



AAC Publications

Lupghar Group: Various Ascents

Pakistan, Karakoram

Murilo Lessa and I visited the Lupghar Mountains in the northwest corner of the Karakoram in July. We approached via the Batura Glacier and made a base camp midway up the Yukshgoz Glacier (Yuksh means ibex; Goz means grass), at a location known to our porters as Khush Dur Gush (“mouth of the happy valley”). Our trek there was fraught with problems. An acute shortage of porters meant we had to hire ones without previous experience. At Yashpirt, midway along the Batura Glacier, they quit due to the general rigors of portering. With great luck we quickly found replacements, but further problems arose from a misunderstanding concerning our planned base camp location. This resulted in our loads being dropped one stage short of our intended camp, with vague plans for some porters to return in a few days. To our surprise, two porters appeared the following morning, and together we ferried the loads to our intended location at 4,150m.

The view south and southwest from the south summit of Peak 5,665m, with the main Batura peaks on the left and the Kuk Sar group to the right.

After a couple of days of acclimatizing, we set our sights on one of the moderately sized peaks at the head of an unnamed valley extending north-northeast from our base camp. [Editor’s note: This valley was explored in 1925 by the Vissers, a Dutch couple.] The approach was no easy task, due to the hemmed-in nature of the lower part of the valley. We made a high camp in the first of two side valleys forking north-northeast from the unnamed valley, a short distance below its glacier terminus at 4,930m.

Next morning we attempted Peak 5,665m. Our critical error lay in the assumption that the summit would be at the head of the broadest section of glacier descending its slopes. This led us to what is best described as a southern broad shoulder (ca 5,600m). It was slightly lower than both the rocky summit pyramid further north. Two days later we returned to the same high camp and made what we believe to be the first ascent of neighboring Peak 5,702m via its southeast face (AD-, 35–45° snow). We named this summit Khush Dur Sar (36.7151°N, 74.5228°E). Subsequently, we traversed to the west-northwest ridge of Peak 5,665m and followed it to a point just 30m below the summit, where we were stopped by soft snow.

Unsettled weather plagued much of our remaining time, so we continued to focus on objectives of moderate scale that were manageable in a single day. We made the first ascent of Peak 5,589m from a high camp at 5,050m in the second of two side valleys branching north-northeast from the unnamed valley. We ascended the southeast face (AD, 50° snow) and named the summit Qalha Sar (Bastion Peak). The following day we made a third attempt at Peak 5,665m from our first high camp. From the head of the glacier, easy snow slopes on the southern side led us to the west-northwest ridge, but again the final pitches of snow were in poor shape, despite it being only 7 a.m. The slope was 55–70°, but felt steeper in the trench that we had to burrow. To our surprise, the final section of rock was adorned with abseil cord. This rock was disturbingly loose and brittle, so we ventured one at a time to the highest point. The technical difficulties were no more than British V-Diff, but the untrustworthy nature of the rock, combined with the high exposure, made it a gripping finale. We graded the route D.

Our porters knew of no other expeditions to have visited the Yukshgoz for around nine years. Given that the peak can be approached from the Lupghar Nala to the north in half the time, it is possible the previous ascent was from this direction.

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Images



The beautiful west-northwest ridge leading from the top of Khush Dur Sar to the pointed summit of Peak 5,665m. The approximate line of the final ascent is marked. The high peaks behind are part of the Batura Group.



View of Lupghar peaks from an earlier trip (2006). Behind and to the east are (A) Khush Dur Sar and (B) Qalha Sar, both climbed in 2015 from the opposite sides. (C) Peak 5,665m was climbed from this side by the snow slopes leading up and to the left of the final rocky summit pyramid.



The southeast face of Khush Dur Sar (5,702m). The peaks behind lie above the upper Lupghar Nala.



The view south and southwest from the south summit of Peak 5,665m, with the main Batura peaks on the left and the Kuk Sar group to the right.



Murilo Lessa midway up the final rock to the summit of Peak 5,665m. Note the white rappel cord in place from a prior ascent.



The southeast face of Qalha Sar (5,589m).

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