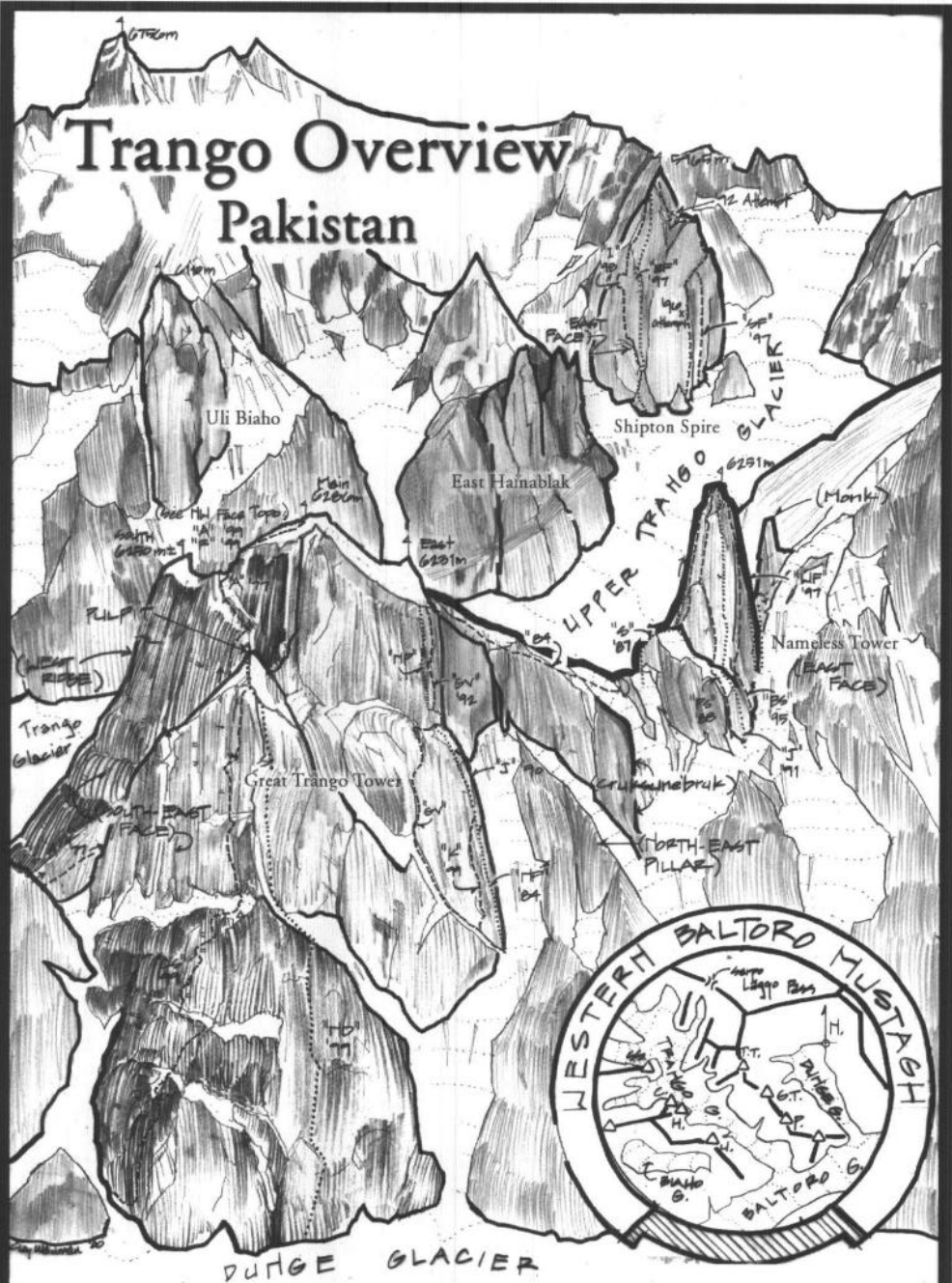


# Trango Overview

## Pakistan



### Great Trango Tower

- 'A' AMERICAN (1971 & 1984) & 1991
- 'C' MORE CZECH LESS SLOVAK (1977)
- 'H' NORWEGIAN DIRECT (1977)
- 'K' KOREAN VARIATION (1977)
- 'N' SPREAD VOYAGE (1976)
- 'S' NORWEGIAN PILLAR (1974)
- 'J' JAPANESE VARIATION (1970)

### Nameless Tower

- 'A' SLOVAKIAN (1987)
- 'P' POLISH/SHING (1988)
- 'J' JAPANESE (1991)
- 'B' BOOK OF SHADOWS (1978)
- 'W' WALL FICTION (1977)

### Shipton Spire

- 'I' ISHALLAH (1970)
- 'B' BALTIQUE FALCON (1977)
- 'G' SHIP OF FOOLS (1977)

### Uli Biaho

based on aerial photos by Colin Preece

# The Trango Towers in Review

by John Middendorf

The impressive rock spires of Great Trango Tower and Trango (a.k.a. Nameless) Tower create one of the wonders of the Earth, capturing the imagination of everyone who travels on the Baltoro Glacier. Great Trango resembles a giant castle flanked by steep walls. On top of nearly a mile of sheer rock, four magnificent summit turrets comprise the East, West, Main (middle) and South summits. The sibling Trango Tower stands as a proud rook, the ultimate rock spire. The walls are among the largest vertical faces anywhere and have been the arena for the world's most impressive and historic big wall climbs. In his 1974 book, *Big Wall Climbing*, Doug Scott predicted, "... as the political situation improves [and access is eased], there will undoubtedly be a flood of applicants maneuvering to tackle these big wall climbs of the future. Here is the ultimate challenge of verticality, uncertain weather conditions and altitude." That challenge was met in 1999 by five teams on the Great Trango Tower alone. All five established new routes, providing inspiration for this introduction, which places the achievements in an historical context.

Great Trango was first climbed to the Main Summit in 1977 by Galen Rowell, John Roskelly, Kim Schmitz and Dennis Hennek from the alpine-esque west side, a long and serious endeavor that contained stretches of difficult rock and ice climbing. In 1984, the Norwegians Stein Aasheim, Dag Kolsrud, Finn Daehli and the visionary Hans Christian Doseth climbed the North Pillar of Great Trango Tower, by far the most striking and longest vertical buttress of the massif, in an ascent that stands as a momentous blend of spirit, human will and tragedy. (See Robert Caspersen's article in the pages that follow for a more detailed description of the climb.) The tragic Norwegian effort proved to be a milestone of style and commitment in big wall climbing that paved the way for future landmarks. The same year, Scott Wollums and Andy Selters put up a new route to the Main Summit via the Northwest Ridge. Their route requires very little technical rock climbing, has some serious alpine sections and is recommended by Mr. Selters.

In 1992, Xaver Bongard and I climbed a parallel route to the Norwegian's line to the East Summit. Our route, the *Grand Voyage*, is a 4,400-foot continuous vertical and overhanging wall capped by the 650-foot summit pyramid. On the final mixed rock and ice pitch, a short snow walk from the summit, we found one of the Norwegian pitons that had been used for a rappel. Despite the fate of the Norwegians, we too had committed to the route alpine-style with no fixed rope, and we realized what a serious endeavor it is to descend with only four 60-meter ropes and one 120-meter haulline from the massive peak. Our ascent marked the second ascent of the East Summit but the first successful round-trip to terra firma. It also set a new standard of length, style and commitment on remote big walls.

Despite the bounty of walls, no new routes were put up on Great Trango in the next seven years, though a variation was climbed on the lower Norwegian Buttress (two other variations to the route were put up prior to 1992). Several teams repeated the Northwest Ridge, including an Australian BASE jumping team. A notable attempt of the impressive unclimbed Southwest Buttress was made in 1990 by Jon Lazkano's four-man team, who climbed 61



*The Trango Massif. From left to right: the Pulpit, the Main and East summits, Cruksunebruk, the Nameless Tower. ROBERT CASPERSEN*

pitches before being turned back by storm some 600 feet from the Main Summit. In 1997, a four-member Korean team climbed a 12-pitch variation to the Norwegian Buttress route, which they then followed to the East Summit in an ascent that went virtually unreported in the West. The team included Youn-Jung Shin, the first female to summit Great Trango; Choi Seung-Chul also became the first to paraglide from one of Great Trango's summits.

In 1999, the West Summit and the summit of the Pulpit were both climbed for the first time. From the Trango Glacier, the strong American team of Mark Synnot, Jared Ogden and Alex Lowe climbed the impressive northwest face, 3,000 feet of steep slabs and ramps leading up to a 2,500-foot vertical wall. A new standard was set not in style of climbing but in expedition communications. Sponsored by the internet community, the team relayed daily messages, images and video through satellite-connected computers to civilization. Mike Graber and Jim Surrette climbed parts of the route to film the climbers. Conflicts that arose on the trip, the result of unprecedented e-mail journals that allowed the climbers to read what the others wrote to readers from around the world, created an indirect communication dynamic. The 28-day ascent was criticized by a Norwegian team strictly opposed to the use of motorized drills in the wilderness, but it is reported that the Americans cleaned the route extensively of fixed ropes and other equipment, which must be applauded, considering the magnitude of the project. Their route, *Parallel Worlds*, set new standards in location documentation. Sadly, it was also Lowe's last major climb.

Shortly after the Americans began their ascent, a team of Russians comprising Yuri Koshelenko, Igor Potankin, Alexander Odintsov and Ivan Samoilenko began a route just to the right of the Americans'. Climbing with less fixed rope, they established a new route in 20

days—an impressive achievement, particularly considering the dated quality of their equipment. It is interesting to read Odintsov's notes of conversations from the trip, in which he shows the strong bond made with Alex Lowe who, after using the Russian fixed ropes one day, carried a load up the wall for them. In his expedition report, Samoilenko is very careful to report the differences in their routes and styles, pointing out, for example, that despite a massive difference in budgets, the Americans did not have a doctor. Michael Bakin, the Russian expedition doctor, attended to all those in the area, including Lowe, to whom he gave stitches for a wound incurred in a fall.

At the tail-end of the media event, the German team of Thomas Tivadar, Gavor Berecz and Oskar Nadasdi arrived with the intention of establishing a new route of their own up the wall, only to find the obvious lines occupied. They climbed 35 independent pitches to the left of *Parallel Worlds* before joining that route. Some 39 days and 44 pitches into it, however, they were forced to retreat short of the summit after a storm had imprisoned them in their portaledges for three days.

Rising up from the Dunge Glacier, the east face of the Trango Pulpit is a 3,000-foot wall topped by a hanging glacier. Above that towers another 1,500-foot wall. At its top (6050m), a ridge continues via a long snow shoulder to the Great Trango's Main Summit (6286m). In July and August, a Czech-Slovak team comprising Michalem Drašar, Tomáš Rinn, Pavlem Weisser, Ivo Wondráček and the sole Slovak, Jaro Dutka, fixed 700 meters of rope on the Pulpit's Southeast Ridge, climbed to its summit, then continued onto the Main Summit in a 53-pitch effort they called *More Czech, Less Slovak*. At the same time, and summiting only several days later, the sheer northeast face was climbed by the Norwegian team of Per Ludvig Skjerven, Gunnar Karlsen, Robert Caspersen and Einar Wold in an impressive capsule-style ascent. Disdaining the use of extensive fixed rope and power drills, the team committed to lightweight style, planning for 25 days up and three to four days for the descent. After 38 days of technical big wall climbing, during which they reached the top of the Pulpit with no food, they set foot back on the Dunge Glacier, a full adventure behind them.

Of the new routes mentioned above, Yuri Koshelenko, Jared Ogden and Robert Caspersen relate their respective climbs in detail in the pages that follow, while Thomas Tivadar and Vlado Linek note the other two ascents in the Climbs and Expeditions section on pages 335 and 336. Combined with a number of fine efforts on nearby formations such as Shipton Spire, which saw a repeat of the 1997 route *Ship of Fools*, another new route on Nameless Tower, plus a flurry of applications for permits to the area peaks for the year 2000, it is becoming increasingly obvious that "the ultimate challenge of verticality, uncertain weather conditions and altitude" is being met in the Karakoram. What will the future behold for the mighty Trango Towers? The wonderful spirit captured by climbing bolder, lighter and faster will hopefully prevail.