Karakoram 1990

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(*Plates 87, 88*)

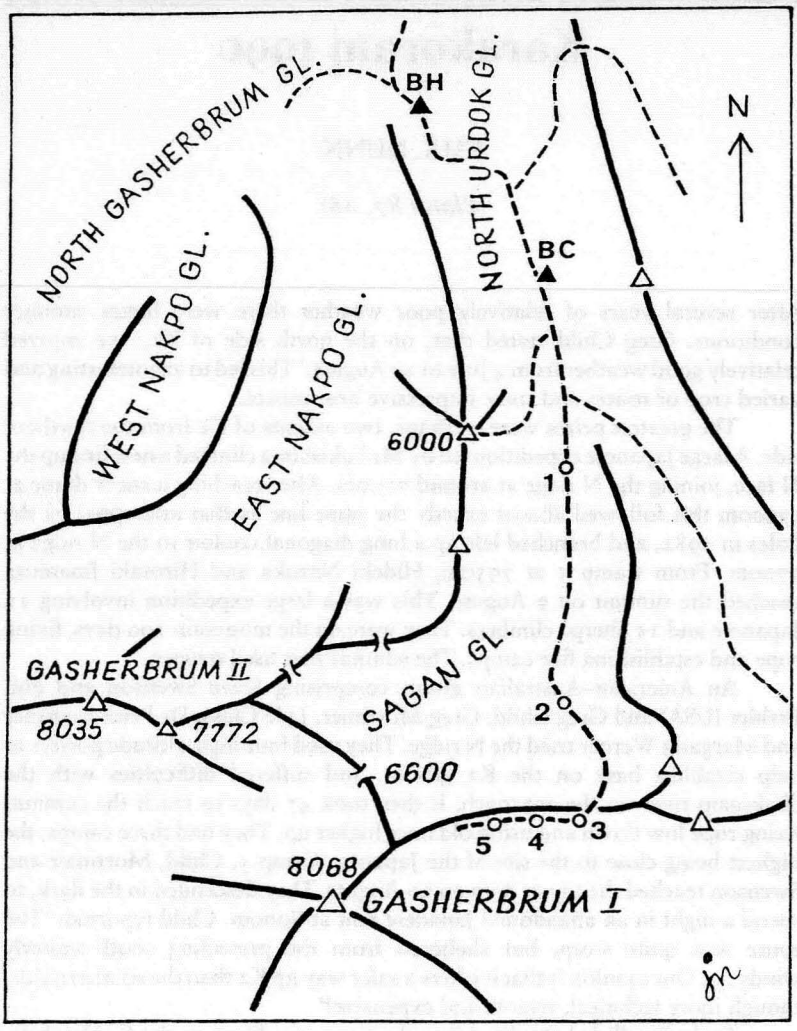
After several years of relatively poor weather there were better summer conditions. Greg Child stated that, on the north side of K2, 'we enjoyed relatively good weather from 4 July to 20 August.' This led to an interesting and varied crop of routes and some impressive near misses.

The greatest prizes were, perhaps, two ascents of K2 from the northern side. A large Japanese expedition led by Mr Fukishima climbed a new line up the N face, joining the N ridge at around 7700m. After reaching a snow dome at *c*7000m this followed almost exactly the same line as that attempted by the Poles in 1982, and branched left up a long diagonal couloir to the N ridge at 7700m. From Camp 5 at 7950m, Hideki Nazuka and Hirotaki Imamura reached the summit on 9 August. This was a large expedition involving 12 Japanese and 15 Sherpa climbers. They were on the mountain 100 days, fixing rope and establishing five camps. The summit pair used oxygen.

An American–Australian group comprising Steve Swenson and Phil Ershler (USA) and Greg Child, Greg Mortimer, Lyle Closs, Dr Peter Keustner and Margaret Werner tried the N ridge. They used four high-altitude porters to help establish base on the K2 glacier, and suffered difficulties with the Shaksgam river on the approach. It then took 47 days to reach the summit, fixing rope low down and using old ones higher up. They had three camps, the highest being close to the site of the Japanese Camp 5. Child, Mortimer and Swenson reached the top at 8pm on 20 August. They descended in the dark, to spend a night in an abandoned Japanese tent at 8000m. Child reported: 'The route was quite steep, but sheltered from the prevailing south-westerly winds . . . Our opinion is that it offers a safer way up K2 than the southern side, though more technical, remote and expensive!'

Carlo Pinelli led the *K2 Libre* clean-up expedition to the S side of the mountain. This 'Biella Wilderness'-inspired venture sought to clean the Abruzzi in its lower reaches, and to take out as much detritus as could be managed. In part a symbolic action, launched in Europe with great fanfare by the Aga Khan, it removed about 400 porter-loads of junk. One wonders, though, whether more benefit might be achieved by specifically encouraging all expeditions to do their part, rather than by introducing new armies of porters in the old-fashioned style to the sensitive areas. A small American expedition led by Douglas Dalquist was unsuccessful on K2.

There was much action in the Gasherbrum range. Wanda Rutkiewicz and Ewa Pakiewicz climbed a couloir by a new variation on Hidden Peak (Gasherbrum I), this being Rutkiewicz's sixth 8000m peak. An 11-member



Route to NE ridge of Gasherbrum I.
First attempt 1990 by Japanese

Korean party led by Keon Jung Youn repeated this variant. On the W ridge the Okayama University Alpine Club led by Haruhisa Kuroda and involving 12 climbers was successful. Base was set up on 24 May. They took a different route from that of the Yugoslav ascent of 1977, placing two camps before joining it at the snow dome at 7200m. After setting up two more camps, Camp 4 being at 7600m, three Japanese and two high-altitude porters set out for the summit on 15 July. Takahiro Katayama, Tomoyuki Yamanei, Ali Raza and Rajab Shah, who at 40 was the oldest, reached the summit. Hidehiko Tajiri turned back at

around 8000m, but Yamanei reached the top without oxygen. The party claimed that the previous Yugoslav climbers went up this ridge only from the snow dome to 7600m, and that this was the first true ascent of the W ridge.

Most novel was the exploration and attempt on Gasherbrum I from the Chinese side by a 12-climber Japanese party led by Hiroshi Yashima and Koichi Otomo. Base was at only 4100m, and the Sagan glacier required a further base established at 4400m on 28 June. A further two camps were then set up at 4750m and 5000m in a difficult glacial approach. They attempted the NE ridge of Gasherbrum I for the first time, ascending steep ice to reach it and setting up camps at 5400m and 5700m by 20 July. Yashima was badly injured in a snow slide, but Camp 5 at 6100m was set up on 4 August. Then dangerous conditions were encountered on the ridge leading towards the summit, and on 9 August the attempt was abandoned. The party made reconnaissances of the glaciers and lower peaks north of the Gasherbrums which ought to be valuable to future visitors to that extremely remote and difficult region.

On Gasherbrum II, Georg Rudiger, a member of a Polish international expedition, reached the top on 18 July from Camp 3 via the western side of the summit cone, a new route. He suffered frostbite and was eventually helicoptered by the Pakistan Air Force from Base Camp.

The Muztagh Tower was repeated by a Swedish expedition. Base was established on 10 July at 4700m, and the party found the route through the Chagran icefall long and tedious, a total of 22km from base to Camp 3 on the mountain. Five camps were set up, and 1200m of fixed rope were used. The Swedes put Camps 1 and 2 north of the Chagran glacier, unlike their predecessors, and made a shortcut up the great couloir at the base of the Muztagh Tower. This they thought less demanding and less avalanche-prone than the original British route on the opposite side of the Chagran. Magnus Nilsson reported: 'In spite of collapsing seracs on the ridge, some mildly frostbitten fingers and a fixed rope that broke during rappel, the team suffered no severe incidents. They reported the extremely loose rock on Muztagh as the major hazard. A lot of snow on the ridge enabled them to avoid most of the rockclimbing, but this on the other hand built up the dangerous seracs mentioned . . . Camps were established at 6800m on 11 August, 7100m on 15 August and the summit was reached on 17 August. The party was led by Ola Hillberg.'

On the Great Trango Tower Takeyasu Minamura led a six-member attempt on the Norwegian NE pillar pioneered originally by Doseth and his partner who died on the descent. Four climbers climbed 11 new pitches (5.12.A2) to the right of the original line on the lower wall, and finished the climb after 27 days' climbing on 17 August. They turned back a few pitches below the NE peak, as their time had run out. The leader Minamura soloed a 27-pitch route on the E face of the Trango Tower to the right of the Kurtyka route (VII.5.10.A4), reaching the top on 9 September. An attempt to parapente off failed, and Minamura was stranded on a ledge. Masonori Hoshina and Satoshi Kimoto then climbed the British original route with three bivouacs and reached him, seven days after the aborted descent. On 17 September they began the descent of the Yugoslav route and reached Base Camp next day.

Also on the Trango Tower a Swiss expedition led by Philippe Scherrer succeeded. A Spanish group climbing on Trango Great Tower and Uli Biaho is reported to have failed.

In the Choktoi–Panmah glaciers areas two Basques, Jon Lazkano and Javi Mugarra, climbed the prominent rock tower of 6100m by an 800m route (6a+. A3+), fixing the lower part with 600m of rope and making a final 22-hour push. Base had been established on 24 June. Doug Scott led another attempt on the great ridge of Latok II (the American Ridge), but without success in heavy snow early in the season. Their cook, Sher Mohammad, died on 26 June when he fell into the Braldu river. In the same area approached from the Biafo glacier Hans Lanters and Roland Beckendam, supported by Gaby Jobses and journalist Joos Philippens, tried Baintha Brakk ('the Ogre'), reaching 6100m on the S pillar. The rock of this route was climbed in 1983 by a French party. They set up base on the Uzun Blakk on 26 June and set up two camps, the top one being just under the pillar at 5912m. Roland Beckendam reported: 'We fixed 900 feet of rope in the 40 to 50-degree couloir leading to Camp 2. 7 and 8 July saw us proceeding up the first 900 feet of the pillar, which we fixed with ropes. It contained a 300-foot high wall of A2–3 difficulty, probably the most time-consuming part of the route. Now everything was ready for an alpine-style push from the end of the fixed ropes towards the summit. Apart from some minor snowfalls the weather had been good, but during our resting period at Base Camp it snowed and rained almost continuously. On 15 July we went up under a blue sky for the summit attempt. Unfortunately the weather broke again next day and we had to sit out snowfalls and very strong winds at Camp 2 for four days.' Thereafter their luck continued poor and, after recovering food from below swept away in the air-wave of a serac fall, bad weather caught them again on the pillar and forced a retreat to base. A final summit attempt was foiled by an upper food dump being destroyed by ravens, and by variable weather. Their Base Camp was plundered by the local bear(s?), who are increasingly aware of the welfare benefits which expeditions and treks provide. Also on the Ogre a Bavarian party led by Michel Lentrodt climbed very high on the Yugoslav route, stopping only 200m from the summit.

Further west another Dutch party made the first ascent of the S pillar of Kanjut Sar II. The five climbers set up base on 1 July at 4500m on the Khani Basar glacier. Two camps were made on the SW ridge and three weeks were spent supplying them. Then bad weather foiled a first attempt. Between 26 and 29 July they succeeded, bivouacking three times *en route* to the summit. H C Freie reported: 'The problems were mainly rock (7–/A1, some ice (55°)). After the second bivouac Peter Kok descended alone because of what later appeared to be pulmonary oedema. On 29 July the others reached the summit (6831m) at 4pm and descended the next day.' Thus Freie, Franck van de Barselaar, Franck Schmitt and Pieter de Kam made the second ascent of this peak, by a new technical route. Further west Alain Vaucher led a 10-member Swiss party in a successful ascent of Bularung Sar (7200m).

Early in the year a French party made a new ski traverse in the spring. Reaching Askole on 31 March the *Groupe Universitaire de Montagne et Ski* Expedition traversed the Biafo, Simgang, Nobande Sobande, Chiring, Sarpo

Laggo, Karfogang and Muztagh glaciers, to finish on the Baltoro. This new high route, a companion to that pioneered by Galen Rowell and Ned Gillette from Kaphalu to Hispar, was completed by 25 April when the six-man party led by Claude Pastre re-emerged at Askole. Temperatures ranged between −15°C and −30°C, and there was some good weather, but also a lot of fresh snow. Norwegian pulkas were used, and there were dangerous crevassed sections, on the Skam La, the Chiring glacier and a steep descent on the S side of the E Muztagh pass. The maps are reported very inaccurate around the Muztagh passes. The W Muztagh seems to be 5700m, not 5370m, nearer to the Sarpo Laggo than indicated by the Duke of Spoleto (1:75,000) and Istituto Geographico Militare (1:100,000) maps. Miyamori (1988, 1:100,000) is thought to be more accurate.

14 expeditions were allowed to attempt Nanga Parbat in 1990. Anton Golner led 17 Slovenes who followed the Schell route (UIAA III-IV(V)) on the 4500m Rupal face, one of the world's highest mountain walls. This was the first Yugoslav ascent of Nanga Parbat, and the first female ascent of the Rupal face. Marija Frantar has past experience in the Alps, including the N face of the Eiger last winter, in the Soviet Pamir and Tien Shan, and was the leader of a Yugoslav womens' expedition to Annapurna South (7219m) in 1986.

Below the Diamir face there was filming of a BBC reconstruction of Albert Mummery's disappearance, involving Charlie Houston, Chris Bonington and Sigi Hupfauer, with producer Richard Else and Jim Curran as climbing camera. They reported disgusting refuse at base, much of it associated with this year's expeditions and including medical syringes and other items traceable to the 11 doctors who visited this summer.

In the Hushe–Kaphalu region there were many parties. An important attempt was made at a big new route on K7 (7100m). Dai Lampard, Bob Wightman, Bob Brewer and Luke Steer spent 20 days in a big single push, climbing 88 pitches of difficult but good rock to a 6200m col below the 'Fortress' climbed during the Japanese first ascent. Though only 100m of hard climbing remained they had to retreat, as Wightman had lost a rucksack and had been without a sleeping bag for five days, and they had run out of food. Most of this climb went free despite its iced-up appearance. The small trips included one by Ian Stewart and Neil Wilson, who climbed for six weeks at the head of the Charakusa glacier in July and August and claim the first ascent of Point 6248m north of the Charakusa, via a (Scottish) grade 3 route on the S face of 1000m. The route was climbed at night on 18–19 August, with descent by the same route. Victor Radvils led a British attempt on Trinity Peak (6800m). He injured his shoulder early. The other members continued but were unsuccessful.

In Hunza, Ultar I (7388m) defeated Tsuneo Hasegawa's small Japanese party. Paolo Civera's Sondrio (Italian) group succeeded on Alstor-O-Nal (7403m), but another Italian group failed on Shakaur (7116m). A West German group led by Alfred Fendt climbed Sharagrar (7403m).

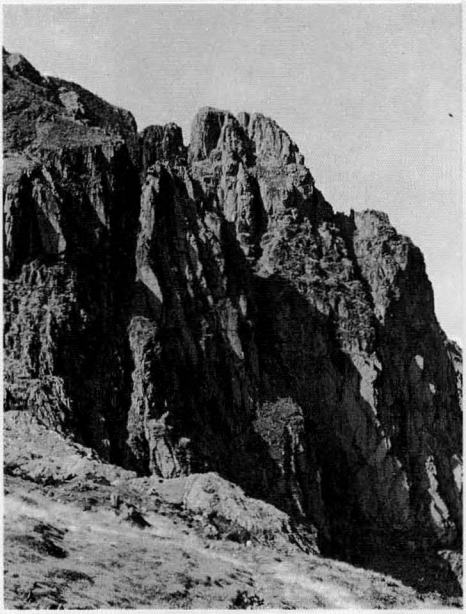
This appears to have been a relatively good year, though conditions seem to have been poor early in the season and better later. The pattern of activity was broadly conventional, with 56 expeditions in the field, and considerable concentration on the lower 8000m peaks. K2 was underattended, and five

fatalities were reported, four on the mountains and one in the river accident mentioned above. Applications for 1991 seem to follow a similar conventional pattern.

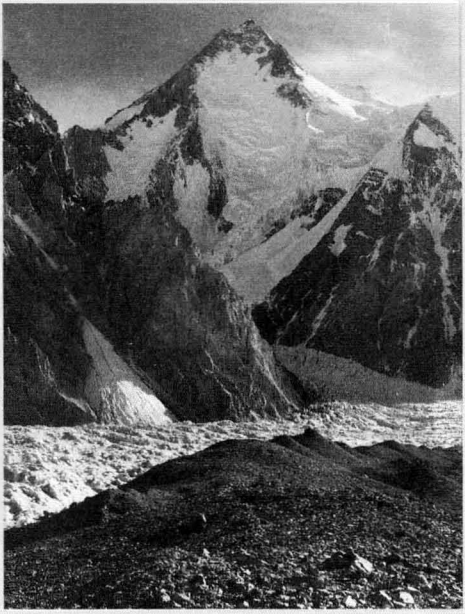
Footnote. At the time of writing full details are not available for the East Karakoram, and from the numerous visitors to peaks below 6000m. Maciaj Berbeka's Polish-British winter expedition to the Rupal face of Nanga Parbat is reported to have failed because of bad conditions.

H Adams Carter adds:

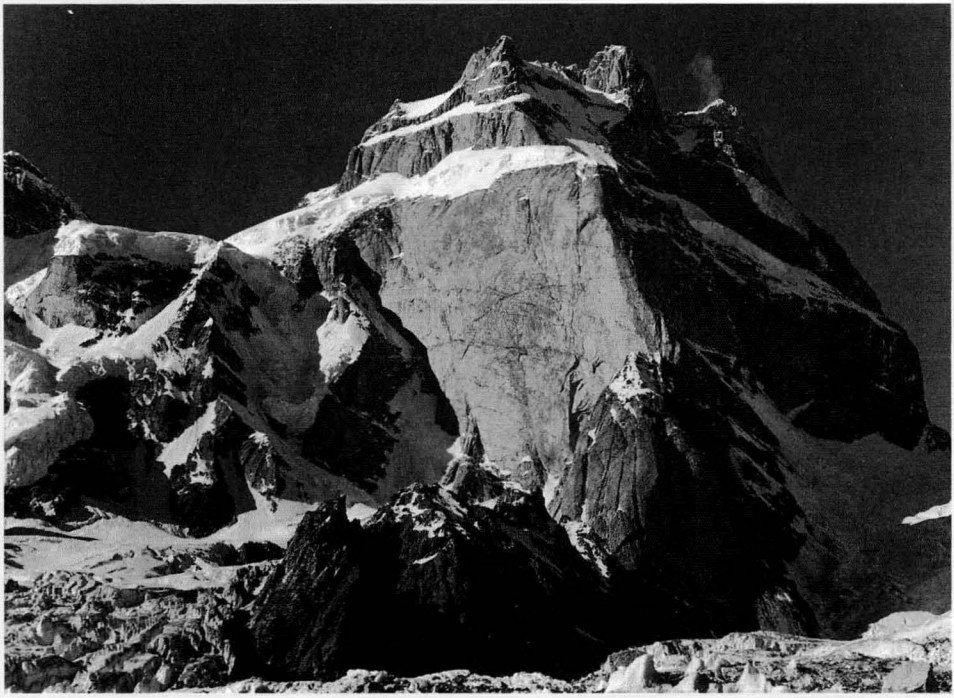
American Jeff Lowe and Frenchwoman Catherine Destivelle were filmed by David Breashears while they climbed the Nameless Tower of the Trango Towers. They climbed the Yugoslav route on the S face free. I suspect that Jim Bridwell and Breashears, who has climbed Everest twice, may also have reached the summit and had even more difficult climbing during the filming. A group of young climbers took advantage of not having to pay a peak fee for peaks just under 6000m in the region near the Biafo glacier. Peter Gallagher and Robert Warren made an alpine-style ascent of the Ogre Stump on 29 June. John Catto, Steve Wood, Gallagher and Max Kendall climbed Lupkilla Brakk by a new route on 6 July. Warren, Gallagher and Wood completed a seven-day, 33-pitch climb of a spire they called 'Deck of Cards'. They rated the climb as VI, 5.11, A4. Not all expeditions were successful. Thor Kieser led parties that got high on Rakaposhi and Trisul but did not reach the summits.



86. Pillar Rock from the east with (R) N face. (C Douglas Milner) (p 215)



87. Gasherbrum I from the Duke of Abruzzi glacier. (Paul Nunn) (p 239)



88. Baintha Brakk (The Ogre, 7285m). (Paul Nunn) (p 239)