

British Charakusa 2012 Expedition

Expedition Report Collection

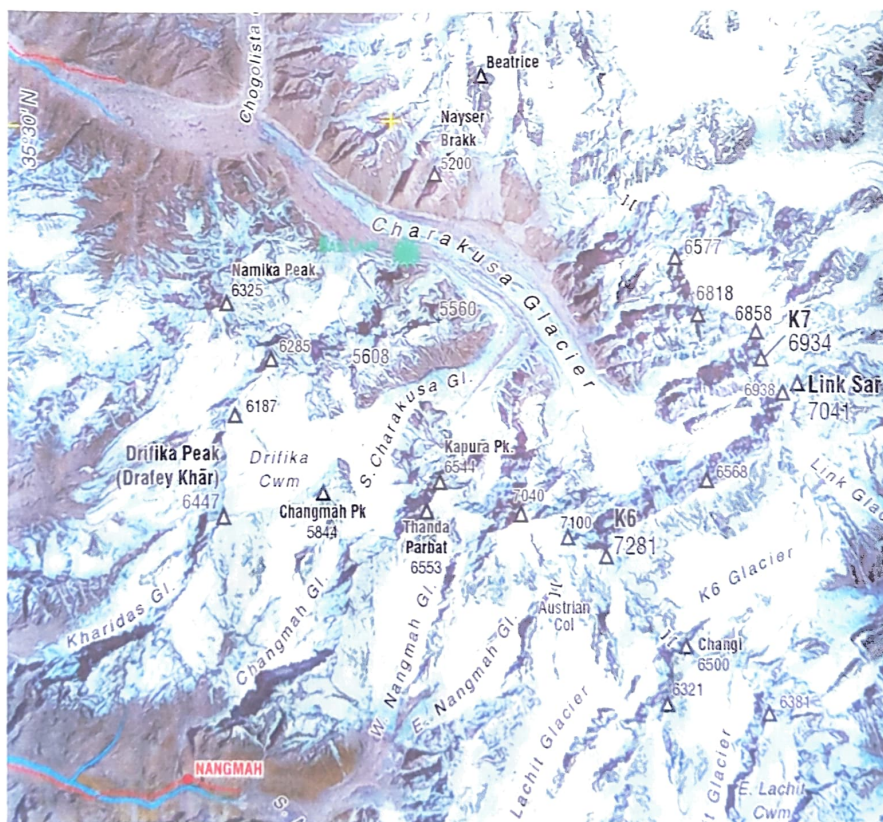
Climbers: Jon Griffith and Will Sim

Dates: 6th August 2012- 22 September 2012

Aims: K6 North Face (main objective), Link Sar, K7

Supported by: British Mountaineering Council
Mount Everest Foundation

Summary: We arrived at our base camp in the Charakusa Valley quickly and without hindrance. From then we set about acclimitising for our main objectives (which lay at just over 7000m in altitude). We climbed the British Route on Naysar Brakk (5200m) followed by the NW ridge of Sulu (6050m). We then spent a night on the West side of Kapura receiving unknown peaks in that area. Back at Base Camp we headed up the Diaper Couloir on Beatrice (~5800m). Feeling acclimitised we turned our attention to Link Sar north face. It took a couple of recces to find the access up a very dangerous glacial valley and trace a line up the face. Our first attempt ended at approx. 6100m due to a blockage in the route and poor weather. A winter weather system moved in from here on and we couldn't really leave base camp due to storm activity. We had one last attempt o Link Sar in a very brief weather window but it never materialized so we left in falling snow and a white out back for Base Camp. On our penultimate day we climbed Fathi Brakk in pretty terrible weather.

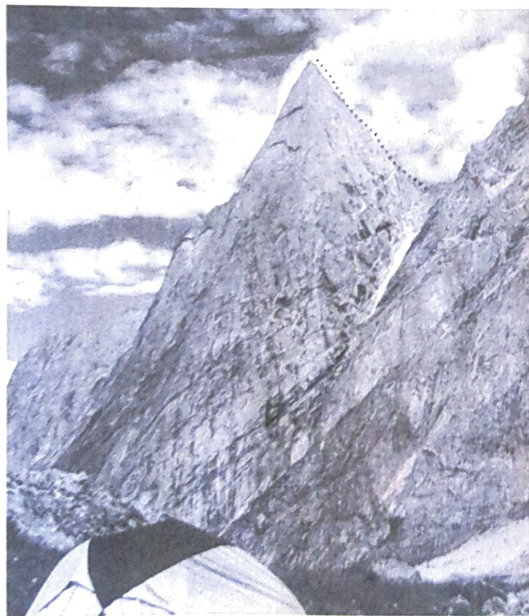


Expedition Dates:

- 6 Aug: Fly Heathrow to Islamabad
- 7 Aug: Arrive Islamabad
- 8 Aug: Fly Skardu
- 9 Aug: Drive to Hushe
- 10 & 11 Aug: Walk to Charakusa Base Camp
- 14 Aug: Climb British Route on Naysar Brakk (5200m)
- 17 & 18 Aug: Climb NW ridge of Sulu Peak (6050m)
- 20 & 21 Aug: Recce days for Link Sar North Face
- 22 Aug: Head up to base of Changmah Peak up South Charakusa Glacier
- 25 Aug: Access the top of the Link Sar Glacier and to the base of the North Face (recce)
- 29 Aug: Simul Solo Diaper Couloir on Beatrice (5800m)
- 1 – 3 Sept: First attempt on Link Sar N Face. Turn around at approx. 6100m
- 3 – 13 Sept: Very bad weather, temperatures drop
- 14 Sept: Second attempt on Link Sar North Face but weather window does not materialize
- 16 Sept: Climb Fathi Brakk (~5600m)
- 17 Sept: Walk out of Charakusa to Hushe
- 18 Sept: Drive Hushe to Skardu, change jeep and get on the Karakorum Highway
- 19 Sept: Arrive Islamabad
- 22 Sept: Fly to Heathrow

Climbing Details

Naysar Brakk British Route



The British Route is a 300m rock with difficulties up to E2 5b. Approach is via a loose gully (approx. 800m) up the backside all the way to the col where the route takes obvious climbing to a stunning arête and the summit itself. Total of 5 technical pitches. Easily done in a day from Base Camp. Really good acclimitisation peak and allows views over a huge amount of the massif

Sulu Peak (6050m) NW Ridge



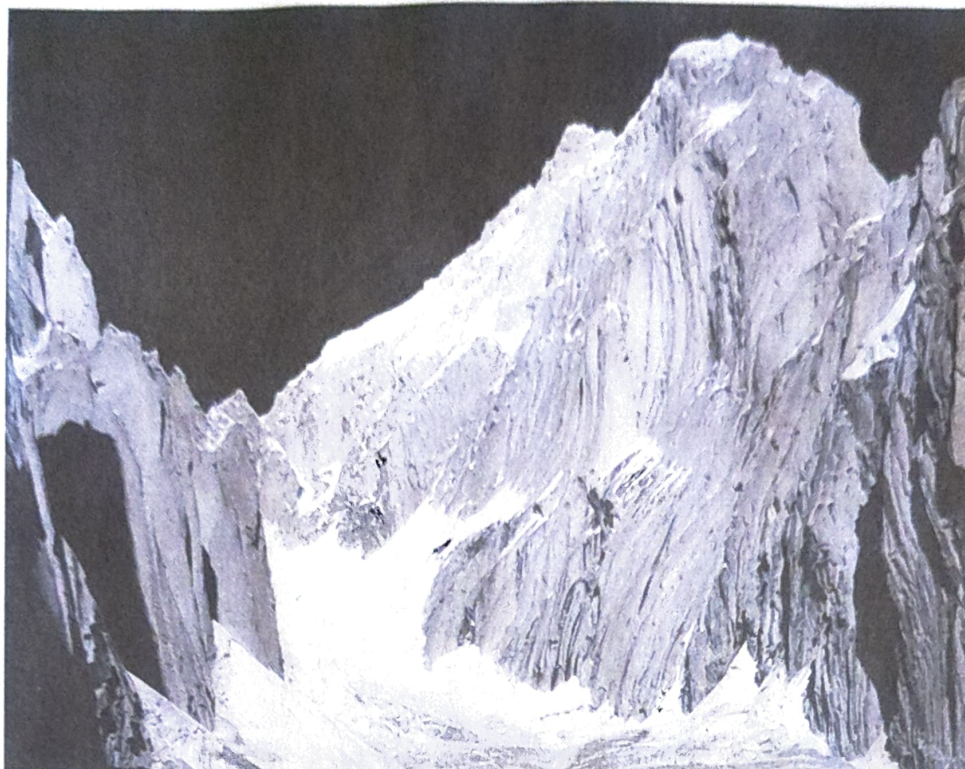
The North West Ridge is the left hand skyline ridge. We climbed this over two days for acclimatisation purposes. On our first day we climbed up from Base Camp up an access gully to a perfect bivy spot on the ridge. The following day we covered mixed terrain (never particularly hard but sometimes dodgy snow conditions) to just beneath the summit where we traversed out the full breadth of the mountain to avoid exiting through big cornices. There is a nice flat bivy spot just beneath the summit where we stopped to further acclimatise. The following morning we traversed over in to the main central couloir (visible in above photo) and descended back to Base Camp.

Diaper Couloir, Beatrice Peak (5800m)



The Diaper Couloir is a 1000m AD gully on Beatrice Peak. Part of the gully is not visible in the above photo. It is formed of one initial snow gully that crests out into the final gully; the final gully being steeper than the first one with hard ice. The rock is very poor around the gullies so you are advised to stick with the snow and ice even if it might feel a bit exposed on the final section. Descent is the same as the ascent. Can be done in a day from Base Camp. We found largely good conditions for a fast ascent apart from the final 200m which required a little more attention to the hard ice.

Link Sar North Face



Due to the narrow glacial valley approach we do not have any images to show the line that we attempted. The only way to recce the face entirely is from the summit of K7 opposite. This proved our downfall as at approx. 6100m we found ourselves at the edge of a 50m snow ridge that we would have to rap down to access another part of the face. So far we had encountered very minor snow ridges (maybe 1 or 2 meters high) but they had been completely bottomless on the side we were traversing in to. This monster ridge would have been impossible to climb back out of and with bad weather brewing we decided not to make an irreversible rap into the top 800m of a face we hadn't been able to see yet.

It is a hugely complex face with a very involved glacial approach. The approach is threatened by seracs overhanging both sides of the valley with an enormous one sitting at the head of the valley threatening to carve down the whole glacier. Any attempt at an advanced base camp nearby the face is not recommended due to this.

South 'face' Fathi Brakk (5600m)



We do not have an image of the south side of Fathi Brakk but there are various options to the summit. After approaching from Base Camp you chose one of the many loose rock gullies leading up the backside of the mountain until you arrive at the col between the summit and a lower peak lookers left of the above photo. From here you follow the ridge, which has 4 or 5 solid and fun rock pitches, up to about Hard Severe to a very airy summit. We climbed this in very bad weather as it was our last day and we were keen to have one last go at something.

Unclimbed Objectives

There are still hundreds of viable unclimbed lines in the area. From short and easier rock routes on the Badalle Wall (K7 West) to the immense North Face of K6. For me the three plum lines are the following:

The North (or NW) face of K6: Threatened by seracs on the NW face but there is one safe line on the North Face. Very committing though as a route and the descent is not a walk over either. This is *the* line still to go in the valley.

West Ridge of Link Sar: Link Sar is an unclimbed 7K peak; the only unclimbed peak (I believe) in the valley. The West Ridge is a huge undertaking and involves a rather nasty serac at one point but otherwise is completely safe and will make a fantastic rock integral ascent.

West Ridge of K7: This has been tried before but failed very near the top. Very similar to the West Ridge of Link Sar it is a stunning rock route to the very top of K7 with minimal objective dangers.

As for other ascents the Charakusa Valley has been reasonably well documented so the best course of action is to take a look at the map included in this document, find a peak name, and just start googling. There are plenty of images on line now of all the mountains as well as the documented ascents.

I have found that Google Earth is very useful for this area as well- NB if you go back in time to the 2004 images they are better than the current ones.

Logistics

Travel

We flew with Pakistan International Airlines, which offers direct flights straight from Heathrow to Islamabad.

All internal travel was handled by our Tour Operator. Blue Sky Treks and Tours come very highly recommended for this area!

Traveling the Karakorum Highway was not as bad as we were led to believe, just incredibly long.

Permits

Permits are required for all peaks above 6500m you can climb anything under this height with a simple Trekking Permit). As of the time of writing the Peak Fee for a 7000-7500m peak was \$1500 plus a non-refundable \$200 pollution 'deposit'.

We found that you can apply for as many peaks as you want in advance and only pay for one, which secures you access to the area and a Liaison Officer. If you decide that you wish to try for another peak then you call your Tour Agent who will pay for the peak permit in Skardu on your behalf. This means you don't have to pay for two or three permits up front if you aren't sure of what you are going to get on. But be sure to apply for the peak permits before you leave the UK as you cannot do it when in Pakistan.

Tour Operator

We used Blue Sky Treks and Tours. We highly recommend them. They were incredibly professional and welcoming and made us feel at home as soon as we arrived in Pakistan.

Visas

Visas for Pakistan are pretty easy to get if you are a UK citizen. We managed to get ours in about 10 days. The problem we found was that we needed our Peak Permit to prove to the embassy in London that we had permission to enter the Charakusa area. As the peak permits seem to always arrive at the last minute this can make getting your visa a little stressful and last minute as well. It is well worth asking for a Trekking Permit in advance from your Tour Operator as this should suffice and means you don't have to worry about waiting for your Peak Permit. (The Trekking Permit is a part of the Peak Permit and is very easy to get).

Budget

Flights	1650
Visa	80
Food and Porters	3881
Peak Fees	1270
Insurance	1400
Satellite Phone	300
Tips	450
Excess Baggage	400
Total	9431

Further Information

William Sim's Website: <http://www.willsim.blogspot.com>

Jon Griffith's Website: <http://www.alpineexposures.com>

We would like to thank the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council for their generous support on this expedition.