Škhawr 1975

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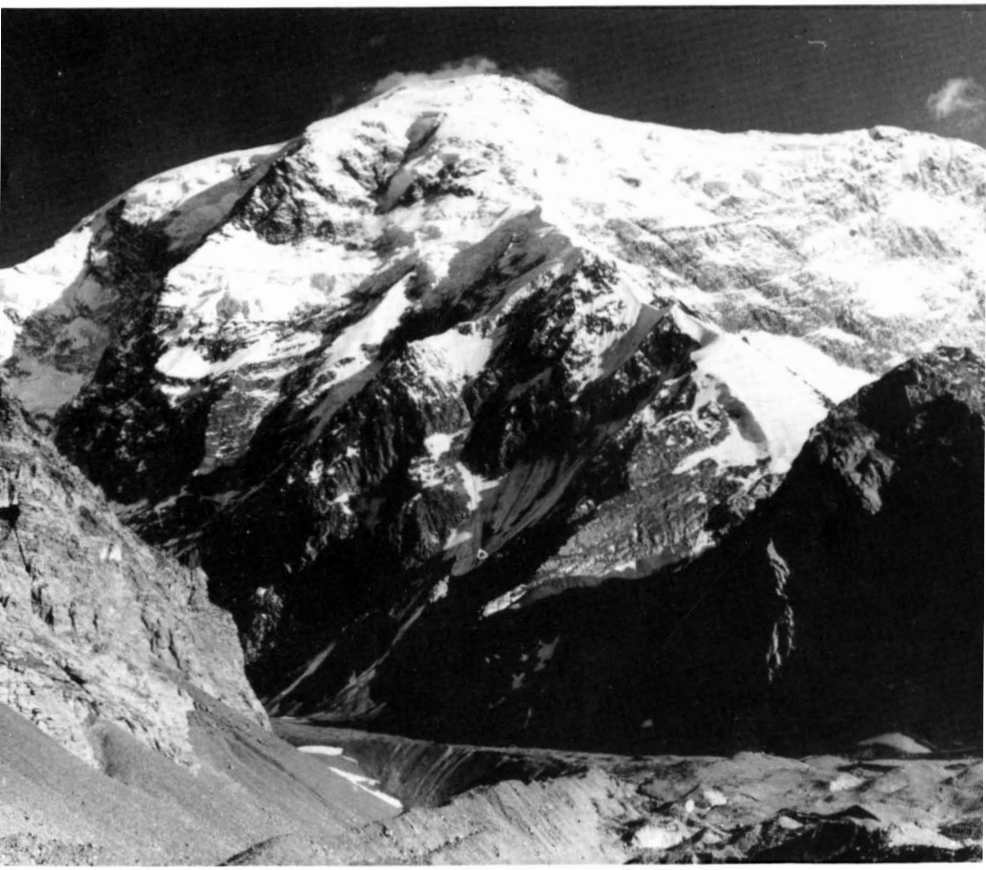
(Translation: Andrzej Kuś)

The expedition of the Cracow Academic Alpine Club was aimed at the ascent of Škhawr (7116m) by a new route. Škhawr was the last 7-thousander of the Hindu Kush not climbed by Polish alpinists till 1975. The first ascent of this summit was made in 1964 by the Austrians Gruber and Pischinger from the Pakistan side. The second ascent belongs to the French expedition (leader– H. Agresti) and was made from the difficult Afghan side. Their ascent was made in 1969 by the N buttress which was attempted earlier by J. Warterasiewicz and partners in 1963 during the 3rd Polish Hindu Kush Expedition. The Škhawr 1975 Expedition reached Afghanistan on 31 June 1975.



86 NE face of Škhawr (This and next photo: M. Bała)

Between 11 and 22 July all participants were acclimatizing in the mountain group of Koh e Zebak, attempting to climb 2 peaks over 5600m in the Yasek Valley. The surroundings are very similar to the famous Bezingi Valley in the Caucasus.

Both the attempts were abandoned at about 5000m due to bad weather. On 23 July the expedition reached the village of Škhawr in Wakhan and immediately set out on a 5-day reconnaissance walk in the Škhawr Valley. During this time the first ascent of the Kotgaz An pass (5468m) was made and a route worked out via the Nadir Šah Glacier. Base Camp (3800m) was established on 31 July on the Škhawr Glacier. Due to the actual conditions of snow and ice on the mountain we decided to climb Škhawr by the E ridge from Kotgaz An and to traverse the peak along the ridge to Nadir Šah (6814m) to the pass between M3 and M4 and to descend further via the Nadir Šah glacier. The ascent and traverse were planned to take place without intermediate camps carrying all food and equipment ourselves.

On 3 August the team consisting of M. Bała, E. Chrobak, K. Liszka and J. Mączka climbed by way of the moraines of the Hošk Glacier to an altitude of 4400m below the pass of Kotgaz An and bivouacked there. Next day we reached the pass in $4\frac{1}{2}$ hrs up a very steep ice-slope covered with tiny penitentes.

On 5 August we climbed the rock and ice pitch of the ridge (grade III–IV) passing the ice-towers on the N side and then we bivouacked behind the second tower on a saddle at 5900m. The next day, we climbed the flattening ridge by the smooth ice-fields and high blown snow-drifts. Night caught the team on an ice-slope at 6500m. After a bivouac on a platform dug in the ice we continued upwards. The weather was excellent, but a strong wind beginning regularly at noon and blowing till the morning was very disturbing. We were compelled to traverse 200m to the S along a big crevasse until it was possible to cross it by the use of pitons. In the evening we reached the plateau at 6950m and there we spent the 3rd night on the ridge. On 8 August about 1pm we climbed the last vertical pitch and reached the summit of Škhawr. The main summit is a vast place with small rocks; no traces of our predecessors could be found. The same day we descended along the easy ridge near the pass below the Nadir Šah, where we bivouacked at 6600m.

By detouring round the huge cornices of the ridge on snow or ice we climbed Koh e Nadir Šah at 2.30pm next day. There were traces of the Jugoslavs of 1968 on the peak and below it a flask with a card of the first conquerors (2nd Polish Hindu Kush Expedition 1962). Then we descended the snowy ridge to an abrupt drop of 400m, which we descended by 6 abseils of full rope length (80m)—very difficult and dangerous due to the rottenness of this area. Below was the broad saddle between the summits of M3 and M4 and here we spent the 7th night on our traverse. The route onwards had been marked with flags by our auxiliary group (Z. Dudrak, W. Jedliński and A. Pawlik) on 4 to 7 August. Next day after bivouac No. 7 we descended to the pass in the ridge between the Nadir Šah and Škhawr Myani glaciers. Again 3 80m-long abseils were necessary to reach the snow-fields of Škhawr Myani. Winding our way between the seracs and crevasses we found the tent of our supporting group at 5000m and slept there. Next day we returned to the Base Camp via the Atrafe Khai Valley.

The route from Kotgaz An to Škhawr seems to be more difficult than the

N buttress. An ascent using a series of fixed camps would involve about 1200m of fixed ropes. We used during our climb a solid belaying system on 90% of the total length of the ridge. The team was very cooperative, properly prepared and previously experienced at high altitudes. This made it possible to do the whole traverse within a relatively short time after the establishment of the Base (16 days from Škhawr village).

Afterwards 2 attempts were also made on the W Face of Languta e Barfi (6827m) by the team: Z. Dudrak, W. Jedliński and A. Pawlik. They both failed near 6000m, after conquering the main technical difficulties, due to deteriorating weather. During these 2 attempts an ice-couloir of 60° inclination leading to the S ridge of Languta was climbed and the further route seemed to provide no serious problems.

The sickness of the expedition's doctor with virus inflammation of the liver (jaundice) and the threat of infections of all other participants compelled the expedition to abandon further activities and return home.



87 On the ridge to Koh e Nadir Sah