



AAC Publications

Uzun Brakk (6,422m), west face

Pakistan, Karakoram, Panmah Muztagh

Uzun Brakk (formerly known as Conway's Ogre) is a prominent mountain on the true left (north) bank of the Biafo Glacier. In 2009 we admired it from the foresummit of Lukpilla Brakk, but there was a lot of snow that year and we did not find the courage to try. Memories remained.

Uzun Brakk (variously spelt Uzum and Uzen—it means “steep mountain” or “sheer mountain” in Balti) is an ideal objective for a lightweight, low-cost expedition, requiring neither permit nor guide. In July, after a three-day walk from Askole, Ondra Mandula and I established base camp at a place called Morpho Goro (a.k.a. Marpogoro, “red stones”), directly below the spectacular south face of Lukpilla Brakk. It was a nice, sandy spot with running water.

In good weather we went to inspect Uzun Brakk's southwest face, which rises directly above the Biafo. This was the flank attempted in 1993 by Americans Jim Donini and Jack Tackle. However, we found the bottom third of this face held huge seracs, which made it too dangerous. We continued into a side valley on the western side of the peak and walked up a glacier (sometimes referred to as Marpogoro) to 4,900m, where we found a campsite with great views of the impressive west face.

The following day we climbed an easy, unnamed peak of 5,600m on the opposite (west) side of the glacier. The summit, which we named Ktak Brakk (“sightseeing peak”), has great views and was the perfect place to study the west face of Uzum Brakk. That same day we returned to base camp.

On August 5, after two days of bad weather, we returned to the unnamed glacier and spent the night at the foot of the west face (4,600m). Leaving at 3:30 a.m. on the 6th, we climbed unroped up a 400m, 60° snow couloir on the right side of the face. At the top, where snow turned to ice, we roped up and pitched moderate ice and mixed to the first rock band. We chose a red dihedral on the right, which gave nice, sustained climbing on good rock (6b). The leader climbed without a sack, while the second followed (no jugging) with a light pack. We hauled a 70L bag with tent, sleeping bag, and ice gear. After 14 hours we pitched our tent on a small ledge at 5,600m.

Next day, two moderate rock pitches and then eight easy but exhausting pitches of ice (60–70°), led to the summit rock band, where an interesting layback pitch gave access to a hidden ice/mixed corner. At the top of this (6,000m) we made our second bivouac. There was not enough room for the tent, but we spent a comfortable night on two separate ledges.

We began climbing again at 6 a.m., taking rock and ice gear, a stove and tent, but no sleeping bags. The day began with an excellent, if cold, finger crack (6b). We moved to the right side of the ridge, where the rock was reasonably sound, and climbed seven pitches to what we thought was the final rock tower blocking the way to the summit. However, we then discovered another monolithic tower that gave complex climbing. A short ice section was followed by drytooling a narrow crack to gain a thin traverse leading to more ice. From there we continued, pulling on gear for 10m, before finishing with fine free climbing.

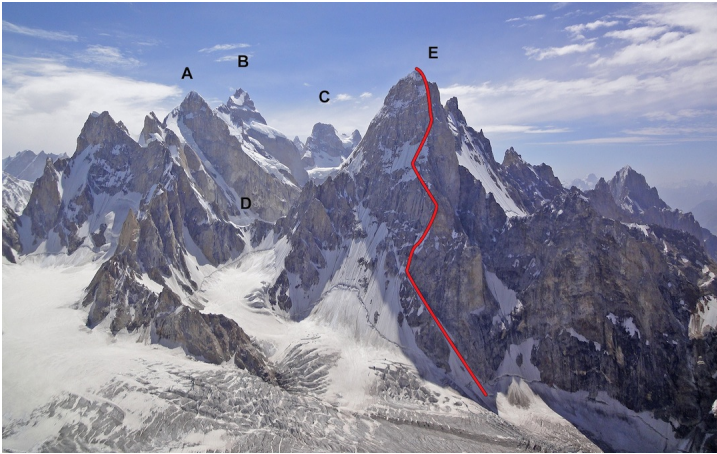
Three pitches of easier rock and ice on the ridge brought us to the summit at 6 p.m. There was almost no wind, and the setting sun was turning everything to red, orange, and pink. There was no rush: We knew we would not make our sleeping bags before nightfall. We started rappelling at 7 p.m.

and stopped at 11 p.m. for a cold but calm night on a small ledge at 6,200m, still 200m above our bags.

The following day we reached the bottom of the face at 10 p.m. The lower section is exposed to rockfall in the afternoon, and this shortened our ropes by 40m. We left two pitons, some nuts, and ca 30m of slings. Because of the nice weather and perfect climbing conditions we experienced, we named our line *In the Right Place at the Right Time* (1,600m, 35 pitches and 400m of unroped climbing, 6b C1 M5 70°). After we reached base camp, the weather turned bad and remained so until we left for home.

Editor's note: Uzun Brakk, which lies just west of the true Ogre (Baintha Brakk, 7,285m), was thought to have been dubbed the Ogre by the British explorer Martin Conway, who traveled up the Biafo Glacier in 1892 on the first major expedition to what is now the Pakistan Karakoram. Prior to 2013 there are only two known serious attempts. The first was in 1980, via the east face, by Victor Saunders and Will Tapsfield. After two bivouacs, and at a point ca 150m from away from the highest point, unstable double cornices on the crest proved too dangerous and the two retreated. In 1993, Jim Donini and Jack Tackle attempted the ca 2,000m southwest face from the Biafo Glacier. The weather proved unstable during their stay, but on their second attempt, four days' climbing took them to a point on the west pillar ca 300m below the top. Unfortunately, a prolonged snowstorm then forced them down. The Czechs' second bivouac (at 6,000m) was about two pitches below the Donini-Tackle highpoint.

Images



Looking east across the Marpogoro Glacier from Ktak Brakk. (A) Pt. 6,700m. (B) Baintha Brakk (Ogre, 7,285m). (C) Baintha Brakk II (Ogre II, 6,960m). (D) Uzun Col. (E) Uzun Brakk (6,422m), with ascent route marked.



High on the west face of Uzun Brakk with the Marpogoro Glacier far below.



Climbing the upper rock tower on the first ascent of the west face of Uzun Brakk.

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