



## AAC Publications

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### **Gasherbrum VI, Southwest Ridge, Attempt; Praqpa Ri, East-Southeast Ridge, Attempt**

Pakistan, Karakoram, Baltoro Muztagh

**My partner, Ralf Dujmovits, and I spent the months of June and July attempting two unclimbed 7,000m peaks, Gasherbrum VI and Praqpa Ri.**

After hiking more than 100km with our cook, liaison officer, several Balti porters, a few donkeys, eight chickens, and two goats, we established base camp at 4,800m on the spectacular Baltoro Glacier, southwest of Gasherbrum VI (a.k.a. Chochordin, 7,004m). It was a great pleasure to travel alongside the Balti porters, who are some of the hardest-working, friendliest, and toughest people I've ever met. Even though they have very little, they offered to share their tea and chapatis with us at every stop. Their footwear, packs, and cotton clothing were unimaginable mountain equipment for us Western climbers, yet they came to us with very few medical complaints and they always reached the next camp before us. Despite sleeping huddled together under a plastic sheet every night, they were always laughing and joking with us and each other, and they often sang together.

Ralf and I found a way through the messy lower icefall into the valley southwest of Gasherbrum VI. Here we slept for a couple of nights at 5,300m before returning to base camp. On our second trip we climbed the right side of a broad couloir to reach a spectacular high camp at 6,200m on the southwest ridge. The summit looked tantalizingly close.

Gasherbrum VI from the Baltoro Glacier. (A) Northwest shoulder (6,839m). (B) Gasherbrum VI (7,004m). (C) Southwest col. (D) Peak 6,300m. (E) Peak 5,979m. Ralf Dujmovits and Nancy Hansen climbed the broad snow and ice couloir onto the southwest ridge at the col (C) but failed to find a way through the rock barrier above.

We could see two possibilities for getting through the rock band that barred access to steep snow slopes and mixed terrain above. We first tried a route directly above our camp, but the snow became shallow and faceted after we'd gained 250m. When we came to the point where there were just a few centimeters of sugar snow lying over compact, steep, and unprotectable marble, we decided to have a look at the other possible route. We ran into the same predicament—it was impossible even to set a somewhat safe belay. We also could see that the mixed terrain above the rock band was going to present hundreds of meters of the same problem. German Walter Hölzler was stopped by the same issue on the southeast face of the mountain in the early '90s. We were disappointed, of course, but in our opinion the risk of pushing farther was not acceptable.

The only other option for aspiring climbers of Gasherbrum VI is to risk the avalanches, seracs, and cornices on the northeast face, which again, in our opinion, is an unappetizing proposition. We believe ours was the fifth attempt on the mountain. [Editor's note: In 1985, Italian Maria Luisa Ercalini claimed to have soloed the peak via the southeast face, above the Abruzzi Glacier, but this is now widely discounted. The ca 1,700m southeast face was attempted by Walter Hölzler, solo, in 1993. The German alpinist left base camp at midnight and reached a point 200m below the summit cornice, by which time the face had overheated in the sun, causing the snow to slide over underlying rock slabs. Considering it too dangerous to continue, he retreated. In 1998 the French team of Nicolas Bonhomme, Jean-Paul Cache, and Jean-Noël Urban, who planned to climb the face and then ski down it, reached 6,900m on the same line before Bonhomme was swept away by a small avalanche and killed. In 2009, Portuguese climbers Paulo Roxo and Daniela Teixeira planned to climb the northeast face and east ridge from the South Gasherbrum Glacier but stopped 60m below the ridge due to poor conditions.]

As soon as we returned to base camp, our cook/camp engineer/surgeon/barber/butcher/cultural guide/negotiator/friend Ehsan Karim sent his assistant in search of porters to move our camp below our second objective: Praqpa Ri (7,156m), south of Skilbrum. It seemed to me that it would take some days to find enough porters who just happened to be in the middle of nowhere with nothing to do, but the young assistant came back the very next day with the required porters and a few donkeys in tow. They opted to make the 25km trip in a single hard push, so they could return to other jobs quickly. We set up camp at the toe of the Savoia Glacier, an inspiring place less than a kilometer south of K2 base camp.

We had found no record of any previous attempt on Praqpa Ri. In “Gore-tex weather,” Ralf and I made a reconnaissance up the Savoia. Neither of us had been on a glacier with so many crevasses, and while our GPS indicated that we walked 5km, we only covered 2.5km in a straight line. After a short stretch of bad weather we packed up six days of food and fuel and headed back through the Russian roulette crevasse field. Camping at the base of Praqpa Ri provided us with unique and stunning views of the west faces of K2 and Broad Peak.

We climbed up a steep 300m slope to access Khalkhal Pass (5,705m) at the base of the east-southeast ridge leading to the southeast summit. [Praqpa Ri has three tops: southeast, 7,026m; middle, 7,156m; and northwest, 7,058m.] It started to snow heavily and we quickly set up the tent to escape it. The storm lasted several hours—long enough that we could not make it to our planned camp that day. We started early next morning, overcoming several short, steep, sugar-snow cruxes. These slopes were east-facing, and the blazing sun quickly turned them into a wet, sloppy mess that started sloughing and avalanching around us. After gaining only a few hundred meters, we were forced to make camp in a somewhat sketchy crevasse. We were starting to realize our quandary on this mountain: These slopes became isothermal very shortly after the sun hit them at 4 a.m., and as it was not freezing hard at night, we could not start much earlier. However, we persevered, hoping to find better conditions on the more defined ridge above.

Upon reaching the ridge at 6,300m the next day, we were immediately disappointed. Snow conditions were awful: a 2cm crust over deep facets. The sun was not yet on us, but still the crust thinned with each step until we were in sugar snow up to the tops of our legs. It was simply too dangerous to continue up the steep ridge, and it was clear that conditions would not be better at a different time of day. With heavy hearts we returned to our sketchy crevasse camp and then to base camp the following day.

For future aspirants, we suggest that if you decide to attempt the east-southeast ridge, you should approach it via the Khalkhal Glacier to the south. We could see from Khalkhal Pass that it would have been more straightforward and much safer.

The Karakoram is indescribably beautiful and its indigenous people are inspiring. It was a big gift to be able to spend almost two months in this wild place. We would like to thank the Gore-tex Shipton/Tilman Grant, Mountain Equipment Co-op Expedition Support, and the Alpine Club of Canada for partially funding this trip.

Nancy Hansen, Alpine Club of Canada

## Images



Nancy Hansen in the couloir leading to the southwest ridge of Gasherbrum VI.



The unattempted northeast face of Gasherbrum VI below the main summit (center). The northwest shoulder is the fluted triangular point at far right. The 2009 Portuguese attempt was way off-picture to the left.





The southeast face of Gasherbrum VI and the line attempted by Walter Hölzler (1993) and the French (1998). The 6,200m col on the southwest ridge, reached by Ralf Dujmovits and Nancy Hansen from the far side, is visible above the large serac to the left.



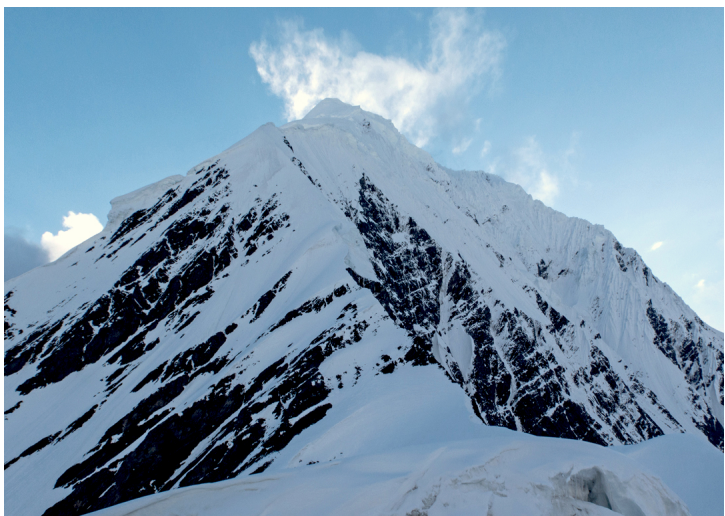
A Google Earth view of Gasherbrum VI from the northeast. The 2009 Portuguese attempt to reach the east ridge and follow it to the summit is marked.



Gasherbrum VI from the Baltoro Glacier. (A) Northwest shoulder (6,839m). (B) Gasherbrum VI (7,004m). (C) Southwest col. (D) Peak 6,300m. (E) Peak 5,979m. Ralf Dujmovits and Nancy Hansen climbed the broad snow and ice couloir onto the southwest ridge at the col (C) but failed to find a way through the rock barrier above.



Praqpa Ri from the Savoia Glacier. The east-southeast ridge, attempted in 2016, is coming down toward the camera on the left from the southeast summit (7,026m). The main (middle) summit (7,156m) is the pointed top to the right, with the northwest summit (7,058m) visible behind. The flat-topped summit far left is Khalkhal North (6,820m).



Looking up the east-southeast ridge of Praqpa Ri.

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