



AAC Publications

Link Sar West, Northwest Face

Pakistan, Karakoram, Masherbrum Range

Situated between K6 and K7, the unclimbed Link Sar (7,041m) derives its name from being the “linking” peak between these two giants. Compared to neighboring peaks, it has seen very little attention, mainly because it is hard to see in its entirety, let alone approach.

This was Jon Griffith’s fourth attempt on the mountain and my second. In 2014, Jon and Kevin Mahoney, climbing through a storm, reached the top of the northwest face but topped out on an unclimbable section of ridge leading to the west summit. Armed with this knowledge, Jon and I followed the same line but continued farther up and left on the face to reach the ridge at a higher point. As Jon explains, “This still left a short awkward section of ridge, but nothing like what Kevin and I encountered.”

Leaving base camp on July 12, we didn’t reach the foot of the face that day as we’d hoped. Really bad conditions on the glacier slowed us down, with knee-deep trail-breaking in wet sleet producing a very Scottish feel. We got soaked and nearly bailed then and there—starting up an unclimbed 7,000m peak with all our gear wet didn’t feel too appealing.

However, the next day we continued up the glacier, crossed the bergschrund at ca 5,600m, and started up the face, reaching our first bivouac at ca 6,100m. The weather cleared, but given the amount of fresh snow on the face, we decided to stay at this relatively safe bivouac site for the entire day and let the face shed the new snow. It was one of the wiser choices I think we’ve made.

On July 15, after a hard 17-hour day, we exited the northwest face and made a bivouac on the summit ridge at ca 6,800m. The climbing had not been too technical: several mixed pitches, with the hardest being a short pitch of M4. However, the face is consistently steep with lots of black ice. On top of that there was the altitude, heat, and large packs. The effort destroyed us.

That evening Jon came down with a fever, and we decided to stay put the next day to see how much he’d recover. On the 17th we continued up the ridge, and by midday we had reached Link Sar West at 6,938m.

We had wanted to continue to the main summit of Link Sar, which is nearly one kilometer away along a complicated and corniced ridge. But, as Jon put it, “We’d run out of food and weather window. I think if I hadn’t been so ill we could have given it a good shot, but that’s the luck of the game. We had a tight weather window and did the best we could. It is really not a mountain you want to come down in bad weather—it could easily turn into a very serious fight for survival.”

Jon’s fever returned that afternoon, so we bivouacked right next to the summit and waited for cooler, safer conditions before heading down. Starting at 3 a.m. on the 18th, we descended a large couloir on the southwest face, then continued down an unnamed glacier and through a time-consuming icefall to reach the main Charakusa Glacier. We eventually reached base camp at 5 p.m., seven days after leaving. We named the ascent route Fever Pitch.

We’ve deliberated over whether we reached a separate summit, and therefore whether our route was

a “success” or not. Jon felt the line had been completed: We had climbed the northwest face and continued to the summit that dominates the west side of the mountain. (The main summit sits atop the east side of the mountain.) On other large massifs (including K6) there are often separate summits, and on maps the western summit is designated Point 6,938m. Having been there, I too feel the west peak justifies being classified as a separate summit. Either way, summit or no summit, we had an amazing adventure getting to it and back. That’s the most important part.

Andy Houseman, Alpine Club, U.K.

Images



Andy Houseman (left) and Jon Griffith at the top of Link Sar West.



An ice crystal halo accompanies Andy Houseman toward the top of Link Sar West.



Andy Houseman on the summit ridge of Link Sar West, with K7 directly behind. Below and right is the K7 Glacier. The prominent trapezoidal snow peak is Chogolisa, with K2 just behind and left and Gasherbrum IV just to the right.



Andy Houseman on the summit ridge of Link Sar West with the north face of K6 behind (from left to right: main summit, unclimbed central summit, and west summit).



Andy Houseman on the northwest face of Link Sar, with K7 behind. A route up the couloir between the two rock spires, and then up and left to the summit, was climbed in 2012 by Kyle Dempster, Hayden Kennedy, and Urban Novak.



Link Sar's main summit (7,041m) is the rock pyramid to the right. The left-hand line (1) is Fever Pitch on the northwest face of Link Sar West (6,938m). The right-hand line (2) shows the committing descent of the southwest face to an unnamed glacier basin.



Jon Griffith atop Link Sar West with K6 behind, and to the right and more distant the snow pyramid of Drifika.



Jon Griffith in the ice runnels on the northwest face of Link Sar West.

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