



AAC Publications

Yernamandu Kangri, First Ascent, via Southwest Face

Pakistan, Karakoram, Masherbrum Range

Martin Sieberer (Austria) and I waited many months for our Pakistan visas, and they only arrived three weeks before departure. By this time, we had given up on the idea of going to Pakistan and were planning a European trip.

Our goal was unclimbed Yernamandu Kangri (7,163m; this is how it is pronounced by the people of Hushe, but other spellings exist, notably Yermanendu on most maps). The approach to our base camp on the Masherbrum Glacier went smoothly. Our camp was at 4,300m, only 20 minutes from the start of the Serac Glacier.

Next morning we began to find a way through the maze of ice walls and crevasses. However, high solar radiation quickly caused avalanches and rockfall, causing us to stop at around 5,300m and spend a night sheltering in our tent. Next day, with sunburn and headaches, we descended to base camp.

It then began to snow and rain, leaving us stuck in base camp: playing cards, reading, and sleeping. Time didn't want to pass. The 2023 summer season in the Karakoram was not an easy one: The weather remained unpredictable throughout, with plenty of fresh snow on the mountains. Some smaller expeditions didn't manage to reach their goals, but we were lucky!

We were able to climb once more to around 5,300m, but, surprised by more snowfall, descended the same day so as not to be stuck on the mountain. This was our only acclimatization. Would it be enough to go to 7,000m?

The weather improved in mid-July, and, wondering if this might be our only chance, we waited one sunny day for the snow to settle and then set out on July 13, despite limited acclimatization. We took the minimum of gear so we could move fast, even leaving our rope.

By early morning we had reached 5,400m, where we dug out a north-facing platform in the edge of a crevasse and camped there the rest of the day and following night. The coolness of the crevasse made it bearable. On the 14th the weather was fantastic, but we were definitely not used to the altitude, and we sunk into the soft snow with every step. At 6,250m, exhausted, we had to stop and camp below a huge crevasse. We hadn't considered how loud it would be when water dripped on the tent the whole day.

At 4:15 a.m. on July 15, we left the tent and, with nearly empty rucksacks, walked along snow ridges, crossed crevasses, and panted heavily on any snow slopes. This effort brought us to the final southwest face (600m, 60°–70°) of Yernamandu. With only ten meters of cord in our pack, we would have to climb up and down this headwall unprotected. We sat on refrigerator-sized blocks of ice at the base, looking at the face. Then, without any discussion, we stood up and started climbing. If either of us had brought up the subject of turning around, we would have both done so without any argument.

Looking north-northeast over the upper Masherbrum Glacier from high on Cathedral Peak. (A) Mandu Peaks (7,121m, 7,081m). (B) Masherbrum west top (7,750m). (C) Masherbrum southwest summit

(7,806m; the main summit is hidden behind). (D) Yernamandu Kangri (7,163m) with the 2023 route. As far as the plateau below the final steep face, this route coincided with the 1960 American route for the first ascent of Masherbrum. (E) Serac Peak (6,273m, Wala map; behind it lies Broad Peak). (F) Gasherbrum IV. (G) Gasherbrum III. (H) Gasherbrum II. (I) Gasherbrum I. Photo by Irena Mrak.

High on the face was an icy section, above which waist-deep snow led to the upper southeast ridge. We traversed granite slabs to a col, from which we saw the summit 100m above us. It was becoming shrouded in cloud.

At 11:15 a.m., exactly seven hours after leaving camp and three weeks after leaving Europe, we reached the top. Our inReach measured 7,185m. We stayed only a few minutes, hammered a piton into a crack a little lower down, then started downclimbing the face. At the bottom, the sun was shining with full force, making progress torturous. Finally, we reached the tent, where we spent a short night before descending all the way to base camp, very tired but happy.

Apart from the 600m headwall, the 3,000m climb had not been technically difficult, but the terrain was complex: many crevasses, exposure to serac fall, and avalanche risk. The final section was certainly prone to avalanche, but at the same time icy under a covering of loose snow.

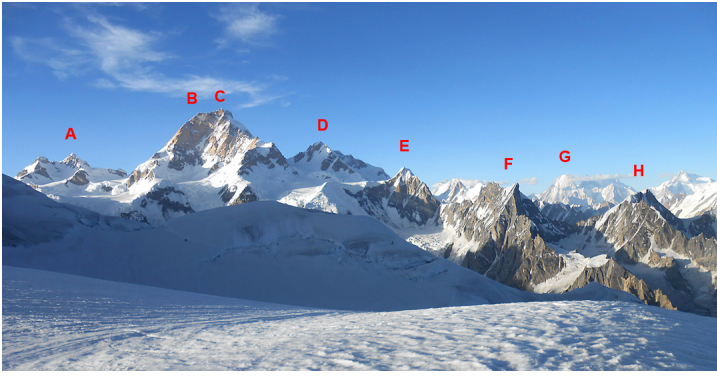
– **Simon Messner, Italy**

NOTES ON YERNAMANDU KANGRI: Yernamandu Kangri rises on the southeast ridge of Masherbrum and, before 2023, had seen no known attempt, although in 1981 Volker Stallbohm reached the col at the base of the northwest ridge during an attempt on Masherbrum. The 2023 ascent more or less followed the original route on Masherbrum until the plateau below Yernamandu Kangri's final southwest face.

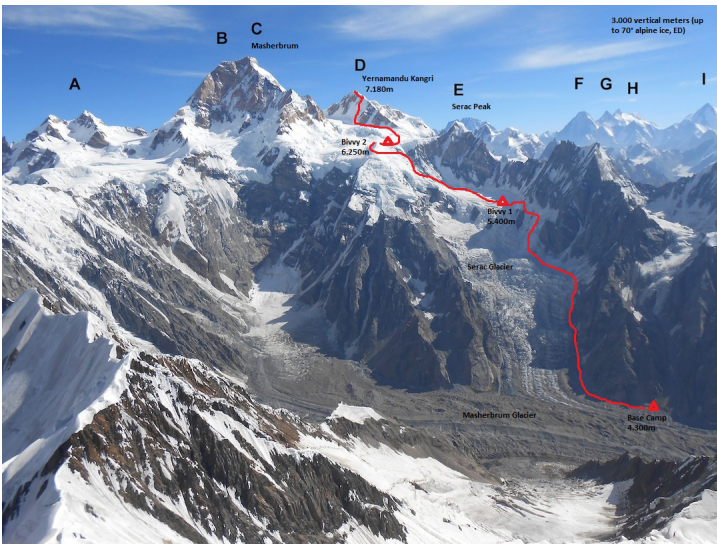
The successful ascent of Masherbrum in 1960, by a talented American team, built on two previous British attempts: in 1938, when the expedition reached nearly 7,500m on the south-southeast face, and 1957, when the team retreated from around 7,700m. Between these two trips, a New Zealand expedition reached 7,070m. While the New Zealanders climbed the middle of the icefall of the Serac Glacier, the two British and the American expeditions all climbed the right side of the glacier via the so-called Scaly Alley and had a camp on the top of the Dome (ca 6,250m), in a similar spot to the 2023 team, which also climbed Scaly Alley.

According to the German chronicler Eberhard Jurgalski, prior to summer 2023, Yernamandu Kangri was the tenth-highest unclimbed summit in the world.

Images



Looking north at Masherbrum from near the summit of Cathedral Peak. (A) Mandu Peaks (7,121m, 7,081m). (B) Masherbrum west top (7,750m). (C) Masherbrum southwest summit (7,806m; the main summit is hidden behind). (D) Yernamandu Kangri (7,163m). (E) Serac Peak (6,273m, Wala map; behind it lies Broad Peak). (F) Unclimbed peak of about 6,000 meters. (G) Gasherbrum IV. (H) Unclimbed peak of about 5,900 meters.



Looking north-northeast over the upper Masherbrum Glacier from high on Cathedral Peak. (A) Mandu Peaks (7,121m, 7,081m). (B) Masherbrum west top (7,750m). (C) Masherbrum southwest summit (7,806m; the main summit is hidden behind). (D) Yernamandu Kangri (7,163m) with the 2023 route. As far as the plateau below the final steep face, this route coincided with the 1960 American route for the first ascent of Masherbrum. (E) Serac Peak (6,273m, Wala map; behind it lies Broad Peak). (F) Gasherbrum IV. (G) Gasherbrum III. (H) Gasherbrum II. (I) Gasherbrum I.



Traversing the "Dome" at around 6,200 meters. Serac Peak, climbed for the first and only time in July 1960 by Tom McCormack and Abdul Rahim, is in the center. Below it is the plateau of the upper Serac Glacier. On the far left is the summit of Yernamandu Kangri.



On the final 600-meter southwest face of Yernamandu Kangri.

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