



AAC Publications

Yawash Sar I, First Ascent, via West-Northwest Face

Pakistan, Karakoram, Ghujerab Mountains, Khunjerab Group

In September, Victor Saunders and I made the first ascent of Yawash Sar I (6,258m), a shapely peak at the head of the Koksil (a.k.a. Shop Dur) Glacier, located in the Khunjerab Group of the Ghujerab Mountains, very near the frontier with China. [In 2022, a British team made three attempts on the south face and southern ridges of Yawash Sar I, on the opposite side of the mountain, starting from a spur of the Northwest Ghidims Glacier. (See AAJ 2023.) No prior attempt on Yawash Sar I from the Koksil Glacier, which drains to the northwest, has been reported.]

Yawash Sar I from the north showing the 2024 route of ascent to the right of the northwest ridge.
Photo: Janusz Majer.

Victor and I met in Islamabad on August 26, flew to Gilgit, spent a night in Karimabad, and arrived at Koksil (ca 4,000m), 12km west of Khunjerab Pass on the Karakoram Highway, on the 28th. Bad weather delayed us for a day, but on the 30th, after one day of walking, we established a base camp at around 4,600m on the highest grassy meadows below the Koksil Glacier.

The weather was unstable over the period from August 31 to September 9. However, we were able to explore the approach to Yawash Sar and get good views of its north and northwest flanks. During this period, to aid acclimatization and get more views of Yawash Sar, we ascended Peak 5,636m, first climbed by a Polish-Italian team in 2011 (see AAJ 2012).

On September 10, we left base camp to attempt our main objective. That day we walked up the main Koksil Glacier to camp at a point below the 5,426m West Yawash Col. On the 11th we climbed through an icefall to gain the previously unvisited glacier basin between Yawash Sar I and Peak 6,072m.

The west-northwest face of Yawash Sar I has three groove/couloir lines. We climbed the central one. On September 12, we crossed the bergschrund and were pleased to find excellent conditions. Once established on the line, we climbed thin ice runnels to a bivouac at about 5,750m. There was a notable dearth of good bivouac sites, and we had to traverse about 35m out of the couloir to a point where we were able to fashion a ledge on a sharp rock crest. On the 13th, we climbed more thin ice streaks and mixed ground to meet the southwest ridge at about 6,050m. Here, we endured a very uncomfortable and windy sitting bivouac.

On the 14th the weather deteriorated, and it began to snow. We traversed left across a rock wall (where we'd been concerned we might be stopped) and gained the summit slopes, which we followed to the top, arriving at around 11 a.m. We stayed about five minutes and then rappelled all the way to the bottom of the face, reaching the glacier at about midnight on the same day. On the 15th and 16th, we returned to base camp.

The upper reaches of the Koksil Glacier had only been visited by one previous party, the Polish-Italian team noted above, and numerous possibilities for climbers remain. On Yawash Sar I, the northwest ridge looks like it might provide an excellent climb. Peak 6,072m, now the only unclimbed 6,000m peak in this area, is a fine objective and could be climbed safely from this side. All the peaks on the southwest side of the upper Koksil (the highest being 5,916m) remain unclimbed. [Of note is the climbers' ages: Fowler, 68, and Saunders, 74. The two British climbers completed their first major route in the Karakoram together—the Golden Pillar (northwest pillar) of Spantik (7,027m)—37 years earlier, in

1987.]

—Mick Fowler, U.K.

Images



The upper north face and northwest ridge of Yawash Sar I.



Victor Saunders on the thin ice runnels of Yawash Sar I's west-northwest face.



Victor Saunders on the west-northwest face of Yawash Sar I. In back on the left is unclimbed Peak 6,072m.



The northeast face of unclimbed Peak 6,072m.



The first bivouac, at about 5,750m, during the first ascent of Yawash Sar I.



The west-northwest face of Yawash Sar I. The climb followed the central groove system to finish up the southwest ridge.



Yawash Sar I from the north showing the 2024 route of ascent to the right of the northwest ridge.



Yawash Sar I (left) and Peak 6,072m from the route to Peak 5,636m during acclimatization.



Unclimbed peaks of the southwest side of the upper Koksil Glacier.



Victor Saunders (left) and Mick Fowler—more than a century of climbing experience between them.

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