



## AAC Publications

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### **Mir Samir (5,809m), attempted first winter ascent**

Afghanistan, Hindu Kush

James and Edward Bingham, Quentin Brooksbank, and Mark Wynne (UK) attempted the first winter ascent of Mir Samir, a mountain in the remote upper section of the Panjshir Valley, made famous by Eric Newby in his best seller *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*. Their objective was the unclimbed north face, although if conditions prevented this they planned to try the northeast ridge, the same route attempted by Newby and Hugh Carless in the summer of 1956, and the line more or less climbed on the first ascent of the mountain in 1959 by Germans. From the date of the first ascent to 1978, Mir Samir was climbed frequently, and up to the time of the Soviet invasion had nine or 10 different routes, but it has not been climbed since.

In 2010 James and Mark had reached the summit of Noshaq in the Wakhan Corridor, taking the usual approach through Tajikistan; this time an approach would have to be made through Kabul. Invaluable help was provided by Philip Abbey, formerly of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) working in the Panjshir Valley, the starting point for their approach to the mountain. He provided the team with information on the roads and travel, advice on weather, security and permits. Mir Samir sits on the border with Nuristan, which had become unstable, but the advice was if they approached from the Panjshir side, it should be safer. In winter passes would be closed and few, if any, people would be moving around.

Toward the end of August 2011, they received news that two German climbers had been kidnapped close to the Salang Pass. The news later took a dreadful twist when the climbers were murdered. Then, in mid-October, the Taliban carried out their first successful suicide attack in the Panjshir Valley, targeting the PRT building.

Originally the team planned to travel with Afghan Logistics, recommended as one of the best transport and logistics companies in Kabul. However, they refused to help and advised the climbers not to come to Afghanistan, given the security situation. When the four finally arrived in Kabul, they didn't know how they would get to the Panjshir or whether it would be safe enough to travel. In the end, they were able to borrow a Land Rover from a Kabul resident, and a car with a local driver.

Unfortunately, a number of factors led to the expedition being cut short. The drive up the Panjshir was challenging. They stayed two nights with a local chief, and at some stage while unloading the vehicles a crucial kit bag "went missing." The loss forced Brooksbank to continue with only trekking boots, and eventually to leave the expedition.

The approach valley above knee-deep with snow, even using snowshoes, and the valley steep-sided, making it purgatory for pulling sleds. On January 20, 2012, at 3,480m, after five days of hard travel, they had made relatively little distance and were now far behind their planned schedule. With more heavy snow forecast, they reluctantly decided to turn back.

All team members were pleased they took the risks and traveled to this beautiful country. On reflection the trip wasn't so much about mountains, but the people they met and the places they stayed. It was a true adventure.

Compiled from information supplied by James Bingham, UK

## Images



Welcome to the Panjshir Valley.



On the approach to Mir Samir in winter.

## Article Details

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