



AAC Publications

Link Sar (7,041m), Northwest Face Attempt; Charakusa Climbing Overview

Pakistan, Karakoram, Masherbrum Range, Charakusa Valley

Will Sim and I (U.K.) had never been to the Himalaya. Together we'd climbed dozens of hard routes in the Alps, as well as taken part in expeditions to Patagonia and Alaska, but we'd never made it to the bigger peaks. The problem is knowing where to start. Ideally, we were looking for something that suited our climbing style—technical alpine—and a good introduction to higher elevations. Base camp, we felt, was pretty important. Having camped on snow and glaciers enough times, we felt keen to camp somewhere dry and warm, to keep the psyche high. After months of research, the Charakusa Valley was the winner.

Base camp turned out to be ideally suited, with plenty of accessible ca 6,000m peaks, all manageable in a day—if we didn't get a crack at anything big, we'd still get quite a lot done. Throw yourself into the deep end on your first Himalayan expedition and you are likely to end up not climbing a single route in two months. We wanted to be productive.

We warmed up with the British Route on Naisa Brakk, the northwest ridge of Sulu Peak (camping on the summit to aid acclimatization and then downclimbing the large central couloir on the west-northwest face), and finally the Diaper Couloir on Beatrice. Toward the end of our stay we climbed Fathi Brakk from the south.

Link Sar, southeast of K7, has not been climbed. The northwestern side is heavily guarded by threatened approaches (seracs) and complex glaciers. Narrow approach valleys result in it being difficult to scope the face, adding to the adventure. We attempted it by the northwest face, but found unconsolidated snow in dangerous amounts. There is a stunning rock line to the top from the south, but it is threatened by a serac partway up. No one has yet been able to find the key to a feasible ascent, and there are two prominent summits. After plenty of research, I am still unsure which is the higher.

Climbing in the Charakusa can roughly be divided into three areas.

The first is the area encompassing Fathi Brakk, Haji Brakk (5,950m), and Farhod Brakk (ca 5,300m) on the south side of the glacier, and Sulu (ca 5,950m), Beatrice (5,800m), and Naisa Brakk (5,200m) to the north. These provide good acclimatization ascents, and the last three named—the easiest to approach—can all be climbed in a day from base camp. The Fathi-Farhod group provides longer outings, mainly because it is farther from camp. The north faces have serious rock routes, but the south sides are almost hikes. They also provide excellent views of nearly everything on K6 and K7. Just above base camp stands a 300m "crag" named Iqbal Wall. Due to its proximity, generally good granite, and low elevation, it is now covered in routes.

The second area forms the meat of the valley, the horseshoe southeast of base camp ringed by K7, Link Sar, Hassan, K6, K6 West, and Kapura. K7 (6,934m) is a huge granite massif, reminiscent of Chamonix in that it has big, steep granite towers of excellent granite, interspersed with gullies and couloirs similar in appearance to the east face of Mont Blanc du Tacul. There is still plenty of potential for new lines in the K7 massif, particularly pure rock routes, and in my opinion the line still awaiting a first ascent is the complete southwest ridge, falling directly from the summit.

K6 (7,281m) is perhaps the jewel. Although only slightly higher than K7, it is in a different league. The immense north side is a convoluted nightmare of seracs, unconsolidated snow, and mixed terrain. The northwest face has seen attention, but two things have prevented parties getting on it. Firstly, the objective danger is high: There is a serac at the top that is only visible when making a full reconnaissance. Secondly, there is a huge crevasse barring access; it was perfectly visible in 2012. The northeast face, between the main summit and K6 West (7,040m), has seracs, cornices and mushrooms. While it presents futuristic lines, it also provides the most spectacular avalanches, and it would be ill-advised to contemplate anything there.

While overshadowed by its bigger brother K6, Kapura (6,544m) is an elegant peak. The northeast face is a snow-fluted nightmare, but there have been at least two ascents from the west side, though the southwest ridge remains unclimbed.

The third and final area lies farther from the main hub of Charakusa climbing, and contains three different yet interesting peaks. Drifika (6,447m) is one of the most eye-catching peaks in the Karakoram, and there are various technically straightforward options to climb it from this side. However, the approach requires negotiating two convoluted icefalls. Changmah (5,844m) looks to offer a few fun options to the top, and one assumes it has already seen an ascent. Thanda Parbat (incorrectly marked on maps as 6,553m; more like ca 6,000m) has obvious and safe lines, and I do not believe it has been climbed.

This is a fun acclimatization area and gives great views of K7 and its neighbors. Access is via the straightforward South Charakusa Glacier. Between Kapura and Fathi Brakk the glacier narrows and forms an icefall. By hugging the northwest side, it is possible to get off the glacier before it becomes too bad. There is an old fixed rope attached to pegs, marking the slabby exit point. Camping beneath any of the above objectives is advisable; otherwise it is a huge day from base camp.

Jon Griffith, France

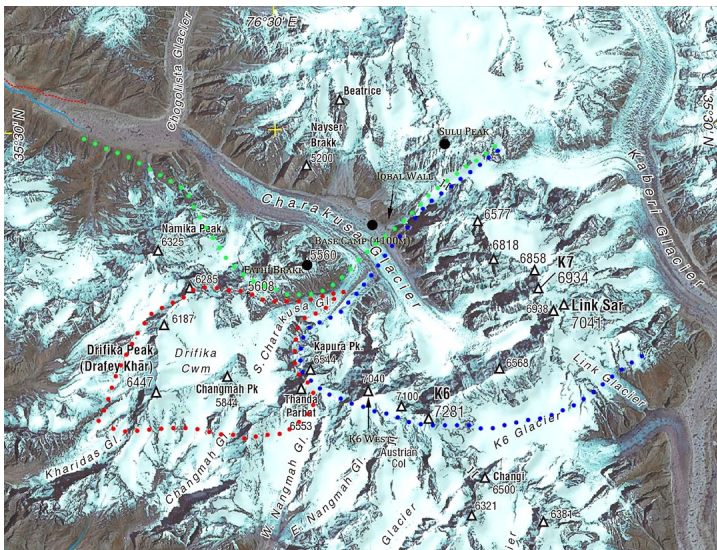
Images



Will Sim on the South Charakusa Glacier. (A) K7 West. (B) Unclimbed K7 Central. (C) K7. (D) Link Sar. (E) First Pillar. (F) Second Pillar. (G) Southwest ridge (no complete ascent). (H) Prezelj-Turgeon pillar. (I) Nafees' Cap. (J) Southwest ridge (no integral ascent).



Northwest face of Link Sar seen from K7. The route attempted in 2012 is marked. According to existing maps the highest point visible in this image might best be referred to as Link Sar North, with the main summit some distance back along a ridge.



Map shows the three areas described in this report. Green is the first area, blue the second, and red the third.



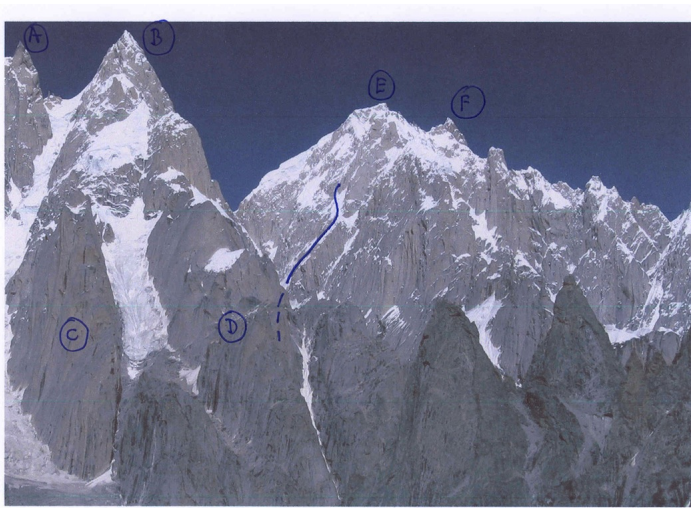
Attempting the northwest face of Link Sar. In the mid background is Kapura, to its right the South Charakusa Glacier, and in the distance the elegant snow pyramid of Drifika.



K6 West (7,040m) seen from the north.



The K7 and Link Sar group.



The K7 and Link Sar group, annotated. (A) K7 Central. (B) K7. (C) Nafees' Cap. (D) Southwest ridge. (E) Link Sar North. (F) Link Sar (7,040m). Route attempted in 2012.

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