

form of a huge arc. Maps and space shuttle images depict large glaciers. This remote range has rarely been visited, but in 2000 a Japanese expedition climbed the west (6,920m) and lower top of Qong Mustagh, a double-summitted peak situated northwest of the main crest (*AAJ 2001*, pp. 406-407). According to SRTM, the east summit is 6,950m. The Japanese approached from the north and the village of Kyantokai, following the footsteps of Captain Deasy, who came this way in 1898.



A short but chilly river crossing on the southern fringes of the Qong Mustagh massif. The main peak in the background is Pt. 6,342m at the southwestern end of the massif, and the photograph was taken toward the end of a largely unsupported circumnavigation of this remote range. *Otto Chkhietiani*

Hidden farther to the east

lies the unclimbed Pk. 6,946m. The map shows a valley leading southeast into the heart of the range toward 6,946m, and we decided to investigate. However, the river led to a narrow gorge, which we penetrated as far as 5,000m before being stopped. We retreated and moved around the northern and then eastern side of the range, crossing a pass of 5,800m, which we named after the Russian Geographical Society and which gave splendid views north to the 6,743m Lushtagh Ridge. We then turned south. The going was quite straightforward, but there were constant dust storms and nighttime temperatures of -22°C .

We then worked our way west around the southern slopes of the range, seeing at close quarters peaks of 6,300m-6,600m, which appeared straightforward climbing objectives, though we had no time to make any attempts. We crossed our highest pass, 5,890m, just south of the westernmost extremity of the range, and headed north, crossing a snow-covered glacier and more passes, before reaching Aksu and the Kerija River. Here we joined our outward route, which we retraced to Polu, meeting local people only when we were 5km from the finish. The three of us had spent 35 days making a clockwise circumnavigation of the Qong Mustagh massif, a roundtrip from Polu of 550km. We had only caught glimpses of the hidden 6,946m, but I plan to return in the autumn of 2007, as I now know the way to reach it.

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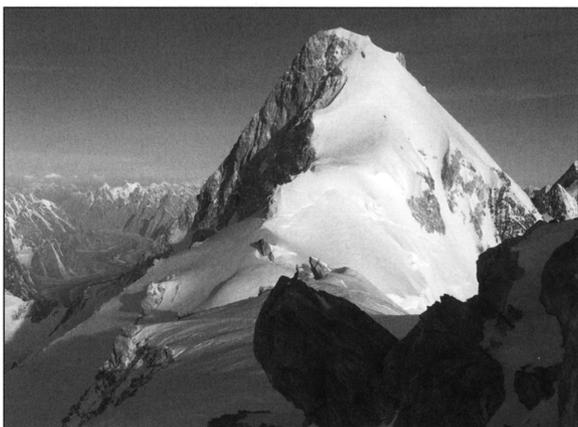
KARAKORAM

Gasherbrum II East, first ascent from China. On June 12, after two days by jeep from Kashgar to Mazar, we started our approach to base camp with 40 camels. On some of the river crossings during our trek to the Gasherbrum Glacier, the water reached the bellies of the animals, and we became anxious about our return in July, when the rivers would probably be higher and more rapid.

After five days we reached a gorgeous place for base camp at 4,300m. We then continued for a further 18 tedious kilometers across glacier and moraine, to establish advanced base at 4,800m on the East Nakpo Glacier, a safe distance from the north face of Gasherbrum II



Hard trail breaking during the first ascent of the ca 3,000m Chinese face of Gasherbrum II East (7,772m). The summit is directly above the climber's rucksack, while Gasherbrum II (8,035m) is the obvious pyramid to the right. *Hans Mitterer collection*



The summit of Gasherbrum II (8,035m) from Gasherbrum II East (7,772m). The connecting ridge has been traversed only once; in 1983 by legendary Poles, Jerzy Kukuczka and Voytek Kurtyka, who climbed the complete east ridge of Gasherbrum II over the summit of Gasherbrum II East. The normal route up Gasherbrum II slants below the rock walls from the left, to finish up the final section of the ridge. To the left and in the far distance is the Baltoro Glacier, with the Paiju and Trango groups. *Ueli Steck*

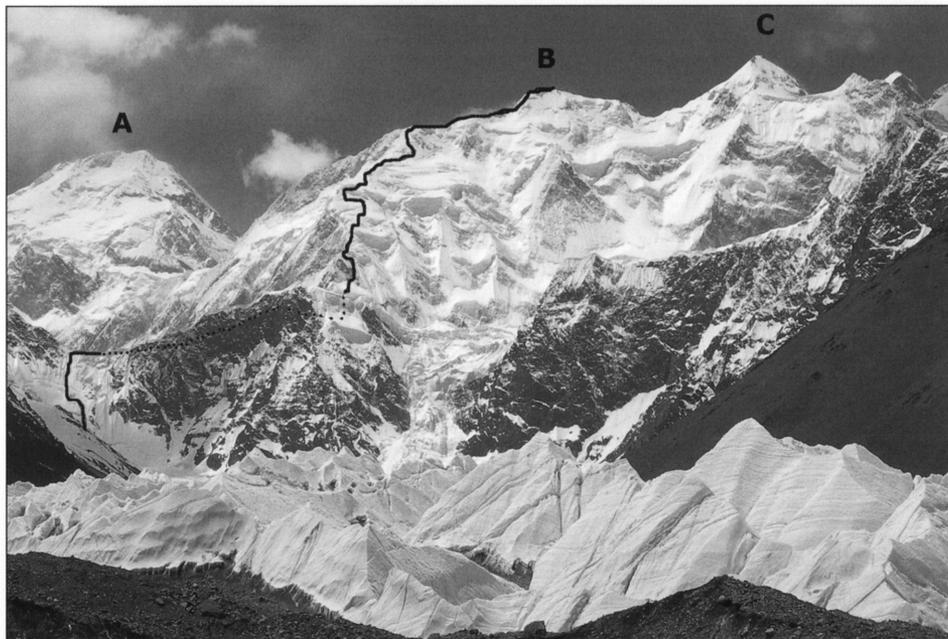
(8,035m). Our aim was the "Magic Line," the northeast pillar leading directly to the summit. However, after watching gigantic ice avalanches, emanating from large serac barriers on the right and left flanks of the pillar and sweeping the approach regularly, we looked elsewhere. We opted for an objectively safer spur on the left side of the face, leading to the crest of the east-southeast ridge. An unknown route of such length seemed hard to achieve alpine-style under prevailing conditions, so we established a second camp and fixed difficult passages.

The first section included a difficult snow mushroom that we had to bypass by rappel and a tricky traverse. Then came a huge bergschrund, crossed on partially frozen snow, and an extremely loose rock barrier: delicate mixed climbing on "vertical" scree for 65m. Above, the route to Camp 2 at 6,800m was largely an exhausting trudge up poor snow. After nine days of nonstop work in great weather, we had the camp well established, and Cedric Hählen and I, now sufficiently acclimatized, descended to base camp to prepare for a summit push. Stefan Siegrist and Ueli Steck wanted to capitalize on the good conditions

and begin immediately, but they had to give up due to bad headaches.

Unsettled weather, more snowfall, one aborted attempt, and days of endless waiting chewed on our nerves. Six members decided against a further attempt, so there were only three of us: Ueli, Cedric, and I.

On July 8 we were again in Camp 1 and the following morning at 9:30 a.m. settled down for an obligatory coffee break at Camp 2. A little later all three of us broke trail to 7,100m and returned to camp. We slept from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., thanks to a shared *Dormicum* pill. Half an hour later we were panting behind Cedric, as he led up our previous tracks. The pockets of our down suits were filled with everything we needed; our packs stayed behind at camp. After



Rising almost 3,000m above the Upper Nakpo Glacier is the Chinese face of the Gasherbrums. (A) Gasherbrum I (8,068m), (B) Gasherbrum II East (7,772m) and (C) Gasherbrum II (8,035m). Marked is the line climbed by Hählen, Mitterer and Steck on the left side of the northeast face of Gasherbrum II East. *Ueli Steck*

one hour the tracks ended, and the hard work began. Cedric was ill and fell behind, so Ueli and I took turns pushing through snow up to our waists. Some of the 50° passages required huge motivation.

On reaching the main ridge we found perfect snow conditions—for powder skiing. We trudged slowly along the summit ridge toward the east top of Gasherbrum II, observing far-away lights in Pakistan. At sunrise we reached the last couloir. A second ice axe would have helped to calm our nerves on the 60° ice and névé, and the ski poles we carried were just in the way. At the top of the couloir Ueli and I had to wait almost an hour for Cedric. Despite illness, he had conserved his strength and followed us, and at 7 a.m. on July 10 take the last steps with us to the 7,772m summit. As the sun's rays were already striking the avalanche-prone slopes ahead, we forewent the 300m descent and 500m ascent to Gasherbrum II. Two days later, after dismantling camps and fixed ropes, we were back at base camp, celebrating with Chinese beer our first ascent of this remote mountain face. Without support from the whole team, our ascent would not have been possible.

HANS MITTERER, *Germany*

Editor's note: This appears to be first time this high summit has been reached since its original ascent by legendary Poles Jerzy Kukuczka and Voytek Kurtyka, during their traverse of Gasherbrum II. In addition, it is only the second major route to be completed from this part of the Shaksgam Valley; the other, which took place in August 1992, was the first ascent of the Chinese (east) face of Broad Peak Central (8,006m) from the North Gasherbrum Glacier by a Spanish-Italian team.