



## **Laila Peak, Northwest Face Ascent and Partial Ski Descent**

Pakistan, Karakoram, Masherbrum Range

**On May 10, shortly after their expedition to Yawash Sar II (see report here), Jędrzej Baranowski and Andrzej Bargiel (Poland) reached the summit of Laila Peak (6,096m, 35°35'29.83"N, 76°24'38.70"E).** Due to difficult conditions on the last section of the climb, they left their skis about 150m below the top. Returning to this spot, they were then able to ski the northwest face to their starting camp at 4,400m below the First Gondogoro (a.k.a. Gondokhoro) Cwm, above the East Gondogoro Glacier. They had left this camp at 4:30 a.m., reached the summit at 1 p.m., and then skied the face in just 2.5 hours.

In 2005, Jorgen Aamot and Fredrik Ericsson skied the northwest face from a point a little lower than the Poles, but it was left to the French skiers Carole Chambaret, Tiphaine Duperier, and Boris Langenstein to make the first complete ski descent from the summit (AAJ 2019). The northwest face has crevasses low down, and the first half is potentially exposed to serac fall.

Today, attempting peaks below 6,500m in unrestricted areas requires more or less no formality, but 35 years ago this was not strictly the case. By the time an Italian expedition made the first official ascent of Laila Peak in 1996 (summit reached on the July 2 via the northwest face by Paolo Cavagnetto and Fabio Lacchini, followed a day later by three other members), the mountain had already received three ascents.

In 1987, Andy Cave, Tom Curtis, Sean Smith, and Simon Yates (U.K.), during a productive summer in the Hushe region, made the first known ascent of the mountain via the northwest face, then descended by rappelling the east face. Their route was repeated by a German team in the very early '90s and again by a Swiss team in 1993. The Italians in 1996 noted that the easiest route would follow the west ridge from a col accessed via an easy-angled snow couloir to the southwest. They descended this way with 10 rappels.

Since then, most ascensionists, including the French in 2018 and, later the same year, an Italian team that made the second ski descent, have approached the northwest face by following the 1996 Italian descent route. This reaches one or other of two high cols on the west ridge from the main Gondogoro Glacier. Both 2018 teams reached the higher of the two cols, traversed onto the northwest face, climbed to the summit, and then skied the northwest face in its entirety. In 2021, Baranowski and Bargiel opted to climb the entire face, keeping close to the rock spur that separates the northwest from north faces, thereby minimizing objective danger. They descended their route of ascent.

Experiencing very favorable conditions during their climbs in late April and early May, the Poles suggested that spring and early fall might now be the best time for mountaineering expeditions to middle-altitude peaks of the Karakoram.

– **Information from Jerzy Wala, Poland**

## Images



The upper section of the northwest face of Laila Peak with (1) 2021 (Baranowski-Bargiel) ascent (dashed) and descent route. (2) Attempt by a 2007 Polish team. In more recent years, teams have accessed the northwest face by coming over either the lower or upper west cols from the far side; these routes are both easier and objectively safer.



The northwest face of Laila Peak from the East Gondogoro Glacier. (1) Italian Route (1996). (2) Italian 1996 descent route to upper west col and from there down the far (south) side. (3) Jedrzej Baranowski and Andrzej Bargiel ascent (dashed line) and descent line. (4) Polish attempt on right side of northwest face in 2007.



Jedrzey Baranowski and Andrzej Bargiel traversing toward the upper west col on the northwest face of Laila Peak during their ski descent.

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