

The International Spantik Expedition

Different styles on the Golden Pillar

MIKHAIL DAVY, *Russia*, and MARKO PREZELJ, *Slovenia*

Prezelj article translated by Ana Perčič

MARKO:

At the end of the summer of 1987, Mick Fowler and Victor Saunders started their ascent of Spantik's Golden Pillar, reached the top, and returned to the foot of the face in nine uncompromising days. They executed the ascent and descent in a very simple style on their third attempt.

Thirteen years later, we started up the same Pillar in two groups, with success on our minds and different points of view on the limits of the possible. How we and our predecessors influenced one another (indirectly by our presence and directly through our actions and conversation) I can only guess from my perspective. When I look at our climbs now, from the distance of time, the most outstanding detail seems to be the difference in approach and equipment of Fowler and Saunders and of the two groups that we became—and, naturally, 13 years that give a shiny glow to my respect for the first ascensionists.

MIKHAIL:

In 17 years of climbing, it was the most striking expedition in which I have had the chance to partake. The route was rather interesting and unique, of course, but the main reason was the international complement of the team. We were composed of seven climbers from five countries: Manu Pellissier and Manu Guy from France, Attila Ozsvath from Hungary, Marko Prezelj from Slovenia, Erik Svab from Italy (who would bow out of the expedition very early on due to health problems) and two Russians, Alexander ("Sasha") Klenov and Mikhail ("Misha") Davy, the author of these notes.

The idea of the expedition was born and became real mostly thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of Jean-Claude Marmier, ex-President of the French Mountaineering and Rock-Climbing Federation. In the autumn, Marmier sent us a photo of Spantik taken by Manu Pellissier the year before during his travels to northern Pakistan. With the photo came an invitation to take part in a spring, 2000, expedition. We could not reject such a tempting invitation and started our preparations.

That winter, in Chamonix, an international mountaineering festival took place at which the final team formation, gear and organizational matters, and the terms of the expedition were decided. After returning from Chamonix, we spent most of the time solving all kinds of problems with money, equipment, visas, tickets, and so forth. Thanks to our sponsors, we were able to resolve the whole lot, and on May 18 we left for Pakistan via Tashkent. On May 22, we met Attila, Erik, and Marko, and that very day went to the mountains by minibus.

We covered the distance in two days, spending the night in Chilas with a stop in Gilgit, where we put our papers in order, called home and sent e-mails. Our route took us along the Karakoram Highway, and we passed Nanga Parbat and that point where the greatest mountain systems of the

world—the Himalaya, Karokoram and Hindu Kush—meet. We covered the last stretch of the journey through the side canyon from Karimabad to Hoper in small jeeps, which nevertheless contained ten or more people at a time.

In the evening, at suppertime, the first discussion of tactics and strategy for the forthcoming ascent took place. Alexander suggested we make the first acclimatization push en route, shuttling part of the load over the snowy, lower-angled part of the route so we wouldn't have to haul the loads. However, Marko and Attila expressed their disapproval of such an idea, as it contradicted the alpine style of ascent. Moreover, they declared, they would not take portaledges (we had brought them with us for the use of the team) at all on the ascent, but planned to climb the route with tents alone. During our last meeting in Chamonix, the idea of using tents had not even been discussed, but they announced this decision as one that had already been made. Apparently, they had been influenced by Manu Pellissier's meeting with Victor Saunders, one of the pioneers of the only route of our valley, a route that had been established without the use of portaledges. But this route went to the right, up the lower-angled part of the wall, which had ledges here and there, making it possible to climb easily.

The next morning, a long, traditional meeting of the local inhabitants took place to distribute the loads. This process was managed on one hand by the representatives of our team and on the other by the leader of the village.

At last, the loads were distributed, and together with the caravan of porters we started moving up. Almost immediately, we were astonished by the view. Twenty meters from the quiet green meadow of our small hotel was a 200-meter vertical precipice, below which moved a huge, many-kilometer-long glacier. We crossed this realm of ice and stone via a path that was hardly visible, encountering cows that walked about the glacier quite independently; the path then crossed one more glacier, and then again went along a flat, green moraine.

On the second day we reached Base Camp at 4600 meters. The Manus had been there for three days and were eager to climb something. The spring this year was early and warm, which is why the Manus were successful in persuading the porters to carry the loads as high as possible and establish BC at nearly the place where Advanced Base Camp would normally go. There remained not more than an hour and a half to the beginning of the route!

On the opposite side of the glacier we could easily see the goal of our expedition, the famous Golden Pillar of Spantik. It was difficult to comprehend that there were two and a half kilometers of vertical to the top. The rest of the valley's wall was snow and ice. Avalanches swept down it several times a day, the snowy clouds of some succeeding in crossing the glacier and covering BC.

We discussed our plans once more. Both Manus wanted to cover the route as fast as possible, without portaledges. To our objections to the fact that there were practically no ledges on the route on which to spend the night, they suddenly stated that they would climb the British route as a last resort. This didn't satisfy us, and it became clear that there would have to be two teams to try the face—but there was still a hope that Attila and Erik would join our pair, as they spoke up for the Manus' idea with less confidence.

MARKO:

We discussed the style of climbing at Spantik's base. The final decisions regarding portaledges, style, and a route had not been established earlier, as it is not possible, in my opinion, to establish a fixed plan before you see the mountain, the intended route, and the route's conditions. Misha and Sasha firmly defended the primary idea of a first ascent and of climbing with

Spantik, showing the British route (with the 2000 variation) and the Russian route (indicated by closed tents). MARKO PREZELJ



a rather large amount of equipment. In Hoper, I had quite aggressively explained my point of view to them, which was that I would do my best to first try a pure alpine-style ascent. The two Manus spoke in favor of a quick alpine-style ascent, while Attila initially sought a compromise.

It was good that we clarified the basic aspects regarding the climb. In this way we probably avoided the quarrels that sometimes emerge when making decisions—decisions that can penetrate the self-confidence of such strong personalities as the members of our group were.

MIKHAIL:

It seemed crazy to start the new route as two teams. Each team would be forced to carry its own heavy load, and the first kilometer of the route went along a steep snow ridge where it would be very difficult to arrange a good anchor with which to haul the loads (not to mention the fact that hauling loads over snow is much more difficult than over vertical rock). The rocky section of the route did not inspire optimism either: the steep rock, consisting, as the first ascensionists had described, of broken marble blocks, was covered at the moment by snow.

The atmosphere in our camp was very friendly: anecdotes, good-natured joking with one another, descriptions of home life....

Admittedly, I had some problems with English: I couldn't understand everything, particularly when Marko was speaking (he spoke too fast, as everybody noted at the end of the expedition). Sometimes, while dreaming, I even tried to think and speak in English. But on the whole all our heads were full of one and the same thing: going over the planned route in our minds. Little by little we got accustomed to the idea of covering the route in two teams, and it didn't seem as crazy to us as it had at the beginning.

It snowed without stopping the whole day and night of June 3, with accumulations of about one meter. We had to constantly dig out the tents. Even at night, first one of the Manus and then Marko would sweep the snow off all the tents. The next morning, the sun was shining in the sky as we dug trenches to connect the tents, naming them as we went (Beverly Hills, the Lenin Prospect, etc.). On the following morning, one of the Manus and Marko went up, breaking trail, and after dinner Sasha and I delivered the gear and portaledge to the base of the wall, as it was impossible to carry all our things at one stretch. We planned on climbing the wall in ten or 12 days, so we took food for ten days (we could always prolong it for one or two days) and gas for 15 (in case of bad weather).

MARKO:

After the snowfall, conditions on the Pillar were anything but encouraging. When we debated, I had to recall what my basic interest was: to fill the time of ascent with as many memorable moments as possible.

We discussed style before deciding on a line. The Manus preferred climbing alpine style to a capsule-style first ascent and I agreed without hesitation. Attila joined us too. After the big snowfall, we made our final decision to attempt the British route, which runs through the most elegant passages in the Pillar, rather than try a new variation on the rock part of the Pillar. Misha and Sasha didn't hide their disappointment. The Russians remained alone with their goal of an independent new route. They insisted on the idea of ascending with a portaledge. Though this did provide quite a comfortable shelter and place to sleep, it also represented a considerable burden regarding weight and the time needed for transport, setup, and breakdown—and therefore also for climbing.

We did two two-day acclimatization ascents, including one on the descent ridge to better

examine the conditions. Spantik gradually got under our skin—or was it the other way around? As the sun moved through the day, the rock formations showed us their dimensions and proportions. We “climbed” the Pillar anew each time we looked at it and soon knew its main relief.

As the moments of decision-making closed in, our minds were more troubled by the question of how much uncertainty and risk we would manage to push away. While selecting equipment, the four of us reassured one another that it made sense to try the route first in alpine style with minimum gear, which enables fast progress. We didn’t have a precise description of the route, but we were able to make it out in general from Fowler and Saunders’ descriptions of the most remarkable sections and from observations of the face in the different light.

I provoked the other three by saying that we would be on the summit and back in BC in three days. I meant it, though I had no arguments other than my smile to support the idea. Now I truly believe that such an ascent of the Pillar is possible. The basic prerequisite is that you should be really light when you start climbing, although this lessens your chances to “bravely escape” in case you find yourself in trouble.

On June 7, bleary-eyed, we watched each other during breakfast in the middle of the night. As we left the comfortable BC, serious doubts disappeared. We moved silently along the edge of the glacial moraine one after another. I soon concentrated on walking, or to be more precise, on the rational movement of my legs, and on the fact that I shouldn’t sweat too much. I put on crampons, helmet, and harness, and approached the entrance gully. After a few steps I felt it: this was it. If I had perceived a shadow of anxiety, I forgot it by concentrating fully on movement and the happiness of motion.

I remember my son’s enthusiasm when he made his first steps. He was shouting with joy. Each of us must keep some of this original enthusiasm in our subconscious. Close behind me, Attila showed enthusiasm as well. The Manus ascended somewhat more slowly, apparently without enthusiasm. Although Misha and Sasha had initially planned a new route up the entire pillar, in the end they brought gear to the start of the British route with us.

MIKHAIL:

Both Sasha and I had rucksacks on our backs; one carried a 15-kilo pack along with two ropes stretched out behind, while the second carried a 35-kilo load. The portaledge was hauled by the man in front while he belayed the second at the same time.

To ensure the safety of the person on the steep (up to 45°) snow ridge was problematic, so we would dig a large hole in the soft snow, sink our axes or a shovel at the bottom, cover them with the rucksacks and sit down on top. The second person tried to move carefully so as not to weight the ropes. We didn’t succeed in reaching the plateau in the daylight, so we traversed onto flat ground and spent the night there.

MARKO:

We ascended 100 meters and took the ropes out of our rucksacks. A steep icy gully was the right thing to calm our initial zeal. We belayed two pitches, then climbed over a sharp snowy crest. Just before the “Hanging Glacier” we tied in again for another ropelength until we had pitched two tents on gentle ground by a serac. We waited for the Russians to arrive and made ourselves comfortable before dusk.

It snowed in the early morning. Manu and I briefly exchanged opinions and tried to sleep some more. By around 8 a.m., lying in the little tents became unpleasant. Indecisively, we



Marko Prezelj (facing camera), with Manu Pellissier and Manu Guy on the approach to the initial gully at the bottom of the Pillar. ATTILA OZSVATH

emerged, complained about the weather, and rhetorically asked ourselves: What now?

“Let’s wait another day. It will get better.”

There was no real determination. We glanced toward the rocky part of the Pillar, which was covered with snow, and again toward BC in the distance. We did some cooking, but not so zealously as we should have. The Manus smoked, while Attila and I fidgeted in front of the tents, moving equipment that had been moved a hundred times before. Elementary boredom mixed with uncertainty.

Soon after noon the snow stopped for a while; the clouds even began to tear shyly. At the same time we observed a person on the lower edge of the Hanging Glacier and after some time another. The Russians. Happy to see them despite such bad weather conditions, we nonetheless realized that they progressed very slowly. The four of us sat like ravens on the edge of our shelter, staring at the figures that slowly approached. At first I couldn’t find a logical explanation for their slowness, but soon I established that in the way they advanced, they were in fact not slow. The first drew a fixed portledge that the other helped direct with rope; the second also removed heavy snow from it.

“That is a struggle,” Manu stated coldly.

Surprised and with admiration, we silently watched their struggle with the excess weight. We were so genuinely amazed that we completely forgot to make tea for the newcomers. I became aware of our impoliteness only when they took off their rucksacks and asked for a lighter. They were in a much better mood than the four of us. They ignored our suggestion to set up a bivouac

at a good place by the serac.

"Let's move on, into the bergschrund!"

"Why?" I asked myself, as it started to snow again, but Sasha and Misha were determined to draw their clumsy comfort toward the bergschrund 100 meters away. We watched them for a while, until the snow forced us into our sleeping bags.

When dusk fell, we again agreed to get up early in the morning. At the appointed hour, Manu and I looked through the tent cloth and saw that it still snowed. The first light aroused impatience in us. Manu asked me a few times what I thought. I thought about nothing except the new snow, relating its alpine implications to my mountain experience.

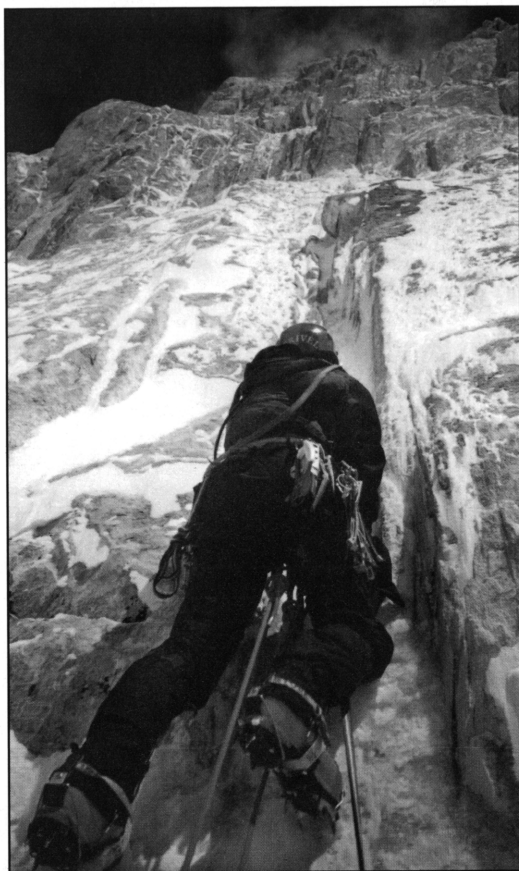
"Down!"

MIKHAIL:

It snowed the whole night. In the morning the weather seemed to improve, but as there was no upward visibility, the others decided not to go farther. We reached the place where they were spending the night by lunch time, drank tea together, then moved farther up to the bergschrund. Toward evening the weather became bad again; it snowed, and we were covered with small spin-drift avalanches while moving to the next camp. We were lucky to spend the night under a cornice; otherwise we would have been fully covered by snow during the night.

The next morning we climbed up the bergschrund, passed through the ice, and went onto the rock. The angle was not too steep (60 to 70°), but the rock was very snowed up, and the cracks were filled with ice, making the climbing very hard (up to 7a A2). From this point to the top, we had particular problems arranging the belay anchors. If we could at times let the intermediate protection points be symbolic (after all, if you don't fall, you can do without protection), then the anchor, loaded by the second as he came up the ropes and pulling our 200-kilo load, had to be absolutely secure, otherwise a fall by us both would be inevitable....

We had to creep over the rock to the right, to the left, upward, downward, searching for proper cracks and spinning a web of ropes and webbing up to several meters long. It would take nearly an hour to arrange the anchor. We brought bolts with us, but we didn't use them, as we believed it to be bad style. In one day



Alexander Klenov on day 3 at 5700 meters.

MIKHAIL DAVY

we covered not more than three incomplete pitches of rock and spent the night in the portaledge.

The Manus and company, who had not managed to come up from where they first spent the night, decided to go down. It was very sad to remain behind alone on the wall, but it was to be expected, as their food and gas would have been coming to an end. We were a little bit glad: they left their tents and gear, so they would be coming back. As for us, we continued climbing slowly up the wall. The weather was variable, and even if it was not snowing, the wind blowing the snow over the rock would periodically pour dirty snow avalanches down on us.

Despite the fact that it took strength and time, we carried a camera and tried to shoot a film, as we had done on previous ascents. Little by little, the days merged into one chain of similar events: awake, eat breakfast, make the day's arrangements, move upward. The sun would quietly cover half a circle over our heads, then, as it began to sink below the horizon, we would set up the portaledge, eat supper, and have a short troubled sleep. The only variety came in switching the leader every day.

MARKO:

A two-day rest was enough for us to leave BC in the middle of the night once more. We knew it would be for the last time. We reached the Hanging Glacier before noon. Manu and I satisfied our eagerness by progressing to the end of the ice slope and climbing two pitches of rock. The conditions were not as bad as they had appeared to be from a distance. There was snow on the rocks and ice, but not much cleaning was needed. It went quickly and casually. Finally, real climbing. While abseiling, I cut off pieces of blue rope that jutted out here and there. This was the only trace of Fowler and Saunders that we noticed on the upper part of the route.

The next morning we woke up at 2 a.m. and instantly began with the morning tasks. At 4, the Manus were the first to leave. We quickly ascended the two ropes. It took much longer for the leader to start the next pitch. There was too much rope and gear. The rope that Manu dragged behind him as the second continually got stuck.

Our system of climbing was as follows. The first climbed without a rucksack, then the second jumared, bringing up the rest of the equipment and another climbing rope for the leader. While the leader climbed the next pitch, the third climber, with the help of the fourth, hauled the leader's rucksack to the stance. We exchanged leads. In this manner, the whole route was climbed free on lead. Soon we got used to ice axes getting stuck in the rocks, as well as the fact that we were rarely able to place good protection.

On the second day of ascent we climbed 12 pitches, five of them more directly than Fowler and Saunders. Each section seemed interesting to me, a new discovery. The moves, which years ago I would have dared to execute only if protected at least at waistlevel, were dainty in spite of the rare air and protection. We bivouacked at the top of Fowler and Saunders' "Shallow Chimneys."

MIKHAIL:

In a day, our friends started the route again. By lunchtime they reached the place where they had first spent the night, and they succeeded further in reaching and fixing two pitches on the rocky wall. The next evening we passed through the snow field that we thought would be the last steep section. We arranged the place to spend the night an hour earlier than usual and were basking in the sun before sunset. At 9 p.m., one of the Manus, tired but pleased, announced to us over the transceiver that they had climbed 12 pitches



Perfect weather, perfect climbing: Manu Guy on the third mixed pitch of the second day's climbing.
MARKO PREZELJ

and were eager to reach the top the next day. We answered that we supposed ourselves to be not far from the top as well. As it so happened, we were both mistaken.

MARKO:

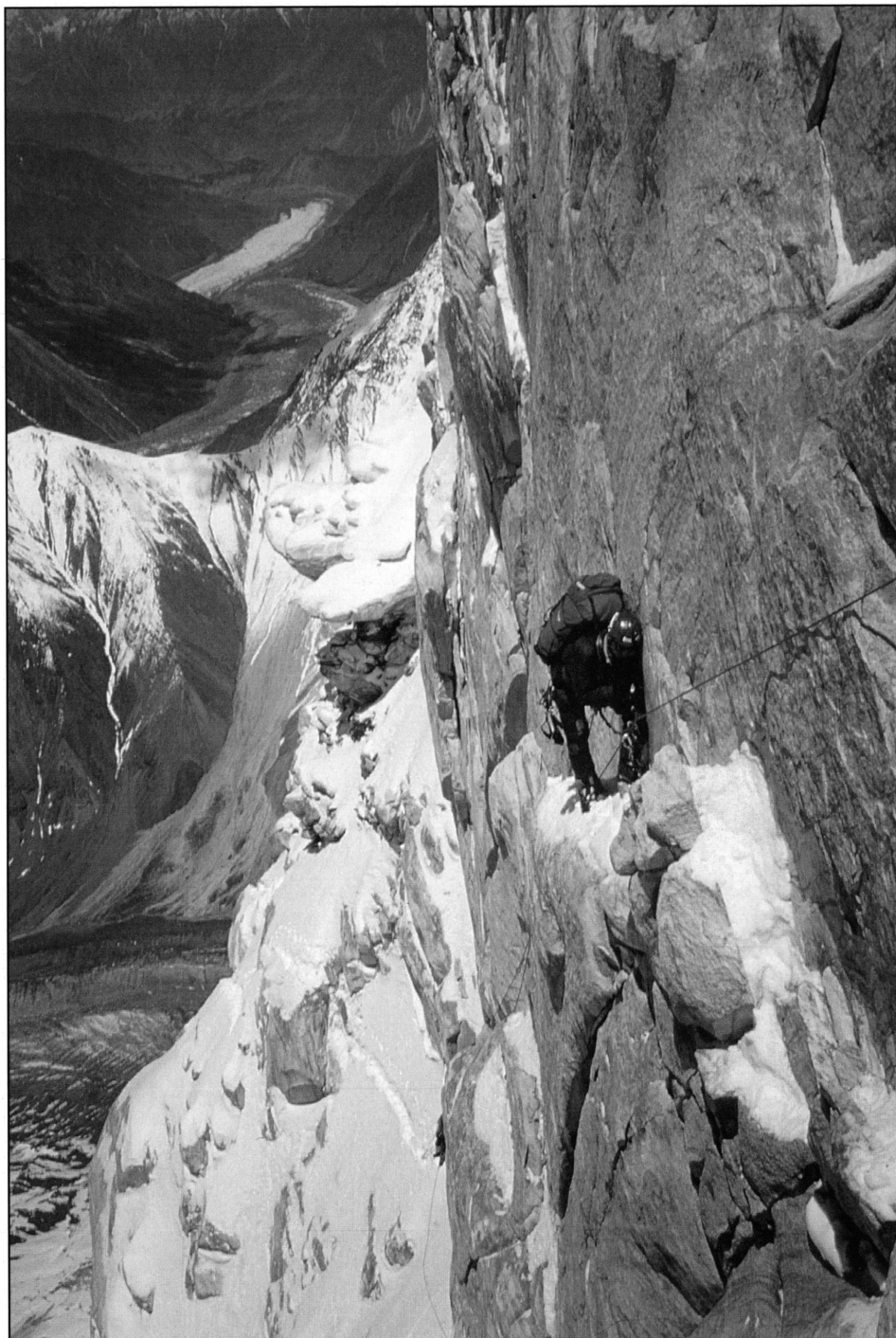
On the third day, we climbed another four and a half new pitches directly above the "Hanging Block" that loomed over the steep rock face. The climbing was exposed and very interesting. My feelings were intense, as they always are when I try to control my fear, a consequence of uncertainty and the unknown. Focusing on the here and now, a kind of harmony of body and spirit arose, at times almost perfect despite the underlying thoughts about the descent.

Late in the afternoon, Manu climbed out of the exit ramps, searching for a place to bivouac. The falling dusk inspired our hopes. In complete darkness, fifty meters beneath the top serac, we realized that our third bivouac would not be a comfortable one.

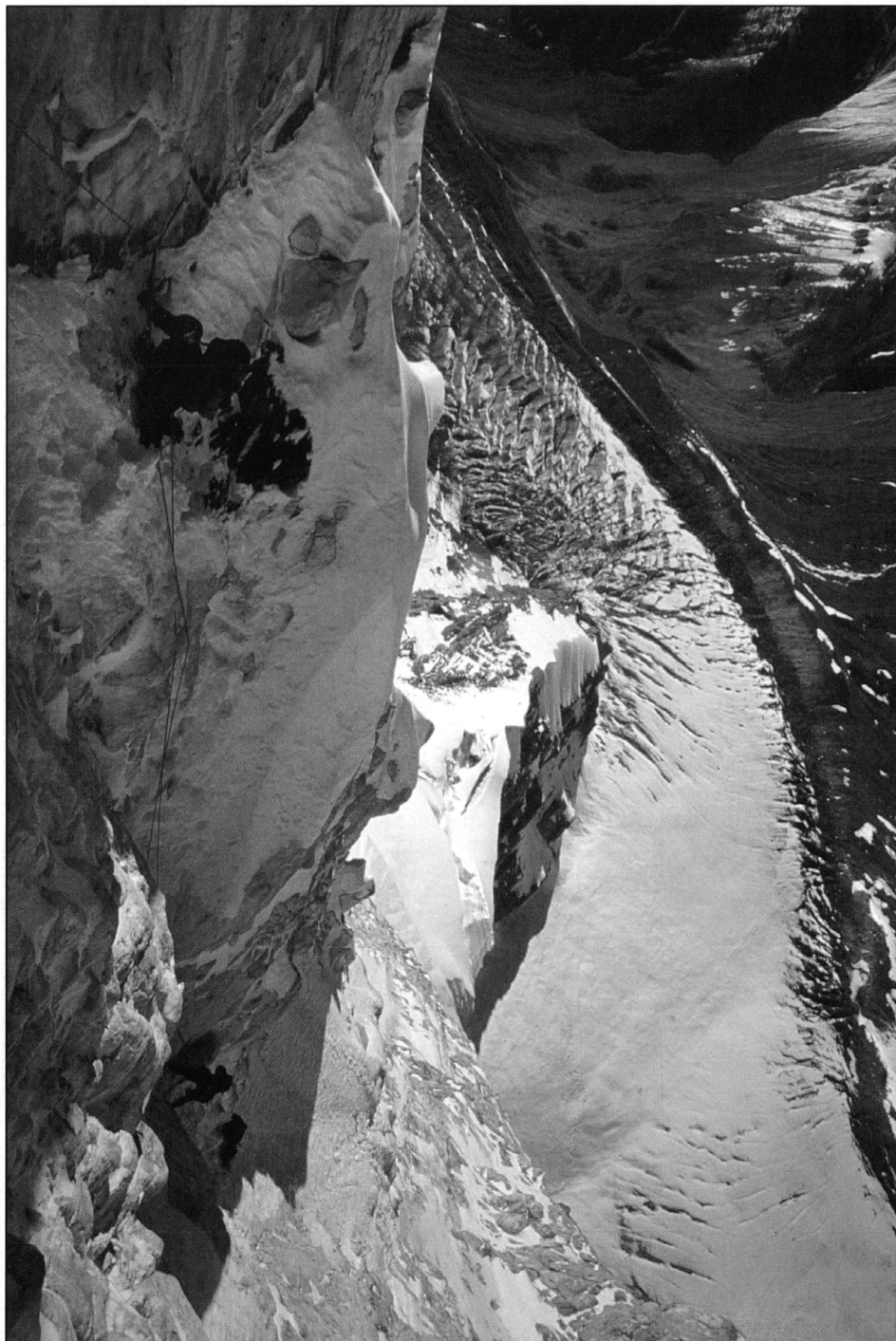
We each found a piece of darkness and cut a ledge in the ice and snow. I took off crampons and harness, roped myself around my chest and crept into my sleeping bag with my boots on. The contents of my rucksack hung all around me, while I used the rucksack itself as insulation for my behind. I sat on a narrow ledge I had made, my legs swinging into the precipice. Some meters higher, Manu cowered on the haulbag, while the other two descended each to his own ledge, where they could almost stretch a little. Another sleepless night, I thought, as my head drowsed.

I woke when the rope on which I hung cut into my chest. I had slipped off the ledge. I somehow got back on, and the ritual recurred until dawn.

For me, the mornings on expeditions are the mirror of mood and will. The cold had gnawed through my clothes and sleeping bag a long time ago. I tried to nap. Soon, the visible empti-



Manu Pellissier seconding pitch one of the second direct variation to the British route. Behind and to the left of him can be seen the Hanging Block. MARKO PREZELJ



Looking down from the Shale Chimney at Manu Pellissier, Manu Guy, and Attila Ozsvath in the Amphitheater. The Hanging Glacier and snow ridge can be seen below. MARKO PREZELJ

ness surrounding me joined the cold to wake me up. Attila made breakfast for himself, while the Manus stood on the lower ledge, smoking.

MIKHAIL:

The next day, the guys were up rather quickly, climbing in the dark, but nevertheless had to sit out the night barely a pitch from the ridge. For us, the forthcoming steep section happened to be far from the last of the climbing, as we had supposed. The upper part of the route became steeper and we came across 30-meter overhangs that consisted of “live” stones frozen together. Had the temperatures been above zero, they would have by all means fallen down, but such was our situation that we had to place cams and stoppers between them and aid off them, risking not only a fall, but an extraction of the rocks above as well. The altitude—we were now at 6500 meters—made itself felt; after pulling ourselves up two or three moves, we gasped as if we had just been sprinting.

MARKO:

Although we felt resigned in the morning, we were determined to accomplish the ascent. I Asked Attila to belay me and started climbing. I felt somewhat stiff at first; later, I began enjoying the movement. With a full 26 pitches in the rocky part of the pillar behind us, I reached the plateau. From the edge of a serac I slowly trudged across the plateau toward the top of Spantik until the monotony exhausted me. We left our rucksacks at the spot where the slope seemed to decline toward the descent route and waded on.

Manu Guy moved slowly—I think he was counting steps—stopped, breathed, and trudged on again. I followed him leisurely, convincing myself that at this point, everything was simply a matter of will and persistence. We were less than 50 meters below the summit. The wind carried big, damp snowflakes, while the fog covered and then revealed Attila and Manu Pellisier below. As I had so many times before, I pushed the issue of sense aside, completely succumbing to the impression that reaching the top depended solely on our will.

“But why to the top when we have already climbed the major difficulties?”

“Have we? Isn’t this more strenuous than the climbing on the Pillar? What are the ‘major difficulties’ on such a complex expedition?”

We reached the top at around two in the afternoon. A ball of disorderly thoughts and feelings knotted into something between indifference and disappointment. We couldn’t see anything. It wasn’t possible to determine the highest point. The wind kept bringing new snow.

From the top downward, everything happened quickly at first. After 100 meters, when we had passed some crevasses, I unroped and, following our tracks, quickly descended in the fresh snow to our rucksacks. Once there, we weighed our options, the advantages and disadvantages. The wind and snow settled. We decided to descend as low as possible.

Manu Guy and I obviously had the most energy left. To trudge through snow was tiring in every respect, especially mentally. We first had to decide on the direction, hoping that in the fog we’d choose approximately the right one, and not find ourselves at the edge of a deep crevasse or a dead-end serac. Our concentration slackened with dawn. We reached a flatter but more broken part of the summit plateau.

Wishing to descend as quickly as possible to a point from which we could reach the descent ridge, Manu Guy and I went too low. We had to climb back up, and occasionally we fell waist-deep into crevasses. We felt troubled as we first looked at the tempting descent ridge not far below us and then at our position.

In a true labyrinth of seracs, the tension increased. Manu Guy went first. Tied to the same rope, I thought that he chose the worst options, though I tried to keep quiet (it is easy to judge a snow slope from a distance). The other two stopped as well. They didn't hide their disagreement and impatience, and they were obviously tired. We had almost picked a place to bivouac when Manu Guy went to "check" what was around the corner. He yelled that he had found a better place. We followed him suspiciously. He did it again, while we complained and nagged (he had left his rucksack with us and we had to drag it along). In this way he found a place for our last bivouac and also discovered a logical continuation of our descent.

Considering the fact that we hadn't drunk anything that day, a bivouac seemed a much better solution than continuing with the descent, although I was almost convinced of the opposite by the proximity of the descent ridge in the last rays of the sun.

The snow melted in our pots as we dug places for bivouacs. Attila and I dug a comfortable hole for our tent, which was somewhat damaged and impossible to pitch properly. With dusk and supper, the fatigue overwhelmed me, too. We often had to shake snow off the tent. The wind blew hard, and we simply couldn't sleep well.

We woke in the morning completely covered with snow; we had to call the Manus to kindly dig us out. The wind had crushed their tent in the middle of the night as well. They were relieved to see the morning come; we, on the other hand, had to wake up first and get motivated. This was a slow process. Cooking, dressing, moving things, packing equipment... an unbearable routine.

The Manus roped up and disappeared behind the serac. All of a sudden Attila and I were alone. This gave us impetus to finish our tasks. We stuffed the last things in our rucksacks, tied in and hurried after the Manus.

Trudging through snow in a roped party is often tiring because all members must walk in the same rhythm. The Manus quickly found the beginning of the descent ridge. Due to large snow cornices and seracs on the edge of the top plateau, we were able to descend from one spot only.

I carefully stepped onto the edge: I could see all the way down to the glacier below the face. It was steeper than I had expected. Slowly we descended to the spot where we had left an abseil screw during one of our acclimatization ascents.

On the ridge beneath the top of the Pillar, I observed one of the Russians. So, I thought, they are going to traverse to the right toward the British route. I felt strangely indifferent to the fact that they were relatively far from the top. Will the weather hold? Are they going to reach BC in time? I didn't envy them. We ceased worrying about them only much later, when we learned that after two weeks of climbing they had safely returned to the deserted BC.

After abseiling, we descended together for a while, then separately. We waited for each other at the bottom of the face, tired but happy.

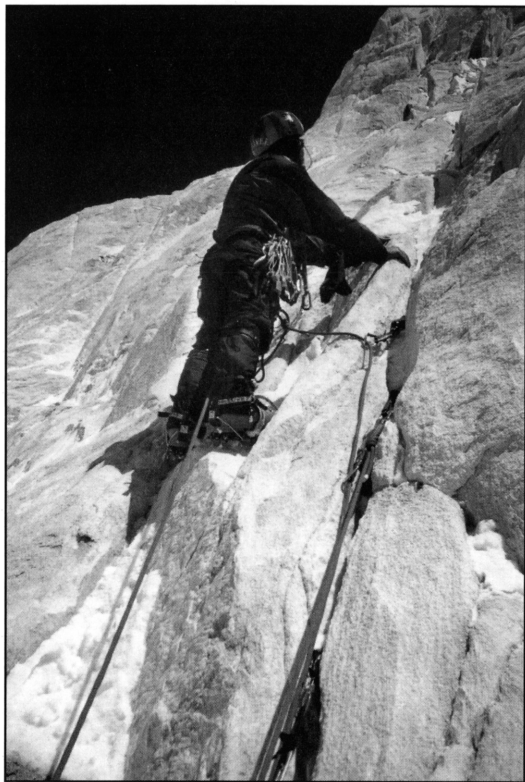
The increased tension eventually loosened. In this way, a door to a new energy was opened. The contents were almost perfect.

I sat down on the first rock. Attila's eyes were not only a reflection of mine. Happiness and relief were in the air. The tension finally disappeared.

The last act was still ahead of us: traversing the glacier. I loaded my rucksack and put it on my shoulders. Its weight made me turn back respectfully and look up to the Pillar.

"God," I thought. "Have we really climbed all that?"

Like so many times before....



Alexander Klenov on day 7 at ca. 6000 meters.

MIKHAIL DAVY

MIKHAIL:

When we had several more pitches to cover before reaching the ridge, our route met the Fowler-Saunders line. After one week of solitude on the wall, it was very pleasant to see even the traces of others. Having moved up onto the lower-angled snow ridge, ridding ourselves of unnecessary gear and packing the portaledge, we could hardly stand and move up with our rucksacks.

According to the first ascensionists' description, there remained about three more kilometers of horizontal terrain to go before we reached the top. By evening we came to a convenient, icy ledge and decided to spend the night there; it was simply too much for us to continue on to the summit.

The next day, June 18, the porters were scheduled to come to BC, and in a day the caravan would go down. Although beforehand we had made arrangements with Manu that in the event we were not there in time they would leave the tent, some food, and two porters to carry the gear for us, all the same we wanted to travel back

together with the rest of the expedition. We got up at 2 a.m. to climb to the top; if we were lucky, we would have a chance to descend to BC as well.

At around 4 a.m. we were climbing for the top. It was very cold and windy, but going without gear was much easier than going with our heavy rucksacks had been the day before, and in an hour and a half we found that we had nowhere left to go. Visibility at the top was rather poor; we took photos and tried to record video, but the camera, having worked properly for the whole ascent, failed at the top, as had happened the year before on Thalay Sagar and in the winter on the Petit Dru. With great difficulty we succeeded in switching it on, but all the same the recording turned out to be of very poor quality.

Both of us took one small piece of stone from the top as a souvenir and then we began to go down. We came to the last bivouac, packed it up and went on slowly with our heavy rucksacks. Before starting down from the plateau, we found packets of soup left for us by Attila where the others had spent their last night. It was very much to the point, as we had dropped our packet with its different kinds of soup three days before, and over the last few days had eaten only snacks and tea.

The others had passed the first 100 meters from the plateau down the ridge over the hard snow unroped, but for us, carrying as we were heavy rucksacks, it was very dangerous. We therefore buried a polyethylene bag, packed it with snow, tied a rap-cord around it and rappelled. After we

had descended about ten pitches this way over the ice, we could at last walk farther. Asymmetrical crevasses ran along the slope, covered only by thin thawing snow bridges. Alexander was moving unroped down the ridge when he fell into a crevasse. We decided to spend the night where we were so as not to risk further falls in the dark. We got through to Manu and agreed that their caravan would start down the next morning. We would join them in Hoper.

By 12 p.m. we had descended down onto the glacier, regretting the fact that we would have to cross it, and that we would have to climb up the opposite side of the moraine with our heavy rucksacks as well. Suddenly, with great pleasure, we noticed people on the glacier: our cook, Dino, and one of the porters had come to welcome us. They solemnly handed us garlands of flowers and rupees, offered us congratulations, fed us juice and took our rucksacks. It was wonderful!

Green grass awaited us in BC; oxen were being pastured nearby. At night, for the first time since our arrival, it was raining, not snowing. Summer had come to the mountains. Our souls became quiet and unruffled. At last we could relax, rest from financial and organizational problems, and not worry about safety, a place to sleep, or the cooking. It was, perhaps, the happiest time of the expedition.

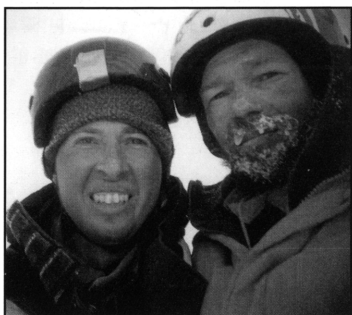
But time passes quickly, and we had to get ready for our walk home. We said farewell to that beautiful valley, to which we might never return, and went downward in the drizzling rain.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS

AREA: Pakistan Karakoram

VARIATION and SECOND ASCENT: The Russian route (ABO 7a A3, 2300m) (route length includes the beginning and finish of the British route) on the northwest pillar of Spantik (7028m), June 7-19, Mikhail Davy and Alexander Klenov; and the second ascent, with two variations, of the British route, June 12-16, Marko Prezelj, Manu Guy, Manu Pellissier, Attila Ozsvath. Descent for both teams was made by the Fowler-Saunders descent route.

PERSONNEL: Mikhail Davy, Manu Guy, Alexander Klenov, Manu Pellissier, Marko Prezelj, Attila Ozsvath, Eric Svab



Mikhail Davy and Alexander Klenov
on the summit. MIKHAIL DAVY

Mikhail Davy, from Yekaterinburg, Russia, wrote for the 2000 *American Alpine Journal* on his team's new route on Thalay Sagar's north face. Marko Prezelj, from Kamnik, Slovenia, authored an article in the same volume on a new route on Gyachung Kang.



Marko Prezelj.
CHRISTIAN BECKWITH