

An unclimbed rock wall near the Uween-e-Sar. *Bartek Tofel* [www.tofel.eu](http://www.tofel.eu)



Looking southeast at the border peak of Sakar Sar (6,272m). The main peak on the left has been climbed twice from the far side—the southeast flank, from Pakistan—by Japanese in 1999 and 2004. *Bartek Tofel* [www.tofel.eu](http://www.tofel.eu)

four days. There are no Kirghiz encampments beyond Sayutuk, from where it is one or two days to Tegerman Su, and the point where Afghan, Tajik, and Chinese borders meet. Here there are around two-dozen unclimbed peaks up to ca 5,500m, with the valley floor at ca 4,600m.

Tegerman Su is a sensitive area: Kirghiz report the possibility of robbery by neighboring Tajiks. Keeping alert or having an armed escort is advisable. I had two Kirghiz with me, both of whom carried old Russian-made rifles. We didn't encounter anyone, so it's hard for me to judge if there is any real threat. Security in other parts of Aq Su Valley is better, although the Kirghiz did tell me about Tajik bandits stealing their animals at night. If that's true, they should pose no threat to climbers in Kohe Aq Su, because the border is relatively distant. No Taliban, rebel, or warlike people exist in this area.

After spending two days at Tegerman Su and getting close to the Chinese border, we went back to the Aq Su Valley. I continued to Sarhad-e-Broghil by the "river route" and got back to Ishkashim on August 15.

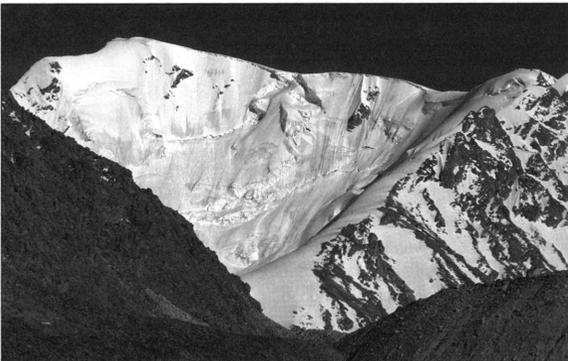
BARTEK TOFEL, *Poland*

## HINDU KUSH

*Koh-i-Beefy* (ca 5,400m). While working in Afghanistan with development projects, I was constantly impressed by the beauty of the Hindu Kush and excited about its climbing potential. "Being involved with projects that attempted to promote sustainable development for poor mountain communities, I was frustrated that insecurity in the region was stopping what could surely be a thriving mountain tourist industry, of great benefit to the local economy. "Economic development is desperately needed in a region where roughly 80 per cent of young men



Looking approximately south to Peak 5,454m at the western end of Kohe Aq Su. *Bartek Tofel* [www.tofel.eu](http://www.tofel.eu)



Looking southeast toward Peak 5,711m at the western end of Kohe Aq Su. *Bartek Tofel* [www.tofel.eu](http://www.tofel.eu)

leave their homes and families to pursue cash incomes overseas, often taking great risks to cross international boundaries illegally.

A trek in 2008 to the ruggedly beautiful Wakhan Corridor made me realize the huge potential offered by this one hidden corner of Afghanistan, as an “adventure holiday” destination for those who like to walk the slightly wilder side of life. The region has no history of violent conflict, and being Ishmaili there is zero tolerance for Taliban ideals. The Wakhan is easily accessible from Tajikistan, allowing travelers to avoid insecure “mainland” Afghanistan.

I was spurred into organizing a climbing expedition for summer 2009, to be part of a growing interest in this region and help promote the potential of the Wakhan to the wider world. Our team of two Kiwis and three Brits met in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, ready for the journey south to the Afghan border. An 18-hour 4x4 trip got us near the frontier, and the following day we crossed to Ishkashim, the border town and capital of Wakhan. Here we finalized simple formalities with the help of Mountain Unity staff, met our indispensable guide Gorg Ali, and did our shopping for the

month-long trip. There would be no opportunities to buy food once we headed east into the Corridor.

Our objective, the Qala-i-Hurst, is one of many high-altitude valleys in the Hindu Kush dominated by jagged peaks. Climbers had only visited this valley twice before, and all significant peaks remained unclimbed. Qala-i-Hurst is situated toward the eastern end of the Wakhan and can be reached in one day’s drive from Ishkashim—but bank on two as the road is seriously rough and claims many tires. As few foreigners ever visit Wakhan, local people greet you with a mixture of excitement and curiosity. “We took a Polaroid camera, which was definitely appreciated by local families.

On September 15 Chris Philipson and I climbed the north ridge of Koh-i-Beefy (5,410m GPS, 5,379m Google Earth Digital Elevation, 5,288m on some sketch maps), named in memory of Jamie “Beefy” Fiddes. The day was clear and sunny, although a little chilly with autumn advancing. Our route follows a beautiful 600m line, which dominates the upper basin of the Qala-i-Hurst Glacier. It was mainly straightforward snow at AD+/D- but had three steep ice pitches of Scottish 4 (60-70°). The ridge also involved several easy rock towers of UIAA II. At around mid-height we left the crest, when snow conditions became too unstable, and moved onto the north face. “We encountered spectacular *penitentes* at various points, due to the arid, high-altitude environment. While the technical crux was the ice pitches, the psychological crux was definitely the summit tower, which involved loose, sugary snow on a relatively steep, exposed ridge, with no secure belay. We descended using snow bollards and Abakalovs for rappel anchors.

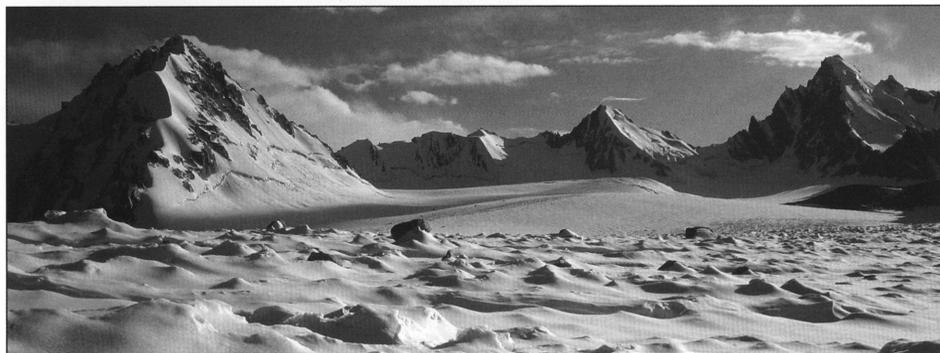
Stable weather, great rock and ice, countless unclimbed peaks, and the superb hospitality of local Wakhi make this a very special region in which to climb or trek. “This is one of the last unexplored mountaineering destinations that our shrinking world has to offer, and a true adventure. “We will be heading back in 2010 with the aim of climbing the stunning granite and ice-clad pyramid of Baba Tangi (6,513m).

A big thank you to our fantastic local guide Gorg Ali and David James at Mountain Unity, both of whom helped make this expedition a success. There is footage from our expedition at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6iH-3YRCxM> and more information, or help with organizing your own expedition to the Wakhan, at <http://www.mountainunity.org/>

JOEL FIDDES, UK



North ridge of Koh-i-Beefy. *Joel Fiddes Collection*



Upper Qala-i-Hurst Glacier. Koh-i-Beefy on left with north ridge facing camera. Other peaks are unclimbed. *Joel Fiddes*