



## AAC Publications

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### **Laila, Northwest Face, First Complete Ski Descent**

Pakistan, Karakoram, Masherbrum Range

**On May 5, in poor weather, Carole Chambaret, Boris Langenstein, and I (all French) established base camp at Dalsampa (ca 4,200m) on the Gondokhoro (a.k.a. Ghondogoro) Glacier, intent on skiing from the summit of Laila (6,096m).** The safest approach appeared to be from the south, where there are fewer crevasses and no apparent serac threat. The weather eventually turned fine, with no wind and clear nights. After putting in a track on the south side of Laila, we decided to try for the summit in one push from base camp.

We left at 1:30 a.m. on the 11th and climbed up to a pass at 5,133m. We then moved up to the left to begin a long traverse to the col on the west ridge of Laila, which gives access to the northwest face at around 5,600m. At 7 a.m. we reached this col, where we had great views of K2, Broad Peak, and the Gasherbrums. We could also now feel the steepness of Laila's northwest face—this was the point of commitment.

After getting established on the face, we began six and a half hours of plodding (without skis) through deep snow on the steepest part of the route. For safety, we tried to stay close to the rocks and kept roped. Laila has a strikingly pointed summit from afar, so we never thought the top would be such a nice chill place. It was an easy flat place to put on skis and get ready for the descent.

We skied the full northwest face, a descent of about 1,800m. The conditions seemed more or less perfect: soft snow but not too warm, and with no wind. The skiing was a real pleasure, as we enjoyed both the snow and the amazing view. We were so lucky to have perfect weather and be able to ski from the very top.

– Tiphaine Duperier, France

**Laila: A Brief History of Climbing and Skiing.** Laila, whose first known ascent was in 1987 by a four-man British team via the northwest face, has seen a number of subsequent ascents, including one during February 2013. The celebrated northwest face (variously reported as 1,500m to 1,700m high, and rising to 55° at the top) became a focal point for extreme skiers after the millennium. In 2005, Jörgen Aamot and Fredrik Ericsson made the first serious attempt, climbing to within a couple of hundred meters of the summit and then descending the northwest face on skis. (Poor snow conditions on the upper reaches of the mountain prevented them from making the top.) Subsequent attempts by several parties were thwarted by similar problems, notably in 2012 and 2014. In 2016, Italians Zeno Cecon, Leonardo Comelli, Carlo Cosi, and Enrico Mosetti were turned back within 150m of the top. All four decided to ski the northwest face from this point. At around 5,350m, Comelli slipped and fell to his death.

On May 14, 2018, a few days after the successful French descent of the northwest face, an Italian-Swiss expedition, also intent on making the first ski descent of Laila, arrived at base camp. On May 25, Cala Cimenti, Julian Danzer, and Matthias Koenig reached the summit and started down the northwest face. Danzer fell partway down and lost a ski, forcing him to complete the descent on foot. However, Cimenti and Koenig continued, completing the second ski descent, following an identical line to the French.

Subsequently, on the 27th, Cimenti and Koenig reached the col (ca 5,700m) that separates Laila from an

unnamed 5,809m peak to its southeast, which is conspicuous to the left of Laila during the popular trek down the Gondokhoro Glacier. (Climbers have nicknamed this peak Laila's Little Sister.) After a night at the col, the Italian-Swiss duo climbed up the northwest face of the unnamed peak and skied from its summit all the way to 4,400m. It is unclear whether this mountain had previously been summited.

– Lindsay Griffin

## Images



At the col on the west ridge of Laila and about to climb onto the northwest face. Behind is the huge southeast face of Masherbrum (7,821m).



Carole Chambaret and, below her, Tiphaine Duperier on the northwest face of Laila, close to the west ridge. The French team approached from the Gondokhoro Glacier (directly behind their skis) and reached a broad col at about 5,600m, visible bottom right in front of the small tower on the ridge. From here they moved on to the northwest face.



Tiphaine Duperier skiing the northwest face of Laila with the Gondokhoro Glacier far below.



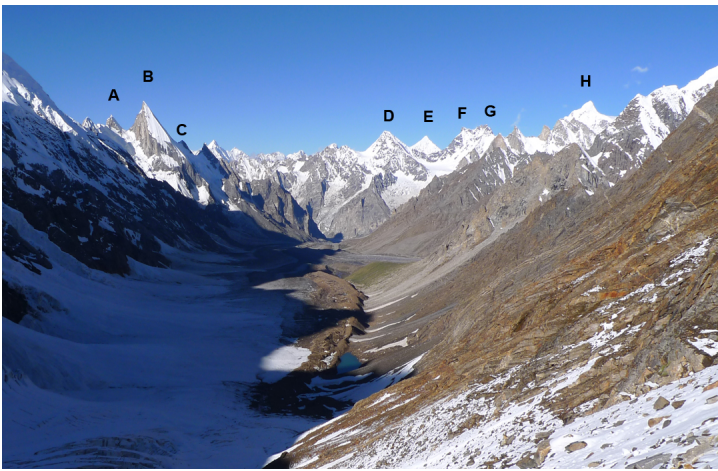
Carole Chambaret testing her steep skiing technique on the northwest face of Laila.



Carole Chambaret skiing the northwest face of Laila with the icefalls of the West Ghondokhoro Glacier behind. (A) Peak 6,180m. (B) Peak 6,200m. (C) Serac Peak (6,615m). (D) Yermanendu Kangri (7,175m). (E) Masherbrum (7,821m).



Tiphaine Duperier skiing high on the northwest face of Laila with, from left to right, K2, Skyang Kangri, Broad Peak North, Middle and Main.



Looking southwest down the Gondokhoro Glacier. (A) Peak 5,809m (Laila's Little Sister), climbed and skied in 2018. (B) Laila Peak. (C) Col used to access the northwest face from the south. (D) Peak ca 6,000m. (E) Cathedral Peak (6,225m). (F) Peak 6,180m. (G) Peak 6,200m. (H) Serac Peak (6,615m).



Laila Peak and the northwest face skied by French and Italian-Swiss teams in May 2018.

## Article Details

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