soon our small two-man tent was pitched. We had left the second one at Camp 1 in order to reduce our loads to a minimum.



50 Towards Camp 1, Golden Throne behind

11/8 Jammed like sardines during the night, we were happy to leave the tent at 7am. Unfortunately I vomited just after drinking a little hot Ovaltine; my stomach was upset due to the rapid climbing and bad acclimatisation. It was bitterly cold on the SW face and I was forced to take off my boots and massage my toes. My comrades had no problem as they all used special double boots. For a long time we could see Sia Kangri summit above us but it took us hours to reach the highest point. Heidi was very little effected by the altitude and she broke the trail a great deal. We stopped for a short rest at the only rocks on the whole snow face, a few feet below the top. Climbing over the ridge and a steep hard snow-slope with crampons we reached Sia Kangri SW summit at 1pm. Standing on the watershed between the Baltoro and Siachen glaciers we

had a splendid view into China. The Urdok glacier originating from the slopes of Hidden Peak leads into the Shaksgam valley. Due to rising clouds and a strong wind we decided to descend as quickly as possible and not to cross over to the 600 ft higher N summit which had been climbed from the Abruzzi saddle. At 3pm we had returned to Camp 2. Albin and Heidi descended shortly thereafter, while I was packing up the tent with Peter. Only at 5.30pm we were ready to leave. Climbing down as fast as possible we still had to belay on the steepest pitches. As we finally stood at the upper edge of the couloir above Camp 1 Heidi and Albin had already reached the tent. There was not much time to watch the colourful sunset on the peaks of the Upper Baltoro and Abruzzi glaciers. The last daylight faded and in the dark we returned to the tent guided by the footsteps of our comrades.

12/8 After the sun had reached our camp we prepared for the descent to the Base Camp. Except for the first part, the snow conditions had much improved. Peter and I decided to leave the same afternoon. Albin and Heidi had to wait till the porters arrived from Askole. In spite of being tired we enjoyed the walk through a scenery whose grandeur is almost impossible to describe. We could not reach our old camp site on the centre moraine of the Upper Baltoro before dusk. We scrambled a short portion in the dark, but found it too dangerous and stopped for the night.

13/8 To our surprise we met the 4 porters at the old camp site. We had expected that they would ascend on the right side of the glacier over the moraine. We appreciated fresh eggs and 'tock' (Balti word for bread), a welcome present as our provisions were almost finished. We took one of the porters to carry a part of our own load and the other 3 proceeded to meet our friends at the Base Camp.

14/8 Back in Urdokas we found a few supplies which we had left for our return journey. After 10 hours' scrambling we were glad to reach in heavy rain the small shepherd's hut of Paju. For days we had very little to eat and with empty stomachs we came to Askole on 17/8. We enjoyed the 'baratas' (pancake-like bread baked in butter) with eggs and tea prepared in the village. After this fast descent, only $4\frac{1}{2}$ days from Concordia, we had to change our porters for the last stage over the 5063 m high Skoro La.

20/8 We returned to Skardu exactly one month after our departure. The last 19 miles from Shigar were covered in the local taxi/jeep.