

Exploring in the Karakoram

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AMERICAN Himalayan expeditions that are not set upon climbing a single major peak of the range are still a novelty in the Karakorams of Pakistan. In fact, an expedition from any country that is not laying siege to an 8,000'er has to answer many questions from officials they meet and the porters they hire as to just what they are doing. So the seven members of the Harvard Mountaineering Club 1955 Karakoram Expedition discovered this past summer. But now with the expedition three months home, we are all convinced, at least among ourselves, of the pleasures and value of a small party with no other goal but good climbing, good company, and good adventure.

We were an expedition of friends who had enjoyed previous mountaineering together. Frederick Dunn, John Noxon, John Humphreys, and I had climbed on and around Mt. McKinley in Alaska. Arthur Read and Craig Merrihue had joined us on subsequent expeditions into the Selkirks. This was our climbing team, and it included our doctor, Fred Dunn; our surveyor and photographer, John Noxon; and our supply officer, John Humphreys. All major expeditions need much good luck, and we had more than our fair share this past summer. It began in the choice of three additional members to our party, each of whom became a close and trusted friend. Dr. Grady Webster and Eugene Nasir from Pakistan joined us as a botanical team, while the Pakistan Army gave to us Lieutenant N. A. Soofi as liaison and transport officer. "Soof," as we called him, became the mainstay of the expedition as soon as we were faced with the hiring and handling of native porters, without whom an expedition gets no farther than the airfield at Skardu. We knew "Soof" two days before we faced our first porters, and on the third evening he was a much sought-after and admired member of the party.

It was Dr. Charles Houston who persuaded us that such an expedition for a college climbing club was possible, and it was he who set us off in the right direction and aided us in getting our permission. Bob Bates finally helped us out of the dilemma about where we could go by suggesting that we look into the literature on the Hushe Valley and gave us a copy of Waller's *The Everlasting Hills*. We discovered that on two previous occasions the valley had been entered by expeditions: the Workman's Expedition in 1911 and Waller on his Masherbrum attempt in 1938. We

also found out that the New Zealanders were heading there this year to attempt the Masherbrum. In our correspondence with them they told us that they were not intending to concentrate on the eastern end of the Hushe Valley, which includes the Ghondakoro and Chogoliza Glaciers. The Workman's had explored well into the Ghondakoro, but the easternmost portion of the Chogoliza Glacier was still unexplored and presented a real call to those of us who like exploring new glaciers and their peaks.

We decided not to attempt a major peak, but instead committed the expedition to a scientific program. This included a botanical study of the area, a physiological experiment, and the surveying and exploring of possible passes that might lie to the north on the Baltoro rim.

We equipped the expedition on the basis of the worst conditions any of us knew, Mt. McKinley, and discovered as the summer progressed that we were overequipped in clothing and heavy gear. Our food supplies were assembled on the basis of our Alaska climbing and on the experience of the 1953 K2 party. In this, also, we again prepared for much more severe cold and wind than we ever experienced and found that our diet was not the best for the heat and dryness of the lower mountains. We were again lucky in having most of the expedition assembled in one place during that trying period of preparation; Arthur Read, however, was in England, where he could buy time-tested English equipment for reasonable sums of money. Fortunately, I could devote most of a year to the administrative work involved with permission, sponsorship, fund raising, and logistics. It was our ability to decide questions quickly and work out details together that accounted for much of the success of the venture and prevented the development of many possible misunderstandings. This fact combined with the tolerance and understanding of each other's point of view gained through long mountaineering companionships accounted almost wholly for the ease with which this expedition progressed.

Our permission came through on December 1, 1954. On May 19, 1955, I found myself on Pan American's Rainbow Flight to the Orient, much to my own surprise, as well as that of my friends. By the middle of June we were all assembled in a bungalow on the campus of Gordon College in Rawalpindi. All our gear was intact and our party healthy. Despite the heat we were enjoying our days in Rawalpindi as we sorted our gear and checked the food for heat damage, and purchased the remaining items of needed equipment. By the time we were notified that our plane would take off for Skardu, we had come to know Eugene Nasir, our second botanist, and we had had several good talks with Lieutenant Soofi. The pool of the 'Pindi Club had seen several frantic games of water polo and

the President of Gordon College and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. Cummings, had thrown a farewell party for us, at which the expedition members were badly beaten at badminton by our Pakistan friends.

We were all thankful to touch down at the airstrip at Skardu, after having seen the upper portions of Nanga Parbat, Rakaposhi, and Haramash at close range, seemingly scraping our wing tips as we flew northeast up the Karon Valley to the Indus Gorge. By the first night, we had hired and paid off our first train of porters, taken over the very pleasant facilities of Skardu House, given to us by the Political Agent, and were beginning to feel like old hands at the game. But five days of repacking and negotiating for porters made us doubt this a bit, and when faced with 60 porters and 30 ponies strung out in a shouting, braying herd on the road up the Indus to Ghol, we all decided that there was still much to be understood before we might be called experienced in these matters.

The march up the Indus and Shyok Rivers to the Hushe Valley gave us the confidence in handling the porters that we had lacked, and the party was developing into a working team. Things began very shortly to become routine as we were able to pack up the expedition at a reasonable hour each morning in the compounds of the Dak Bungalows. Our start was always enjoyed by the assembled villagers as we headed out through the rich irrigated fields of wheat and barley, past astonished children and silent working women, to the barren sandy areas that extend all along these rivers, except where broken by green patches of cultivation. Eight to 12 miles farther on we would come into another town, differing from the last only by small details, but with a character of its own, distinct enough to place it in our memories. Fred Dunn would seize his medical box, and he and Lt. Soofi would begin sick call, while the necessary wood, chickens and ata were bartered for with the local Teshildar. Dinner would usually be cooling by the time Fred was done, and we would turn in very shortly thereafter with our high porters sleeping around our boxes and ourselves a little distance away. Only once did real confusion interrupt the normal routine. We met the Canterbury Mountaineering Club Masherbrum Expedition from New Zealand returning from their attempt. The village of Doghani witnessed the spectacle of the century with 200 porters, 30 ponies and drivers, and 25 Sahibs all milling about in the compound of the bungalow, with piles of boxes and duffles littering the area. In the morning it took us four hours to hire the New Zealanders' porters; they, our ponies. Perhaps this was due to the previous gay evening over a pot of reinforced tea, but I think much more attributable to the endless taking of pictures. It was wonderful to meet half way between our homes in such

a distant place, and I don't think any of us will soon forget the occasion.

Two days from Base Camp we enjoyed our first real view of the Karakoram. Masherbrum and the surrounding peaks appeared at the head of the valley just as we came into the town of Kande. With two easy stages left, we strolled through Hushe and on to Base Camp at the junctions of the Ghondakoro and Chogoliza Glaciers. Base Camp was placed in a clump of willow trees on the northeast edge of the gravel flats at the confluence of the two glacial streams. We paid off the "thundering herd" of porters and began looking around to see what was next.

After a short reconnaissance into the Chogoliza Basin, we decided that the Ghondakoro was a much less forbidding venture. As our botanical team combed the high meadows for alpine plants, we moved camp nine miles up the Ghondakoro to the last yakherders' village of Dalsangpa at 14,000 feet and prepared to explore the glacier that leads down from Masherbrum and Sérac Peak, which we called the "East Masherbrum Glacier." Here was a smaller peak of 20,000 feet, "Objective Peak," that seemed from below to offer a reasonable route to its summit. Already we were impressed by the sheerness of the mountains in this area. The top 2,000 feet seemed quite climbable, but the bottom 5,000 were vertical; and although the glaciers in this area are sizable, they don't gain much altitude and lead *into* the mountains but not *up*. However, in our favor was the weather, which was improving daily. Just as we were about to move up to Camp 2 (17,000 feet) on the East Masherbrum Glacier, Arthur Read developed the first symptoms of pneumonia. Fred Dunn and I stayed very near to camp for the next three days watching every twitch and wiggle that Arthur made. Fortunately penicillin did its job. We were entertained throughout this period by notes from our botanical team at Base Camp. We had given instructions that we were to be supplied regularly with eggs. Our botanists took this so literally that at one time we had 14 dozen of them and four chickens, one of which proceeded to lay just one more egg as I was doing my best to reduce the supply by making a 12-egg nog. We boiled that chicken for dinner.

With Arthur recovering rapidly, we moved camp to 17,000 feet. One day's reconnaissance showed us that with the beautiful cloudless days we were having, our route up this peak was not a safe one. The route to the summit lay up a steep snow buttress to a steep and corniced ridge off which a quantity of snow was beginning to slide. We satisfied ourselves with a fine view east up the Ghondakoro across to Gasherbrum I (Hidden Peak, 26,660 feet), and then headed down to finish off the remaining eggs, still cooling in a stream at Camp 1.

While the party climbed a small rock pinnacle called "Katrina" (18,000 feet) from which they had a unique view of Masherbrum, the surveying team finished off the stations at the bend in the Ghondakoro Glacier. We packed up camp and headed east to a small gravel island between two lateral moraines which were formed by the confluence of the East and the North Branch of the Ghondakoro. At this point, about 16,000 feet, we sent our porters to Base Camp and set off to explore the surrounding glaciers. A brief snowstorm, the last we had until the middle of August, delayed us for a day, but we soon had dried out and climbed a further rock tower "Khanjar" (18,500 feet), and two snow peaks, "Takiya" (19,000 feet), and "Khaima" (20,000 feet). We were so far disappointed, however, in our inability to find either a pass across to the Vigne Glacier, or even a summit from which we could see the entire Karakoram massif.

From "Khaima" we had seen Gasherbrum I and to the south of it, Bride Peak (25,110 feet). Bride Peak was a very attractive-looking mountain, and we could see up the Vigne Glacier to the mountain's upper slopes. Except for an icefall on the upper Vigne, which was hidden by an intervening ridge, the approach and climb up Bride from this side do not look impossible. Fred Dunn and John Humphreys had to retire to Base Camp at this moment to re-equip our botanical team, which was leaving for the Nanga Parbat area but rejoining us at Skardu in late August. The remaining four of us packed up camp and moved it to 17,500 feet, to a moraine ridge near a glacial pond from which we hoped to try a peak farther north.

On the 25th of July we had a sensational day. An easy climb was complicated by 40 pounds of camera gear and several unexpected rock towers on our ridge. A 1,000-foot snow slope above this almost finished us off late in the afternoon as we dragged ourselves up through soft drifts. I was about to quit, hopelessly buried to my waist, when I looked back over my shoulder. As if it were on top of us, K2 loomed up with only a thin thread of cloud across its face. This so stimulated all of us that we rushed to the summit of Jharokha (20,500 feet). K2, Broad Peak (24,680 feet), Gasherbrum I-IV lay to the north and east. Bride Peak was to our south and Masherbrum to the west, the sun already setting behind its summit. There was no wind and very little cloud and a breathtaking sight. We did not leave the top until almost 7 P.M. Fortunately the slopes leading off from the ridge, which had been dangerously soft in the day, were now solid, and we quickly returned to the glacier stumbling into camp by moonlight after the most exciting day that I have ever spent in the mountains. Two days later we were in Base Camp enjoying a special goat curry prepared by "Soof."

We spent the first three weeks of August exploring the Chogoliza Basin. Again in a series of four camps above Base Camp (11,500 feet), we moved into position to attempt a peak of 21,500 feet, which we called Thanda Parbat, the frigid mountain, with our highest camp at 18,500 feet on the southern extension of the Chogoliza Glacier. The surrounding mountains became more vertical than ever, and the scenery was filled with the rock towers that are characteristic of the Saltoro area in the Southeastern Karakoram. In the midst of this barrenness we were wonderfully lucky, for three of our four camps had fresh water, grass, and flowers. Exploration discovered for us a break in the tremendous wall of this basin; a glacier leading to the south on which we could gain an approach to this climbable looking peak. From a camp at 18,500 feet all seven of us laid siege.

Our weather was beginning to deteriorate, and K6 (23,840 feet) and K7 (22,480 feet) were shrouded in misty white clouds. The day we explored into the col through some crevasses to 19,000 feet it was snowing: silent, heavy, wet, soggy snow. The weather cleared long enough the next day to allow three of us to get well entangled on an ice face before the snow returned, and then we had to back off fixing hand lines and pitons all along the route. On the 18th of August four of us made a try for the summit. We were beaten back by our previously good summer weather. The sun of the preceding three weeks had melted the snow off the ridge, exposing the ice below. We cut steps to 21,000 feet and at 4 P.M. in the afternoon decided to turn back. We pulled back to Camp 2 the next day to rest, and that night the monsoon hit us. In the steady rainstorm we evacuated all camps back to Base Camp and sat under our shelters listening to our radio and repacking our gear for the trip back down the Hushe Valley through the now ripe apricot orchards to the Shyok and Indus valleys and Skardu, 100 miles away.

Summary of Statistics

AREA: Hushe Valley, Karakoram, Pakistan.

SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM: Botanical collections; surveying and exploring.

ASCENTS: "Katrina," *ca.* 18,000 feet; "Khanjar," *ca.* 18,000 feet; "Takiya," *ca.* 19,000 feet; "Khaima," *ca.* 20,000 feet; "Jharokha," *ca.* 20,500 feet, July 25, 1955.

PERSONNEL: Frederick Dunn, Henry S. Francis, Jr., John Humphreys, Craig Merrihue, John Noxon, Arthur Read, Lt. N. A. Soofi, Grady Webster, Eugene Nasir.