



**“Life is either a daring
adventure, or nothing.”**

Helen Adams Keller (1880 – 1968)
American memoirist, lecturer

Frisbee '99

22nd June – 29th. July, 1999



Frisbee '99 team on the summit of the Hispa La, 5151m

What started as a daydream in Weymouth College, developed to an idea in the Hog's Head finally consolidated into a full-blown expedition.

Initially plans were thwarted with reactions like "Oh f****!!" from leading white water canoeists and mountaineers alike, on hearing of the proposed K2-like ascents and still steeper descents! Trying to ignore them the plans progressed, but after much well meant advice were eventually scaled down somewhat to: crossing the longest stretch of glaciated terrain outside of the poles; mountaineering in one of the most isolated regions in the Himalayas; and descending only the mid/lower sections of the glacial melt rivers! An expedition team of six was formed, and training weekends were undertaken in Scotland, with many-a-game of frisbee whilst climbing in the spindrift blasted corries, and nights spent in dripping snow holes. Paddling-wise Hicksy is the demi-god of all rock splatting, drop boofing freestyle boaters, so hopefully his river magic would wear off on the rest of the team. Similarly Thacker's used to pulling many up a rock face, and coaching through those difficult 'disco leg' sessions which would be more at home in the Ministry.

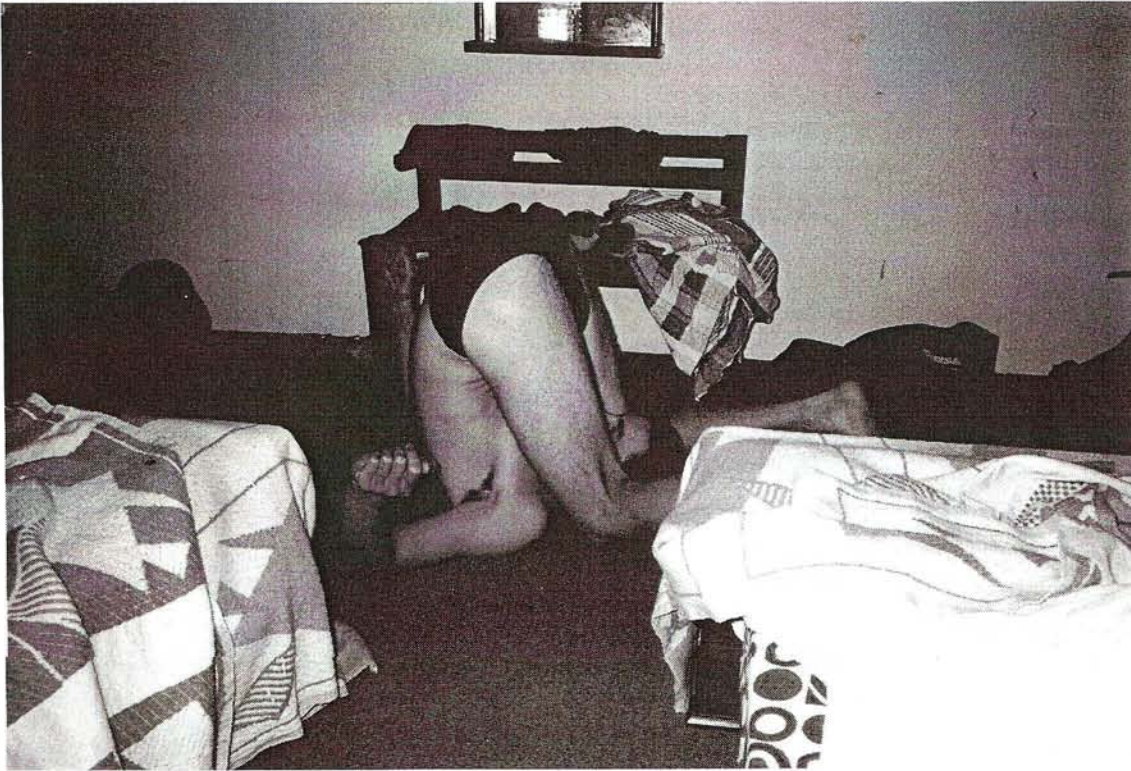
Meetings with the Young Explorers' Trust, Imperial College Exploration Board and the Dorset Expeditionary Society provided further encouragement, with comments like "planning of outstanding quality", "good to see such inspiring young leaders". Now all that was required was for everyone to come back alive!!

Then came sponsorship, with support from companies from all over the country.

Finally, after many months of planning "Frisbee '99" was born, and six young men were ejected from the comfortable placenta of college life kicking and screaming onto the mountains of Karakoram.

The following are extracts of their jottings and ramblings (alcohol induced and otherwise).

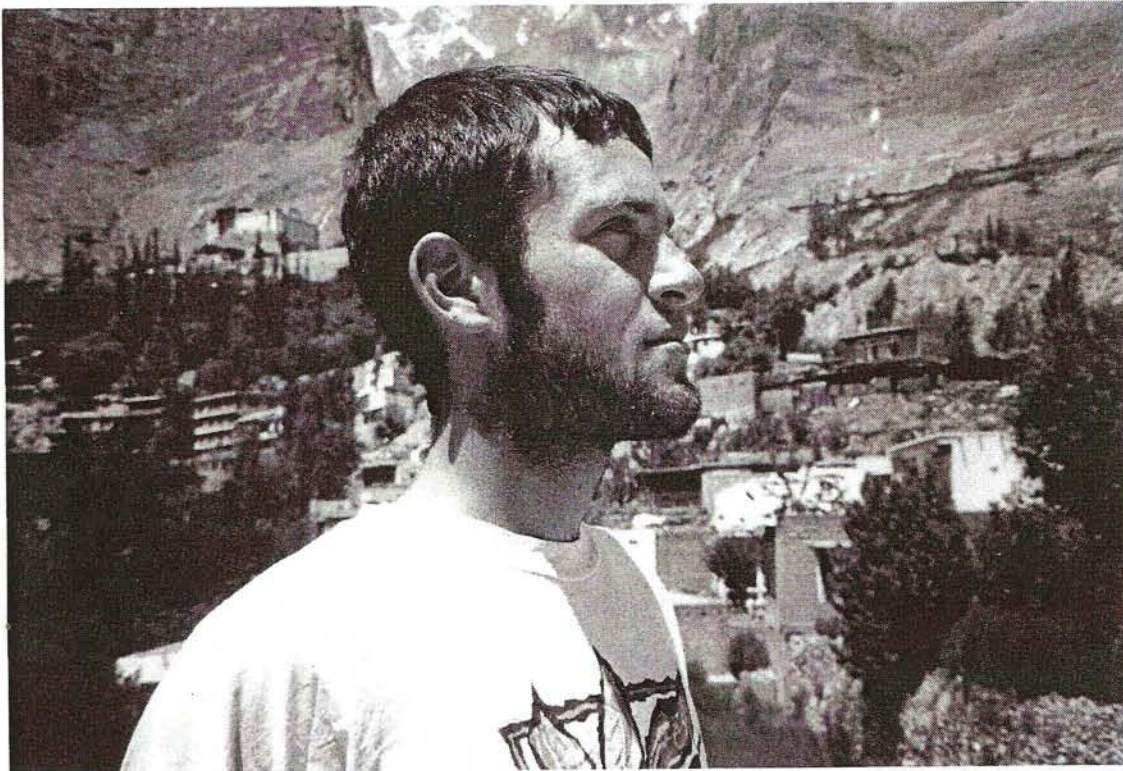
THE TEAM



Simon Hicks[y] (Co-Leader)

Hicksy was a stud!

... who organised and led the whole trip, with a little help from Nige!



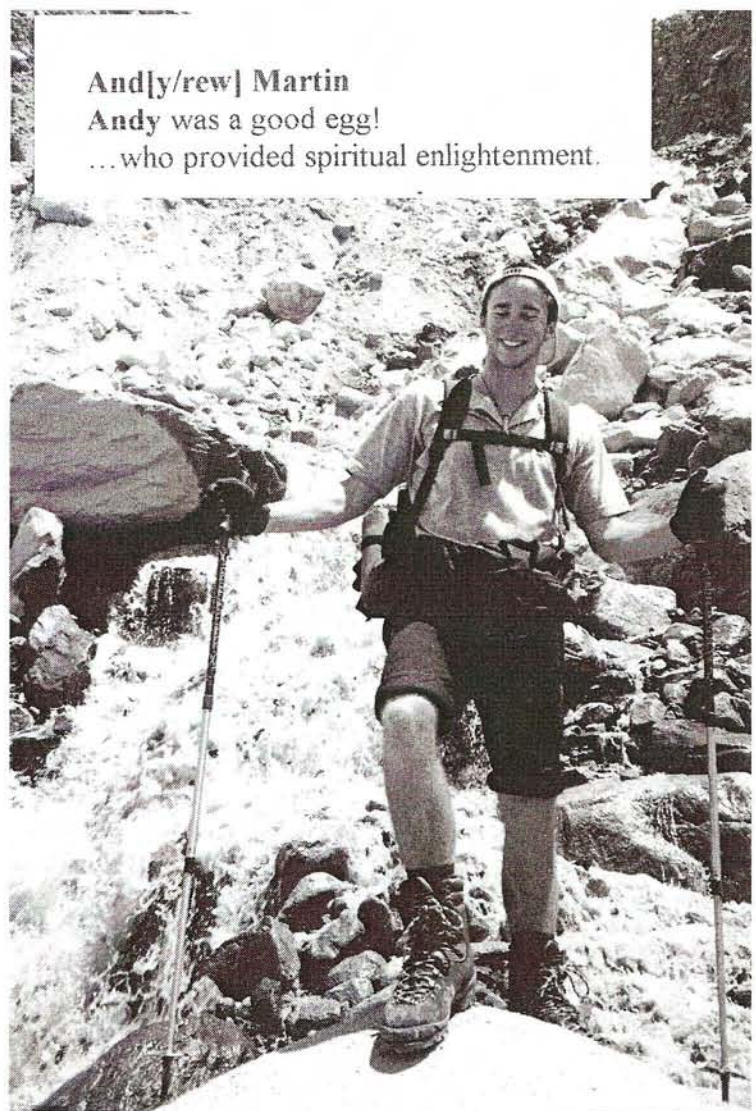
Nige[l] T[h/r]acker (Co-Leader)

Nige was a beard!

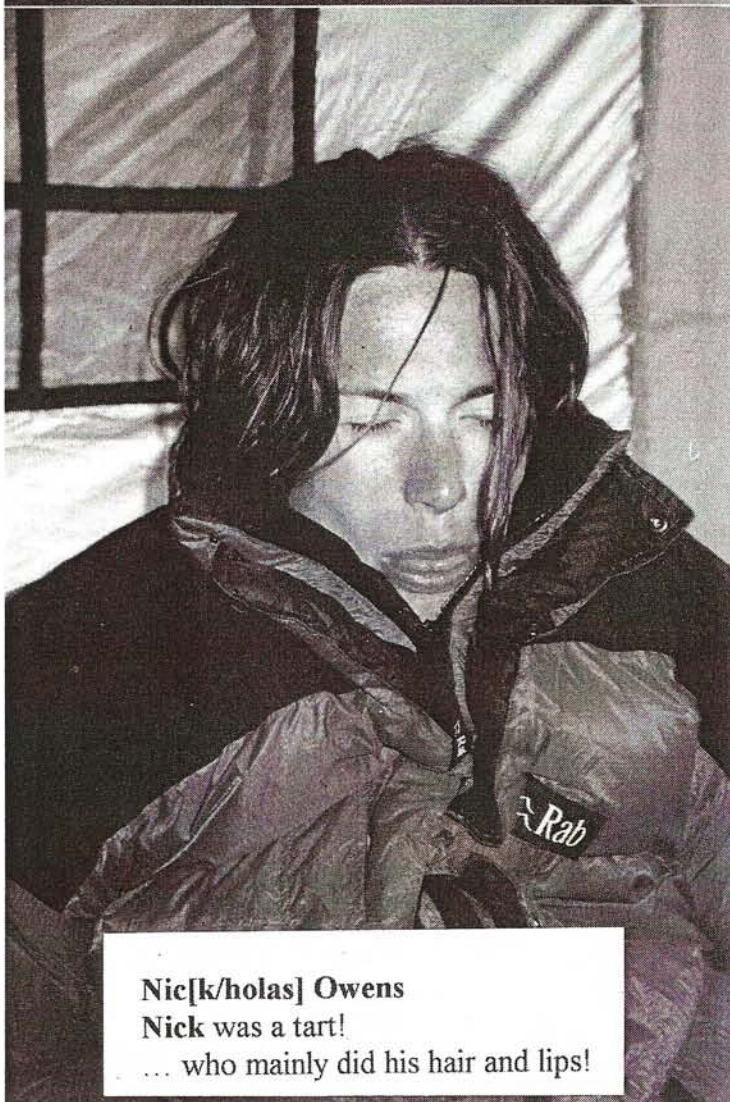
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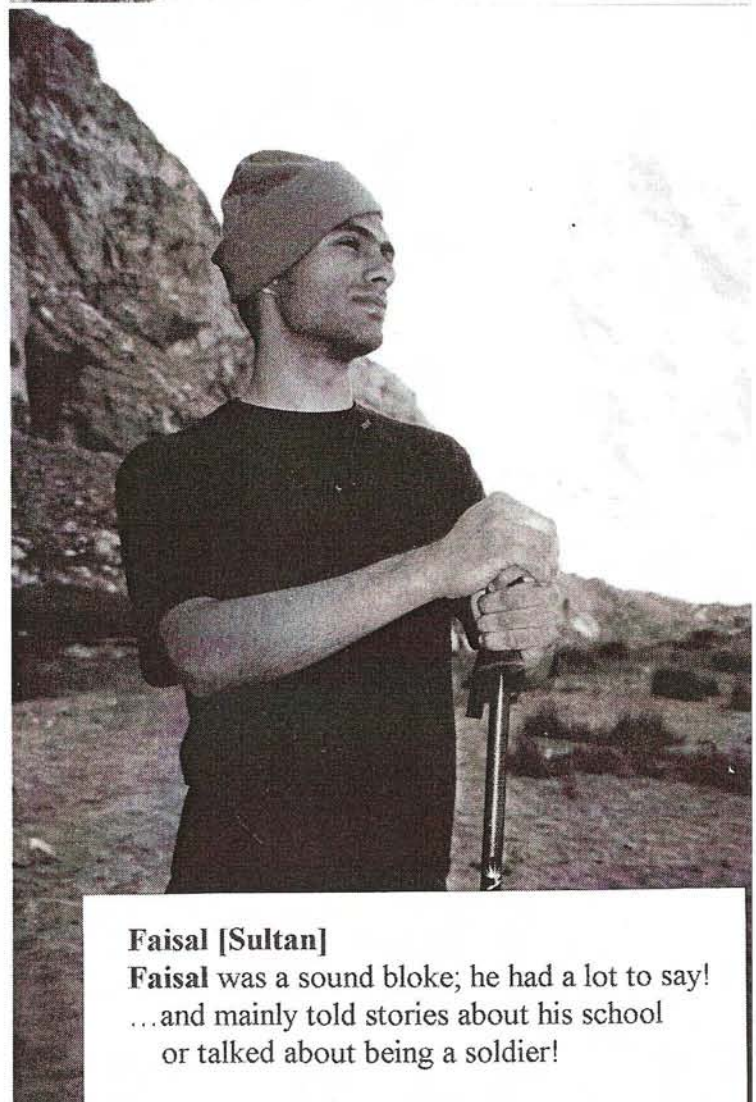
[James] Brooman
Brooman was enthusiastic!
...and he loved it!



And[y/rew] Martin
Andy was a good egg!
...who provided spiritual enlightenment.



Nic[k/holas] Owens
Nick was a tart!
... who mainly did his hair and lips!



Faisal [Sultan]
Faisal was a sound bloke; he had a lot to say!
...and mainly told stories about his school
or talked about being a soldier!

Itinerary 22 June – 29 July, 1999

TREKKING PHASE (22 June – 17 July)

Depart Gatwick UK	22 June
Arrive Islamabad (via Dubai)	23 June
Leave Skardu for trekking phase	26 June
Ascend Baintha Peak (5603m)	1 July
Ascend <i>Frisbee Brakk</i> (5825m)	3 July
Ascend Sim Kiang Peak and Crevasse exploration	6 July
Pass the Hispar La	7 July
Trek down Hispar Glacier, arriving at Huro	14 July
Karimabad rest stage	15 July
Gilgit transit stage	16 July
Road travel to Skardu	17 July
<i>Faisal returns to climb in Spain!</i>	<i>16 July</i>

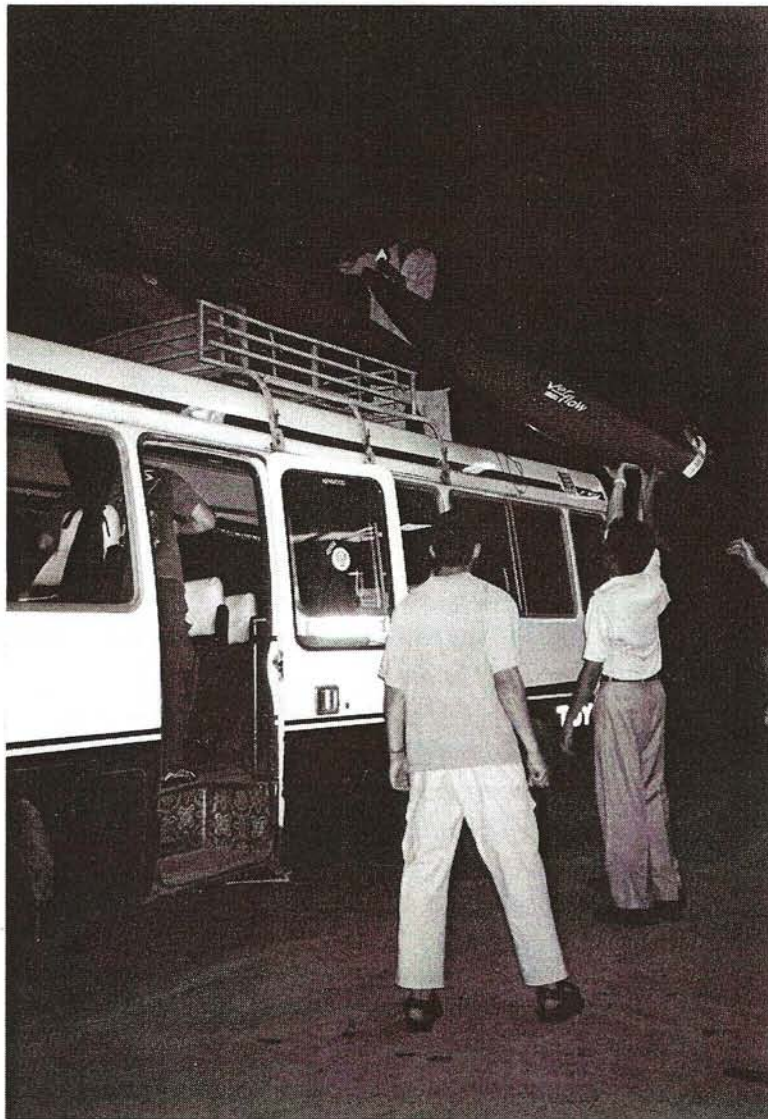
KAYAKING PHASE (18 July – 27 July)

Depart Skardu on jeep drive to Khapalu	18 July
Exploratory kayaking on the Syhok and Hushe	19 July – 22 July
Return to Skardu	25 July
Flight to Islamabad	27 July
Chill down time in Islamabad	28 July
Expedition Party	29 July

RETURN TO U.K.

Nige and Andy	30 July
Hicksy, Nick and James	11 August
... after some 'independent travelling'	

Our departure was overshadowed a little by the ominous India-Pakistan situation dominating the world news for the latter part of June. The dispute over Kashmir had once again arisen, and neither side looked willing to back down on this largely political trophy. And so, against this fragile political backdrop, our team departed from London towards the largely unknown, on our six-week adventure.



Weary travellers pile canoes onto the bus early in the morning at Islamabad airport

Tuesday 22 June; Nearing Islamabad arrival on the plane it hit me how much faith we had placed in Baltistan Tours, our agents. Should they not be at the airport the expedition would be severely set back. Having handed over one thousand pounds cash in a pub in Reading six months earlier I hoped they would be there, and of course they were; quite a relief. Since then Baltistan Tours have proven outstanding.

Wednesday 23 June; We had to decide whether to drive or fly to Skardu. The plane was delayed, so drive it was, and at 2pm a non-AC minibus turned up. It was extremely hot – noise, pollution – the bus was going to be fun! The drive from Islamabad to Skardu was quite incredible; twenty-five hours along the Karakoram Highway. After a few hours we progressed to the foothills, and it felt like the adventure had really begun. With the Indus' white torrent raging about 600m below, the drops were sheer and one driver did the whole lot, not faltering once on the many blind overtaking manoeuvres; he then slept for forty-eight hours!

Looking good near the start of our forty eight hour marathon



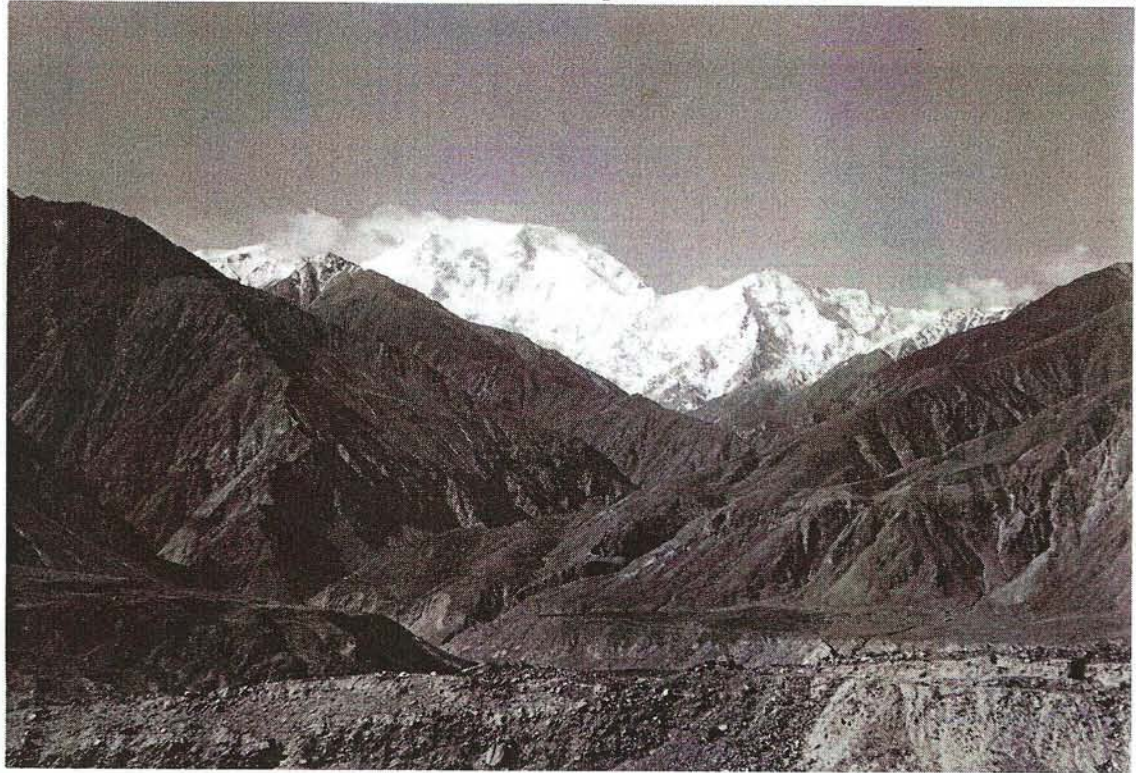
Thursday 24 June; Time for dawn, and still we are on the bus, following the Indus, with no snow yet visible. All the mountains are bare rock and scree – no vegetation. At Nanga Parbat, 8125m. some grass, great views. More hours, military bridges, and we arrive at the K2 Motel, Skardu, a lovely and very relaxing place, with fantastic views of the river, the mountains and Skardu fort. Evening meal, relax in the gardens before retiring for the night. The plan is to stay here for another night to acclimatise. Skardu is 2300m above sea level.

Friday 25 June; We went up to Lake Satpara. The water was very cold and Nick came close to drowning after an extended swim to fetch the frisbee- still, he did well and we got him back.. He really was very seriously cold and collapsed on the bank for some time.

“Watch out for 'horse play' on the first 5 days”, were Nigel's words of wisdom at the start of the expedition. Its day 3 and we're all chilling out in Skardu, waiting to leave for the trek the next day. We decided to take a trip up to a nearby lake that is used as the water supply to the town. We find a sheltered spot so as not to offend anyone, whip our T-shirts off, and one at a time dive in. I'm the first in, and also the first out. Its bloody freezing!! The cold engulfs your whole body, and you feel it quickly starting to become unpleasant. James amuses us all with his effeminate scream as he enters the water, and then exits, complaining of painfully cold ankles. We'd brought the frisbee with us, and some clever person decides that a game of fetch is in order. The frisbee is thrown out onto the water and someone else then has to go in and fetch it. The first couple of throws are pretty tame, and then my go comes along. Andy, with the look of the devil in his eye, turns his shoulder and fires the frisbee out towards the centre of the lake. Not wishing to disappoint the group, I loosen up and take the plunge.

The swim out to the frisbee wasn't too bad. I could feel the cold slowly creep towards the centre of my body, but it was just about bearable. Once I reached the frisbee and turned around the situation started to change a bit though. A frisbee is not the easiest thing to swim with, especially when you're in a hurry to get out. You can only manage about half your usual pace at best. I tried several techniques, from throwing it a few metres ahead and then catching it up, to holding it in my teeth and swimming on my back. By the time I was half way back the cold was really starting to bite into me. My head felt like it was being crushed, and it was a real effort to breathe. I could hear the others cheering me on from the bank. I had to get out of the water, I was starting to feel desperate as my energy was being drained and the cold seemed to engulf my whole body. I've never felt so cold in my life! I knew things were starting to get serious when the cold began to subside and a warm relaxed feeling began to creep over me. Luckily by now I had just reached the edge and I just managed to haul myself out, frisbee in hand, and collapse onto a rock. It took me a good hour to return to normal temperature, and I began wheezing at one point as well. There was no more frisbee fetching after that! A good team bonding exercise though!”

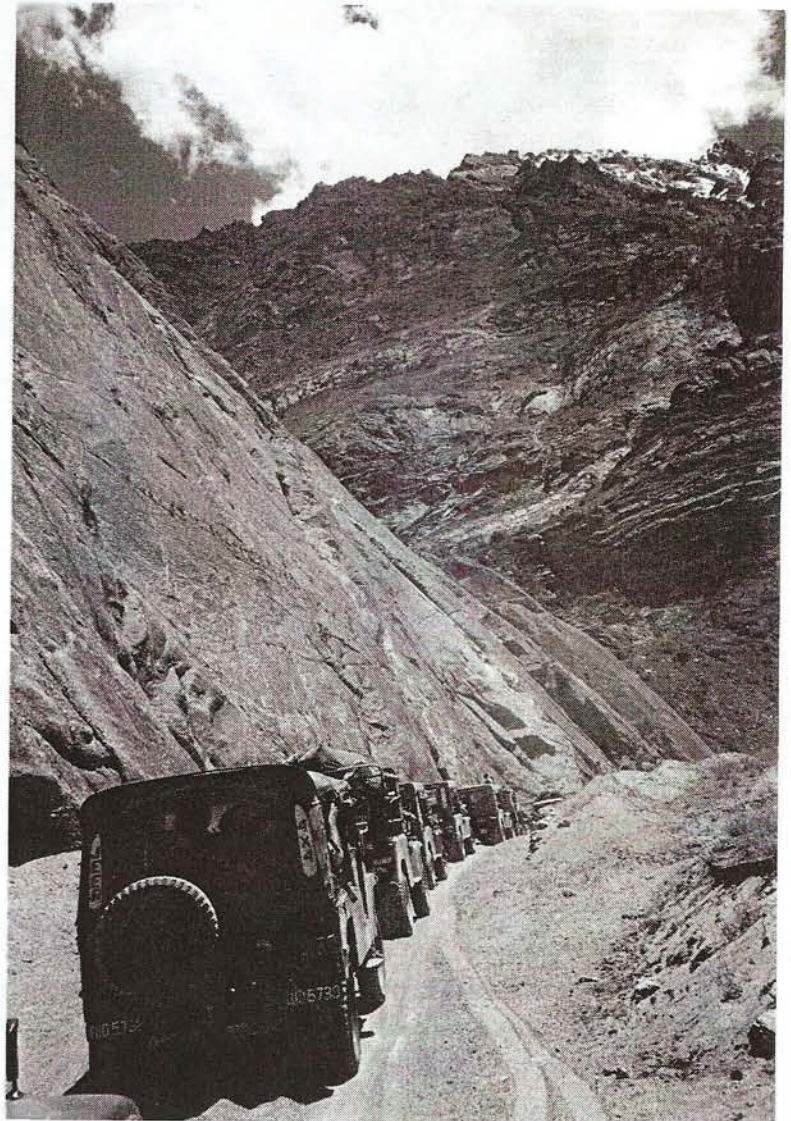
Nanga Parbatt at over 8000 meters made a spectacular welcome to the Karakorams



Saturday 26 June; We burst on the scene at 5am, and after breakfast two jeeps took us up to Askole. One jeep suffered two blown tyres in a row, but whilst waiting we met a team on their way to climb K2. At the top of the valley near Askole the river Shigar is quite amazing – never before had we seen water that turbulent and fast. Arriving at Askole we climbed a hill to a shady lush campsite. I think the others were a little disappointed with the luxury - stools, tables, frame tents - but I was sure we'd all be appreciating it soon! After crackers and pate, even primula cheese! We explored the mountainside, almost losing the holy frisbee!

“Rock Fall. Passing the afternoon I went for a little scramble up the face behind camp. Following a corrie up about 400m I sat on a rock to chill. The descent was more interesting with a few sliding rocks. Still, I went on. Then, vwwm!! A large rock flew past my head. Suddenly lots were falling and I sheltered under a large boulder. Then, like a guerrilla sniper I got out from my rock and ran to the next one. Quite a scary moment.”

Later the frisbee was ‘reward marked’ to encourage its return if ever - god forsake - it was lost. Sleep – camping out under the stars – Sleep – camping out under the stars was a great feeling.

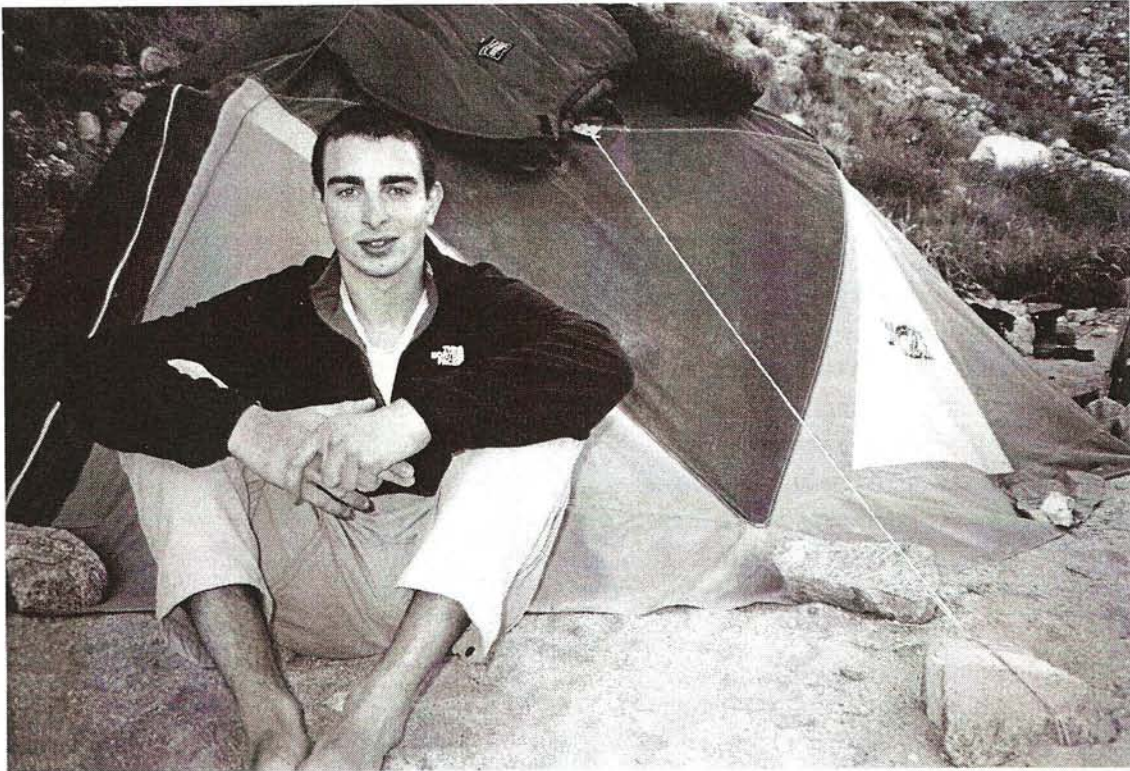


Traffic jams in the Karakorams!

Sunday 27 June -trek day one (Askole - Namla); Up at five, as will be the norm from now, we began the trek at six-thirty. A fairly relaxed start saw us meandering along a flat path through the valley towards the Biafo Glacier. Mumma-Hussain, one of the prominent porters, led us along the trail. The pace was pleasant and the weather cool (but it was six thirty!) Later we stopped for lunch under a rock and began chomping our peanuts and chocolate bar, assuming this to be lunch. We were most surprised when our cook turned up with a barrel that he emptied for lunch; biscuits, pate, cheese. They were really going to look after us!

The afternoon was more demanding as we moved down onto the glacier. Lonely Planet's "chaotic and debris covered" description proved very apt. Nick took one nasty fall but was OK.

The terrain continued to be large icy blocks covered with a thin layer of shale and many boulders as we picked our way through to the campsite.

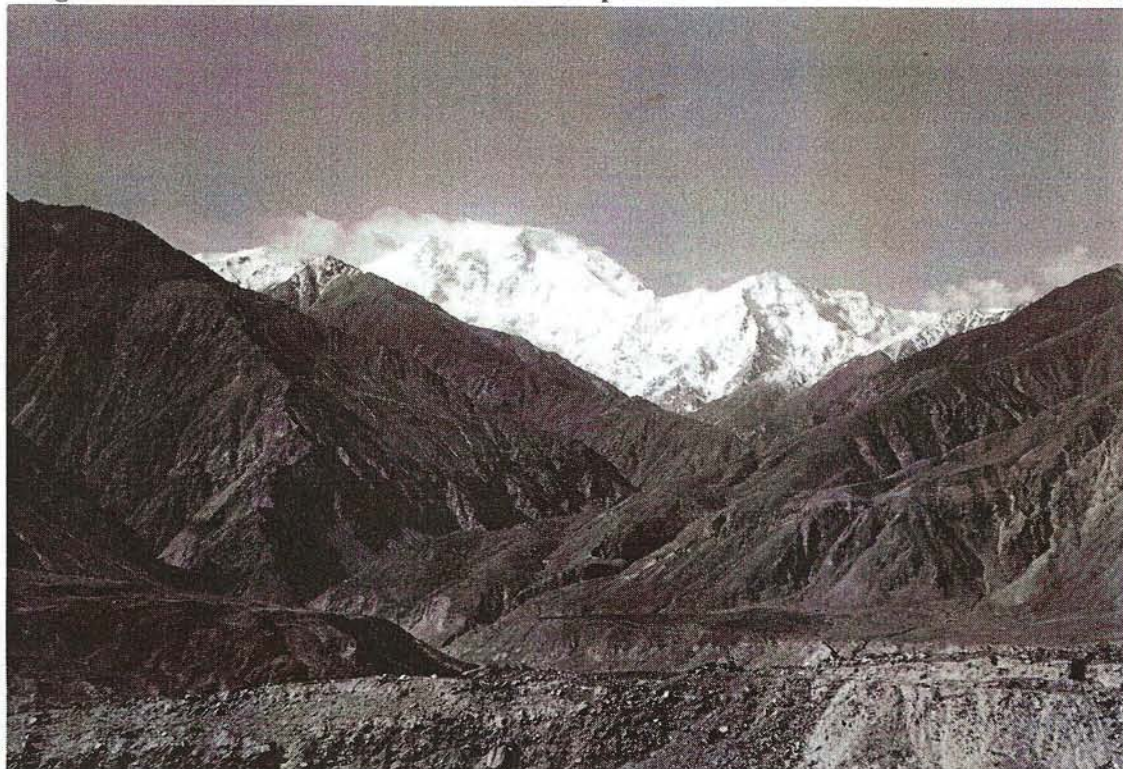


Hicksy contemplating at Namla, our first camp

The team had trekked well today and the transition from complaints about frequent stops, to tiring legs was quite interesting! The site was positioned just off the glacier and we enjoyed relaxing there as we listened to numerous rock falls and creaking ice. The Karakorams are certainly a very dynamic range!

Monday 28 June - Trek day 2 (Namla - Mango); A slightly later start led us straight back onto the chaos of the glacier. At this point crevasses were everywhere and we often balanced precariously along icy ridges, wary of falling on either side. The terrain continued like this throughout the day with many exciting jumps and a few slides from James, mostly.

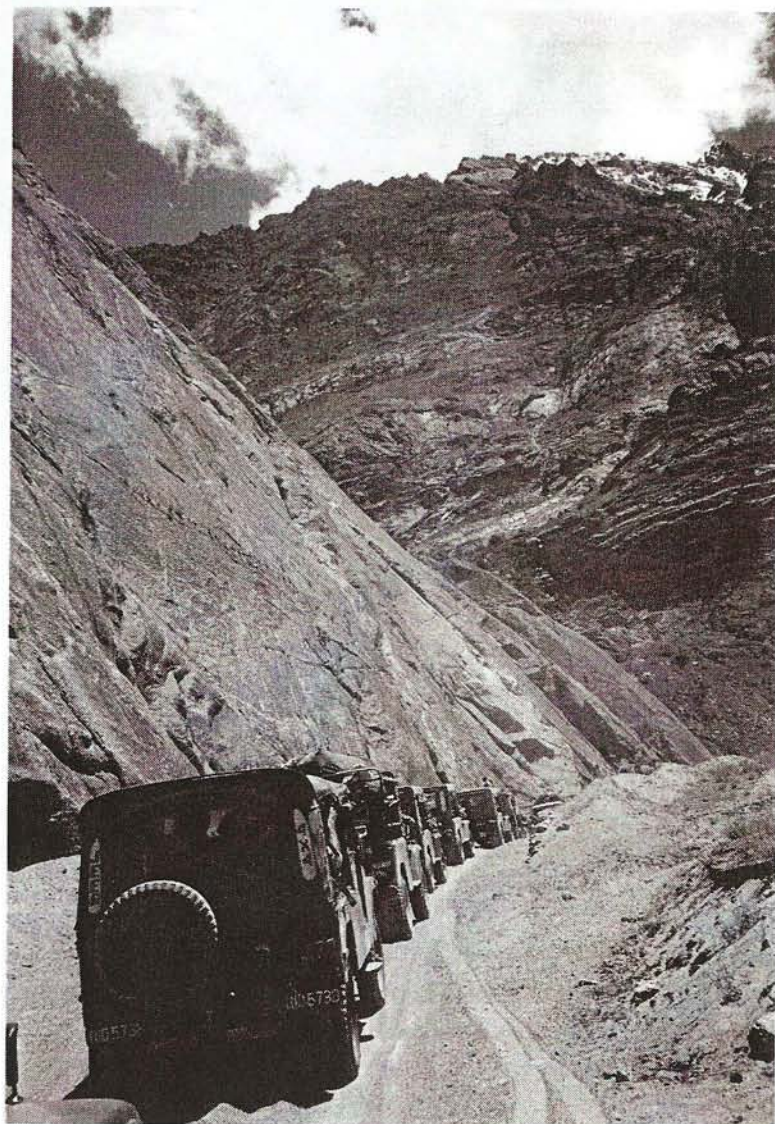
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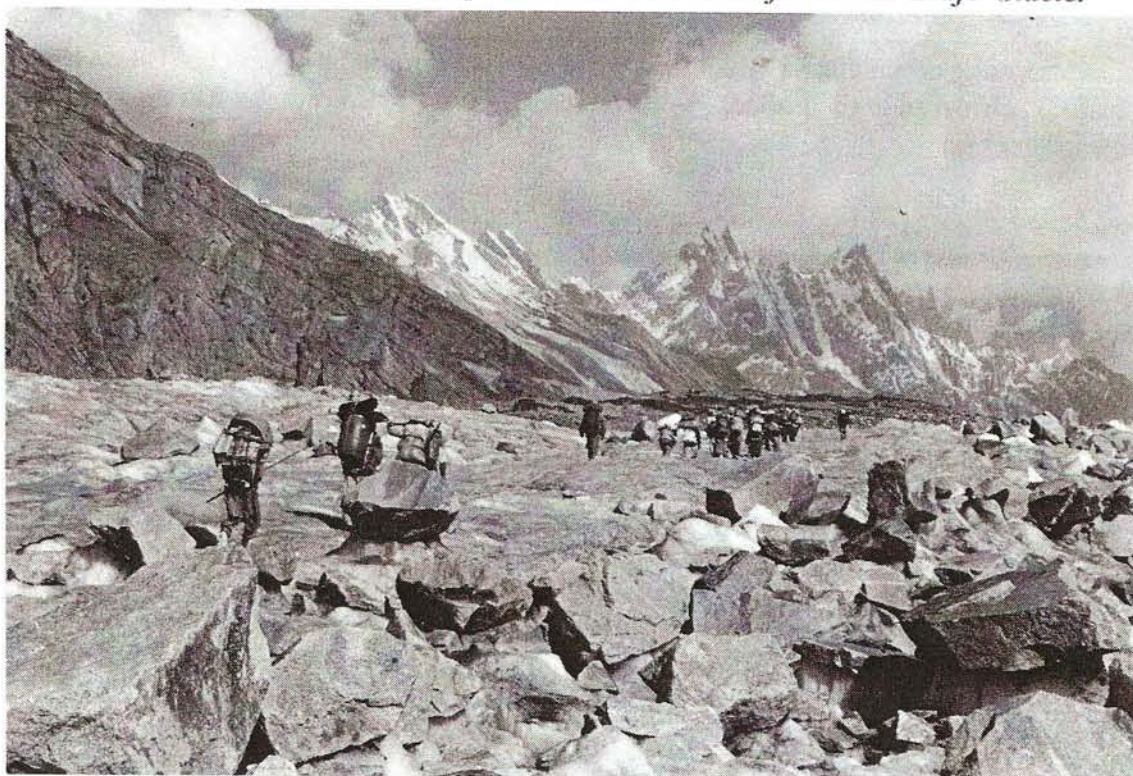
“Rock Fall. Passing the afternoon I went for a little scramble up the face behind camp. Following a corrie up about 400m I sat on a rock to chill. The descent was more interesting with a few sliding rocks. Still, I went on. Then, vwwm!! A large rock flew past my head. Suddenly lots were falling and I sheltered under a large boulder. Then, like a guerrilla sniper I got out from my rock and ran to the next one. Quite a scary moment.”

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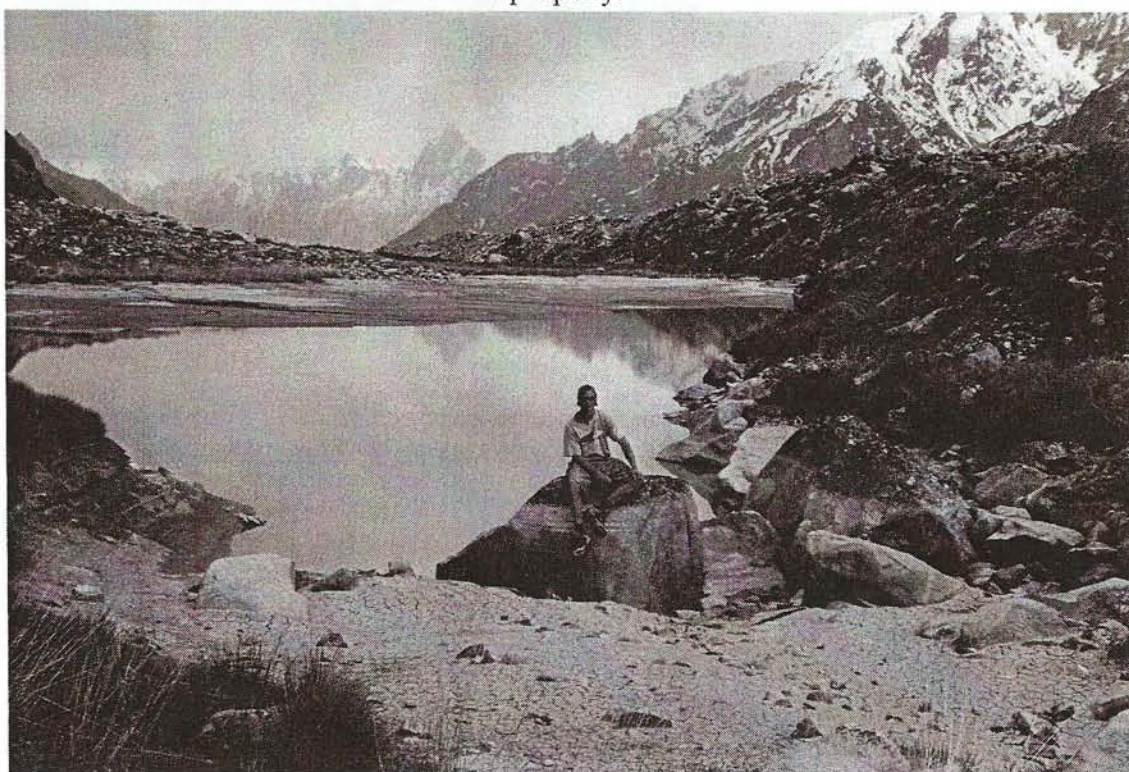
Our Porter Herd crossing chaotic terrain as we joined the Biafo Glacier



The porters seemed like animals today, drifting along nonchalantly like cattle grazing. In the evenings they would sit around chatting before curling up and sleeping in the open.

This was not a derogatory observation, more a comment on the simple way of life. The terrain we had crossed was so chaotic we were all pleased to arrive at camp and spent some time washing clothes and bodies in the icy waterfall of Mango. Tomorrow would be a glacial day- much easier.

Tuesday 29 June - trek day 3 (Mango - Baintha); Another days trek across the glacier took us along a winding hillside path towards Baintha. After half an hour of crossing the chaotic and difficult moraine ridge, we walked up the glacier on the ice section – white ice with deep crevasses. Following a goat track up the mountain we arrived at Baintha camp, an oasis of green, with even a small lake at the end of the campsite. Later we swam in the lake- nice to wash bodies properly.



The tranquil lake we chose to wash in. Bloody freezing!

A ridge marked the edge of the glacier which when you climbed up, the observer could see a river of ice which was biao glacier. And in the horizon, towering rocky peaks, famous in the Karakoram, sat there sneering with a silent grin.

That evening before dinner the whole team happened to be sitting on the ridge. We all sat on our own contemplating various issues in our own minds and being hypnotised by Mother Nature and her sunset. Sitting on a rock, which allowed me to take in the sunset that illuminated the glacier, I began to think of our team and how we would cope over the next few days. Having been in similar situations before I knew that it was an individual's personality and character that gave strength to a team and helped to bond it together. To the right of me were Nick, Andy and James and to the immediate left was Nigel. All were lost in their own thoughts and kept quiet. However Simon, who was further down the ridge making sure he wouldn't disturb us, was shouting the phrases 'yeah baby' and 'c'mon'. With a Walkman in his ears and listening to the wicked sounds of trance nation, Simon was moving and grooving to the rhythm and the beats of the happy hardcore sound. In bare feet and a huge smile, he was definitely taking in Mother Nature in his own unique way.

The thought suddenly occurred to me, this would be a cool place for a rave.



Hicksy giving it some out in the Karakoram range

Wednesday 30 June - trek day 4 (Baintha rest 1); Well, the first week has passed and things are going well.

Today, our "rest day", we (Nige and James) headed up the gully behind camp. The distance was extremely deceptive, as were all distances, and the altitude was really kicking in. Three hours later we made the snowline although had to descend before the ridge to be back for lunch.

My first taste of Glissading was much enjoyed and accompanied by a few squeals of excitement (?) from James. We eventually hit camp having descended perhaps 1000m. (Baintha camp, 4300m). Not a particularly restful rest day!



Billy getting ready for dinner.

A delightful main course consisted of the liver from our deceased trekking partner Billy, washed down by a delightful desert of rhubarb crumble and mango custard!

Thursday 1 July - trek day 5 (Baintha peak); The most challenging day so far, and the day we learnt most about the Team.

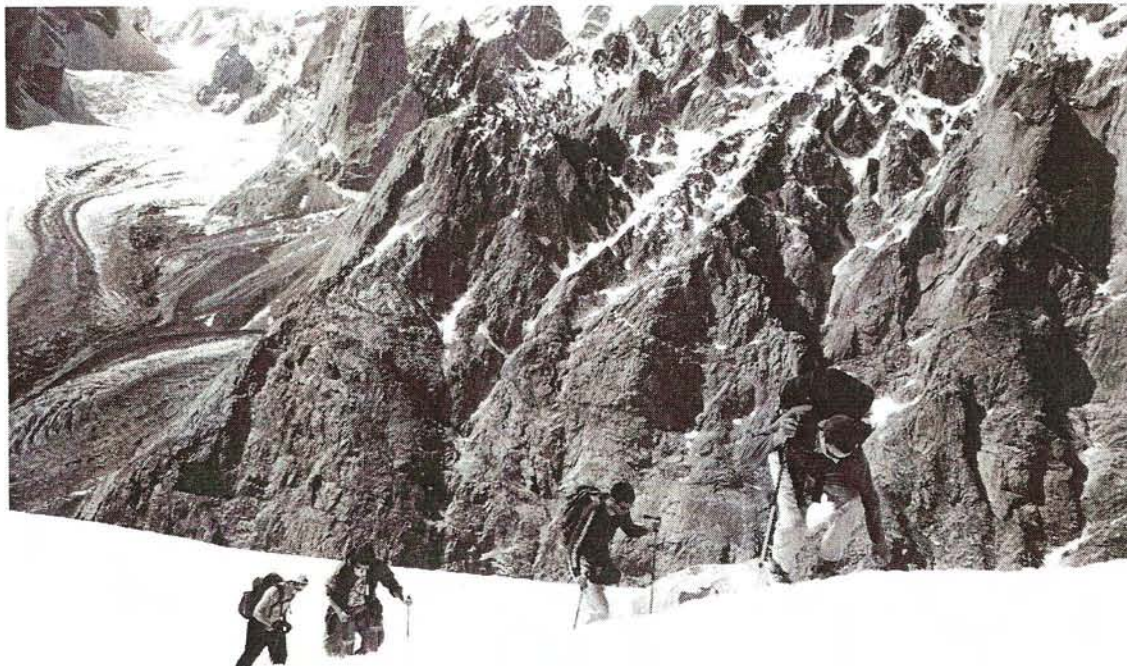
A later-than-planned start saw us trekking along towards Baintha base-camp. The path contoured round the ridge, being hard to follow in places. Eventually we arrived at base camp.



The team look ominously up towards to summit of Baintha Peak

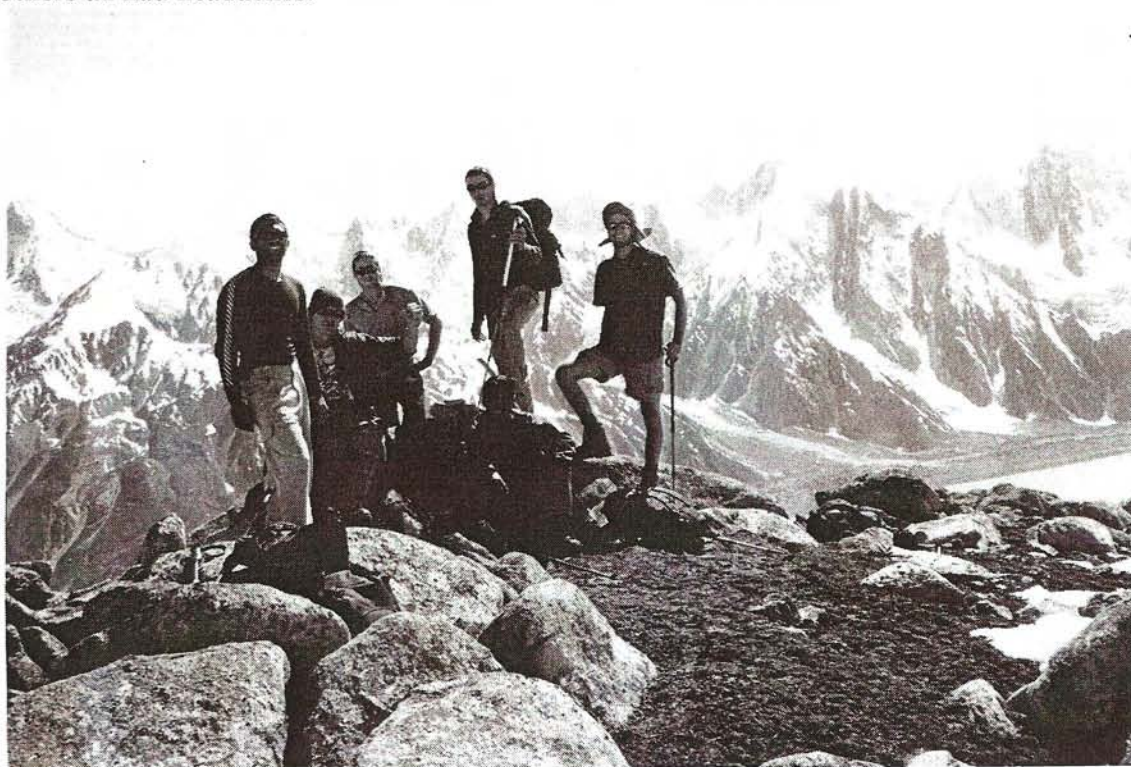
We met three Germans planning to launch their assault on the Ogre- it would be the second successful attempt since Bonnington and Scott's epic over twenty years ago. Very friendly blokes.

Our ascent followed a steep snow splattered valley where we finally reached the first summit. James had been swaying, silent, not drinking, and cold so it was decided that he should wait at 'summit 1' whilst we headed up.



The final slog up Baintha Peak

The final slog was hard up very unstable boulder zones but the view well worth it. At 5603m we had a tremendous view across the Karakoram and the Biafo glacier. Mehdi was feeling bad - ill and not eating, and the others all had headaches.



The team happy to make their first peak, sadly without Brooman.

Saturday 3 July – Baintha trek day 7 (first epic!);

We woke to our first bit of bad weather – it was overcast, with the threat of rain.

After a very relaxed start and a game of *apooos* with the porters (an alternative to cricket where one hits a small stick, not a ball) James and Simon set off up the ridge out the back of camp. Andy and Hicksy had started it a few days earlier and seeing the top (well, a top) they reckoned five hours to summit. “We’ll be back by five p.m.” we said.



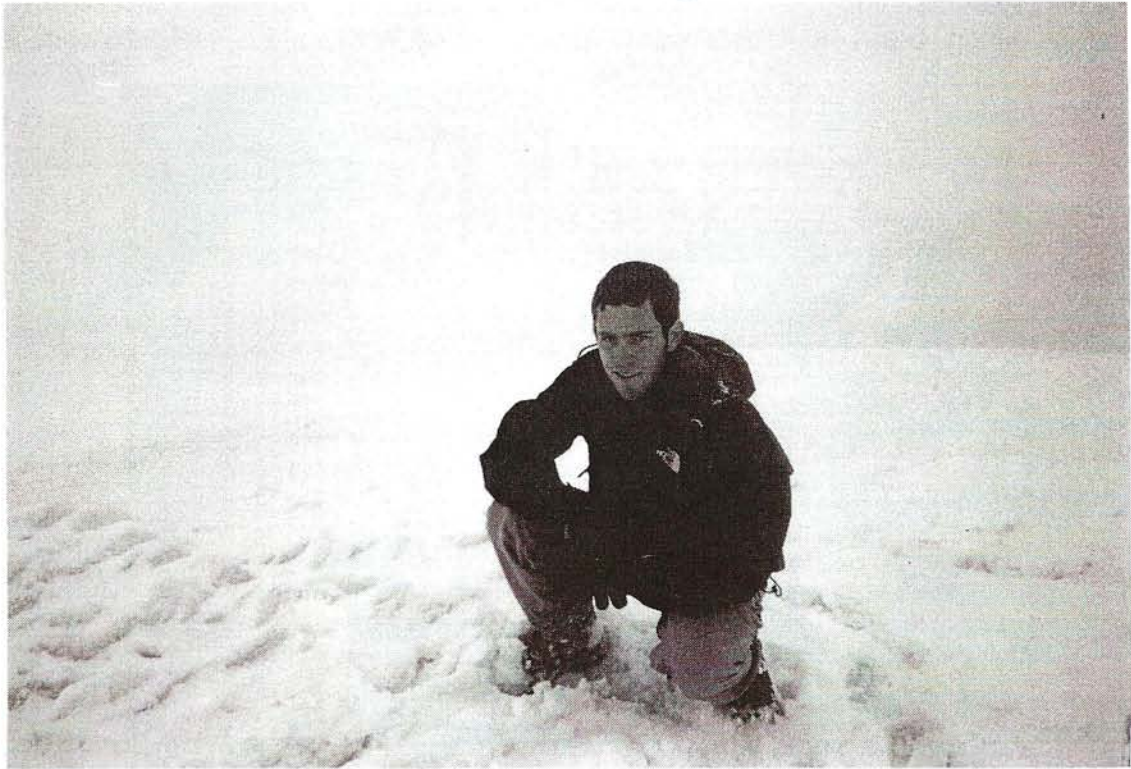
Apoos being played by the porters.

There was a lot of low cloud as we started up the rock-climb scramble along the ridge, of concern as the cloud might close in. We gained height very quickly, as we went up the ridge, stopping before it got serious to don extra clothing. The ridge became more serious now as we progressed and visibility varied between 50 and 100metres, occasionally but briefly clearing to the valley below to our right - very useful for later. When I once commented that “It gets pretty hard-core up here” James explained how it scared the crap out of him

Under heavy snow and low visibility, near the summit we found a very dangerous corrie. It was steep - perhaps thirty-five degrees - and covered with very hard neve, sprinkled with fresh snow. I could not kick steps in it and so we crossed, trek poles in hand, by balancing precariously and hoping we would not fall. Fortunately we didn’t and following a short yet exposed and difficult rock section we followed a snow ridge to what we believed to be the summit. We were pleased to find by exploring around (visibility was that bad) that it was the top.

Although I find this hard to believe, Mehdi believes the peak, at 5825m (not far off Cotopaxi, 5897m) had never been climbed making it quite monumental as we stepped onto the top. No one had ever before been up here, and here we were on untouched world. This was supported by the absence of ‘cairns’ or stone towers normally built to prove ascents – we now built one.

Thacker on top of the world. Well, his little world anyway! ("Frisbee Brakk" 5825m.)



The descent was now upon us. The weather was bad, we were pushing for daylight and were pretty exhausted, calling for a very difficult yet critical decision.

In the poor weather it was impossible to drop off the ridge to the North as had been initially planned as we could see no feasible descent route. This left two options. Either we could follow the ridge back down; a laboriously slow and dangerous feat, and doubtful whether we would reach the bottom by dusk. Alternatively we could drop off the ridge to the South following a new and unexplored valley out to the Glacier. Whilst offering better protection from weather, and faster descent the valley could easily close to a steep gully forcing us back up, and the snow was formidable neve. Of course we would also have to find a route down into the valley.

The descent route was difficult and in parts dangerous as we crossed steep neve, poles in hand to arrest should we need them! Our descent was rapid yet very long, with the glacial floor never in sight when our valley suddenly closed to a steep waterfall and descent was impossible without ropes. We had to head back up the floor, and then skirt around the valley at our first chance. This involved a steep climb. Following the contour was easy and rewarding as the sun came through the clouds, letting us see the glacial floor - still some way below.

Then camp came into view and the remaining descent was easy, helped by Nick's directions shouted from camp as he guided us through exposed rock faces below us. Walking into camp felt good as Andy and Faisal took photos. It was good to see everyone again!

Sunday 4 July - Trek day 8 (Baintha - Napina); We were unable to begin trekking 'till 9 as Mehdi was unsure about the weather. We crossed the moraine and trekked up the white ice, making good time, though there were many deep crevasses and even a large river running along the ice before disappearing into the depths of the glacier. Soon the clouds closed again and snow blew in. Two hours later we arrived at Napina. The campsite, directly below the 1500m Napina Tower, is a sandy river delta, with no vegetation.



A rest stop during the day's trek

The porters were quite amazing. They carry huge loads up to 35kg with the most basic of back systems; some have barrels simply strapped on with rope. A lot of respect goes to these people!

Monday 5 July - Trek day 9 (Napina - Sim Kiang); Day nine today, and this Trekking thing is beginning to lose its novelty. Still amazing and quite spectacular to be so isolated - today we saw two climbers; only the fifth people we have seen since leaving Askole nine days ago.

Today's trek was very similar to yesterdays without the adverse weather; one hour onto the glacier, four hours along it, and then a thirty-minute scramble to our camp.

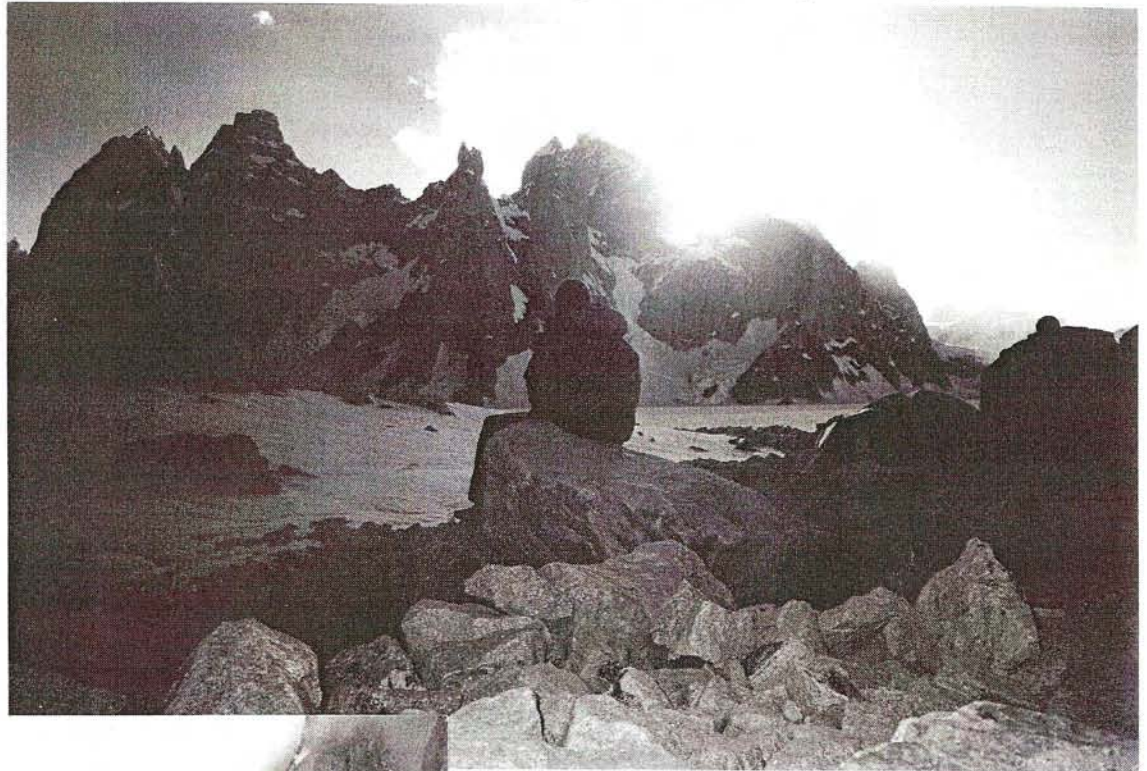


Poor trekking conditions at high altitude.

The views today were spectacular, surpassing anything we had seen before. Looking back down we saw the Biafo stretching away, technical towering peaks on both sides. The camp was spectacular; perched on the edge of the glacier's side. Our camp 'pitch' was amazing; a ledge hacked on the moraine ridge with views over the glacier. We spent the afternoon chilling out, sunbathing and listening to music.

Mehdi was keen to move on over the 'La' tomorrow, as the weather was not looking too stable. Our rest day for Snow Lake would have to be abandoned. It would have been foolish not to, so we planned to leave at 3am if the weather was good. The evening was spent discussing God, Christianity and Religion.

*Solitary thoughts
about Christianity
and Religion.*



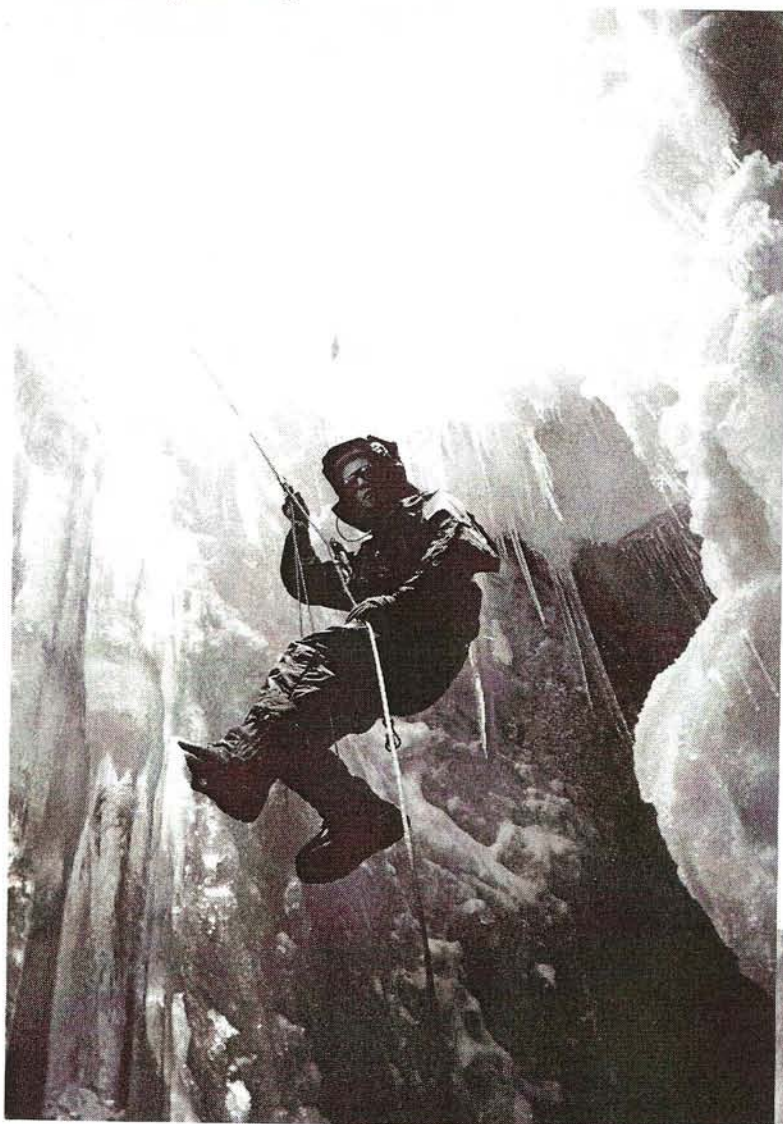
Tuesday 6 July - Trek day 10 and Hicky almost dies; We had all gone to sleep early on 'alert' for the possible 3am start up to the "La", should weather permit, but we awoke to heavy snowfall, so the departure was delayed by a day allowing us to sleep in 'till 7:30- a real luxury.

"So, Faisal, Hicky and me set off to explore some crevasses. I led the way feeling like a mine clearer as I moved out, roped to the others.

On finding a suitable crevasse we set up three solid anchor points and Hicky abbed in- an exciting moment as he sliced through the lip, falling all over the place. Soon enough he was at the bottom and I followed down to the beautiful platform he had found.

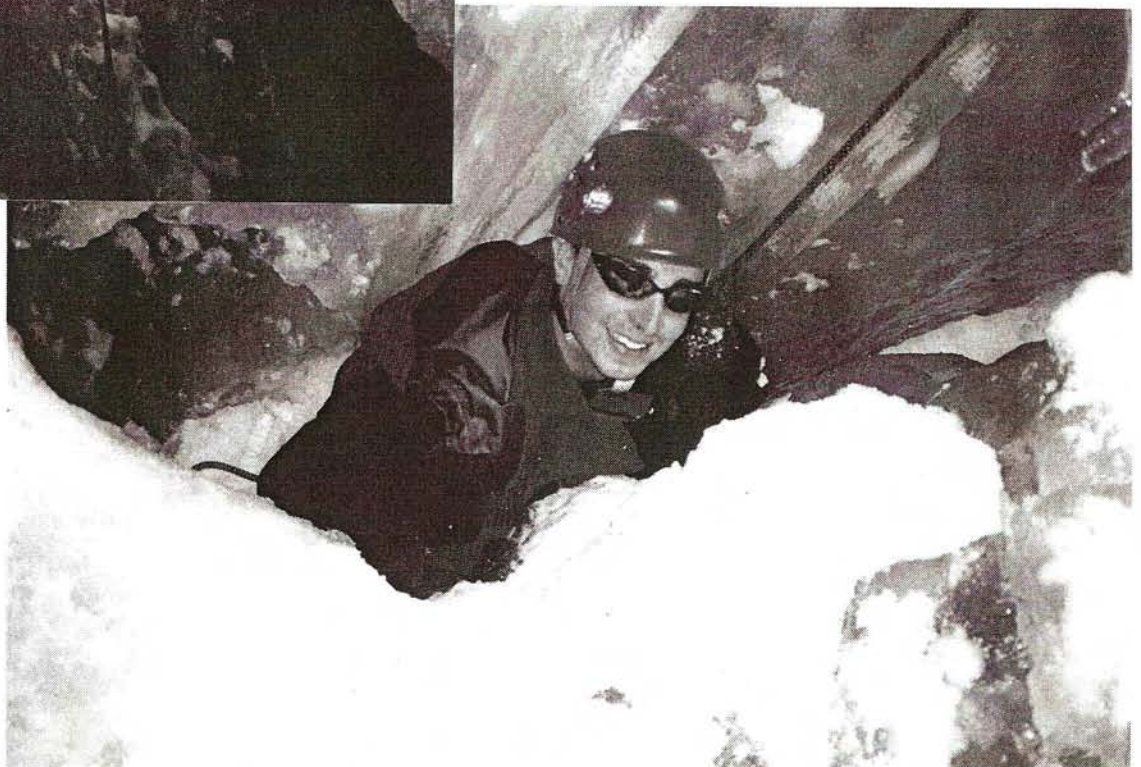
Geared up and ready to descend.

Thacker following on down.



*Here we made 'base' leaving mitts, axes, and goggles to explore short distances down various chutes. Hicksy was keen to go down a very narrow vertical hole into a possible cavern, but I couldn't see him getting out. Still he tried, giving up only when his chest would fit no further. So, crevasse explored I prussicked back out the twenty-or-so metres to the top where I scrambled over to join Faisal. Just then, a very large chunk of heavily compressed ice fell from the lip to where Hicksy and I had been only minutes earlier. Frantically Faisal and I called down to Hicksy for a response; it shortly came in the somewhat worrying and delayed form of "Oh F**k!"*

Faisal and I were concerned about Hicksy who quickly ascended the rope and given a skewed helmet and mild, yet worrying headache was fine, so we tried to pull up the rope; Hicksy assuring us it was coiled on the shelf in the bottom. It clearly wasn't so I had to go down and free it.



Hicksy beaming after a scary experience.

I found the rope buried under a 2 x 1 x 1m block of ice that must have clearly only grazed Hicksy's helmet; direct impact would surely have killed him. Miraculously it had fallen where we had both been sanding only moments earlier. A very close miss!

I worked quickly to free the trapped rope, worried about the overhanging ice above. The rope was soon freed, up I came, and back we headed to tea and biscuits."

Meanwhile Nick, Andy and James climbed the adjacent mountainside to a saddle below the summit. The ascent took over five hours, glissading down just 17 minutes!!

Andy leading the way up Sim Kiang Peak



Wednesday 7 July - trek day 11; Sim Kiang - Hispar La; Today's trek was the most enjoyable so far. Leaving at 4am, having closed camp, the start was bitterly cold, and we soon roped up to cross the Biafo Glacier. The team did this most efficiently. Seeing the sun rise and light up the mountains from the top down is a fantastic sight.

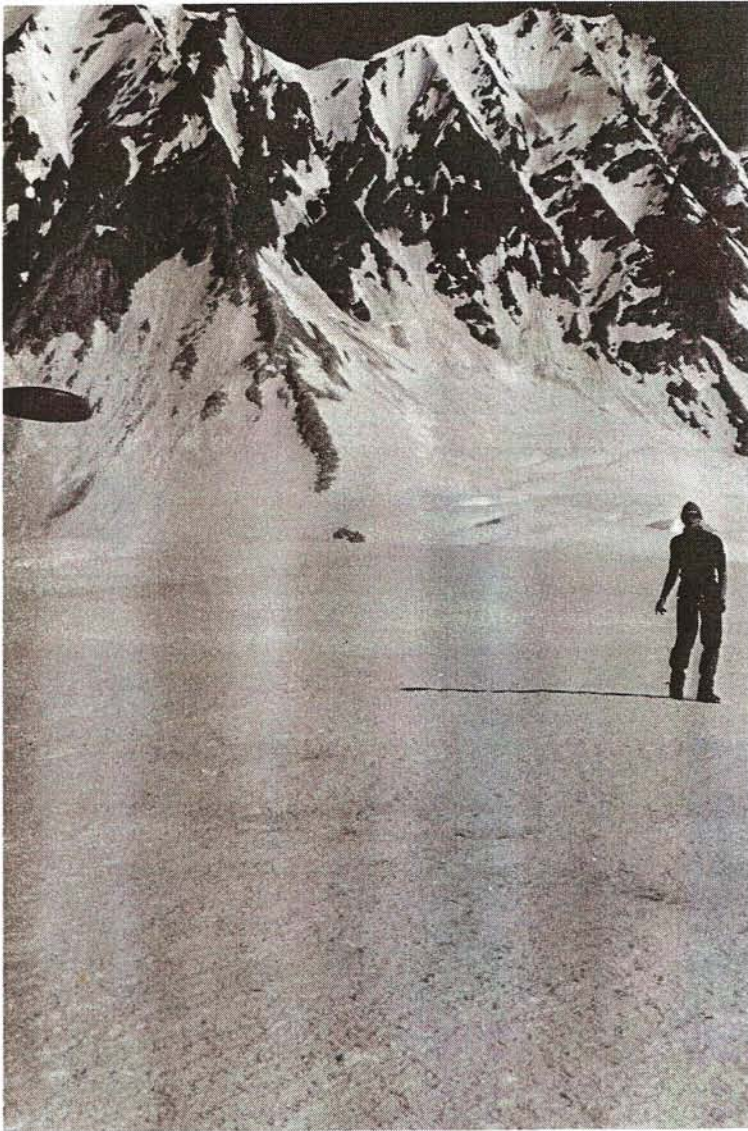


Early in our approach to the Hispa pass

Having crossed the glacier, and seeing our second encampment as Snow Lake, we began to ascend the "La" and could hear the distant rumbles of unseen avalanches.

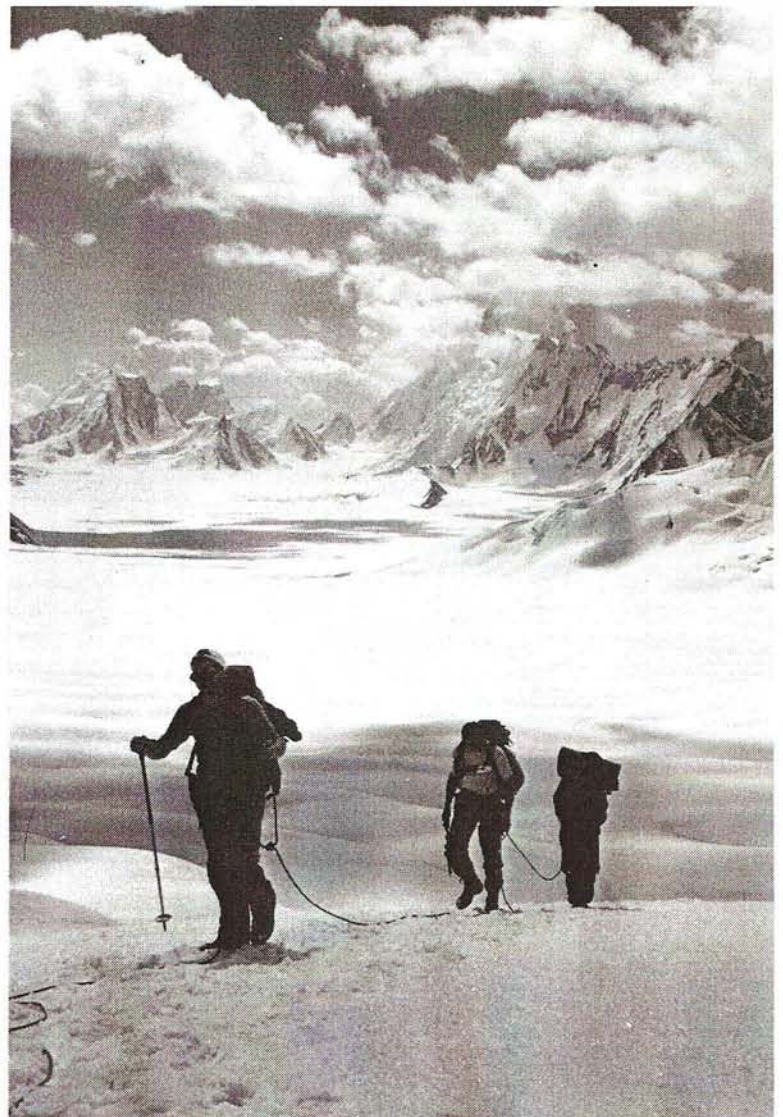


A toilet break and a game of Frisbee before climbing up the pass.

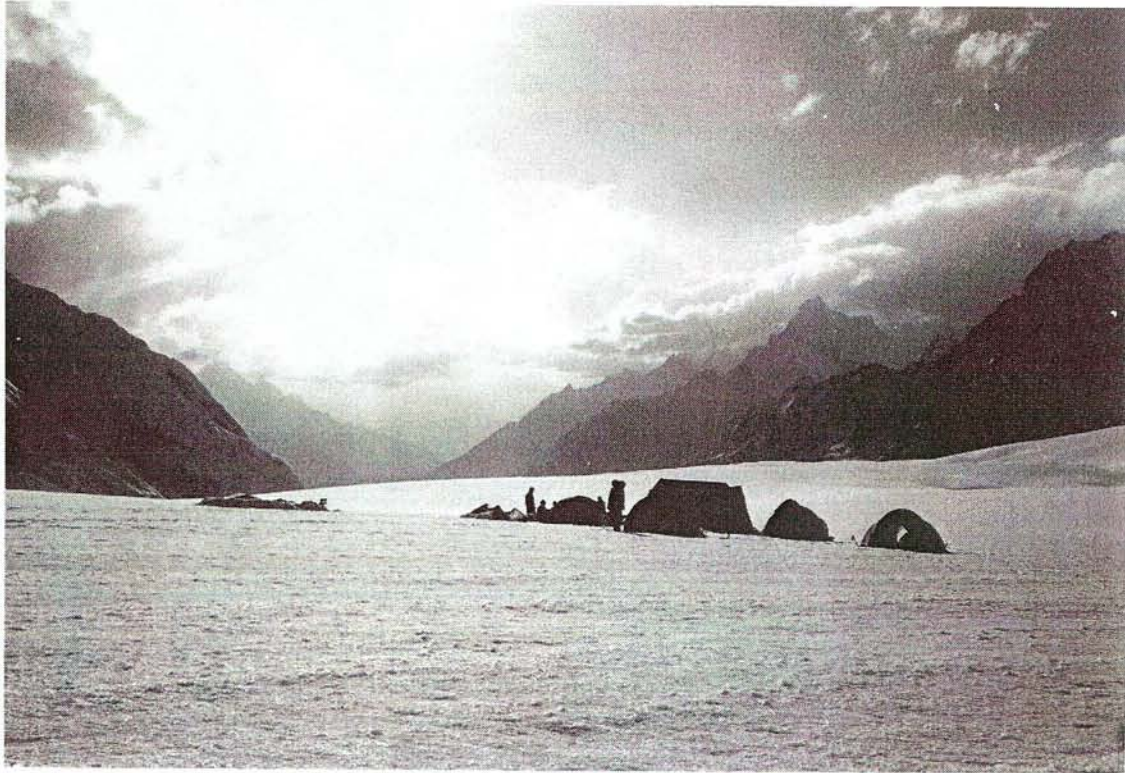


Moving up the steep section towards the pass.

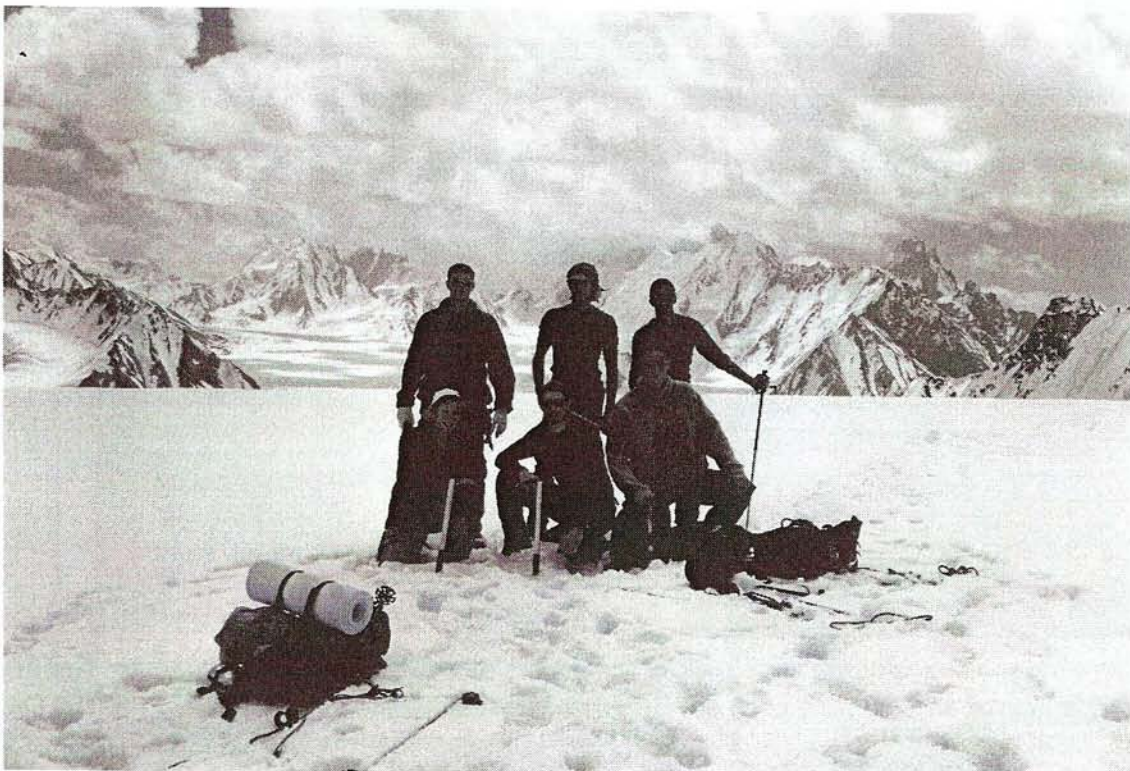
The frisbee has proven a good mascot, being played today at the base of the La for the first time; at 4900m possibly the highest game ever?



"Well here I am, sitting alone on the top of the Hispar La at 5151m. To my left stretches our next goal, the Hispar Glacier, whilst to my right lies Sim Kiang Glacier. Our main expedition objective is complete."



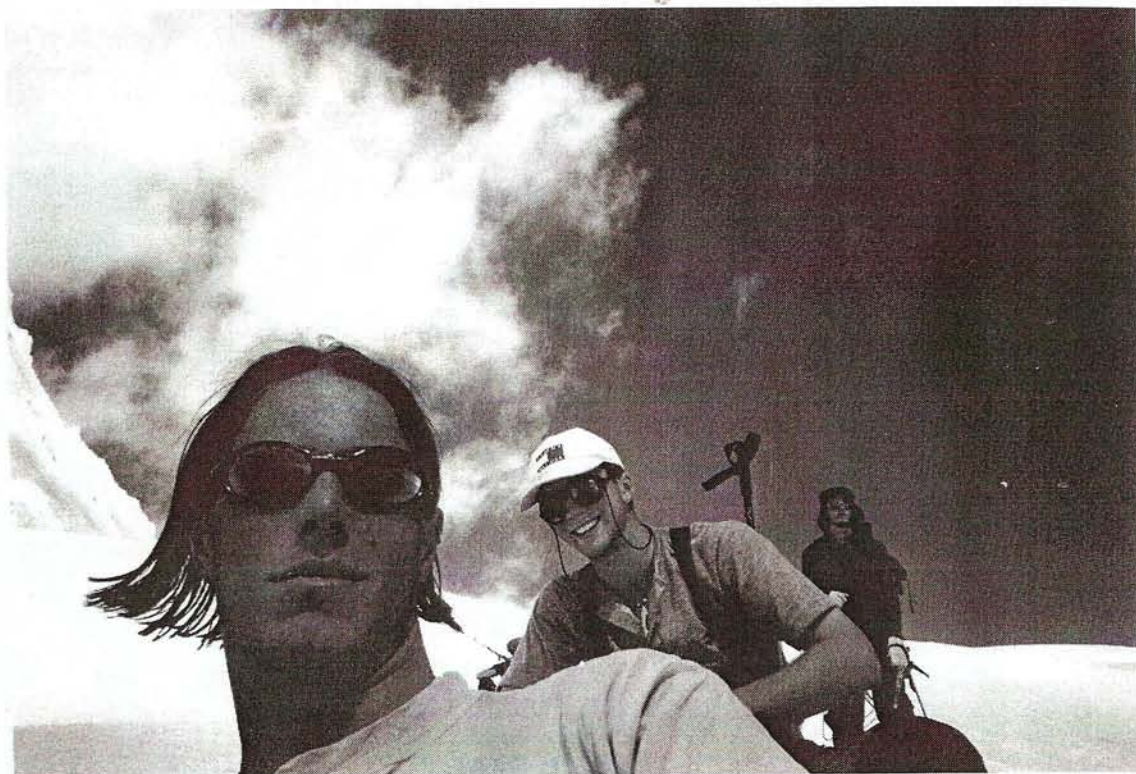
The view back down to our camp site, still above 5000m.



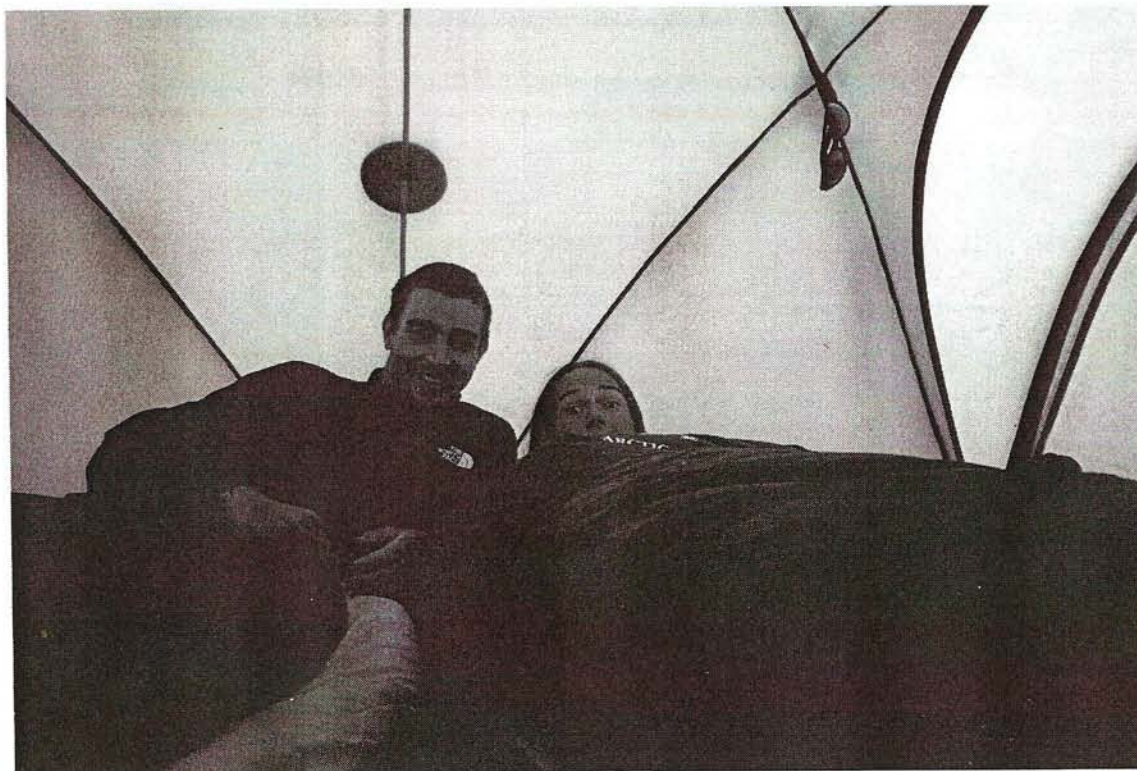
On top of the world!!

Thursday 8 July - trek day 12; La - Kani Basa; Today was a slightly harder, but very enjoyable day as we headed down the snow covered La. We found trekking on the Hispar glacier different from the Biafo as it was almost completely covered with moraine.

Walking off the Pass.



The best route was along the side of the valley, but this entailed difficult crossing of tributary glaciers. Finally, after five hours, we arrived at our camp – Kani Basa.



Hicksy and Nick relieved to have made it over the Pass.

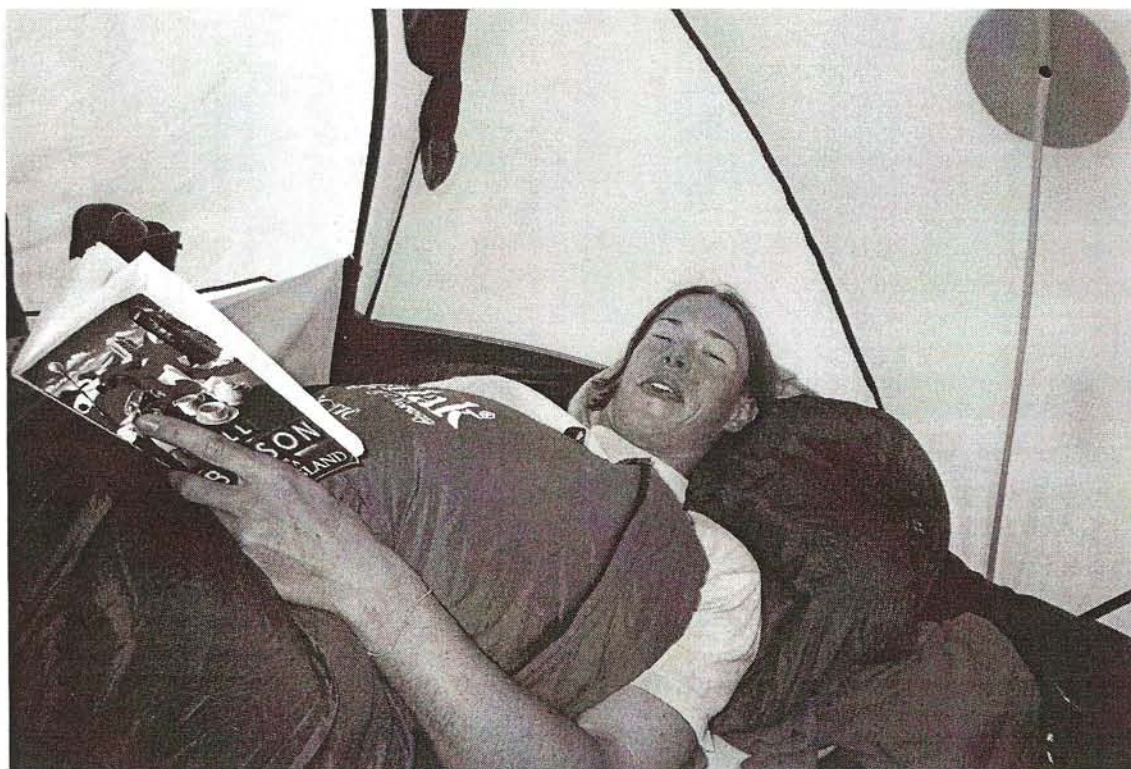
The camp here is nice with a pleasant rock in the middle of a stream for writing diaries. Tomorrow we have been promised an easy (2 ½ hr!!) day down to Jutenmal where we can wash! That will certainly feel amazing.

This is certainly an amazing trek that everyone is enjoying. Special to be so isolated although we noticed today that litter is appearing for the first time so far.

Friday 9 July - trek day 13; Kani Basa – Jutenmal; Well today has, as promised, been a very relaxing and chilling day. The trek took about three hours as a new trail had to be cut along the scar side, but camp was good and amazing to be able to wash again! Especially hair.

A glacial stream flowed over a large rock, creating a 2 metre high powerful waterfall – ideal for bathing, but absolutely freezing!

It has become so much warmer just 300m lower- nice to be able to sit around in the evenings and feel ones toes!



Nick reading one of the available six books that did the rounds!

After a bit of sunbathing and reading we played our first “ultimate frisbee” game today; really felt the altitude!

Saturday 10 July - trek day 14; Jutenmal - Haga; Well, two weeks today since civilisation and expedition boredom has truly set in.

Today’s trek was similar to yesterdays, and will probably be pretty similar to tomorrow’s, and probably the next day. Nick has decided he prefers travelling and “non-exertive adventure sports” e.g. skydiving - tart!

This is not to say we are not enjoying the expedition; we all are. It is just that the novelty (if there is any) of trekking has worn thin. The scenery is very different now. Green is beginning to line glacial melt rivers, and we have encountered our first yaks (who, incidentally wouldn’t sponsor us). Descending is proving more demanding than ascending

One thing that has to be said about this trek is the outstanding quality of toilet scenery. Each day a new perspective comes as one squats and takes in the view. Sure beats floral wallpaper.

*A magnificent
"Toilet View"*



The food too has been outstanding, with good portions and variety. Meals have included creme caramel, sponge puddings, goats liver and curry. Having said this, the more common and much recurring diet consists of rice (lots of it), daal (lots of this too) and chappatis. We have not had meat since our goat left us at Baintha; or at least not identifiable meat! Breakfast is always the same, but I always enjoy it; porridge, muesli, pancakes (thick ones deep-fried) and tea. It has to be the "Bed-tea" brought to our tents to wake us up that makes the trek!

At our evening meal a special sweet of two kinds of jelly and crème caramel were presented to mark James' birthday, and after the porters produced makeshift drums for a singalong and dance, making this one of the highlights of the trip. Our rendition of 'Father Abraham' got quite a few laughs.



*Birthday
celebrations!*

Drinking games followed the party atmosphere.



Sunday 11 July - trek day 15; Haga – Bitenmal; Today's trek was very "English" with drizzling (then heavier) rain, and a green footpath to follow most of the way. The crossing of the Punmari Chish glacier proved difficult as it has cliffs on both sides, but was compensated by the view up it to the 7200m peak bearing the same name.

Camp was reached in heavy rain, lunch eaten, then retired to our tents. Snakes and ladders, then noughts and crosses; desperate times!

For evening entertainment we tried strapping a maglight to the frisbee, but to no avail. After dinner a forfeit drink was concocted from water, dioralite, salt, orange concentrate, tabasco and toothpaste! Well, having had a laugh last night about everyone's morale (being generally low and bored) spirits began to rise as a good round of drinking games ensued.

Tomorrow is a rest day here, though not much to climb.

Monday 12 July - trek day 16; Bitenmal rest; We enjoyed a lie in this morning till 7:30, when we awoke to more rain but it soon cleared and the group variously enjoyed a day of rest and relaxation, or climbing on the nearby mountainsides, which proved difficult and unstable.

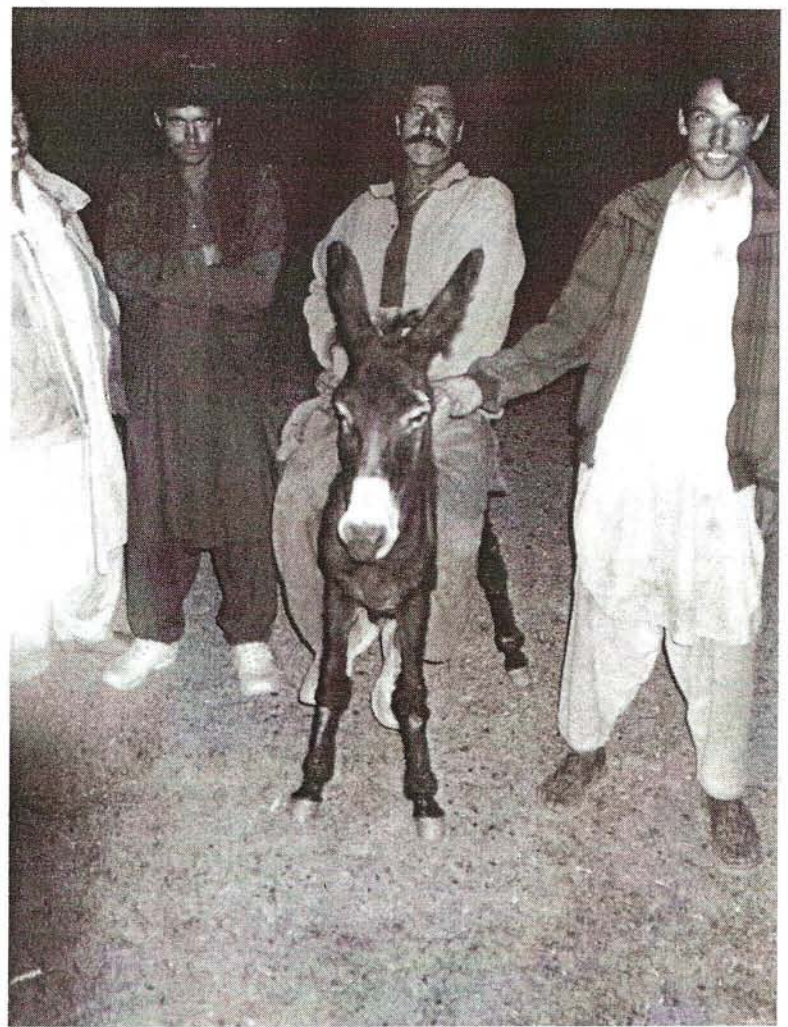
To be a little more specific, Hicksy found himself making a solo ascent of Bitenmal Peak, getting lost in the mist, and descending down the wrong side, getting himself quite worried. Meanwhile, Andy and Nige set off on a quest "Not to go anywhere that could be walked". Of course this took them up the first cliff face, unprotected and with no gear. An exciting and exposed climb up 300 metres of crumbly rock left them both suitably excited!

Tuesday 13 July - Bitenmel – Flemingish; Last night Mehdi suggested we do the trek in one day, and all agreed, keen to finish I think. We trekked across our last glacier, thicker vegetation later appearing, including juniper trees. We met a Pakistani man who had done our trek on his own (plus porters), and had caught us up. After talking a bit, he set off ahead of us.

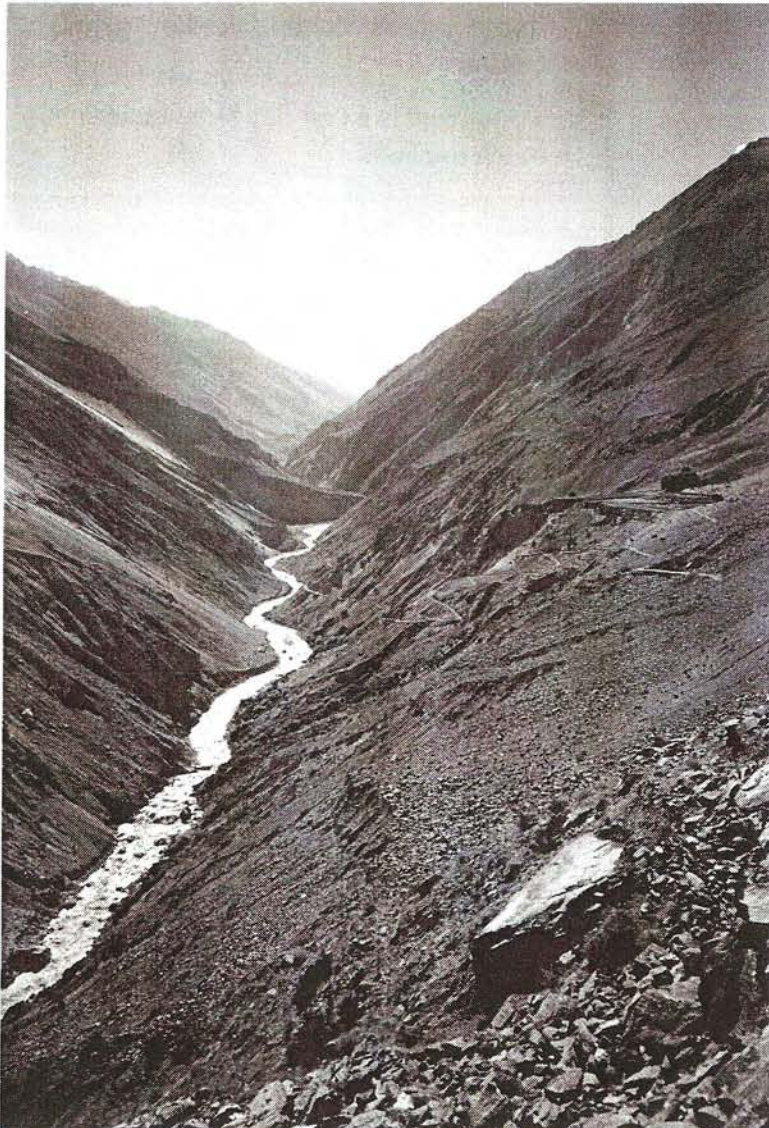
So, our last night away from civilisation was spent at Flemingkish. The evening went well with a bonfire and a few rampaging rides on a less-than-happy local donkey, which kept voicing its objections throughout the night.

The stars were amazing and most of the team slept outside watching shooting stars and satellites 'till late..

An obliging donkey: A pre-requisite to any good night under the stars.



The long slog up a scree slope to our final camp.



Wednesday 14 July - trek day 17;

We woke early to begin the now long and final day's trek to Huro. The route dropped steeply into a gorge where we crossed an ancient and very bouncy chain bridge over the Hispar River. The rest of the day was spent following a jeep track with only two notable points;

The crowd of children who followed us for several miles

And secondly the local 'road repair team' who were working very physically fixing the slid-away road. Mehdi explained that since 1991 the Government had stopped funding for repairs and so they are now carried out voluntarily by Hispar Villagers keen to keep their only link open. What dedication. One had sadly received a blow to his foot by a falling rock causing considerable bruising and swelling. Andy gave painkillers but it was clear he needed hospital treatment.

The camp was a long slog up a steep hill and we were all very pleased to have finished such a long, hard trek. Hicksy and Nigel later sorted out backsheesh with Mehdi. A formal presentation followed.

Thursday 15 July – Karimabad; Today we closed camp leisurely, and after frisbee with the locals drove down to Karimabad in the Hunza valley. Again the views were fantastic, with the Ultar mountain and Rakaposhi overlooking the town. Karimabad seems very pleasant, if extremely touristy, filled with embarrassing sights of largely large American tourists.



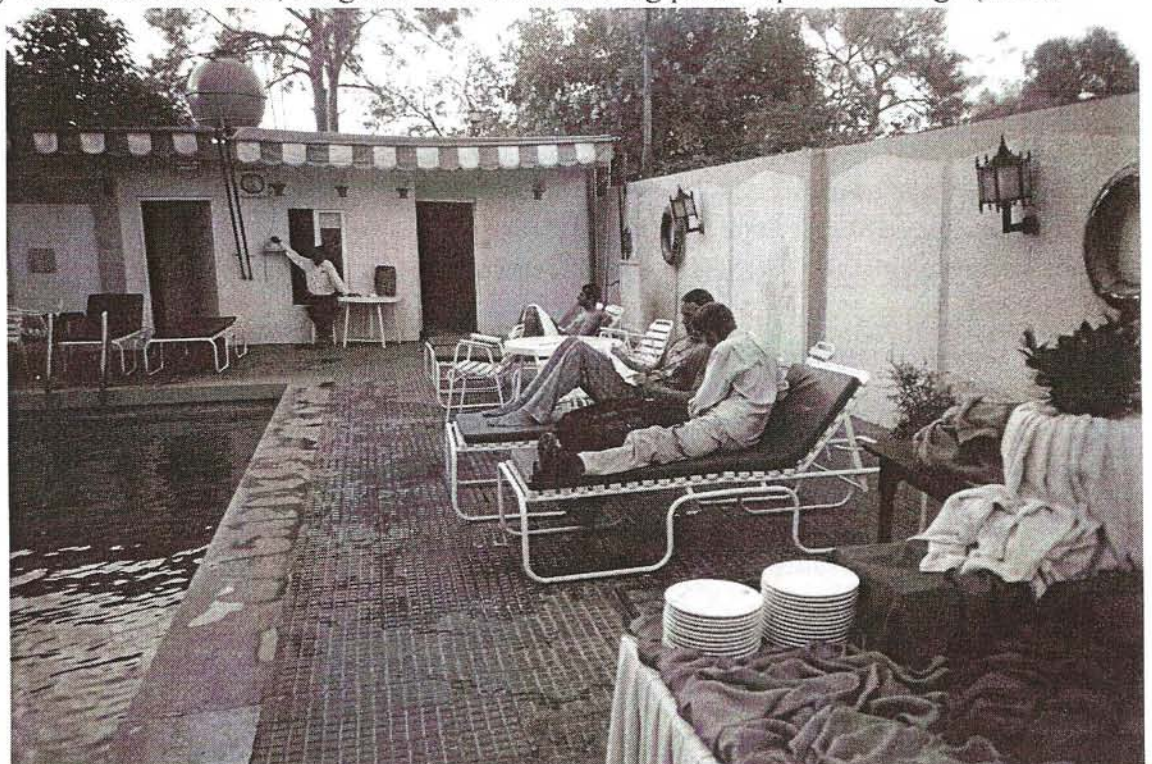
Some intrigued local kids who helped carry our bags!

At the hotel it was amazing to wash under the albeit cold shower. Nice to wash clothes too, and a comfy bed!

“Faisal and I headed into town searching for a barbers, Andy and James along as spectators. We soon found one (having passed the confusingly named “Bar-bars Inn”) and Faisal went up for the chop first. It was great to lose the beard, which made me look about twenty years older. The change to both of us was amazing, Faisal looking about twelve years old! At thirty pence a shave, not bad.”

Friday 16 July; Gilgit

Today we took the 3-hour drive to Gilgit in a somewhat cramped minibus. We passed through yet more spectacular scenery to arrive at the hotel, delighted to find a swimming pool. “Space Walking” (with a rock) proved fun.



Relaxing by the pool side.

Saturday 17 July; At 4 O'clock we drove on towards Skardu, but not before discovering that Hicksy had succumbed to food poisoning during the night. He now joined Nige who was far worse for wear after tackling an unwashed, unpeeled mango from the market the previous day. The journey was long, hot, unpleasant, and interrupted by frequent breakdowns until we arrived in Skardu at 12 O'clock; a very long five hour journey!

Faisal now embarked upon changing his flight to an earlier date, and was later informed at the K2 Motel that he would catch the bus at two, to be in Islamabad for Monday's flight. Missing lunch, he set off on what was presumably a twenty-four hour journey from hell, and after six hours would take him through Gilgit where he had been six hours before! His departure seemed very sudden.

Nick entertaining some local children at a rest stop.



The rest of the day was spent loafing and shopping. We later met Iqbal; nice to see him again with his newly acquired grey beard; the stress of politics eh! Yet again we were reminded of our massively reduced prices and special service.

Sunday 18 July;

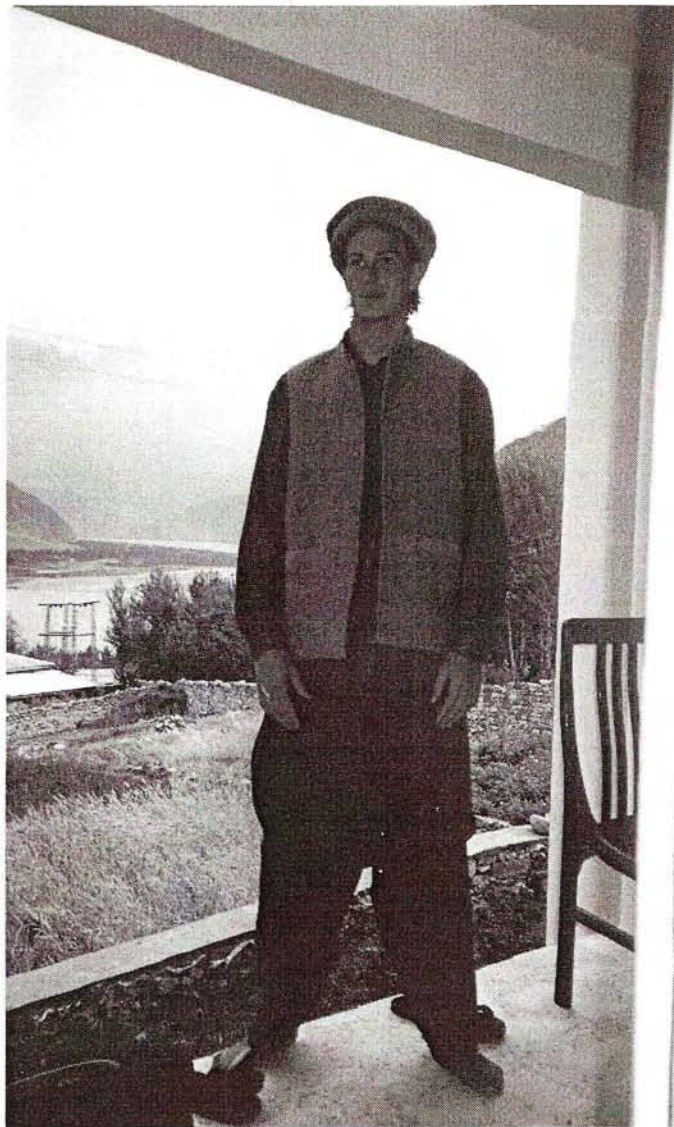
"Yesterday I was delighted when Nick returned from town with some mangoes. As always I ate mine with the skin, loving every minute of it. I was later to regret this; as I sat in the room I felt gradually weaker and more lethargic although for a long time I thought I was being poofy in the heat. Later as I walked to the bathroom and violently vomited mango I could at least be satisfied that I was going down properly. Hoorraah!"

Today, we left at ten to drive to Khaplu for the kayaking phase. The route followed the Indus river until it joined with the Shyok. Khaplu proved idyllic, lush greenery nestled along the riverbank. The water here is quite wide and flat, although it still flows extremely quickly compared to Welsh or alpine rivers.

Nick on the terrace of our newly constructed Karakoram Lodge.

Our "Karakoram Lodge" proved to be the best hotel in the town and we were honoured to be the first guests in Baltistan Tours' newest and only hotel. Being the only guests, negotiation got us moved to the expensive rooms at the front overlooking the town and river. Later we were amused to learn from Iqbal that he had warned all the senior staff - guide, cook, head porter - that if his "special customers" (us) complained then they would be dismissed. Suddenly the impeccable service made sense and we were able to understand Mehdi's alertness to our needs.

Tomorrow we start kayaking.....



July 19th – 25th;

The Paddling Efforts!!

Upon our arrival in the beautiful, tranquil setting of Khaplu, we immediately decided that a jeep ride the next day up the Hushe valley would be our first priority. Nothing was however going to interrupt the afternoon's most desirably allocated relaxation time in our newly acquired home for the week. The three adjacent bedrooms looking over the plain of the Shyok could not have been more perfect. The balcony immediately outside the rooms provided a romantic way for the intrepid English explorers to take their evening tea after a pleasant day's paddle, whilst surveying the sleepy village of Khaplu from their palace vantage point. We could not help wondering whether this amazing building had been built for us! We were after all its first ever inhabitants. Locals as well as our man Mehdi, (who understood as much about kayaking as we did of the locals' like of butter tea), had described the Hushe as being 'steep,' and 'yes, many, many rocks!' 'BOMBER, we'll have a look there then,' we thought!

Loading the boats for a day's paddling.

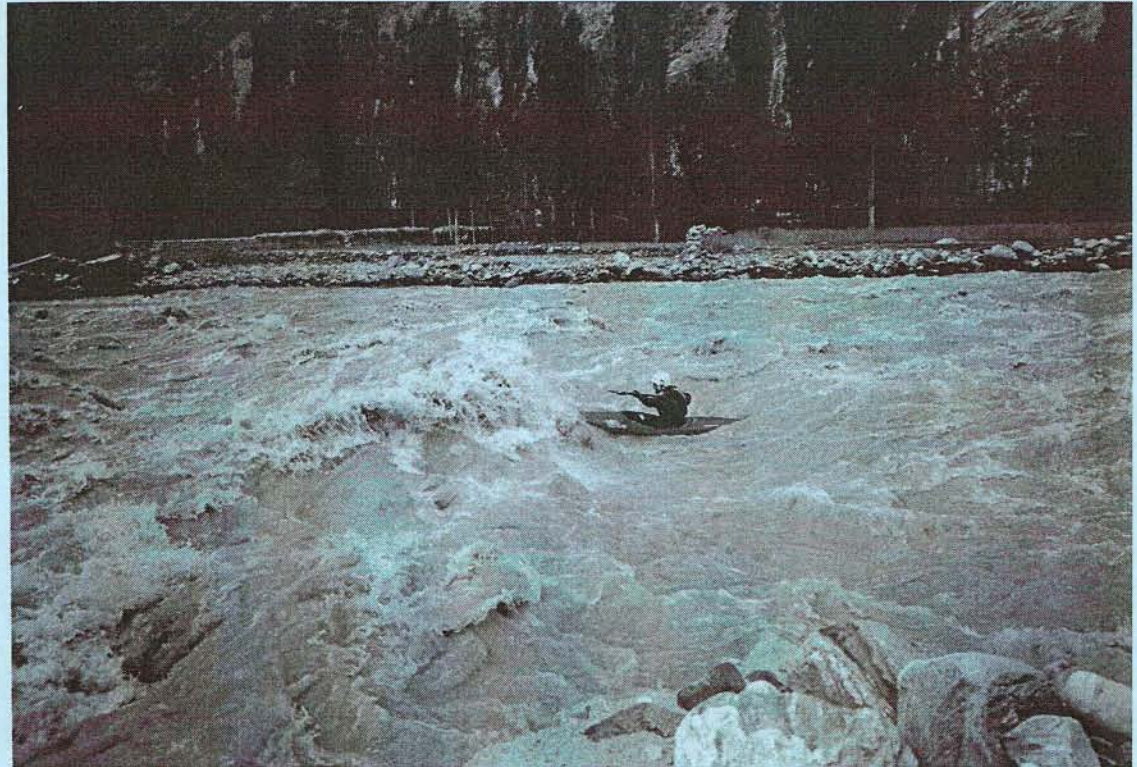


An hour's jeep ride up the Hushe track after Saling bridge took us to an extremely technical and sustained grade V section. The volume of water in the river was highest at this time of year, and any desires to run the awe-inspiring 500 metres of water were soon defeated when the lack of any reasonable rescue possibilities became apparent. Despite the obvious inappropriateness of the section being the team's first taste of Pakistani water, tiny images of a little Whip-It named Mr Whips boofing off every one of the pour-overs and wave-wheeling down the colossal mountains of wave-trains, were paddling through my mind. Even the wry smile accompanied with the normal whites of the eyes associated with pure concentrated fear. All vivid images; telltale signs of a kayaker attempting to navigate this kind of torrential and pounding chaotic mess of such large water! The committing nature of the run, as the Hushe twisted round a cliff and dropped out of view toward the flat plain of the Shyok, meant that each one of the myriad drops and pour-overs had to be successfully negotiated. This was of course, unless the prospect of recirculating 75 metres from either bank, with little chance of assistance from another paddler, (due to the lack of any form of slack water and continual power of the water), was appealing. Some lines were identified and I enjoyed toying with various ideas on individual problem areas down the fall. However the task of linking all the solutions together and completing the section in one was not within the ability of the team. This particular attraction would have to be returned to later in the week!!

Above the 'gnarly V' section the Hushe was a placid flowing and wide river providing spectacular views of Masherbrum. We were assured that once above Hushe village, paddlers could find quite a few more torrential drops and large falls. As was in the nature of the many large wild, deep, twisting valleys of the region the water that thundered along the bottom of the valley often flowed as though it had the character of a madman. For hours it can stroll along leisurely, then just round the next corner it will rapidly make the transition into a raging maniac.

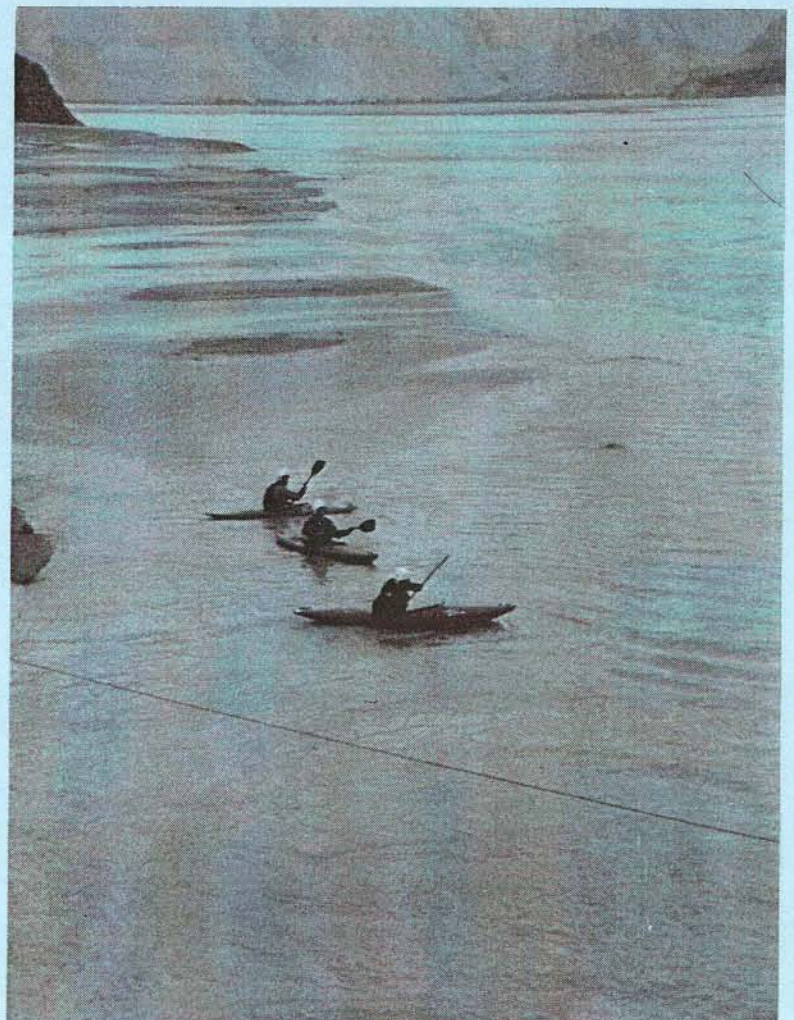
Still eager to get wet on what was initially to be just a 'recce day,' the team returned to the jeeps and ventured back downstream toward Talus. A friendly but exciting section of fast grade III flowed under Talus bridge.

Thacker descending the section immediately below Talus Bridge.



For a good kilometre after Talus the Hushe provided a fun paddle over bouncy wavetrains and strong boils. The Lower Hushe rapidly widened into what became a wide alluvial plain with many subdividing channels. At many places on the lower section where two or more of these channels rejoined, strong eddyfences and grippy boils provided entertainment. Even on these lower and less powerful stretches of water, the river's force could still be heard by way of large stones and boulders bouncing along the riverbed beneath the kayaks. In what were late July river levels, the entirety of the Hushe could be run, joining the Shyok 2 kilometres upstream of Saling bridge. Minimum scraping and maximum fun could be found river left on the fastest flowing channel of water flowing into the Shyok.

The contrasting alluvial plane section of the Shyok



Day 2 took the team as high up the Shyok as was permitted for tourists. Following the Khaplu Road further than Sormoo village took you to the line of control. The day's paddling was relaxed and sedate with the most excitement stemming from being able to squirt on a few of the eddylines and in a few of the large boils that appeared to always exist behind any outcrop of rock that attempts to block the Shyok's path. The opportunity of being able to please Sormoo's schoolchildren during their lunch hour was also taken up. A slightly concentrated flow next to the steep riverbank accompanied with a few nicely placed flat rocks, provided a perfect playground for some nice rock spins and squirting. Although it was always the abysmal failure that the locals of all ages would enjoy far more! A very fast wave was also happening at Sormoo when we were there, although it was not deep or retentive enough to properly play in.

From Sormoo the sedate Shyok was leisurely paddled back to Khaplu on what was used as a very constructive and enjoyable session for teaching and conveying skills. Once again in Khaplu, some slightly better and deeper bank-side waves were exploited in impressing the locals on the beach next to the police station. So pleased to see us was one policeman, that he carried my boat to the top of the wave after each washout! Lovely rivers, lovely people!

Suspicious that the river would be considerably less interesting at lower levels were confirmed later in the week. On day 3 of our week we re-ran the first day's efforts for want of fun and allowing non/poor-paddlers amongst us to have a paddle in the afternoon on the Shyok. This format for the day worked well, allowing the more confident to have a play on the Hushe above Talus bridge on a few waves that were produced by the bank. The faster sections were also run until the Shyok. A deep hole was also in existence underneath Talus bridge, river right. Day 3 was a good day of paddling for everyone, but the water levels in both the Hushe and Shyok appeared to be dropping rapidly. The previously bucking waves of the Talus section were becoming smaller and less steep by the day. Similarly, the running of the lower section of Hushe into the Shyok would not be recommended at low river levels for any reason other than buttock toning! The extreme flows of late July paddling in the region that we had been promised were rapidly being stolen away from us by a spell of cooler weather in the mountains and a high build up of seemingly static cloud cover. The melt was temporarily diminishing! Just my luck! You travel a thousand miles from home and once again, that nasty weekend in North Wales feeling is back!! Where's the water gone?

Upon joining with the mighty Shyok, a paddle river right onto a secondary flow away from the main gentle flowing channel is rewarded by the discovery of rock-splat heaven! Here on a large promontory of rock before Saling bridge, every pronounced shape next to the 150 metres of rushing water produces a lovely eddy so that you can enter perfectly in control and drift vertically onto each of the forceful cushion waves on the neighbouring outcrops. In certain spots, the high-scoring manoeuvre would be to exit one cushion wave still on end, and flow round the next drop into the next pillow, maybe even making a transition to front end for the next splat! Hours of vertical fun! The exhausted splatter now finds him/herself back in the main flow under Saling bridge and an ideal exit point on the Khaplu road. Time to return back to the manor but not before another head-banging, hand-surfing, leg-gyrating speedy, twisty, turney jeep-ride to the sound of Trance Nation! That night, Mr. Whips and I looked at each other and told each other that we loved being together. It was very emotional. We also spoke about religion and our personal beliefs as to the ultimate power of the river god, especially concerning the fun that had been granted to us that day.

On the occasions that we ran the Lower Hushe/Shyok combination back to Khaplu, Saling bridge was often used for changeover of paddlers. The Shyok into Khaplu was flat and sedate but fun could be sought river left, next to the cliff and riverbank where an eddy would always provide a nice spot for another rock splat! Three semi-interesting waves river left into Khaplu also provided smiles.

On days 6 and 7 the Shyok below Khaplu was run. Similar to above Khaplu, a rather relaxed morning's paddle was provided by the river up to Darwinney bridge. Below the bridge, the Shyok slowly gathered momentum and after 4 kilometres, (completed by jeep to be back in Khaplu for a fresh trout dinner), two very exciting sections of water presented themselves.

A small jeep bridge allowed us to cross the river at Kharfaq onto the river right bank. We were able to gain a better look at the lower of the sections, a 200-metre stretch of high volume mayhem. It became immediately obvious that the river right channel was the option more congenial to breathing! Pure volume of water was causing the slightest of rocks, (which along with their big brother boulders were positioned all along the central divide), to produce huge re-circulating and very deep holes in evidence all over the river. The pushy and demanding choice of line through the river right chaos was however the preferred option over river left's thunderous spray and lack of any clear jets or water propelled anywhere than absolute doom and destruction.

One hour of consultation with my inner self and of course, Mr Whips allowed us to come up with a solution. I would warm up by putting in above the earlier section glimpsed from the road. The team served little use in this type of water because it was all or nothing, I was on my own. Either I paddle like a divinity, every edge carving gloriously along stopper waves into and over the next boil with all the bouncy vertical finesse and ultimate control of one who has Mr Whips as his best buddy; or I provide a lot of nasty bacteria sitting on a rock under one of the sixteen gnarly stoppers, a very enjoyable and fruitful existence for him and his next billion zillion offspring. To this end, the team was instructed as to the classiest points for photos! In short, as long as I paddled like a man possessed into the gushing green of the river right jet; Mr Whips flew off the lip, leaving the first cliff of white stuff; stayed flat, power on, go right, go right, go right, sprint right, don't ever fall over and carry on bouncing over the last wave train, Mr. Whips and I would attain a higher level of mindfulness and become closer to the truth of harnessing the power of nature. We would also remain alive, possibly.

Mr Whip dropping down a large section of the Shyok.



Unfortunately, this grade V was not run due to an eventful couple of runs on the V that is a few hundred metres calm paddling round the promontory above it. Hours of fascination and psyching up for the bottom section caused a gross oversight in our river reconnaissance of the 'easier warm up shoot!' In fact the 'warm up shoot' proved to be an immensely exciting hundred metres of massive wave trains and gigantic stopper/boil combinations that would not allow the passage of a luxury liner. The first glimpse, (and it is very short lived due to the speed), of the 5-6 metres of solid green water wall that presented itself to the paddler just going over the lip were horrifying. Mr. Whips was juddering with fear as we were sucked down into an abode of the damned. What happened over the next few seconds in the physical and real dimension must have been a combination of instinct and Mr Whips caring for our orientation with respect to what felt wet and what felt dry. Meanwhile, the inner dimension was in turmoil and I was very heedful of my stupidity in failing to properly recce. the section and also of my luck if I somehow remained intact.

The surprised paddler was easily thrown into the air, flipped and munched again and again with decreasing altitude gain until the large welcoming eddy on river left presented itself. I wish I had the guts to pull off wave wheels, but for me survival was just a little too close to mind in this volume of water. River right was avoided due to a very large boil sitting happily under a powerful poor-over that formed the nasty illusion of the main channel from a paddler's perspective upstream.

Mr Whips and I immediately decided to get out of the water and inspect the cause of our experience. It was amusing when a concerned Thacker came running from the jeep that was following me down. 'Are you all right Hicksy?! I thought you might be having a bit of trouble when I saw you got flipped; that water was quite big!' In fact, poor Mr Whips could hardly move with shock so I left him and inspected the torrent alone.

Sure enough a roaring V greeted my eyes and I became remarkably thankful when I attempted to figure how I had fluked avoiding a killer stopper the size of a factory, mentioned above.

As a spiritual essential Mr Whips and I ran the section a second time, now having deduced a better line and having more of an idea as to how the water was working. I was now more collected and could notice Nick and James' smiles. I hoped Andy had a nice piccy to show Mum!

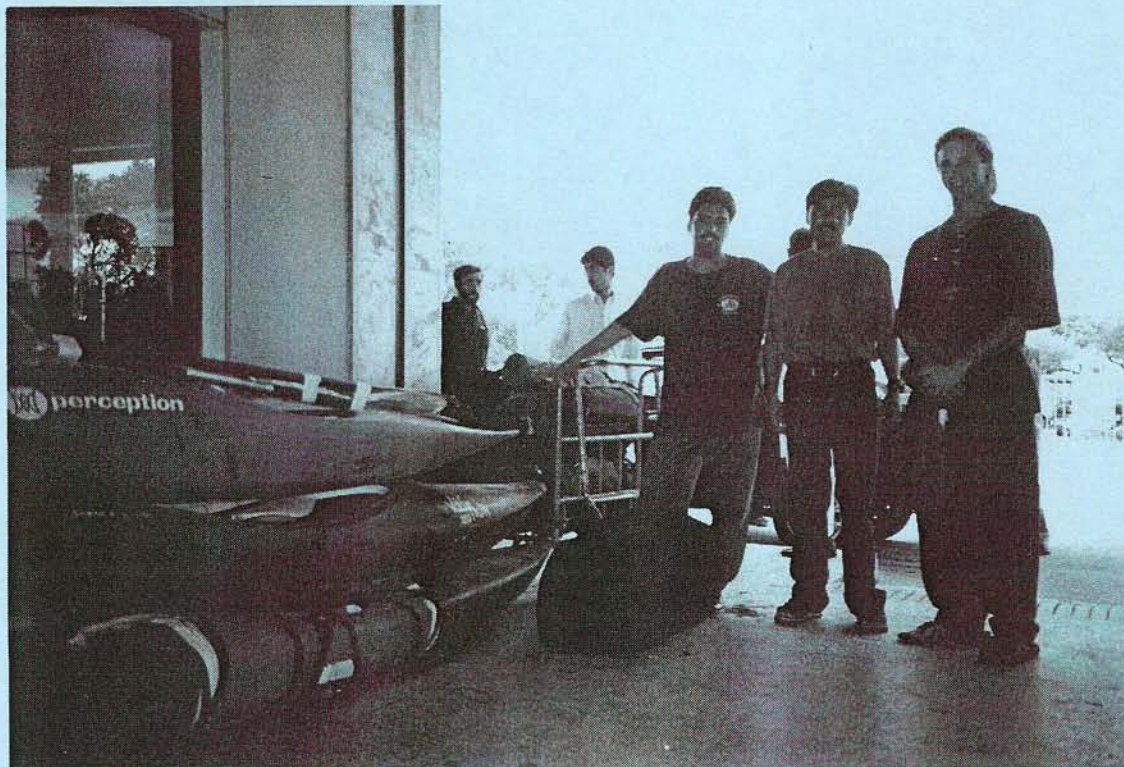
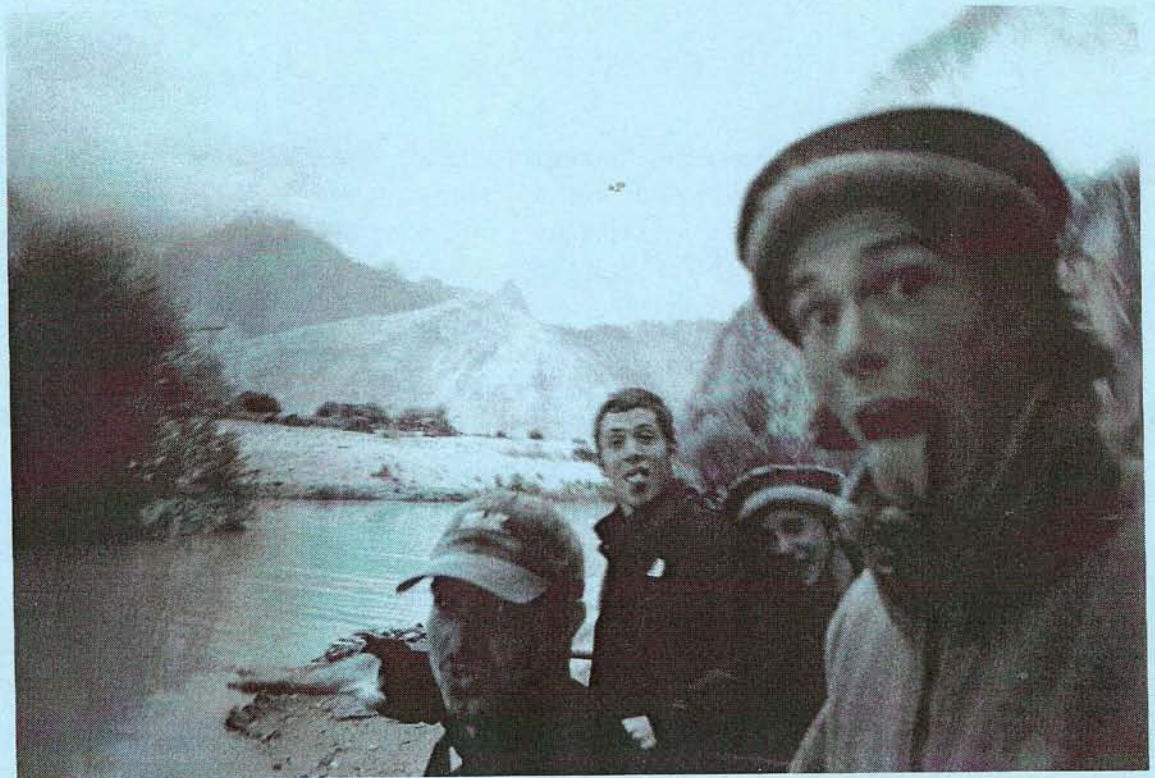


The locals meet Mr Whip after a legendary run.

Paddling in Pakistan was an amazing experience. When the water was slow, listening to the silt striking your blades was a soothing reminder that you were somewhere a bit different and a bit more mystical. The cracking of boulders along the river bed and then the beautiful tall walls of green water that are your entrance into something totally different and altogether exhilarating; the two tiny jeeps now miles away across on the valley wall or behind the promontory of rock: just yourself and your Mr Whips to see what you're really about!

Returning to Skardu after the paddling section.

After the drive to Skardu, the evening of the 25th. saw us back at the K2 Motel, barbecue in the evening, and after some stargazing – bed.



Loading up to come home after a spectacular day.

Monday July 26; Our flight had been delayed, so we had a free day in Skardu – shopping, and a trip to the Shangri La hotel resort for a ‘change of scenery’.

Tuesday July 27; 8am flight to Islamabad. – a fantastic flight taking us right past Nanga Parbat, the 5th. highest mountain in the world – so huge it takes 15 minutes to fly around it.. Eventually we landed in Islamabad and it felt good to be back in a city again (this feeling didn’t last long!). We booked into our hotel, and after a short rest explored the city for a bit, then back for dinner.

“The end of the expedition! It was fantastic fun, and I enjoyed it immensely. It really has changed my outlook on life to see how other people live, and to realise what you have is precious, and what is important in life. I hope that I never forget any of these memories, because they are one of the most precious things I possess.”

Pakistan - memories

"Lasting memories of Pakistan will be, for me, of towering mountains, precipitous gorges, stunning scenery and the friendly smiling faces of the peoples of the North.

Coming from Africa, the friendliness of the third world was something I expected and to which I was looking forward, but I was totally unprepared for the beauty of northern Pakistan.

The long journey up the Karakoram Highway allows you to adjust slowly from the flat, hot plains of central Pakistan to the mountainous splendour of the North. It has to be said that this journey, although long, is anything but dull. The breakneck speed and abandon of the driving comes naturally to the Pakistanis and add to that the winding roads cutting through steep valley sides and the journey becomes an adventure in itself. I remember spending that night lying on one side, head out of the window, alternately gazing up at the huge shadows of the mountains and the narrow, star-studded strip of dark blue that ran down the middle, and then looking down to where the side of the road frequently seemed to disappear beneath the wheels of the bus, and then further down into the darkness from where we could hear the river roaring as it raced on its own journey towards the south. Newspapers occasionally report that a heavily laden bus has been lost over the side, together with all of its passengers, save a lucky few. It amazes me that more don't suffer the same fate, and I'm still thanking God that we didn't ourselves!

There's a certain magic about places like Pakistan, especially in the North, which comes from both the beauty of a place and its people, and also, I think, from its history. The history of this part of the world is an incredible one, and there are stories of incredible wealth and splendour but at the same time unbelievable savagery and inhuman cruelty. M.M.Kaye's book, "The Far Pavilions" (which everyone should read if they haven't already) tells some of this history but at the same time paints wonderful pictures of this part of the world. Pictures of distant mountains, small kingdoms hidden in valleys that take weeks of travelling to reach, and pictures of stunning, natural beauty. Skardu, in the distant north, provided such a picture. The view from where we were staying was breathtaking. We were in a hotel on the edge of Skardu on a plateau that overlooked a vast plain. About a hundred feet below us the river Indus meandered slowly past, very wide at this point yet very fast flowing. The river banks were lined with trees and cattle and goats were grazing among them. In the distance several small hills rose out of the plain and behind that snowcapped mountains formed a continuous barrier. Evening often saw the nearby hills shrouded with mist and in twilight it was magical. I found it easy to believe that I was in some Indian palace back in the early 19th century. It was one of the most beautiful scenes I've ever seen.

The trek itself did not disappoint. Walking up the glacier along the ice highway, walled in on either side by huge rock walls and unclimbed peaks was an unforgettable experience, and suffice to say there was always something to take your breath away. The view from the top of Baintha Brak with the glacier set out below like a giant motorway, or the view across snowlake, or the sunset over the Hunza valley as we looked down from the top of the Hispa Pass. I could go on about this beautiful place but there are other memories as well.

As the medic on the trip I soon found that most of my medical skills would be used on the porters rather than on any of the team. The most frequent were headaches, several came along with stomach upsets and there were a number with blisters, cuts and grazes. It was a great opportunity to get to know some of them that little bit better and left some wonderful memories of people. Abdul, who was really far too old to be a porter and had arthritis, would often turn up with sore joints wanting something for the pain. He couldn't speak a word of English but there was always a smile of greeting and a word of thanks (in Urdu, I hasten to add). Muhammad Hussein as well, his joints sparked off by the cold, always willing to talk in very good English. Then there was the little 3/4 year old boy before we had left Askole, with a nasty gash on his scalp. Not a whimper out of him despite the stinging of antiseptic cream. Even worse was the old man who, while working with labourers to repair a road, had a rock fall on his foot. He was sitting there with a badly broken foot the size of a football, but to look at his face you might have thought he'd only a small cut on his knee. They show a people used to hard work, used to suffering and discomfort, yet at the same time very friendly and welcoming.

Of course it wasn't only the porters who were ill. Most of us managed some form of food poisoning, Nick almost died of cold (it was my fault I have to admit), Hicksy came in one day having mangled his hands, Nigel almost persuaded me he had malaria, but happily we all made it back alive!

Then there are myriad smaller memories of the food, card games played by lamplight, books read and discussed (some more controversial than others), the discussions late into the night (about 10pm!), the waterfall right in the middle of the glacier, sharing a tent with James(!), the adrenaline rush while scrambling up some exposed faces with Nigel.

There's no easy way to sum it up, there was so much to it, all superb. I can't wait to go back!!"

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- Dorset Expeditionary Society
- Young Explorer's Trust
- Baltistan Tours

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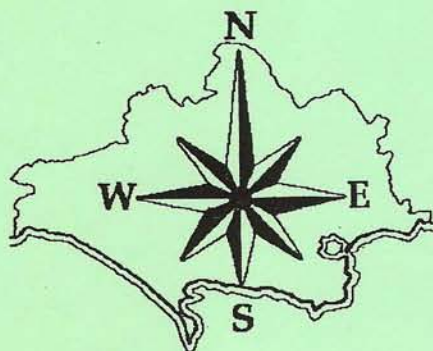
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