Karakoram 1989

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Although 46 parties booked with the intention of climbing in Pakistan, only 44 arrived, according to the Ministry records. It proved a harsh summer for weather, with relatively short periods of fine weather and much that was poor. This was a problem on the high peaks, and probably contributed significantly to the low summit bag everywhere. Of 'official' expeditions only 10 reached their summits. These figures do not include Pakistan military expeditions, nor the 'trekking' permit activities on mountains under the 6000m level. The former are relatively few, but activity on small peaks seems still to be on the increase.

K2 and Broad Peak were unclimbed in 1989 despite both strong parties and more conventional attempts on the standard routes. On K2, Loretan, Troillet and Kurtyka hoped to attempt the W face, but were beset with the two other parties by bad weather. An Austrian climber, Hans Barnthaler, died in a 200m fall while attempting the E face, and a large (Basque) Spanish party failed on the Abruzzi. On Broad Peak all five parties reported very adverse conditions; several were led by very experienced climbers.

In these circumstances the successes on the Gasherbrums were all the more creditable. Three expeditions climbed Gasherbrum 2. Rhona Lampard and Wanda Rutkiewicz reached the top on 12 July, with Wanda filming for a German TV station. This was a considerable achievement for the British womens' party, who did not use high-altitude porters on the mountain as has been common on many ascents. Other climbs of the peaks were completed by Swiss and Spanish parties, the latter suffering the loss of Antonio Jaurequi who fell in descent from the summit on 13 July. South Koreans, a Madrid party and Americans led by Mike Covington all failed. Undoubtedly, conditions here were also dangerous. The British women had one camp destroyed by avalanche, and on Gasherbrum 1 an Austrian party was also avalanched. This party included Willi Bauer, a survivor of the K2 storm of 1986. One member had to be helicoptered out from Base Camp, and they were fortunate to avoid worse consequences. Makato Hara's Japanese Scientific Expedition succeeded on Gasherbrum 1 on 12 July, but Sherpa Tsindi died in a fall during the descent.

On the Trango Tower Wolfgang Güllich returned and did a new route, and a Spanish party of four, led by Miguel Gallego, did a route left of the original British route and close to the unfinished British (Dai Lampard) route of 1984. On Uli Biaho Nick Cradock's New Zealand party was successful, and in the Baltoro Cathedrals Jim Beyer (USA) claimed a solo ascent of Thunmo (5866m). From a camp on the Dunge glacier he started with three difficult aid pitches, taking three days. These were fixed, but the face above was climbed alpine-style; he took nine days to climb 600m of 'big-wall' rock and 1000m of mixed ground, in all graded VII 5.10d A4. This sounds like the most extraordinary feat of the season.

On the Biafo glacier there was little success on the 7000m peaks. A Spanish attempt on Latok I and the British on the N face of Baintha Brakk (The Ogre) failed. A report on the latter by Andy Perkins appears at the end of this article. On the West Biafo Wall, Jerry Gore and a companion made the first breach on these large granite walls. They made substantial progress up the central pillar with 'Patience', a rock route with some fine climbing. Much of this was subsequently repeated by Cave and Flewett who confirmed its quality. In the Choktoi Spanish climbers Jon Lazkano and Javi Mugarra climbed the prominent rock-tower (6100m) right of Baintha Brakk in July. The 800m route was fixed to three-quarters height, with a final 22-hour push to the top, and sections of French 6a and A3.

Not far away, in the Hoh valley, French climbers B Domenech, Y Duverney and J Dolby Monet tried the E face of the Sosbun Tower. A first attempt (10–11 July) involved great technical difficulties and was fixed. After much bad weather they climbed 700m of the 1100m face (French 6b A4), but were eventually defeated by more bad weather. A more traditional expedition was successful near the head of Snow Lake. In July a British Metropolitan Police expedition made the first ascent of Lupke Lawa Brakk (Snow Lake Peak, 6590m), via the W ridge. Paul Vardon, Steven Sands, Philip Salt, Peter Stapely, Arthur Collins and Lew Hardy reached the top on 29 July, and got down as weather deteriorated after seven days on the mountain (Alpine D). In the same region an unnamed peak of 6000m was climbed by Tony Walkenden, John Wakefield and Mark Deith (29 July).

British small groups were also active in the Barpu and Hispar glacier areas. In August and September Sean Smith, Simon Yates and Simon Richardson made the first ascent of a 5500m peak at the W end of the Bal Chhish range from the S edge of the Hispar. Yates and Mike Searle climbed another unnamed peak of 5700m on the Hispar-Chomolungma watershed between 14 and 17 September, and Smith and Richardson failed on a difficult peak near Pumari Chhish. On the Barpu, a party from the Wolverhampton MC was active (see Dave Wilkinson's note at the end of this article).

In the Batura, Steve Hart and Kay Bruger (UK) climbed the N face of Shelin Maiden Peak (5973m, 800m AD). On Shispare (7819m) the Japanese Ryukoku University expedition led by Masato Okamoto went very high, but failed because of deep snow near the summit. On Spantik a West German expedition led by Arnold Hasenkopf was successful, but another DAV expedition failed. Diran was climbed by a Hirosaki University expedition, but two members of a South Korean expedition, Sang Woen-Ha and Su Fee-Le, died in an avalanche on 20 June.

A Spanish attempt on Rakaposhi and a French on Minapin peak failed, as did several on Nanga Parbat. There the Pakistan army had a resounding success. Led by Major Sher Khan, they did the Kinshofer route on the Diamir flank, with the leader, Atta, Mohammedullah and Rajab reaching the summit on 13 July. Ekkert Gundelach of West Germany was the only other climber to do so. Kwang Ho-Kim of South Korea died when a fixed rope snapped on the Kinshofer.

In the area south of Masherbrum, Ginette Harrison's group failed on

Masherbrum. There was as usual much action on lower peaks in the Hushe. George Szuca and George Armstrong (UK) climbed five unclimbed peaks: Pata Kha (c6000m) S face, Dru Peak (c6000m) twice, by couloirs on the S and N faces, Tower Peak (5800m) by the N face, Pointed Peak (5400m) NW couloir, and Parantha Peak (5300m) from the route up Pointed Peak. Dave Scott Maxwell and John Ashdown climbed the W face/SW ridge of Raven's Pyramid. This involved 41 pitches up to 5c on excellent granite and about 1000m of climbing, with retreat by abseil back down the route (23–25 August 1989). These are some of the Hushe climbs, but it is known that a large number of climbers were active there and more notable climbs are likely.

In the east of the Karakoram there were some notable events. These are reported in 'India 1989' (pp248–254 of this volume).

Among the tally of 'under 6000m' was the ascent of Shifkitin Sar (c5800m). An Irish expedition examined the Malanguti glacier near Shimshal in 1986, and tried this peak. In September 1989 four Dutch climbers visited the area. From a low base (3300m) they set up two further camps at 4200m and 4600m along the glacier. After a bivouac in a snow hole at 5200m on 16 September, Robert Eckhardt, Rob Lith and Tanja Merkelbach reached the summit. The route ascended snow and ice on the NW of the peak, to the W ridge, without great difficulty. Noes Lautier was the fourth member of the party.

Meanwhile a Japanese expedition explored the vast faces east of Broad Peak, approaching from Xinjiang. For those with the time and money (for it is very expensive), the scope there is enormous. On Nanga Parbat a winter attempt by South Koreans on the Rupal appears to have failed.

Andy Perkins adds:

Baintha Brakk (The Ogre, 7285m)

A British team comprising Andy Cave, Phil Butler, Andy Perkins, Steve Hartland, Chris Flewitt, Tim Jordan, Paul Nunn and Dave Green explored the possibility of climbing the remote N face of this mountain in July and August 1989. After a porter strike on the Biafo glacier (future teams in the area should note that Base Camp is 10 stages from the roadhead and opposite the Sokha La), and attacks at night by a Himalayan brown bear, Advanced Base was established under the N face at the E end of the Sim Gang glacier. All load-carrying was done by ski over the 10 miles between Base Camp and Advanced Base.

On the first attempt on the face, Cave, Flewitt and Perkins were hit by serac fall in the couloir leading to the col on the ridge bounding the left side of the face. Flewitt sustained minor injuries and the three retreated. Soon after, Perkins and Butler had another attempt and reached the col without incident at 5800m. Above this, the ridge (which had appeared to be feasible) turned out to be heavily corniced and heaving with seracs. Poor snow conditions and the impossibility of retreat in bad weather forced abandonment of the attempt.

The prominent central pillars on the face remain a superb but desperate objective. An approach up the lower snow-slopes is raked by avalanche daily and the pillars themselves rise from 6000m to the summit with no respite from steep technical climbing.

Dave Wilkinson adds:

In mid-August, a party from the Wolverhampton MC visited the Barpu glacier, W Karakoram. *Members*: Ralph Atkinson, Ged Campion, Mick Curtin, John Keska, Stewart Muir, Dave Wilkinson.

The approach from Hunza used the jeep road to Hoppar, where local porters were hired for the three-day walk-in to a Base Camp at Girgindil. These porters seemed more co-operative than men from this province of Nagar have proved to be in the past. The weather was variable, but good enough for the three small peaks climbed:

1) 'Girgindil Peak' (5296m), the obvious easy snow-plod above Base Camp. Frequent previous ascents. This party used four separate routes for ascent/descent (NW ridge, NE ridge, two routes on N face), all of them easy (alpine F/PD).

2) 'Girgindil Pyramid'. The obvious symmetrical mountain to the left of Girgindil Peak, as seen from Girgindil. In reality, it is formed by a ridge running SW from the Chukutans group. Not marked on the Polish map. Estimated height 5800m. No record of previous ascent. Climbed and descended by W ridge. Awkward access to the small glacier to its north, then easy snow to the ridge. The ridge (seen in profile from the Barpu walk-in) was easy at first, then some awkward climbing on loose schist to turn the steep section on the right, followed by precarious snow crests. Grade alpine D/TD.

3) 'Yengutz I'. The highest of the Yengutz group, to north of Spantik. No height given on Polish map. Estimated height 5999m! No record of previous ascent. Climbed via Yengutz col, W ridge and SW face, all snow/ice with a detour right to turn the rock-band on the face. Grade alpine AD/D.