

# Payu, Karakoram

MANZOOR HUSSAIN, *Major, Pakistani Army, Alpine Club of Pakistan*

THE vertical rock and steep ice of 21,658-foot Payu (less correctly written Paiju) was the target of the first all-Pakistani expedition, organized by the Alpine Club of Pakistan. The peak, which rises from just below the tongue of the Baltoro Glacier, had already defied two previous attempts. A joint Pakistani-American expedition, led by Nicholas B. Clinch, abandoned the attempt in 1974 at 18,000 feet after a fatal accident to a Pakistani member, Momin Hamid. The second try was made in 1975 by a French expedition led by Jean Fréhel. The French reached 19,000 feet but gave up when one of the members was swept under an avalanche and broke his leg.

In November 1975 the Alpine Club of Pakistan started preparing our Services Expedition. The members consisted of Squadron Leader Javaid Iqbal deputy leader; Major Bashir Ahmed, Captains Mohammad Ayaz, Amjad Kamal Butt and Saeed Ahmed, Flight Lieutenant Z.H.K. Yousafzai, Captain Doctor Tahir Ahmed, Nazir Ahmed Sabir, Allen Steck and me as leader. Except for the doctor all Pakistanis were young, but with several years of climbing experience. Allen Steck, the famous mountaineer from California, joined us to give instruction in technical climbing.

We flew to Skardu on June 5 and traveled by Jeep to Dassu on the 7th. After recruiting 107 Balti porters, we started the seven-day approach to our 15,000-foot Base Camp, placed in what we named Momin's Meadow, named for the Pakistani climber who had lost his life on Payu in 1974. After reaching Base Camp on June 14, the expedition carried out a week-long refresher course under Steck's supervision. The weather was consistently bad with heavy snowfall even at Base Camp.

The first attempt to establish Camp I was made on June 23 in partially bad weather. Saeed, Bashir and Steck started up a snow-and-ice gully that rose from 15,000 to 18,000 feet, 30° in the lower part and up to 50° in the upper portion. At 17,000 feet, just below the proposed site for Camp I, the party was struck by an avalanche. Saeed, who was in the lead, was dashed against the rocks and left hanging on his belay rope upside down below a rock ledge. Allen and Bashir rescued the injured climber and lowered him to Base Camp. A few days later, on June 28, after the fresh snow had avalanched, Camp I was established at 17,200 feet. We fixed 500 feet of rope. An effort to push the route to Camp II on June 30 failed in oncoming bad weather. We withdrew to Base Camp.

PLATE 20

*Photo by Allen Steck*

**PAYU from the lower Baltoro Glacier.  
Camps II = 18,500 feet; III = 19,600  
feet; IV = 20,100 feet.**



On July 6 we finally were able to establish Camp II at 18,500 feet at the top of the gully, above 50° ice as well as rock ledges, where we fixed another 750 feet of rope. That camp had a fantastic view of K2, Broad Peak, the Gasherbrums and Masherbrum. Saeed, Bashir and Allen Steck worked above Camp II, up steep, avalanching gullies and frozen rock until Nazir had to replace Bashir, who was taken ill. The rest of us shuttled food and equipment to Camp II.

Saeed, Nazir, Steck and I established Camp III at 19,600 feet on July 13. The whole route between Camps II and III was fixed with rope. A 300-foot section of difficult rock was encountered there. On July 14 Saeed and Steck started up the initial easy snow to reconnoiter and possibly to climb the last 2000 feet, but the route was much more difficult than anticipated with some 60° ice. They retreated from 20,600 feet, exhausted and with some frost-bitten toes. Saeed descended to Base Camp, eventually to be evacuated by helicopter because of his feet.

I decided to put up Camp IV. On July 17 Bashir, Nazir, Allen Steck and I climbed past Camp III and established Camp IV at 20,100 feet, just below a very steep ice pitch. At 3:30 A.M. on July 19 we headed for the summit. After 17 hours of tough climbing, which included 200 feet of direct-aid on rock, led by Allen, and other good leads by Nazir, we dug a snow cave at 21,400 feet and bivouacked without sleeping bags or food.

In partially cloudy windy weather on July 20, we climbed 50 feet to a snowfield that joins the nearly vertical main summit to the 150-foot-lower east summit. Only the lower top can be seen from below on the Baltoro Glacier. I belayed Nazir as he struggled up the steep ice to the main summit 200 feet above us. Allen decided to sit on the final snowfield and photograph our final climb. Bashir joined us on the summit at two P.M. At three o'clock we began our tortuous rappel to Camp IV, which we reached at midnight. We were all back in Base Camp by July 27. Our good comradeship achieved our success. We are particularly grateful to Allen Steck for his cooperation and guidance.

#### *Summary of Statistics:*

AREA: Baltoro region of the Karakoram, Baltistan, Pakistan.

FIRST ASCENT: Payu, 21,658 feet, July 20, 1976 (Major Bashir Ahmed, Major Manzoor Hussain, Nazir Ahmed Sabir).