



## AAC Publications

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### **Khane Valley, Twin II, Northwest Face, Attempt; Tangra Tower, Southeast Face, Attempt**

Pakistan, Karakoram, Tagas Group

**Last year, when my good buddy, climbing partner, and fellow adventurer Cory Hall passed away in a tragic climbing accident, I knew a memorial expedition with a friend Max “The Bear” Fisher, also one of Cory’s climbing partners, was in order. Cory was, and still is, an inspiration to many, not only in his impressive climbing career, but also in his carefree, fun-loving, and adventurous life style.**

The granite spires of Pakistan were a long-held dream for Cory and me, and I wanted to forge an uncompromising line, in good style, up a remote, untouched spire, in a rarely visited valley. Tangra Tower (ca 5,620m) fit the bill perfectly. After months of research, fund-raising, and preparation, Max and I met in Delhi in early September, bought Royal Enfield motorbikes, and learned to ride in the deep end. After three days of dodging traffic and cows through the foothills of the Himalaya, we reached the Pakistan-India boarder. Try as we might, we were unable to bribe the bikes into Pakistan, so we continued by public transport up the infamous Karakoram Highway.

In Skardu we bought supplies for a one-month stay. Entering the Khane Valley, our psych was running high—however, fate had other plans. After an initial day of reconnaissance, we spent the next nine days pinned at base camp while a foot of snow fell, and I suffered badly with giardia. On day 10, only partly recovered, we moved our heavy big-wall kit into the base of Tangra, only to find that we were going to have to allow more time for the sun to melt all the fresh powder on the lower slabs.

Meanwhile, we opted to acclimatize on Twin II. Endless trail-breaking through knee-deep snow finally gave way to some great ice climbing on the northwest face. Taking a shortcut straight up seracs yielded good ice and less slog. A huge spindrift avalanche ripping down the tasty-looking chimney we were aiming for meant we had to rethink. We romped up an alternative couloir, slowed initially by powder snow sat on brittle ice and loose rock. After a few hundred meters we rejoined our line and were rewarded by 400m of excellent ice. In hindsight, after moving together for so long, and with Max mentioning his fatigue, it was unwise not to take a break and refuel at this point. But we pushed upward, reaching a point ca 150m below the summit. Max was done: unused to the altitude and unacclimatized, a deep fatigue had set in. Our rappel through the night went reasonably well, and we stumbled back to advanced camp after 20 hours on the go.

After only one full day at base camp we returned to Tangra, collected water, and got established on the wall. I led up the lower slabs. Dirty, gritty, rounded cracks would finish abruptly, and I would continue into the unknown, hopeful. Friction combined with 30kg of water did not make hauling any fun, not that it ever is. We spent that night on our orange ledge. There were almightly views, and the rising and setting sun helped to rewarm Max’s psych a little.

On day two Max got stuck into some slow-going awkward aid on the first pitch, and several pitches later snow flurries and unprotected moves halted my upward progress. We set up camp in an awesome position. After two more days we reached the headwall. Wild splitter cracks, which required a mixture of free, aid, and pendulums, led to a chimney where we spent the night. After an hour of trying to get the stove going using cheap Asian lighters, we succumbed to a depressing meal of dry noodles. Searching every pocket, I later found three matches, meaning we could continue to eat and melt snow for one more night. However, lack of gas forced us to make a summit attempt on day five.

This did not go well. After taking two hours to achieve 20m of horrendous offwidth climbing, loose rock, and tricky aid, I had to admit defeat. Despite the tips of my fingers being painfully split, and my body tired, my motivation to keep going up was high. However, this didn't change the fact we were out of water and gas. Going down was the only logical choice.

We managed to escape, leaving behind mainly tat around spikes. Now, having done the majority of the leading, it was my turn to feel the deep fatigue. As we stumbled for the last time back to base camp, the weather remained mockingly good.

Tangra put up a great fight. It's the unknown that beckons us back to the alpine, time after time. In this case there was no certainty of success, and many challenges to overcome. Although we didn't overcome them all, and we didn't stand on a summit, the trip was a success, because coming home to friends and family is the most important objective. Tangra will still be there, and I will be back. To my friends and family, thank you for your support, and sorry for the worry that my self-indulgent sport inevitably causes.

We would also like to thank the British Mountaineering Council, the Mount Everest Foundation, and Gore-tex for supporting the expedition financially.

James Monypenny, U.K.

## Images



Max Fisher on the third day of the attempt on the southeast face of Tangra Tower.



Day five and the high point of the Fisher-Monypenny attempt on the southeast face of Tangra Tower.



Max Fisher high on the northwest face of Twin II after 300m of simul-climbing.



The southeast face of Tangra Tower, showing the line of the Fisher-Monypenny attempt.

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