



AAC Publications

Gasherbrum VI, Northeast Face, Attempt

Asia, Pakistan, Baltoro Mutagh

As far as we know, there have been only two or three attempts on Gasherbrum VI (7,004m), all via the south face, directly above Gasherbrum base camp. The latest was by Jean-Noël Urban and two friends in 1998. They retreated from very high on the mountain after one of them was caught in a small avalanche.

Paulo Roxo and I tried Gasherbrum VI on July 12. Our idea was to climb the northeast face and east ridge in alpine style, and we chose the route that looked least prone to avalanches or cornice falls. We started to climb at 2 a.m. with reasonable snow and ice. The route began with slopes of about 55°-60°, and gradually became steeper. We stayed close to the rock to avoid possible avalanches and to try to find good protection. As a consequence, we found some mixed-climbing steps on precarious rock. We mostly simul-climbed, but sometimes belayed from pitons, ice screws, or snow stakes. Cams would have been mostly useless in the rotten rock.

We stopped about 60m below the east ridge. At that point we were climbing 70° ice, and above us a narrow ice couloir led to vertical rotten rock. The only way to pass this was to climb vertical snow on either side. This loose powder must have blown over the ridge and plastered the face; protection was virtually impossible. We also could see that the east ridge had many large and overhanging cornices. Maybe it could be done by someone keen to accept these risks, but not by us.

We started the descent around 12:30 p.m. The sun had hit the face and quickly transformed the snow and ice into a gelatinous mixture. It was hard to find good anchors. We got to the bottom by rappelling from double Abalakovs and a few single-piton anchors, plus downclimbing. We reached our tent on the glacier around 9 p.m.

This route is exposed to rockfall as soon as the sun shines on the face, and it is avalanche-prone in poor conditions (but less so than any other potential route we saw on Gasherbrum VI). It is advisable to climb as much as possible at night.

Images



The northeast face of Gasherbrum VI showing the line of attempt.

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