

Imperial College

Shimshal Expedition

July 2007

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Neil Dowse - Andras Szollar

Robert Porter

Supported by

Imperial College Exploration Committee

University of London Convocation Trust

Royal College of Science Association

Synopsis

The Imperial College Shimshal Expedition 2007 comprised of five students: Joseph (Joe) Johnstone, Neil Dowse, Andras Szollar, Robert Porter and Dominic Southgate. The initial proposal objective of the trip was an ascent of Sonia Peak (6340m) in the North Ghuzerav Mountains near Shimshal, in Northern Pakistan and was the first visit to the Greater Ranges for all but the leader, Joe. After many months of planning, the team departed the UK on 10th July for Islamabad, via Dubai. The first two nights were spent in Rawalpindi purchasing equipment and organising transfers up to Gilgit at the edge of the mountains. The intended transport (public bus) was not possible due to man-made roadblocks on the Karakorum Highway but fortunately seats were found on flights instead. Food and fuel was purchased in Gilgit and jeep transfers arranged out to Shimshal.

Three days were spent in Shimshal acclimatising, finalising equipment and organising porters. Accessing Sonia Peak was not possible in the end due to the cost of porters and the number required for the long trek in. An alternative objective was selected that was closer to Shimshal; Yazghil Sar (6001m), which although lower in altitude than Sonia Peak, was a slightly more technical ascent. The trek to base camp took two days, with eight porters, two yaks and a donkey. Two of the porters then also stayed at base camp for approximately half the time spent on the mountain.

Over the course of the next two and a half weeks, the team made several attempts at different routes up the mountain but a number of times were forced to retreat back to base camp by bad weather. The lower slopes of the mountain mostly consisted of large blocks of scree and negotiating these was time consuming. The final attempt was made via camp 1 in the Western cwm and a new route up to high camp on the North-West ridge. On summit day, the team left high camp and traversed the ridge all the way to the South summit, reaching the top at approximately noon on 30th July.

Acknowledgements

The team all had a fantastic experience, both in the mountains and from being in Pakistan. We would like to thank the following organisations and companies who supported the expedition:

Sources of Income

The Imperial College Exploration Board, the University of London Convocation Trust - Dunsheath Expedition Award and the Royal College of Science Association.

Equipment and Supplies

Rab Clothing (Equip UK), PHD Mountain Software, Montane clothing and First Ascent (distributors of Black Diamond Equipment, MSR and Nalgene).

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Introduction

The primary objective of the expedition was to make an ascent of Sonia Peak (6340m), located in the remote North Ghuzerav Mountains near the village of Shimshal, in Northern Pakistan. Even by Pakistan's standards the Ghuzerav Mountains are largely unexplored with numerous virgin peaks awaiting their first ascents. Sonia Peak had only received a handful of ascents and offered a technically easy climb over 6000m, at an alpine grade of PD. Whilst the peak was relatively close to the Karakoram Highway, few people choose to climb mountains in the Karakoram Range this far north. Our secondary objective was therefore to explore the surrounding area and make ascents of neighbouring unclimbed peaks between 6000 and 6500m.

All preparations were made for this peak and we did indeed start from the village of Shimshal in the North Ghuzerav Mountains. However, the cost of local porters combined with the number of days required to reach Sonia Peak put the total cost beyond our budget. We therefore had to alter our plans slightly and instead opted for a closer peak, Yazghil Sar (6001m) which was a grade more difficult (AD) but slightly lower altitude. It cut four days off the walk-in which meant that we would also hopefully have more time to attempt other peaks in the vicinity.



Geographical locations of Shimshal (1) and Gilgit (2) (Bing Maps).

The Team

The team comprised of five members and all knew each other through the Imperial College Outdoor Club. Joe Johnstone was elected expedition leader having been to the greater ranges on three occasions in '04, '05 and '06. Andras Szollar, Neil Dowse and Dave Gent were the other original members at the outset. However, due to other commitments Dave was unable to take part in the expedition and so the exploration board also suggested taking additional members, at which point Rob and Dom also joined the team.

Joe Johnstone (20)

Expedition Leader

3rd Year Civil Engineering Undergraduate

Joe was a member of a British 14-man expedition in '04 to the Tien Shan Mountains, Kyrgyzstan and was one of five climbers to make the summit of Peak Chapaev, c.6400m. In '05 he was a member of the Imperial College Shar Kangsum Expedition, Tibet where he summited a previously unclimbed mountain, Pk 6603m. In '06 he was a member of the Imperial College Chogolisa Expedition but unfortunately bad weather and avalanches prevented the team from summiting. Joe is a regular climber, hill runner and road biker.



Andras Szollár (22)

First Aid and Safety Officer

3rd Year Civil Engineering Undergraduate

In '05 Andras was part of the Imperial College El Salvador Reconstruction and Development Project working in a rural community. In '06 he was a member of the Imperial College 'Building Bridges' Expedition and spent 6 weeks living in rural Africa, designing and building a footbridge. Other highlights in his experience include an ascent of Volcan Acatenango (3976m) in Guatemala and hiking up Chimborazo, Ecuador. He enjoys trad climbing up to HVS and winter mountaineering, seconding up to Scottish grade V.



Dominic Southgate (24)

First Aid and Equipment Officer

2nd Year Bioengineering PhD

Dom was a member of the Imperial College Greenland expedition in '03, performing a reconnaissance of the western ice-cap for a full crossing on skis. He has climbed and hiked in a number of different countries and ranges, including Australia, South Africa, USA and throughout Europe. He has spent almost 2 months in the Pyrenees and also climbed multiple 4000m+ peaks in the Alps. He also enjoys winter climbing up to Scottish grade III, rock climbs to VS and sport to F6a.



Neil Dowse (21)

2nd Year Mathematics Undergraduate

Neil has climbed a number of summer mountaineering routes in France, up to Alpine grade D and 4000m+. He also completed a couple of Scottish winter seasons with mixed climbing and mountaineering in the Cairngorms. In '05 he walked John O'Groats to Lands End unsupported in 69 days and in 2004 walked 'Camino de Santiago' from Orleans (France) to Santiago (Spain) with daily wild camping for 72 days. He is a keen hill runner as well as enjoying climbing, scrambling and walking.



Robert Porter (19)

2nd Year Mathematics Undergraduate

Rob has experience of Scottish mixed climbing in the Cairngorms and has lead up to Scottish grade IV. He is a competent rock climber, leading up to 6c indoors and traditional climbing up to VS 4C in the Peak District and Snowdonia. He is an avid walker and regularly goes on hiking trips with wild camping.



Preparation and Planning

The expedition's initial objective, Sonia Peak, was suggested to the team by a local Pakistani agent, Asghar Ali Porik, who was the agent that Joe used on the Imperial Chogolisa Expedition 2006. Consultation between Joe and Asghar lead to the area of Shimshal being selected, as it was well matched to the ambitions and abilities of the team. The mountains around Shimshal remained largely unexplored; there were a number of unnamed and unclimbed peaks, as well as many more unclimbed faces on previously-summited mountains such as Shimshal Whitehorn.

The original intention was also to use Asgher Ali Porik as the agent for the expedition, however, the initial quote for his services arranging transport and accommodation seemed excessively high at nearly £6000. A rough estimate by the group of the individual costs of these items totalled around £1400 and so it was decided that we would do the organising ourselves and save money. Based on his previous experiences in Pakistan, Joe was confident that we would be able to arrange most of the transport and accommodation once we were in the country and so the only item booked in advance was accommodation in Rawalpindi for the first couple of days.

It was indeed possible to book everything once we were there and a great amount of money was saved in doing so. It has to be said that we were lucky to get seats on the flight up to Gilgit when the Karakoram highway was closed due to a man-made landslide - the expedition would have been considerably delayed otherwise. However, flying there would not have even been possible had we booked and paid for the bus journey in advance, as per the original plan. As much of the logistics was arranged on a day-by-day basis as plans changed,

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please refer to the Expedition Diary for more detailed information on specific aspects of travel and accommodation.

The Lonely Planet guide to trekking in the Karakorum was useful in the planning stages as the approach to Sonia Peak was included in one of the routes. This provided information on accommodation in Shimshal, the location of camping spots and stage lengths, as well as the cost of porters and local fees. Despite having the most up-to-date copy though, the costs of porters and other fees were found to be greatly inflated when we arrived. Summitpost.org was also invaluable for finding information about the mountains and routes in the Shimshal region.

The team spent a number of weekends climbing together in different parts of the UK prior to the expedition in order to learn each other's strengths and weaknesses and to generally get to know each other better. In addition, Neil, Andras and Rob went to the Alps in the month before departure to practice techniques and get more experience at altitude. Dom and Neil also completed the Wilderness Medical Training "Far From Help 1" first aid course in order to compliment Joe and Andras' first aid experience. This also enabled us to obtain prescription medication such as antibiotics and analgesics through the course doctors and Nomad Travel.



Nanga Parbat (taken from the aeroplane on the flight to Gilgit).

Expedition Timeline

- 10th July: Depart UK/Arrive Islamabad
- 12th July: Transfer to Gilgit by aeroplane
- 13th July: Jeep transfer to Shimshal
- 14th July: Shimshal preparations, met with porters and negotiated fees
- 15th July: Acclimatisation walk up to the glacier
- 16th July: Packing and final preparations
- 17th July: Walk-in to Yazghil Sar Base Camp
- 18th July: Arrive Yazghil Sar Base Camp
- 20th July: Ridge reconnaissance
- 22nd July: Cirque reconnaissance and Camp 1 establishment
- 25th July: Retreat to Base Camp
- 28th July: Return to Camp 1
- 29th July: Climb to High Camp
- 30th July: Summit day
- 31st July: Descent to Base Camp
- 2nd August: Walk-out to Shimshal
- 4th August: Jeep transfer to Gilgit
- 5th August: Private bus transfer to Islamabad
- 10th August: Depart Islamabad/Arrive UK

Expedition Diary

23rd June

It was just over two weeks before our flight left for Islamabad. We had already made most of the expedition preparations. Only a few minor logistics like the organization of first aid kits and selection of university equipment still remained to be completed. Joe and Dom stayed in London to make these final preparations. Meanwhile Neil, Andras and Rob were just about to set out for two weeks training in the Ecrins in the French Alps on the Outdoor Club summer tour. This involved glacier walking, crevasse rescue and climbing up to 4000m, all of which gave these team members valuable experience in a safer and less remote environment than the Pakistan Karakoram. They also tested and practiced using avalanche safety equipment. In addition they spent time reading about safety in the wilderness and at high altitude, with opportunities to practice some of the preventative measures outlined in the literature.

When the trip returned from the Alps on the 7th July we all immediately met up to discuss what remained to be done. Some last minute shopping for equipment and printing of information on mountains and routes in the area made for a busy couple of days. On the evening of the 9th we travelled to Joe's house near Gatwick where all bags were weighed and rearranged to comply with our allowance on the flight.

10th July

The morning of the 10th was an early start. We arrived at Gatwick airport before 6.40am just as the desk opened. The rather large bags were successfully checked in without any charges for the excess baggage. At this point we were all rather hopeful because Joe's dad, working for BA at Gatwick, had very kindly tried to arrange for us to be upgraded to business class. When we got to the boarding gate the airport staff told us the good news. We were told to be discreet because there weren't going to be many upgrades on the flight. In spite of our best efforts, the other passengers must have noticed something strange about our huge grins and excessive politeness. We knew at this time that this was the last real comfort we would have on the expedition so we all made the most of it! After the 7 hour flight we landed in Dubai airport and managed to exchange GBP for some Pakistani Rupees while waiting for our connecting flight to Islamabad.

11th July

The plane landed in Islamabad at 3am. Despite this, the temperature outside was 38°C and it was extremely humid which took some getting used to. We were rather worried about what the temperatures would be like in the afternoon. Even though it was so late we had no problems finding a taxi. Joe, who had been on another expedition to Pakistan the year before, had said that it would be more difficult not to get a taxi. This proved to be the case. Some drivers immediately spotted us and wanted to know where we were going. They charged us 450PKRs per taxi for the journey to the Paradise Inn, Rawalpindi. We tried to negotiate but they wouldn't budge on the figure. There were some mumblings about the taxis being government approved and therefore they didn't decide the price. Later we would pay 200PKRs per taxi, but at the time it didn't really matter. We just wanted to get some sleep. We managed to rest until 11am.

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When we woke up we had lunch at a local kebab shop, where we all discussed the jobs to be done that day. It was decided that Joe and Rob would go to the bus station to deal with transport to Gilgit and jeeps to get us further up the Karakoram Highway to Shimshal. Dom, Neil and Andras would go and buy water containers, duffle bags and plastic bags for food portioning.

It was then that we had our first major setback of the expedition. It turned out that the Karakoram Highway would be blocked for about a week due to a man made landslide. This was caused by extremist activities in response to the situation at the Red Mosque in Islamabad. Therefore we could not travel by bus but luckily we managed to get some flight tickets for the next day. This meant that we would avoid the long, uncomfortable journey to Gilgit by bus, but it also meant that we would have to do further food shopping in Gilgit. After discussing these changes in fortune Andras showed the rest of the team how to fix various problems with the MSR stoves. We managed to piece together two whole fully functional stoves and another that just about worked and would do as a back up should one of the others get blocked up with the poor quality fuel.

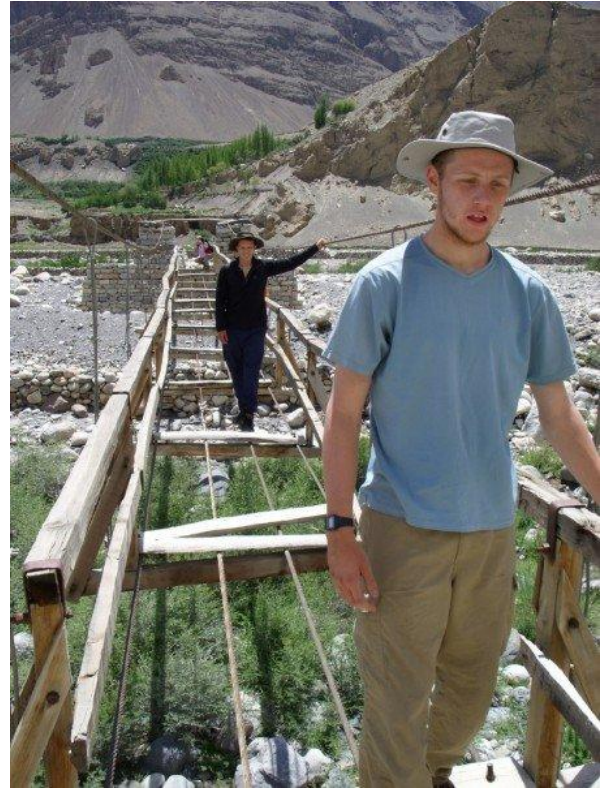


12th July

On the morning of the 12th it was an early start to get back to the airport by 6.30am. This time the price was 200PKRs each taxi. When we got to the airport we had no problems checking in the overweight bags. They didn't even seem to even notice the weight as we checked in. There were breathtaking views from the plane over vast mountain ranges, the most notable peak being Nanga Parbat (8125m). Again we had no problems hiring cars to take us from the airport to the Medina hotel, a local friendly tourist lodge, where we spent the rest of the day shopping for food, gas canisters and tarpaulins. The manager of the hotel was especially helpful with these. Everyone was very friendly in Gilgit and local shopkeepers invited us for a cup of tea or a chat whether we bought anything from them or not. On returning to the hotel we decided to break peanuts ourselves, as they would be a useful source of protein for the trip. We could not find anywhere that sold the quantities of cleaned peanuts that we needed. This turned out to be ridiculous waste of time as almost half of them were rotten and many more had gone bad by the time we reached base camp. That evening we had a last feast in a local all-you-can-eat restaurant to stock up our reserves for the rest of the trip. We had problems trying to get back afterwards though as it was more difficult than expected to call a taxi. After a while a very generous local student gave all five of us a lift back to our hotel in his car on his way home.

13th July

Friday, 13th July and unluckily for Dom something about the food we had eaten the night before had disagreed with him quite violently. He decided to take Loperamide to make the long, bumpy jeep journey slightly less unbearable. We set out at 9am with an old style jeep and a Toyota 4x4. Along the way we stopped to pick up some petrol and later we had some tea at a café with great views of Rakaposhi (7780m). After passing many rural villages, landslides and impressive bridges we had some local lunch at Passu pass. While the rest of the team were waiting for what must have been over an hour for the food to arrive, Dom spent most of the time there in the rest room and subsequently had to take some Ciprofloxacin to improve his condition. Just a little way up the road we arrived at the Shimshal junction. They had only finished building the jeep road in 2003 and it was this road that had led to Shimshal being a more accessible base for expeditions. On reaching the turn off we were told by another group that the road ahead was blocked, although some people were already working on it. We decided that we wanted to see the situation for ourselves and maybe help clear the road. However, this second potential setback was just as short lived as the first. When we arrived at the landslide the road had just been opened again.



The jeep ride from the Karakoram Highway (KKH) to Shimshal was probably the scariest drive any of us has ever had. The jeeps edged their way along the narrow, winding track cut through the sides of enormous canyons. The road meandered many thousand feet above the valley bottom with continuous rock falls all around us. In addition it began to rain, which only served to make the rock falls more frequent. At one particularly memorable point a side stream washed the road away from next to its bridge and after much discussion about the best course of action our drivers eventually decided to take the jeeps through the torrent itself. There was much relief all round as both jeeps made it out to the other side. After getting stuck in a field of mud we finally made it to the guest house on the far side of the village. Straight away we booked into two rooms. It was already late at night so we were all hungry by then we ordered some local vegetarian curry and rice before going to sleep.

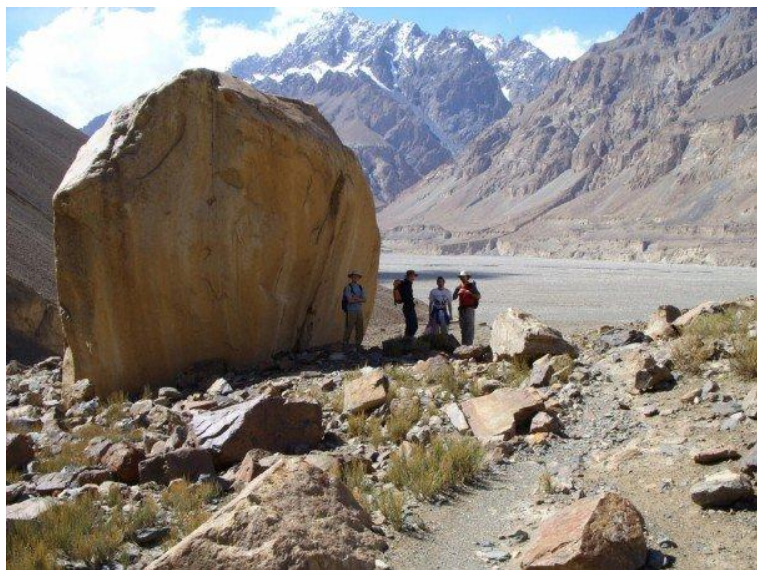
14th July

On the 14th we met Ferman, the porter organizer. We had spoken briefly with another porter the night before and it seemed that the word had got around that there would be some jobs available. The prices they presented us were much higher than we had expected from the information in Lonely Planet guides and talking with members of a previous expedition based in Shimshal. We had to start thinking of saving measures, including purifying water ourselves and only eating chapattis with rice. This also effectively let everyone in the village know that we were serious about the tight budget. First Aid kits were checked and updated with newly bought or specialized additions. These were then separated into two team packs and a base camp bag. We managed to

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set up the Walkie-talkies' charger to fit into local plug. It eventually worked after several trials of different charging setups.

15th July



Sunday the 15th was the day of our acclimatization walk. To save money we decided to all move into one room and cut down even more on the food we were buying from the village. We then went for our walk from 12:30 – 8:00pm. From here we could see the summit of Yazghil Sar and also got a good view of the Yazghil Glacier which we would have to cross. On our way back we collected water from a spring just up the valley from Shimshal village. Most of us suffered from dehydration due to the lack of water sources and the hot and dry environment at 3500m elevation. That evening Neil and Rob started to display the signs of intestinal problems too. After much haggling we came to an

agreement with the porters. We agreed to hire all eight of them for the two days trek to base camp and then Ferman and one more porter stays for five additional days. It was decided that we would not hire any porters for the trek back.

16th July

The next day was our final day of preparations. We spent a large part of it packing food into appropriate portions, checking stoves and doing other last minute checks. Meanwhile local guides tried to convince us to hire more equipment from them, such as base camp tents, water storage tanks and other “luxury” items. At the end we agreed to take a chicken which we called “Dave”, after our missing sixth member. In the evening we met a local man called Karim in the guest house. He very kindly invited us to dinner in his family home. We all ate the local cuisine and discussed religion, politics and personal issues late into the night. This only confirmed the opinions we had already formed about how friendly and welcoming the local people were.



17th July

We set out to start our trek to base camp on the morning of the 17th. At 7:30 we met the porters, distributed loads and set out the same way as we had done on the acclimatization walk two days earlier, carrying approximately 14-15kg of personal bags each. Most members, except for Dom, now suffered from serious diarrhoea, which was almost certainly caused by some of the food. Neil and Rob suffered particularly badly. Because of this it was necessary to collect as much water as we could, however the only spring that we had found before was underneath a scree slope and we had to avoid some falling rocks as we filled up our bottles. After more trekking with occasional toilet breaks we reached Yazghil Glacier. Being a dry glacier, there was no need to use crampons. Crossing took approximately 1 – 1.5 hours. Halfway across the glacier we had a problem with one of the fuel containers leaking onto our food bags which were both packed in a porter's bag. We learned that from then on we would be more careful with which things we packed together as most of the breakfast cereal and some chocolate bars were damaged. When we reached Goat Camp, a sheltered place with adequate water supply where we would spend the night, we decided to play a game with the porters. Yak-Goat-Chicken is a game that involves throwing pebbles at rocks and it helped us bond more with the porters. Afterwards we ate a small dinner and settled down to a cramped night's sleep. Antibiotics treatment was started on Rob and Neil, in addition to the charcoal tablets they had already been taking, as their diarrhoea had not improved for three days by then.

18th July

We woke up at 6am the next day and had a meagre breakfast of three biscuits and some dried apricots. Andras in particular was unimpressed, but we were not sure how much food the fuel incident had cost us and strict rationing was the only option. Rob and Neil were already doing better. We were up at base camp (~4000m) by 12am, after a long lunch break halfway. This was much earlier than we had predicted. The base camp had a small animal hut where we stored our food and equipment. The rest of the day was spent resting and socializing with the porters. Later on the same day six porters returned to Shimshal, after being paid. Before they left they asked for what



seemed to us an excessive bonus equivalent to the price of a sheep. They said that it was customary for an expedition to pay for the porters to have a good meal after they had finished their job but that is normally after a week's work and not one and a half days. In the end we gave them a bonus equivalent to two chickens. Ferman Karim and Karim Panh stayed with us at base camp. We put up all four tents and made ourselves at home.

19th July

The next morning we spent rearranging packs, doing more equipment checks and attempting to dry out the spoiled food on rocks in the sun. Dealing with our petrol fragranced food made us wonder what had happened to Dave the chicken. We hadn't seen Dave since the other porters had left. It seemed fairly likely that they had taken it when they went back to the village as an extra tip, but it reappeared some time during the day. Later on, after much confusion about how to turn this live chicken into something that looked more like dinner, Dom killed Dave. Ferman and Karim prepared Dave into some seasoned, skewered chunks flame grilled over a yak dung fire and a spicy stew. This was definitely the best food we had the whole week. Afterwards we prepared the bags to leave for a reconnaissance mission of the suggested rocky ridge route, with the possibility of setting up an advanced base camp.

20th July



We decided on another 6am start as this was going to be quite a long day. Even so, we were still worried about how much food we had left and only ate a small breakfast of three biscuits and some hot chocolate each. This wasn't too bad since we had eaten well the night before. We set out with our first intention of finding the base camp used by another expedition we had read about on summitpost.org. Joe had contacted "Big Lee" beforehand and he had been helpful giving us information about the route and logistics. The presumed base camp did not seem to be as comfortable as ours and the nearest water supply

seemed to be quite a way back down towards our base camp anyway. After we found this site we pushed on up to the ridge up to about 5000m. The narrow ridge turned into an exposed scramble on unstable blocks of rock with no real protection. After carefully picking our way along this with our large bags we were met by a shear wall preventing us from continuing along the ridge without using ropes. On the left side appeared to be a very steep traverse that could not be protected due to the rock falling apart. The right side seemed better and could be traversed just below the wall across unstable rocks and scree up to a side ridge, where we found two old snow stakes. Dom and Andras made a further traverse up from there without bags trying to pick the easiest route across steep scree slopes and small side ridges. After this traverse it might have been possible to cross the main ridge to the other side on to a steep snow gully; however this was considered to be too dangerous to be done with large bags. Furthermore we didn't know whether or not the route would continue on afterwards. The team agreed, after considering all possibilities, to take the loads down to Big Lee's base camp, and have a look at the cirque of the glacier as an alternative route before committing to the potentially treacherous ridge. On returning

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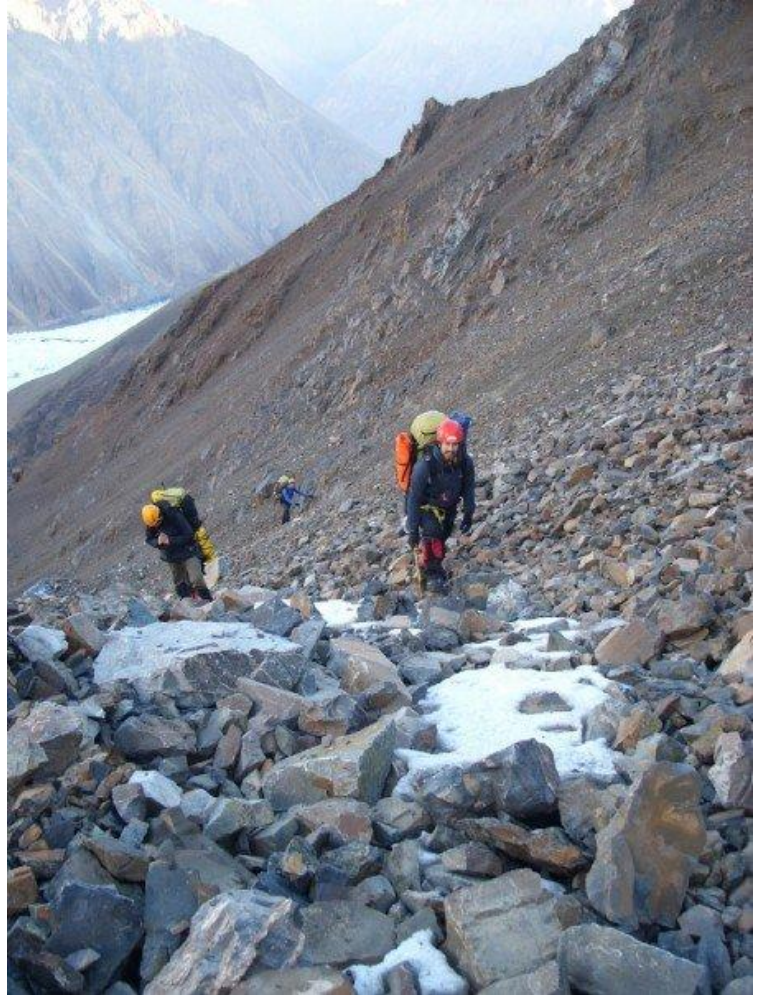
to our base camp we had a good freeze-dried meal for dinner after the exhausting day. Some team members suffered from headaches and dehydration from the day's exploration and ascent of approximately 1000m.

21st July

Conveniently the following day was rainy, giving us the perfect excuse for a rest. We spent the day socializing and reading up on first aid. We were very grateful to have the luxury of the porters collecting water for us while we were away the day before.

22nd July

When we woke up at 6am the weather seemed to be good enough to attempt an ascent. The cereals, having been aired out thoroughly, were found to be digestible by then. This provided us with more carbohydrates than we had been able to have in previous breakfasts. After some trouble with a team member's Camelbak leaking into his rucksack and drenching his clothes, the team left to collect the loads left higher up two days earlier. We spent some time shuffling loads around to have roughly 20-25 kg each. We traversed across scree aiming not to lose more height than absolutely necessary before reaching the glacier. However, after tediously crossing two ridges, we decided to descend on one of the scree slopes to the glacier, rather than risking injury from climbing over more ridges. Descending scree with our heavy loads proved particularly difficult. Despite tentatively zigzagging downwards many great boulders were dislodged and sometimes entire sections of the slope started moving down with us. Nevertheless we all made it to the edge of the glacier. After some exploration on the north side of the glacier, it was deemed to be safer to ascend on the middle face of



the dry glacier as rocks were continuously falling on both sides of the glacier due to the ice thawing in the sun. We knew the side scree slopes were highly unstable because we had just come down them accompanied by some large rocks so we were keen to get onto different terrain. This proved harder than expected as it started raining again and the thin layer of scree easily slipped on top of the ice underneath. On a raised patch just up from where we joined the glacier we found a reasonably flat snow patch at a safe distance from the next face with its falling debris. We put up the two tents we had brought. We used the crux for Neil, Rob and Andras and a summit tent for Joe and Dom. These we put up in the rain on roughly cut platforms and we quickly put

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everything inside the tents and survival bags to shelter them from the rain. A bit later we collected water from melt water streams nearby and went to bed after a two hearty meals.

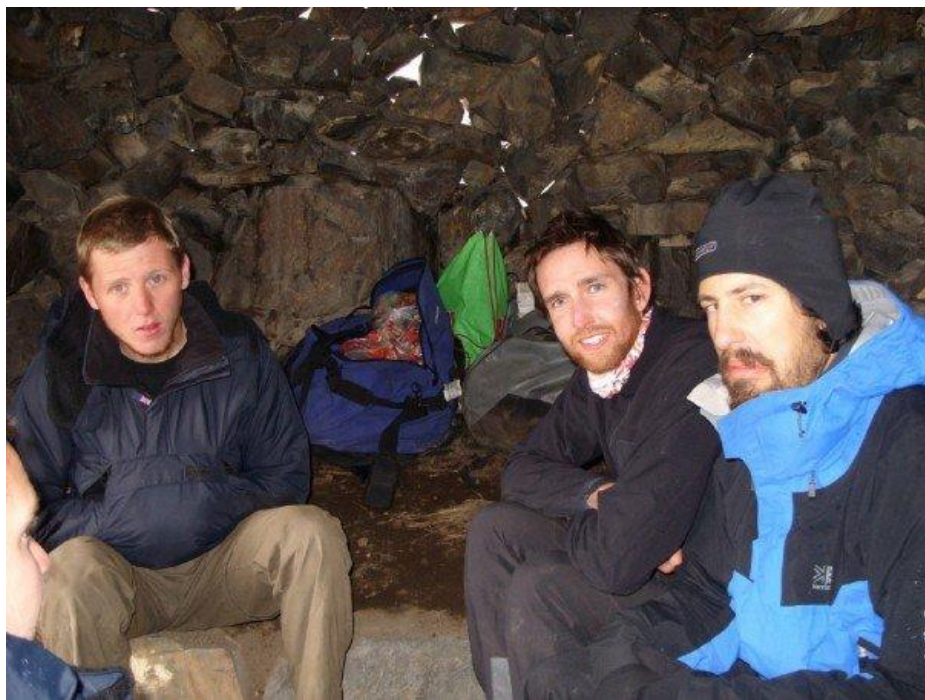
23rd July

It had been raining all through the night so we gave up any plans of climbing the next day. A small crevasse a few cm wide opened about 10m away from our tent. It seemed very loud from inside the tents. The thud and squeak made some of us slightly concerned during the night. Our equipment was outside in the survival bags and we didn't want to lose any of it to a crevasse. Most of us got wet from all the water around us, and being squashed in the tiny tents. We spent the day trying to dry most of our belongings inside the tent, which wasn't a quick process given the humidity. The rest of the day we spent socializing in the tents, playing cards and having lively discussions.

24th July

Unfortunately, the next day was a similar story to the day before. Again it rained all night; however then, just for a bit of variety, it snowed early in the morning. Later in the morning the sun came out which gave us an opportunity to dry our equipment and clothes and some cause for hope. It was decided that if there was no further precipitation until next morning than we would attempt to climb up to high camp. Listening to avalanche noises and crevasse movements along with falling boulders made was quite disturbing for the members who were new to the Greater Ranges trying to get a cramped night's sleep.

25th July



The next day was probably the most frustrating of the entire trip. We awoke at 5am full of hope. The weather was not quite ideal but it seemed like a decent opportunity for an ascent to high camp. After a couple of days of frustration this was just what we needed. Everything was prepared ready for ascent. We had packed up camp, had a quick breakfast and were just about to set off when clouds gathered and it started raining and snowing again. At this stage we were forced to retreat to base camp to gather more food, as any longer stay at camp 1 would not have left us with enough food for a

possibly prolonged summit push. When we returned to base camp, we paid the remaining two porters for their services. As a bonus we gave them two cheap duffle bags and some money. They also took down the rubbish we had accumulated so far. We spent the rest of the day resting and playing "Mountain Olympics" as the

weather turned sunny again. This involved as many different ways of throwing and carrying rocks as we could come up with. We didn't have much else to play with. This helped to relieve some of the frustration. We were to head back to camp 1 if the weather was good.

26th July

It rained heavily during the night again, preventing any climbing attempts again. Since the porters had left water collection was decided on a competitive basis. Whoever lost in the pre-determined rock-game would be volunteered to make the hour commitment of fetching water from a nearby spring-come-puddle of water which we shared with the local yaks. Rob lost the game the day before, this day was Joe's turn. We discussed expedition logistics and bad weather at length, finding that the best way to cope with our frustration was to make light of it and have a laugh.



Yaks came during the night to have a look at our tents, not causing any damage, yet still keeping many of us in fear of getting tramped on. One of them was very friendly indeed and started licking the tent, or so it seemed. They were however found to be harmless and could be frightened off by throwing pebbles in their general direction.

27th July

The 27th was Rob's birthday. Fresh snow had covered everything during the night and we heard many avalanches crashing down onto the glacier. It was a wise decision indeed to retreat to base camp. Andras went for water. This task took him over three hours as the spring was beginning to run out of water with the sun drying everything away during the day. These collection trips gave some opportunity to team members to have some solitude and time to reflect on their experiences. We talked about what we would eat when we returned to civilization. Our diet at base camp consisted mainly of biscuits, dried fruit, nuts, noodles and very occasional meal packs. Having tried all of the food we had with us we were all rather fed up of most of it. Most of us had decided that the chocolate was just about inedible, even those bars not contaminated with fuel. An attempt was made to make a pudding from some locally obtained "custard powder" for Rob's Birthday. Unfortunately this ended up as an inedible pot of fluorescent chalky mess. Nevertheless the clear sky was highly promising and we all desperately hoped it would hold so we could leave the next morning.

28th July

The morning was spent on evaluating the weather and as it proved to be steadily improving, we made the decision to climb back to camp 1 early in the afternoon. Water collection was extremely difficult by now as the dry weather left the spring almost entirely dry, leaving only a small muddy puddle, in which a baby yak was found to be happily playing. After half an hour of engineering around, Joe and Rob managed to drain the pond into our water bladders, receiving an increased amount of iodine as treatment. We left base camp after a good meal, using up



some of the fuel contaminated noodles as well. Since we didn't have to collect any bags from higher up this time we could traverse a more direct route across the scree to the same camp 1. By setting up an extra summit tent, we made enough space to have a slightly more comfortable night.

29th July

We woke up at 3:30am and left swiftly, leaving some resources behind in one of the summit tents, under brilliantly clear skies. Finally the weather was on our side. We ascended the second plateau of the glacier through some steep scree and a boulder gully on the north side. There were two routes from here up to the ridge which lead to high camp. The first was a scree slope on the north side leading up to the ridge which Joe, Neil and Rob took. A more direct route was taken by Dom and Andras. This involved climbing the headwall at the top of the glacier before diverting left and ascending on snowy ice next to the edge of the scree, meeting up with the rest of the team at the top of the ridge. Both routes presented a different set of problems. The scree was hard to ascend and kept giving away underfoot and after a while the route turned into icy snow. Furthermore the final traverse on the ridge was fairly exposed too. The glacier face on the other hand, turned out to be steeper and much longer than expected, proving to be difficult at altitude with bags weighing roughly 20kg. The top section was significantly easier though, with gentler slopes good for kicking-in steps for another similar distance. There was still plenty of avalanche debris, crevasses and a few steep sections to pass before meeting the other part of the team on the ridge. Both groups were physically exhausted by then and we stopped for a lunch break. The rest of the climb on snow we did as a group of five all tied together on one rope until we reached a suitable snow ledge at approximately 5300m altitude. The camping spot was tested for crevasses with a snow probe, and we compressed the soft snow into flat surfaces to provide a base for our tents. The rest of the afternoon we spent resting and melting water, waiting excitedly for the summit push.

30th July



Again we woke up at 3:30am, ready for our summit attempt. After eating Reiter puddings for breakfast and losing a shovel in an unfortunate accident we packed up and got ready to leave by first light at 5:00am. We started climbing all together with Joe leading on relatively steep snow right from our high camp following the cornices on their north side up to the start of the ridge passing a few seracs on our right. Then we contoured the ridge on its west side until being forced to cross it to the east, Joe having to break through the corniced top of the ridge. More traversing followed, we continued picking our way between some large crevasses and steep seracs to

gain a smaller snow ledge where we took a break. It was decided that the best route was to follow the ridgeline which shot steeply upwards from there, from where it was possible to spot high camp far in the distance below us. As the ridge got narrower, we were forced to traverse on the side, in fear of cornices giving away below us if we went any closer to the ridge. These traverses on steep slopes were very tiring both physically and mentally as great care was taken to prevent a fall. A small ledge was finally reached from where we could see that the actual summit was standing a valley away from the ridge we were ascending on. This had not been seen previously. However the wet-glacier route seemed to be too treacherous, full of crevasses across its entire section, and there would be no safe way to descend the steep slopes anyway. Therefore, rather lethargically, we decided to carry along the ridge along which we would descend into the valley and climb up to the final summit. At about that time some of us started developing mild headaches with the altitude at roughly 5600m. The exposed and steep traverses continued on before we reached a subsidiary peak.

On the subsidiary peak at about 5800-5900m we took short break and Dom took over leading the group for the final push. By now we were all exhausted and stopped for breath first after every three or four steps. We climbed the side ridge at a safe distance from the gigantic serac and icicle formations on the centre of the face as we saw it from the subsidiary peak. The last few snow bulges of the top were conquered step by step, unable to do anything for a few minutes after finally making it to the top.



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Our team all summited Yazgil Sar, 6001m at approximately 12 noon on the 30th July. After our break, taking food and the last few sips of our water, we took pictures for both personal as well as exploratory and sponsorship purposes. There was beautiful weather; we had no wind and barely any clouds to spoil our moment. However our celebrations and resting had to be short lived as it was already quite late and we still had to make it back before the melting triggered avalanches.



The next hours presented us with the most dangerous part of the climb. Descending across the steep slopes, which all started melting saw us slipping and sliding all over the place, sinking deeply into the snow occasionally. Most of us ran out of water long ago and exertion, dehydration and increasing headaches were starting to bother us more and more. After an almost continuous descent with just a few short breaks we finally made our way down the last 300 metres of steep snow slopes without injuring ourselves. Once we reached high camp, we started melting snow straight away to revive ourselves before going to bed after a quick ready meal dinner, still uncertain on which route to take for the descent.

31st July



The next day we had a well earned lie in until 7am. Most people's headaches were gone by now and we shared a common excitement about climbing down through the last true mountaineering section of the expedition. After descending to the start of the rock ridge, where our previous two routes met, we decided to go by the rock route; we thought the icy descent could require the setting up of multiple abseils in the glacier face. We scrambled along the ridge until we reached a long steep scree slope which meandered all the way down to the glacier. After some hesitation, we descended one by one on the scree using such techniques as glissading,

sliding and "rock-boarding" on larger flat rocks taking much of the scree slope with us. After a narrow section and some more scree a smaller rock face had to be negotiated before reaching the first of the crevasses on the side of the glacier. In the previous two days many new crevasses had opened up and we had to take great care whilst zigzagging our way safely amongst them. After descending the next step of the glacier we arrived back at camp 1. By that time it had already started raining and hailing again and soon the summit was covered in thick dark clouds. We had been extremely lucky with our timing. The additional load from camp 1 was divided and we made our way straight for base camp by the same route as before. We all arrived back to base camp completely shattered after our successful summiting which filled the team with joy and pride in our combined team effort. Although only a small meal was prepared we all struggled to finish it as our stomachs had definitely shrunk during the previous few days of extreme exertion.

1st August

Most of the next day was spent resting and recovering in the tents. Joe confirmed our transport from Shimshal to Gilgit and organized another vehicle to take us straight to Islamabad with the Medina Hotel boss by satellite phone. Later on we cleared away our trash and burnt what we could on the fire.

2nd August

The following day it was raining again. We woke up around 8am and sorted all our stuff into piles. We separated the food that shepherds could use which we left in the hut, climbing equipment and three days worth of food that would go down with us and rubbish to be taken down. We left base camp inside a cloud at around 11:30am. Without the porters we ended up taking 35kg bags each with a lot of additional bits strapped onto the outside. This made balancing difficult at times, especially on any sections that could really be described as scrambling. Our burdens seemed to become heavier and heavier forcing most of us to have multiple short breaks before reaching goat camp just on the other side of the glacier from Shimshal, where we could finally refill our water bottles which had been empty since leaving base camp. Crossing Yazgil glacier proved to be

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much more difficult on the way back without the guidance of the porters and carrying twice the weight. Route finding was particularly tiresome and slipping on the glacier ice did not help either. The ice got ever slipperier as the top layers started to melt in the afternoon sun. We had to retreat and go further down the glacier a number of times due to the long parallel crevasses which prevented our crossing. After finding our way around the largest crevasse we finally made it to the somewhat flatter section and found a way across to the other side without any serious injuries. On reaching the other side we had some food and refilled water from the glacier. We then headed for the valley, first through the side moraine with some sticky, muddy, quick-sand like substance then finally crossing the moraine and reaching the valley leading to Shimshal village. It was 6pm by now and any hopes we had for an easy three hour walk were soon shattered as the wind picked up and dark clouds gathered to drench us with rain. We soon had to use headtorches to find our steps through the river valley in absolute darkness. After some time struggling even to drag ourselves and our bags along the long, flat valley we had to traverse along the bottom of a new landslide. The now swollen river forced us to take this route along the side and whilst passing the landslide a few rocks tumbled down amongst us, almost knocking Dom and Andras into the flooding torrent of bitterly cold water. We rushed across to safety and rested a bit before starting the last section of the trek across irrigation ditches and stone walls. By now we had all been in pain from the now crippling heavy loads for a long time and exhaustion was continuously testing our resolve. The thought of falling aside and sleeping in the rain until the morning seemed ever more alluring. Finally, after turning off the pain receptors and going into a half dead trance, we arrived at the lodge at 11pm. The guest house was in total darkness as the hydraulic generator wasn't working due to the flooding. After unloading our packs we collapsed into the corner of the dining room where to our surprise we stumbled upon a meeting. Apparently a committee from the Department of Tourism in Pakistan had arrived to discuss the development of the Ghujerab National park, including the village of Shimshal, into a more attracting place for tourists. Although we were exhausted we talked with them at length until the early hours sharing our experiences and suggestions.

3rd August

We spent most of the next day drying and cleaning our equipment. We talked with the tourism committee some more and gave more suggestions, especially on the usage of internet sources and guide books such as Lonely Planet that tourists rely so heavily upon. Unfortunately Hasil, the owner of the lodge and an accomplished mountaineer himself, was in Islamabad and we could not discuss our trip with him. Later we packed everything ready for departure the next day.



4th August



Our jeeps arrived the next day at 8:30am just as we were waking up and we were soon heading off for Gilgit, after a brief hour long hold up by a broken down jeep on the Shimshal pass. Later we stopped again at the same tea house near Rakaposhi for a quick break and chat with another local man. He seemed keen to climb Rakaposhi some day, we said we would be too. Maybe we'll meet again some time. After a long but wonderfully scenic drive we reached Medina hotel in Gilgit at about 6pm where we had some dinner and bought fresh water for the lengthy journey by minibus down to Islamabad. We left Gilgit at about 8pm beginning our journey down the Karakoram Highway. There were a few stops,

one time waiting for more than an hour, at army posts where until sufficient number of vehicles gathered to form a convoy guarded by armed army vehicles to avoid any sabotage by bandits in the mountains.

5th August

After travelling through the night, the light of dawn revealed the numerous picturesque landscapes of the slowly changing environment we were passing through. After hearing the same cassette for the fiftieth time we returned to Islamabad at about midday, glad to have survived all the adventures and ready to finally fill our stomachs with the copious amounts of food our shrivelled stomachs had been crying out for during the last week or so.

6th August

The next few days we spent mostly resting, eating, trying to regain our strength and appetites that had both diminished during the trip and collecting a few gifts for families and friends. We also invested in a cheap local outfit for each of us in an attempt to blend in better with the locals. Most people we met appreciated our efforts; it was only the police whom found it suspicious to have five dirty bearded western strangers in old fashioned local clothes. On talking with them it seemed that a 500 rupee bribe would suffice and they then let us get on with our business. After being invited for tea and a chat about our trip and national politics by officials in Jinnah Park, we had a final birthday meal for Dom and packed ready to head to the airport early in the morning.



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10th August

We awoke at 4am and arrived on time at the airport to check in before the routine horrendous crowds. Eventually we managed to talk our way around the excess baggage; we each had 28kg of bags each rather than the allowance of 20kg and for a while it seemed like this was going to be a problem. After one change in Dubai, we finally all stepped into the arrivals hall at Heathrow, into the arms of some of our loving family members, being thankful and unexplainably happy to be back all in one piece. Adventure over.

Climbing Report

Prior to leaving the UK we had investigated other possible objectives in the Shimshal area so that when it happened that we couldn't afford to reach Sonia Peak we already had some idea of the other mountains available to us. Further enquiries with the manager of the lodge in Shimshal, who was a seasoned mountaineer himself, lead to Yazghil Sar being chosen as our new objective. The walk in to base camp was two days with an overnight stop on the South-East side of the Yazghil glacier. The route was generally easily identified and the porters knew the quickest way across the glacier.

Beyond base camp we had been told about two options for gaining the summit ridge; the local climbers insisted that there was a route via the North-West ridge but a previous ascent by "Big Lee" described on summitpost.org headed into the cirque and onto the North-West face. The team's first excursion out from base camp to reconnoitre the North-West ridge reached a height of about 4800m but further progress would have meant tackling either a vertical buttress or traversing into a steep scree and snow-filled gully which appeared very unstable. We had little in the way of rock protection because our initial objective, Sonia Peak, was entirely snow-covered and therefore the buttress would not have been feasible. The rock was quite friable and many large blocks were loose which meant great care had to be taken when traversing slopes, especially those that had a thin layer of scree on top of angled flat rock. The gully didn't present an attractive option either and so the team descended back to base camp to try the second route.

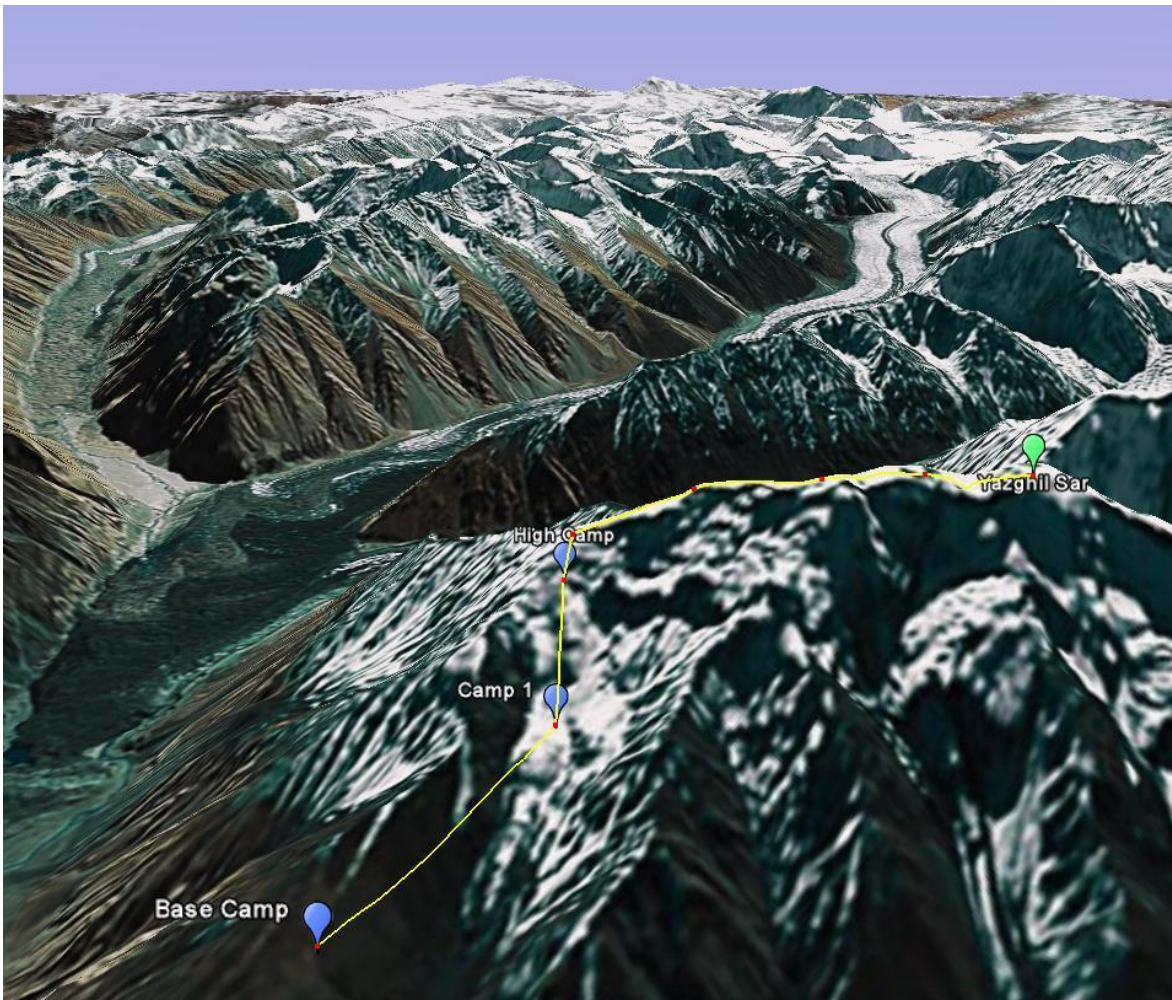


Shimshal region and Yazghil Sar (*Google Earth Images*).

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Camp 1 was established in the cirque after traversing across huge fields of scree and ascending the snout of the glacier. This was also tricky due to a thin layer of moraine that had collected on the glacier in this area and although it looked stable from a distance, was able to slide very easily over the smooth ice underneath. Crampons were then worn from this point until we got to the site for camp 1. The location for the camp was good but poor weather meant a summit attempt was not possible and forced a retreat to base camp. A second attempt allowed us to ascend back to camp 1 and then push on up to high camp.

In hindsight, the route up to high camp described by Big Lee left camp 1 and headed up a snow-filled gully at the left of the headwall next to the scree. However, at the time our team were not entirely sure of his route and so decided to take the most sensible looking approach to high camp. In fact, the team split into two groups, with Rob, Neil and Joe tackling a scree-filled gully on the left and Dom and Andras climbing directly up the ice headwall at the top of the glacier and then bearing left on snow. Both routes joined in the end at the very top of the North-West ridge and the team continued on together to the site of high camp. Little protection was used in order to speed up the climbing which was also done simultaneously. The last section was the same route that Big Lee took, but it is believed that for the lower 400m it was the first time these routes had been climbed.



Yazghil Sar camps and final route (*Google Earth Images*).

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The site of high camp was a good size for two tents but the snow was not good quality and appeared to be formed from layers of varying softness. The area was tested with an avalanche probe but it was hard to tell whether the snow was very soft or there were in fact crevasses beneath the surface. Really there was no choice about the campsite though and the team tried to make it as comfortable as possible. Quite frequently feet would sink in up to the thigh so the group did its best to tread down an area for the tents and no crevasses opened up for either night that we were there.

On summit day we didn't leave quite as early as desired and as a result the snow quality towards the middle of the day began to deteriorate. The climbing was fairly consistent as we gained the ridge quickly and followed it for the rest of the day. There were moments when care had to be taken traversing the steep sections and it was also difficult knowing how far was left to reach the top – on gaining the North summit we believed at first we were there, only to realise that we still had a way to go to the true South summit. The final part of the ridge up to the South summit was steep and very hard work but still just a snow-plod. Much care also had to be taken on the descent as the sun had softened the snow considerably and a couple of the team took slides down the channels which had been carved by our steps. Returning from high camp was relatively straightforward and mostly involved descent down scree slopes and gullies to camp 1 and then on to base camp. The original plan had also been to travel further up the Yazghil glacier and explore other areas for future expeditions; however, because of the days lost to bad weather we unfortunately didn't have enough time left at the end and instead had to head back to Shimshal village for the jeep pick-up.



Yazghil Sar summit ridge.

Equipment Report

For the base camp a Terra Nova Quasar and a Crux X2 Storm were used. These two man tents were cramped with five of us in total so we also used two of the Outdoor Designs single skin summit tents. This was not a perfect alternative at lower altitudes as we had more problems with condensation than we did with the traditional two layer system tents. The lack of a porch in the summit tent was also awkward and in that respect the Quasar was the best option of the lot having two entrances with decent sized porches. The back porch of the Crux was very small and not very useful, especially with any rain as there was no way of keeping items in the small porch from touching the outer.

Scarpa Omega boots were used by three of the expedition members. All three had problems with the inner boots and none of them came back in a useable state. Another member used Scarpa Alphas with Berghaus Yeti overgaiters. These worked well except for the damage done to the gaiters by the mixed terrain and ended up torn in places on the rubber rand. The other member used Vasque Ice 9000 boots, which were very warm, sturdy and comfortable but would have been cumbersome had the climbing been more technical. For the climbing, Grivel G12 and Black Diamond Serac crampons were used and we each used one walking axe (Grivel Munro). As the climbing was not especially technical we did not use any protection. Choices of gloves varied but ski gloves were actually good enough, Black Diamond dry tooling gloves also performed well. We all took spare pairs so we could change when our gloves/mitts got wet.

At base camp MSR Whisperlite stoves were used. These were not all in perfect condition when we set out but after a few hours cleaning these worked fairly well. However the poor quality unleaded fuel bought on the KKH north of Gilgit blocked up the stoves again and although they did not need much maintenance they were never as effective as they have been using cleaner fuel in the UK and Europe. For higher camps we used MSR pocket rocket stoves for their light weight. The gas canisters were bought in Gilgit and some were half used when we bought them. It had been a case of weighing them up in the shop to see which ones had most fuel remaining. This meant that at high altitude we had some problems with the gas pressure and this led to us not being able to melt enough water for the summit push. However these stoves were probably still the best option for us.

Clothing systems used were layering systems with outer waterproof shell layer and base layers for top and bottom. Montane pertex/pile smocks were also used, though the 'extreme' version was too warm for most purposes. The waterproofs came in handy as it did rain even up to base camp at 4200m. Crux flak jackets and Rab Super Dru jackets worked well and had good mountaineering cuts. Waterproof bottoms were used by one member, though the others did not have problems using normal hiking or mountaineering trousers, varying from Craghopper Kiwis to Mammut Base Jump pants. Smartwool mountaineering socks were comfortable and warm. Most members used PHD Yukon down jackets, which were possibly excessive and were unnecessary for most of the trip, only being used briefly at high camps. Whilst we were on the move for summit day we found base layer and shell to be plenty warm enough.

The sleeping bags used were PHD Hispar 600, a Diamir 700 and a Mountain Hardwear Big Bang. The PHD bags were warm enough and very lightweight (the Mountain Hardwear was a little heavier). We spent most of the time in the sleeping bags once the sun set and it got cold, which was another reason for our lack of use of the down jackets.

Medical Report

Immunisations were needed by some expedition members for Hepatitis A and Typhoid (others were still up to date from previous travels). These were obtained for free from each person's GP in a single injection. On consultation with medical professionals, it was deemed unnecessary to receive Japanese Encephalitis immunisation (due to region visited) or Rabies injections (due to highest risk being from animals in the city when hospital treatment would be close by). Malaria prophylaxis was also not taken by the group due to the brief exposure to the risk (in the city) and possible side-effects from taking them for 2 months. Instead, precautions were taken to prevent mosquito bites (repellent spray, long baggy clothing and coils in hotel room).

One member of the team was taken ill with food poisoning during the brief stay at Gilgit; the symptoms were headaches, cramps, diarrhoea and vomiting. Stemetil was taken as an anti-nausea medication, which was unfortunately brought back up again the first time but worked the second time. Immodium and charcoal tablets were tried for the diarrhoea but had no effect. Rehydration sachets were given to replace fluids and plain food to eat (rice and chapattis). A short course of Ciprofloxacin was taken and this cleared up the illness after a few days in Shimshal. Dehydration (and possibly mild altitude sickness) affected some members of the team on the 1-day trek out from Shimshal. They recovered quickly after finding a good water source and dropping back down a few hundred metres. There were no effects when we returned a couple of days later.

Mild altitude effects were felt by all members of the group at some point during the acclimatisation days up the rock ridge (to approx 4800m). Symptoms included headaches and slight nausea. These were only experienced for the first few days above base camp however and none of the team had any problems with altitude during the summit push, although the effects were felt in elevated breathing rate and greater fatigue, especially around 6000m. Acclimatisation drugs e.g. Acetazolamide (Diamox) were not used at any point, nor were the treatment drugs, Dexamethasone or Nifedipine.

In habited areas only bottled purified water was consumed by the team, and precautions were taken to avoid eating anything susceptible to contamination by non-purified water. Still, by the end of the first week each member suffered from some sort of digestion system related problem, the most serious case being a stomach poisoning. Two more members appeared to get sick from locally prepared food in Shimshal village. All 3 cases had to be treated by antibiotics at the end; a short 3 day course of Ciprofloxacin proved to be sufficient to eradicate the problem. During the trek in and stay at base camp, iodine solution was used for purification, though a minimal amount was used to lessen the effect on taste and for better economy. The team could only prepare 2 litres of water per person the night before the summit push which proved to be significantly smaller than required and resulted in most team members running out of water soon after summiting. The effects of dehydration were felt by most members, and were worsened significantly by the altitude in at least 1 member's case.

The first aid kits were not really tested as no serious injuries occurred and only very few minor ones such as cuts and grazes. It was reassuring to have a comprehensive range of supplies with us though and it was felt that the right balance was achieved between low weight and having enough equipment. An improvement that could be made based on the usage of the kits would be to have more rehydration sachets or to pre-mix salt/sugar portions. The amount of medications for treatment for digestion system related problems could be increased; i.e.

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more Ciprofloxacin should be taken – there would have been not enough for appropriate treatment for more serious bacterial infections, if more than 1 member became seriously ill. Unfortunately, the team's order of Betadine got mixed up and 1 large bottle was provided only, which was impractical to be carried around and could not easily be split into smaller bottles which would have been useful in each team's first aid kit.

The team had one member who would normally wear glasses, with (-1.75, -1.5) eyes. As prescription glasses would have been very expensive, and if they broke, the member would have been put at additional risk due to limited visual abilities. Therefore, this member decided to use a combination of normal glasses and contact lenses during most of the expedition. Glasses were used in all habited areas up to Shimshal Valley. Thereafter 24 hour contact lenses were used which could be in permanently for a week (after a period of getting used to them and additional checks by the optician before departure). These lenses would be taken out for the night, cleaned and stored overnight, when circumstances were appropriate. On the approaches, the lenses were not taken out for up to 4-5 days, until the team got back to base camp where they could be taken out and cleaned again.

The lenses were used up to 6000m without experiencing any abnormal discomfort or damage to the eyes, or decreased visual abilities compared to normal usage of lenses. There was however slight discomfort felt usually by the end of the day – probably more due to the strong sunlight and wind and general decrease in oxygen saturation of the air than the presence of the lenses – this would normally be relieved by soothing eye drops; taken once in the morning and once in the evening. Although the lenses provided a good alternative to glasses, it did take significant extra time to do all the cleaning, droplets in the eye and other additional activities compared to the rest of the team, which resulted in slight delays to progress on some days.

Food Report

It was decided that most of the food we would eat would be bought in Pakistan to save weight on luggage for the flights. This meant that the only food brought with us from the UK was the freeze dried Reiter meals. We took these to be used at high altitude due to their light weight and their ease of preparation. As they come packaged in heat proof foil all that we needed to do to prepare them was to pour boiling water into the bag and wait for a few minutes. This saved on washing and it was a relief to have something that tasted good for so little effort when we were already tired. We found the beef and potato and the beef stroganoff were particularly good while the chicken korma was disappointing and not as filling as the others. The Reiter desserts were also used. These tasted very good and were easy to make just by adding cold water but were not very good value for money. Cheaper desserts would have done the job just as well and the packaging that worked for the hot main meals seemed like overkill for the cold desserts. Having said this, the custard powder bought in Pakistan had a chalky texture and was pretty much inedible.

The rest of the food was bought in Gilgit from stores and market stalls. We found that dividing the food up into day portions per person worked well and saved time later as we knew where everything was. Although we sampled a lot of the food before committing to buying large quantities, we found that on the mountain the food was less appetizing. Much of the food we had bought became a chore to eat as we lost our appetites due to the altitude and lack of variation. In particular the chocolate was very difficult to eat on the mountain due to its sickly sweet, artificial flavour. The biscuits in general were good and we used these as a quick breakfast at our two advanced camps as well as for general snacks throughout the days. Local nuts and dried fruit were bought in quite large quantities (by weight) and these were not too bad, apart from the monkey nuts which went off very quickly. The pre-packaged salted and spicy snacks worked much better and were treats we actually looked forward to. Cereals like cornflakes also worked well and by using powdered milk this made for a pleasant breakfast while we were at base camp, with sugar mixed in for extra calories. For our dinners at base camp we used instant noodles and pasta purchased in Gilgit, which worked well and were easy to prepare. We brought one live chicken up from Shimshal village which provided an excellent meal one day, though it didn't go far between five.

One problem that we had was that some of the food became contaminated with petrol during the walk in to base camp. This meant it was even less appealing and we ended up taking in less calories at base camp than intended. Another related problem was the poor water supply. It would often involve an hour or so wait by the spring to wait for enough of a trickle to fill our containers and we had to rely heavily on iodine to make the water drinkable. This contributed in part to our overall dehydration, although the days we suffered most were on the summit push. At higher altitude melting enough snow was difficult due to the time required, the drop in performance of the stoves due to less oxygen and the amount of gas needed.

In Rawalpindi, Gilgit and Shimshal we also bought some cooked meals. Despite the fact that we were very careful to only eat cooked food some of these meals seem to have been the cause of stomach problems. We could possibly have taken more care but sadly in general the safest option was to buy food from large western corporations like McDonalds, Pizza Hut and Subway.

Environmental and Ethical Report

The expedition aimed to minimise the impact it has on the environment by adhering to the environmental guidelines outlined by the British Mountaineering Council (http://www.thebmc.co.uk/world/exped/guide_1.htm) and the UIAA Ethical Code and the Kathmandu Declaration (<http://www.thebmc.co.uk/world/exped/uiaacode.htm>) throughout the expedition.

Porter welfare:

The welfare of the porters was highly important during the expedition and in light of this the expedition members agreed to follow a number of additional local guidelines. These included significantly higher wages than those previously advised to the team. In addition to the minimal requirements the following were paid for:

- Wages for days used by porters to return un-loaded to their homes.
- A bonus after the successful completion of the transportation of expedition equipment to base camp.
- The lead-porter and a companion were paid to remain at base camp for a few days extra; although there was no particular need for this, it was more of a thank you gesture for their efforts.

The maximum load per porter was kept to 20kg / person, which was further reduced as some porters decided to use their yaks instead. On the second day a donkey was also found, which apparently belonged to one of the porters, and most of the load from the rest of the porters was arranged onto this pack-animal. Hence by the end of the transportation, the team members appeared to be almost the only ones who were still carrying laden backpacks.

Environment:

Preserving the delicate environment which surrounded the team throughout the expedition was of utmost importance. The area visited is not yet well travelled and the members felt that it was particularly important to minimise any impacts on it, thus to preserve the habitat in its original state. In addition, the team agreed to pay the newly-established Environmental Restoration Fee, which the local community use for the maintenance of the environmental resources near Shimshal Village, to ensure that tourists return to the area.

Base Camp was situated next to a shepherd's refuge, being part of the only green yak grazing field higher up in the Shimshal valley. The hut was made of local stones and transported timber elements for the roof and because it was used during bad weather, efforts were made to maintain its condition. Few animals were encountered at base camp and little impact was made on the local fauna. The rocky slopes downhill of base camp was used as a latrine and all efforts were made to burn toilet paper, though this was difficult due to the poor performance of cigarette lighters at the altitude.

The water collected from the nearby stream was treated with iodine, however, none of the treated water was released back into the environment. At the end of the expedition some of the waste was incinerated and that

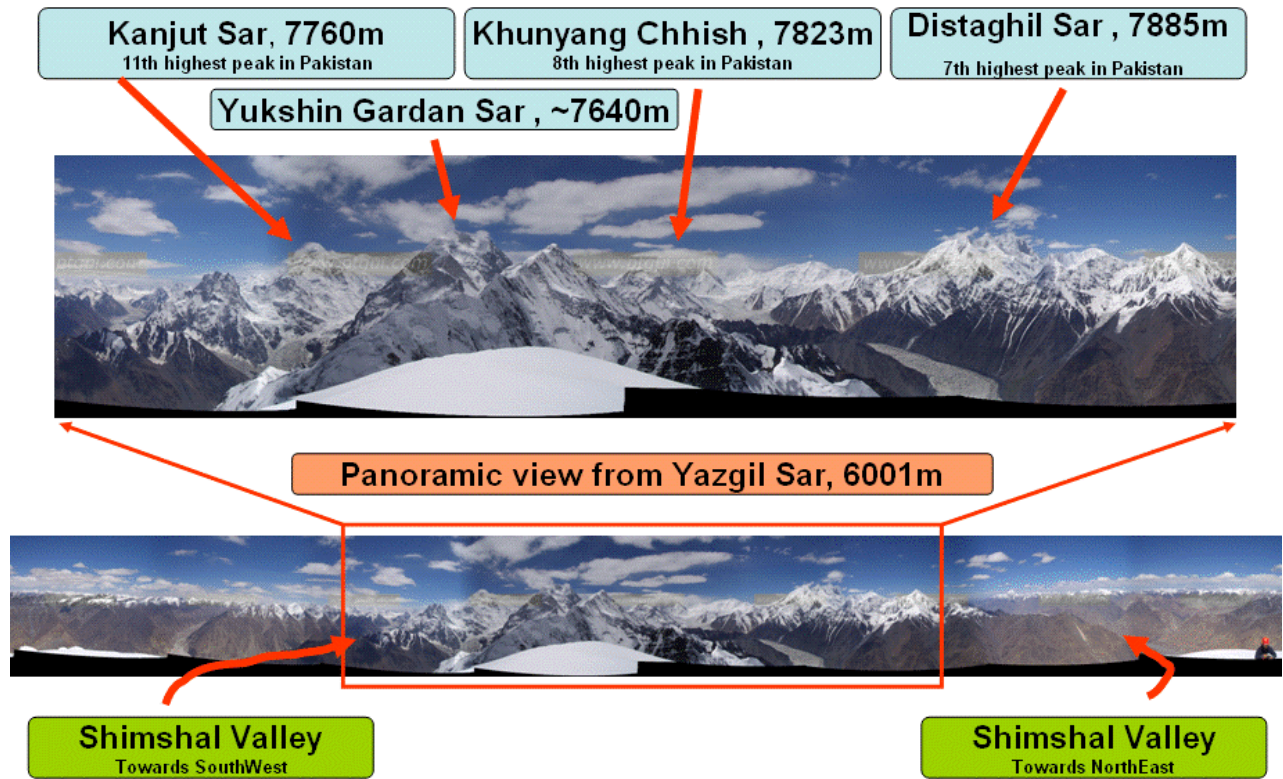
which could not be burned was collected and brought back to Shimshal village for disposal. Some of the food reserves which had not been consumed but were thought of being useful for anyone being caught in bad weather were left at the hut for the benefit of the local shepherds.

Future Expeditions

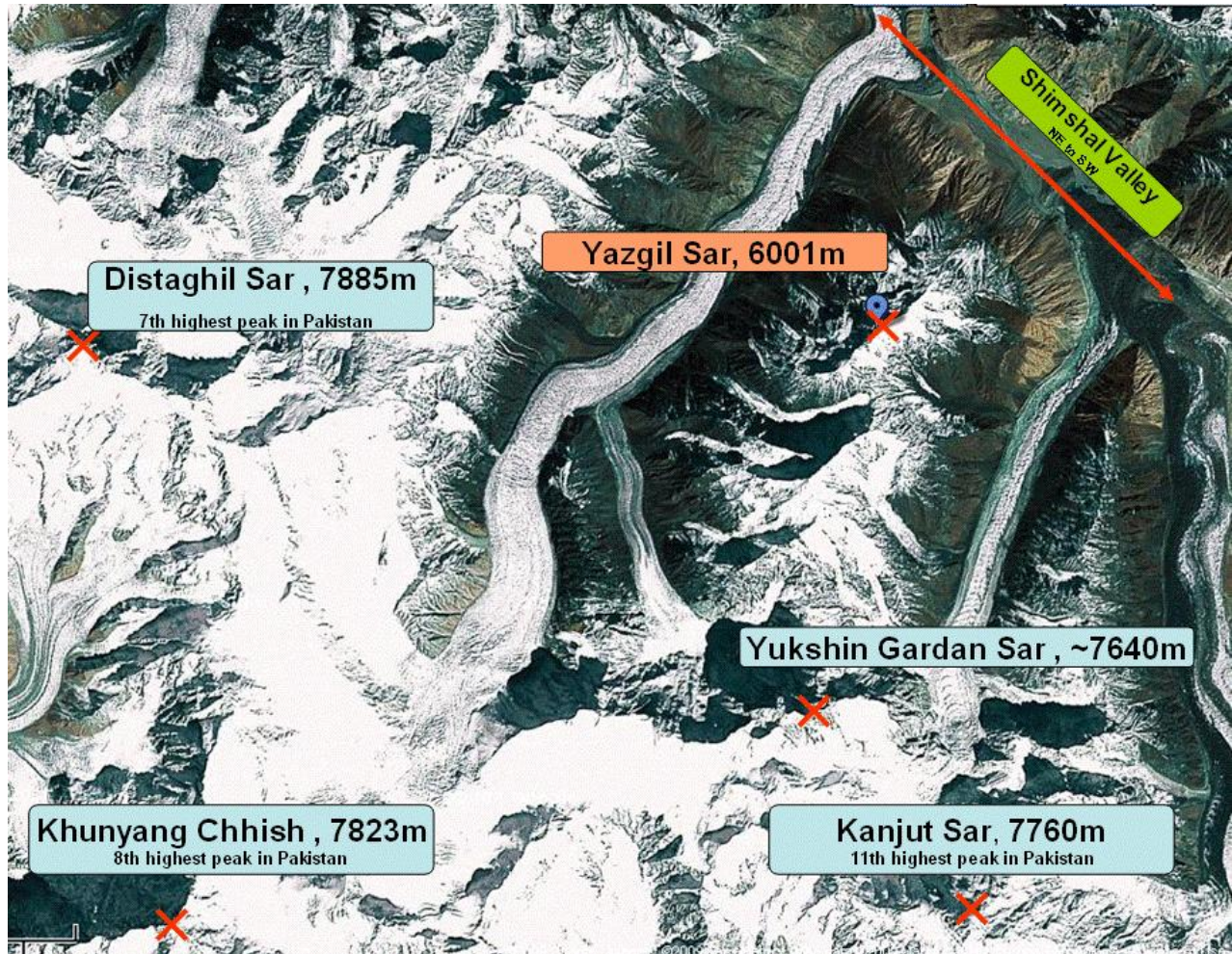
There are at least two experienced high altitude guides in Shimshal and both are highly knowledgeable about the local peaks, both climbed and unclimbed. One of them is the owner of the tourist lodge, Hasil, who has previously summited K2 and Nanga Parbat.

Although the most significant peaks above 7000m have been climbed already, there are still many unclimbed 6000m+ peaks and a lot of opportunities for new routes. The only downside to the area is the relatively bad quality of rock, which produces large rock falls and even large many car-sized blocks can give way under the pull of a climber – as experienced by the team during the expedition. Most peaks also require a long approach from either Shimshal or the valley on the southern side of the Hispar range.

The most important mountain to be mentioned is Distaghil Sar, which is the highest mountain in the Hispar Muztagh as a subrange of the Karakoram mountain range. It is the 19th highest mountain in the world and the 7th highest peak in Pakistan.



Panorama and surrounding mountains from the summit of Yazghil Sar.



Significant mountains in the Shimshal locality.

The future of the area:

The team had the privilege to meet an envoy from the Department of Tourism in Pakistan aiming to develop the Ghujerab National park (including the village of Shimshal) into a more attractive place for tourists. It is foreseen that both the road – which is barely passable at the moment – as well as the lodging facilities will be improved through government funding in the near future. Although the main focus of the development is not mountaineering, but rather trekking and short visits to the area and the nearby Kunjerab Pass to China, it could significantly ease access to the nearby Peaks and increase the amount of information available prior to arriving in Shimshal.

Bibliography

Below are the institutions, companies and websites used in the planning stages of the expedition.

Institutions and Resources

Alpine Club Library

Climb Magazine, Mountain Info Section (Sept, Oct, Nov issues)

BMC Winter Skills lecture

BMC Alpine Skills lecture

Websites

<http://www.summitpost.org> - Information about Sonia Peak, by Asghar Ali Porik

<http://www.thebmc.co.uk> - British Mountaineering Council - advice on mountain medicine, insurance, environmental and ethical guidelines.

<http://www.rab.uk.com/expeditions.html> - Expedition equipment.

<http://www.phdesigns.co.uk> – Expedition equipment.

<http://www.ukclimbing.com> - General information.

<http://www.rgs.org> - Reports from past expeditions.

<http://www.mef.org.uk> - Mount Everest Foundation.

<http://earth.google.com> - Google Earth, Aerial imaging.

<http://www.avtraining.org> - The American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education

<http://www.avalanche-center.org> - Avalanche Centre

<http://www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk> - The Mountaineering Council of Scotland

E-mail addresses (of other trekking / tour / expedition companies contacted during planning stage):

info@karakorumexplorers.com

info@karakorumadventure.com

info@jasminetours.com

Imperial College Shimshal Expedition 2007

info@hunzaguidespakistan.com

Books

Pakistan Lonely Planet Guide, (Lonely Planet Publications, Sep 2004)

The Avalanche Handbook, David McClung, Peter Schaerer (The Mountaineers Books, 1993)

Extreme Alpinism: Climbing Light, Fast, and High, Mark Twight, Mountaineers Books; 1st edition (1999)

Medicine for Mountaineering, 5th edition

NOLS: Wilderness & Mountaineering Handbook

Royal Geographical society: Expedition Handbook

The High Altitude Medicine Handbook, 3rd edition 2003

Pakistan Authorities

Alpine club of Pakistan (<http://www.alpineclub.org.pk/>)

Pakistan Embassy (<http://www.pakmission-uk.gov.pk/>)

Other

Imperial College Shar Kangsum 2005 Expedition Proposal. (Primarily put together by Daniel Carrivick, Joseph Johnstone was a member of this expedition)

Imperial College Chogolisa 2006 Expedition Proposal. (Primarily put together by Ben Gready, Joseph Johnstone was a member of this expedition and thus contributed to the making of the proposal)

Appendix 1 – Budget

<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Equipment	
Joseph Johnstone	£ 535.00
Dominic Southgate	£ 564.00
Robert Porter	£ 809.00
Andras Szollar	£ 999.00
Neil Dowse	£1,009.00
Emirates - return flights to Islamabad for 5	£2,734.00
Cell Hire - Hire of satellite phone	£ 222.96
Cell Hire - Additional Hire costs for satellite phone	£ 75.20
Cell Hire - Additional Hire costs for satellite phone	£ 7.04
Approx. local spend*: transport, accomodation and food	£1,500.00
	Total £8,455.20
Income	
Imperial College Exploration Committee contribution	£2,000.00
Funds From Convocation Trust, University of London	£2,000.00
RCSA	£ 500.00
	Total £4,500.00
Defecit	
Approximate personal contribution by each member	£3,955.20
	£ 791.04

*Figures are based on the local withdrawals made by the group in Pakistan, as actual figures were not available at the time of report publication.