

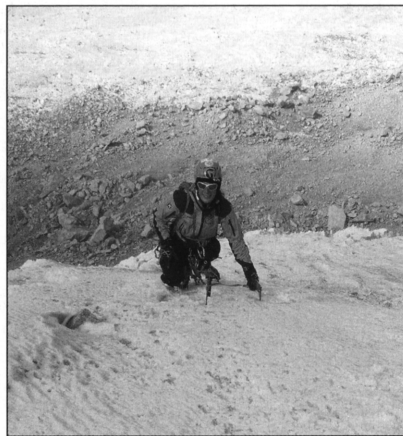
an ice axe. We highly recommend these locals, for no one else speaks English, and you need to be familiar with local customs when looking for porters and animals.

We first drove east along the Wakhan to the village of Kezget, where there is a simple guesthouse and the opportunity to recruit porters. From there it was a two-day walk south up the Kezget Valley to a base camp below the mountain, which lies on the border with Pakistan. It looked much drier than in pictures from the 1960s, with many hanging serac barriers.

The west spur was not a walk, as we thought it might be. From base camp we climbed mixed ground, with rock up to UIAA III and a short 45° ice gully, where I fixed a rope. Above, we made Camp 1 at 5,500m. The next 200m was mixed climbing leading to a 45–50° ice slope which rose from 5,700 to 6,000m. Above, the terrain became more mixed. However, the weather throughout our stay was not on our side. Snowstorms followed one another in quick succession. When Afiat Khan, Roberta, and I reached 6,000m, the wind was icy, and we were sinking deep into fresh snow. We abandoned the attempt, and the weather never improved sufficiently to make another. Nonetheless, I created a new start to the ridge with Afiat Khan, climbing through the seracs to join the original route at 5,300m (350m, D+).

I came to Afghanistan to speak about emancipation of women but was crushed by a world far from my own. My original idea had been to make an ascent with Wakhi girls, but after a long silence the Aga Khan Foundation told us a month or two before departure that this would not be possible; permission had not been given by the village chiefs. On arrival I understood the problem. Women in the Wakhan marry at 16 and then have children. Children become arms for working and bringing goats to pasture; it is impossible to see them in any other role. The women of the Wakhan have a certain autonomy, being Ishmaeli they do not have to wear the Burka, as do Muslim Afghans, but are still subordinate to men. In 2007 three women participated in a Mountain Wilderness ice-climbing course, but they were young students from Kabul and therefore in a different cultural class from their counterparts in Wakhan. I felt impotent to speak about emancipation and realized that it is not only the attitude of the women in this region that would have to change to provide more freedom but also that of the men. Amruddin and Gurg Ali can be contacted directly at amruddin@gmail.com (Tel: 00937965136860 and gurgalibabatangi@gmail.com (Tel: 0093796513942)). For more information look at www.mountainunity.org, particularly the forum.

ANNA TORRETTA, *Italy* (translated by Marina Heusch)



Anna Torretta on the variation start (350m, D+) to the west spur of Koh-e-Baba Tangi. Anna Torretta collection

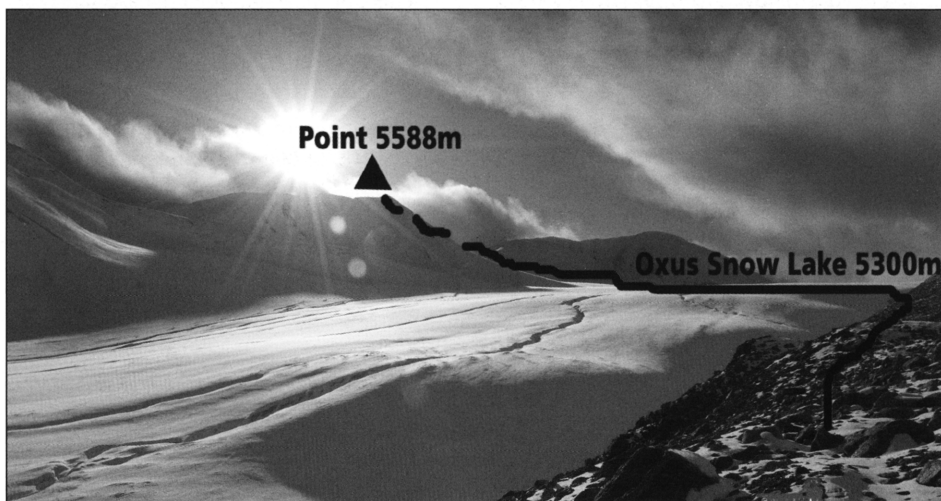
PAMIR

Oxus Snow Lake (ca 5,300m), new discovery; Peak 5,588m, attempt; Pamir-i-Wakhan Range, first traverse of central section. The Oxus River has washed geological and geopolitical dust through time and space into the great Central Asian deserts. Reversing its course, we followed the river

(now named the Amu Darya [or Darja] but referred to as the Wakhan in its upper section) to its source, thereby following our own ambitions to explore the remote far-eastern Wakhan Corridor and to attempt virgin summits.

Today less than 100 foreigners a year visit the Wakhan, and they generally travel to the region from Kabul by an arduous, dangerous journey via Faizabad. Reaching Ishkashim (Eskashem), the “capital” of the Wakhan at the entrance to the Corridor, can take a week. In contrast we took the fast track from the north. For the well-organized traveler it is, in principle, possible to reach the new Tajik-Afghan border post at Ishkashim (villages on opposite sides of the Amu Darya are both named Ishkashim) in just 24 hours from Europe by the safe, reliable air lane to Dushanbe and Khorog in Tajikistan and continuing by jeep south for three hours.

We crossed into Afghanistan on October 3, having chosen this late date to allow for acclimatization in the Tajik Pamir and to benefit from low water levels for our frequent river crossings. With the help of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, and the Aga Khan Foundation, our friend Mehboob Azis from Afghan Ishkashim is developing basic concepts of community-based ecotourism in the Wakhan. He provided us with a jeep and, more important, articulate translator and skilled mountain guide Malang, from Qaz-i-Deh. That night and next day we drove 220km on rough dirt tracks to the roadhead at Sarad-e-Boroghil (3,300m). South of Sarad lies frequently traveled 3,882m Boroghil Pass into the Yarkhun and Chitral valleys of Pakistan, reached on foot in less than a day. However, we continued to trek eastward, with two packhorses carrying our gear. Crossing 4,173m Dalriz Pass and then following the Wakhan River, we reached Bozai Gumbaz by mid-day on the 6th. In August 1891 Russian Colonel Yonoff and British Captain Younghusband had met cordially at this spot, in one of only two meetings by players of the Great Game. We continued hastily eastward along the right bank of the Wakhjir River and on the evening of the 7th, below the last steep ascent to the Wakhjir Pass, bade farewell to our horse drivers and Malang, with whom we had traveled 120km from Sarad by foot in just three and a half days. Here, at



The newly discovered Oxus Snow Lake (ca 5,300m) and the attempted route on unclimbed Pt. 5,588m. The climb stopped at the end of the solid line, the dashed continuation being the projected route. *Steffen Graupner, supplied by Wolfgang Heichel*

4,381m and N 37°04.201' E 74°26.714', adobe brick shelters from caravans using this ancient branch of the Silk Road still provide protection from the fierce cold.

The next day we walked south-southeast for three hours, following Lord Curzon's footsteps to his famous ice cave (4,600m, N 37°02.326', E 74°29.630') at the snout of an unnamed glacier flowing north. With his bold expedition of 1893, Curzon thought he had solved the decade-old puzzle about the source of the Oxus.

On the 9th we continued northwest to the Wakhjir Pass (N 37°05.881', E 74°29.100'). Different references give the altitude as 4,923m and as 5,024m. Our GPS, receiving a clear signal from eight satellites, gave 4,832m. Though the pass is guarded only by an unmanned, open iron gate, it is not advisable to cross eastward into Chinese-occupied East Turkestan. A Belgian who claims to have done so in 2007 ended up spending weeks in a Chinese jail. We preferred to stay in Afghanistan, so we turned north, then northwest into "virgin" land, then ascended the left lateral moraine of a flat glacier. Despite its gentle slope, the glacier displayed long and wide crevasses, all running lengthwise to its direction of flow. At 5,250m we pitched camp for two nights. Next day we discovered a huge horizontal plateau at ca 5,300m, four square kilometers in area, centered at N 37°04.33', E 74°26.74. Resembling the famous snow plateau between the Biafo and Hispar glaciers, though somewhat smaller, it was, we felt, a true snow lake. Its waters flow both south towards Curzon's ice cave and the Wakhan River, and north to Kara Jilga, which eventually makes its way to the Amu Darya. Farther upstream and at a greater altitude than either the ice cave or Lake Chakmaktin, this newly discovered snow lake implies that the true source of the Oxus is not necessarily the ice cave nor Lake Chakmaktin, believed to be the sources for two centuries. We therefore propose calling the plateau Oxus Snow Lake, suggesting it as a possible source of the Oxus.

Surrounding it are half a dozen accessible and technically easy 5,500–5,900m peaks. After crossing the snow lake, we attempted a virgin 5,588m summit. At 5,400m, a few meters short of a wide saddle on a broad ridge leading to the summit, one of us fell into a bergschrund concealed by loose snow. The other made a successful rescue, but we abandoned the ascent.

On the 11th we crossed the Oxus Snow Lake again, this time with full gear, and descended the glacier to its northern end at 4,721m. At midday of the 12th we met Kirghiz herders where the river Kara Jilga leaves the mountains for the wide Aksu Valley. Having been greeted by the Kirghiz with warm hospitality and much appreciated tea and food, we continued west across the plains of the Little Pamir toward Lake Chakmaktin (4,000m) and then back home.

STEFFEN GRAUPNER and KATHRIN MÜNZEL, *Germany*

Mountain Unity. Mountain Unity International (www.mountainunity.org) is a non-profit organization providing marketing, media, and communications support for any tour operator organizing expeditions to Afghanistan, though particularly the Wakhan Corridor in the northeast of the country. It hopes to become self-sustaining in the next two years, locking profits into the community, assisting locals to build small businesses that will stimulate the local economy. Mountain Unity's website provides much information on climbing in the Wakhan Corridor and from it can be bought *Peaks of Silver and Jade* by Carlo Alberto Pinelli and Gianni Predan, a guidebook that until recently has only been available from tourism offices in northeast Afghanistan. The authors provide maps and text describing previous expeditions to the Hindu Kush, and suggestions for first ascents.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *Mountain INFO*