

ICE CLIMBING AROUND HUNZA

Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan

A brief guide by

Giovanni Trambaiolo, January 2019

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Introduction

The Northern areas of Pakistan are well known for the 8000m peaks (K2, Nanga Parbat...), the high-quality rock and mixed climbing routes around the Trango towers, as well as the scenic tourism and trekking. In recent years the mountains of Gilgit Baltistan have also attracted skiers in search of deep powder and new lines.

The water icefalls (frozen waterfalls) of Gilgit Baltistan, however, have seen almost no attempts, despite their abundance and quality. Many of these icefalls, were they in North America or Europe, would have colourful queues of Gore-Tex clad climbers at their feet, and be instant classics.

This guide offers a description of some of the great routes climbed during a visit to Gilgit Baltistan in December 2018, together with Pakistani climbers Javed Ali, and Naveed Iqbal.

There is huge potential for more quality climbs to be developed: some routes to be finished, some to be climbed for the first time.

The access to most routes is straightforward: 25-45 minutes' drive from Karimabad, Hunza in a regular (non-4WD) car.

Equipment

Twin or double dry ropes (60m), a rack of 10-12 screws, and some cord and slings for v-threads and slinging boulders/trees for descents. On some routes, nuts/friends and pitons can be used to build or supplement an anchor. On climbs such as Shimshal falls, Attabad falls, and Hidden falls, future ascensionists could consider installing bolted rappel anchors: this would make descents easier and more secure, and help attract more climbers to the area.

Grades

Ice grading anywhere, as in this guide, tends to be subjective and often will not reflect the difficulty of a route at any given time. Routes in this guide vary between WI2-WI4+, and several of the unclimbed routes and pitches are harder.

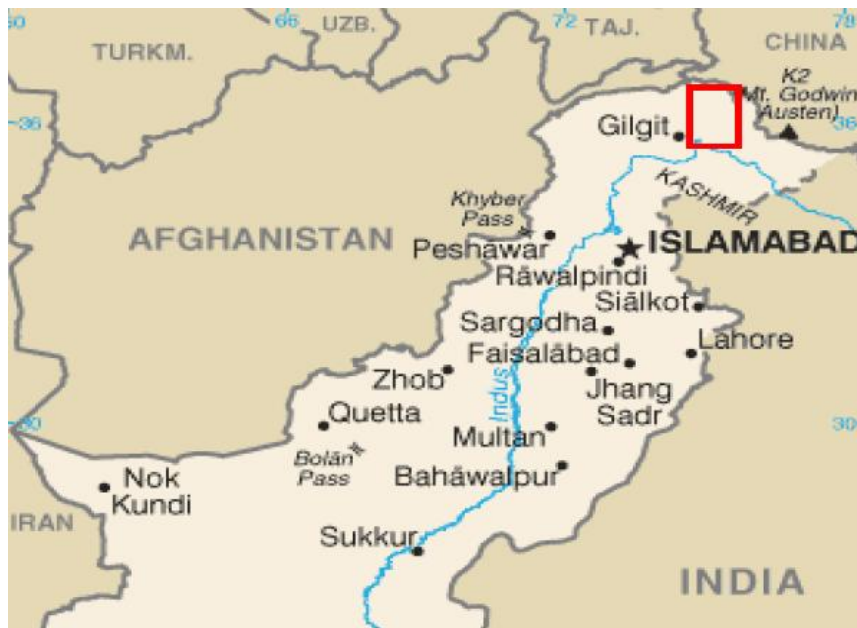
DISCLAIMER – READ this before you go ice climbing in Pakistan

Ice climbing and its related activities are extremely dangerous and carry significant risk of personal injury including, but not limited to paralysis and death. Training, proper technique and the proper use of equipment, along with the exercise of good judgment and common sense can help you manage the risks inherent in ice climbing and its related activities, the hazards associated therewith can never completely be eliminated. Beware of falling and breaking ice, and in certain areas risks of avalanches and/or rock fall. The author assumes no responsibility and can in no way be held responsible or liable for any accident, injuries, or damages caused directly or indirectly from any information contained in this book. **YOU ALWAYS CLIMB AT YOUR OWN RISK!** Ensure someone is aware of your plans, carry a mobile phone (or sat phone where there is no coverage) with emergency numbers, and have comprehensive insurance and a plan in place in case of injury/accident. There are no mountain rescue services in Pakistan. Ensure you know how to rescue yourself and your partner.

The climbing locations and routes included in this guide will perhaps not look like they did when the pictures were taken. It is the sole responsibility of the reader to verify all conditions prior to climbing.

As of January 2019 the Gilgit Baltistan region of Pakistan is generally safe from armed conflict and violence, but you should check travel advice before coming to the area. There are several police and/or army checkpoints in between Gilgit and the Hunza Chinese border, make sure you have your passport with valid visa on you at all times.

Map 1: Pakistan, with Hunza highlighted in the red box



Map 2: main ice climbing areas of Hunza and Nagger highlighted in red



A. Attabad Lake area, Hunza

Three fantastic and very accessible climbs 30 minutes' drive east of Karimabad along the Karakorum Highway that connects Hunza to the China border. A scenic place to visit, with a couple of small restaurants, and boats that take tourists around the lake.

1. Attabad falls ***, 250m, WI5 (?)



Clockwise from top-left: 1. View of Attabad falls from the exit of the “Pakistan-China friendship tunnel”; 2. View of Attabad falls (L) and Hidden falls (R) from base; 3. The beginning of Pitch 5, Attabad falls; 4. View of Pitch 1, Attabad falls

Approach: Coming from Karimabad, you will see Attabad falls on your right after 25-30 minutes when you exit the fourth and last section of the “Pakistan-China friendship tunnel”. Continue over the bridge and past the falls, then park at the first restaurant by the side of Attabad lake. Walk back towards the tunnel and descend beneath the bridge, walking up the river for 2-3 minutes to the start of the first pitch.

Pitch 1, 60m, WI2+: steep but easy ice for 20m before arriving at a small icy ledge. Follow the ice for 40m and belay at the large tree on climber's left.

Pitch 2, 40m, WI2+: from the belay of pitch 1, scramble up ledges for around 15m to make a belay above some bushes. Easy climbing leads to a 7m steeper section that quickly eases off. Belay using slings and nuts on boulders.

Pitch 3, 60m, WI2+: walk 30m up the snow/ice slope and belay at the base at the beginning of obvious ice wall. Straight forward climbing up the centre or right of the ice fall, belay off screws and/or by slinging the large rock

Pitch 4, 15m, WI2+: short pitch up and right to gain ledge beneath headwall of Attabad falls, belay on screws or natural gear in cracks.

Pitches 5+6, 75m? WI5?: Unclimbed, was still hollow when attempted on 25.12.2018. Climb up through the steepness to top out at ledge and tree. Some funky mixed variations may be possible on the right side of the falls.

Descent: 60m rappel on v-thread from top of pitch 4, then scramble down/follow vague path that leads back to the road.

FA Giovanni Trambaiolo and Javed Ali (Pitches 1-4), December 2018.

2. Hidden Falls ***, 300m, WI5 (?)



Clockwise from top left: 1. View of pitches 1-3 from the base of Hidden falls; 2. Giovanni topping out on pitch 3; 3. The steep unclimbed pitches 4-7

Aesthetic climbing up a series of easy waterfalls in a gully leads to a dramatic pillar and steeper pitches above.

Approach: as for Attabad falls, but continue up the river for another 250m to reach the obvious base, an 8m fall that starts the first pitch.

Pitch 1, 30m, WI2: climb the short 8m then 12m waterfalls in the gully and belay on natural gear.

Pitch 2, 30m, WI3: up the waterfall to belay on natural gear

Pitch 3: 50m, WI3: up the 10m and 20m waterfalls, belay on natural gear

Pitches 4, 5, 6, 7? 150m? WI5?: walk 50m up the river to the base of the impressive pillar (easier and more solid than it looks) and the steep pitches above. Unclimbed, was too wet when attempted on 26.12.2018, but was already in condition and is a beautiful looking climb.

Descent: rappel from slings around boulders. Descent from top pitches by rappel from v-threads.

FA Giovanni Trambaiolo and Javed Ali (Pitches 1-3), December 2018.

**There is a nice path/walk 30 minutes in the canyon upstream from Hidden falls, with a potential 50m icefall that was not fully formed on 25.12.2018, but may be climbable later in the season.*

3. Friendship falls * (or “Pakistan-China friendship tunnel falls”), 60m, WI3



1. Giovanni leading on Friendship falls; 2. Masakondo from Japan tries ice climbing for the first time on the bottom section of Friendship falls

A very accessible easy one-pitch climb, right by the road.

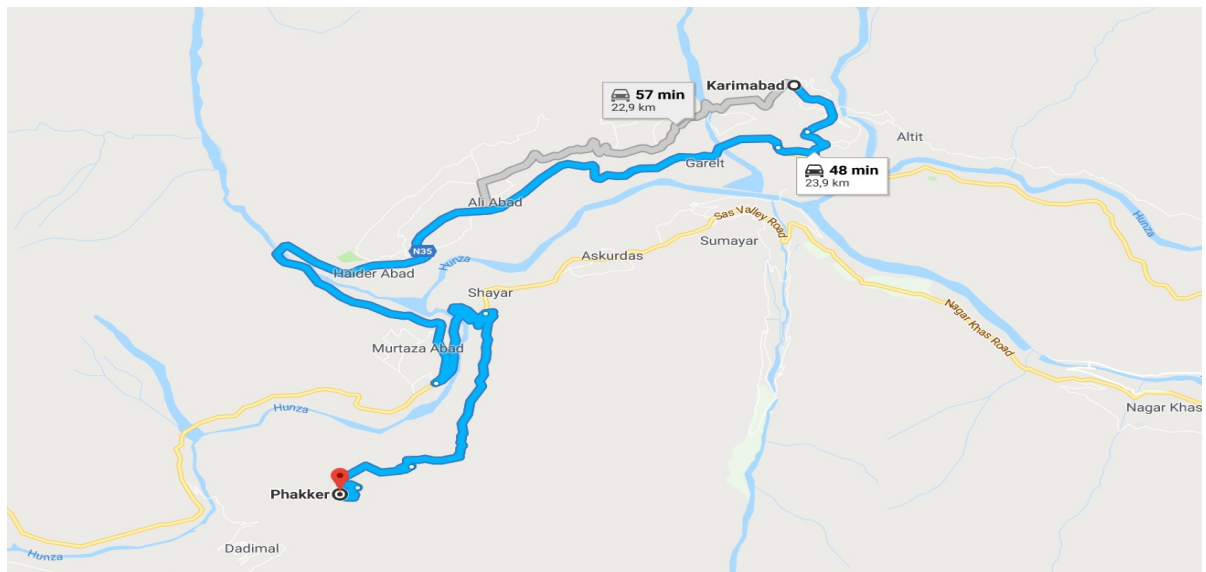
Approach: Coming from Karimabad, after 25 minutes park on the side of Attabad lake at a lookout just before the third of the four “Pakistan-China friendship tunnels”. Walk through the third tunnel (2 minutes), the first pitch is on your right immediately as you exit the tunnel. Walk down to the base of the climb (1 minute) and begin!

1 Pitch, 60m, WI3: An enjoyable and long pitch, with a ledge at 15m that can be used if you want to set up an easy top-rope for beginner climbers. A steeper section of around 15m (70-80 degrees) near the top provides the most enjoyable climbing before the waterfall eases off for the last 10m.

Descent: from large sling around several bushes (bring a sling)

FA Giovanni Trambaiolo and Javed Ali, December 2018.

B. Nagar Valley: around Phakker and Dadimal



1. Happy new year falls***, Phakker village. 550m, WI4+



Previous page-left: View of Happy new year falls from Karakoram Highway; Previous page-right: Pitches 8-10 of Happy new year falls; This page, left: Pitch 9, WI4+; This page, right: top view of pitch 9



Approach: from Karimabad, drive back down KKH in the direction of Gilgit (20mins) and at Murtazabad cross the bridge over the Hunza river, then drive up to **Phakker village** (another 20 minutes). Drive up to the top of the village (five minutes) to park close to the ridge that overlooks the village on one side, and a canyon on the other. Walk down towards the river on an obvious path, cross the river and walk up to the base of the climb (total walking around 20 minutes).

Pitches 1-7, 50-60m pitches, WI2: mostly easy and pleasant climbing up the waterfall line, easy to protect on screws and the occasional sling around a boulder. Could be simul-climbed by stronger parties. There is also possibility to scramble up

Pitch 8, 50m, WI3+: Climb up fall and belay on screws beneath and right of the obvious ice curtain.

Pitch 9, 60m, WI4+: a stellar pitch! Up the obvious ice curtain and belay on screws.

Pitch 10, 50m, WI3+: up to belay at tree on left of fall.

Pitch 11-12, 80m, WI3+?: unclimbed, but possible to continue on and top out onto plateau

Descent: from top of Pitch 10, from sling around tree. All other raps from v-threads.

FA Giovanni Trambaiolo and Javed Ali, December 2018.

**There is another a long (500m) unclimbed line 300m climber's left of Happy new year falls.*

Other unclimbed falls in the Dadimal and Phakker area:

There are numerous other unclimbed climbs around Karimabad, Dadimal, and Phakker, that we did not have time to try on our trip. Below are a couple of photos:



Clockwise from left: 1. This two pitch (60m + 15m) waterfall is on the drive from Karimabad to Phakker, five minutes' walk from the road; 2. Great looking 30m fall 10 minutes' walk from the top of Phakker village. Belay from tree (can walk to the top on a path and top-rope); 3. "The Dadimal Phang" Very cool-looking 60-70m climb on the Southern side of Dadimal, can be seen from the main Gilgit-Hunza road. Impressive looking ice walls around 50m in front of the "Phang".



C. Shimshal

1. Shimshal falls ***

Very attractive line directly above Shimshal Village. Besides an attempt in 2018 by Naveed Iqbal, locals told us that Spanish and German parties had also tried this climb before, but we found no record of the ascent.

Approach: from Shimshal village, walk 45 mins up to the base of the obvious falls.

Pitch 1, 60m, WI2: aesthetic climbing up gully, belay on screws beneath pitch 2

Pitch 2, 55m, WI3+: sustained and enjoyable climbing up the waterfall. After topping out, walk 10m up and right to belay on natural gear/pitons (*a fixed belay/rap anchor at the top out would be very useful in the future).

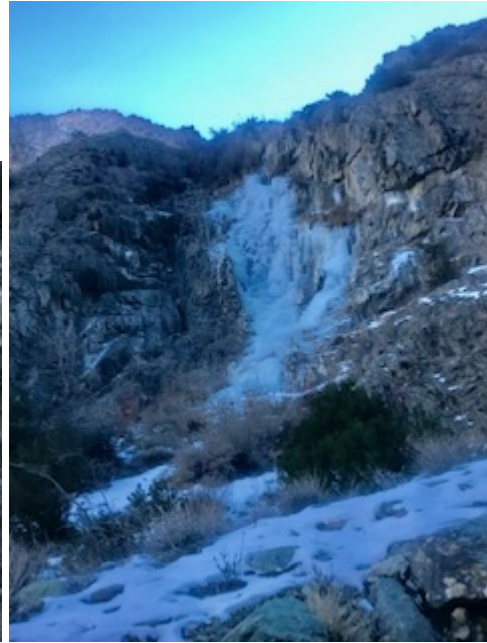
Pitch 3+4, 65m?, WI4+?: walk 20 minutes further up the gully to reach base of last pitch(es). Steep but straightforward climbing. This pitch was apparently climbed for the first time in 2017 by a German party, no more information available.

Descent: rappel down last pitch of v-threads or natural gear, then possible to walk down to village from bottom of pitch 3.

FA: unclear

D. Rakaposhi





Logistics:

Local knowledge, local guides:

Transport

Getting to Pakistan:

Islamabad International airport

Getting to Hunza:

Gilgit airport

Hunza

Getting to the ice falls:

A vehicle with driver can cost between 2500-5000/day, depending in the type of vehicle, amount of time needed.

Shimshal can only be reached by 4WD, either through public transport (jeep) at 400 PKR/person, 4hr journey, or by hiring a jeep 10,000 return trip, slightly quicker

Accommodation

Karimabad

World view guest house

Serena Inn (7500/night for double/twin)

Shimshal

Sifat Guest house (1500/night for big room)

Videos:

Shimshal falls:

<https://vimeo.com/309818857>

Hidden falls:

<https://vimeo.com/309852119>

Attabad falls

<https://vimeo.com/309824182>

Happy new year falls

<https://vimeo.com/309820840>

Getting to Shimshall

<https://vimeo.com/309829225>