



73 Kohe Mandaras—N face (Photo: J. Wojniak)

Anglo-Polish Hindu Kush expedition 1977

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Five new routes including 2 of the most difficult lines in the area and ascents of 6 peaks achieved in the time of 18 days—these are the fruits of the first Anglo-Polish expedition to the Hindu Kush that took place in July and August of 1977.

The party was organized jointly by the British Mountaineering Council together with the Mount Everest Foundation and the Polish Alpine Association while Christian Bonington patronized the venture. It was composed of 10 excellent climbers: Robert Janik (doctor), Piotr Jasinski, Marek Kowalczyk, Wojtek Kurtyka, Jan Wolf, Andrzej Zawada (leader) of Poland and Peter Holden (deputy leader), Terry King, Howard Lancashire, and Alex MacIntyre of Great Britain.

On 24 July the expedition reached Faizabad where they divided into 2 self-contained teams. MacIntyre, Kurtyka, Porter and Wolf decided to attempt the NE face of Kohe Bandaka and two days later left their companions in Zebak and started their approach march up the Zidghar Valley, while the rest of the expedition aimed for the Mandaras Valley.

On 28 July the larger party set up their Base Camp at a height of 4300m in the Mandaras Valley. British members established an advance camp some 200m higher providing a convenient place to view the N precipices of Kohe Mandaras, the main goal of the party. Luckily, huge serac barriers hanging high on the face were exceptionally quiet that summer. In order to acclimatize they did a couple of minor ascents. The Poles attempted the NE spur of peak M9 (6100m) over 1500m high. On 2 August, early in the morning 2 Polish parties (Janik, Zawada and Jasinski, Kowalczyk) started to tackle the pillar. The lower part of the route provided excellent rock-climbing while the upper one was mixed and bristled with miniature snow-ice pinnacles. The climb involved 3 bivouacs established between 5500 and 6000m and the difficulties were Grade 3-4. At the same time the British team composed of Holden, King and Lancashire were lucky enough to establish a new route on the W pillar of peak M5 (Kohe Zin—6074m). The pillar is about 770m high. In its central part it assumes a shape of several pinnacles towering one above another. On this section the route followed the very edge of the spur. In the upper reaches the line went up an ice-couloir leading on to steep ice-slopes straight in line with the summit. The climb required one bivouac and was graded 3-4.

After 3 days' rest at the Base Camp 2 parties (King, Zawada and Jasinski, Kowalczyk) made ready to attempt the N face of Kohe Mandaras. This gigantic, 1600m face has fascinated and frightened climbers. It seemed to be almost unclimbable due to most dangerous, overhanging ice barriers stretching over its whole length. Despite that there is in the very centre of the face a rock pillar promising a safe ascent, the sole obvious line on the face. Before sunrise on 10 August the 2 parties started to climb up a steep ice-wall to the left of the pillar. King and Zawada climbed very rapidly and when loose rocks and ice-blocks started to sweep the wall very frequently they traversed to the edge of the pillar having already covered most of its height. After some 12 hours of climbing they made their first bivouac which proved to be exceptionally comfortable. They formed tiny snow platforms and for the last time on the climb they took their boots off. During the day they lost sight of the other couple who traversed to the rocks much earlier and took a more difficult variant following the edge of the pillar. On the next day King

and Zawada tackled a steep ice-field and reached the bottom of an overhanging rock band over 300m high situated in the very centre of the face. First they attempted a steep, slanting ramp but it turned them back. Traversing to the right across smooth, ice-covered slabs they tried to force their way up the overhanging rocks above but this ended in failure too. It was getting late and the light was fading fast. The night found them on a narrow rock shelf. They still were not in touch with their friends and there was little likelihood of finding a route up the band. Fortunately, the third day of their Grade 6 climb produced a solution in the shape of an overhanging, ice-covered chimney leading to the foot of hanging ice barriers. To avoid the danger of hanging seracs they traversed rapidly back to the edge of the pillar where they spent their third night on the face. On the following day they climbed 28 pitches of the final walls of the pillar that led straight up in the direction of the summit, going in between 2 overhanging ice barriers. At nightfall they found themselves at the highest point of the rocks where they made another bivouac. On 14 August they hurriedly scrambled up the remaining snow-slopes and set foot on the summit (6628m) at 8am. Jasinski and Kowalczyk followed and arrived at the top a short while later.

74 Kohe Bandaka—NE face (Photo: M. Bala)



In the meantime Holden and Lancashire, members of the Kohe Bandaka team took 3 days (11–13 August) to establish a new direct route (Grade 4–5) on the NW face of peak M7 (Kohe Kaimak—6284m). On 9 August Kurtyka, Porter and MacIntyre approached the NE wall of Kohe Bandaka and started to climb taking an almost direct line going up in the centre of the face, to the left of a huge hanging ice-terrace situated in the right lower stretches. During the first day of the climb they covered a comparatively easy section exposed to falling rocks and bivouacked on a level with the ice-terrace mentioned above. On the following day, after strenuous scrambling up some loose rocks interlaced with steep scree slopes they arrived at the foot of a narrow chimney cutting across a vertical rock belt over 100m high and made their bivouac there. The chimney proved to be a critical part of the route. The next morning they found it impossible to force their way up the chimney because frequent avalanches were sweeping the face above. In the afternoon things improved and they decided to start up again. The climbing was extremely difficult, exhausting and time-consuming. Late in the evening they reached the beginning of an ice-snow couloir where they spent their third night on the face. The fourth day saw them climbing a very steep spur to the right of the couloir. Extreme technical difficulties (Grade 6) at a height of over 6000m required considerable effort and attention so the following night found them half-way up the spur. This time they spent it on some tiny shelves one far from another. Only the next day in the afternoon did they complete the remaining part of the spur and so reach the final ice-field. Here they established their last bivouac on the climb. In the evening of 14 August, after climbing the top slope of steep hard ice and surmounting an overhanging serac barrier they set foot on the summit.

The expedition ended with a 3-day ascent of the W ridge of Noshag (7492m) by Janik and Wolf. On 23 August the teams met one another at Zebak exchanging happy news of their triumphs.

Climbers' playgrounds—Europe

28 Sea cliff climbing at Gaeta

Gianni Battimelli

About halfway between Rome and Naples, on the Tirreno coast, the Montagna Spaccata, a rocky headland around which is built the small town of Gaeta, merges into sea with a vertical drop of 120m. Two fine routes (the 'Via dei Camini' and the 'Spigolo') were until a few years ago all the cliff had to offer to visiting climbers. Writing on these pages about the climbing grounds around Rome in 1972, A. Heppenstall said: 'The two existing routes (grades IV and V respectively) do not by any means exhaust the possibilities of the place'. As has been shown, Alan was right; and it must be admitted that to the British climber, used to the rapid and intense development which sea cliffs such as Anglesey have undergone in Britain, the presence of only 2 routes on such a large cliff would be somewhat incongruous. The point is that for a long time Roman climbers have considered this, and similar crags, only as practice ground for the 'true mountains'; climbing in such places was not considered as having any particular interest, were it not for training. But in