



AAC Publications

Keshni Khan Valley, White Pyramid (5,612m GPS) and other ascents

Afghanistan, Hindu Kush

Alexandre Darrioulat, Franck Mazas, and Arnaud Pasquer (France) visited the Wakhan in July and August. Their original goal was an ascent of Noshag, but due to the unrest in Tajikistan, the authorities at Ishkashim would not allow them to enter the Qazi Deh Valley leading up to the mountain. Fortunately, in Qazi Deh village they found a copy of Carlo Pinelli and Gianni Predan's guidebook, *Peaks of Silver and Jade*, in which they read about the Keshni Khan Valley, two drainages east of Qazi Deh. They were granted permission to enter this, as it has no border with Pakistan. Several expeditions climbed here during the 1960s and '70s, and it was visited again during the first six years of the new millennium by Pinelli, Predan, and others.

The French established base camp at 4,300m and first climbed the north top of Koh-e-Qalat (5,505m, altimeter). This involved a long and boring walk (reconnaissance recommended) along moraine to climb a broad, northeast-facing snow/ice slope of ca 40° to a 5,360m (GPS) col on the northwest ridge. Here, they left their packs and then climbed the icy ridge, reached a beautiful granite pinnacle marking the north top. To reach the south summit, no more than 10-20m higher, would have involved traversing the top of a steep, icy "toboggan run" ending 1,500m below. As there was no easy possibility of belaying across this, they returned. The route was thought to be AD-. Although there are conflicting altitudes in past reports and on various maps, this is most likely the peak first climbed by Austrian Karl Graetzl in 1970, repeated by Poles in 1976, and quoted as 5,508m.

Two days later they established a high camp on the glacier at 4,924m. The back wall of the valley is formed by a high ridge running from Koh-e-Keshni Khan (6,755m) to Koh-e-Wark (6,136m). The cirque below is divided in two by a small but attractive summit, Koh-e-Token (ca 5,200m), climbed in 2006, most likely for the first time, by Italian instructors and Afghan students from Carlo Pinelli's Mountain Wilderness training program. The three French first reconnoitered the southwestern sector of the cirque to find a route to the high ridge. They found only one safe line, and on the way climbed a small, unnamed summit of ca 5,200m, well to the west of Koh-e-Token. Although steep and impressive from the north, it had easy snow slopes on the south flank, which they followed to the summit at F.

Their next excursion saw them follow a glaciated route onto the high Keshni Khan–Koh-e-Wark ridge, at a point approximately one-quarter of the way along from Koh-e-Wark. Here they turned west (toward Koh-e-Wark) and climbed to a fine, snowy summit, ca one kilometer from Koh-e-Wark, which they named White Pyramid. The view was breathtaking, and while there are no previously recorded ascents, the climb was straightforward (PD) and the French are dubious about claiming a first.

Lack of time did not allow attempts on any of the higher summits, and when the team returned to Ishkashim, the border with Tajikistan was closed due to the Khorog riots. Travelling north to Shughnan, they met the Afghan general, Sayed Khail, controlling border police in the entire north and northeast of the country. He tried for several days to get them authorization to cross the border, but to no avail. Eventually, he arranged for them to travel with his convoy from Shughnan to Taloqan in Takhar province, and then provided onward transport, including an escort through Kunduz, to the border post at Sher Khan Bandar, where there is a bridge over the river to Tajikistan. Via this, they returned home.

Future parties should keep in mind that a lot of time is needed to conclude negotiations and hire porters before entering any valley in this region. Local people who have worked on previous

expeditions are kind, full of advice, and glad to help visiting alpinists.

Lindsay Griffin, Mountain INFO, from information provided by Alex Darrioulat and Franck Mazas, France

Images



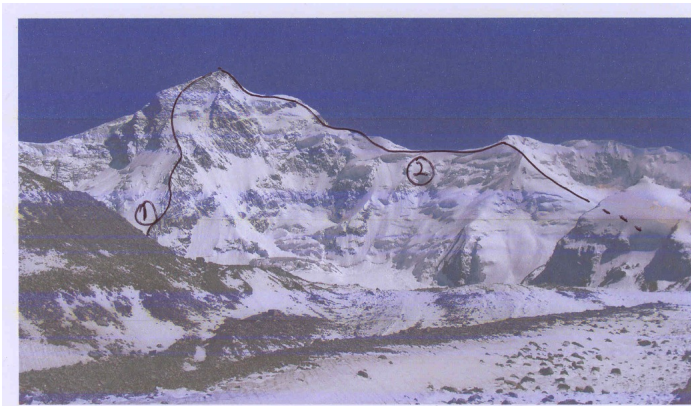
Koh-e-Keshni Khan from the summit of a small, unnamed peak on the upper glacier. The original route climbs the snow spur left of center to the west ridge at Pt. 6,000m, then along the west ridge to summit. Polish north face route in profile to left. White Pyramid just off picture right.



Arnaud Pasquer on the summit of White Pyramid. In the distance, to the southwest, is the broad north face of the Noshag massif (7,492m). To its right the flat-topped dome-like peak is Gumbaz-e-Safad (6,800m). Unknown peaks of the northern Mandarav Valley in the foreground.



Koh-e-Qalat from the northeast. The 2012 ascent of the north top climbed the broad snow/ice couloir to the small col, and then left up the skyline ridge.



The north side of Koh-e-Keshni Khan from the upper Keshni Khan Valley. This mountain was climbed 10 times up until 1976, though mostly not from this valley. (1) North face (three Poles in 1976; the 1,800m route, climbed alpine-style, was considered one of the major ascents of the Hindu Kush at the time). (2) North spur and west ridge (four Austrians in 1963 to make the first ascent. Their attempt the year before accessed the ridge much farther right). White Pyramid lies off picture right.



The steep, mixed east-northeast face of Koh-e-Wark. This peak has only been climbed twice, in 1963 (four Austrians) and in 1976 (two Poles). In the foreground is the small but elegant unnamed peak climbed in 2012 by snow slopes on the far side. Koh-e-Tokan is just off picture left.

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