Finding Langar

Three New Routes in the Hindu Kush

The summit of 7,134-meter Koh-e-Langar in Pakistan's Hindu Kush lies very near the frontier, and not far to the north, in Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor, is the village of Langar. The name carries meaning for communities across central and south Asia. The term langar originated in Persia and meant an anchor (literally "holder of the boat"), but in a broader sense it signifies sharing and community. For Sufi Muslims, Sikhs, and other traditions, langar became the practice of sharing food with visitors and the needy, regardless of class or religion. For Baqar Gelashvili and Giorgi Tepnadze, it could also mean the sense of belonging they feel in a remote valley in northwest Pakistan that few climbers ever visit.

In early August, Baqar and Giorgi began their second expedition to the Rosh Gol valley, with the goal of climbing a new route on Koh-e-Langar. Their planned line had been envisioned by their close friend Archil Badriashvili, with whom they had climbed in the Rosh Gol in 2021, completing a new route on Languta-e-Barfi (6,833m) and the first ascent of Saraghrar Northwest (ca 7,300m).

Three years later, in August 2024, Badriashvili died in an accident on Shkhelda, at home in Georgia. Archil was gone, but the Hindu Kush continued to inspire great interest, motivation, and affection for Baqar and Giorgi. They would often say they missed the area's people and energy.

As this was their second visit, the two were recognized and warmly greeted at Zondrangram, the gateway village to the Rosh Gol valley. When they were there the first time, in 2021, the villagers had not taken them very seriously, particularly Rehmat Karim Baig, an elder who was a veteran of many expeditions to the Rosh Gol, known as the Professor to people in his community. After the successful climb on Saraghrar, the local people had more trust in Baqar's and Giorgi's abilities, and now the Professor thoughtfully answered their questions.

As they prepared to head into the mountains, the two were buoyed by the villagers' welcome. Even though Archil was absent, their expedition was shaped by the spirit and decisions of the original team of three. In difficult moments throughout the expedition, Giorgi said, he had the persistent sense that Archil was with them, like a "third presence."

The two established base camp at around 4,265 meters, then decided to try a peak down-valley to the south: unclimbed Mutrichili Zom (6,127m GPS, 36°24'53"N, 72°04'43"E), referred to as Bulishomo Zom by the Professor. The peak is named after the aromatic medicinal plant mutrich, which grows in this area.

Through an inReach device, Baqar and Giorgi were keeping in close contact with me. I am Archil's younger sister and had known these two for years. I was able to provide weather forecasts and keep tabs on them. I was relieved to hear they planned this warm-up climb because the weather was still very warm, with freezing levels predicted to be above 7,000 meters. It was no time to be attempting Koh-e-Langar.

As with mountains everywhere, the hazards here are increasing with global warming. Baqar and Giorgi heard frequent rockfall at their advanced base camp below Mutrichili; they never imagined the stones could reach that camp, but this turned out to be a mistaken assumption, fortunately without

serious consequences. Later, on August 27, while Giorgi and Baqar were in base camp between climbs, a large earthquake hit the Hindu Kush. I messaged Giorgi immediately to check on them, and he joked that the earthquake had simply knocked loose the rocks that were bound to fall anyway.

Mutrichili had no known previous attempt. Starting from their advanced base at 4,300 meters, below the northeast ridge, Baqar and Giorgi climbed the 1,830-meter ridge with two bivouacs during the climb and a third as they descended along their ascent route. They reached the summit on August 13 and graded the climb Caucasian 5A. Baqar had carried a Georgian flag to the top—the same flag that had covered Archil's coffin at the funeral a year earlier. In a video taken at the summit, he spun the flag in a complete circle. It was as if he were showing Archil the view.

Back in the green meadow at base camp, they were ready for a good rest in their tents; everything seemed idyllic. This didn't last. The river was rising rapidly in the heat and quickly flooded the site, forcing them to move their camp higher, then higher again—four times in all. At one point, Baqar and Giorgi saw their cook down below, refusing to leave the dishes and other equipment behind. The two were forced to employ "assertive communication" to ensure he reached safety.

The pair's second objective was Languta-e-Barfi (6,833m), known locally as "the bride of the Hindu Kush." This peak lies on the border with Afghanistan and had first been climbed in 1963 from that side, by a Polish expedition, following the west spur to the northwest ridge. In 1973 there were two more ascents via the northwest ridge, using a different approach from the original route.

In 2014, New Zealand alpinists Pat Deavoll and Chris Todd tried the southeast face and south ridge from the Rosh Gol valley, retreating due to deep snow only a few hundred meters from the summit. Seven years later, Archil, Baqar, and Giorgi made the first ascent of the mountain from the Pakistan side, climbing the right side of the southeast face and finishing up the east ridge, during their acclimatization for Saraghrar Northwest.

This time, Baqar and Giorgi planned to complete the New Zealand line to the south ridge and on to the summit. Conditions on the mountain were very different in August 2025 than they had been in mid-July 2014, with bare rock exposed where the New Zealanders had climbed plentiful snow and ice.

Using porters, the two carried loads to an advanced base on the upper glacier at around 4,860 meters. On August 22, they climbed in a long day to 6,248 meters on the south ridge, where they bivouacked. Baqar and Giorgi found mainly loose rock and steep rubble almost all the way up the face. [Their line was a little to the right of that followed by the New Zealand team.] The next day, they set out for the summit, overcoming technical ice and mixed along the ridge. Although they moved efficiently, the day was long and the ridge enormous. However, they were rewarded with good views of Mutrichili and their next objective, Koh-e-Langar. After reaching the summit, they started down the east ridge.

In 2021, they had descended from the east ridge close to their ascent route. This part of the face was now dry and looked almost suicidal. Instead, they continued down the entire east ridge to a low point between Languta-e-Barfi and Koh-e-Langar, then descended to the south. A little way down the south flank, the two bivouacked at around 5,900 meters, before returning to base camp the following day.

The primary goal of the expedition was Koh-e-Langar (7,134m, 36°34'48.18"N, 72°4'58.15"E). Half a dozen summits of the Langar massif rise from a high plateau, and the highest point was first climbed in July 1964, starting from Afghanistan to the north. Otto Huber from a German expedition made a solo push from the team's top camp to reach the main summit and continued to the southeast top (7,061m), just to be sure.

The second ascent came in August 1968, when a Japanese team climbed from the Hushko Glacier to the northeast (the first ascent of the mountain from Pakistan). A Polish expedition repeated the route from the Afghan side in 1973, while three years later another team from the same country traversed the entire eight-kilometer ridge from Langar North to take in most of the summits. Another expedition, from Italy, reported an ascent in 1974, but they are believed to have climbed to Langar South-Southeast. The Professor took part in that expedition.

All of this activity was more than half a century ago, and little or none had occurred since. The mountain's biggest and most impressive aspect—the northwest face—was untouched.

On August 30, the two started up their route, which began with a prominent rock buttress that initially required mixed climbing, then gave way to drier rock that could be climbed free with a few points of aid. The two slanted up the left flank to the crest, moving over broken slabs of granite, like the piles of concrete at a demolition site. Compared with what they'd seen Saraghrar, the rock was more unstable; several short sections felt "alive," as if everything was shifting under their hands. They bivouacked near the crest of the buttress at 5,400 meters.

Now the buttress gave way to a sharply defined ridge with gendarmes of broken rock. Near the end of this section, the ridge dropped into a gap, and downclimbing and a rappel were necessary. On the far side of this gap, the terrain gradually became easier. They bivouacked again at 5,850 meters.

On the morning of September 1, the two continued up onto open snow slopes, which quickly took them to the broad snow couloir cutting through the upper mountain. Rockfall had been a constant menace due to the very high freezing level, though they had tried to follow a line that felt relatively safe.

When darkness fell, they had not found a good bivouac site. A little higher, a bit higher, they kept telling each other. By 11 p.m. they had still not found a good spot, but they perceived a sheltered site toward the right edge of the couloir, at around 6,500 meters. After an hour of work, they had the tent set up and spirits were high. Only an hour later, they realized that safety was an illusion. Ice shards and debris were hitting the tent, leaving small punctures. Although nothing hit them, neither man got much sleep that night. Could they even call it a bivouac? "We rested our eyes a little," Giorgi said later.

The next day, September 2, they climbed through the tricky upper section of the couloir, pushing themselves to move as fast as possible to minimize exposure to falling ice and stones. Finally they exited onto the plateau, where they turned north and climbed past a couple of false summits to reach the highest point. In a video the two made on the summit, Baqar can be seen lighting three candles, with great difficulty, for Archil, Vano Imnaishvili, and Nick Phaliani, three recently deceased Georgian alpinists. He says in the video that he and Giorgi had now climbed three mountains by new routes since their friends' deaths, and each was dedicated to the three guys.

There was no chance they would descend the route they had climbed—the plan was to traverse to the north, then down to the same saddle with Languta-e-Barfi from which they had descended around ten days before. From the summit of Koh-e-Langar, they dropped to the low point on the plateau before the north top and made their fourth bivouac.

The descent over the following two days was arduous. They first bypassed the north summit on the east side and downclimbed (along with several long free rappels over ice walls) to reach the west ridge leading toward Languta-e-Barfi. Parts of the ridge were extremely sharp and loose, and much of their clothing was shredded on this section. Giorgi recalled later that the descent from Langar was, by itself, the equivalent of the most challenging routes he and Baqar had ever undertaken.

At around 6,300 meters, they were unsure which direction to go. Suddenly, a small bird—thought to

be an Afghan snowfinch—landed nearby. After a few seconds it flew off, and as the two men made their way in the direction the bird had departed, they saw this to be the correct line of descent. It was the only bird they saw during the descent, and the species is highly unusual at those altitudes.

Well after midnight, they reached the top of the couloir they had used to descend from Languta-e-Barfi and made their final bivouac. As they started down the couloir toward the upper Rosh Gol Glacier the following morning, Giorgi thought, If we're moving well, let's just continue all the way down to base camp. A little later Baqar voiced the same thoughts. So that's what they did.

During their month in the Rosh Gol valley, the two had completed three serious new routes in difficult conditions and on unstable terrain. Yet one of their main challenges was the "imbalance" they felt a little over a year after Archil's death. Baqar and Giorgi had usually climbed together with Archil and did many of their most difficult routes as a team of three, which helped to maintain a sense of stability. That balance had been missing this time. The sense of happiness they felt also was different from what it had previously been, Giorgi said. Quieter. Perhaps not as carefree.

On their way out of the mountains, they stopped to relax at the same hot springs they had visited with Archil in 2021, but the magic was no longer the same, Giorgi said. "Even a stolen pear didn't taste as sweet as it had four years ago."

Summary: First ascent of Mutrichili Zom (a.k.a. Bulishomo Zom, 6,127m GPS), by the northeast ridge (1,830m, Caucasian 5A), with descent by the same route, August 10–14, 2025. New route up the southeast face and south ridge of Languta-e-Barfi (6,833m), with descent by the east ridge and south flank, August 22–24; the nearly 2,000-meter route was 5A with 60° ice and 70° snow. First ascent of the northwest face of Koh-e-Langar (7,134m), with descent to the north and west, August 30–September 4; the route gained 2,266 meters and was graded 6A/6B. All climbs were by Baqar Gelashvili and Giorgi Tepnadze from Georgia.

About the Author: Rusudan Badriashvili lives in Tbilisi, Georgia, and works as a mental health specialist and artist. She aims to continue the work of her older brother in organizing the country's mountaineering archive, documenting new ascents, and supporting the development of Georgian mountaineering.

Images

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