

## KARAKORAM-HUSHE REGION

*Denbor Brakk, west face, Dancer in the Dark.* In July Marcin Tomaszewski and I, both from Poland, arrived in the Nangma Valley. First we aimed for the west face of Amin Brakk. This wall harbours a couple of A5 routes and is said to be 1,600 meters high. No way! The wall is not much higher than El Cap, so the routes have to be much shorter than claimed. However, they all look hard. For our line we picked the prominent bulge (shown on the photo in *AAJ* 2000, p.119), followed by the immaculate nose of Amin lying to the left of all previous routes.

Marcin led two pitches of mixed and one of crumbling rock to the base of the huge bulge. There was no protection between belays. We hung a portaledge ready with food and water for something like three weeks of action. The wall above looked pretty blank, but we thought we might be able to link some small features with bat-hooks until we reached good prominent formations 250 meters higher. The features were there all right but they were all as loose as hell. Big blocks started cracking off the wall under the pressure of pitons. We started drilling, not only between features but also along them. We realised there was much more rock that would require drilling, so after breaking a couple of bits, we gave up. Seven days of work for nothing.

Of alternative venues Nawaz Brakk looked wet and loose, while Brakk Zang was already crowded with routes. However, across the river from camp was Denbor Brakk, a beauty with three steep distinctive west pillars more than 450m high. After studying the wall we opted for the central pillar. The first crack, which looked through binoculars like a perfect splitter, turned out to be flaring and slightly off-width with crumbling sides. It took some time to adjust to this type of formation. We followed cracks, mostly on aid due to their character. In order to try to stay on the prow of our pillar, we sometimes had to leave one crack system and pendulum to another.

We passed through the big A-shaped roof a little over halfway up and established our high camp just before the rain set in. Wearing rock boots, Marcin first tried to free the pitch above but fell due to poor rock. It was back to using aiders. Above, I began my lead with a simple 10-meter crack, followed by a very fragile traverse requiring the smallest Aliens and HB Offsets under thin expanding flakes. I needed to break off part of the flakes, because they were so thin at their ends they wouldn't hold half my weight. The traverse first curved slightly up, then down where it ended at a blank wall. After a pendulum I found a nice and easy off-width leading to the "hanging castle," a huge granite flake improbably sticking out of the wall. I went behind to find that the only attachment of the castle to the wall was at its base, where it sat on a 30-centimeter-wide and seven-meter-long sloping ledge. I moved up very carefully and after a tight chimney and beautiful hand traverse reached a belay. Marcin disappeared into the rain above my head and after his lead we fixed three ropes and descended to our high camp.

The next day was full of surprises. First we encountered a hard long pitch, where we thought we would find easy ground and then the top was inaccessible from our side. Fortunately, Marcin managed to find a small cave-like passage to the final summit block. According to the locals Denbor had never been climbed but on top we found battered slings and later learned that the peak had been climbed several years earlier from the southeast (the Gentian Traverse) by the British female climbers, Libby Peter and Louise Thomas. We took GPS measurements (a reading with five satellites indicated 4865m—i.e. more than 100 meters higher than Brakk Zang), summit photos, and happily began rappelling toward the foggy and rainy valley. *Dancer in the Dark* was rated VI A3+ 5.10d and was completed in eight days from July 18-25. There are 11 pitches.

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