



AAC Publications

Gulmit Tower (5,810m), Southeast Ridge, Attempt.

Asia, Pakistan, Karakoram, Batura Muztagh

Rising west from Gulmit village on the Karakoram Highway is the Bulkish Yaz Glacier, dominated at its head by an outstanding peak named Gulmit Tower, one of several summits toward the end of the long ridge running east from Ultar. The village is the administrative center of Gojal region and the former residence of the Mir of Hunza.

According to information collected by Polish cartographer Jerzy Wala, Gulmit Tower was first attempted in September 1988. Frenchmen Gerard Decors and Emmanuel Schmutz approached from the Bulkish Yaz Glacier and climbed the couloir left of the peak to reach its south col at 5,500m. Bad weather prevented further progress. A second attempt was made in July 1994. Julian Freeman-Attwood and Ed Webster, approaching up the Sikardu Glacier to the southwest, climbed a south-facing couloir to the west col (5,500m). The rock on the 300m headwall of the west ridge above proved to be very loose, and the pair retreated.

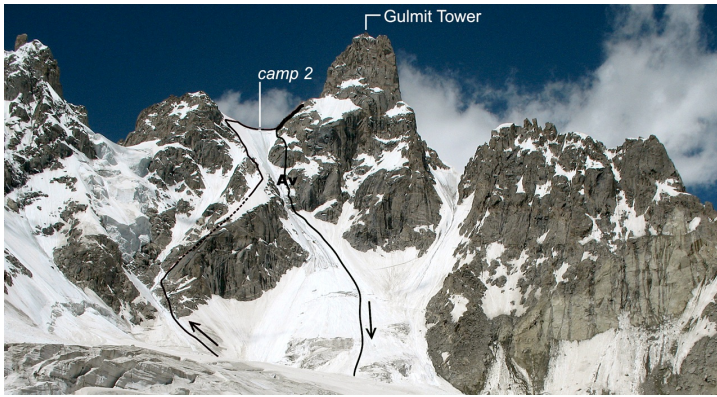
In September 2006 two Poles, Tadeusz Mazeno Dzi?gielewski and Jakub Hornowski, made the third attempt, following the route tried by the French. They climbed a little way up the southeast ridge above the south col to the main headwall at 5,650m but then retreated. Tadeusz returned in July 2007 with Rafel Zarebski and two colleagues, but continuous bad weather and high avalanche risk prevented them climbing the couloir.

In 2008 Klaudiusz Duda and I made the fifth attempt. On June 4 we left Gulmit and the following day established base camp at 4,000m in the Balkish Yaz valley. On the 6th we discovered a way through the complex glacier and made Camp 1 in the upper reaches, at 4,300m. Over the next few days we acclimatized on a nearby ridge, then rested in base camp. We anxiously watched avalanches of heavy wet snow come down the left couloir, the only route used to reach the south col.

The couloir proving too dangerous, we tried a different route. On the 12th we started climbing farther left, passing below a big serac, and heading right up a snow/ice field to a rib, which was crowned by an impressive cornice. A slope of ice and rock took us to the south col, where we bivouacked. Next day we climbed the ridge to the headwall at 5,650m but, unable to find a continuation, returned to the col and rappelled alongside the couloir. Halfway down we got too close to the couloir, and a sizeable avalanche passed right over us. We escaped with just a few bruises and torn trousers. By the 14th we were back at base camp and reached Gulmit next day.

On January 4, 2010, the enormous landslide above Attabad dammed the Hunza River, forming a lake that became several kilometers long and 100m deep. Gulmit is 40 percent flooded, and the lake has isolated 25,000 people in Gojal (upper Hunza) from the rest of the country. Food has to be delivered by boats, which are also used to transport people across the landslide area.

Images



Gulmit Tower, from Bulkish Yaz Glacier to east. 2008 attempt was by left-hand line, initial section of which is threatened by large serac to left. (Av) marks site of avalanche during rappel descent alongside couloir.



Klaudiusz Duda on top rib leading toward south col. Below him Bulkish Yaz Glacier runs down to distant Gulmit village and Hunza River (before 2010 landslide).



Kawecki on first section of southeast ridge above south col. Note rock quality.



Kawecki at 5,650m high point below headwall on southeast ridge.

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