



## AAC Publications

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### **Gasherbrum IV, East Face Attempt**

Pakistan, Karakoram, Baltoro Muztagh

**Gasherbrum IV (7,925m) is perhaps the ne plus ultra of inaccessible mountain giants.** The 18th-highest peak on the planet has no easy routes, has never been climbed in anything other than an epic, and has seen fewer pairs of feet (10) on its true summit than have walked on the moon.

The east face appears to offer a relatively straight shot up snow gullies and occasional rock pitches for 1,000m, and is known to have been tried in 1980 by Americans Craig McKibben and Steve Swenson, in 1993 by Yasushi Yamanoi (Japan), and in 1996 by a Korean team including the irrepressible Kim Chang-ho. Yamanoi did not get far above the floor of the 6,900m cwm separating Gasherbrum IV from III, while both the Americans and the Koreans were repelled low in the central gullies by "spindrift and compact rock." [Kim Chang-ho and Lim Saeng-muk report reaching about 7,400m before complete lack of protection and constant avalanche risk forced them down.]

Marcos Costa (Brazil), Billy Pierson (USA), and I arrived in Pakistan in late May, flew immediately to Skardu, and required only one day of formalities before embarking on the six-day trek to Gasherbrum base camp. In June we established the seasonal approach route through the South Gasherbrum Icefall to Camp 1 (5,900m) on the normal route to Gasherbrum II, then continued to Camp 2 (6,300m) and Camp 3 (6,900m). The oft-repeated route from Camps 2 to 3 involved seven pitches of 50° ice. Stable weather periods into mid-June lapsed into generally unstable conditions by the end of the month, with every foray beyond Camp 1 requiring a new trail.

In early July we pushed to 7,300m on the east face of nearby G-IV, finding 50° snow over slabs of unprotectable fractured marble. Thereafter, the snowfields were interspersed with previously invisible compact marble slabs, which were even less protectable. While the first such slab was only 5m long, it was at minimum tenuous M8. In the absence of any form of belay, the route was considered too dangerous to attempt and we descended. [This high point and that of the Koreans may be the same.] In a year with more winter snow, as seen in pictures taken in 2009, it might be possible to climb over some or all of the marble bands on unprotected snow.

We cleaned our line and considered a bid on the 1958 Italian route, which has not been repeated, but this was ruled out due to continuing inclement weather. A brief attempt on "Gasherbrum 4.5", a 6,950m peak along the ridge joining Gasherbrum IV to V, had to be stopped at 6,700m due to dangerous snow conditions. We left Pakistan in late July.

I would like to thank the Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council, and the Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund for their generous support of the expedition.

– Bruce Normand, Switzerland

## Images



The east face of Gasherbrum IV from high in the Gasherbrum III/IV cwm. The 2017 attempt is marked and the original, unrepeated northeast ridge is the right skyline.



The unclimbed east face of Gasherbrum IV and the 2017 high point. The original, and unrepeated, 1958 Italian route follows the right skyline (northeast ridge). Lines up the south face to the southwest ridge (left skyline) have seen a number of unsuccessful attempts.

## Article Details

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