

Ultrar Expedition 2018

Greater Karakoram, Pakistan, May-July 2018



Mount Everest Foundation Expedition

(Expedition Reference MEF 18-25/BMC 18/09)

Final Report

Authors: Tim Miller and Bruce Normand

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1 Aim

The goal of the expedition was to summit Ultar (7388m) by its unclimbed Southeast Pillar.

2 Summary

The expedition was led by Bruce Normand (Scotland), climbing with Tim Miller (Scotland) and Christian Huber (Austria, resident in the USA). The team had a very successful acclimatisation mission in the Muchuar Glacier basin, sleeping at 5900m and climbing to 6600m, in excellent early-June weather. They arrived in base camp unsupported, due to the dangerous nature of the final 1km traverse, on 14th June. From then until 30th June, the weather was cold, wet and unstable, leading to autumnal snow conditions. In a forecast break in this pattern from 25th June, the climbers ascended to C2 at 5900m on the SE Pillar, but were then pinned down by 4 further days of snow. While waiting out this bad weather, their tent was buried in a small avalanche, in which Huber died and Miller was able to rescue Normand in the nick of time. A helicopter rescue/recovery was executed flawlessly by the Pakistani military.

3 Introduction

3.1 Purpose

Ultar is a former poster child for the inaccessibility of Karakoram giants. Making up in steepness for its rather modest 7388m height, it is clearly visible to travellers along a significant stretch of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) through the Hunza, and yet remained unclimbed until the mid-1990s. British teams played a significant role in its early prominence and exploration, and in fact were the first visitors to the southeast side of the peak for close-up views of a striking pillar high on this aspect of the mountain. Nearly 3 decades later, and despite the further attentions of French, American and Japanese teams, no parties have yet reached the upper pillar, let alone the summit of Ultar from this side. The purpose of the Ultar 2018 expedition was to change this situation.

3.2 Geography

The summit of Ultar is located only 8km horizontally, but also 5km vertically, from the KKH. Together with its Siamese twin Bojohagur Duanasir (7329m, sometimes known as Ultar I while the higher summit is Ultar II), it constitutes a brief reappearance of the granitic spine that cuts through the Pakistani-controlled Karakoram from the Kondus and Charakusa valleys, through Masherbrum and the famous walls of the Baltoro (Lobsang, Cathedral, Trango, Paiju) to the Latoks and Ogres, before dissipating in the upper Hispar (Tahu Rutum and Pumari Chhish). The broad ridge of these two peaks forms a forbidding backdrop to the northern side of the Hunza valley and their south face presents 3000m of cascading, serac-draped buttresses stacked directly above Ultar Meadow, which is a 2-3-hour hike from Baltit Fort at the top of Karimabad town.

Ultar was billed (incorrectly) as the “world's highest unclimbed peak” for some time in the 1980s and 90s, and was the object of a reported 15 expeditions. UK climbers explored all three of its aspects (S/SW, SE and N) in 1991 and 1994 expeditions and pioneered both the approach to the S Ridge from Ultar Meadow (Fowler and Jones, 1991) and routes on the SE Face (Saunders and Sustad, 1991; Jones and Reid, 1994); the authors thank Julian Freeman-Attwood and Crag Jones for information concerning the SE approach and attempted routes. The summit of Ultar finally fell to two Japanese teams in 1996, one using a dangerous route on the SW Face and the other taking the S Ridge; a reported solo third ascent followed one of these lines. Since then, the SE Pillar has been approached by Graziani and Trommsdorff (France, October 2005), Brown and Haley (US, August 2008) and Ichimura and Sato

(Japan, September 2011), the last setting the current high-point of 6500m. All previous teams have reported on the terrain problems affecting access to the base camp (BC) for the SE Pillar.



Ultar viewed from the East, on the Gharesa Glacier.

3.3 Access

For a 7000m mountain in northern Pakistan, Ultar could not be much closer to civilisation. Villagers live, and irrigate fields, where its precipitous lower slopes plunge into the Hunza river and they graze animals in the few meadows higher on these slopes. Access to the mountain is nonetheless far from straightforward. In spring this year, the Ultar Meadow approach was the scene of a massive landslide from high on the S Face, which killed some day-hiking visitors. Direct access to the Southeast Pillar from Ahmedabad is blocked by a vertical icefall on the Gurpi Glacier, which necessitates a long detour up a grassy side-valley and a steep, dangerous talus traverse for the final 1km. In early season this traverse involves significant snow work. Normand had decided that no Pakistani porters or BC staff would be risking their lives in terrain like this for the sake of a few foreign climbers, and so the team shuttled its own loads across this final section.

In the bigger picture, the approaches for climbing in the Pakistani Karakoram have not changed for some decades. One approaches via Islamabad or across the Khunjerab Pass from China. The Khunjerab approach is less taxing again now that the Attabad tunnel on the KKH has been opened, but the bus services remain slow and restricted. Islamabad has not suffered security problems for over 5 years now, although the upcoming elections led to a general increase of tension in 2018. The advice that the KKH is to be avoided around Besham is also now losing validity, with many foreigners and domestic outsiders passing through this region untroubled in recent seasons.

4 Team

The team members were Bruce Normand (Scotland, leader), Tim Miller (Scotland) and Christian Huber (Austria; US permanent resident). The agency was Higher Ground Expeditions, Treks and Tours, whose chief operations officer, Abdul Karim, had arranged all of the necessary permits and paperwork. The company owner and sirdar was Abdul Ghafoor, a long-time friend of Normand and his expedition

associates, whose tireless work ethic was put to the test by the authorities in 2018.



Team members: Ghafoor, Huber, Miller, Normand

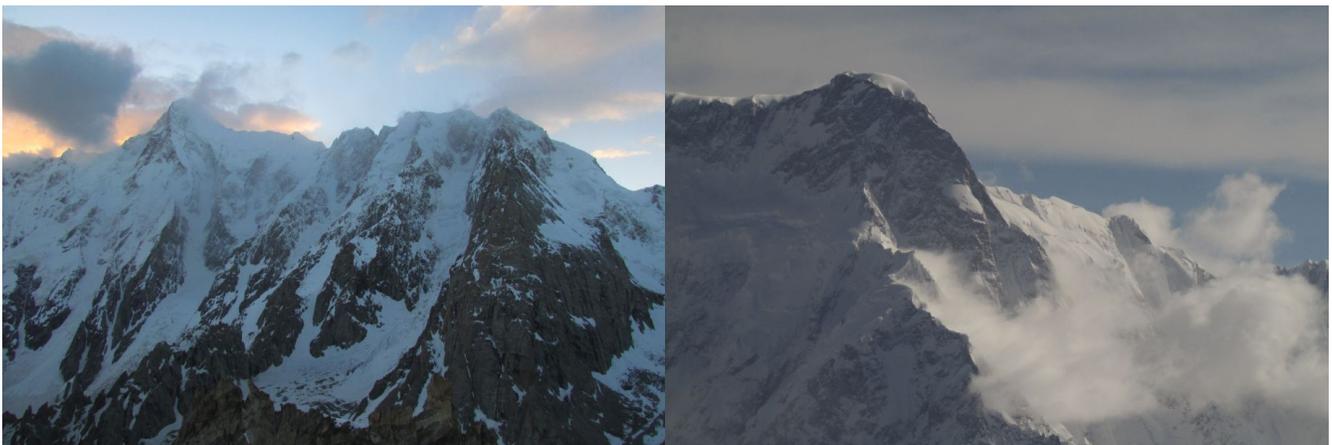
5 Preparation

5.1 Conception

Normand had viewed the pillar, and reconnoitred the approach from Ahmedabad, in June 2016 during an acclimatisation trip prior to an attempt on Shispar with Nicolas Preitner. He had formed the opinion, backed up by discussions with Jed Brown, who had looked at the line in August 2008 with Colin Haley, that the route is an early-season objective.

5.2 Objective

The Southeast Pillar has a total length of 3200m from the end of the Gurpi Glacier to the summit at 7388m. More than half of this distance is made up by a lower buttress, which is topped by a serrated ridge at 5900m. The lower half of this buttress is riven by a number of south-facing gullies, which are far easier in early summer when filled with snow and ice, than in their loose and rocky late-season shape. These gullies lead to open snow slopes by which the ridge is reached with no further difficulty. Above the ridge is a steep, fluted, east-facing slope leading to upper East Ridge, which remains snowy until 6500m, then turns to slabby rock on the pillar proper. Above 6900m, the route ends in a broad gully feature and leans back for a long, snowy finish.



Ultar SE Pillar from the SE (left), showing the lower buttress, and in profile (right).

5.3 Permission

Permits for peaks in the Karakoram are granted by the Gilgit-Baltistan Council (GBC) after a security

clearance is issued by three government ministries. The price for a 7000-7500m peak in the Hunza has been \$300 since 2002, but for reasons unknown was \$250 this year. The “environmental fee” of \$68 per person per peak was \$200 for a party of 3 this year; there remains as little evidence as ever that this money is put to any environmental purpose. This year's rule complication was that Elisabeth Revol's behaviour during and after the Nanga Parbat winter rescue had caused a new requirement for the helicopter rescue bond of \$15000 to be paid before the permit could be issued. This is of course a showstopper for any small team, we had objected, and we had been granted a reprieve to leave the money with our agent on condition that it be delivered to Askari Aviation at the first inkling of trouble. By the time we arrived in Islamabad, this decision had been changed again and we were asked to give the \$15000, which Huber and Normand had brought in cash, to Askari (who would return only \$14700). An alternative offer was to lodge \$5000 with the Pakistan Association of Tour Operators, who would return this sum in September. Normand insisted that neither option was remotely acceptable, and neither were unilateral changes to existing agreements. The impasse was resolved by reverting to the previous agreement that the bond money would remain with Ghafoor.



Malubiting (left) and Rakaposhi (right) viewed from 4400m on the Ultar approach.

5.4 Logistics

The GBC had insisted on a briefing in Islamabad, which was carried out by the serving head of the Pakistan Alpine Club, the ever-useless climbing groupie Karrar Haidri. Thus Miller and Normand were forced to spend a night in Islamabad for this pointless ceremony to take place (although it was enlivened by the above argument).

Huber was able to bring a significant quantity of mountain food. Further staples and assorted top-up items were all purchasable in Aliabad. Canisters of quality gas are not available in any quantity in Northern Pakistan these days and should be pre-ordered through the agency. Climbing equipment consisted of standard half ropes (60m x 8mm), rock (nuts, cams, pitons) and ice racks, cord and a V-threader. No fixed rope was used. The team carried one bivouac tent and two Jetboil stoves for the mountain plus two more small tents for base camp. An InReach (satellite text device) was carried for emergencies, status updates and weather forecasts.

5.5 Medical

No vaccinations are required for Northern Pakistan. Huber brought antibiotics, painkillers and emergency altitude medicine from the US. Normand brought BC and climbing first-aid kits.

5.6 Travel

Miller and Normand flew overnight from Europe, arriving on the morning of the briefing. Huber left on the same day US time for a far longer transpolar flight and arrived the following morning, meeting the other pair at the airport for an immediate continuation to the Northern Areas. Flights between Islamabad and Gilgit have become very reliable, as are the road conditions in the Hunza while the Chinese rebuild of the KKH remains new.

5.7 Finances

Full financial details are presented in tabular form. Numbers are quoted in UK pounds (GBP) at the exchange rate of June and July 2018, 1.00GBP = 1.30USD.

Expenditures

<u>Item</u>	
International travel	2440
Domestic travel	360
Climbing equipment	760
Medical supplies	50
Agency fee	230
Peak fee	190
Environmental fees	150
Vehicles	150
Porters	340
Sirdar	800
Staff and porter insurance	90
Hotels	290
Tips	310
Mountain food and fuel	570
Meals	110
Insurance	880
InReach	100
	<hr/>
	£7820

Income

<u>Donor</u>	
Mount Everest Foundation	£3250
British Mountaineering Council	£1500
Glasgow University	£1900
	<hr/>
	£6650

The MEF and BMC funds were shared equally among the three team members. The Glasgow University funds were shared equally after subtracting £650 to cover Miller's BMC climbing insurance. Personal contributions from the three climbers made up the balance.

The authors would like to thank all of the expedition's sponsors for their generous support.

6 Expedition Log

27th May

Miller flies from Glasgow via Dubai and Normand from Zurich via Abu Dhabi. Huber flies from Denver to Los Angeles in the evening local time.

28th May

Miller and Normand meet in Islamabad's new airport at 8am. Higher Ground's Islamabad operations manager, Karim, is there to meet them and take them to a hotel in G9. Ramadan is under way, so food and water have to be consumed in the room. The climbers go to the Blue Area to change money. The briefing at the Pakistan Alpine Club's office under the Jinnah Sports Stadium is presided over by the ineffectual Karrar Haidri, and turns contentious when Haidri informs the climbers that the rules concerning the helicopter bond have changed (see Sec. 5.3). Karim appears to side with Haidri, and suggests that if he is given the bond money he will lodge it with Askari, thereby costing the climbers \$300. Normand refuses to agree with this direct contravention of the previous agreement. Agreement is reached that the PAC will "explore other options" while the climbers keep the money and will give it to Ghafoor in the Hunza when the situation is clarified. There is little to do for the remainder of the day but sleep and overdose on mangos. Huber flies to Dubai in a single, 18-hour flight.

29th May

Miller, Normand and Karim are at the airport at 05:30 to meet Huber and check in for the early flight to Gilgit. The agents are entirely indifferent to bag weight, which is 30-35kg instead of 20, and so only one extra piece needs to be paid. However, when the flight arrives in Gilgit, it turns out that 3 of the 4 bags have not been loaded. A ridiculous scene occurs over a poster which Karim wanted given to Ghafoor, and which PIA refuses to acknowledge is on the plane; the poster is never seen again. Ghafoor arranges the onward shipment of the missing bags and the team heads up the KKH to the Hunza, lodging in a small hotel at the top of town in Karimabad. A shopping trip to Aliabad nets expedition food, kerosene and more mangos. Ghafoor is hassled by different local branches of the security agencies, who demand permission for foreigners to trek anywhere, even though the entire region is an open zone.

30th May

The climbing plan is to go to Spantik North BC for 10 days of acclimatisation before going to Ultar. Part of the reason for this is a lack of good acclimatisation options from Ultar BC, but the main reason is to reduce the loads the climbers have to carry across the dangerous section of the Ultar approach. The fact that Ghafoor will not be going to Ultar BC is fine by him but is also causing problems with the local security people. Ghafoor and Normand go to Sikanderabad, capital of Nagar district, to get permission from the local District Commissioner. This is granted. Only then do the pair think to ask the head porter Ghafoor has contacted in Nagar about the price per load to Spantik BC. It turns out that the Nagar porters demand 9800Rs for "6" stages (2 days of work). The government rate for this inflated stage count is 5200 and K2 BC (11 official stages, 6 days of hard work) is in practice 11000Rs. The climbers refuse. The head porter is not prepared to move an inch, and thus gets as much work as Nagar porters always get: none. The bags are delivered by PIA and are repackaged for porter transport. The back-up plan is the Muchuar Glacier to Batokshi peak (6040m), which sits at the base of the Batura wall. The Aliabad lambardar (head man) quotes 8000Rs for "5" stages and does not like it when Normand asks him if he is in Pakistan, where the rule of law states that the rate is 4450Rs even if the inflated stage count is to be believed. Ghafoor spends the remainder of the day running around Karimabad, Aliabad and Haiderabad finding 3 porters who are prepared to work for a more conventional rate.



Left: loading and boarding the jeep for Hassanabad Nallah. Right: Salauddin at work.

31st May

The porters Ghafoor finds insist immediately that the work is 7.5 stages. Word are exchanged and they get into the jeep anyway. The jeep actually drives for more than half of the first stage, up the Hassanabad Nallah to the reconstructed water works within sight of the Shispar Glacier. Ghafoor gets a call just at the limit of cell range, from the security bureaucrats telling him he has to remain with us at all times (which was definitely not the plan, and he has no food for a week). The day is grey and cloudy, which makes for good trekking temperatures. The porters become shockingly slow as soon as the trail becomes steep, and after 1.5 hours of trekking the climbers wait for them for 1.5 hours. The porters then decide they have come far enough for 1 day: there is a threat of rain and the next camp is too far away. The climbers and Ghafoor voice their disappointment, and make clear that it will reflect in the porters' tip. The afternoon is enlivened when the locals see a snow leopard chasing their yaks across a high meadow. A gun comes out, but nobody goes uphill, and in the end no animals are killed.

1st June

The porters are less incompetent, although one is very slow. Progress is made past the first of the main Muchuar grazing meadows to a long halt in the second. The strongest porter, Salauddin, comes up the glacier regularly to hunt and has deposits of food in different huts, so he will look after Ghafoor for the week while the team acclimatizes. Now with a view of the Batura Wall as the afternoon brightens, the party proceeds north, crosses the Muchuar and scrambles over rough terrain to a final camp with no clean water. It is clear that the last two hours to Batokshi Meadow will have to be made the next day.

2nd June

The weak porter is unable to continue and Ghafoor takes his load. The final hour across the snowy moraine of the glacier is painful, as is the dusty scramble up to the meadow at 4100m. The meadow is entirely covered in snow, and after some efforts to dig down to grass, which is lumpy and wet, the climbers decide to camp on top of it. The porters arrive and one refuses to accept 6000Rs for their work, so the climbers wave them on their way. The cloudless day turns hot and the climbers sort gear for a carry the next morning.

3rd June

The team is away at 3am, cramponing on a hard crust. After the slope visible from camp, it is necessary to make a short down-climb, traverse an avalanche slope and then get onto the glacier spilling from the SE slopes of Batokshi. There is an obvious trench leading NW towards the peak, to the right of which are the huge seracs and broken icefalls of the lower Batura Wall. The climbers rope up and Huber leads an initial traverse into the trench. Ascending is straightforward and, with the sun rising far behind the Batura Wall, the team has daylight but shadow and persisting low temperatures. The trench opens onto less crevassed slopes below the rock walls of the ridge connecting Batokshi to Hachhinder Chhish, and

the climbers continue to an obvious plateau at 5100m, from which they have a clear view up the slopes leading directly to the Batokshi Col (5900m). This is a good place for an intermediate camp on the way to the col, and so a hole is dug, the gear (food, gas, warm clothing) is dropped and the team spends an hour digging a tent platform to gain extra acclimatisation value before hurrying back down to BC as the snow starts to soften up. The remainder of the day is spent sleeping, reading and trying to avoid the heat.



Left: Batokshi Peak (6040m) from on the Muchuar Glacier. Right: Tim digging the platform for C1.

4th June

On another cloudless pre-dawn, the team strikes camp and repeats the previous day's work. Despite somewhat heavier packs, they arrive a little earlier at C1 and end up waiting for the sun to rise and the snow to soften a little before smoothing the tent platform and setting up. Once again there is little to do for the rest of the day but rest. Fortunately the camp is out of the sun before 5pm. Miller begins to suffer a headache, which everyone hopes is dehydration rather than altitude. It is in any case not necessary to make a further gear carry as early as the next morning.



Left: Huber and Miller on the upper slopes of Batokshi NE Face. Right: Hachhinder Chhish from Batokshi summit.

5th June

The team is up and away by 2:30am. Miller's head still hurts and, although he is not markedly slow, he decides to turn around at 5500m. Huber and Normand push on, still finding excellent snow conditions in old slide tracks. They head straight up the E slopes of Batokshi and the snow only becomes soft once they are into NE-facing gullies above 5900m. Normand breaks trail, which with the exception of a single spot is not too arduous, but the very last shoulder looks like a death-trap of unconsolidated snow

for 10m. The pair circle around to the N side, now looking down on Batokshi Col, and climb a few moves on 80-degree serac ice before making the final steps onto the summit. The day is again cloudless and the views to the southeast and west are stunning, but otherwise Batokshi is a midget, still 1000m below the nearby peaks of Sangemar Mar and Hachhinder Chhish, and nearly 2000m below the crowning point of the Batura Wall. An annoying breeze and lack of sunrise diminish the experience for some time, but then the sun comes around and the climbers thaw. They descend the ice step and continue down to Batokshi Col to investigate the camping options. There is an alternative descent below the col, which involves a long traverse on a bench below the highest crevasse, and then an angling traverse back below a tall but stable-looking ice wall. The pair move quickly through this terrain and walk down to camp as the snow begins to soften. The afternoon passes in the usual way. Miller's headache comes and goes. Some cumulus begins to form but is gone soon after sundown.



Left: view to the far Hindu Kush from Batokshi. Right: Huber and Miller on Batokshi summit.

6th June

The plan on another perfect morning is to repeat the previous day's work and see how Miller's head is doing. The ache is not gone, but he is every bit as strong as Huber and Normand. Today their summit timing is better, and more time is spent on top of Batokshi. Down in the col, the threesome spend some time making a tent platform; there is not enough soft snow to make a wall around camp, but nor is there any wind from which to seek protection. A few items are deposited and the descent to 5100m is uneventful. The afternoon is hot and the cumulus is thicker, but still rather little of it actually blocks the sun.



Left: Batokshi Col campsite. Cente: looking down on Batokshi. Right: Shispar from Batokshi.

7th June

The sky is clear as the team strikes camp. The hike up the previous days' descent trail is slow due to the weight being carried, but nobody is off the pace. The team is back in the col soon after sunrise, but by

the time the tent is pitched everyone is tired and overheated. After some water-melting and a rest, Huber is keen to go for a stroll up the low-angle snow slopes beneath the Batura Wall. The others are less keen but rouse themselves and head up. Miller's headache is returning and he turns back after a short time. Huber and Normand continue in the noon heat up to the only hole in sight, at around 6200m, which is fully filled in. They enjoy views over Batokshi to Hachhinder Chhish and the ever-present Rakaposhi, then return to camp to do more resting and waiting. In the late afternoon, it is Normand who drives the plan to go up Batokshi again in order to enjoy the evening light, and Huber is with him, but Miller again remains behind.



Left: Batura Wall. Centre: wall approach. Right: Huber feeling the height.

8th June

In the morning Miller's headache is unchanged. The three pile out and start walking up towards the Batura Wall, this time without the rope. Above 6300m the snow is a few cm deep, but otherwise cramponing conditions are perfect. At the top of a very uniform slope, Normand angles right to avoid a slope-splitting set of crevasses and finds a filled-in crossing point. The team is surprised to find itself at 6600m, and still some 300m (vertical) short of the rock at the foot of the Batura Wall. Miller has kept pace well, but the ever-present headache is still annoying and he feels this is far enough. Huber and Normand are also happy with this, feeling little need to push limits. The team enjoys more extensive views, which reach as far as Nanga Parbat in the south and Tirich Mir in the west, before returning once more to the tent. On this evening it is Miller who goes to the top of Batokshi again.



Left: moonset over Hachhinder Chhish. Centre: bulky loads for the hike out. Right: meadow camp.

9th June

The acclimatisation trip is over. The climbers strike camp early and are back at 5100m well before the sun is on them. The deposited items are dug up, the rope is deployed and the descent continues with no route-finding difficulties despite a few heat-induced changes to the glacier. The brief climb back up to the shoulder above BC has turned into a mess of poorly consolidated scree, which Miller navigates. Ghafoor and Salauddin are waiting at BC, an hour earlier than the agreed time. The climbers pack two loads as fast as they can, so that the staff can head back to their own final camp. The remaining gear is not unduly heavy but it is a lot of unwieldy volume to carry. The afternoon is cloudier than the previous days, but is still very warm down at 3500m. The caravan winds its way slowly through the rough

moraine-edge terrain and across the Muchuar to the first meadow for a long rest, then decides to continue down and up to the next meadow. A warm and pleasant evening is spent lounging in the grass and trying to lighten the loads by eating as much of the remaining food as possible.

10th June

This day is cloudier, and starts with a morning shower that makes everything good and wet just before it needs to be packed. The team ambles along and down the glacier's edge, then up a steep and marginal packed-mud trail to the top of the moraine. A long traverse brings them to the final meadow and the steep descent above the Shispar Glacier on the opposite side. Suddenly a routine walk-out turns into a nightmare: the Shispar has surged, the river is undercutting both it and the slopes of dried mud over slabs on the trail side, and a landslip has removed the track. Now there is only steep mud, a smooth slab and a landing on ice blocks freshly calved from the Shispar, which are falling on the opposite side of the snarling Muchuar River. Ghafoor and Salauddin decide to go up and around, which means tenuous footholds on 40-degree dried mud, with thorn bushes to grab for balance, all the while balancing 25kg packs. The traverse is possible, thanks in large part to clumps of vegetation, but the descent is going to involve slabs and a serac wall made of dried mud. Normand, strategically bringing up the rear, pulls out a rope. Miller, at the sharp end, slings some bushes with help from Huber and the two reconnoitre the descent. Loads and people are lowered and belayed in random order. Ghafoor takes off down the rest of the mud and shouts back that the way is clear. Miller cleans the route with a one-bush lower-off and the most dangerous phase of the entire week is over. The clouds have perhaps limited stonefall from above during the whole enterprise. The riverside walk-out has also been chewed up significantly due to the heat and high water levels of the intervening week. Back at the bridge and the water works, the jeep Ghafoor had ordered is nowhere to be found, and he has to hitch-hike most of the way to Aliabad to get it. The team is back at its BC hotel in upper Karimabad by mid-afternoon, ready to eat ice cream, rest and worry about the Ultar phase the following day.



Left: surging Shispar Glacier. Right: thorn-bush, slab and dried-mud acrobatics at the land-slip.

11th June

Rest day. The climbers reassess their supplies for Ultar and decide that there is very little they need to add. On a mission to Aliabad to visit the dhobi wallah (laundry man), tuna, peanut butter, rice and mangos are procured and ice cream is eaten. 5 loads begin to take shape.

12th June

On the second scheduled rest day, Ghafoor and Normand go over to Ahmedabad, 6km from Karimabad at the foot of the Gurpi Glacier outflow, to look for porters. The first person they meet is an ex-army NCO who carried a load for Normand and Preitner in 2016. He understands the deal and the word goes out around the village. Officially it is 4 stages to Ultar BC, but after some discussion and translation from Ghafoor, everyone understands that the requirement is for only the first 3 stages to a 4400m ridge

before the dangerous traverse, which will not be the porters' problem. Ready by now for some outlandish salary demands, Normand agrees to 4000Rs per person for what is actually less than 1.5 days' work. Back in Karimabad, Huber and Miller have been resting and completing the packing arrangements, but Miller is starting to go down with gut trouble. The whole issue of salary for the Muchuar porters has not yet been sorted out, and Ghafoor rounds up the 3 of them for a payment ceremony. At this point Normand holds all the cards. Ghafoor sensibly gets an outside opinion from Bashir, who knows Normand from 2016, and 6000Rs are agreed upon. Salauddin was happy with this all along and the weak porter had no standing in the matter, so there was only one hold-out. Everyone goes away trying to look happy. Ghafoor is unhappy about something else: he is still being harassed by the security people to accompany us to BC. Normand offers to go with him to talk to somebody. In the end it is agreed that things will be done as the climbers demand, not least because it is dictated by safety concerns. Normand writes a lengthy statement for the local police and Ghafoor waits up for half the night to give it to an officer who is purportedly coming over from the DC's office for it. Nobody shows up, which demonstrates that we have won the battle, but Ghafoor's annoyance is redoubled by the fact that hours of his time have been wasted when clearly none of it mattered: once again, the authorities hassling normal people for doing normal business. Pakistan's bureaucracy still has much to learn about winning hearts and minds ...



Left: first view of Ultar and the upper SE Pillar. Right: the dangerous talus traverse to BC.

13th June

The porters are ready for the agreed 5am start, because a warm day lies ahead. However, they are not very fast, and one is particularly slow. The first stage as far as Gurpi Meadow is tolerable, and still in the shade, but the rest there is long and the next climb is steep, which completely guts the porters. Trail conditions are better than in 2016, but Huber and Normand spend 1.5 hours hiking and 2.5 waiting. Miller is weak and slow for stomach reasons, but still twice as fast as the slowest porter. The faster porters make a drawn-out lunch break to pass the time. Huber and Normand lose patience soon after the slowest porter is sighted below, and carry on for another hour to the last hut. This will clearly be the end of the day, so Normand gathers water for everyone while Huber finds a flat spot for an open bivvy on what looks set to be a cloudless night. Ghafoor arrives with some curt remarks about the porters, knowing that he will have to look after them for the evening when what he really wants to do is kick a few of them. Miller arrives at a carefully measured pace, hoping that his gut is past the worst. The porters stagger in around 5pm: 12 hours to gain 1400m, longer still for the last one. It is indeed a beautiful evening for enjoying vistas from Spantik to Rakaposhi, and a stunningly starry night.

14th June

The porters make an early start for the final 700m to the appointed ridge. Ghafoor and the climbers, even a still below-par Miller, are soon well ahead of them. Normand scrambles around on the rotten

slopes of the traverse and establishes that the first stage is a long descent; some old cairns are visible. Huber prepares a depot. Ghafoor spits fire about the porters, especially when they stop at some flat spots 50m below the ridge and declare themselves done. He brings up Normand's load himself. Normand declares himself in possession of the money and about to leave in 10 minutes for the first gear-carry to BC. Ghafoor relays this message and the porters find some more energy. The porters are paid but not tipped and leave with Ghafoor behind them. The climbers pack a first load and begin the descent to look for BC.



Left: BC soon after arrival. Right: BC shortly before departure for the route.

The route is an unstable traversing descent punctuated by snow slopes, followed by a long climb up snow and then some clear vestiges of a trail through talus to a saddle. A rotten shale climb follows, then a traverse on larger blocks with some snow to make life easier. The high point (c. 4600m) is followed by a pure-snow down-climb and traverse across slopes that are later found to become bowling alleys in the afternoon heat. After a second and third small saddle is a long snow descent to a morainal semi-meadow with significant amounts of visible waste from previous expeditions. Normand makes the tracks with Huber following close behind, while Miller sets a careful pace. With the team still quite under-equipped, Normand decides to make another run the same afternoon, while Huber prefers to stay and make the largely snow-covered camp area somewhat more habitable. Normand brings a serious load including the larger tent, the pressure cooker and some of the “real” BC food (rice and tuna), also finding out some of the pitfalls of tackling the traverse in the afternoon, when it is fully in the sun. Huber and Miller clear some flat spots and find two decent, adjacent tent sites, which have flowing water right beside them by mid-afternoon. A decent dinner and some decent rest are had.

15th June

The team sets off early to do a double carry. The weather is cloudy and unstable. Miller is still ill and moves slowly. Huber and Normand complete a first carry just as the first storm of the day sweeps through BC, threatening the tents with its wind and dumping a load of snow. The pair batten down, shelter inside until the storm abates and head out again. Miller skips a second carry and Huber and Normand are not quite able to clear the cache. Showers pass through BC for the remainder of the day.

16th June

Miller is feeling stronger and does a final carry to bring over his remaining equipment. Huber and Normand are ready for a rest day, and cross the moraines level with their 4400m camp to get an uninterrupted view of the route from a local pinnacle. The weather deteriorates rapidly around 1pm and Miller is back soon after. A grey and showery afternoon follows.

17th June

In the night Normand is violently ill for no very obvious reason (perhaps a bad piece of dried fruit).

Miller has finished a course of Cipro and is feeling fine again. The plan is to head up the glacier NE of BC, to camp around 5500m on the very end of the extended E Ridge of Ultar, much as Normand and Preitner had done in 2016. Huber and Miller set off while Normand remains behind to recover. The climbers leave late and cross to the moraine on the west side of the glacier, to avoid some crevassed terrain in the middle. They camp around 5000m on a rocky dome in the ice. The day is partly cloudy but remains dry.



BC flora and fauna.

18th June

Huber and Miller continue to a col at approximately 5500m and dig in with a good view to the north. They are one col east from where Normand and Preitner had been in 2016, and 200m lower, but the approach is much easier. They look to climb higher up the ridge but snow conditions are poor. Normand feels slightly better and spends some of the day on a recce of the approach: 300m down moraine to the Gurpi Glacier, then 30-40 minutes across low ice fins and solid neve, skirting between regions with actual crevasses. The climb back up to camp will be arduous after a week on the mountain. The weather is cloudy but again remains dry.

19th June

Huber and Miller have no problems with the altitude of their camp and return in the morning. The weather deteriorates and snow showers punctuate the day. Normand's recovery stalls and he starts a course of Cipro.

20th June

The team waits in BC. Sunny spells alternate with snow squalls and occasional thunderclaps. The forecast has nothing better to offer (but nothing worse either). It has been a while since BC last had running water in the afternoon.

21st June

The forecast continues to offer unstable weather with snow showers. Concerned at lying in camp for a week, Normand is ready to go up to sleep at the 5500m col for 2 nights. Miller decides to join him, but Huber feels he has nothing to gain. The pair leave late and head up-glacier, experiencing a snow squall and then some broiling sunshine. Normand is happy to follow the crest of the ice, where he and Preitner went in 2016, but now this leads to a little crevasse-jumping. The 400m climb to the col is soft and deep, which afternoon sun does not help. Clouds on the col never clear, and the pair arrive to cold winds near sunset. Some digging is required to use the old tent site and the night begins partially clear.

22nd June

Snow begins to fall soon after daybreak. It continues all day. The climbers are not too concerned about snow accumulation for their descent until a windstorm arrives in the afternoon. It is necessary to brace

the tent. The snow continues until nightfall. The climbers shovel their tent and find up to 30cm of new snow on flat terrain. The night is partly clear with considerable wind and a little more snow.



BC rubbish and the perpetrators' graffiti.

23rd June

The pair leave early in deep snow. It is hard to tell how bad the avalanche danger may be. Normand goes first, facing in to kick through the 30cm of new snow to firmer neve beneath. After 150m of steepening terrain, the climbers reach the first slough lines, and from then on have little to worry about. Visibility improves and the pair climb down to the flat glacier, Normand finding the Bergschrund the hard way. On the glacier they are caught by a white-out and set off in the wrong direction, Miller doing well to catch the first crevasse before falling into it. Miller navigates with care and at the first brightening finds the route he and Huber had used 5 days previously. The new snow is deep at 5000m and still measures 5-7cm at camp, where Huber had to clear the tents. The day sees only a slow warming and brightening. Ultar remains shrouded in cloud.

24th June

The forecast starts to offer a clearing in a few days, but for the moment conditions are still grey and unstable. The lower buttress is visible for much of the day, but gets little sun. The upper route clears only in the evening, appearing to be in full winter conditions. However, the night becomes completely clear with a large moon, engendering hope for a weather change.

25th June

The clear morning lapses quickly to further incoming clouds. Once again the route does not receive a lot of direct sunshine. Forecasts of the previous day which suggested a week of clear weather, with the exception of a day on the 29th, are now being scaled back to suggest continuing clouds but no precipitation, other than the 29th. The team is well aware that an attempt on the route is turning into a now-or-never affair. The highly unseasonal June weather – two bad days in a row would be normal, 10 is unheard of – has already cost them the chance to make an initial foray to mid-height on the route before a summit push. Preparations are made to climb with 8 days of supplies, the intention being to weather the snow day at 5900m, hope that it is less bad than forecast, and be in a position for a final push in the first 3 days of July. Inspection of the upper route suggests that the technical difficulties are limited to 400m of slabby rock, from one good camp (snow ridge) at 6500m to another at 6900m.

26th June

The team breaks out of camp soon after midnight. It is clear and the moon is high. Huber takes a painful tumble on the descent to the glacier. Normand does a reasonable job of finding his old route through the ice fins in the dark. The trio is at the base of the route by 2am. The packs are heavy and progress is slow, but the going is acceptable. The climbers enter the gully they have chosen and it

narrows down to a steep step. Huber finds a belay point and Miller takes the lead, giving some of his load to the others, as day breaks. The rock is slabby and protection is sparse. The snice is questionable and does not take screws. Miller makes slow but careful progress to an adequate belay and brings the others up. The process is repeated for another rope length, whose crux is shorter and less steep, but no more solid. The couloir continues as snow, which is most solid in a spindrift runnel. The ropes are packed away and progress resumes, stopped briefly as a spindrift train goes by. Normand assumes the lead as the couloir widens and the footing becomes less firm. Some options for going steeply up and right, which the climbers had viewed from BC, look to be in poor condition. Normand pushes all the way to the top of the couloir, the last 50m of which turn into a painful wallow as the sun swings around and comes directly onto the climbers.



Left: snice lead by Miller. Right: following with the other kind of lead.

The altitude is 5050m. The col at the top drops into a bowl, whose right side will allow the climbers to gain direct access to the snow slopes making up the second quarter of the route. However, the snow looks soft and the sun is up. Before the climbers can think further, a huge avalanche rakes the gully 200m below them and a gigantic cloud of spindrift boils up to swamp them. 5cm of snow fall in 5 seconds. This makes it very clear how to use the present location as a camp site. A second avalanche blasts down. It looks like a bad idea to continue onto the sun-exposed snow slopes above. The decision is made to stop here and the team digs in. The snow is bottomless and making a platform of adequate width is no big problem. Cumulus clouds thicken as the team sets up the tent and moves in. At noon a surprisingly early, heavy and completely unforecast snowfall starts, and lasts for 2 hours. The climbers sleep through it, but it is not raising the chances of the current mission succeeding. The remainder of the day is cloudy, so that the snow slopes above have little chance to consolidate.



Left: a distant avalanche ... Centre: aftermath of the second one. Right: couloir camp.

27th June

The night becomes clear and the climbers are up and out at 2am. Miller again leads, finding sparse rock protection on the right and soft but adequate going in the 40 to 45-degree snow. After several simul-climbing rope lengths he is through the vague rock barrier and into the uninterrupted, left-angling snow slopes of the upper buttress as the sky brightens. Normand takes the lead and the climbers work steadily through powder 30-50cm in depth. Two weeks earlier, this would have been neve. Huber and Miller take turns at the front as the route skirts extensive rock slabs to aim up into a narrow gap between the rock on the right and a serac wall on the left. Normand leads this long and direct section, finally coming out above the serac edges, at approximately 5700m, where the angle of the slopes relents. He makes a mistake and remains above the bergschrund line, leading to an awkward and softening traverse instead of a snow-slog across the glacier proper. This ends with a short downclimb over what turns out to be a massive hole. Just as the sun should be rising on the climbers, the clouds thicken and light snow begins. Huber takes the lead and climbs a wall of neve before attacking a lower-angle slope which is the softest and deepest terrain of the day. Miller takes over and postholes a long way up the slope. The snow and wind intensify. Huber takes over for a final push to the low-angle crest at the very top of the lower buttress. The altitude is 5870m, the snow is soft and the visibility is nil. The climbers decide to dig in on a slope above the lowest point of the crest, which runs over to a sharp, rocky summit. Beyond the crest is a steep drop into the major gully draining the seracs of the upper E Face of Ultar, and directly across from camp are the seracs hanging from the south side of the E Ridge, but very little of this is visible in the present conditions. Two hours of digging yield a comfortable tent site with snow walls on all sides, as high as the tent roof on the mountain side and 50cm in height on the low side. The snow is still falling, contrary to the last forecasts the team had received. The climbers make themselves comfortable for a potentially long wait.



Left: Huber and Miller at 5300m. Centre: Normand wallowing. Right: 29th June – Huber's last photo.

28th June

The snow does not abate. Even the current forecasts say it is not presently snowing, but that snow is to be expected the next day. There is no break in the clouds and light snow continues all day. Things are getting fairly damp inside the tent, but temperatures are quite high and the wind has dropped to almost nothing. It is clear to the climbers that they have been taken in by an overoptimistic forecast, or by their own overoptimistic interpretation of the forecast, and they will now need to wait for better conditions just to descend safely. By evening conditions inside the tent are not too wet, despite continued light snow.

29th June

The snow has become more persistent. The climbers go outside only for toilet breaks and occasional tent-shovelling. The snow wall on the low side of the tent is now 50cm higher and is approximately roof-height. The other three walls are slightly higher than the highest point of the tent. Normand starts

to worry about the danger of a snow slide and suggests that it is time to move down to the col. Miller agrees. Huber says “we're fine here” and so the other two shrug lazily and lie down again. Huber is right that there is no danger from a large avalanche off the face above, which would indeed go down both sides of the ridge. He is wrong about small avalanches from the 25-30-degree slope directly above the tent. At 2:30pm a slide occurs and the tent is buried.

All three climbers know immediately what is happening. Normand, on the slope side, has time to throw his arms in front of his face and is pushed over to the middle of the tent. He is completely pinned by the weight of snow. Huber, on the outside, grabs for the tent zip but does not seem to have made himself an air space. Miller, at the back of the tent, reacts immediately to get up on his hands and knees. Miller rips the back of the tent with his teeth and starts to dig himself out, moving the snow into the space he has created. Normand is aware of a grey patch above him and reaches an arm up, but Huber shouts something, perhaps taking snow in his face. Normand withdraws his arm, thinks Huber has twisted into his air space and tries to talk to him, tries to breathe and blacks out. Miller gets to the surface, where it is still a white-out with light snow and wind, clad only in his underwear. He immediately takes a bead on the debris and starts digging down for Huber and Normand's heads. Normand wakes up again and realises there is oxygen. His hand is back up above his head and is wiggling around. Miller hears it and digs down, and Normand responds. Normand is still fully pinned, but after a little more digging by Miller he slides up and out of his near-tomb. With Normand realising his hands are very numb and getting out of the way, Miller digs again with his bare hands, finally exposing Huber's head and right hand. Huber is white and is not breathing. His eyes are closed. His head is out of the tent door but he had no air space, and clearly has not breathed for several minutes. Miller and Normand, shocked but not surprised after the amount of time they feel has elapsed, do not think to try blowing into his lungs on the faint chance that this might bring something back.

After a moment of numb silence, the two realise the need to address their incipient hypothermia. Miller pulls the two sleeping bags out of Normand's hole and they dive in, ignoring the fact that the sleeping bags are getting soaked. Normand's clothes, gloves and boots are piled up near the hole. Miller pulls them out and puts them on in order to move and dig better. Also by Normand's head in the tent was the stove, his mug and a cooking bag. Miller retrieves them and Normand makes himself useful by fumbling two mugs of hot tea together. Miller gets deeper into the hole, digging away from the tent, towards the spot where the three packs were lined up. This process involves burying Huber again. Miller's pack is first, and contains his boot shells and many of his warm clothes. The next item is the shovel. After this it is easy to pull out some random rack items, Normand's pack and finally Huber's. It is still snowing lightly with occasional wind. Normand finally gets his hands warm enough to get out of the sleeping bag. The two change clothes and jump around frantically, their extremities refusing to warm up while they are wet to the skin. They pack away some of the snowy stack of gear and share the task of digging out all the snow that had piled up top of the tent. They dig Huber up again and heave him out of the tent spot, moving him onto a sideways boot track. Finally they dig out the tent itself. One pole is broken, the other is S-shaped but whole, and the corner by Normand's head is ripped off, still pinned by an ice axe while the rest of the tent moved. Some final items are retrieved, including Miller's 'phone.

By now it is nearly dark. The pair go down to the low point on the ridge, a distance of approximately 40m, and stamp out a new platform. Normand shuttles the tent and most of the gear as Miller continues to dig and stamp. It is possible to pin out the tent in such a way that the single bent pole allows 2/3 of the normal volume inside. The wind has died and so the hole Miller escaped through is not a problem. Armed with a bagful of snow for melting, the pair dive inside and get both stoves going. Warm soup to drink and warm bottles for feet and crotch start to make a difference. Normand decides to get out of his shell gear and work on drying out his sleeping bag, but Miller is reluctant; the bags had performed

excellently, but his is still wetter. Sugar, dinner, soup and more tea go down, and bottles are rewarmed. Normand gets out the InReach at 2:30am and types a terse message to Jed Brown, the team's weather man, who is in Boulder, CO. He is not anticipating that any kind of helicopter action will be possible soon, due both to weather and to the \$15000 being with Ghafoor, not Askari, and thus decides that everything else can wait until the morning. As soon as Miller and Normand lie down, wind starts blowing snow through the hole in the tent. The pair move their heads to the other end and let it blow.

30th June

Miller and Normand are warm enough to get several hours' uninterrupted sleep. Moving somewhat after 8am, they get the stove on for more fluid and seal the hole in the tent with Normand's shell jacket. They switch on the InReach and find that a lot has happened. Brown has set a helicopter rescue in motion. Karim and Ghafoor are fully informed. Askari Aviation will accept the \$15000 paid on landing. Shamy Sharafat, a French-resident Pakistani who was involved in Revol's rescue in January, is in the loop and is translating both from English to Urdu and from Mountaineering to Layman for Askari. Miller's 'phone has single-digit battery reserves but works again, making typing easier. He and Normand report that it is still a white-out and no rescue can take place yet. Askari is apparently ready to launch an operation by noon, but the climbers continue to tell them the local weather is no good. Brown transmits full location and terrain data (from the InReach) to Askari. He expects the weather to clear in the afternoon and that the following day should be nice. The climbers are ordered to make a landing pad, but postpone this while the snow keeps falling.

They go back up to the avalanche site to dig out the last remaining items, including Huber's and Normand's axes and crampons. The snow has stopped falling but the visibility is as bad as ever. More messages arrive asking about launching the operation today. Again the climbers answer in the negative. Things quieten down after 2pm. The weather does not change until 6pm, when it starts to clear. The information is relayed and a reminder comes back from Brown about the importance of the landing pad. Miller and Normand eat dinner and head outside. The sky is completely clear and the wind is still calm. There are 70cm of new snow on the flat area, which is approximately 7x10m in size. Normand stamps out a circle of roughly 7m in diameter and the two get to work, Normand stamping and Miller shovelling; the area slopes and all the snow from the north half of the circle needs to be moved to the south half. After two hours of work the pad looks acceptable and the pair decide to leave it for the night, thawing themselves with another hot drink before sleeping in their nearly-dry bags.



Left: waiting for the helicopter, avalanche site behind. Right: landing zone.

1st July

Miller and Normand are up again at 3:30am to start breakfast and packing. They report that the weather remains calm and clear, and that the landing pad is solid. By 6am everything is packed and Huber's body has been moved to the edge of the circle. The message comes in that ground fog in Skardu is

delaying lift-off. The sun comes up and the climbers take some photographs of the mountains and the avalanche zone. They go back to the pad and stamp it a little more. The last report had been that the helicopters would go first to Gilgit, and so the sound of their approach at 7:30am comes as something of a surprise. One chopper appears far overhead and then the pilots make the sighting. Miller and Normand wait 15m from the landing zone as both helicopters fly up close to the ridge before flying away and around again. Apparently the terrain, with a deep gully and a steep rock wall directly to the north, is a problem. The lead helicopter comes in again and sets down in a huge plume of snow. The pilots feather the rotors and one steps out. The three load Huber's body and one rucksack, then Miller and Normand step back. The helicopter lifts up by 2m and then sets down again. The climbers are horrified and Normand goes back to the near window, but the message from the pilot is to get in: he was testing and found he had the capacity for one more person. The chopper lifts up and dives over the ridge, but the pilots circle back around and overfly the landing zone as Miller is being picked up with the remaining two packs. They ask Normand about the avalanche and try to film the area with a GoPro, but there is little to see. The two helicopters circle down into the Hunza valley and the lead one tries to land in Haiderabad, but what looks like an agreed-on location has electricity wires right beside it. Instead the pilots fly to the old brickworks in the valley floor and set down there.



Left: Pakistan Army helicopter support 5th Squadron at work. Right: the ridge from which the climbers were evacuated; the altitude of 5860m is a current height record for a helicopter landing.

Everyone steps out while the choppers are refuelled. They had changed plan and flown directly from Skardu, but will indeed return to Gilgit now. Some photos are taken and additional points are discussed. The two helicopters then fly down the Hunza at low altitude and set down in Gilgit, where Ghafoor is waiting. The pilots are worried that the body might need to be flown to Skardu in order to be flown down-country in a commercial 737, as Gilgit is serviced only by ATR-42s, which are too small. After some waiting the decision is made to off-load the body here, and it is transferred to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH). Miller waits in the pilots' mess with the gear while Ghafoor and Normand go round to the CMH to ensure that the body is treated properly and cooled as soon as possible. The process is slow and the doctor disinterested; nobody inspects the body and the wrong date is entered on the "death notice," which is only a certificate of admission and will not serve as a death certificate. Finally Ghafoor's persistence prevails and the body is moved to a cooler. The major in charge is most concerned that the body should be moved on as soon as possible. It is 35C in Gilgit. The climbers are still clad in their mountain gear. Left to walk back to the helipad, Ghafoor and Normand go to a taxi stand and arrange a vehicle back to Karimabad. In mid-afternoon they check in to the central Al Barakat Hotel, throw all their equipment out to dry and find there is no internet anywhere in the Hunza. There is also no power for several hours, and communications can start only when Miller's 'phone is revived.



Miller, Normand and the four pilots on the ground in Karimabad.

2nd July

Normand gets through to the British, Austrian and American Embassies. The first is only a courtesy call. The second elicits a disappointing lack of action, decision or even information. The third is also mostly for information, as the consular officer states this is important but it will never be possible to get through to her, or any other consular officer, again. Huber was insured by Global Rescue, who call to stress that they pay only “from the trailhead to the funeral home,” i.e. not for the helicopter and not for any sort of cremation, burial or shipment from Pakistan to Austria or the US. Normand reaches Huber's real insurance, Europ Assistance USA, but they say they cannot help with only the “plan number” Huber gave Normand – they need a “policy number,” which is presumably with Huber's valuables in BC. Contact is made with Huber's emergency point man, Gregory Kumor, in Fort Collins, CO. He soon relays that Huber's last wish is to be cremated and his ashes dispersed over the Rockies in the US. The Austrians need to confirm this with his mother, which takes them some days. The search for a place to cremate a body in a Muslim country leads to a Hindu temple in Islamabad. Miller and Normand need to go back to BC to clean up, retrieve Miller's passport and get all of Huber's valuables. Brown reports that Wednesday and especially Thursday will have heavy rain or snow, meaning that a BC mission should be done immediately. Ghafoor reports that the local authorities are refusing to allow this because “the route is too dangerous.” Normand, whose expedition is in possession of government permission to proceed anywhere to and beyond BC, is livid and is ready to deal with the District Commissioner at the first possible opportunity. Ghafoor sets off to defuse the situation and ends up getting help from Sharafat to convince the DC that his actions are unlawful as well as jeopardising the safety of a necessary mission. The matter is resolved at 11pm, after Normand writes another long undertaking and acceptance of risk for the police to pick up. Miller and Normand both start to feel themselves going down with food poisoning and dive immediately for the Cipro – they do not have time to be ill now.

3rd July

The pair are up at 4am for a rapid transfer over to Ahmedabad. Their packs are bulky but light. The

Cipro seems to be working. The first sections to the Gurpi hut and then up the steep hill into the hanging side-valley go quickly. Once in the sun progress slows. Above the upper hut Miller begins to feel the pain, but the two are back at the ridge putting on their mountain boots by 1pm. All the snow has disappeared from the west-facing aspect of the traverse, making it looser than ever. Over the high point there is still a little snow. Despite their best efforts, the climbers cross the dangerous gullies in the heat of the afternoon, but there seems not to be too much rock waiting to fall. They make it to BC by 5pm and immediately ransack Huber's gear, texting the insurance policy number to Brown. It turns out that Europ/Generali's agent in Pakistan, Atta Ul Haq, is the most aware and competent person yet to assist with the case, and by the time the pair are back in Karimabad the following day he has already taken charge of a number of matters. Miller and Normand then bravely attack all the food still in BC, making a game attempt to reduce the weight and volume of material to be carried down the following day. It is one of the nicest evenings the two have ever seen in BC: calm, cloudless and sunny up to the 6pm local sunset.

4th July

At 3am it is a different story. The strongest windstorm the climbers have ever seen in BC is blasting down-glacier. The tents are pitched to resist up-glacier winds and there is a real danger of damage as both are flattened sideways. The pair collapse Huber's First Light at minimal damage cost (one ripped tab) and reinforce the larger tent, but further sleep is not possible. The entire packing job is cold and miserable, and the resulting packs are heavy as well as huge. The climb back up to the col is slow and painful, the descent is precarious and the final rise to the ridge is agonising. Here the haul bags have to be added on top of the loads. There is no space to add more, so the climbers keep their mountain boots on. At least it is all downhill. Rests at the intermediate waypoints get longer as backs ache ever more. Despite the forecast, it remains hot and mostly sunny: of course after the 2 weeks of terrible conditions when it mattered, everything is good now, and in particular is better than expected. Finally Ahmedabad comes into sight and the marathon is over. The taxi is waiting to shuttle the loads back to Karimabad.

5th July

It is another telephone day. Global Rescue are persistently useless. The Austrian Embassy is persistently lame, trying not to do any work. The US Embassy switchboard workers refuse to let Normand speak to anybody responsible – Huber was not a US citizen, so f*** off. Normand is strongly tempted to sell his Green Card in the bazaar. Ul Haq saves the day, finalising the cremation arrangements, co-opting Ghafoor to transfer the body to Islamabad, talking to people about the death certificate and forwarding money for everything. In the evening, finally, there is a weak internet signal and the e-mail mountain can be attacked.

6th July

Miller and Normand pack all their equipment, including Huber's. Ghafoor is driving down the road on this night, when temperatures are lower, and takes all the bags. He is priceless. He leaves for Gilgit to pick up the coffin, the ice and the van he has arranged. There is nothing left for the climbers to do.

7th July

The climbers get up late and get a taxi down the road to a cheap hotel in Gilgit. There they meet long-time Pakistan trekker Moritz Steinhilber, who has been everywhere in the Northern Areas, usually more than once. Steinhilber wears a shalwar kameez and speaks Urdu, which works well in the bazaar. He has an unlimited supply of stories, most about how crazy the Chilasis and Kohistanis (Nanga Parbat locals) are. He has been having endless trouble with the authorities this season, and soon will be thrown out of the country completely. As in Ghafoor's case, he was not doing anything different from normal, but the rules seem to be getting reinterpreted. The three take a walk around the bazaar but it is not possible to get into the climbers' cemetery. For Miller and Normand the heat is almost unbearable, but for the locals it is “much better than last week.” Lunch is eaten in one restaurant full of “tribals” down

from the mountain villages and dinner in another.

8th July

Miller and Normand get an early taxi to the airport. The weather is great and the flight is on time. On it, Normand is struck down by a 3rd bout of food-poisoning, presumably from the previous evening, but this time Miller is not. In Islamabad Ghafoor and Karim are both waiting at the airport for a quick transfer to G9. The heat is again stifling but “much better than last week.” Normand is at death's door and sleeps for much of the afternoon. Miller goes looking for mangos. For dinner, they meet with Naiknam Karim, boss of ATP (Adventure Tours Pakistan, the largest agent in the country) and long-time friend of Normand's. He takes them to the Pearl Continental in Rawalpindi for the all-you-can-eat buffet, where both acquit themselves well. Naiknam is not optimistic about the state of the trekking business or indeed about the future of Pakistan. His dinner is interrupted by multiple satphone calls to Broad Peak BC, where a Liaison Officer is refusing to allow the planned departure of half of a climbing team (who lost much of their gear in an avalanche), despite all the porters having arrived.

9th July

It is a working day. The climbers return Huber's passport to the Austrian Embassy. The representative there is still slow and knows very little about the way things should work. The next stop is the PAC for the debriefing, which is as pointless as ever but for a chance meeting with Qasim Ali, who is attending a briefing but is also the Pakistan agent for the UK company handling Miller's (BMC) helicopter insurance. Ghafoor and Normand transfer Huber's bag to the ATP office, from which Naiknam will ship it to Kumor in Colorado. The team checks out of the hotel and goes to Karim's apartment in Rawalpindi. The last stop is the Askari Aviation office. Miller and Normand thank the functionaries there for their service. A discussion follows with one of the senior officials about the whole set-up, with Normand emphasising how hard it is for small climbing teams and small agents to deal with posting \$15000. The Askari personnel are somewhat surprised and seem to have thought this is not a problem, either directly or through PATO. The final bill is \$16929 for 5.6 hours of helicopter time (a 2.8-hour operation). Normand asks whether they would be prepared to trust the insurance companies concerning the bill. Askari rightly says “no” – they have been stiffed many times before. Normand puts down the remaining \$1929 with the last of the team's currency reserves. [Indeed it will take 10 weeks to get it all back from the insurers.] On the way out, Brigadier Ehtasham, CEO of Askari, is arriving and more hands are shaken and photos taken. In fact the rescue was excellent publicity for Askari and for the Army, with a lot of positive domestic reaction to the youtube film. The team repairs to the apartment where Ghafoor cooks up one last meal, topped off with mangos and peaches. Normand has to leave for the airport at 6pm, flying out at 9pm, and Miller at midnight.

10th July

Miller flies out at 3am Pakistan time, Normand arrives home at 7am Swiss time and Miller at noon UK time. It would take until 21st Sept for all of the logistics surrounding Huber's death to be settled, namely death certificate, cremation, shipment of the urn, equipment and personal possessions and legal representation in the US.

The authors would like to thank Consul General Lukas Bachmayer of the Austrian Embassy in Islamabad (whose return from vacation made a huge difference to their participation), Atta Ul Haq, Naiknam Karim, Daniel Dessau for shipment of personal possessions and Gregory Kumor for handling affairs in Colorado. They thank Askari Aviation, Shamyil Sharafat, Graham Williams and Abdul Karim, and owe huge debts of gratitude to Jed Brown and Abdul Ghafoor for all of their work on the rescue and its aftermath.

7 Conclusion

The expedition was unable to execute its declared aim of climbing the Southeast Pillar of Ultar, due to extremely unseasonal and unstable weather in the second half of June. The resulting snow conditions cost the life of team member Christian Huber, who will be sadly missed. The authors would like to express their condolences to his grandmother Margaret, mother Edith, ex-wife Sarah, girlfriend Amity, son Caleb and all of his many friends from study, work and 30+ years in the mountains.

8 Acknowledgements

The expedition acknowledges with gratitude the generous assistance of the Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council and the University of Glasgow.

Appendix A: Bibliography

The SE Pillar of Ultar has been chronicled in numerous accounts of failed attempts. The AAJ contains the most complete source of information.

Appendix B: Contact Information

Pakistan Alpine Club

The PAC (www.alpineclub.org.pk) may be contacted at info@alpineclub.org.pk

Agents for Expeditions in Pakistan

The authors recommend Higher Ground Expeditions, Treks and Tours (highergroundexpeditions.com), who may be contacted at ghafoor.guide@gmail.com. Normand also continues to recommend Adventure Tours Pakistan (www.atp.com.pk), who may be contacted at info@atp.com.pk, and who as a large agency have more capabilities and leverage in non-standard situations.

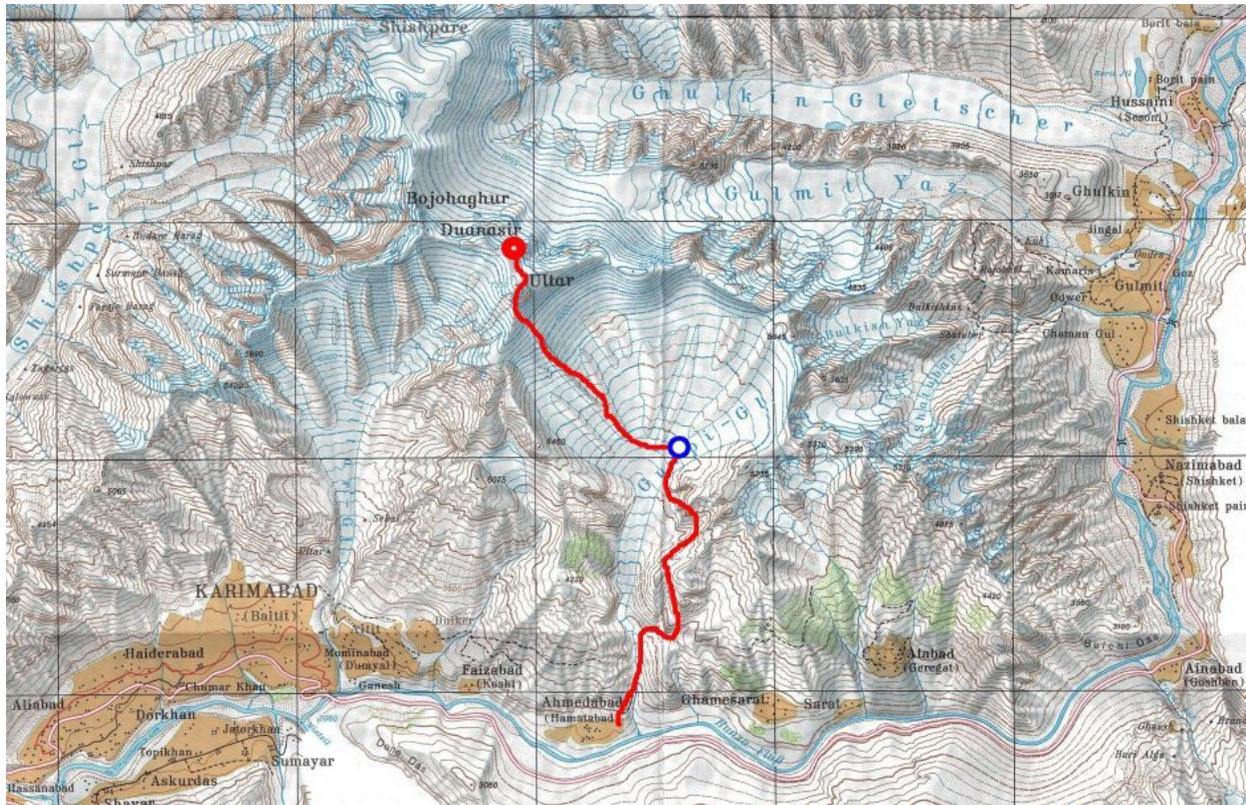
Expedition members' contact information

Bruce Normand: bruce.normand@gmail.com

Tim Miller: tm@jsrt.net

Appendix C: Map and Route Diagram

Next page: map of Ultar (sometimes known as Ultar II, 7388m) and Bojohagur Duanasir (Ultar I, 7329m). To the south and east are the Hunza valley, including the urban area of Aliabad and Karimabad, and Karakoram Highway. The direct approach to the south side of both peaks from Karimabad is via Ultar Meadow. The SE Pillar is approached from Ahmedabad by skirting the ice cliffs of the Gurpi Glacier. NB: this map predates the 2009 creation of Attabad Lake, which submerged Ainabad and parts of Nazirabad, by a large landslide which erased the village of "Atabad."



Ulta viewed from above the Gurpi Glacier, showing the entire SE Pillar route. Red denotes completed route, blue the part which could not be attempted. Blue circles denote C1 (5050m) and C2(5870m). C2 was the site of the avalanche which killed Huber and of the helicopter evacuation.