



## AAC Publications

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### **Hispar Sar (6,400m), Southwest Face**

Asia, Pakistan, Karakoram, Hispar Muztagh

Bruce Miller, Steve Su, and I left the U.S. on July 11 for an attempt on unclimbed Pumari Chhish East (ca. 6,900m). This peak and our base camp were located on the Yutmaru Glacier, a tributary of the Hispar Glacier. Steve and Pete Takeda had attempted it in 2007, and the mountain was tried again in 2009 by Slawinski, Walsh, and Welsted.

Our hopes were quickly dashed. A serac overhangs the upper cliffs, guarding the top quarter of the peak. Photos had led us to believe that we could skirt the most dangerous part, but after two days scouring the route with a spotting scope, we realized our plan was fantasy. A chunk of ice even calved off while we were watching, further sealing our decision to look elsewhere.

The choice to focus our energy on Hispar Sar was easy. It was unclimbed and showcased a striking 1,100m ice couloir that cleaved the southwest face. This line was first tried by Sean Smith and Simon Yates in 1989. Yates returned in 2004 with Andy Parkin, and the two climbed the couloir to reach the south ridge 300m shy of the summit but had to retreat due to bad weather and a dropped food sack. Another Brit, Rufus Duits, attempted the same line solo a few years later, but did not get much higher. Prior to this, in 1991, a team of New Zealanders had tried two routes from the north but were turned back by slab avalanches and a dangerous icefall.

On August 2 we left base camp and hiked nine hours to the base of the route. We carried enough supplies to reconnoiter and then attempt the peak. We spent the 3rd crafting a strategy and watching the couloir. The weather was clear and forecast to remain so. With freezing temperatures we departed at midnight on the 4th, to avoid late afternoon wet avalanches and falling ice chunks. Bruce led the first block and easily crossed the bergschrund at 5,000m. By headlamp he climbed delicate ribbons of ice, as Steve and I huddled at the belays. The pitches flew by, and soon it was my turn to lead. On this section we mostly simul-climbed. Near the top of the couloir we could see a cornice threatening our exit to the ridge, so we opted for a lower traverse, which coincided with the beginning of Steve's block. He climbed seven pitches of mixed terrain to the ridge, the last in the dark. The climbing was difficult (M6), loose, and run out, but he didn't seem to mind.

On the crest we chopped snow and ice to accommodate an open bivouac. The narrow ridge wouldn't hold a tent, so we crawled into our bags, sat upright, and waited for morning. We'd climbed 20 hours to get to this point, up 1,100 meters of WI4+ and difficult mixed terrain.

The sunrise brought immediate relief from the cold. We brewed, ate, and left early. Bruce led 300m to the top, sometimes on easy snow, other times over mixed terrain. The climbing was not as easy as we had hoped. At 3 p.m. on the 5th we were as close to the top as we could safely get. A fully curled cornice was dripping, and threatening to peel away, so one at a time we got belayed to the summit for a look down the serac-choked north face. We made it back to camp before dark.

Well before sunrise on the 6th we started down the couloir by rappelling from our only picket. Twenty or so raps over six hours brought us to flat ground. The climb was a gem, and we were thankful to have reached the top.

After a week of rest and bad weather, we loaded packs to explore peaks and possible routes from the

Khani Basa Glacier. Two long days of hiking led into a cirque of peaks, but we had to abandon hopes of climbing due to bad snow conditions and continued snowfall. On August 23 we hiked out, our expedition finished.

Launching an expedition from the village of Hispar was problematic. We'd been warned we'd face hurdles, but hadn't appreciated how difficult they could be. Our problems included, but were not limited to, porter rates almost double than the government schedule, forced hiring of additional porters and sirdars, gear being stolen; agreed prices becoming meaningless. Luckily, this type of alpine mugging seems limited to Hispar.

## Images



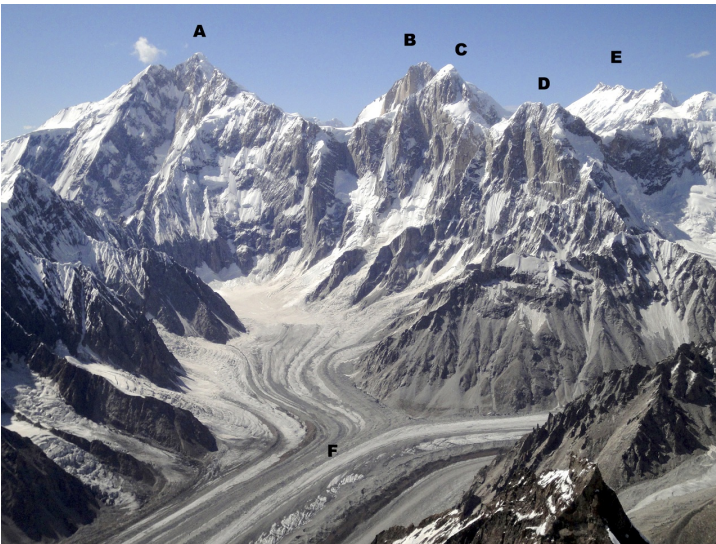
Hispar Sar, lower southwest face hidden behind foreground ridge. Route ascended prominent ice couloir, with a rocky exit onto south ridge.



Looking steeply up 1,400m southwest face of Hispar Sar. Ascent followed prominent ice couloir that curves right to hit skyline ridge just left of a rock tower.



Steve Su exiting mixed ground onto south ridge.



Looking northwest from summit of Hispar Sar. (A) Khunyang Chhish East (ca. 7,400m, unclimbed). (B) Pumari Chhish Main (7,492m, Japanese, 1979). (C) Pumari Chhish South (7,350m, French, 2007). (D) Pumari Chhish East (ca. 6,900m, unclimbed). (E) Disteghil Sar (7,885m, Austrians, 1960). (F) Yutmaru Glacier.

## Article Details

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