



AAC Publications

Koh-e-Ak Su range, Koh-e-Elgha Eli IV (ca 5,725m), northwest face and southwest ridge

Afghanistan, Little Pamir

In July our international team of five climbers started from Dushanbe (Tajikistan) on a nine-day approach to unexplored valleys in the eastern end of the Wakhan Corridor, southeast of Lake Chaqmaqin. The team comprised Sarah Sheridan (Australia), Malgorzata Skowronska (Poland), Mariusz Hoffmann, Andreas Schnall, and me (all from Germany).

From the roadhead at Sarhad-e-Boroghil we trekked for five days with yak and horse caravans, past Kyrgyz nomad settlements and Lake Chaqmaqin (Firestone Lake) into the valley of Elgha Eli, which is named after a kind of willow bush that grows in the lower part of the valley. Our goal was to explore this valley and the Terghen Qorum. We were helped during our preparation by a record of local valley names recorded by Remy Dor and Clas Naumann in their 1978 book *Die Kirghisen des Afghanischen Pamir*.

In 2008 Germans Steffen Graupner and Kathrin Münzel crossed the eastern part of the Ak Su range from south to north (AAJ 2009). In 2009 Bartek Tofel explored the western tip of the Ak Su (AAJ 2010) and returned in 2010 with a big Polish team, which enjoyed massive summit success (AAJ 2011). Further east, which includes the Elgha Eli, all Ak Su peaks were thought to be unclimbed.

On July 26 we established base camp at 4,500m, whereupon a storm moved in and put down 30cm of snow. Next day things improved, and by the 29th we had placed a high camp in a glacier basin we named Yach Badaan-e Bozorg (Great Icefield). In contrast to the moderate approach to base camp, the way to high camp was over the worst moraines imaginable, making progress extremely hard. At the far end of Yach Badaan-e Bozorg we discovered a névé slope that led to the summit ridge of a peak, like a white staircase to heaven. This was our route. And what name could be more suitable than Roh-e-Asmaan—staircase to heaven?

We left camp at 4 a.m. in two teams, traveling to the head of the glacier on snowshoes. We changed into crampons for the névé slope and climbed this west-southwest for ca 250m to the ridge, where we were met by the rays of the rising sun. The temperature rose quickly under a clear, deep blue sky. We cached our snowshoes and continued southwest close to the crest, which steepened to more than 45°. The ascent to the summit, which we reached at 9 a.m., was PD+ but strenuous. Our two GPS units measured 5,732m and 5,719m; summit coordinates are 37°09'38" N, 74°16'18" E. To equal the spread we chose the average of 5,725m as the official summit height.

There was a fine view deep into Pakistan and China, and immediately to the east we could see the neighboring valley of Terghen Qorum, which according to our Google Earth research is home to the highest peaks of the Koh-e-Ak Su. However, from our viewpoint, we were not completely convinced.

We now realized that we were not on the highest summit. There were three more summits, all a little higher, to the northeast, so we have dubbed our peak Koh-e-Elgha Eli IV. The simple ridge implied by Google Earth and old military maps was actually a sawtooth involving steep climbs and descents, and we were too late to continue to higher tops; the shark-fin summit of II would have involved climbing a 55° snow face. There are great challenges here for future expeditions, including the ca 1,000m north faces from the Terghen Qorum Valley. On our descent of the glacier to high camp, snowshoes proved

a big help in the now soft, wet snow.

While resting at base camp we received the disturbing message about turmoil and casualties in the Tajik bordertown of Khorog, through which we had to pass. Border problems were predicted, so we decided to descend all the way to the Kyrgyz nomads'yurt settlement of Elgha Eli. However, we didn't want to leave without a decent finish to our expedition, so while three team members used the daytime to explore access to the Terghen Qorum Valley by horse, the others bought a nice goat for a summit celebration with all the locals of the village—after sunset, according to Ramadan.

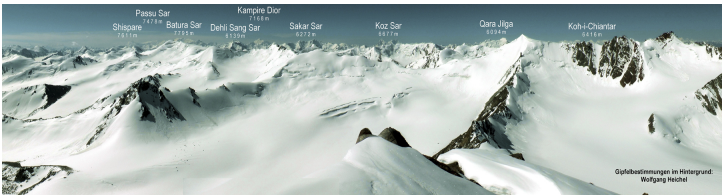
On our return the Tajik border posts were closed due to the conflict and we were stuck in Afghanistan for several days, together with Pat Deavoll and her New Zealand team. After being turned back three days in a row, the Tajik border commander finally let us pass, unofficially and surprisingly without bakshish. Otherwise, we found the Wakhan Corridor to be safe, with welcoming, hospitable people.

Chris Nettekoven, Germany, www.wakhanexpedition2012.jimdo.com

Images



Unclimbed peak on west side of Elgha Eli Valley.



Looking approximately southwest from summit of Koh-e-Elgha Eli IV. High background peaks identified.



On the upper slopes of Koh-e-Elgha Eli IV with Lake Chaqmaqtiin and Tajikistan Pamir beyond.



Koh-e-Elgha Eli IV from northwest.

Article Details

Author	Chris Nettekoven, Germany, www.wakhanexpedition2012.jimdo.com
Publication	AAJ
Volume	55
Issue	87
Page	279
Copyright Date	2013
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions