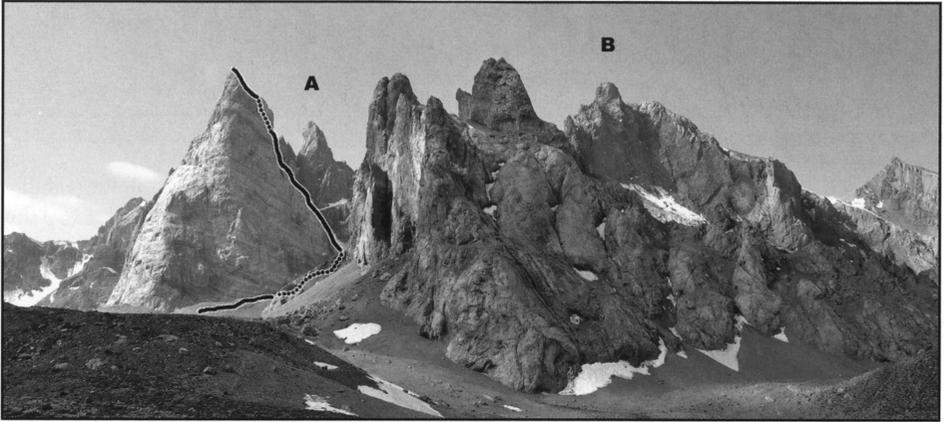


## Afghanistan

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### KOH-I-BABA MOUNTAINS



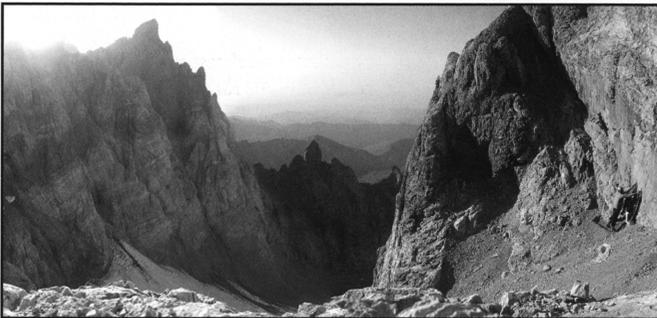
Ibex Horn from north, with ascent route and bivouac site. (A) Ibex Ear East. (B) Ibex Ear West. *Mike Libeck*

*Ibex Horn, west face-north face.* In 2010 I went to the Koh-e-Baba to explore cool-looking rock towers. Though I was able to reach two summits, East and West Ibex Ears, I was denied my goal of reaching the prominent tower in the group, the Ibex Horn, and just missed being crushed by massive rockfall (AAJ 2011).

Redemption. In early July 2011 I flew to Bamyan and met the same friends as the previous year. In three days I was back at base camp, almost one year to the day after the rockfall incident. I'd tried two routes in 2010, on the north and west sides. Even when I was back home, I felt many strange emotions about how close I had been to death. My goal this time was to find the fastest and safest route to the summit, if such a way existed.

In 2010 I'd climbed a couloir system to the East Ear, which is connected to the ridgeline of the Ibex Horn. From this high vantage point, I saw good systems on the west side that would

make a great route. It proved to be really nice. I took a couple of ropes and a rock rack and started up the couloir. There was fun climbing for 1,200', steep enough that any fall would prove disastrous, but solid conditions brought me to the stone. I left my ropes and rack and went back to base



Bivouac site on Ibex Horn. *Mike Libeck*

camp. The following day I brought up bivouac gear to my high point, and where the ice ended, I rope-soloed two pitches and bivouacked.

Next day I set off for the summit, climbing two more pitches and traversing left and north to another couloir, which went up for 400'. I found myself on easy terrain, traversing a ridge toward the summit using a combo of conventional and continuous-loop rope-soloing. I stood on top by late afternoon, having climbed a 2,500' route at V 5.9 A1 WI2.

I had to rope-solo the descent, eventually rappelling to my bivouac spot, where I spent another night. It was my third attempt on the summit, and as the saying goes, "third time's a charm." I went back to Kabul as fast as possible and bought a plane ticket to Urumqi, China, looking forward to more adventure.

MIKE LIBECKI, AAC

## HINDU KUSH

*Introduction/Overview.* Two expeditions are known to have climbed 7,492m Noshaq by the "normal route" up the west ridge. Summiting on August 4 were Tim Wood and local guide Aziz Beg, Wood becoming the first Australian to climb the mountain. A third member, Tony Simms, stopped 200m below the top. The team left base camp (4,400m) on July 25 and spent 10 days establishing camps before making their summit attempt. Arriving at base camp on August 4 was a seven-member Polish team. They made two camps on the ridge—at 6,200m and 6,800m—and on the 13th Krzysztof Garolyna and Krzysztof Mularski reached the main summit. These are the sixth and seventh known ascents of the country's highest mountain since before the Soviet invasion.

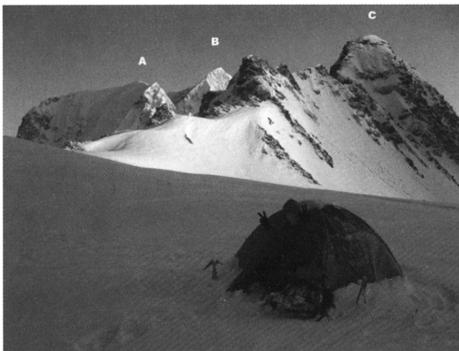
In 2010 Mularski had attempted Noshaq, reaching 7,200m with Jakub Rybicki before retreating.

*Mandarar Valley, M3 (6,109m), south ridge.* In recent years the north side of the High Hindu Kush has again become accessible to climbers. There are beautiful peaks, untouched walls, and lonely valleys. There is also a lack of food, fuel, tourist infrastructure, mobile phone coverage and emergency services; in short, everything that makes climbers looking for adventure happy. The last ascent on a peak in the Mandarar Valley took place in 1978, a year before Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan.

This was incentive enough for Klaudiusz Duda and me to organize an expedition to the area.

Crossing to Ishkashim from Tajikistan is currently the only safe access to the Wakhan. Reaching the area from Faizabad has become potentially dangerous, due to the appearance of the Taliban in 2011. We found the Tajikistan border closed due to a holiday and had to wait two days before crossing the river to Afghanistan, reaching Ishkashim on June 29.

Formalities for journeying onward have changed since 2010. To obtain permission to enter the Wakhan, it is now necessary to obtain a letter from the governor, to register with the



Sunrise at Camp 3 on Palane Safad, with south ridge of M3 behind. (A) Koh-e-Naser Khosraw (M2, 6,424m). (B) Koh-e-Keshnikhan (M1, 6,754m). (C) M3 (6,109m). *Klaudiusz Duda*