



## AAC Publications

---

### **Khalkhal West, Southwest Ridge; Praqpa Ri, Southeast Top, East-Southeast Ridge**

Pakistan, Karakoram, Baltoro Muztagh

(A) Khalkhal West, (B) Praqpa Ri southeast top, and (C) Praqpa Ri (Central), seen from the east across the Savoia Glacier. The Chileans climbed a new route (not visible) on Khalkhal West and made the first ascent of Praqpa Ri Southeast, via the ridge rising from the obvious col. Photo by Armando Montero

**ON JUNE 13, Andres Bosch, Armando Montero, and I arrived in Pakistan with the intention of exploring virgin peaks in the Khalkhal Valley, directly opposite well-known Broad Peak. We knew Praqpa Ri was unclimbed, and there were three other smaller peaks nearby.**

Six days of trekking took us to Broad Peak base camp, where we rested for two days. On the third day we reconnoitered the Khalkhal Valley to ascertain conditions on the glacier and find the best way to reach the 5,705m Khalkhal Pass, at the foot of the southeast ridge of Praqpa Ri (7,156m), where we planned to establish a camp. Finding good conditions, with solid snow bridges over crevasses, we returned to base camp to prepare for a four-day trip to the pass, and, if possible, climb a nearby 6,000m peak.

We decided on the higher of two summits southeast of the pass, which, according to Google Earth, was around 6,200m. The approach was safe but long: It took two days to reach the pass, where we placed Camp 1. During the approach, we saw a nice snow and rock ridge leading directly to the summit of our peak from the southwest.

We rested one day on the pass and then, at 3 a.m. on July 4, left our tent and descended back to the glacier, from which we reached the start of the ridge at ca 5,300m. The first part of the route was mainly rock climbing up to UIAA IV. After 500m we put on crampons and climbed a snow ramp (45–60°) to a small col just 40m below the summit. A final pitch of 70° ice led to the snowy top, 12 hours after starting the ridge. Our GPS read 6,270m.

We began the descent as soon as possible, because the weather had been unstable the whole day. Downclimbing most of the route, and making a few rappels, we regained the glacier late at night and decided to keep going down to base camp, which we reached next morning. Our 1,000m route was graded D+ IV 45–70°.

Back home, during discussions with Eberhard Jurgalski, we discovered this peak had been climbed on June 25, 1983, by Dutch climbers Ronald Naar and Gerard van Sprang. From a camp near the head of the Khalkhal Glacier, the two climbed the west flank of the northwest ridge to reach the crest and then followed it to the summit in a total of eight hours. They found the last corniced section of the ridge dangerous and decided to descend the southeast ridge (also corniced) until it became dark, when they headed straight down the south face, returning to their tent at 11 p.m. They dubbed the summit Norit Peak, but this peak and its lower eastern summit have been labeled the Khalkhal Peaks for some time, notably on Polish maps of the region. The most recent survey, a joint Pakistan-China initiative, lists Khalkhal West at 6,250m and Khalkhal East (sometime referred to as Pastora Peak) at 6,206m.

After our climb of Khalkhal West, Armando returned to Chile, leaving Andres and I to attempt Praqpa

Ri.

With a good weather forecast, we headed up to Camp 1 on the pass, arriving on July 12. At 4 a.m. on the 14th, we began climbing the east-southeast ridge of Praqpa Ri, which leads to Praqpa Ri's southeast top (7,026m on Polish maps; this is the same ridge attempted by Ralf Dujmovits and Nancy Hansen in 2016). After a short pitch of M3, we climbed 300m of snow (50–70°) with three 90° bergschrunds. Fortunately, we sometimes found ice under the snow, so it was possible to place ice screws. Above the snow, 300m of good ice at 60–70° led to a sharp, exposed ridge. Deep snow on this ridge made for slow progress. At 8 p.m., after a two-hour fight with the conditions, we camped in a nice spot beneath a large serac. That day we had belayed 10 pitches and simul-climbed the rest. The following day we rested and then set off for the summit at 11:30 p.m.

Back in Santiago, before the expedition, our proposed plan had been to traverse from the south summit to the main summit. However, after observing the uncertain conditions of the upper ridge, the weather, and the long distance between the summits, we had decided to focus on the southeast top. So, for our summit push, we left our tent and sleeping bags at Camp 2 to go light. (In the back of our mind was the idea that, if the traverse proved to be easy, we might still go for the main summit.) The terrain above Camp 2 proved less technical, but the altitude and deep snow slowed progress. We first traversed left 50m and then climbed direct for 150m to a small plateau (possible campsite). After traversing left across this plateau, we climbed another ridge and then a long ramp of deep 50° snow to arrive on the southeast top at 10 a.m. on July 16. The GPS showed an altitude of 7,046m. The ridge leading toward the main peak was very sharp and corniced, and the higher peak was very far away, requiring some descent before climbing to the top. I think that the best way to reach the main summit will be to follow a different approach to the base and climb a direct route.

The weather was now deteriorating, so after an hour of enjoying the view, we followed our footprints back to the tent. Bad visibility kept us in camp the whole next day, but the following morning a short window of good weather allowed us to escape, eventually reaching Broad Peak base camp on the 19th. The 1,500m ascent to the previously unclimbed southeast top of Praqpa Ri was graded TD+ M3 50–90°.

– Alejandro Mora, Chile

## Images



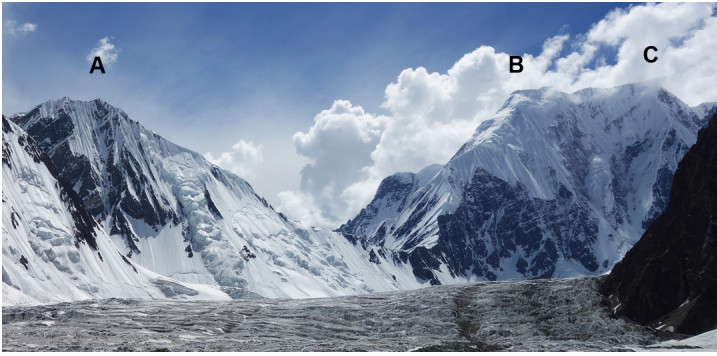
Armando Montero close to the summit of Khalkhal West.



Alejandro Mora (left) and Andres Bosch on the summit of the southeast top of Praqpa Ri (7,046m GPS) with Broad Peak behind.



Alejandro Mora on the east-southeast ridge of Praqpa Ri.



(A) Khalkhal West. (B) Praqpa Ri southeast top. (C) Praqpa Ri (Central). Seen from the east across the Savoia Glacier.



Khalkhal West seen from Khalkhal Pass. The original Dutch route climbed onto the northwest ridge, facing the camera, from the right and followed the crest to the summit. The new Chilean route (2017) on the southwest ridge is marked. Khalkhal East is the lower summit immediately left, while the rocky summit visible behind the lower part of the southwest ridge is Marble Peak.



Alejandro Mora and Andres Bosch on the Khalkhal Glacier with Marble Peak (6,256m, left) and Crystal Peak (6,252m) behind.





Alejandro Mora on the rocky section of the southwest ridge of Khalkhal West, with Crystal Peak behind.



The Chilean route to the southeast top of Praqpa Ri. The map height of Khalkhal Pass (site of Camp 1) is 5,704m.

Article Details

Author	Alejandro Mora
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions