reach a saddle on the ridge. Above this, 12 pitches of mixed and rock climbing with 100m ropes took them to the west summit of the mountain they called Corean Sar (6,000m); the highest summit of this formation is the northeast peak. They descended all night to reach their high camp and returned to base camp later that day.

Calls to Korea for research led the team to conclude they still had not climbed Khani Basa Sar, so the climbers laid new plans despite deteriorating weather. From August 14 to 17 they attempted the east face and south ridge of Khani Basa Sar, reaching 6,100m in midafternoon on the 17th. In poor weather, and without enough gear to descend their route, they descended to the East Yutmaru Glacier, from which they struggled through heavy snowfall to return to base camp, 25km away.

The Corean Alpine Club has a five-year plan to climb 6,000m peaks around the Hispar and Biafo glaciers.

Christine Pae, Korean Alpine Federation

Tahu Rutum, west face, solo attempt. Mothers have it the hardest. “I’m going climbing in Pakistan by myself. I’ll be home in three or four months,” I told mine. It’s an easy thing to say when you’re 25, curious about the world, and fired up to climb. I can’t imagine what it’s like to hear when you’re 51, you’ve lost a nephew to climbing, and you have an addicted-to-adventure child. In the last 11 years climbing has taken a lot from me: Most profoundly, on an Arctic trip together in 2005, my best friend and cousin fell 250 meters into his next life; more recently, I lost 16kg and the tip of a finger. I regained the weight and will adapt to the loss of a finger, but not a day passes that I don’t miss my cousin, who opened my eyes to climbing. Climbing has given me my spirit, my reason—something my mother both understands and supports.

On July 19, after a refreshing four-day hike from the town of Hispar, the porters deposited me and my gear at the junction of the Khani Basa and Hispar glaciers. We exchanged handshakes and Inshallahs before they disappeared over the moraine. It would be seven weeks until I’d see them again. By choice I had no cook, guide, or partner. I was entirely alone.

From base camp I made six carries on the East Khani Basa...
Glacier to the base of Tahu Rutum (6,651m; sometimes spelled Ratum), 13-14km each way. I never found an elevation for the base of Tahu Rutum on a map or the Internet, and I don’t own an altimeter, so I am not sure of the peak's vertical gain. My best guess is that it rises 1,350m from base to summit, but it doesn’t really matter—it was big enough.

I spent a month shuttling loads, waiting out a week of heavy snow, and fixing 300m of rope up mellow aqua-blue 50°-60° ice. On August 20, with 20 days of food, I committed to life in the vertical world.

The initial 640m of ice involved seven days of battling significant snowfall, constant sloughing, and tedious hauling through small rockbands. The weather finally cleared, and for several days I followed a beautiful left-leaning crack system. I tied four 70m ropes together and climbed using the continuous loop method. This allowed for pitches as long as 140m, but most were 80-90m and steep, with cruxes around A3. These were my most enjoyable climbing days: high-quality granite, fantastic weather, two gear-ripping whippers, and flawless hauling. My vision for climbing in Pakistan had become reality.

Then, at 6,000m, I sat through my first four-day storm. Any outside activity was impossible, so I dangled and waited, reading and rationing my little remaining food. I was hungry, had terrible diarrhea, and hauling at altitude had gotten extremely laborious. Even still, the views of the mighty Karakoram and a few days of good weather motivated me. After I’d climbed another 200m of steep, aesthetic crack systems, the wall began to roll over. I set up my portaledge at 6,200m, and almost immediately another storm blew in.

September 10, my 21st day on Tahu Rutum, I woke early to a cloudless sky and immediately began my summit attempt. I had a little food, some gear, and the infinitely important summit costume. But soon the snows returned, the wind howled, and the temperature dropped. I kept climbing through deteriorating rock quality, on terrain that had looked slabby but, in fact, remained quite vertical and amazingly featured.

At 6,500m I reached the steep snow and ice ridgeline leading to the summit, and I had had enough. It was snowing, with 40 mph winds, the Earth had rotated the expanse of the Karakoram into complete darkness, and my headlamp was nearly dead. I was dehydrated and malnourished, but stoked on my effort. The decision was easy. I bailed.

The isolated hours rappelling in the dark had a bleak joyfulness to them. I was worked beyond any previous understanding of the condition, but I was headed toward family, friends, and, most importantly, food. Thirty hours after leaving, I returned to my portaledge, ate the very last of my food, and passed out.

The next day I continued my descent, taking two days to rappel the wall. I removed all of my supplies and gear, leaving only rappel anchors, which included three bolts and one rivet that I placed on the descent. Wrestling haul bags and stuck ropes exhausted me, requiring a full rest.
day once I reached level ground. My body was rapidly weakening.

The snow that had fallen during my 24 days of vertical living now lay unconsolidated on the East Khani Basa Glacier. Assessing my rapidly deteriorating health, the continuously falling snow, and the 13km trip to base camp, I decided to cache my two haul bags of climbing gear. Deep down I knew I couldn’t return—at least not that year. Who knows, maybe the porters will make a winter siege of my equipment, and if they do I will be happy. In the northern villages, where opportunities for work are slim, the earnings from selling my equipment would help with their difficult lives.

I packed my necessities and, with intense hunger, began post-holing toward wellness. It took two painfully long days to make it back to base camp; they were my fourth and fifth days without food. Many times I collapsed, taking several minutes to stagger back to my feet. Anytime I stopped, painful diarrhea would start, red blood entwined with white gooey stuff that I presumed was muscle. My body was shutting down, eating itself. But it’s amazing how the universe balances itself out; my physical strength had left me, but my mind had never been clearer. I was never worried or frightened, for there was no sense in it. Motivated by friends and family, focused on food, and deeply conscious of necessities, I just kept trudging.

Two weeks later, at the Salt Lake City airport, tears streamed down my mother’s face. She had been fighting her own battle, dealing with the stress that comes from having a child at a physical breaking point, alone in Pakistan. It was then that I realized I had had it easy.

Kyle Dempster, Salt Lake City, UT

Hispar Sar, attempt; Emily Peak (Point 5,684m), first ascent. In mid-September I traveled alone to Hunza in northeast Pakistan to attempt the first ascent of Hispar Sar (6,400m), north of the Hispar Glacier. The plan had raised eyebrows among my family and friends, especially among those who climbed, since the commitment involved in attempting a solo ascent of a virgin peak in a remote region of a politically volatile country is certainly immense. I would explain that climbing alone in such an environment placed unique parameters on my risk assessment: It was not more likely that I would suffer disaster, since my level of acceptable risk would be reduced; rather, I was just less likely to reach my summit. Why then did I want to go alone? Many reasons, not least because I wanted to experience the extraordinary responsibility that such commitment involved.

Hispar Sar presented itself as an accommodating objective for such a project, since, although virgin, it had been well-explored, and it sported a couloir line well-suited to my style of climbing.