



Bonington, Saunders and Robertson on their way up the western cwm between camps II and III with Mount Sepu in the background. CHRIS BONINGTON PICTURE LIBRARY

never recovered and after two nights they descended to Base Camp.

By then we had run out of time, but we had at least discovered a reasonable route to the summit. There are also a wealth of other climbs to be had in this fascinating area, both on the north and southern side of the mountain. The site of Base Camp is particularly attractive and our neighbors became good friends. It is an area I would strongly recommend to anyone attracted to exploratory climbing.

CHRIS BONINGTON, *Alpine Climbing Group*

CHINA

Mustagh Ata, Gasherbrum II, and Other Activity in the Chinese Karakoram. Our expedition was co-led by Daniel Mazur and Jonathan Otto. On June 29, we set out from Kathmandu, Nepal, to Islamabad, Pakistan, across India by rail with 600 kilograms of mountaineering equipment. An in-progress war of nuclear detente was currently in full swing between India and Pakistan, which made the border crossings interesting. On July 20, our bus crossed from Pakistan into China via the Khunjerab Pass on the Karakoram Highway. On July 21, a four-hour, camel-supported trek from the highway into the Chinese Pamirs brought us to Mustagh Ata's clean, comfortable, grassy, well-organized, permanently established north side Base Camp at 4350 meters. On August 3, Ellen Miller led the way to the summit (7546m) in a wind-blown whiteout, with Angela McCormick and Daniel Mazur in tow. That afternoon, they telemark skied down from the summit and reached Base Camp.

By August 10, 11 of our team members (including Frank Pitula, Clint Rogers, Steven Ross, Patricia Peterson and Howard Yee) had reached the summit, either on foot, snowshoe, or ski. Richard Bothwell made a snowboard descent on August 9. Upon departure, we exchanged all



Mike Sinclair at Camp II (5750m) on the north ridge of Gasherbrum II. DAN MAZUR

of our in-place equipment, including ropes, fixing lines, snow, rock and ice anchors to a well-organized expedition we had met from Osaka, Japan. In this way, we tried to reduce the pollution of mountain environments that occurs with the unnecessary duplication of safety equipment on a well-traveled route.

On August 13, we began an attempt on the unclimbed south face of Mustagh Ata. After leaping initial time-consuming bureaucratic hurdles, including interesting visits to the police station, we entered the Mustagh Ata complex from the east side, crossing several technical 5000-meter ice and rock passes in the process. Our 80-kilometer mountaineering traverse was only possible because we carried lightweight, high-standard equipment. Weather and loss of time prevented us from making a bonafide attempt on Mustagh Ata's stunningly massive south face, but we did reconnoiter a very feasible route for the future.

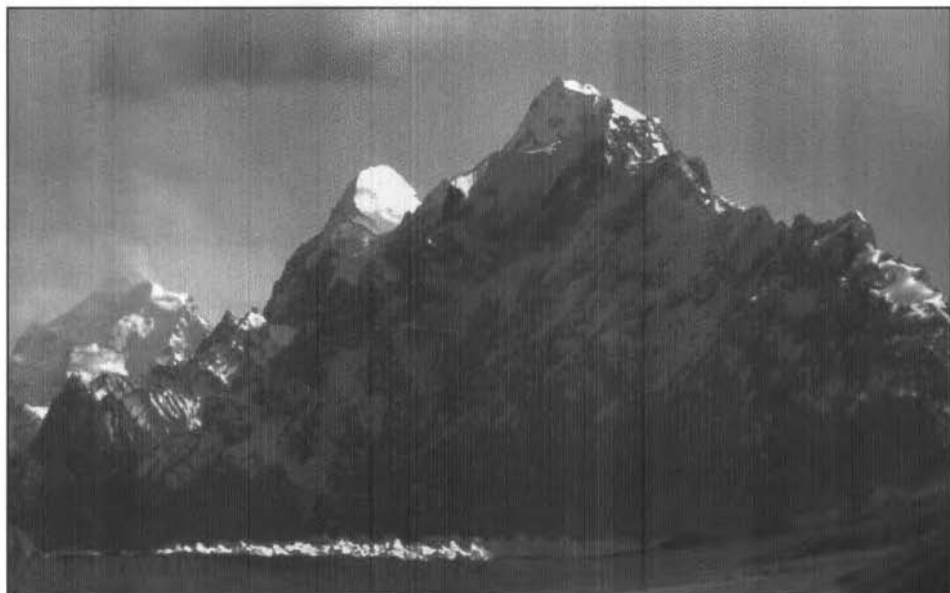
During our travels across the Mustagh Ata complex, we made the first ascent of the 6100-meter Tokoruk Peak. Olivier Raimond and Richard Bothwell led the way on the semi-technical snow- and ice-covered west ridge, traversing several cornices and false summits before reaching the top, where we enjoyed a fine view of our entire eight-day traverse and of Mustagh Ata's classic south face itself.

On September 1, our team began the first attempt of the 8036-meter Gasherbrum II via its unclimbed north face. Eight of us made a rather pleasant trek, and a few exciting camel-assisted crossings of the snow-melt swollen river, through the desert-like Shaksgam River Valley. We established Advanced Base Camp I at 4650 meters and ABC II at 4800 meters on September 2. On September 11, in sunny warm weather, we finished fixing 700 meters of rope on the steep and icy 30-60° "Hilton Headwall." On September 13, we established CI at 5750 meters on safe flat ground at the edge of "Destruction Plateau" between the "Skyang Ice Cascade" and "Sinclair's Scepter." Our single-wall tents were deluged in snow and battered by winds from the Tibetan Plateau until October 1, when we fixed another 500 meters of line over three days. Our route of ascent was the "Wallis Traverse;" we reached a high point of 6400 meters. We found this to be a rather technical, but highly possible, route that stretched the limits of our equipment. On October 3, we turned back in raging winds, out of time, short on hot chocolate drink mix, and a tiny bit let-down, but wiser and 100% primed for a future ascent of this exciting, still unclimbed route.

On October 1, Ian Hatchett made the first ascent of the unclimbed summit of the 6061-meter Madame Butterfly via the east ridge. He climbed solo on 30-60° snow and ice, and his one-day, fast-and-light first ascent was particularly gratifying, as Andrew Dunn and Daniel Mazur had nearly reached the summit in 1996 via the west face.

On October 2, David Wallis and Andrew Hilton attempted to make the first ascent of 6850-meter Venus Rising. At 11 a.m., while climbing at 6400 meters on the east face, they were sucked into a mountain-wide, meter-deep slab avalanche. The two were tossed down the slope, somersaulting through fast-moving snow blocks. Andrew suffered a severely sprained ankle, and both climbers were stripped of ski poles, hats, goggles, and ice axes before coming to a halt at the edge of a rock precipice as the avalanche carried on and tumbled into a deep ice couloir.

On October 7, our entire team, assisted by the faithful Tadjik and Uighur people as camel caravaners, fled the Karakoram in stable, cold, windy weather and low-water river conditions. We carefully buried our biodegradable wastes, then burned and packed out every single scrap



The unclimbed Urdok Hills, sub-7000m peaks at the confluence of Urdok Glacier and the Shaksgam River. DAN MAZUR

of rubbish. During our 48-day expedition, we had encountered a few shepherd families and no other tourists. In fact, the mountaineering authorities told us that during the last two years, ours had been the only climbing expedition permitted to enter the Chinese Karakoram.

On October 10, at the end of the 100-kilometer camel trek out, while visiting Korul, a village of the seasonally-nomadic Kyrgyz people, a seven-year-old shepherd boy was hit by a flying piece of rock shrapnel thrown from a road builder's dynamite blast. Our expedition doctors Andrew Hilton, Mike Sinclair and Rob Allen amputated his shattered foot and nursed him through the night. We then transported him, his sister, and parents in our vehicles to the nearest hospital, where we pooled our resources to pay for an operation that his family would have been unable to afford. It was the first time any of them had ever ridden in a motor vehicle, or been to the nearest city. As a result of this mishap, we met with local government officials, and are currently joining together to create a health care system that will begin to fill the void for these people, who currently have nothing.

Finally, between October 15 and 27, we crossed Xinjiang Province and the nation of Tibet by rail, plane, and road with 300 kilograms of equipment, hosted along the way by regional mountaineering clubs. We were welcomed warmly, and were able to conduct extensive mountaineering research into high-altitude mountains in and around the Tibetan Plateau. As a result, we are planning expeditions and further explorations in Tibet and Xinjiang for the upcoming climbing season.

DAN MAZUR

Mt. Kongur, Attempt. Our group this year tried to climb Mt. Kongur (7719m) in the Kashgar Range. The extremely bad weather did not allow us to even approach the summit tower. The

route (Bonington, 1981) is very long and indirect. We dug our last snow cave at 6800 meters. Due to avalanche-prone slopes (snow fell every day) and lack of visibility, we turned back.

OTTO CHKHETIANI, *Russia*

Yunnan Province, Various Ascents. In April, I traveled to northwest Yunnan province and made my way to the town of Dechin by public bus. From April 25-27, I receded the approach to Baima Shan, an unclimbed peak of around 5500 meters on the west side of the road between Zhongdian and Dechin. On the 28th, I climbed a small unnamed and unmarked 5300-meter peak on the east side of the road. I began climbing from my camp at around 4000 meters and reached the summit after three-and-a-half hours via the west ridge. Temperatures were -15°C on the summit at sunrise. I had great views over Sichuan and toward Tibet. The climbing was characterized by moderate snow and ice slopes plus two large gendarmes of rotten and loose rock that I was forced to climb over. I climbed by headlamp as there was no moon. The weather during my stay tended to be clear in the morning, hot in the afternoon, then stormy at night. Snow cover at this time of year was considerable, blocking the road from Zhongdian until mid-April, though I saw no signs of avalanches.

I returned to Lijiang, again by public bus. Then, on May 3-4, I approached Yulongxueshan, also known as Jade Dragon Snow Mountain (5590m), reaching 4200 meters on the south side. Bad weather and lack of food led me to descend and return to Lijiang.

DAMIEN GILDEA, *Australia*

SICHUAN

LOTUS FLOWERS MOUNTAIN RANGE

Peak 5704m, First Ascent. The 5704-meter main peak of the Lotus Flowers mountain range (a.k.a. Zharha Latse, Mt. Haitze) lies to the north of the Minya-Konka mountain area in Sichuan, China. It is about 20 kilometers north of Kangding and 350 kilometers west of Chengdu. The Japan Workers' Alpine Federation Trans-Mountain Expedition 1998 ascended this unclimbed peak via the southwest face in September and October. We were Hitoshi Yamaoka (leader), Yoshio Kondo, and Yoshitake Shirai. We reached Base Camp (3900m), a one-day walk from the nearest small village of Sutunba, on September 17. Though it was small, the glacier began at more than 5000 meters. Camp I was placed at 4900 meters on the moraine near the southwest face on September 23. It was easy walking from BC to CI. We made CII at 5400 meters on an unstable snow ridge on September 28 after climbing the southwest face in 15 50-meter pitches. The route followed the edge of the couloir and entailed snow, ice, and rotten rock between the south peak and the couloir itself (UIAA II-IV). On September 30, Yamaoka and Shirai climbed the mixed face of the main peak in nine 50-meter pitches, encountering unstable rock and snow (III-IV). Rainy weather had continued for 11 days after our arrival at BC. Fortunately, around the time we reached the summit, we had fine days. On October 6, Kondo and Shirai made the second ascent. Near here and in the north of Mt. Siguniang in Sichuan, there are some sharp peaks suitable for rock climbing.

HITOSHI YAMAOKA, *Japan Workers' Alpine Federation*