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TIMOTHY ELSON

## Pakistan 2017



Approaching the north-west face of Shispare. (*Kazuya Hiraide*)

The 2017 summer season in Pakistan saw 35 registered expeditions. (Expeditions to peaks under 6,500m do not need a climbing permit.) Of these, 16 were to 8,000ers and a further five were to Spantik. On the whole, these were commercial expeditions. There were two stand-out climbs: the first ascent of the north-east face of Shispare (7611m) by the Japanese climbers Kazuya Hiraide and Kenro Nakajima; and a difficult new route of the south-west face of Gasherbrum I (8080m), also known as Hidden Peak, by Czech climbers Marek Holeček and Zdeněk Hák. The two climbs share some similarities as they were both climbed in impeccable alpine style and required multiple attempts over several years to achieve success.

In addition there was a very impressive ascent of Badal Peak and traverse to K7 West (6615m), and there was a strong attempt of Latok I's (7145m) north ridge that got the highest on this much-tried objective, with the first attempt dating back to 1978. In general, August was very wet and did not have much stable weather, with July being more stable. A continuing welcome trend in the Pakistani Karakoram is for increased tourism from Pakistanis rather than from hitherto predominant foreigners. Unlike some recent years there does not seem to have been any major issues with permits. The FCO continues to recommend not using the Karakoram highway between Islamabad and Gilgit; there are regular flights from Islamabad to Gilgit and Skardu that overcome this difficulty, though delays are still a common occurrence.



The north-west face of Shispare. The Japanese climbed the left hand spur topping out to the left of the summit pyramid. The American team's aim was the central spur. (Steve Su)

### Shispare

Kazuya Hiraide had attempted Shispare three times previously: the north-east face in 2007, and the south-west face in 2012 and 2013. In 2017 Hiraide and Kenro Nakajima arrived at base camp on 26 July and then acclimatised on the initial section of the first ascent route of Shispare and then on nearby Passu Peak (7478m), where they reached 6,750m before being forced back in bad weather. After eight days of more of this, they made their first attempt on the north-east face, however continuing bad weather turned them back low down.

On 18 August they set off with a slightly improved forecast: the whole of August saw high precipitation with more frequent than usual landslides. Their second day on the climb proved most trying, dodging avalanches on the lower exposed slopes and then climbing until late to a poor bivouac on a snow arête.

The third day provided the crux climbing (M6, WI5), then they spent the fourth tent-bound at 6,850m in bad weather before finally reaching the summit on 22 August. They spent the next two days descending the long and complex original route arriving in base camp on 24 August. Hiraide is no stranger to this type of climb, having won the Piolet d'Or in 2009 for his ascent of the south-east face of Kamet. Shispare has been climbed twice: its first ascent in 1974 by a Polish-German team and its second in 1994 by a Japanese team. Both teams climbed the very long and complicated *Borchers Ridge* in siege-style, named for Heinz Borchers who died on the first ascent.

### Gasherbrum I

Marek Holeček and Zdeněk Hák climbed a new direct route up the south-west face of Gasherbrum I in an eight-day tour de force, with three days spent climbing the headwall between 7,400m and 7,700m with reported difficulties of M7 and WI5+. The south-west face had been partially climbed by two separate routes first by Jerzy Kukuczka and Voytek Kurtyka in 1983 where the headwall was avoided and more recently by Viktor Afanasiev and Valery Babanov who climbed the left side of the face and then joined the upper south-west ridge. Holeček first attempted the face in 2009 with Zdeněk Hrubý where they reached 7,500m at the headwall; the pair returned in 2013 but Hrubý fell to his death with all the technical climbing gear and ropes leaving Holeček facing an epic retreat. Holeček returned in 2015 with Tomáš Petreček and reached 7,400m before furious weather forced retreat; Holeček came back again in 2016 with Ondřej Mandula and reached 7,700m where the pair were trapped for several days in a terrible storm before making their way back to base camp after 13 days out. Holeček suffered frostbitten feet as a consequence of this.

In 2017 Holeček returned and after acclimatising set off with Hák on 25 July. They climbed the lower section of the *Afanasiev-Babanov* route to meet the *Kukuczka-Kurtyka* route before heading directly up the headwall. They reached the summit on 30 July and arrived back at base camp on 1 August after descending an avalanche-prone normal route. This seems to have been the only ascent of the mountain in 2017. They named their route *Satisfaction* in memory of Zdeněk Hrubý.

### K7 West

In August a Japanese team of Katsutaka Yokoyama and Takaaki Nagato made the first traverse from Badal Peak to K7 West (6615m). The pair, along with Ryo Masumoto, had climbed Badal Peak in 2014 via the massive south-east ridge (VI, 5.11c, C1, M5, 1600m) but considered it incomplete as they had not traversed to the summit of K7 West. Badal Peak is the shoulder south-west of the summit of K7 West and was first climbed by a Spanish team in 2007. In August 2017 Yokoyama and Nagato were back and after fixing some of the initial pitches on 2 August, set off in a single push. They climbed 2,300m of technical ground over five days, from 5 to 10 August, ascending the south face of Badal Peak then traversing to K7 West. In the upper part of their route they joined the 2012 *Slovenian* route on the north-west face. They abseiled down the north-west face to arrive at base camp on the 11 August. They called the route *Sun Patch Spur* (ED+ 5.11cR, A2, M5, 90°). This impressive alpine-style ascent of a highly technical route was considered one of the 'last great problems' of the Charakusa valley.

### Latok I

The north ridge of Latok I (7145m) is one of the great outstanding problems in the Karakoram. It has repulsed around 20 strong teams that have included some of the best climbers in the world. The closest attempt to

date was by Jeff Lowe, George Lowe, Michael Kennedy and Jim Donini in 1978, when they reached approximately 150m from the summit before being forced to retreat. The 2017 Russian team consisted of three climbers: Alexander Gukov, Anton Kashevnik and Valery Shamalo. They climbed in pure alpine style. On the approach Shamalo fell in a river and was submerged, which resulted in him getting a lung infection.

After acclimatising, the trio set off on 17 August, climbing a gully left of the ridge initially then onto the ridge itself. They took ten days' food with them and climbed through never perfect and sometime terrible weather for 12 days. On the 12th day they reached around 6,700m and felt they were almost at the end of the difficulties. However, they were also at the end of their tether and with no improvement in the weather, plus Shamalo's deteriorating condition, they thought it would still take three days to reach the summit, so decided to descend. On 29 August, while abseiling, a mistake led to one of their packs being dropped, unfortunately the one that contained the tent and sleeping bags. That day they did 14 abseils and spent a terrible night huddling under a hammock. The consequence was the team suffered bad frostbite: Shamalo lost all of his toes and parts of several fingers and Kashevnik several toes. After 14 days out, at 5am on 31 August they reached the glacier and took a further eight hours to wade to their base camp after a heavy accumulation of snow. By this time Shamalo had developed full pneumonia. This is an incredibly impressive attempt that clearly pushed them to their limits.

### **Pakistan's 8,000ers**

The five Karakoram 8,000ers saw the main volume of high-altitude expeditions in the summer of 2017. The majority were of a commercial type with almost every team attempting the 'normal' routes in a siege-style with oxygen. K2 (8611m) saw its first ascent in three years with Vanessa O'Brien and Mingma Gyalje Sherpa's team of 12 reaching the top on 29 July, despite deep snow that turned back all other expeditions. Mingma Gyalje Sherpa had a remarkable year, climbing five 8,000m peaks: Dhaulagiri (8167m) and Makalu (8485m) in Nepal in the spring and K2, Broad Peak (8051m) and Nanga Parbat (8126m) later in the year. He had got very close to the summit of Nanga Parbat in June, in fact claiming an ascent until doubts were raised. On 2 October he undisputedly made the summit and was very late in the year to make such an ascent.

On Nanga Parbat in June the very experienced Argentinian-Spanish team of Mariano Galván and Alberto Zerain attempted an alpine-style ascent of the massive Mazeno Ridge, first climbed to the summit in 2012 by Sandy Allan and Rick Allen. However, they disappeared and, after an aerial search was made, are presumed to have been caught in an avalanche. Also of note was an experienced Spanish team attempt on the Gasherbrum I-II traverse, which they abandoned. The Pakistani government requires foreign expeditions to employ Pakistani high-altitude porters in an attempt to discourage expeditions from bringing Nepali Sherpas to do this work, although many

expeditions have Nepali Sherpas in addition. This is only really relevant for siege and commercial expeditions.

### Winter

The 2017-18 winter season in the Karakoram was dramatic: a large Polish expedition attempted the first winter ascent of K2 while a French-Polish pair attempted the second winter ascent of Nanga Parbat. The 13-strong Polish team, led by Krzysztof Wielicki who made the first winter ascent of Everest in 1980, arrived in Pakistan at the end of December, set up base camp and started climbing the *Česen* ridge. Meanwhile on Nanga Parbat, Elisabeth Revol (France) and Tomek Mackiewicz (Poland) were climbing the *Messner-Eisendle-Tomaseth* route in alpine style without oxygen. They had attempted the route twice together in winter, getting to 7,800m in 2015. Mackiewicz had attempted the mountain a further four times. They summited on 25 January but Mackiewicz was soon suffering from frostbite, snow blindness and altitude sickness. They spent the night in a crevasse at 7,400m and managed to reach their camp four at 7,200m the next day.

At the same time a rescue effort had begun, with a crowd-funding campaign started and co-operation from the K2 winter expedition. Revol made Mackiewicz as comfortable as possible and continued her descent and late in the afternoon of 27 January Adam Bielecki, Denis Urubko, Jaroslaw Botor and Piotr Tomala were helicoptered from K2 base camp to Nanga Parbat base camp at 4,900m. Urubko and Bielicki immediately set off up the *Kinshofer* route and climbed through the night up more than 1,000m of ground to find Revol at 2am on the morning of 28 January at 6,100m. Revol had severe frostbite by this point and Urubko and Bielicki provided first aid before making the heart-breaking decision not to continue up to Mackiewicz who was unable to move unaided according to Revol. On 29 January Urubko and Bielicki lowered Revol down to camp one where she was airlifted to hospital in Islamabad. This was a truly dramatic and daring rescue on the part of the climbers and Pakistani military pilots, though sadly it did not manage to save Mackiewicz.

Following the drama of the Nanga Parbat rescue, the Polish K2 team continued, establishing three camps. However, with a dry winter rock fall was a constant danger. After Adam Bielicki was hit in the face, breaking his nose, and Rafal Fronia sustained a broken arm they decided to switch routes to the classic *Abruzzi* ridge. By 23 February, Bielicki and Urubko were at camp three and Urubko proposed to Bielicki to make a summit attempt. An argument ensued and on 24 February Urubko set off on a summit push alone against the wishes of the team. By 26 February Urubko had abandoned his attempt and descended to base camp, where he left the expedition. Urubko's attempt was in part due to a disagreement over what 'counts' as a winter ascent. Officially the winter season ends on 28 February while the astronomical end of winter is 20 March. The rest of the team continued but failed to make much headway due to heavy snow that did not let up. The expedition was abandoned in the middle of March.

### **Baltoro**

In the Baltoro region, the most notable news was the first ascent of Praqpa Ri South (7026m) via the east-south-east ridge (TD+, M3, 90°, 1500m) from the Khalkhal pass (5705m) by the Chilean team of Andres Bosch and Alejandro Mora. They approached via the Khalkhal valley and acclimatised first via a new route on Khalkhal West (6250m) via its south-west ridge (D, 1000m). Their ascent still leaves the main summit of Praqpa Ri (7156m) unclimbed. Also in the Baltoro region, Bruce Normand, Billy Pierson and Marcos Costa made an attempt on the unclimbed east face of Gasherbrum IV (7925m). They reached 7,300m but were defeated by a band of unprotectable marble, only about five metres high. They felt that in a deeper snow year the wall would have been possible. See page 79 for an account.

### **Biafo**

In addition to the strong attempt on Latok I there were attempts on Ogre I (7285m), also known as Baintha Brakk, and on Ogre III (6950m). A strong Swiss-German-Austrian team comprising Alexander Huber, Dani Arnold, Mario Walder and Christian Zenz attempted the east pillar. They experienced very high temperatures, only being able to move on their route between midnight and 5am, describing the snow at 6,100m as slush; this forced them to abandon their climb as they felt the risks were too high. Huber, who has been on numerous expeditions to the Biafo over a 25-year period, felt this was a consequence of climate change and that teams attempting technical routes on lower altitude peaks in the Karakoram are better aiming for the end of August and start of September rather than the traditional Karakoram climbing season of July into August.

At the end of August a young German team consisting of Xari Mayr, Rainer Treppete and Fritz Miller attempted the south pillar of Ogre III. They fixed ropes on the lower part of the climb through a complex icefall and established two camps, before retreating back to base camp. They then made two attempts on the summit: on the first their highest camp had been destroyed; on the second attempt the forecast good weather did not materialise and they retreated. Sadly, in January 2018, Mayr died in an avalanche in the Dolomites. He was only 22.

### **Hispar**

The Hispar region was fairly quiet in 2017. There was an interesting attempt on an unclimbed peak called Machu (6630m) from a British team consisting of Peter Thompson and Aiden Laffey. They tried the south-west ridge to west ridge and reached 5,650m where they reached an impasse they could not overcome. In June Symon Welfringer (France) climbed a new route on the south face of Emily Peak (c5850m), which he called *La Vengeance de Robine* (AI4, M4, 1000m).

### **Batura**

In the Batura area, in addition to the Japanese success on Shispare, there

was a Pakistani expedition to attempt Passu (7478m), which was turned back by bad conditions in the icefall approaching their intended route. The American pair of Steve Su and Rusty Wills aimed to climb a new route on Shispare but after a reconnaissance Wills learned his mother was in hospital and returned to the US. Steve Su stayed on and climbed a new route on Maidon Sar (6085m), climbing through the night on 5 August up the south face and east ridge with difficulties up to M4.

### **Shimshal**

In August 2017, a British-Pakistani team consisting of George Cave, Ross Davidson, Steve Carratt, Clay Conlon and Karim Hayat visited the Gunj-e Dur glacier system off the Shimshal valley. Davidson and Hayat made the first ascent of Yad Sar (6,015m) via a 900m long Scottish II-III gully on the south-east face. They did not reach the highest point but rather the most prominent one on the multi-summit ridge. At the same time Conlon and Carratt were making the first ascent of a 5,855m peak from the Second East Gunj-e Dur glacier via the loose west ridge (PD). Also in the Shimshal valley were Tim Sheers, James Lawson and Will Smith (UK), whose original aim was to attempt the unclimbed Khurdopin Sar (6,310m) from the Virjerab glacier. However, on arrival they found that the Khurdopin glacier had advanced by a kilometre over the winter blocking access to the Virjerab glacier so they changed plans to attempt peaks above the Boesam pass (c5000m). They set up base camp south-west of the pass and then made four first ascents and attempted three other peaks over three weeks. They climbed a 5,700m peak via its north-west face (PD) from the pass, a 5,503m peak immediately south-east of the pass at AD, followed by ascents of Imtizaz Sar (5930m) and Arman Sar (5970m).

### **Charakusa and Kondus Valley**

A strong US team of Chris Wright, Steve Swenson and Graham Zimmerman based themselves on the Kaberi glacier in the far east of the Pakistani Karakoram to attempt the east face of Link Sar (7041m). They were unsuccessful, turned back by a combination of bad weather, hard climbing and complex route finding. However, they marvelled at the potential of the opposite site of the valley and the views up the Kondus valley where the Actual Ground Position Line between India and Pakistan lies. They approached up the Kondus valley, which has been closed to foreigners for the last 16 years, although the authorities seem to be allowing expeditions into the area again. Also active on Link Sar at the same time were Tom Ballard (UK) and Daniele Nardi (Italy), who attempted the north-east face. They reached 5,700m and retreated in bad weather; they noted that Link Sar seemed to attract the bad weather. Link Sar is unclimbed. Andy Houseman and Jon Griffith climbed the lower west summit (6938m) in 2015. An Italian team made up of Federica Mingolla, Simone Pedefferri and Luca Schiera visited the Kondus valley in July inspired by photos from the 2000 American expedition there. They set up base camp an hour's walk below the start of



Beautiful rock peaks near the snout of the Kaberi glacier. The striking tower on the right is Tahir Tower, climbed by Brady Robinson, Jimmy Chin, Steph Davis and Dave Anderson in 2000. (Graham Zimmerman)



Looking down the Kaberi from the lower flanks of Link Sar's east face. (Graham Zimmerman)

the Sherpi glacier and attempted some rock climbs but found the rock to be sandy and vegetated. They moved base to the Kiris valley and climbed a big-wall-style route (7b, A2) on a 4,900m peak they named Peak Nic.

### Hindu Raj

In June and July, an Italian team of Francesco Rota Nodari, Tarcisio Bellò and Mara Babolin visited the Hindu Raj, situated north of the main Karakoram on the border with China, a region infrequently visited. Between 30 June and 1 July the team made the first ascent of the last unclimbed 6,000er in the Chiantar glacier area, which they named Jinnah Peak (6177m) after the first president of Pakistan. They climbed the south-east face via an ice and mixed route they named *Ghotolti Dreams* (TD, IV, 70°, 1500m), climbed in a single 27h 30m push.