

PREFACE

Strung-out deep in the remote mountains of northern Pakistan in early September, Vince Anderson and Steve House heard drumming. They saw fires burning in the valley below, a region reportedly rife with Islamic militants. In the ensuing days, all the way out to the village of Tarshing, locals repeatedly stopped them. They wanted to offer congratulations, for they'd been watching with binoculars and tracking Anderson and House's progress by spotting their headlamps at night as they completed one of the greatest alpine climbs in history, an ascent in pure style on the biggest mountain face in the world, a climb refreshingly done sans pre-event hype, reality TV-show website drama, and senseless publicity stunts. Everything about their climb was real, and worthy of celebration. Some 200 school kids greeted them with flowers in Tarshing, where the mayor and school headmaster gave speeches at a ceremony to commemorate their incredible climb.

The picture easily forms in my own mind, as during my first visit to Pakistan, in 2004, I was greeted with more kindness and warmth than anywhere in my world travels. That trip gave me the strongest memories of my life, ones that still come to me almost daily and extend far beyond just the climbing. Once you've been somewhere and made a personal connection, your ability to relate to the place changes.

Likewise, my disappointment and irritation at ignorance deepens when, predictably, people get a frightened look when I tell them I'm going to Pakistan. Or they say something worse. Before a friend's trip in 2004, another climber called him an idiot for going and predicted he'd get his head cut off. Such a fool's game, blindly succumbing to the political power of fear. As if you can divide the world, based on countries and broad categories of people, into "good" and "bad." Indeed, South Asia and the greater Middle East, including "-stan" countries, tend to make the news a lot these days. As does the United States. Pakistan is the world's second most populated Muslim country, and though hardly anybody will come out and say that all Muslim areas are places to universally avoid, the de facto portrayal of Muslim countries in our culture, media, and propaganda causes people to react in a way that would be considered abject racism or sexism were we talking about black people or women. War-fed nationalism is no excuse for the absolutely stunning ignorance too-often displayed by citizens who, ironically enough sometimes, hold themselves in such high regard. After all, as far as good and bad go, there can



Steve House and Vince Anderson trying to maintain a low-key presence while slipping past Islamic extremists in Tarshing on their way home from Nanga Parbat. *Steve House*

be no denying the fundamental evil of selling and starting a war over bad information, analyzed through the lens of prejudice. We should all be careful about judging an entire nation or group based on the actions of a sinister few, lest we become what we despise.

In light of our seemingly polarized and corrupt world, it's easy to tune out and just go climbing. But we fail as human beings if we use climbing as an excuse to avoid at least a basic level of conscientious behavior, whether in our day-to-day interactions with neighbors or on a more global scale.

On October 8 a horrific earthquake struck northern Pakistan, killing more than 80,000 people and leaving 3.3 million homeless. Many of those hardest hit faced a Himalayan winter in remote mountain villages that had been completely destroyed. Scores of climbers—and as a group, we're rarely accused of being a selfless lot—pitched in to help.

Going through the piles of clothes, sleeping bags, and tents in my little cabin, the difference in what I had versus the people I saw in the villages of Pakistan, people living *hard* lives with smiles on their faces, overwhelmed me. My local friends, none of whom had been to Pakistan, didn't need the personal connection—helping was the right thing to do. Soon I'd filled my car with warm clothes and tents to bring to the AAC, where boxes upon boxes of donated gear lined the hallways. AAC staff and volunteers set aside their other obligations for the relief efforts. Contributions poured in from companies, both outdoor industry and others, as well as individuals. The AAC shipped 28 tons of materials, and people helped out first-hand, like Renan Ozturk, whose painting of the view from Shipton Camp on the Trango Glacier during his summer 2005 trip graces this *Journal*. He and a crew of North Face athletes traveled to the devastated Kashmir region around Thanksgiving, spending several weeks helping with the relief efforts. Danika Gilbert and Sallie Dean Shatz each spent nearly two months, beginning in mid-January, delivering supplies and helping in the most remote villages. Many people and organizations, including the AAC, continue to help through the ongoing and epic recovery.

Indeed, it becomes exponentially harder to harbor prejudices when, no matter how different our cultures, we see people face-to-face, experience their warmth and kindness, and share their grief. We soon realize that, despite a fair share of nutballs and religious fanatics (yes, including here), the world is full of wonderful people and the boogeyman just might not be who we're led to believe. I've heard it said that if we don't travel, we stagnate. This certainly holds true for us as climbers, if we spend time only in our home crag wiring the same patterns, but even more true for us simply as humans.

Our climbing in distant places fills most of this book's pages. Whether we go there as tourists or something more perhaps depends on how we do things. After all, if we were just looking for a vacation, why not Disneyland? Hell, it'd be safer and probably cheaper. It's also more than just the climbing. For pure climbing quality, most climbers would never leave Yosemite. (I've got some excellent bouldering right by my house, too.)

Once we form an emotional connection with a place, its people, and its landscape, our travels transcend basic tourism and become unforgettable parts of our lives. And though most of us will never have an entire village celebrate our climb, that matters little relative to the richness of these connections and the power we experience in the world's mountains. When climbing our best, it seems we don't succumb to irrational fears, but remain open and aware, look at risk objectively, and seek good information. I hope you'll do the same and see the world. The *AAJ* gives you just a tease.

KELLY CORDES, *Senior Editor*