I felt such an enormous sense of relief when Paul hugged me. He had water and food ready and vacated the tent so I could lie down. After 40 minutes he left to descend 1000m to advance base camp – another night in a plastic bag was beyond the call of duty. I fell sound asleep. At dusk I woke, made another brew, and then passed out till 7am. Descending the gully next day, my legs were like jelly. Paul was waiting at ABC and we packed up and made our way slowly back to base camp.

Back in Islamabad, I was happy to spend the time before my flight watching Wimbledon on cable in my hotel room. While we'd been in the mountains there had been further bombings in nearby Peshawar and Rawalpindi. Baig was ever adamant we keep a low profile. 'Only go out on the streets very early,' he said, 'and take me with you.' But when we did venture into the bazaar in the quiet of the morning, as vendors loaded their



9. Summit day: Pat Deavoll on the ice rib high on Karim Sar's south face (*Pat Deavoll*).

stalls and the first of the day's shoppers drifted by, we were approached by Pakistanis who thanked us for visiting their country. 'Thank you for coming in troubled times,' they said. 'It's not always like this. Really, we just want peace.'

Summary: An account of the first ascent of Karim Sar (6180m), Hunza region, northern Pakistan, in June 2009 by Pat Deavoll, accompanied to 5100m by Paul Hersey.

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SANDY ALLAN

To Get Closer

Tenth July 2009. We're at 8125m, the summit of Nanga Parbat. I have semi-frozen hands, the weather is awful and Rick and I think we are a tad late to be in such a high place. It's 3pm and our top camp is long way down at around 7000m.



10. Nanga Parbat's Diamir Face, from base camp. *(Sandy Allan coll)*

Rick rushed his photos but I insisted on taking some better ones. While we had both already climbed several 8000m peaks, most of my photos are really poor. As it turned out my Nanga Parbat images are not much better, but there are at least some without thumbs or the inside of down mittens in the frame; one of Rick in fact is rather good and I know he likes it. That's how I partly froze my hands. The old ego trap was yawning again, a trap that for mountaineers can lead to poor decision-making with potentially grave consequences. I was putting my wellbeing at risk for the sake of a photo. Everyone, including me, seems to want a photo, a memento or



11. Rick Allen between camps 1 and 2 on the Diamir Face. *(Sandy Allan coll)*

perhaps nowadays a requirement to prove to others that we were there, like an attendance certificate from school days.

We had kept to our turn back time, but had stretched it to the maximum. Most of the Austrians and Italians had turned back ages ago, exhausted and disheartened by the continuing false bluffs and Cairngorm weather. Yet I felt an amazing calmness, an inner strength and surprisingly well. When the final Italian climber who had kept us company turned back at around 7900m I simply gave a hand sign in my big mittens to Rick not be influenced and to keep going. Rick read the sign and responded positively. We said our goodbyes to a sad Giuseppe and climbed on upwards. Less than an hour later we were forced to our knees, crawling the final metres in a strong cold wind. At the summit we could only sit or kneel; the wind would not let us stand.

Apart from the love of it, one of the reasons we had returned to Nanga Parbat was to peer down from the summit and see if there was a climbable way up from the Monzino Ridge side, which Rick and I had tried in 1995 on an Alpine-style expedition led by Doug Scott. However, due to the wind neither of us had the nerve to peer over what seemed like the very edge of our horizon.

After descending a short distance we sheltered behind a rocky protrusion while I massaged my hands back to semi-circulation, something the

first aid manuals advise against but which invariably works if you catch the freeze early enough. We then scooted away downwards, meeting a large Korean team with some Pakistani and Sherpa high altitude porters who were making a concerted effort to get a 'Miss Go Mi-sun' to the summit. 'Wow! You're even later than us,' I said. 'It's wildly windy up there, we could not stand up on the summit. You should be careful.' I added a good luck and take care.

A few steps onwards and I recognised the face of Wolfgang who was part of a large, friendly Austrian team. He seemed calm and, when I asked, said, 'I am OK and with the Koreans.' I warned him that while 'you may think you are with the Koreans, the Koreans may not think you are with them'. I was incredibly concerned for him and knew he was far too late and was, in reality, by himself. 'Take care; you should come back with us,' I told him explicitly. But I knew his eyes were fixed on the summit and there was no way he was going to retreat. My thoughts were struggling with the knowledge that these people were actors entering their own 'perfect storm'. It was obvious that none were for retreating.

Rick and I continued down, moving fast and efficiently, the weather becoming even worse and it was starting to snow. The thought of having to cross a soft, deep, unstable snow-pack on the open slopes below was not something either of us relished. We were still feeling strong, and soon caught up with another famous Korean woman who had summited at least an hour before us and was being guided by Sherpas who were on oxygen. I recall one Sherpa in front of her and two behind, with tight ropes to their precious employer.

Miss Oh Eun-sun did not actually use bottled oxygen herself and was claiming that all her ascents were therefore 'oxygen free'. A literal interpretation if ever there was one; it seems that being hauled around by some of the highest paid Sherpas from Nepal, sucking oxygen from cylinders on their backs, does not really count as assistance. Nevertheless, as an enlightened Scottish Highlander I believe that our existence depends on our ability to build a harmonious, respectful global community and Miss Oh Eun-sun was a nice lady so I kept my thoughts to myself. I had spoken to her on a number of days before; we'd even shared a photo shoot and I was getting to know her quite well. On one occasion we chatted for ages while washing clothes by the stream at base camp. I was impressed that she did not send one of her minions to do her laundry. She explained that both she and Miss Go Mi-sun wanted to be the first woman to climb all 14 eight thousanders. While Miss Go was competitive with her, Miss Oh felt she was not competitive with Miss Go, she simply liked the idea of doing them all first. Misses Go and Oh were quite chatty and we often saw them on walks together around base camp. They had managers and a film team and their own teams of hyper-fit, quietly competent Sherpas. It was a bit of a circus. But the Korean teams fixed lots of rope and did a great deal of the work on the mountain from which we all benefited.

It was almost dark as we arrived back at our high camp at 7000m where

my Vango tent was still standing. Two local porters were there, as originally I had been guiding the mountain until my client, Edward, went home after a couple of forays to Camp 1 at 4890m. Huge avalanches crashing down only metres from our camp, an incessant tummy bug and a pregnant wife back in London had won the day and Ed decided to go home. Immediately, with the help of Ali, our liaison officer, I told Mehrban and Quasim they could consider themselves on holiday with full pay. I had hired the two high altitude porters to assist me with fixing the mountain for Ed. However, I explained that Rick and I did not really need them; they could stay and climb the mountain for themselves or hang about and try and get work with the other teams, or simply go home. Mehrban was a wonderful guy who had already climbed K2 and was greatly respected by all the expeditions' porters and local staff. They operated independently and seemed to hang out with the porters of the much larger Austrian team, led by Gerfried Göschl.

I fully expected Mehrban and Qasim to have descended on our summit day but there they were on our return, offering us water to drink. It tasted of sweaty sock or something even worse so I vomited the first mouthful, then discreetly dislodged the large pot and began melting fresh snow. They were cool guys, good company and it was ace to have them around. However, in my opinion, while the Pakistan mountaineering agencies tell us their high altitude porters are good, they are still not equal to the Nepalese Sherpas.

That night at high camp I was awoken by a hullabaloo going on in the darkness. From the sound of it, people were trying to organise something. It transpired that the Koreans we met going up as we descended were now stuck up on the mountain between high camp and the summit. The news came as no surprise, but being reasonable men, rather than informing them it served them right we sent out a rescue party. Mehrban got up in what seemed like the middle of the night in freezing cold temperatures and went to help, joining forces with local staff from various expeditions who had been looking after the high camp. It was a sterling effort, moving by head-torch light, carrying freshly melted snow-water, spare food and clothing, and breaking trail for the Koreans back to Camp 4. They had extended the Koreans' lives. But being out overnight with limited food and water in terrible weather is not good for the human condition. Add to that the effects of extreme high altitude and the reader can work out that the tale does not end here.

The following morning Camp 4 was quiet. Rick and I got up early thinking that all was as good as could reasonably be expected and that all the climbers were back at high camp, in their tents warming up, re-hydrating and resting. We struck camp and headed down. We had spent enough time at altitude to know that it's best to hang out where there are good supplies of fresh water, thicker air and hearty meals. Rick also needed to get back to work and my daughter Hannah was graduating in Edinburgh so we both had good reasons to be back home.

The descent was made more complex by the lack of fixed ropes. While



12. Rick Allen on the summit of Nanga Parbat (8125m). *(Sandy Allan coll)*

Rick and I are not too fond of the fixed rope thing, they are actually really handy when descending. But as the weather window for the summit attempt had come faster than the commercial groups had planned for, they had had to pull the lower ropes to fix higher parts of the mountain for the aforementioned Koreans and their entourages. This resulted in some quite exposed down-climbing but being reasonably early the snow was in good condition. We struck my tent at Camp 3 (6500m) and went on to Camp 2 (6000m) where we again packed tents and tided up. Rick hung out at C2 for a while, but I wanted to get off the hill as soon as possible so declined the offer of tea from some high altitude porters, shouldered my huge sack and set off abseiling down the Kinshofer Wall and on to Camp 1. (I should mention that the Kinshofer Wall is an impressive bit of climbing, good Scottish grade IV at 5800m.) At Camp 1, I struck the old Salewa tent that Rick and I had bought second hand in Kathmandu for our new direct route on Pumori south face – that was back in 1986. It was sad seeing the faded flysheet in tatters although it made me realise that even with the occasional imperfection my own skin was holding out quite well under the circumstances. I tidied the camp up as best as I could, meanwhile melting snow and making a quick brew. Taking as much of the equipment and rubbish

as I could by tying it to the outside of my Berghaus expedition sack, I left the rest for Rick.

I arrived back at base camp exhausted but happy. Rick and I were greeted like royals for, though we hadn't realised it, most people had turned back and did not make the summit. We had a few brews and some food, then went instantly comatose in our tents. Next morning we were updated on all the news. Miss Go Mi-sun had died; exhausted, she had fallen off on the descent somewhere above Camp 2 where a section of the fixed ropes had been removed for use higher up. Wolfgang Kölblinger, the Austrian we met intent on the summit, had also disappeared. There was a dreadful list of sad tales, all very human and unfortunately avoidable. Gerfried and some of his team turned up having climbed a new line to Camp 4 and then summited the next day, really looking for Wolfgang but all they found was a hat in the rocks. They presumed he had been blown off the summit.

The Korean budget was sufficient to charter two helicopters to search for Miss Go. This all added to the pandemonium. There were people milling about wearing the finest designer mountaineering clothing comprehensively adorned with sponsors' logos, taking photos and rushing to be the first with the bad, but potentially money-making news. It simultaneously amazed and disgusted me. They were really just ordinary people who wanted to climb a mountain yet who somehow were getting tangled up in the futile grabbing of associated fame, sacrificing empathy by being the first to get news out to some commercial website.

It made me sad and I was relieved to just hang out in my tent. The time alone allowed me to reflect on this 8000m peak bagging scene, so different from the Himalayan new routing I'm more familiar with. I saw many mountaineering people camped in the same remote but beautiful base camp as me, letting their sense of responsibility erode. Have these mountaineers, set on ticking eight thousanders by the normal route, fixing rope every step of the way, lost the habit of inwardness and open-hearted listening? So willing, or so it seemed to me, to sell their soul for a quick lucrative tit-bit.

Thinking back to our moment at 8125m, it was an amazing summit truly worked for, and we had it to ourselves. It was ace! And that was in line with much of our experience in Pakistan.

At the start of the expedition we had spent one night in Islamabad and then driven along the Karakoram Highway. We met amazingly friendly locals and travellers from distant lands; crossing into the Swat valley, we travelled in convoy with police and soldiers riding shotgun on our trucks; turning up in a village looking for beds in the middle of the night, the hospitality shown to us was humbling.

Walking out from base camp – Rick and me, Mehrban and Qasim – we met some holy men and invited them to share a hastily-made brew and our remaining biscuits. We sat together on boulders among green grass by the edge of a small stream. Once our biscuits were finished they shared their snack food with us. I talked about Pakistan, my ascent of Muztagh



13. Sandy Allan on the summit of Nanga Parbat: 'We could only sit or kneel; the wind would not let us stand.' *(Sandy Allan coll)*

Tower and journeys with friends on the endless Baltoro, climbing in these awesome mountains, jungles of inspiring ice-encrusted rock obelisks, cathedrals and spires, turbulent glacier-melt rivers, creaky bridges, ageing hand-painted jeeps with treadless, bulging tyres. Wonderful Pakistan; oily lentils, onion bhajis, goats and goat herders, stubborn mules, flies, apricot trees, irrigation channels and dusty chickens, well-intentioned people who do not necessarily believe that 'west is best' but understand that we are all simply different.

The conversation was amiable and engrossing. It became obvious that these spiritually rich men were also well-heeled and well-travelled. The leader of the holy men looked into my eyes and wonderingly asked why I wanted to go to the summit of Nanga Parbat? I replied, 'To get closer of course.' He nodded and smiled.

Summary: An account of how Sandy Allan unwittingly became the first Scotsman to climb Nanga Parbat. He and Rick Allen reached the 8125m summit on 10 July 2009 via the *Kinshofer Route* on the Diamir Face.