



AAC Publications

Gasherbrum IV, Southeast Ridge, Attempt and Tragedy

Pakistan, Karakoram, Baltoro Muztagh

In August, Dmitry Golovchenko and Sergey Nilov attempted the unclimbed southeast ridge of Gasherbrum IV (7,925m) in alpine style. Their plan was to descend the original route on the northeast ridge, climbed in 1958 by Walter Bonatti and Carlo Mauri.

The two Russians arrived at Gasherbrum base camp on August 1. From August 8–13, they slowly found a route through the difficult icefall that leads to the glacier plateau between Gasherbrums III and IV. Fierce wind and low temperatures almost produced frostbite, but they were able to reach the plateau, where they stashed gear and food. They arrived back in base camp on the 14th.

I was in touch with Dmitry the next day. With help from one of my friends who is a meteorologist, I agreed to send forecasts to Dmitry's wife, Sasha, who would be keeping in regular contact with her husband.

Dmitry and Sergey left base camp on August 18 for their summit push, and on the 20th they made camp below the southeast ridge at about 7,000m. On the 21st it was windy, and they only managed four pitches, camping at 7,100m. The following day they were unable to move, but on the 23rd, despite continued strong wind and snowfall, the two climbed 1.5 pitches to a large ledge and a better campsite. Bad weather confined them to the tent the following day.

On the 25th, the weather seemed better, and they climbed another half pitch before rappelling to the tent in a snowstorm. Next day, Sergey climbed a difficult chimney and a second pitch through a series of rocky walls, but the two were then forced to descend to the tent to avoid frostbite. On the 27th, they jumared the four pitches now fixed above the camp, climbed two more pitches, and brought the tent up to a big, snowy ledge at above 7,300m.

On the 28th, they added two more pitches, then, over the next two days, they were able to simul-climb in places as the angle of the ridge eased, and they reported that they could see the final headwall on the ridge. They reached 7,583m by the night of the 30th.

The usual evening satellite phone message did not arrive on the 31st, their 14th day out from base camp. The last tracker location showed them to be at 7,684m, about 240m below the summit (and still below a difficult-looking headwall and sharp final ridge). After a couple of days, during which Dmitry's wife had not received any contact, efforts were made to initiate a rescue. Unfortunately, bad weather and bureaucracy prevented this. Five days later, Nilov arrived in base camp, frostbitten and alone.

A summary of Nilov's account of what had happened was published by Anna Piunova, chief editor of Mountain.ru: On August 31, the two men found a small, sloping shoulder on the ridge, at 7,684m, where they could place the tent. The site needed to be enlarged using stones and snow. Anchoring was difficult, as the rock was shattered and covered in ice.

The tent was secured with the rope, and the two got inside and attached themselves to the rope before making tea and settling in for the night. However, they discovered the tent was slipping. Sergey unclipped from the rope and went out to level the platform. He tied knots in the rope and threw the

end inside the tent for Dmitry, who was gathering their equipment so it wouldn't slide out of the tent. Then Sergey heard his partner call, "Sergey, I'm falling!" and saw the tent slide from the platform and down a couloir with Dmitry inside. Only the rope remained.

With no partner and none of his personal equipment, Sergey sat out the night, fighting the cold. Next morning, he made around 15 rappels along the fall line of the tent. He found Dmitry's body on the glacier plateau, wrapped it in the tent, collected what gear he could, and dragged the tent to the middle of the plateau to place it in a crevasse.

Sergey's five-day return to base camp was without food or drink; the stove had been broken in the fall and any remaining food eaten by birds. He spent the nights in snow holes inside two sleeping bags. He was eventually repatriated to Moscow to begin treatment for severely frostbitten feet.

Born in 1983, Golovchenko had climbed new routes on Trango Tower, Kyzyl Asker, Asgard, Jannu, Muztagh Tower, and Thalay Sagar, among other peaks. The two-decade-long Golovchenko-Nilov partnership was one of the most formidable in recent times. [Victor Gorlov and Natalia Zotova contributed information and translation for this account.]

— **Federico Bernardi, Italy**

Images



(H) marks approximate 2023 high point on the southeast ridge of Gasherbrum IV. In center is the unclimbed east face. The right skyline is the 1958 first ascent route (northeast ridge).



The southeast ridge of Gasherbrum IV, with (H) the approximate 2023 high point, faces the camera. The unrepeated 1958 original route follows the right skyline (northeast ridge). Between the two, the east face remains unclimbed, despite several attempts. Lines up the south face to southwest ridge (left skyline) have been completed but stop far short of the summit.



Dmitry Golovchenko in Ghunsa, East Nepal, after climbing a new route up the east face to south ridge of Jannu. He and Sergey Nilov spent 18 days on the ascent and descent, foregoing the summit after cresting the east face at 7,412 meters.

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