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Afghanistan & Pakistan 2005

The 2004-2005 winter recorded the heaviest snowfall seen in Pakistan for more than 40 years. This led to the Pakistan Meteorological Department issuing a warning to climbers and trekkers, noting in particular the danger of serious avalanche on the high peaks in early season. This proved to be the case and high-altitude successes generally fell to parties who had plenty of time, patience and persistence, or those coming later in the season. Despite this, the most notable ascents of 2005 took place on 8000m peaks: Nanga Parbat and Broad Peak.

The last few years have seen several teams visit the Afghan Hindu Kush and in July-August 2005 David Cejudo Fernandez and Luis Miguel Lopez from Spain made a rare visit to the Wakhan Corridor where they achieved a probable first ascent of a 6040m peak, subsequently named **Koh-e-Maghrebi**. This is one of very few first ascents made in Afghanistan's mountains since the Soviet invasion during 1979. The pair drove to the confluence of the rivers at Qala-e-Panja, then walked to a base camp at 4200m in the West Ali Su valley. From here they climbed the 1000m south face of the mountain (60° maximum) on 13 August.

On the Pakistan side of the border the High Hindu Kush appears to be almost equally neglected. Border peaks can still present a problem with permits, as a British team applying to climb Noshaq in 2006 found to their dismay; but access to many other interesting objectives should not present too much difficulty. A Swiss team made the first ascent of **Saraghrar South-East** (7208m), one of several unclimbed summits on the Saraghrar plateau. The team, led by Jean-Michel Zweiacker, opted for a route on the south face above the Rosh Gol, similar to that followed by the 1967 Japanese expedition that made the first ascent of Saraghrar South (7307m). Several members climbed both the latter (second ascent) and the south-east peak.

In the Himalaya there were two impressive ascents on **Nanga Parbat** (8125m). Pride of place goes to Vince Anderson and Steve House's superb alpine-style ascent of a new route up the central pillar of the south (Rupal) face, between the SSE spur (Messner, 1970) and the SE pillar (Buhler, 1982 to foresummit only). House had attempted a similar line in 2004. The pair rated the route, which is more than 4000m high, VII, 5.9, M5X, WI 4 but had weather so glorious on the final day that House was able to remove his boots on the summit and dry his socks. They descended via the Messner route. (*See article 'Pure Alpinism on the Rupal Face', p77.*)

Nanga Parbat had been climbed slightly earlier in the season by a strong Korean team using fixed ropes to 7550m. Kim Chang-ho and Lee Hyun-jo completed the route in mid-July to make only the second ascent. The pair



154. An avalanche, initiated by an earthquake on 1 July 2005, falls from the south face of Saraghrar towards the Warsin glacier. The recently climbed Saraghrar South-East (7208m) is the summit in the centre of the picture above the avalanche cloud; Saraghrar South (7307m) is the summit to the left. (*Yves-Alain Peter*)

made a descent of the Kinshofer route, thereby completing a traverse of the mountain. On the summit they found a note from Messner in a small container, which they took with them as proof of their ascent. It was later presented to Messner in Korea.

A Spanish team is thought to have climbed a new route on one of the **Mazeno Peaks**, possibly the highest summit, but no details have been made available.

Moving to the Karakoram, Yannick Graziani and Christian Trommsdorff made an attempt on the stunning south-east pillar of **Ultar** above the Hunza valley, reaching a point above 6000m on this elegant 3000m-high pillar before being forced down by bad weather. This is the best effort so far on a coveted line.

In the little frequented Ghujerab Muztagh north of Shimshal, François Carrel, climbing with local Shimshali Abdullah Bai, made probable first ascents of two peaks near the Boesam pass. Both gave easy ascents (F/PD); **Boe Sar** (c5700m) via the south-west ridge and **Shah Izat Peak** (also c5700m) via the south-east ridge. These could become classic trekking peaks. South of Shimshal a French team attempted the elegant **Shimshal White Horn** (c6400m) unaware that it had been climbed in 1999 from the east. The French looked at the east side but finally decided to attempt the north-west ridge, on which they reached 6000m.

In the Panmah Muztagh two Spanish teams attempted **Baintha Brakk** (aka 'The Ogre', 7285m). Members included accomplished Basque mountaineers such as Jon Beloki, Alberto Iñurrategi and Jose Carlos Tamayo but both teams recorded failures on the south pillar and *Original British Route*.

The Benegas brothers, Damian and Willie, with fellow Argentinean Matias Erroz were back for another attempt on the highly desirable north spur of **Latok I** (7145m). While they failed low down on this, they did manage to achieve other ascents on lower neighbouring peaks. They climbed the Supercouloir on a c6000m peak on the northern rim of the Choktoi glacier, a little to the right of Biacherahi Towers. This was a 1000m-high 55° névé couloir leading to the summit ridge, on which the pair was stopped 60m below the top by a rock barrier for which they were not prepared. They completed the original line of the *Indian Face Arête* to the summit at 5.10a and A1. This route was first climbed by Sandy Allan and Doug Scott in 1990 but they stopped about six pitches below the summit. The Argentines also climbed a couple of c10-pitch rock routes at around 5.10 on formations close to base camp.

In the Baltoro, the Trango Group saw huge amounts of activity and some high notable ascents. Jonathon Clearwater (New Zealand), Jeremy Frimer (Canada) and Samuel Johnson (USA) climbed the south-west ridge of **Trango II** (6327m), the major snow-capped peak immediately north of Trango Monk. The 1600m route was named *Severance Ridge* and graded VI 5.11 A2 AI 3 M5. The three spent five days on an alpine-style ascent of 63 pitches but traversed some 150m below the highest point of the snow cap to find a descent route down the south ridge, leaving the summit unclimbed. On 6251m **Trango Tower** several parties attempted *Eternal Flame* and the now standard line of the *Slovenian Route*. On the south-east face, between the *Slovenian Route* and *Run for Cover*, a Korean team engineered a new route, which they christened *The Crux Zone* (A4). This completed a new start, pioneered in 2004, above the approach couloir. Fixed ropes were used throughout but the team completed their line to the highest point of the tower.

Eniko and Iker Pou, together with photographer/journalist Jabi Baraiazarra, climbed *Eternal Flame* to the summit. Their idea was to complete the ascent all free, so they established a line of fixed ropes up much of the route so they could work some of the pitches. In 2003 Denis Burdet free climbed the entire route except for one bolt ladder on pitch 10. The Pou brothers managed to create a variation to this pitch by linking two cracks to the right. The first part, climbed completely free by Iker, was hard. The upper section was only 6c, but because it was wet the Spaniard could not climb it without rests. They estimate it to be 8a. Unfortunately, time did not allow them to free climb the two hard pitches (7a and 7c+) freed by Burdet, but they have proved that a strong climber, finding good conditions, can make an all free ascent.

The major event in the Trango Group was Gabo Cmarik and Dodo Kopold's alpine-style ascent of a new line on the south side of **Great Trango** (6286m), right of the 2004 American route, *Azeem Ridge*. They carried minimal gear, found difficulties harder than expected and endured a very unpleasant bivouac high on the route without sleeping bags in poor weather and the temperature down to -15°C . They reached the summit ridge of the c6250m south-west top on their seventh day, having climbed more than 3000m of rock (*Assalam Alaikum*; 90 pitches; VIII and A2). Unable to reverse the standard route to the Trango approach couloir due to large quantities of fresh snow (the traverse to the couloir can be very avalanche prone), they made a quite remarkable decision to rappel the huge north-west face. For this they had only their rack, five pitons, and eight remaining bolts to make c60 rappels. They rappelled the c2000m face from right to left, crossing through the Russian, American and German routes, taking a couple of serious falls and having a generally epic time before finally reaching base camp.

In the meantime the rest of their team, when not worrying about the safety of this bold pair of young climbers, had been busy themselves. Andrej Kolárik and Erik Rabatin climbed *Mystical Demno* (1400m of climbing, with 34 pitches up to VII+ and A2) to the left of the 2000 Copp-Pennings line, *Tague it to the Top* on the SSE face of **Hainabrakk East** (c5650m). Close by, Igor Koller, Vlado Linek and Juraj Podbradski tried to complete a line on the far right side of the south-east face of **Shipton Spire** that they had attempted in 2004. They completed the route to the notch on the north-east ridge and junction with *Ship of Fools*, from where Koller and Linek made a spirited attempt to reach the summit. Over very difficult ice and mixed ground where they were hit by successive storms, they managed to reach a point 80m below the summit but were thwarted by dangerous snow conditions. *Prisoners of the Shipton* (not to summit) was rated VIII A3 WI 5+.

On the flanks of Great Trango above the Dunge glacier rises the **Trango Pulpit** (6050m), sporting a huge precipitous wall that until last year had only been breached by a Norwegian team in 1999. Sam Beaugey, Martial Dumas, Jean-Yves Fredriksen and Yann Mimet added a second route to the left, climbing for around 17 days in capsule style to create *Azazel* (1500m; VII A3+ M6 WI 4 6a). To say all four completed the route is untrue: three pitches below the top Sam Beaugey donned a winged suit, sized up the prospects of clipping the midway terrace, and launched for a BASE jump. Less than a minute later he was back on the Dunge glacier, where he had to wait three full days for his mates to summit, strip the route and return to base camp.

North of the Baltoro there was a rare attempt on the **Muztagh Tower** (7284m). The original aim was a new line on the imposing north face but when this proved impossible under the conditions, an attempt was made to climb the unrepeatable *1956 route* on the south-east ridge. On the last try Bruce Normand (a Scot living in Switzerland) and Philippe Oberson (Swiss)

reached an altitude of c6300m, above the great sérac before avalanche conditions forced a retreat. During the expedition, members had made ascents of **Pt 5850m**, **Pt 6001m** (Tsetse on the Swiss map), and **Pt 6345m** on the Biange-Godwin Austen divide, all possibly first ascents.

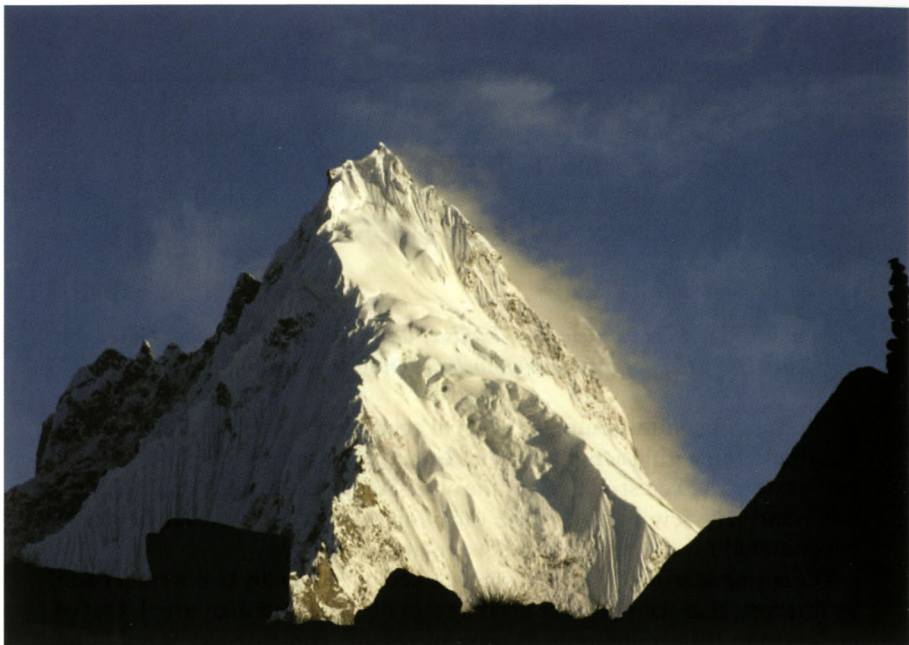
On the unclimbed **Savoia Kangri** (aka Summa Ri, 7263m), just west of K2, a Japanese expedition failed at 6300m on the south face, following the couloir climbed by the 1998 British expedition (which reached 7000m on the mountain, the high point to date).

No one summited K2 last year and there is little of interest to report on the neighbouring 8000m peaks except for a most notable new route on **Broad Peak** (8047m). Kazakhstan mountaineers Sergey Samoilov and his partner, currently very much the 'man of the moment', Denis Urubko, made a remarkable alpine-style ascent of the previously unclimbed 2500m south-west face. The pair took six days and on the lower section overcame two steep rock barriers with difficulties up to F6b A2 and M5. At c7400m they were forced onto some rocky ribs, which gave a section estimated to be M6+. The south-east ridge was gained in strong winds and the pair followed the crest over the summit to descend the *Normal Route*.

The Hushe region was again popular with many teams operating in the Charakusa and Nangma valleys. Running north from the Charakusa is the Chogolisa glacier and there a team of strong Italian rock-climbers put up some impressive routes on peaks below 6000m. Hervé Barmasse, Ezio Marlier and Fabio Salini climbed the north face of virgin **Pk 5500m**, via a line they named *Fast and Furious* (700m; V/4, A1). They stopped 10m below the highest point. Two routes were added to **Raven's Peak** (c5300m) above the Beusten glacier. The eight-pitch *Green Tea* was 6b and A1 but the 16-pitch *Up and Down*, on the left and steepest part of the south face, was more demanding. Barmasse, Cristian Brenna, Francesca Chenal and Luca Maspes climbed it using fixed ropes at 6c/6c+ and A1, placing some bolts where necessary in view of a possible future free ascent. This wasn't long coming. Less than two weeks later Brenna climbed it all free in one day at 7c. With a number of other pitches of 7a and 7b, *Up and Down* is a good contender for one of the most difficult free routes in the Karakoram.

Gianluca Bellin and Giovanni Ongaro made the 'first ascent' of the 5500m **Capucin** (originally nicknamed 'The Dru' by Pat Littlejohn and Mick Hardwick, who made the first ascent of Raven's Peak). They climbed the south face (400m; 6b and A2), though it is not clear whether they reached the summit or stopped on the ridge below. Finally, Barmasse and Giovanni Pagnoncelli climbed the north-west face of an unnamed and previously virgin c6000m peak on the long west ridge of **Farol** (only Barmasse reached the highest point). The 1000m route had ice up to 60°. This may be the same as the '**Fiona Peak**' marked on the 2005 Polish sketch map.

Farol Central (c6350m) received its first ascent courtesy of Cedric Haehlen and Hans Mitterer from Germany. The pair climbed the long south pillar at VI A1 M6/M7, avoiding the first big rock buttress via a snow



155. Namika (6325m) rises above the south bank of the Charakusa glacier, close to the point where the Chogolisa glacier flows down from the north. Being below 6500m, the peak is now officially permit free but received its first ascent back in the late 1980s by a British party. (*Luca Maspes collection*)

couloir to the left, which brought them to the crest at around 5600m. They bivouacked once and from the summit made an exciting descent of the snow face to the west, rappelling between séracs and the pillar. They found no trace of any previous passage. Mitterer also joined Canadian Raphael Slawinski and American Steve Swenson for an attempt on the unclimbed **Hassin Peak** (c6300m) on the eastern rim of the Charakusa glacier, north of K6. They had one bivouac but retreated from 6000m when the summit snow slopes became too dangerous to continue. Slawinski and Swenson later attempted **Farol Far East** (aka Righthand Farol peak, c6200m) via a fine-looking goulotte. They enjoyed some intricate climbing before reaching a blank granite headwall. This peak is thought to be unclimbed, though a French team got close in 2004 via a line in the same vicinity as the Slawinski-Swenson attempt. Other parties in the area repeated some of the now quasi-classic routes on peaks such as **Naysar Brakk**.

In the Nangma only one new route has come to light at the time of writing. Polish climbers Jan Kuczera and Tomasz Polok climbed the south-west pillar of the final (lowest) tower on the south-west ridge of **Changi Tower's** east summit. They called this c5000m formation **Barasa** or Changi Peak. Their route was 500-550m high, sometimes slabby with no protection and graded VII. They named it *Moonlight Pillar*.