

A reconnaissance of the Nangma Valley was our next foray. We spent a week in the Nangma looking for new route possibilities. Believing it unclimbed, we started up a line on Brakk Zang, but bailed after learning that it had been climbed by Silvia Vidal and Pep Masip some years earlier. Todd and I returned to Islamabad and flew home August 15 while Sean stayed on another week to make a trip up to Bublomotin and Ultar.

NILS DAVIS

*Brakk Zang, South Face, Ascents.* It was reported that a Korean expedition was responsible for two new lines on the south face of Brakk Zang (a.k.a Sotulpa Peak, 4800m). Jang Hyung-Won, Lim Sung-Muk and Shin Moon-He established a route over the course of 15 days that was given the grade of VI 5.9 A4-. "A lot" of fixed ropes were used in the course of the ascent. Anjong Neonj and Moon Sung Wook established a second route to the right of the first in capsule style at VI 5.9 A3+. A portaledge was employed during the ascent. Both routes occur to the right of the 1998 south pillar route *Ramchekor* (Peter-Thomas, VI 5.10 A2, 600m) and left of the 1998 route, *Ganyips* (Masip-Vidal, VI 6a A3, 540m), which takes the southeast pillar. Parties visiting the area later in the season were reported to have noted that large, bright silver spots were painted on the rock to indicate belay stations of the Korean routes. The Koreans were said to have replaced the carabiner left by the British women on the summit with one of their own. (*High Mountain Sports* 221)

*Amin Brakk, New Route.* Juan Miranda and I arrived in Islamabad on June 3 with the intention of climbing a new route on the 1300-meter west face of Amin Brakk (5850m). We established Base Camp on the Changma Glacier at 4300 meters. Our idea was to climb the route as a two-person team.

The climb kept us in the Changma Valley for 51 days, 31 of which were spent on the wall itself. We spent ten days carrying gear and getting used to the altitude, then lived in portaledge between July 5 and August 4. On the wall, we had 13 days of bad weather (during which we could not leave the portaledge), four sunny days and mixed weather for the remaining days.

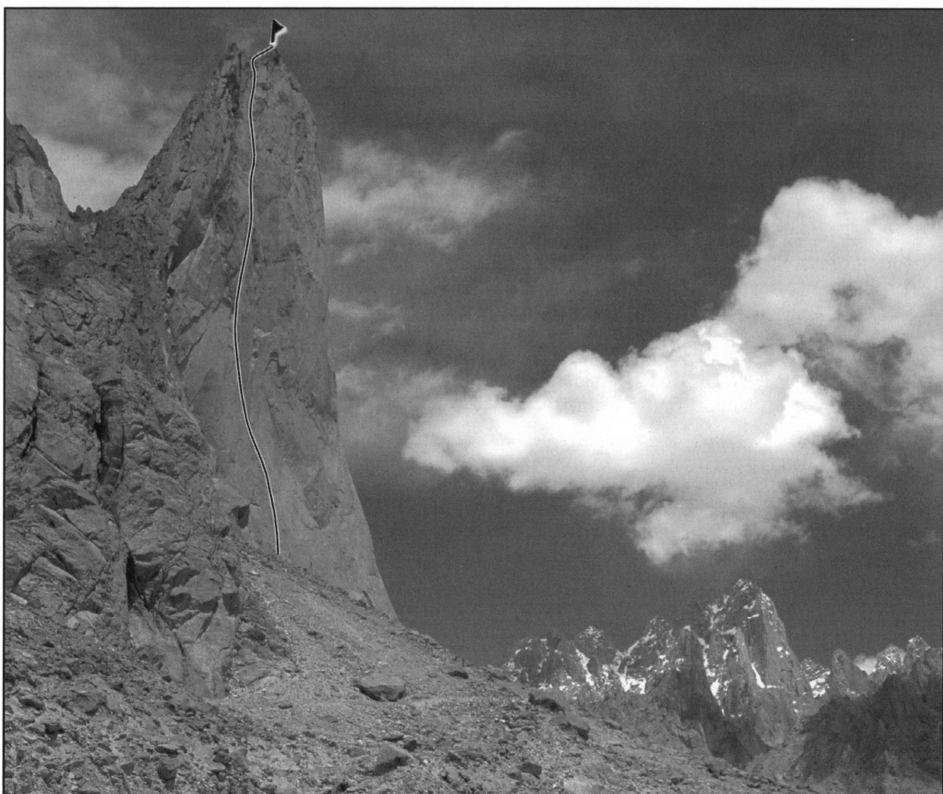
*Namkor* (6b+ A5, 1550m) is 31 pitches long, 17 of which were free climbed. The rest were aided. Even though the route reaches the summit ridge, we did not ascend to the summit, since a storm with heavy lightning forced us to descend back to Camp III. After riding out the storm in the portaledge for two days, we ascended back to belay 27 to recover a haulbag with gear and to clean up the fixed ropes that were still on the wall. The following day, August 4, we returned to Base Camp with our seven haulbags and their 300 kilos of weight.

*Namkor* has three parts: the first follows angled terrain over loose slabs and flakes up to belay 11 (Camp I). It can be free climbed at 6b+. The second part involves serious aid climbing: two A5 pitches and one of A4 lead over a smooth, slightly overhanging wall to Camp II. Finally, the third part is a magnificent 600-meter dihedral that reaches the summit ridge. We graded this section 6b A2+.

ADOLFO MADINABEITIA, *Spain*

## Saltoro Mountains

*Tahir Tower, First Ascent, and Exploration of the Kondus Valley.* During the months of June and July, Dave Anderson, Steph Davis, Brady Robinson, and I were given a special permit to



*Tahir Tower, showing All Quiet on the Eastern Front (Anderson-Chin-Davis-Robinson, 2000).*

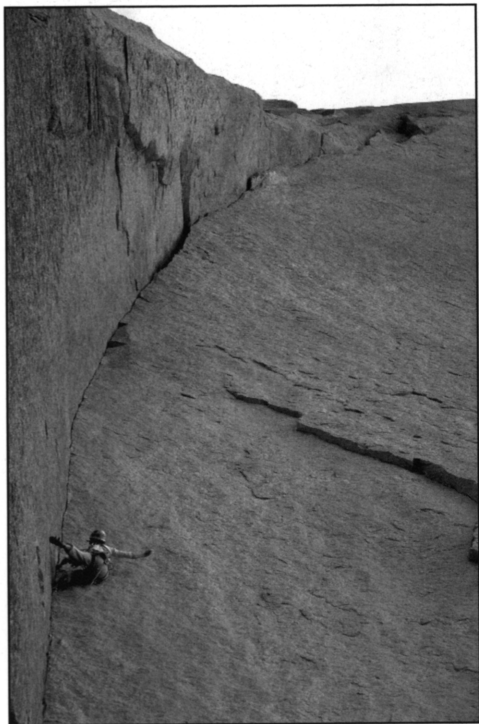
JIMMY CHIN

explore and climb in the Kondus Valley of Pakistan's eastern Karakoram. The Kondus Valley had been closed to foreigners for the past 18 years due to its proximity to Pakistan and India's Line of Control. The valley borders the Siachen Glacier, where Pakistanis and Indians sit in stalemate waiting in outposts as high as 6500 meters.

We headed off to Pakistan feeling a bit nervous, as we had no clear objective and we were going into a war zone. When we arrived in Islamabad, we were briefed at the Ministry of Tourism. They warned us that our special permit was of no use if the military decided at any point to turn us around. Fortunately, we were able to recruit Brigadier Tahir to join our cause. Brigadier Tahir sent us along with a special escort who had direct orders to see us through to our base camp.

After the requisite days spent in Islamabad, on the Karakoram Highway, and in Skardu, we finally arrived in the Kondus Valley on June 23. Within a day, we had found our objective: a giant unnamed and unclimbed tower right off the road. We decided to take the obvious line that goes up the middle of the formation.

Before we got started, Dave and I had the pleasure of experiencing the traditional Pakistani quivering-like-jello, high-fever, gastrointestinal-mayhem condition. After a week, Dave and I eventually recovered and we all began the task of moving loads to the base of the



Steph Davis on the first ascent of the Tahir Tower. JIMMY CHIN

wall. After fixing lines for a few days, we moved onto the wall.

The initial slabs were loose and dirty. Since there was no water on the route, we got to load up all the water for the next 12 days into dromedary bags and an improvised water barrel. We all enjoyed the hauling, particularly Dave, the team alpinist.

As the days moved on, we gained a giant dihedral we cleverly named the "Giant Dihedral." This continuous dihedral arced up for 1,200 feet of mostly 5.10 to 5.11 climbing, the majority of it being fingers and hands.

After six days on the wall, we moved our camp up to a small leaning ledge we dubbed the "Emergency Room." This was where Brady steri-stripped my eye after I did a faceplant falling off an easy aid pitch.

Highlights on the route included Steph's burly onsight lead of a steep and dirty 40-meter 5.11 offwidth, Brady's big-wall cragging sessions, and Dave's loose 5.10 X pitch, the crux of which actually went to the belayer (me), who tried to belay while digging out as many knifeblades as possible and adding them to the chossy seam that held the rest of the anchor.

The final pitch was a fitting end to our route. The desert-tower-like finger stuck up in the air with a summit the size of a pool table. After ten days on the wall, we finished our route, *All Quiet on the Eastern Front* (VI 5.11 A3, 3500').

Of course, climbing was secondary on this trip. Our real goal for the expedition was to shoot AK-47s. On our way out of the valley, we were invited for a banquet at the military base camp in Dansam. Here our dreams were fulfilled, as the captain of the Special Forces allowed us to fire off a few rounds.

JIMMY CHIN\*

\*Recipient of an AAC Mountaineering Fellowship Fund award and an AAC Lyman Spitzer Climbing Grant

## INDIA

### GARHWAL

*Nilkanth, West Ridge, New Route.* Between May 28 and June 3, a guided British expedition