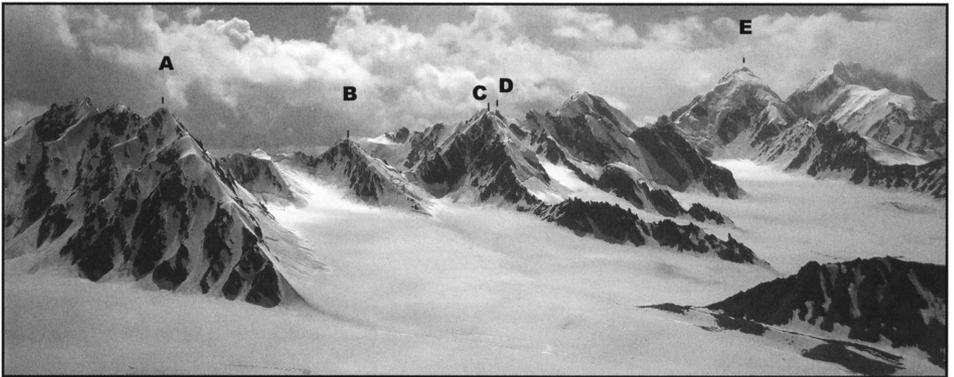


Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor lies in the province of Badakhshan and is surrounded by Tajikistan, Pakistan, and China. This map serves to locate reports in the 2011 AAJ, along with various geographical features. (1) Iskashim. (2) Nushaq. (3) Oxus River. (4) Pik Karl Marx (6,723m) in Tajik Southwest Pamir. (HHK) High Hindu Kush. (5) Qala-i-Hurst. (6) Big Pamir. (7) Roadhead at Sarhad-e-Boroghil, south of which lies Koh-e-SuzAnna. (8) Little Pamir. (9) Koh-i-Iskander. (10) Koh-e-Ak Su, the sector of the Little Pamir explored by the Polish expedition. (11) Lake Chaqmaqin (4,000m), reached by Madge and Torretta. Compiled by Lindsay Griffin on a Google Earth map



The expansive upper Qala-i-Hurst Glacier basin. (A) Koh-e-Beefy. (B) Koh-e-Baffa. (C) Koh-e-Forot Zorman. (D) Top of unnamed peak attempted by Dutch. (E) Koh-e-Yakhi. Low rocky ridge in right foreground is southern end of Pt. 5,200m, climbed in 2008. Bart Klein

In 1978 a coup d'état and the Soviet invasion the following year put the Hindu Kush off-limits. Otherwise, Nushaq's west ridge would probably be one of the world's most popular objectives for commercially organized expeditions attempting a high but technically moderate ascent. If access to this region (via Tajikistan) continues to be relatively straightforward and safe, the mountain could see a strong resurgence in popularity.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *Mountain INFO*

*Qala-i-Hurst (valley), Koh-e-Hoppa, Koh-e-Baffa, and Koh-e-Forot Zorman.* Roeland Bom, Bart Klein, Daniel Kuipers (leader), and I wanted to travel to an adventurous part of the world, without

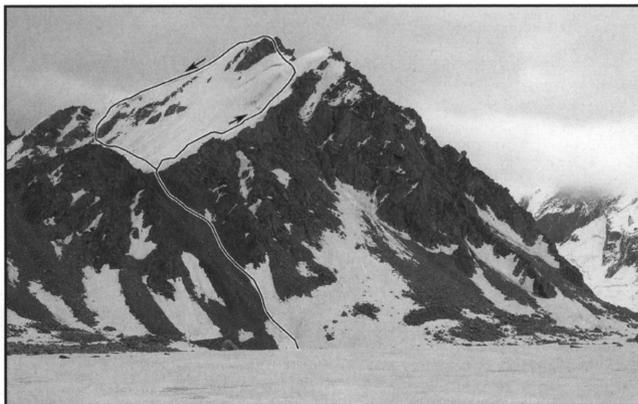
many climbers, within our limited budget, and with mountains below 6,000m. Our gaze had already turned towards the stan countries of Central Asia, when we discovered the strange strip of land between Tajikistan and Pakistan, known as the Wakhan Corridor. After some internet research, we decided this would be our goal: an area untouched by the war in the rest of Afghanistan, with friendly people, and many beautiful, unclimbed mountains.

We arrived at the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border with 200kg of luggage. It felt strange to be entering voluntarily a country that makes headlines daily with stories of war and terrorism. Nervous due to our satellite phone, supply of strong medicines, and video camera, we approached the check point. Our worries turned out to be groundless.

The Afghan border guards were happy and friendly and only took interest in our Netherlands candy.

After four days of increasingly remote travel, we arrived at Qala-i-Hurst, a village 150km into the Corridor, from which the glacial valley of the same name rises south to the Pakistan border. We arranged for 10 porters for the final trek to base camp at 4,800m, which we reached in two days. The glacier here is more than 10km wide, and rimmed by many imposing north faces. On our first day we made an acclimatization climb on a small mountain in the middle of the glacier, from which we had a good view of the surrounding peaks. Our preparation at home had consisted of looking at Google Earth maps and a few photos from a previous expedition, so it felt good to view the mountains for real. We decided to try four mountains that looked feasible, all previously unclimbed, as far as we knew.

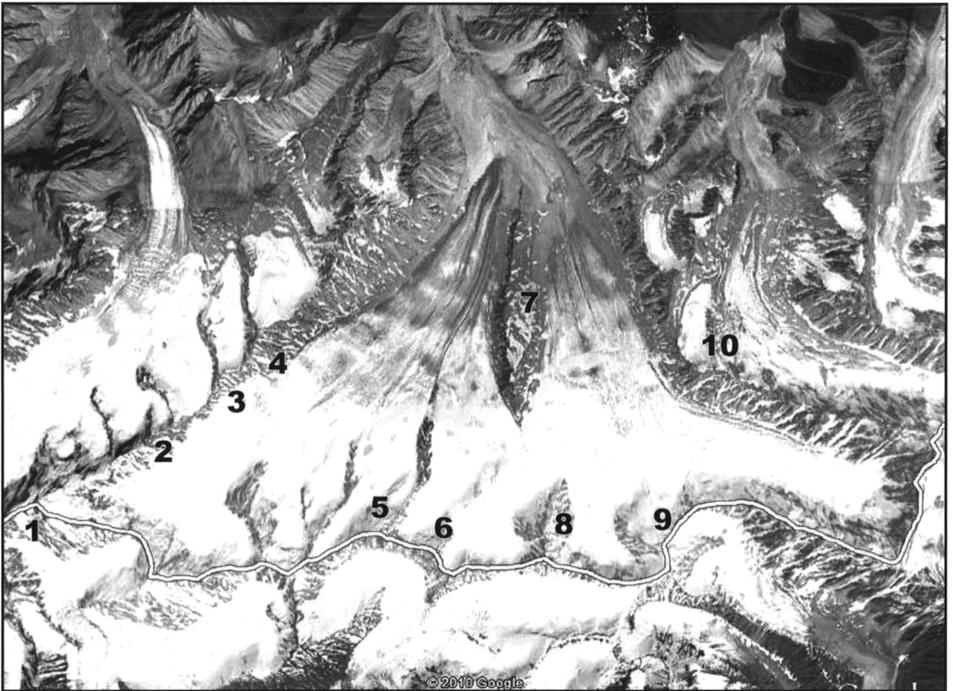
The first peak quickly gave us a lesson in estimating scale. We thought we would run up and down it in a morning, but we needed a full day to summit, panting because of the lack of oxygen. A rocky couloir, followed by steep snow and a short ridge, led to the 5,300m top, which we named Koh-e-Hoppa, after the word most frequently used by our porters. The route was AD and mostly



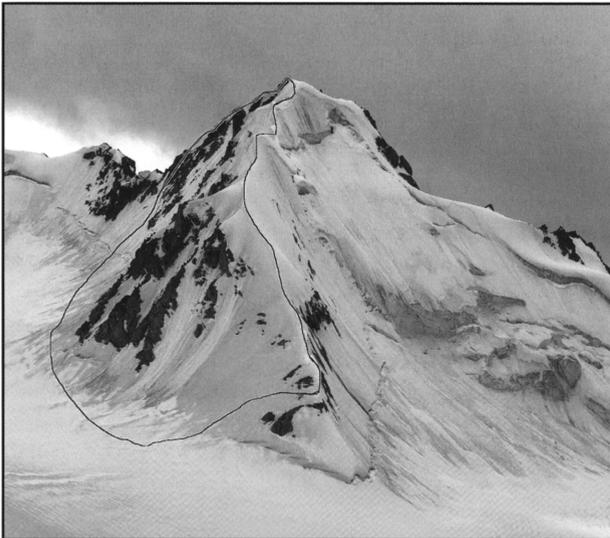
Koh-e-Hoppa on east side of Qala-i-Hurst Glacier, showing route of first ascent. The mountain was traversed from right to left. *Bart Klein*



Koh-e-Forot Zorman. From col camp on frontier ridge, west ridge was followed to summit. Photograph taken low on east face of unnamed peak, attempted by Dutch. *Bart Klein*



Qala-i-Hurst. Named peaks and ascents, where known, are indicated. (1) Koh-e-Yakhi (Koh-e-Goldar, 5,974m), (2) Sakh-e-Kucek (5,408m), (3) Sakh-e-Sangi (5,237m), (4) Koh-e-Awal (5,299m), (5) Koh-e-Fort Zorman (5,500m, Dutch 2010), (6) Koh-e-Baffa (5,300m, Dutch 2010), (7) Pt. 5,200m (Gorg Ali, Amruddin, Lucia Foppoli, Elisabetta Galli, Afiat Khan, Giorgio Mallucci, and Angelo Quattrini, 2008), (8) Koh-e-Beefy (5,410m, Joe Fiddes and Chris Philipson, 2009), (9) Pt. 5,600m (Elisabetta Galli, Afiat Khan, Giorgio Mallucci, 2008), and (10) Koh-e-Hoppa (5,300m, Dutch 2010).



Koh-e-Baffa. Peak was traversed from right to left: up north ridge, down southeast ridge and east flank. *Bart Klein*

snow to 70°, with a chimney of UIAA III.

Our second objective lay at the head of the glacier, and we first had to establish an advanced base. Heavily loaded, we certainly felt the altitude at 5,000m and again underestimated the distance. After a night of little sleep, we were greeted the following morning by a beautiful, steep, snowy ridge rising to the summit. Deadmen and snowstakes proved most useful, and we named the 5,300m peak Koh-e-Baffa: the good mountain. We traversed the mountain, descending an ice couloir. The ascent of the exposed ridge was AD+.

Three days later we prepared for the most beautiful mountain so far by establishing a camp in a col on the frontier ridge. To our knowledge this pass had not been crossed by humans, but that night we dreamed of carpet-smuggling Taliban. The next day we woke to a glorious morning. We climbed a snowy ridge, then made a steep traverse around a rock tower, and finally followed another ridge to the top. Superb! We called it Koh-e-Forot Zorman (5,500m), after Roeland's newborn nephew. Our route was AD+, with snow to 60° and one short mixed gully of 80°.

We spent another night at the border camp and then tackled our fourth peak. Again, we had problems estimating scale. A couloir led to a ridge. We thought the couloir looked rather difficult and delicate, but the ridge seemed to pose no problem. How wrong we were. Climbing the couloir on the east face was effortless, but the ridge turned out to be steep, unconsolidated snow alongside equally steep rock. Two hundred meters below the top we had no choice but to retreat. As far as we got, the grade was D-, with loose snow to 70° and rock to UIAA V. We were a little disappointed by this failure but, overall, very satisfied with our journey through a wonderful country, and our three new peaks.

MARIAN MICHIELSEN, *The Netherlands*, with additional information by Daniel Kuipers

## PAMIR

*Hindu Kush, Koh-e-SuzAnna (4,660m); Little Pamir, Koh-e-Ski (4,760m) and Koh-e-Grivel (4,800m).* On May 25 Anna Torretta, from Italy, and I arrived in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and traveled southeast for two days by 4WD to Ishkashim, where we crossed into Afghanistan. This sensitive border is renowned for opium and people smuggling, so imagine my astonishment when I stepped outside the smoky wooden passport hut and spotted Anna filming with her video camera. Was she mad? A shreik from a border guard told me that someone certainly was. My nostril got nervous as a gun was poked up it. Not good. Anna took out the tape and offered it to the police. I wanted to snatch it from her, stamp on it with my mountaineering boot, and attack it with my ice axe. Slowly, slowly, the matter was settled with cigarettes, cash, and diplomacy, and my nostril breathed again.

Anna had visited the Wakhan in 2008 (*AAJ 2009*) and was keen to go farther east. But the valleys of the Hindu Kush south of the Wakhan Corridor were loaded with snow, and the weather did not seem good, so we decided to stay low and attempt smaller peaks with less avalanche risk.

Our aim was to complete a journey on horse and foot along the Oxus River to Lake Chaqmaqtin, stopping along the way to ski anything that tickled our fancy. We had no maps or photos, but knew there was one difficult snowy pass to cross. We didn't even know whether we would get to ski. And I had never ridden a horse.

After two days of bureaucracy we boarded another 4WD and traveled a further two days along the Corridor to the roadhead at Sarad-e-Boroghil (3,300m), where we stopped for a day, May 31. It was time for some skiing.

"I think the peak is about 4,000m" said Anna. By the time we reached 4,500m, I was fried. My feet were on fire, and my throat as dry as the Sahara, from six hours of ascent in ski boots. We had started the day bumping south across the Oxus on horseback—my triumphant first ride. We then scrambled for two hours on scree, followed by skinning for four hours. It was a bold acclimatization day, but every sweaty painful step was worth it for the final, astonishing views into Pakistan from the top of what we named Koh-e-SuzAnna. After the first ascent came a magical ski descent on spring snow.