

Lukpilla Brakk's Western Edge

PHILIP C. POWERS, *Unaffiliated*

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ALKING OUT after our climb of Gasherbrum II was quite a social experience. The Baltoro Glacier had lost its snow and become populated. We found friends to feed us, doctors to mend us and porters a plenty to speed us out. We hurried to Skardu with typical roadhead fever but found little satisfaction: beer, mail and such. The friends who were to climb with me above the Biafo Glacier were still a day's wait and a day's drive away in Rawalpindi.

Tony Jewell, Phil Peabody* and Tom Walter arrived the day before the Gasherbrum II boys flew home. They had hitched a ride with a French Chogolisa expedition. This second expedition already promised to be simpler and easier without the logistical nightmares of the higher peaks. Sub-6000-meter goals require no permits and no liaison officers. We had some monetary help from the National Outdoor Leadership School and the advantage of making all the arrangements a second time in 1987. It would be a friendly relaxed trip. After a few days of purchasing, arranging and bouldering, we picked up Greg Collins and Sue Miller at the airport, thus completing our crew. That same day we drove to Dasso, hired porters and managed to inveigle our jeep drivers to continue through a few rough sections to a camp past Biansapa.

The quick pace for Greg and Sue, who just a few days before were teaching in the mountains of Alaska, did not slow till we arrived four days later on July 25 at Base Camp up the Biafo Glacier. Expeditions coming out from the mountains all brought the same news: disappointment, bad weather and deep snow on the high peaks. We experienced the traditional porter problems at Baintha, our destination on the north side of the Biafo. Ahmad, our friend and sardar, never could explain the logic of the strike for higher wages *after* our loads had already arrived intact.

On July 28, in an Alaskan drizzle that became a heavy rain, three of us moved six miles up the Biafo: Sue Miller to get a better look up-glacier, Greg Collins and I to climb the golden western edge of Lukpilla Brakk. The next morning under a clear blue sky, we humped our loads up the lower snow slope, anxious for and intimidated by the spire above. We said goodbye to Sue

*Recipient of American Alpine Club Climbing Fellowship Grants.

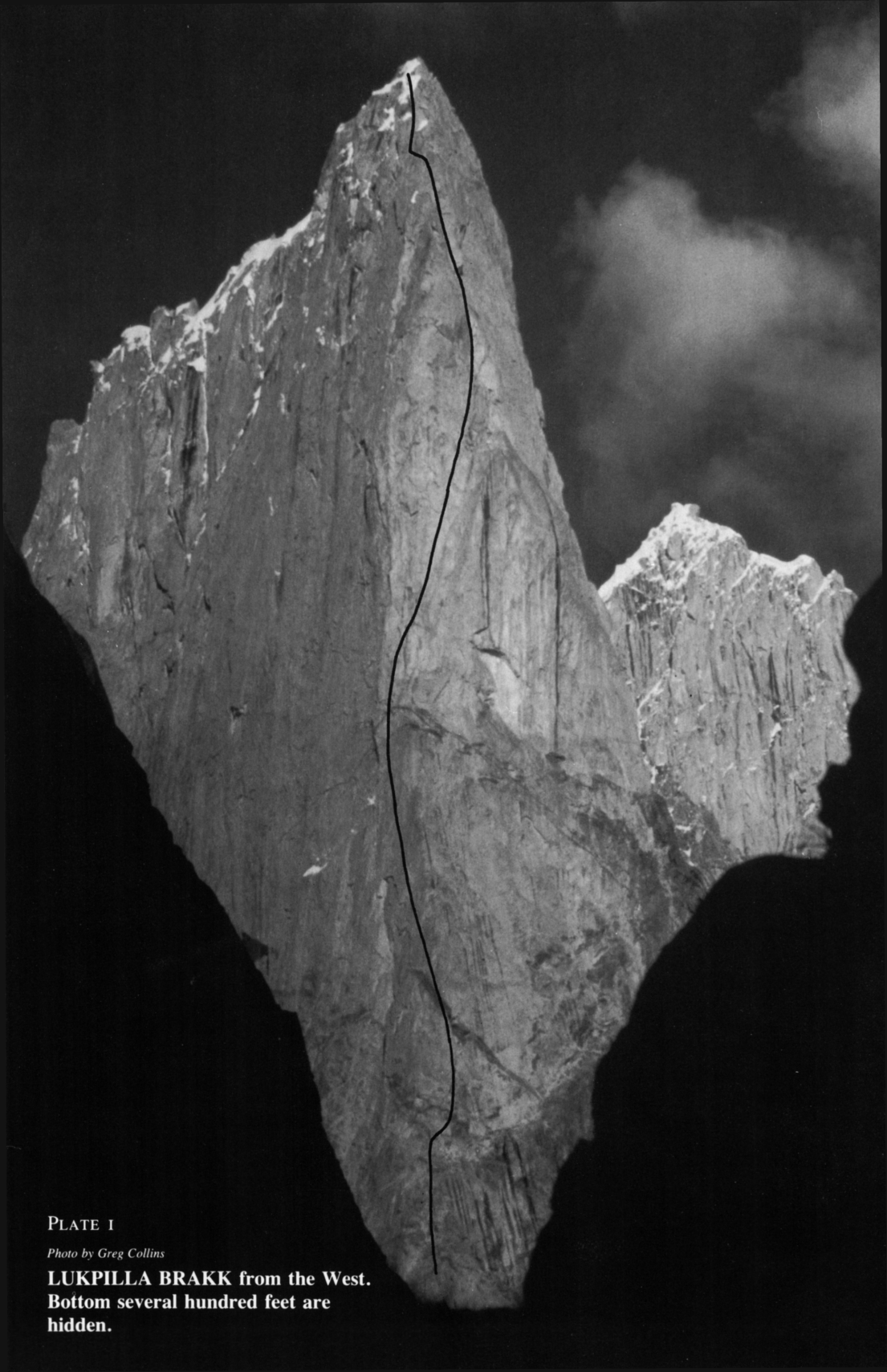


PLATE I

Photo by Greg Collins

**LUKPILLA BRAKK from the West.
Bottom several hundred feet are
hidden.**

while underestimating the number and difficulty of the lower pitches. Though the climbing at the spire's base was not steep, it was seamy and quite hard. Harder still was hauling our heavy bag. Tony Jewell had made it for us and we were convinced that he had added special, hidden rock-grabbers. Dusk brought us to "Sickle Ledge" where we began the first of our major ledge excavations under the roofs and steepening wall above.

We left some rope and gear to lighten the rock-grabbing haulbag-beast and began a cold morning of climbing with no sun till noon. Greg left the ledge via a steep hand crack. The next section widened and steepened in a cold wet corner. Greg was forced to drill the first of two bolts on the route. He pulled up over a body-length roof and was at "Tower Ledge" at over 16,000 feet.

The summer's storminess often granted clear mornings but rarely allowed a full day of fun. We were not climbing so fast that we needed to take a three-hour break, but it was blowing and snowing so hard by the time I reached the ledge that we took one anyhow. Bivy sacks and candy bars. The storm lifted long enough for two more pitches at dusk before retreating to our now nicely gardened ledge.

Melting snow for breakfast was easy. It was four inches deep on our bivy sacks. I won the disconcerting chore of jumaring the lines to retrieve a rope for the descent. Greg's talk of the rope-eating rodent he saw at our high point did not help. We were safely down by noon, leaving four ropes in place. At Baintha that night we were all together again. The storm had forced Tony Jewell, Phil Peabody and Tom Walter off their route on the "Ogre Stump."

We baked, bouldered and chased the local bear around for four days. He loved to eat our kerosene, candy bars and sometimes a butane canister for dessert. Our bear visited us nightly and he became progressively bolder and smarter as our tactics for scaring him became more creative. In the beginning we just threw rocks and yelled. Sue usually slept through these attacks, but one night she woke and threw Greg's walkman. We knew we had trained our bear well when he evaded the 200-pound food barrel Tony tried to drop on his head with an elaborate snare.

With light packs and with the crux pitches fixed, Greg and I reached Tower Ledge early on August 6. Steep rock, tough route-finding and harder climbing soared up above us. We woke to beautiful weather which allowed us a full day of climbing on the best rock we had yet been on. I led through some unbelievably thin flakes while Greg hid behind packs and made a neck shield out of rope. Steep cracks and tiny roofs brought us to a large roof which had worried us from the start. We were able to pass it on an unprotected face to a tiny roof and a mossy aid crack. Here the climbing became more intricate and the route-finding tricky. It was still a long way to "Snow Pillar Ledge."

We expected that the climbing would ease at least a bit at the base of the pillar. Instead, we were in steep aid cracks. When they finally widened, they became too wide to aid and much too icy to be fun. Greg free-climbed this nastiness, mumbling about run-outs and nonexistent tube chocks. He was forced to downclimb or lower twice to retrieve large Friends from below. I was

PLATE 2

Photo by Tony Jewell

Tom Walter on the Summit Ridge of
"Ogre Stump" above Uzun Brakk
Glacier.



mostly concerned with finding comfort at my cold hanging belay by eating a granola bar. Whoosh! A brick-sized rock passed by me, carrying my snack with it. Ice-filled finger cracks in the back of a chimney and a final short moonlit pitch brought us to the big gardenable ledge.

Within minutes of tying-in the next morning, Greg was trying to warm his fingers with the breath from his question, "Who needs coffee when you can stand on tied-off knifeblades first thing in the morning?" I understood his question later when leading past a giant, detached chopping-block flake which woke me up. Above the chopping-block, the climbing was pure fun on excellent granite. Even the 30-foot ice section in Fires was enjoyable: hand-jamming between the icicles. By two P.M. we had reached the first summit of the spire and its amazing bus-sized balanced boulder. Though this summit is two pitches from the true top, the incoming snow and wind of a big new storm made it easy to call the bus-stop the end of our route. We descended to the Snow Pillar Ledge by dark and spent the long stormy night huddled, laughing and happy, under a portaledge fly. At 17,000 feet, there was not enough air under the fly both to breathe and operate the stove at full power.

The snow fell deep again. We rose reluctantly to horrid visibility and packed for the tedious descent. Any smugness I had felt in being healthy while others suffered from "third-world bowels" vanished that morning. Greg engineered the rappels and we were in Base Camp eating Sue's freshly baked cookies that night.

Meanwhile, Tony Jewell and Tom Walter had done an impressive route on a previously unclimbed rock tower that rises from the Uzun Brakk Glacier, two-and-a-half miles south-southwest of the Ogre (Baintha Brakk). We could not find any local name for this 18,000-foot peak, but it has been referred to as the "Ogre Stump." Tony Jewell describes the climb: "We ascended the dominant prow and the southwest side of the peak and took three days to climb it and to rappel off. There were 21 pitches and we rated it VI, 5.10+, A2. The crux, led by Tom Walter, consisted of a huge ice block choking the top of a dihedral two pitches from the summit. With no other option, Tom had to do several layback moves on the edge of the ice to overcome this formidable obstacle."

Before the bear's impact on our rations slowed us down, Greg Collins and Sue Miller made an enjoyable ascent of P 19,100, east of the Biafo Glacier on the south side of the Baintha Lukpar Glacier, opposite Latok II. Tony Jewell and Tom Walter paired up again to reach the top of Gamma Sokha Lumbu by its snowy northwest ridge.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Biafo Glacier, Karakoram, Pakistan.

ASCENTS: Lukpilla Brakk, 5380 meters, 17,650 feet; New Route, the Western Edge; Foresummit reached on August 7, 1987 (Collins, Powers); VI, 5.11, A3, 23 pitches.

"Ogre Stump," 5487 meters, 18,000 feet; First Ascent; Southwest Face; August 13, 1987 (Jewell, Walter); VI, 5.10+, A2, 21 pitches.

P 19,100, 5822 meters; August 14, 1987 (Collins, Miller).

Gama Sokha Lumbu, 6282 meters, 20,610 feet, August 23, 1987 (Jewell, Walter).

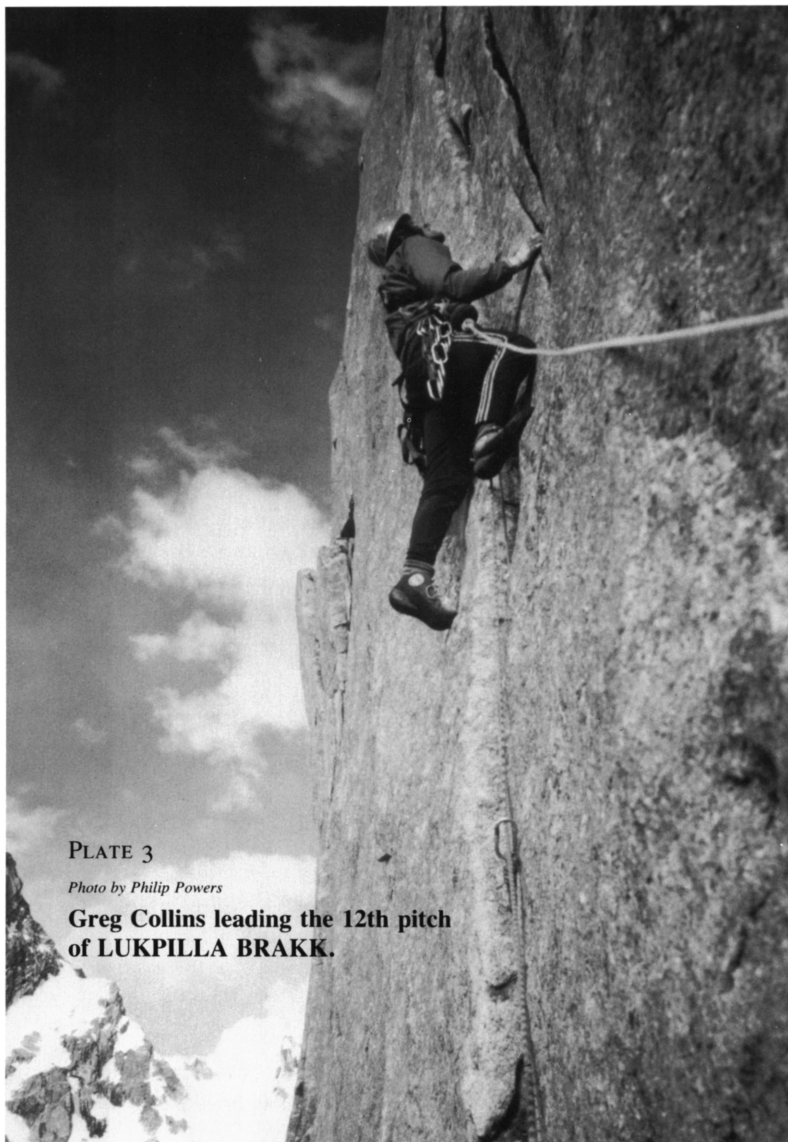


PLATE 3

Photo by Philip Powers

**Greg Collins leading the 12th pitch
of LUKPILLA BRAKK.**