

*Mushishan Group and Karangutagg Valley, First Ascents.* It was reported that in August, 1998, a large group of Italian climbers and scientists travelled via Urumchi to Hotan on the southern fringes of the Taklimakan Desert. From there, they drove some 200 kilometers south to the small village of Houku, from which they were able to access the Mushishan Group, a group of glaciated peaks culminating in Mushishan (6638m), the high point on a long ridge of unclimbed summits. Renzo Corona and Franco Nicolini trekked to below the south flank of Mushishan, establishing a camp on August 19. Serac danger forced the pair to climb to a col on the ridge ("Col Lena," 6150m) via a vague rib on the southern snow slopes. On August 23, they followed the crest of the ridge west over Pt. 6450m ("Cima della Guide") to the high point of Mushishan.

In 1999, Corona and Nicolini returned to the region with an eight-member expedition to explore the Karangutagg Valley, a high valley they had reconned the year before. The peaks in this region offered technically straightforward snow climbs. Base Camp (3850m) was accessed via a three-day trek over a 3500-meter pass from the village of Kash Tash, itself a six-hour jeep drive from Hotan. In good weather, the team divided into two groups; Giacomo Corona, Nicolini and Omar Oprandi climbed Pt. 5850m while Renzo Corona, Mauro Fronza and Rocco Romagna made the first ascent of Pt. 5600m. On September 12, the group minus Romagna set out for the highest summit (6060m) of the area, reaching it at 5 p.m. (Fronza did not make the summit.) The team explored a pass into Tibet in 13 hours from BC, and Renzo Corona and Nicolini climbed a 5300-meter peak above BC that involved IV rock and 60-degree snow in its last 300 meters. On September 17, BC was struck and the team finished with a 1700-kilometer jeep drive across part of the Taklamakan Desert. (*High Mountain Sports* 210)

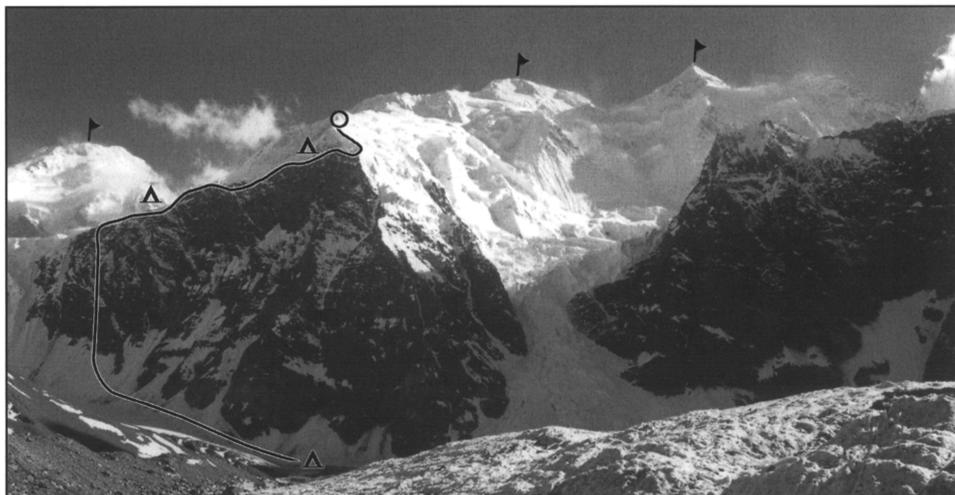
*Gasherbrum II, Northeast Ridge, Attempt.* In contrast to the relative ease of access from the west (Pakistan), the east side of the Gasherbrum mountains has been called, for geographical as well as political reasons, the "blank on the map" since the first expedition of Francis Edward Younghusband in 1887. And since the famous 1937 Eric Shipton expedition, highly acclaimed for its surveys of the unknown Aghil mountains and the eventual discovery of the Zug Shaksgam River, the area has been closed to foreigners. Not until the recent decade has the authorization to enter the upper Shaksgam river area (upstream from Durbin Jangal; downstream is relatively frequently trodden by expedition parties to the north face of K2) been issued to foreigners.

Since the successful 1993 first ascent of Mt. Chomo Lönzö (7816m), a satellite peak of Makalu, from the Chinese side, the Rikkyo University Alpine Club had nurtured a good relationship with the Chinese authorities. In 1998, it was granted the authorization to access the east face of the Gasherbrum region. Initially the main target of the expedition was the east ridge of GII, which was partially reconned by the 1989 Miyagi prefecture Federation of Mountaineering Expedition. As the recon progressed, however, the route was concluded to be too difficult mainly because of its distance to the summit via a line of knife-edge ridges liable to cause avalanches.

In 1998, a reconnaissance party reported the north ridge of GII was hopeless due to the heavy concentration of avalanches. Instead, they suggested the northeast ridge.

In 1999, the main party, led by Seisei Ajisaka and comprising seven members (including a medical doctor), five Sherpas and two Chinese staff (a liaison officer and an interpreter), started the mountaineering expedition to GII.

The Japanese members left Japan on June 1, organized the expedition party in Kashgar and started the 50-camel caravan with the assistance of 14 camel herders from Mazar Dara



*Summit flags indicate the tops of (from left to right) GI, Gasherbrum East and GII. The line taken by the 1999 Rikkyo University expedition to the top of "Junction Peak" is shown. The glacier leading up to GII is the Upper Nakpo Glacier. SEISEI AJISAKA*

on June 11. It took one week for them to cover the way to the Base Camp. On their way to Aghil Pass, they encountered an international party organized by Daniel Mazur. To their excitement, one of the eight members turned out to be Mr. Kurt Diemberger, who had a respectable climbing record in the Gasherbrum mountains. They exchanged friendship and were provided precious information on the climbing route to the exact northeast ridge of GII. Thanks to the information, the party adopted the East Nakpo Glacier route as the approach route to the Nakpo-Sagan col.

They passed the Aghil Pass (4780m) without any altitude trouble and covered the route on the broad river bed of the Shaksgam River. Although they did experience difficulty wading in the icy water, they at last reached Base Camp (4260m) at the confluence of the North Gasherbrum and the Urdok glaciers. Base Camp was placed on the Urdok Glacier side of the moraine on June 17.

They started climbing on June 18 and established Camp I (4500m) on the side moraine of the North Gasherbrum Glacier on June 20. They transported equipment and provisions to CI with the assistance of the camel herders. On June 22, they reached CII (4900m) which was located on the East Nakpo Glacier, just beneath the overwhelming great snow wall. After a struggle that included the fixing of 700 meters of rope on the 500-meter icy snow wall, they reached Nakpo-Sagan col and constructed CIII (5900m) on July 5. While advancing the route, they continued the transportation of supplies as well as acclimatization.

At 6400 meters on July 14, one of the three members fixing the route was hit by an slab avalanche and suffered a light bruise on his chest. As from the middle of July, with the change of the weather cycle pattern, heavy snowfall continued and avalanches were frequently observed. On July 24, two Sherpas who were transporting materials on the snow wall between CII to CIII were hit by an avalanche, barely escaping it. Two days after the avalanche (June 26), a second avalanche assaulted the route near CII and severely damaged the route by dislodging almost half of the fixed rope and isolating Camp III. On July 27, three members who had started to construct CIV found the uppermost fixed rope slashed away on the Sagan

Glacier side by an avalanche and were obliged to return to CIII. On July 28, Ajisaka ordered the retreat, and they started the descent, having reached a high point of 6780 meters. On August 2, they completed their climbing activity and gathered at BC.

After a week's stay at BC (on August 9), two of the camel herders arrived to report the inaccessibility by camel to BC due to the rising of the Shaksgam. (Two of their 35 camels had drowned in the flooded Shaksgam.) On August 10-11, the team transported equipment to the so-called American Base Camp with the assistance of nine camel herders. It was only on August 14 that they were at last able to start their return caravan. They reached the Mazar Dara on August 20.

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*Lao Ding Shan and Mt. Desio, First Ascents, and Exploration of the Chinese Karakoram.* It was an article by Kurt Diemberger in the 1995 volume of this journal that first inspired me to organize an expedition to the Chinese Karakoram. When I called the "Berg Fuehrer" himself to ask for information about the region, I couldn't believe my luck when Kurt wanted to join the expedition, which he promptly did. Around us gelled a team of Himalayan veterans including Dan Mazur, Greg Child, Chris Breemer, Andrew Brash, field technician Mark Dwyer and Nepalis Phurba Tamang, Kaji Tamang and Krishna XX. On April 9, we left for China with the considerable backing of Quokka.com, who would cover the expedition on a daily basis on their website.

After 3,500 miles of driving from Beijing to Mazar, six more days of walking with our caravan of 40 camels brought us to Base Camp on May 2, 1999. BC was situated in the Shaksgam Valley near the snout of the North Gasherbrum Glacier. This is an ideal base of operations for exploring this area as there is water and the spot is quite safe. However, camp must be placed on the north side of the glacier; otherwise, you stand a chance of being marooned when the Shaksgam River rises and floods the narrow gap between the glacier's snout and the opposite wall of the main valley. While the half-mile-wide Shaksgam River dries up almost completely every year (and wasn't there at all on our way in), the car-sized icebergs, torn from the North Gasherbrum Glacier and left strewn for miles along the riverbed, are a clear indication of the force the river can deliver when in flood.

From BC, we set out for our objectives, which were, in no particular order: to make a reconnaissance of the east face of Hidden Peak, to explore as far up the Shaksgam Valley as possible and to climb as many peaks as we were able. With the help of the camel drivers, we began by laying strategic food and gear depots in the Skyang Valley and on the south side of the North Gasherbrum Glacier.

The camel drivers are loath to go up the Shaksgam past the North Gasherbrum Glacier because of the danger of being trapped by a sudden flood. However, after cajoling them to help us, we headed en mass up the valley for approximately 35 kilometers to a point at which the Singhi Glacier flows across it and blocks further travel. We set up an Advanced Base Camp at the foot of the Shinghi's 80-meter ice towers. On the first day out from the Singhi camp, six members of the team, including Greg, Mark, Andrew, Phurba, Kaji and Dan, tried to climb a training peak. It is visible on the Russian maps of the area as the 5500-meter, ridge-shaped peak directly above the Shinghi camp. The climb was mostly moderate scrambling; the team, exhausted and unacclimatized, turned around just under the summit. The weather was stunningly clear and the team was able to make extensive photographs of Teram Kangri, the Singhi Glacier and the Shaksgam valley. Greg christened the peak "Mount Beckwith." From