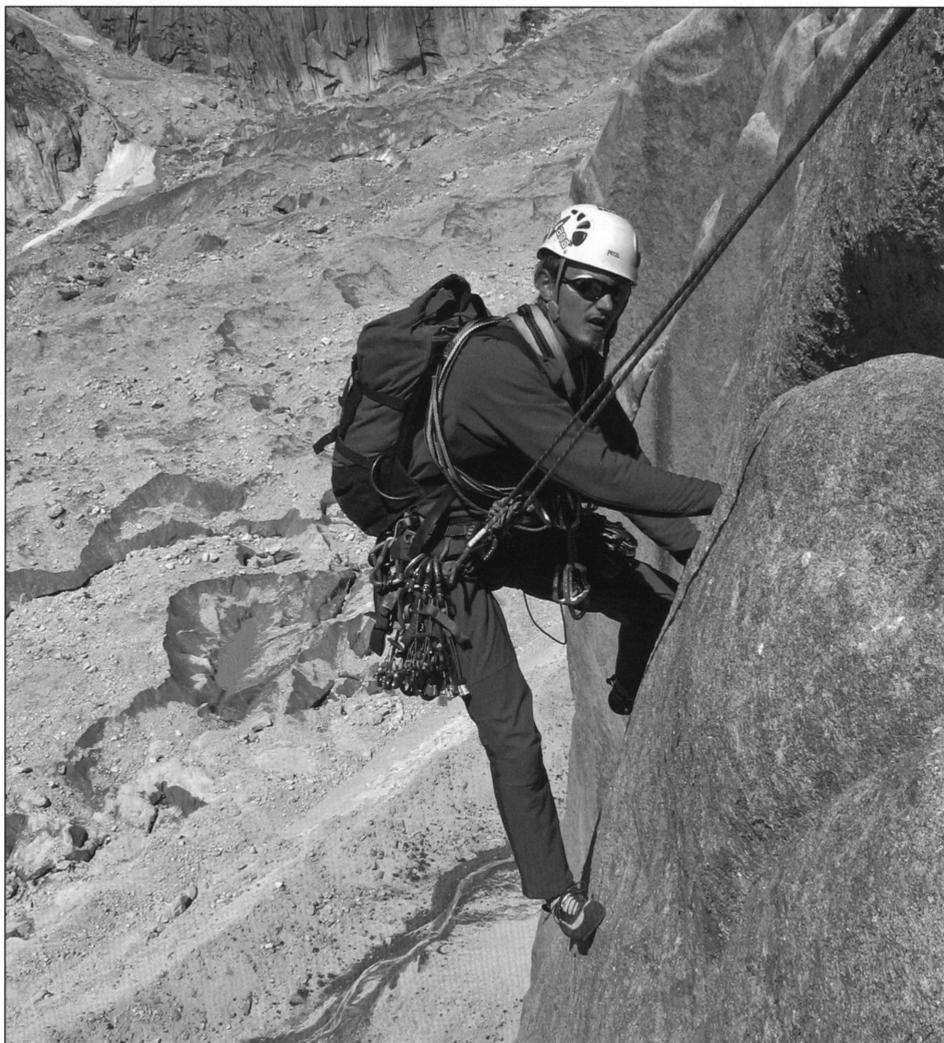


UP AND DOWN GREAT TRANGO TOWER

Going light on a stormy new route and harrowing descent in Pakistan.

GABO ČMÁRIK AND DODO KOPOLD



Gabo Čmárik enjoys good weather and a light load (for a 2,000-meter route) on the first day of climbing.
Dodo Kopold

Dodo Kopold: An ascent of Great Trango Tower meant more to me than all the routes I had done before. It was a big dream, and, not wanting to leave anything to chance, I spent a lot of time training and choosing the line, equipment, and tactics. But the hardest job was to find the ideal partner. We needed to form a good team, to be capable of all kinds of climbing, and to be very strong physically and mentally. To survive all possible situations, we needed the perfect partnership.

Gabo Čmárik: Dodo and I share the same ideal, which is to go alpine style on the biggest faces. We focused our training on long routes; for example, we did the Colton-McIntyre route on the Grandes Jorasses in winter with one bivy. There, we tested our minds and ability to survive in cold conditions. But I knew that Trango would be much more difficult.

Dodo: Neither Gabo nor I could be sure what would be involved with the actual climb, how many days of climbing it would require, how difficult the headwall would be, if there would be no way down except over the top. We thought a long time about such possibilities, about snowfall, a slow descent, or an injury to one of us. Great Trango is almost 6,300 meters high, and the altitude difference between base camp and the summit is more than 2,000 meters. Crack lines in excellent rock start just above the talus and finish very high. We chose the south-southwest face, one well suited for alpine style, but dangerous in case of bad weather. Climbing such a big face is not only about experience, but also about luck. We knew that if we were to be successful everything had to be okay, from a good spell of weather to excellent acclimatization. We wanted to do a new line on our first try, and our plan was to climb it in four days. That meant to go as fast as possible, as light as possible, and to climb even into the night.

Gabo: We thoroughly examined the face before the climb and chose our starting point. In the evening we packed our equipment. Everything had pluses and minuses. To climb quickly means to be light, and so we decided not to take our sleeping bags. We started at 4:30 a.m. The first pitches were up to me. Our tactic was not to lose time with changing equipment, so I was to lead all day. There were a lot of hard offwidth cracks, and I had only one big Camalot that I moved many times with me. Sometimes this Camalot was not big enough. The difficulty was between 7 and 8 [5.10–5.11]. It was very hot, and we had only three liters of water, which we drank very soon. Later, we had no water for cooking, so we were both thirsty and hungry.

Dodo: I don't know who was more dead after the first bivy, but neither of us spoke about



The southwest and south faces of Great Trango Tower: Azeem Ridge (2004, Cordes-Wharton) on left; Assalam Alaikum (2005, Čmárik-Kopold) on right. Courtesy of Vladimir Linek

going down. I started leading in the morning. After five pitches we found water. We were so happy that even falling rocks and a coming storm could not spoil our enjoyment. But our picnic finished soon—we had to climb smooth slabs with poor protection, and the rain was coming. Finding a good place for a bivy was a big problem. We climbed many hours in the rain and finally found a small cave not even big enough for us to extend our legs. We sat on our packs, listening to our MP3 players and writing in our diary. It rained all night.

Gabo: It was not possible to descend because of falling rocks and because of the nature of the terrain. We realized that our only chance was to climb to the summit ridge. With this idea in mind, I nestled next to Dodo and tried to sleep. I was praying for good weather.

Dodo: In the morning the rock was completely icy. I climbed toward a crack and chimney system with big problems. Later, we had to make many pendulums to get to another climbable crack line. At the end of the day we did mixed terrain to a big ledge for a comfortable night.

Gabo: The fourth day began once again with icy pitches, followed by long runouts on slabs. Cirrus clouds appeared, a sign of more bad weather. I climbed as fast as possible, despite not feeling my toes in my climbing shoes. At 3 p.m. I reached the headwall in a heavy snowstorm.

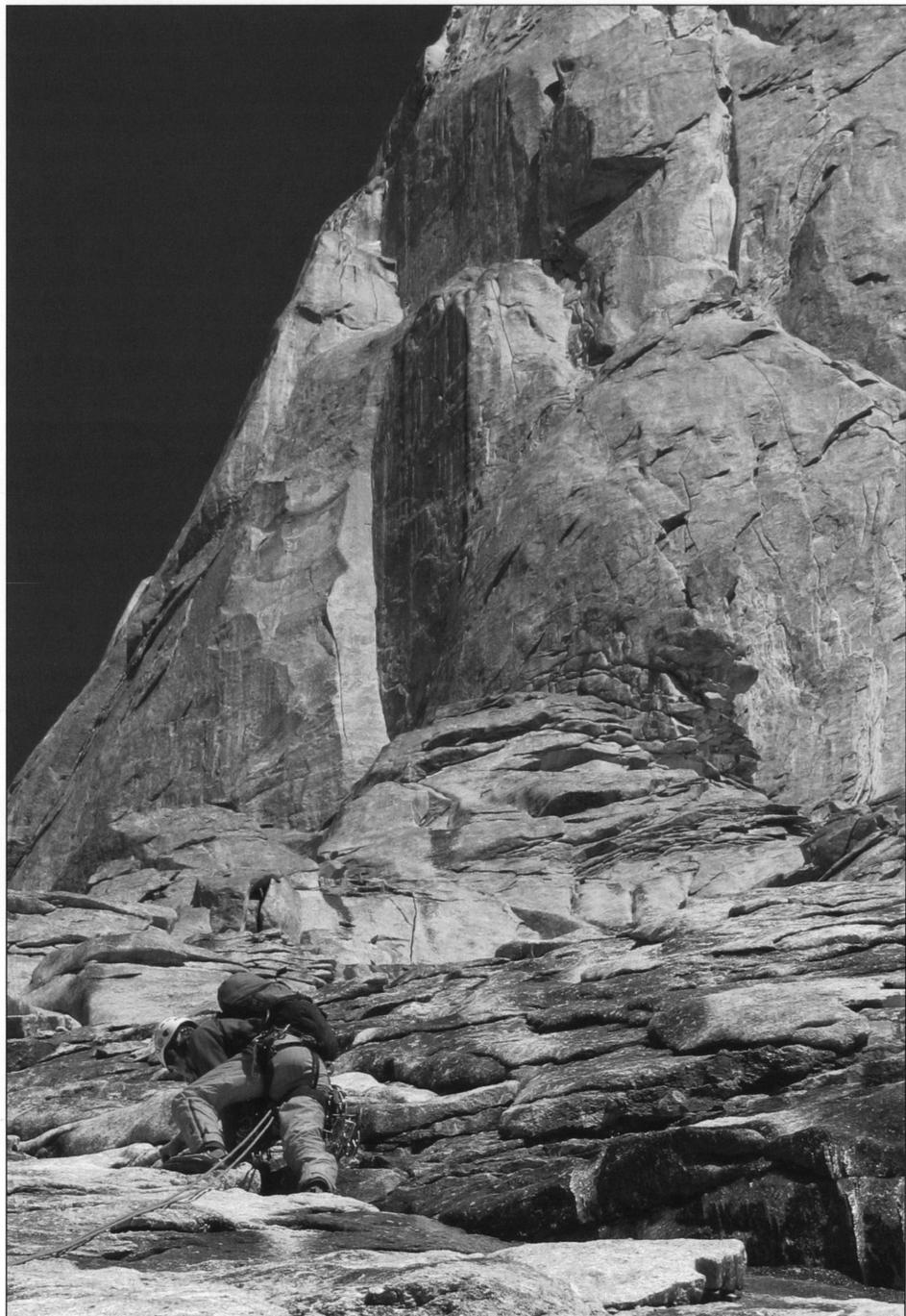
Dodo: We had not been sure how we would climb the headwall. The bad thing was that we had minimal gear to tackle this 400-meter-high face. We had only seven pitons, so we had to climb mostly free. At the beginning, the face was vertical and overhanging. We climbed a crack system to a wide chimney and then slabs into the unknown. The climbing would have been good, but it was snowing. I fought until dark but did not find a good place for a bivy. So we rappelled 80 meters to a col and found a small ledge. The wind was strong, the temperature -15°C , and it was snowing hard. The night was terrible. We nestled together to gain warmth.

Gabo: It continued to snow on the morning of the fifth day, and it was terribly cold. I was climbing with aid and cutting ice from cracks to make places for protection. I did two pitches to a snowy ledge, where we bivied. We ate our last food. It snowed again all night.

Dodo: I didn't sleep at all. In the morning I had to force myself to climb. The rock and our equipment were all icy, and hard climbing lay above us. For the next four hours I fought to complete one pitch. I was dreaming about serious sleep in a warm room far away from Trango. I knew that with no food we would not survive for long if we didn't keep climbing. In spite of the cold and the snowfall, I headed up smooth slabs. It was not possible to climb them with aid, only to do them free. My fingers and toes were stiff and frozen. Gabo was shaking at the belay. In the evening we had to rappel 60 meters to find a bivy. We left one rope fixed and used the second as a pad.

Gabo: We spent the night in a snow cave on a small ledge. By now we were accustomed to nonstop snowfall. During this day I had problems with my vision, probably from high-altitude illness, and from time to time I was unable to see anything. We were tired, without food, battered in body and mind. We crawled into our bivy sack and lit our stove in desperate need of warmth. This worked, but immediately we fell asleep and I dropped the stove. Miraculously, Dodo woke up and caught it.

Dodo: In the morning, conditions were even worse. I tried to ignore this and focus on climbing. We were only a few meters below the summit ridge. Unluckily, I fell eight meters and bashed my hip. But my fear and powerlessness were transformed into unbelievable energy. I climbed to my high point and in a rage did the icy crack free. I crawled the last meters in the snow. We were on the summit ridge. One ordeal was finished but the second was just beginning. There was lot of snow on the ridge, so we were not able to climb to the summit



Day 4: Čmárik leads icy rock toward the 400-meter headwall atop Great Trango's south face. The two spent that afternoon and the next two and a half days surmounting this steep wall in severe weather. *Dodo Kopold*



Circles mark the Slovaks' positions partway through their rappel descent of the enormous northwest face of Great Trango Tower. See Climbs and Expeditions for the descent line. *Courtesy of Vladimir Linek*

and descend via the normal route. Our only choice was to rappel the northwest face, yet we had only our rack of nuts and cams, eight bolts, and four pitons. We were not sure if this was enough for such a big wall. Brilliant idea.

Gabo: We decided to rappel via the Russian route in hopes of finding their anchors. The top half of the face is vertical and overhanging and plunges 1,000 meters. We found only two old anchors. We rappelled either from one bolt or from nuts, pitons, or cams, using up our gear frighteningly fast. The face overhung so much in places that we had to place gear during the rappels so we wouldn't lose contact with the rock.

Dodo: By 7 p.m. of the seventh day, we had descended half the face. I slipped 10 meters during one rappel and almost died. Then I fell 150 meters in an avalanche and was only stopped by a miracle. I lost one of our 60-meter ropes in the slide, so this meant that we could make only 30-meter rappels. It was dark, and we could see lights in the Trango base camp, but nobody came to meet us. We were lost and tired. Gabo fell down an icy slab and disappeared but stopped after 30 meters. We found our other rope, but we were moving so slowly now. Only several hundred meters to go, but I felt I could not do it. When we reached the talus, I moved only a short distance before collapsing. Gabo went ahead, hoping to wake someone at base camp. I started down on my own, and when I reached camp it was 5 a.m. Gabo was asleep on the ground. I fell next to him. Then somebody grabbed my hand. It was over.

SUMMARY:

AREA: Trango Valley, Baltoro Region, Pakistan

ROUTE: Alpine-style first ascent of Assalam Alaikum (ca 90 pitches, ABO VIII A2) via the southwest and south faces, finishing on the summit ridge of Great Trango Tower's southwest summit (ca 6,250m), Gabo Čmárik and Dodo Kopold, August 4-11. The two descended the northwest face from right to left (looking in) to reach a gully on the left side, making about 60 rappels. Other members of this Czech-Slovak expedition climbed new routes on Hainabrakk East and Shipton Spire. See the full report in *Climbs and Expeditions*.

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Gabo Čmárik was born in 1982, lives in Trenčín, Slovakia, and works in the building trade. Dodo Kopold, born in 1980, lives in Bratislava, Slovakia, and designs outdoor clothing. The two began climbing together in 2005.



Happy to be alive: Kopold (left) and Čmárik collapsed at base camp just before dawn after their 16-hour descent.