



## AAC Publications

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### **Broad Peak (8,047m), west face, partial new route and tragedy**

Pakistan, Karakoram, Baltoro Muztagh

Our team of five, hoping to complete a new route on the west face, were Aidin Bozorgi (24), Mojtaba Jarahi (28), Pouya Keivan (24), Afshin Saadi (43), and me (47) as leader. Aidin, Mojtaba, and Pouya climbed the line in alpine-style above 7,000m, but died tragically while descending from the summit. Since then I've not stopped thinking about the ordeal, trying to understand what went wrong, and what we might have done to save their lives.

We had dreamed about climbing a new route on Broad Peak since 1998, but until 2009 had not been able to finance an expedition. That year a strong team of 10 from the Arash Mountaineering Club sieged the first half of the face, joining the normal route at ca 6,800m, at which point they descended. [See AAJ 2010. The line climbed by the Iranians in 2009 was more or less identical to that soloed by Carlos Carsolio in 1994, as far as Camp 3.] Aidin, Afshin, and I were members of that team.

In 2011 six climbers from the club tried to complete the line by following the normal route to Camp 3 at 7,000m, and then traversing right, climbing new ground on the west face. Running out of time, they abandoned the mountain after having fixed 350m of rope on the traverse. It was the first time Iranians had crossed new ground at such an altitude.

Based on experience gathered during the two expeditions, we decided that climbing this top section in alpine-style would not only be possible, but also faster and probably safer. In 2009 we'd had a few close calls that were mainly the result of exhaustive rope fixing.

We arrived at base camp on June 26 and began acclimatizing on the normal route. While the others seemed totally comfortable moving up to Camp 2 at 6,100m, I suffered with a severe headache. I live in Toronto at 100m above sea level, while my teammates are from Tehran (1,200m) and have the opportunity to climb above 4,000m on weekends.

Aidin, Mojtaba, and Pouya reached Camp 3 before descending to base for a rest. It was obvious these young climbers were the strongest, and although I was the most experienced, I was not acclimatized, and so decided not to accompany them on a summit attempt. We estimated it would take a day to climb from 7,000m, through the technical difficulties, to ca 7,350m, then a second day on easier terrain to the summit. They took a spare day of food and fuel, just in case. Aidin told me the traverse section fixed in 2011 had taken five hours; he expected it to go faster this time.

On July 13 they left Camp 3 at 7 a.m., but by 7:30 p.m. had only reached the end of the traverse; they pitched their small tent just above a small col (7,050m). The ice had been much harder than two years earlier. The same day Afshin and I climbed to Camp 3, hoping to continue next day to the summit via the normal route.

On the 14th Aidin called to say they hadn't slept well, the ledge being too small. It then took them all day to reach 7,250m, where they were able to build a comfortable tent platform on snow.

It was cold when I left for the summit that night on the normal route, and by 6:30 a.m. on July 15 it was snowing. I turned around at about 7,700m. I contacted Aidin and told him to leave all the gear, go to the summit, and return the same way. He disagreed, saying they still intended to traverse over the

summit. At 1 p.m. they told me they were only one hour from the top, but at 7:30 p.m. they thought they still had 45 minutes to go.

I didn't hear anything until 4 p.m. the next day, when Mojtaba called. He sounded tired and despondent. All three were exhausted and were still 30 vertical meters below the top. I was fairly certain they were still to the south of the main summit, and I urged them to leave all gear, including the tent, bypass the summit, head to the Broad Peak foresummit, and descend the normal route to Camp 3. One hour later he called again, happy and energetic. "Sorry, Ramin, we disobeyed you. We've gone to the main top." I congratulated them, saying that Afshin and I would start up toward Broad Peak Col (7,800m) and meet them on the descent. However, I was far too slow. I told Afshin to go down, as I didn't want him to suffer. After three and a half hours, I saw my efforts were pointless and returned to Camp 3. In the meantime the three climbers had contacted base camp to say they were stopping for the night between the two summits.

On July 17 the conditions deteriorated, and neither Afshin nor I were in a fit state to go up. Other climbers at base camp attempted to guide our three, who were asking for directions from the foresummit. Aidin called Iran that evening, confessing they had taken the wrong route and had been forced to re-ascend. Afshin went down to base camp, and while crossing the glacier river on a bamboo bridge, the same spot where a few weeks earlier a German lady had fallen to her death, he also fell and was lucky to save himself after being swept down river only 20m.

The following day the three climbers were too exhausted to move. At 4 a.m., a high-altitude helper, Aziz, arrived at Camp 3. I was too weak to accompany him higher, and he wouldn't go on his own. I begged him, saying we would pay any price. He wouldn't budge, and when he told me he had five children, I could no longer insist.

On July 18 and 19, various other climbers selflessly came to our assistance. At Camp 2 the Mongolian female mountaineer, Ganga, immediately abandoned her ascent and released her two Pakistan guides to help in the rescue. However, they had no idea of the whereabouts of the stricken climbers, nor were they convinced they were still alive. Neither we nor anyone in base camp knew that Aidin had called Iran the night of July 17. One of the guides stopped beyond the foresummit, and the other reached the main summit. Neither found anything except tracks on the west face and an Iranian flag under a rock.

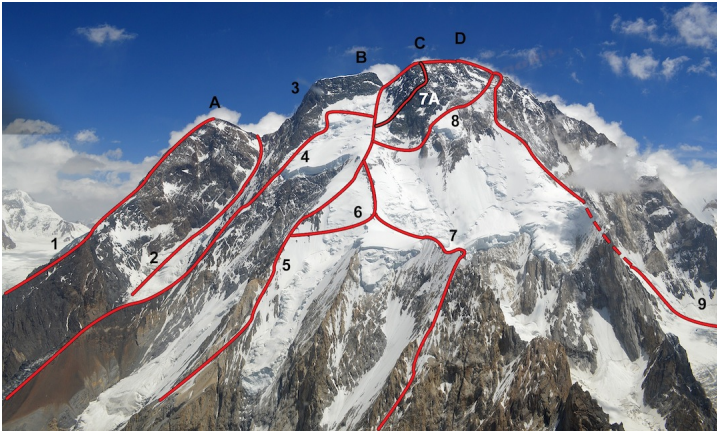
On the 20th we were promised a helicopter with a professional German rescuer, Thomas Lammie. Then, at 2 p.m., Iran contacted us to say Aidin was still alive and begging for help. His last words were, "If nobody helps me, I will end up like the other two".

On the 21st helicopters arrived, one bringing Lammie. They flew up the mountain and took photos, but were unable to spot the climbers. We had tried to get GPS coordinates from their transmitting satellite phone (a Thuraya), but this was not possible until the intervention of Iran's president. Using Google Earth, our friends in Iran tracked the location to a point some way down the northwest pillar. Aidin, with or without the other two climbers, had obviously become completely disoriented and descended the wrong ridge from the rocky foresummit.

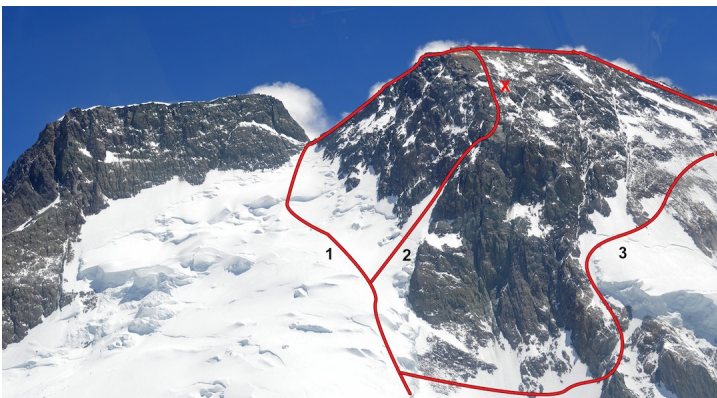
Two days later we called off the rescue, concluding that even in the best of conditions our three climbers would be very hard to reach, and it was an impossible task with the work force currently at base camp. On the 25th we left for Skardu.

Ramin Shojaei, Iran

## Images



Broad Peak massif from the southwest. (A) Broad Peak North. (B) Broad Peak Central. (C) Broad Peak Rocky Foresummit. (D) Broad Peak. (1) West-northwest ridge, first climbed in 1984 by Kukuczka and Kurtyka to start their traverse of the three main summits via the skyline ridge (3). (2) West Couloir, first ascended in 2010 by Iñurrategi, Vallejo, and Zabalza, who first climbed Broad Peak North, then traversed the skyline toward Broad Peak. (4) West-northwest ridge (2008). (5) Normal route, as climbed today (first ascent unknown, though climbed to nearly 7,000m in 1954). (6) Original line (1957). (7) West-southwest spur (1994, repeated by Iranians in 2009). (8) Iranian route (2013). (9) Southwest face and south ridge (2005).



The west side of Broad Peak above 7,000m, with Broad Peak Central on the left. (1) Normal route via Broad Peak Col (1957). (2) Carsolio, solo (1994). (3) Iranian route (2013). (X) marks the location of Aidin Bozorgi's last Thuraya call.



The initial traverse across the west face from Camp 3 on the normal route at 7,000m. The lower triangle marks the first bivouac at 7,050m, the upper the second at 7,250m.



The three Iranian climbers can be seen toward the far end of the initial traverse onto the west face.

## Article Details

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