



## Harjoldur Sar, South Face and West Ridge

Pakistan, Karakoram, Virjerab Muztagh

**In 1925, Philips Visser and Jenny Visser-Hooft, a Dutch couple, explored the Virjerab Glacier. They described it as “the very worst glacier of the whole Kara-Korum....The whole valley was filled with stones and boulders often of a tremendous size.” Possibly due to this account, there has been very little mountaineering activity in the area ever since. Of the 30 or so 6,000m peaks above the Virjerab Glacier, I could only find a record of one having been climbed. In 1991 a New Zealand expedition summited Peak 6,460m above the Second West Virjerab Glacier, approaching on skis from Snow Lake.**

Our expedition consisted of Phil De-Beger, Aiden Laffey, and me. Our aim was to climb Khurdopin Sar (6,310m, 36.257278°N, 75.558144°E) and other unclimbed 6,000m peaks above the Spregh Yaz Glacier and in the Chot Pert Nala, both of which branch from the lower Virjerab Glacier. On June 3, after a three-day trek from Shimshal Village, our porters and guide left us at a 4,095m base camp at the junction of the Virjerab and Spregh Yaz glaciers (36.304154°N, 75.598044°E). This was near the base camp used in 2012 by a Polish expedition, which made the first ascent of a 5,900m peak above the Spregh Yaz Glacier that they named Khushrui Sar (AAJ 2014).

After establishing an advance base camp in the Spregh Yaz Valley, we attempted Peak 6,140m (36.255998°N, 75.579313°E) by the north face, but gave up due to avalanche conditions. We also abandoned our planned attempt on Khurdopin Sar due to the number of seracs and avalanche risk.

Next, we decided to attempt peaks in the Chot Pert Nala, on the other side of the Virjerab Glacier. At one point this valley narrows to a gorge, and there are two short rock climbing sections. After establishing another advanced base at 5,100m, we attempted the first ascent of Peak 6,020m (36.333729°N, 75.646283°E) by the west face and west ridge. After encountering deep snow, we pressed on by what seemed like the relative safety of a ridge. Climbing without a rope, I was above the others and attempting to wade through a very deep section of snow when I heard a muffled boom and started tumbling in an avalanche. Fortunately, I managed to brake, leaving the others on a plinth of snow on the ridge below. Fault lines a meter deep, extending perhaps 100m on either side of the ridge, indicated that I'd triggered two avalanches simultaneously. We retreated, and on the way back to our bivouac site we crossed the debris from two big avalanches.

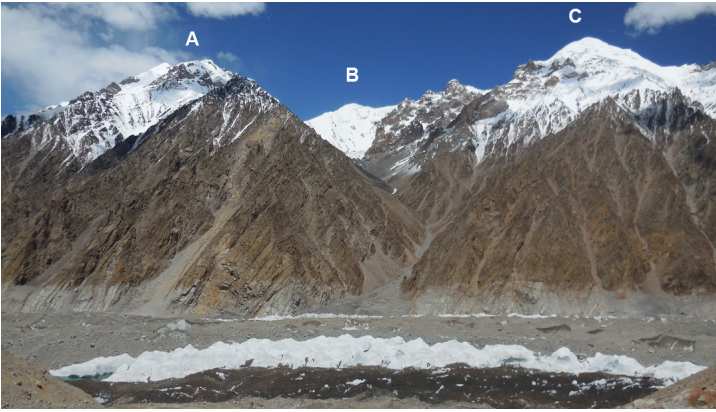
The next day we reconned the approach through an icefall to Peak 6,104m (36.359936°N, 75.632656°E), the highest in the Chot Pert Nala. Setting off at 1:30 a.m. on June 19, we climbed a wide couloir up the south face and then continued along the west ridge to make the first ascent of this summit (PD), returning to our bivouac at 8 a.m. Later, locals suggested the name Harjoldur Sar, which in Wakhi means “the mountain of the valley of the black and white yak.” The peak overlooks the Harjoldur Valley to the east, which the Shimshalis occasionally use to reach the yak pastures of Shimshal Pass from the Virjerab Valley.

After returning to base camp, we trekked a short distance up-valley and photographed unclimbed peaks of the upper Virjerab. Some of these appear to be fairly easy, so an expedition with a base camp in the upper Virjerab would have plenty of options. All heights quoted in photo captions are taken from Soviet 1:100,000 military maps.

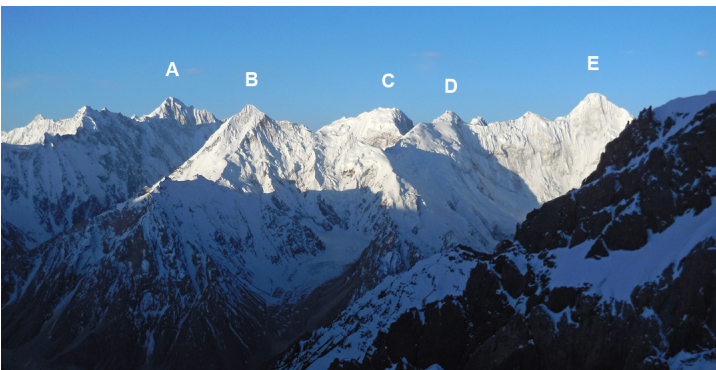
Finally, after returning to Pasu in the Hunza Valley, Aiden and I trekked for three days in the Momhil Valley, where there are six 7,000m peaks. This is rarely visited by either trekkers or climbers, and only one of the 7,000ers appears to have been climbed from this valley (Malangutti Sar, 7,026m, climbed by a Japanese team, by the southwest ridge, in 1985). However, the trek up the Momhil Glacier is difficult, particularly to reach the upper glacier. [Download a full expedition report with maps and more photos.]

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## Images



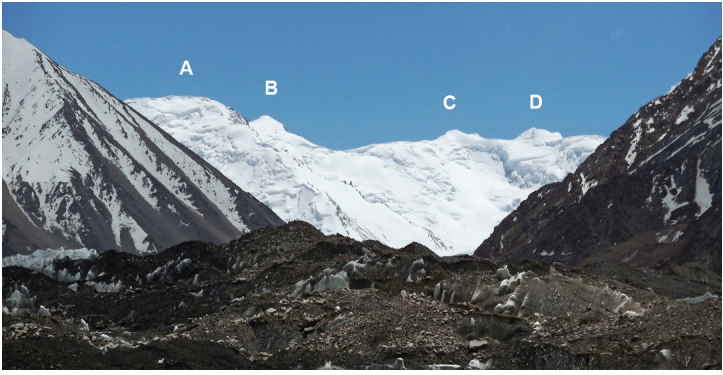
Peaks in the Chot Pert Nala from the south. (A) 6,009m. (B) Harjoldur Sar. (C) 6,020m (attempted in 2015 from the west).



Seen from Harjoldur Sar, these peaks above the First West Virjerab Glacier and Spregh Yaz Glacier are thought to be unclimbed. (A) 6,172m. (B) 6,099m. (C) 6,316m. (D) 6,140m (attempted in 2015 from the north). (E) Khurdopin Sar.



Harjoldur Sar from the south. The route of first ascent followed the snow slope far left to the ridge, and then up this to the summit.



Peaks in the upper Virjerab, thought to be unclimbed and never attempted. (A) 6,306m. (B) 6,211m. (C) 6,091m. (D) 6,121m.

## Article Details

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