



AAC Publications

Darchan and Garmush I and II: New Routes and Ski Descents

Pakistan, Karakoram and Hindu Raj

The 2021 ascents on Garmush Zom I (left) and II. The snowy summit on the far left is Garmush Zom North.

After four canceled flights and a week in the hot atmosphere of Islamabad, waiting for our skis to arrive, Boris Langenstein, Aurelia Lanoe, Guillaume Pierrel, and I finally reached Gilgit on June 2.

Our main goal was a ski descent of Gasherbrum II (see report here). However, we didn't want to get bored going up and down on the same route for acclimatization, and we also wanted to experience new places, so our plan was to acclimatize during 15 days split between two different areas.

We originally had hoped to explore the Chiantar Glacier in the Hindu Raj, but a transport strike forced us to change plans. Instead, we went first to the Bagrot Valley, 30km northeast of Gilgit, on the south side of Diran (7,266m) in the Rakaposhi Range, hoping to ski new lines. Half a day's walk along the Bulche (Burche) Glacier took us to a base camp at 3,342m on a fine meadow. In order to see the possibilities, we climbed and skied a 4,800m summit, directly above base camp, via the west ridge. We found late-spring conditions, with the snowline at around 4,000m, and spotted two interesting summits a little over 5,000m. We decided to leave base camp for four days to attempt these two peaks.

Everything worked as planned, despite high temperatures. First, we climbed Darchan (5,347m GPS, 36°1'35.32"N, 74°42'35.38"E). [Labeled as 5,500m on the Polish orographic map "Rakaposhi-Malubiting Mountains," this summit was first climbed in 1976 from the east by an Italian team; the 2021 ascent is likely a new route.] We climbed the northwest ridge and skied down. The snow conditions were horrible, and the top section was relatively steep (45°).

We then moved camp to 4,573m on the west ridge of an unnamed 5,040m summit, immediately south of Darchan. We climbed to the summit and skied the airy west ridge. It was 55° at the top, decreasing to 45° at the base, and gave us a breathtaking view of the Bulche peaks (6,950m and 6,700m) and Diran. Happy to have seen this cool spot quite close to Gilgit, we moved on toward Darkot in the Hindu Raj.

We arrived in Darkot village on June 11 with only five days before our scheduled journey to the Baltoro. To make the most of this short time, we opted not to take porters; slow and heavy, we walked 10km on good shepherds' paths to the northeast of Darkot. At first it was disappointing. The mountains looked very dry, with the snowline up at 4,700m. At least snow conditions would be safe. We stopped for the night at the last flat place with clear spring water (3,674m) and made our second camp at 5,142m on the snow-covered glacier at the base of the west flank of Garmush Zom I (6,244m).

On the 13th we climbed directly up the northwest couloir of Garmush Zom I, finishing up the north ridge. Fortunately, the snow was hard enough not to be exhausting, but monster cornices on the summit ridge blocked any view of the Chiantar Glacier on the other side. We needed to wait for the sun to soften the snow in the couloir, but the cold and altitude made us leave the summit earlier than desirable. Our descent therefore was far from how we had dreamed but proved a good exercise in steep skiing—1,100m between 55° and 45°.

Excited by our success, we moved camp to the south, at 4,711m on the glacier directly below

Garmush Zom II (a.k.a. Garmush Zom South, 6,180m). There was a 1,400m leftward-curving couloir on the southwest face. The ascent was harder and more technical than the day before, with the first 500m on steep avalanche debris. The following 200m had icy sections, and then we started to break through the surface to calf depth. A final 30m of mixed led us to the summit ridge, where we could finally see the Chiantar. We skied from the summit, crossing the mixed section with a rappel. The ground below was again a good technical exercise. The snow proved hard to anticipate—sometimes firm, sometimes crusty.

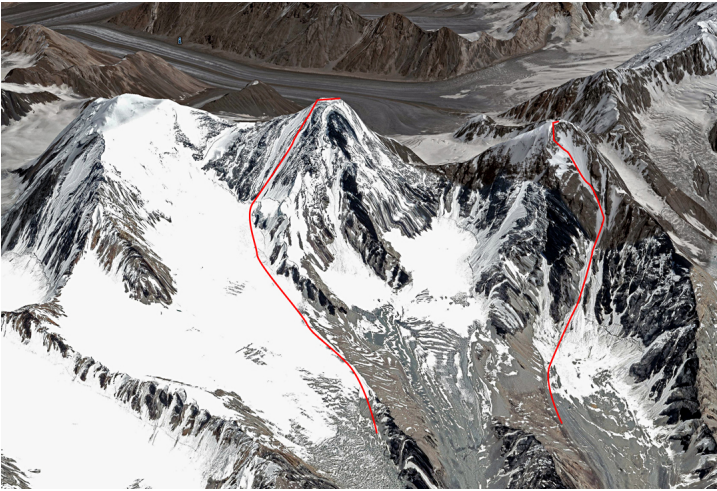
Going down the beautiful valley, beside a powerful river, I thought how lucky we had been to find what we came for: steep skiing in remote locations.

— Tiphaine Duperier, France

Historical Notes on the Garmush Peaks: Garmush Zom I was first climbed in 1975 via the southwest ridge by three Austrian climbers. In 2007, a Korean team climbed a similar line, crossing the toe of the southwest ridge and climbing more on the northwest flank. The 2021 French party climbed the northwest flank directly from the glacier, possibly following much of the same ground as the Koreans.

Garmush Zom II was first climbed in 2000 by four Italians—Alberto Peruffo, Enrico Peruffo, Michele Romio, and Mirco Scarso—via the complex and long east ridge (D), approached from the south. (They proposed renaming it Casarotto Peak after the Italian alpinist.) The 2021 French party most likely made the second ascent of this peak by a new route. Snowy Garmush North (6,048m) appears to have no known ascent.

Images



The 2021 ascents on Garmush Zom I (left) and II. The snowy summit on the far left is Garmush Zom North.



Southwest face of Garmush Zom II with the line of the 2021 ascent and ski descent, seen from the approach.



Peak 5,040m from the west, looking along the ridge of ascent.



Darchan Peak from the approach. The ski descent followed the northwest ridge (left skyline) to past the prominent cliff, then down the slope immediately below.



On the summit ridge of Garmush Zom II after an ascent of the southwest couloir. Below lies the Darkot Valley.



On the west ridge of Peak 5,040m, looking over the Bulche Glacier toward (top right) Rakaposhi.



Tiphaine Duperier on the northwest ridge of Darchan. Up right are the two, high, unclimbed summits of Bulche with, between the two, the top of Diran just visible. On the far left is the east ridge of Rakaposhi.



Tiphaine Duperier skiing the northwest ridge of Darchan. In the background is Dobani (6,143m) first

climbed in 1979 by two Japanese after several attempts.



Tiphaine Duperier during the ski descent of the southwest couloir of Garmush Zom II. Below is the Darkot Valley.



Tiphaine Duperier on the lower section of the northwest ridge of Darchan.



On the northwest ridge of Darchan.



On the west ridge of Peak 4,800m, looking over the Bulche Glacier to a distant Rakaposhi.



In the southwest couloir of Garmush Zom II during the first ascent. During the ski descent, this section was avoided on skier's left.



On the last section of the north ridge of Garmush Zom I with Garmush Zom North in the background.

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