

53 Base Camp with K2 behind (This and next photo: J. Ferenski)

Victory and tragedy on Broad Peak

Kazimierz Głasek and Janusz Fereński
(Translation: K. Głasek and A. Kus)

In the summer of 1975, the second Wrocław High Mountaineering Expedition Himalaya-Karakoram 1975 was active in the region of the Baltoro Glacier. It was sent by the High Mountaineering Club of Wrocław with the participation of the Academic Alpine Club of Wrocław and The Sudetes Group of GOPR (Mountain Voluntary Rescue Service). The Voivode of Wrocław province, Mr Zbigniew Nadratowski, assumed the role of patron to the expedition. The expedition received help in organization from the country authorities and from industrial firms in Lower Silesia. The members: J. Fereński (leader), S. Aniol, T. Barbacki, R. Bebak, K. Głazek, W. Jonak (doctor), J. Juszkiewicz, Z. Jurkowski, M. Kęsicki, J. Kuliś, B. Nowaczyk, M. Sajuog, A. Sikorski,

A. Skoczylas, J. Woźnica. Pakistani liaison officer Capt. Abdul Ghani.

After a fortnight of waiting for a flight from Islamabad to Baltistan our expedition landed on 13 June in Skardu. From the village of Baha on the river Braldu, the expedition accompanied by 160 porters started on 15 June. On 29 June, it reached the Concordia Plateau. After consecutive strikes of the porters here the members of the expedition started heavy ferry-trips from this place to the Base Camp on the middle moraine of Godwin Austen Glacier (4950m). On 4 July K. Głazek, B. Nowaczyk and A. Sikorski placed 400m of fixed ropes in the entry gullies below the W pillar of Broad Peak. They reached a rocky spur at an altitude of 5500m under a big (about 500m) snow-ice-field. The degree of difficulties in these gullies was IV–V and depended on the ice conditions, which changed continually. In the upper part of the left gully there is a narrow chimney. There were some scores of metres of ice-fall, which were a part of the route presenting special difficulties.

On 7 July 12 people set up camp just above the ice-field at the edge of the pillar, at an altitude of 5800m, and supplied it with equipment and food. This camp was situated exactly at the site of Camp 1 of the Austrian expedition in 1957 (leader Marcus Schmuck), which conquered Broad Peak Main (8047m). Above Camp 1, up to an altitude of about 7300m we climbed at the edge of the pillar, thus following a different route to the Austrian team. Our route was more difficult but—at the same time—safer, because in the region where the Austrians had climbed we often saw avalanches. On 8 July Camp 2 and on 13 July Camp 3 were set up at altitudes of 6550 and 7200m, respectively; on the way we placed about 550m of fixed ropes. Observations which were made from different points of the route and from Base Camp convinced us that the place we had chosen for Camp 3 was the safest and also the highest place for this purpose. The snow-ice-fields above were often (especially after the periods of bad weather) swept away by avalanches. So we decided (as did the Austrian expedition which climbed Main Peak of the Broad Group from an altitude of 7000m) to attack our aim from Camp 3. While setting up and supplying with stores all 3 camps the team-members were in Camp 1; 13 persons climbed to Camp 2 and 9 persons to Camp 3.

After these preparations the leader of the expedition appointed the summit team of 6 persons: R. Bebak, K. Glazek, M. Kęsicki, J. Kuliś, B. Nowaczyk and A. Sikorski. All of them were very experienced alpinists and had the best acclimatization at that time. On 26 July this team left Base Camp and reached Camp 3 on the next day. The night which they spent in Camp 3 was the second in this camp for Bebak and Kuliś, and the third (13/14, 21/22, 27/28 of July) for the others. Our 6 weeks of experience showed that in this region of the Karakoram the periods of good weather used to last 4–5 days. So we still could expect 2–3 more days of good weather, and blue sky without any clouds confirmed us in this conviction. We listened to the weather forecast of the Pakistan radio for expeditions climbing in the Karakoram. It was very optimistic and it did not foresee any weather changes for the coming days.

On 28 July at 3am we left Camp 3. There was a starry sky outside and the temperature was below -20°C, promising good weather. At 1.30pm we were about 300m from the pass. At that time we still had not seen any clouds in the sky. There we took a rest and talked with Base Camp on the radio. To make the climbing faster we left behind some of our equipment (spare clothes,



54 Broad Peak group from the Godwin-Austen glacier

some food) and 2 hours later reached the col. From Camp 3 to the col between Middle and Main summits of Broad Group we went through the above-mentioned field, as did the Austrians before us. These fields are shut off from the upper part by a 50m-long wall; 2 gullies lead through this up to the pass.

At about 4pm, the attack team started from the col to climb along the ridge towards the summit. There were only 5 of us, as 100m short of the col, R. Bebak had turned back to Camp 3. From the pass the further route followed a steep and narrow mixed (rock, ice and snow) ridge, which from its NE Chinese side breaks off as a vertical 3km-long wall. Along the ridge there were very big cornices, overhanging to the right. The ridge is blocked by 2 faults: one a huge overhanging rock block, just near the col, the other a horned vertical rock, just close to the top. Our team passed both of them along the rocky wall at the left side by very difficult (IV^+) climbing. At about 7pm, very strong wind brought in some snowy clouds. The visibility became much worse and it started to snow.

After reaching the horizontal part of the ridge behind the second fault when leading the party, I went several metres ahead to find the highest point of it. The other 4 waited at the end of the rope in a place more protected from the wind.

In a few minutes Kuliś came to me and when the visibility improved for a while we found that the rise of the narrow rocky and icy ridge that we had reached, was the highest point of all. So we were finally on the summit at about 7.30pm.

Thus Broad Peak Middle (8016m) was conquered by Kazimierz Głazek, Marek Kęsicki, Janusz Kuliś, Bohdan Nowaczyk and Andrzej Sikorski. We left on the summit a coffee tin with the names of the participants in the expedition. For the first time a Polish team had reached an unclimbed 8000m peak. This ascent was technically more difficult than any done so far by Polish alpinists in mountains of above 7000m. It is worthwhile to remark that the peak had not been attempted before although there had been several expeditions (Austrian, Japanese etc.) to the area.

During the descent we abseiled some of the more difficult parts of the ridge. At about 9pm there arose a hurricane wind and snow-storm making it difficult for the members of the team to see and communicate with one another. Temporarily, the visibility was less than 2m, even using forehead lamps. Sharp snow crystals blown by the wind, hurt our faces and eyes. We were then about 30m from the pass. The last of us coming down with help of the rope was Bohdan Nowaczyk. After some time Sikorski, who had to help him by pulling the rope found out that Nowaczyk had fallen down together with the rope to the abrupt Chinese side of the ridge. He might have been hurled by the wind. Neither calling nor signalling with the lamps had any effect; the topographical features made any rescue work impossible. We had to bivouac on the pass.

Under these circumstances the rest of the night was extremely difficult– snow-storm, hurricane wind and no place to shelter. We found it simply impossible to dig any hole in the ice or hard snow. Each of us tried to hide at least his face from the wind and to sleep a little. We had no sleeping bags and no tents, and the temperature fell to -35°C.

At 6am on 29 July when it brightened up, we continued to search for Nowaczyk; but without any result. The lengthy snow-storm made all our efforts extremely difficult and we could not count on any help from the lower camps for 2 or 3 days. In the gully coming down from the pass we hung on a makeshift rope made up from individual loops and unbraided rescue belts. In the afternoon we decided to go on down.

For the sake of security (danger of knocking down rocks and ice lumps) we descended the gully one by one. I was to go down first setting the route, making the steps in the ice and hard snow. I intended also to find a rucksack we had left the day before with a valuable camera, 100m below the pass. We all were very exhausted by the altitude, snow-storm and hard bivouac. The distance from the pass, which yesterday took half an hour, today took me 3 hours to descend. Some places were more difficult than the previous day due to pieces of hard snow blown by the wind, others due to fresh snow-drifts. The visibility was very limited. Fortunately I found the rucksack with the camera under the snow. Because of the coming darkness I decided to bivouac just here in an ice-cleft. My calls to my friends went unanswered. Kęsicki, who followed me, was to take care of the remaining climbers. Unfortunately, he and, after him, Sikorski slipped on hard snow; Kęsicki fell and was killed. Later Kuliś found evidence of his death but he did not find the body; Kuliś, who fell also, was brought to a stop about 50m below me. I went down, took

his rucksack and brought him to the hole. Here we had the next nightmarish bivouac. Both of us were frost-bitten, and had nothing to eat and to drink. Throughout the night there was a snow-storm and we were shaking with cold.

When daylight came we began to go down looking for our colleagues and the ice-axe which Kuliś lost during his fall the previous evening. The weather improved a little. About 100m down we found the ice-axe and a few metres further the dead Andrzej Sikorski covered by snow. His body was lying head down. He was not breathing and had no pulse and he had a wound on his temple. Since his face was not completely stiff, we performed resuscitation breathing for a long time 'mouth-to-mouth' and also external heart massage, unfortunately without any effect. We found neither the body of Kesicki nor the rucksacks which we left somewere here on the way up because there was a lot of fresh snow.

The deaths of our friends happened due to the exceptionally unhappy coincidence of events, but first of all to the sudden, totally unforeseen break in the weather, which left us helpless on the face.

J. Kuliś and K. Głazek, the surviving 2, after 2 very difficult, nightmarish bivouacs without sleeping bags and tents, at altitudes of 7800 and 7700m, in snow-storm and hurricane wind, and with night temperatures of -35°C, came, with their friends' help, finally to Base Camp at night between 1 and 2 August. J. Kuliś had frost-bitten legs (later some of his toes had to be amputated), and K. Glazek had frost-bite of the hands and legs.

With heavy hearts after the loss of our friends, on 5 August, our expedition began to hike down, arriving in Skardu after 11 days.

Mountains of paradise

J. G. R. Harding

What range in the Alps conjures up such visions as the Paradiso? With the Gran Paradiso itself at 4061m the highest mountain wholly in Italy and a clutch of other famous peaks besides—Grivola, Herbetet, Torre del Gran San Pietro; the range has over 35 glaciers, is Italy's oldest National Park, was for years past the last redoubt of the ibex and even now contains the greatest concentration of wild life in the Alps. In 1976 when exchange rates gave Italy an edge on its rivals, I recalled the promise of this romantic area as seen 20 years ago on my first Alpine season when traversing its W outliers from the Val d'Orco to the Val d'Aosta en route from the Tarentaise to Courmayeur.

Although never quite forgotten, the Paradiso lost its vogue for the general run of British climbers many years ago. Yet it was the AC which first explored these mountains and with Ormsby and Bruce's ascent of the Grivola in 1859 its climbing history began. A year later, when Cowell climbed the Gran Paradiso with Dundas, he reported the area as *terra incognita* with the nomenclature of the main peaks shrouded in obscurity. Subsequent AC forays followed in which Tuckett, Coolidge, Pendlebury, Freshfield and C. P. Baker were prominent.