

Pakistan

K2, South-Southwest Ridge Attempt and Tragedy. Our expedition reached Base Camp on May 31 and took its place in line on the moraine of the Godwin Austen Glacier. We found ourselves among nine expeditions on the south side and four expeditions on the unclimbed south-southwest ridge. This concentration of climbers was initially dismaying, but the collection of Who's Who in Himalayan climbing, past and present, provided an interesting backdrop to our attempt, as we spent many days in Base Camp in foul weather. Our group consisted of eight climbers from the Pacific Northwest, Base-Camp manager Chelsea Monike and liaison officer Major Mobshir Hussain Tarar, who, as senior army officer in the Base Camp, provided counsel to other expeditions' liaison officers as climbers shuffled from one route to another. On June 3 we set up Camp I at the head of the De Filippi Glacier. From June 6 to 9, John Smolich, leader, Brian Hukari, Kerry Ryan and I fixed 1000 meters of line on the Negrotto Face to the saddle at 6300 meters. Andy Politz and Jon Sassler occupied Camp II on the saddle the next day. Bad weather drove us all to Base Camp on the 11th. On June 18 we started again to build up Camp II and while the rest of us ferried loads, Politz and Ryan helped the Italians fix line to Camp III at 6800 meters. Camp III was reached on June 20. That evening Murray Rice, Politz, Ryan and Dassler stayed in Camp II, Hukari and I descended all the way to Base Camp and Smolich and Al Pennington remained in Camp I, planning to do another carry the next morning. On June 21 at 5:30 A.M. a boulder fell from the south-southwest ridge just above Camp II and started an avalanche on the Negrotto Face. Smolich and Pennington had left Camp I about 20 minutes before and were caught in it as they started up the face. Hukari and I found Pennington's body near the surface three hours later. We carried him to the Gilkey Memorial the next morning and held a service attended by the international community. We found no trace of Smolich. The slab depth at the starting zone was two or three feet, but at the base it was 15 to 20 feet. It scoured the slope to blue ice. We abandoned the route and the expedition as our permit was specifically for the south-southwest ridge. Ours was the only expedition on the south side that did not start on, or send one or more members to, the Abruzzi Ridge. Probably as a result, we were the only expedition on the south side not to reach the summit. The Polish expedition on our route took over our fixed line to Camp III and our tents, rope and food in Camp II. They completed the previously unclimbed route in early August. Considering the small windows of good weather which they had, most certainly our work on the lower half of the route was instrumental in their success, and so we share their feeling of victory on what Renato Casarotto had referred to as the most difficult route in all the Himalaya and Karakoram.

STEVE BOYER

K2 Tragedy. The Italian climber Renato Casarotto was trying to climb solo the long, then still unclimbed south-southwest ridge of K2 with a slight deviation to the right in the upper part. A first attempt ended at 8200 meters about