

*Baintha Brakk, attempts and second ascent.* Four expeditions attempted 7285m Baintha Brakk (The Ogre) last summer and although talented groups from America, Austria, and Slovenia all failed, a three-man Swiss-German team achieved the highly coveted second ascent after an interval of 24 years. No new ground was climbed, but their success was arguably the most notable mountaineering achievement during the entire 2001 season.

Thomas Huber (Germany), Iwan Wolf, and Urs Stöcker (both from Switzerland) arrived at base camp (4500m) on June 7 to find three Americans, Hans Johnstone, photographer Ace Kvale, and Mark Newcomb, already at work on the South Pillar. Huber and friends therefore decided to concentrate on the unclimbed Ogre III, for which they also had permission. Their successful ascent, in itself a very major achievement, is reported below.

On June 30 Johnstone and Newcomb reached the top of the South Pillar (fifth ascent) and bivouacked. On the 1st July they headed up and across the large snow/ice field towards the summit tower but were caught in a snowstorm and retreated. They descended to base camp and then left for home. It was now the turn of the Swiss-German team. The three left their 5000m advanced base (Camp 1) on July 8, climbed the 300-meter couloir to the notch on the pillar crest and fixed 10 pitches. These included the crux, which Huber, now well-acclimatized, was able to redpoint at VIII+. Next day Stöcker and Wolf fixed rope to the proposed site of Camp 2 at 5900m, where they established a portaledge. A bad storm now moved in, the climbers retreated and subsequently were unable to regain the portaledge until the 18th.

On the 19th Huber, Stöcker, and Wolf climbed eight more pitches and established the portaledge (Camp 3) at 6200m. The following day they reached the top of the pillar in five more slabby pitches and then climbed the icy crest above to make Camp 4 (a bivouac under the portaledge fly) at ca 6500m. To the end of the rock section they had climbed 26 roped pitches. A 2:00 a.m. start on the 21st saw the three climbers ascending rightwards across the giant snow/ice field, reaching its apex at 8:30 a.m. In strengthening winds they tackled the summit buttress, following the line taken in 1977 by Bonington and Scott. Difficult mixed ground led to the three hard rock pitches, on which the alpinists discovered old pegs and confirmed the grade as VI and A2, with a long and tricky pendulum. The three reached the highest point at 3:30 a.m. and on the following day rappelled 800 meters down the South Pillar to arrive safely back on the glacier by mid-afternoon.

Prior to this activity a two-man Italian team of Alois Brugger and Hans Kammerlander was at base camp, planning an alpine style ascent of the Original British route. The pair were on the mountain in early June, having established an advanced base below the face at 5000m. Their best shot took them to 6200m but the weather was unsettled and the route threatened by snow and serac avalanche. They retreated from their high point (below the plateau) on the 21st. A second foray up to advanced base on the 24th showed more than half-a-meter of fresh snow lying as low as 5000m and with time running out, the pair abandoned any further attempts.

Elsewhere on the mountain a very strong four-man Slovenian team, comprising Urban Azman, Tomaz Jakofcic, Silvo Karo and Peter Meznar, attempted the unclimbed south east pillar leading to the virgin East Summit (7150m). This is a route that has been attempted on numerous occasions from the Choktoi Glacier. The Slovenians arrived at their 4600m base camp in the middle of June and spent the next month attempting the pillar. They managed to climb the difficult 700m rock section above the col and reached a high point of ca 6350m at the base of the large snow field but very bad weather drove them down.