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Baintha Kabata (ca 6,250m), east face; Bobisghir (6,414m), south face and southwest ridge; Baintha Ahrta (ca 6,300m), west couloir; Biacharahi Central Tower (ca 5,700m), southeast face, attempt

Pakistan, Karakoram, Panmah Muztagh

In June the international team of Olov Isaksson (Sweden), Anton Karnoup (Russia/U.S.), Jesse Mease (U.S.), and I (as leader) trekked to the Choktoi Glacier. Having been denied permission to enter the Chinese Karakoram, and denied official registration on a permit for the Charakusa, we were simply in search of freedom to climb without bureaucracy. Fortunately, in Pakistan everything below 6,500m is a "trekking peak", and the Choktoi offers technical trekking in the shape of granite big walls. Although best known for the impregnable north face of the Latok group, the upper Choktoi offers a series of serrated granite spires in the high 5,000m and low 6,000m range.

We arrived at Latok I north base camp on June 23, our guide Karim and cook Shehzad making an excellent job of getting the caravan there despite deep snow in the last kilometer. Our Askole porters were ably assisted by six strong Balti glacier ponies, which made it to within one kilometer of camp.

In excellent weather we spent the first two days in reconnaissance. Karnoup, Mease, and I followed the East Biacharahi Glacier north to the Biacharahi Pass (5,270m), which afforded close-up views of the three rocky Biacherahi spires to the west, and of Bobisghir to the north across the Nobande Sobande. Then Isaksson, Mease, and I climbed to Sim La (5,300m/5,481m, various maps), on the way up passing the north side of Choktoi Spire (the "island" peak near the head of the Choktoi) and on the way down to the south side, thereby gaining optimal views of the Ogres and Latoks, as well as the Baintha Kabata group of low 6,000m peaks.

With good weather persisting, we all decided to make an attempt on Baintha Kabata, the peak north of Sim La, climbed in 2008 via its south ridge by Colin Haley and Maxime Turgeon, and again in 2009 by Aymeric Clouet, Julien Dussière, and Jérôme Para. Rather than taking this complex and technical route, we were attracted (for acclimatization purposes) by the snow flutes of the east face, and thus climbed a short icefall southeast of the mountain to establish a 5,500m camp in the basin between Baintha Kabata and a neighboring, slightly higher peak. On the 27th all four of us climbed snow and névé to the summit ridge, finding very rotten snow/ice in the final meters to the top (also reported by Haley and Turgeon). The measured height was 6,250m, close to the reading of the French party, while the value reported by Haley and Turgeon seems to be at least 300m too low. By the time we returned to base camp next day, the weather was bad, and continued so for the following five days, allowing us to experience some of the feeling encountered by Latok north ridge parties.

With the next good weather we set out for the Nobande Sobande Glacier, intending to climb Bobisghir. Crossing the pass, we descended to the glacier by a short, steep, and very soft downclimb. A flat hike led to a forward camp at 4,800m, below the south side of the peak. On July 5 we made an early start to the northwest, climbing a snow face that narrowed to a thin ice gully. Mease led one pitch of low-angle but centimeter-thick ice to access the basin above the small icefall at ca 5,600m. We crossed the basin above the crevasse line, encountering some breakable crust and deep snow, then followed the rounded southwest ridge to the summit on excellent névé. In perfect weather we were rewarded with a marvelous 360° panorama, which included the Crown, K2, and the Hispar Muztagh.

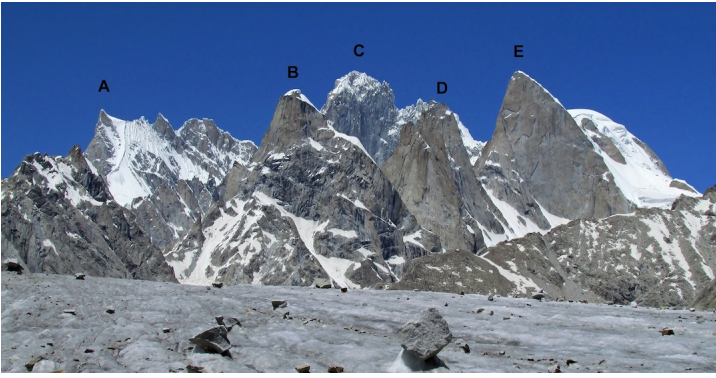
Descending, we waited some time at 5,600m for cooler conditions on the lower face, then made two rappels over the thin ice pitch, returning to base camp next day. [Only one previous ascent of Bobisghir has been reported: in 1985 by Japanese climbers, via the southeast ridge. There have been several subsequent attempts, including one by the southwest ridge in 1995 by a British team.]

An extended period of bad weather ensued, lingering longer on the Choktoi than in other regions of the range. When it cleared, opinions diverged on what to do during our few remaining days. Karnoup and Mease were interested in rock climbing, I in climbing more summits, and Isaksson in no further action. With the 17th appearing to be the best summit day, and having established during the Baintha Kabata climb that the approach was crevasse-free and the neighboring peak could be reached by a long snow gully, I set out at 8 p.m. on the 16th for an overnight approach. I reached the ca 6,300m summit via the west couloir, a long gully of 50° snow and ice topped by a short, vertical ice step in blocky terrain and rotten snow around the corniced summit. Lingering morning cloud gave less of a view than intended, but cleared in time to cause some very soft snow on the descent, which was completed to base camp by midafternoon. We propose the name Baintha Ahrta (Horse Peak) for this summit, in honor of our uncomplaining assistant Balti porters.

Meanwhile Karnoup and Mease were attempting Biacherahi Central Tower (ca 5,700m), on a one-day push that saw them climbing soon after first light. Mease led nine pitches on the southeast side of the tower until stopped by blank rock about one pitch short of the south ridge, and some five pitches short of the summit. This line was followed in 1989 by Spanish Jon Lazkano and Javier Mugarra to make the first ascent of the peak. [Their 20-pitch route up the ca 550m face rated 6a+ A3+; the pair report fixing 600m of rope over several days before jumaring to their high point and reaching the top in a 22-hour push.] Karnoup and Mease found many pins and bolts, and much fixed rope. They graded their pitches 5.10 and surmised that the redder rock, of which much of the range is composed, is disappointingly featureless.

We left base camp on the 19th in excellent weather.

Images



Looking west up the Choktoi Glacier. (A) Baintha Kabata. The 2013 ascent climbed the fluted east face visible. (B) Biacherahi South Tower. (C) Baintha Ahrta. (D) Biacherahi Central Tower. (E) Biacherahi North Tower.



Looking southwest from Bobisghir at (A) the ridge leading to Ogre II; (B) The Ogre or Baintha Brakk; (C) Baintha Ahrta; and (D) Baintha Kabata.



Bobisghir (right) from the Nobande Sobande Glacier. The 2013 ascent avoided the icefall to reach the southwest ridge (left skyline).



Bobisghir seen during an ascent of Braldu Brakk. The southwest ridge, climbed in 2013, is on the right. The flat-topped extension to the left is known as Bobisghir North. The high peak in left distance is K2.

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