



AAC Publications

Koh-e-Wakhan Range, Peak 5,965m (6,060m GPS), south face; Peak 5,842m, northeast face, attempt

Afghanistan, Pamir

In early September, Mick Follari, Aidan Loehr, and I traveled through Tajikistan to the Afghan border, where we were delayed crossing the frontier for more than a week by a cholera epidemic in northern Afghanistan. Once over the border in Ishkashim, Adab Shab, our agent, provided a driver and translator. We then drove two days to Ptukh, where I had been one and a half years earlier with three ski-mountaineering partners (AAJ 2013). After hiring porters, we reached our 2012 base camp in the Issik Valley via two easy days of walking.

The Issik Valley appears to be stocked with good granite and is not dissimilar to Chamonix, albeit 2,000m higher, with no people for hundreds of kilometers and endless, horrendous moraine. Our primary objective was the northwest face of Koh-e-Pamir (6,320m), but from our high camp at 5,100m on the glacier we could see it lay in the shade for all but two hours a day. September nights are long and cold, and none of us wanted to stuff fingers and toes into icy granite so late in the season. We turned instead to an unclimbed peak between Koh-e-Seh Aspe Safad and Koh-e-Helal. The Austrian map puts this at 5,965m (actually, the map marks it as 4,965m, but this is obviously a typo as the adjacent col is marked as 5,814m).

On September 17 we started up the south face in the small hours, climbing several pitches up a thin line of ice and rock (AI4+ M5) to a moderate snow couloir made up of the most awkward, bladed, mega sun-cups imaginable. We unroped, continued together, and at 5,800m roped up again for several pitches of moderate ice to the summit ridge. A quick jaunt led to the top, where a GPS measured 6,060m and an altimeter 6,030m. We now discovered we had forgotten the V-thread tool, so Mick made a stupendous job of rigging 18 consecutive ice anchors down our route using a #6 Black Diamond Stopper instead of a V-threader.

Several days later we made our first attempt on Peak 5,842m, a summit with no known ascents that lies a couple of kilometers east of Koh-e-Seh Aspe Safad (6,101m). On the 21st we climbed unroped for 100m up an initial ice ribbon on the northeast face, and then belayed several pitches before reaching a steep section of rotten, white ice overlying a black-ice core. Aidan tried first, finding zero protection and breaking a pick. Mick then advanced the line by half a dozen moves and two ice screws. We went down, and after a rest day spent aggressively sharpening crampons, regained the same crux pitch. Aidan made steady progress over the bulge via some aid and desperate scratching. We then climbed several more pitches of AI5 M6 to reach an alcove approximately halfway up the face.

The sun had crossed the sky. The ropes were now frozen cables. The temperature was dropping, and we had not taken bivouac gear. I tried to imagine the horror of sport climbing back home with missing toes, and couldn't reconcile it. During lulls between each rappel we viewed the vast array of possibilities in this area awaiting any climbers prepared to brave the bureaucracy, visa dilemmas, poverty, security issues, and endless loose talus. The descent to civilization began next day. Having carried a paraglider to base camp, I elected to fly back to Ptukh.

On our ride back down the Wakhan, we discovered that battles were now frequent between the Taliban and Afghan National Army (ANA) in the Warduj district, a couple of hours south of Ishkashim. By dint of its ANA military base, an Ismaili Shia majority, and its appreciation for tourism dollars,

Ishkashim itself is still fairly secure. That said, I'd encourage climbers to use prudence and discretion if you visit the Wakhan.

You should also ensure visas are in order. Aidan paid for a multi-entry visa to Tajikistan, but upon arriving back at the border discovered that in reality he only had a single-entry visa (which had already been used). By the time we learned of this, Aidan was already stamped out of Afghanistan and in effect became someone similar to the Tom Hanks character from *Terminal*—he was stuck in a no man's land between two countries. It cost him almost a month and a lot of money to get home. More info on the expedition may be found at Afghanalpine.com.

Images



The northeast face of Peak 5,842m. The attempted route climbed the narrow ice couloir through the center of the rock wall (right of the climber), to just below its exit onto the triangular snow patch halfway up the face, where the team retreated.



The initial section of the south face of Peak 5,965m during the first ascent.



Looking northeast from slopes below Peak 5,842m. (A) East ridge of Peak 6,041m. (B) Peak 5,798m. (C) Koh-e-Marco Polo (6,194m). (D) Koh-e-Pamir (6,320m). (E) Peak 6,009m. (F) Northern Issik Glacier.



In the lower section of the ice couloir during the attempt on the northeast face of Peak 5,842m.



The south face of Peak 5,965m above the Northern Issik Glacier. The climbers followed the thin ice runnel rising from the glacier directly below the summit to gain the prominent rightward-slanting snow couloir/ramp. This was climbed to the upper snow and ice slopes, which were followed back left to the top.

Article Details

Author	Dylan Taylor
Publication	AAJ
Volume	56
Issue	88
Page	279
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions