



Aling and Masherbrum valleys, Double Peak, Hunchback Peak, and Cathedral Peak attempts; TIMI ascent from both west and east; Peak ca 5,220m

Pakistan, Karakoram, Masherbrum Mountains

Ludvik Golob, Tomaz Goslar, Mojca Svajger, and I planned to acclimatize in the Aling Valley, then cross 5,620m Gondokhoro La and make an alpine-style ascent of Gasherbrum I. We climbed in the Aling from July 17–31, then descended to Hushe, where we were informed the Gondokhoro La had been closed to foreigners. In the meantime our permit for Gasherbrum I had been canceled: We had joined an international expedition supported by Adventure Tours Pakistan, but after the Nanga Parbat massacre, the expedition was called off and we no longer had a permit to enter the Baltoro. In Hushe we were monitored closely by police. Eventually, they allowed us to enter the Masherbrum Valley. We left the area toward the end of August.

On July 18 we established our first base camp (35°31.693'N, 76°12.340'E) at 4,320m on the moraine of the Aling Glacier at the junction of two side glaciers, one coming down from Double Peak. It had fresh water, and we suggest future parties use the same spot, as the area has very limited campsites. Opposite us, directly across the Aling Glacier, we later found remains of an old base camp, which may date back to a 1961 British expedition, which made the first climbs from this valley.

Over the next two days we attempted Double Peak (6,700m), but were unable to access either the west ridge or south face. On the 23rd we crossed the main glacier, went up a side glacier to the east, and camped at 5,200m. On the 24th we attempted an unnamed peak, but we had to retreat at 5,638m (at the point 35°33.133'N, 76°14.566'E), about 150m below the summit, because the ice above seemed too dangerous.

On the 25th we climbed to a summit on the watershed ridge between the Aling and Masherbrum valleys. We named it TIMI. Our GPS recorded 35°32.167'N, 76°15.096'E, and a height of ca 5,690m.

On July 27 and 28, Golob, Svajger, and I attempted Hunchback Peak, but due to poor snow and ice conditions we retreated from 5,400m. We all then descended to Hushe.

After our difficulties with permits and police, we returned to the area on August 7 and established a new base camp at 4,650m, above the west bank of the Masherbrum Valley. This was southeast of TIMI and a peak to its north that the locals call Masherbrum II and claim to be over 7,000m. Both this name and altitude are inaccurate; the mountain was originally known as Cathedral Peak (see editor's note below).

We managed to climb to within ca 40m of the top of Cathedral Peak on two separate days, but were stopped by a large crevasse encircling the summit. On August 10 we tried via the east ridge, and on the following day more directly via the southeast face. We discovered 10m of fixed rope above base camp. Conditions were icy and we experienced much rockfall. We climbed 1,500m up to 60-70°, and estimated the summit to be ca 6,100m.

On the 20th, while waiting for the weather to improve, Svajger and I decided to climb TIMI from our current base camp (from the opposite side of our first ascent). In a weather window of a few hours we climbed a 690m, 50–70° ice slope to the summit. The following day we reached the standard base

camp for Masherbrum, but found the glacier leading to this mountain too dangerous. Instead, we decided to explore the immediate area. Svajger and I ascended a small side valley on the east side of the Masherbrum Glacier and on the 23rd made the ascent of a small peak (35°34'40.47"N, 76°19'00.47"E; 5,220m Google Earth). Again, conditions were icy and the glacier approach was crevassed.

We feel this area provides a good acclimatization venue for parties planning an alpine-style ascent in the Baltoro (presuming that the political situation improves), but would suggest they visit earlier in the season, in order to find easier conditions.

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Editor's note: The name Masherbrum II has been applied to at least three peaks in the area. The true Masherbrum II would be the 7,806m southwest summit of Masherbrum. In 1988, however, an Italian team climbed the most westerly of the Masherbrum group, calling it Masherbrum Far West and reporting a height of 7,200m. When a British commercially organized expedition repeated this route in 1991, they referred to the mountain, possibly for commercial reasons, as Masherbrum II. Subsequent parties felt the height to be no more than 6,600m. Then, in 1996, a Pakistan military expedition to Masherbrum climbed a 6,200m summit 12km south of the main peak, and also called it Masherbrum II.

In 1961 Group Captain Tony Smyth's RAF expedition climbed four peaks from the Aling Glacier, including Mitre (ca 5,940m) and Sceptre, which lie on the ridge north of Peak 6,200m. The RAF named the 6,200m summit Cathedral Peak, but did not attempt it. Cathedral is the summit attempted by the Slovenian women and almost certainly the peak climbed by the 1996 Pakistan expedition.

In the last 30 years climbing visits to the Aling Glacier have been rare. In 1989 a six-member British team climbed Reed Peak (ca 5,625m), but the location of this summit is unclear. Two years later, two British women reached the head of the glacier and made an unsuccessful attempt on a peak they call Shingkhong (5,900m).

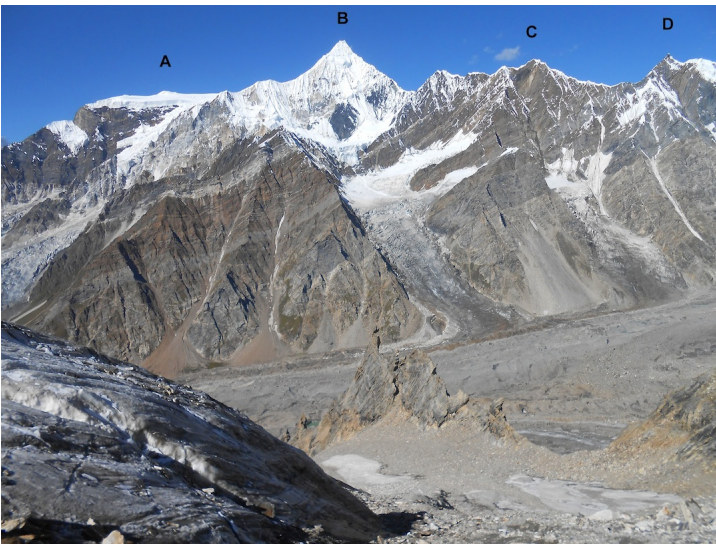
Images



Looking west-northwest over base camp, across the Aling Glacier. TIMI is the pointed rocky peak on the right.

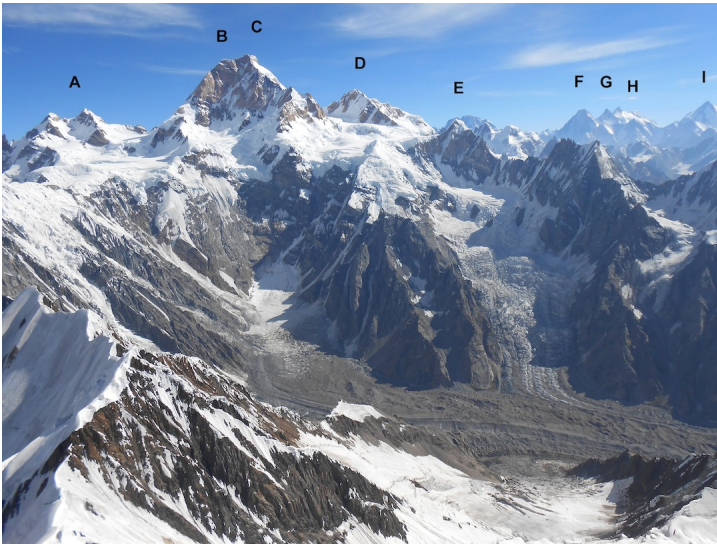


Camp (5,700m) on the plateau southeast of the summit of Cathedral Peak (visible behind).



Looking west across the lower Masherbrum Glacier to: (A) Peak marked on some maps as Ice Cap;

(B) Cathedral Peak; (C) Mitre, and (D) Sceptre.



Looking north-northeast over the upper Masherbrum Glacier from high on Cathedral Peak. (A) Masherbrum far west peaks. (B) Masherbrum II/Masherbrum West (7,806m). (C) Masherbrum (7,821m). (D) Yermanend Kangri (7,163m). (E) Serac Peak (6,614m; behind it lies Broad Peak). (F) Gasherbrum IV. (G) Gasherbrum III. (H) Gasherbrum II. (I) Gasherbrum I.

Article Details

Author	Irena Mrak, Slovenia
Publication	AAJ
Volume	56
Issue	88
Page	300
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions