



## **Patkhor, Northeast Spur, Attempt and Ordeal**

Tajikistan, Pamir, Rushan Range

**British alpinists Mick Fowler and Simon Yates attempted the northeast spur of Patkhor (6,083m), the highest peak in the Rushan Range, in mid-July.** This unclimbed line had been the aim of Pete Dronkers and Spencer Gray (USA) in August 2017; they retreated from about halfway up because of rockfall concerns.

On July 13, Fowler and Yates gained the eastern side of the northeast spur via a couloir leading to a col at around 5,200m. At this col (the American high point), they poisoned themselves on freeze-dried meals that had gone bad and concluded that six of their remaining ten meals also were contaminated. This resulted in significant gastrointestinal issues and a much-reduced food supply for the climb.

The following day they moved very slowly up 50° ice slopes and easy mixed, bivying not far below a couloir leading through the upper face. The couloir provided Scottish IV/V climbing, which deposited them at their third bivy, below the final ridge. On July 16, the pair continued up despite poor weather. They found the ridge crest corniced and icy, so they traversed below it. Eventually, in a whiteout, they were forced to retrace their steps to the previous bivy. They estimated their high point was about 6,000m.

The next day, in continuing poor weather, they ate their final food and agreed to descend. After rappelling to the bivy site on the col, they set an alarm for midnight to ensure cold conditions for descending the lower couloir, but the alarm did not go off, forcing them to stay at the col another day.

In the early hours of July 20, on their final rappel down the couloir, a V-thread anchor failed and Yates fell around 100m, sustaining broken ribs and back injuries. Fowler downclimbed to Yates, and they continued down to the glacier at 4,200m. Here, they called for a helicopter rescue, but after waiting two nights with no tent and one missing sleeping bag (lost after Yates' fall), and after five days with no food, they concluded Fowler would have to walk out for help. Four hours down the valley, he met a rescue team, which eventually reached Yates. With no helicopter likely to arrive, Yates and his rescuers spent three days walking the remaining 25km to the road.

— **Damien Gildea, with information from Mick Fowler, U.K.**

## Images



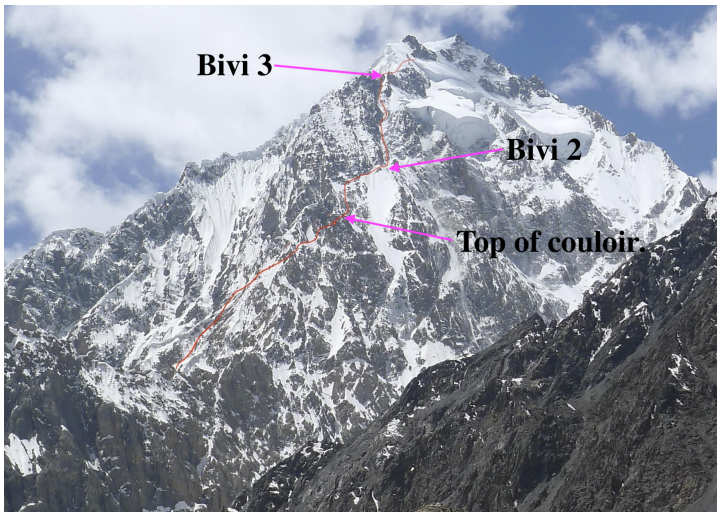
Climbing on the northeast spur of Patkhor.



Mick Fowler on the third day of the attempt on Patkhor.



Patkhor and the 2023 attempt, with a high point of about 6,000 meters. The lowest bivouac shown is at the 5,200-meter col, reached by a hidden couloir.



The 2023 attempt on Patkhor, with a high point at about 6,000 meters. The point labeled "Top of couloir" was the site of the bivouac at 5,200 meters, reached by a couloir that is hidden from this angle.

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