

Yawash Sar I-IV 2022 Expedition Report

Location: Karakoram Ghujerab Mountains, Gilgit-Baltistan Region, Pakistan

Dates: 11 September to 9 October 2022

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‘In the Himalaya, the only certain proof of a route is to try it.’ T.G. Longstaff

Contents

Introduction

Maps and locations

Expedition members

Destination area and monsoon flooding

Research and information sources

Permissions and permits

Fund-raising

Insurance

Travel and off-setting

Porters, food and accommodation

Communications

Medical arrangements, acclimatisation and medical issues

Covid protocols

Weather

Detailed Itinerary

Achievements and conclusions

Finances

Acknowledgments

Photographs

Introduction

This expedition planned to explore and make the first ascent of Yawash Sar I 6258m via the West Ghidims Valley, and to undertake exploration and documentation of Yawash Sar III & IV, also unclimbed. Our visit to the area hoped to build on the work of previous visitors, including that of team member Karim Hayat.

Maps and locations

The mapping used was a combination of google earth mapping, and a map by Jerzy Wala ‘The Ghidims Valley’, Ed. 2013. The mapping on the Suunto app also proved very useful and accurate.

Basecamp 4200m: 36°40’13”N 75°28’27”E

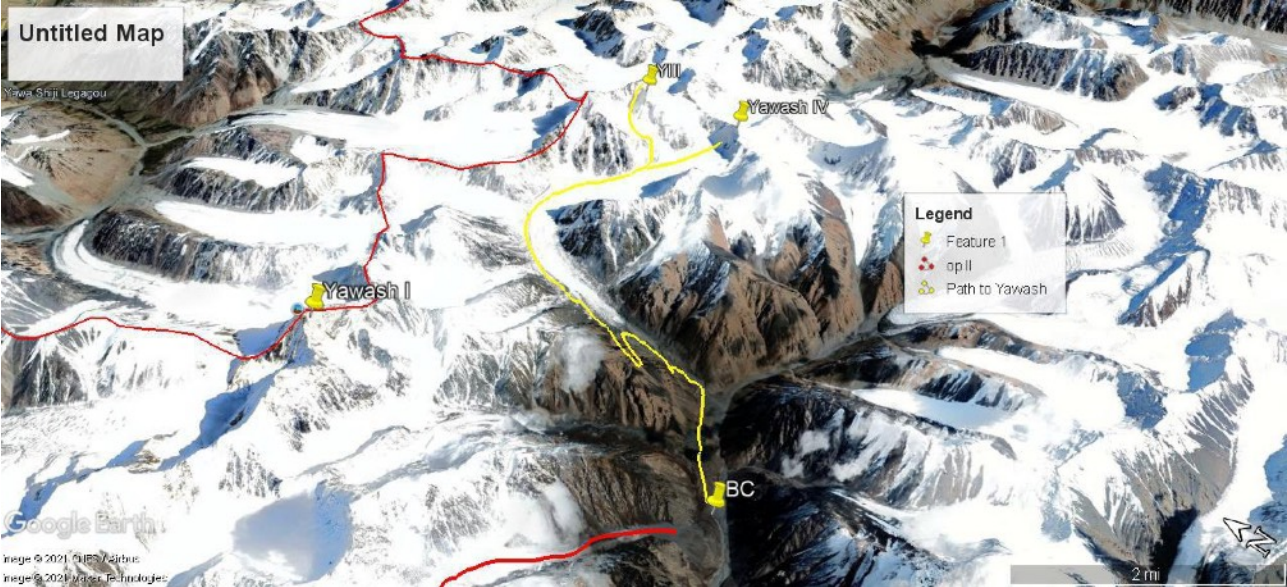
Advanced basecamp 5200m: 36°42’23”N 75°27’38”E

Yawash Sar I 6258m: 36°43’11”N 75°27’31”E

Yawash III 36°42’59”N 75°32’30”E

Yawash IV 36°41’57”N 75°32’30”E

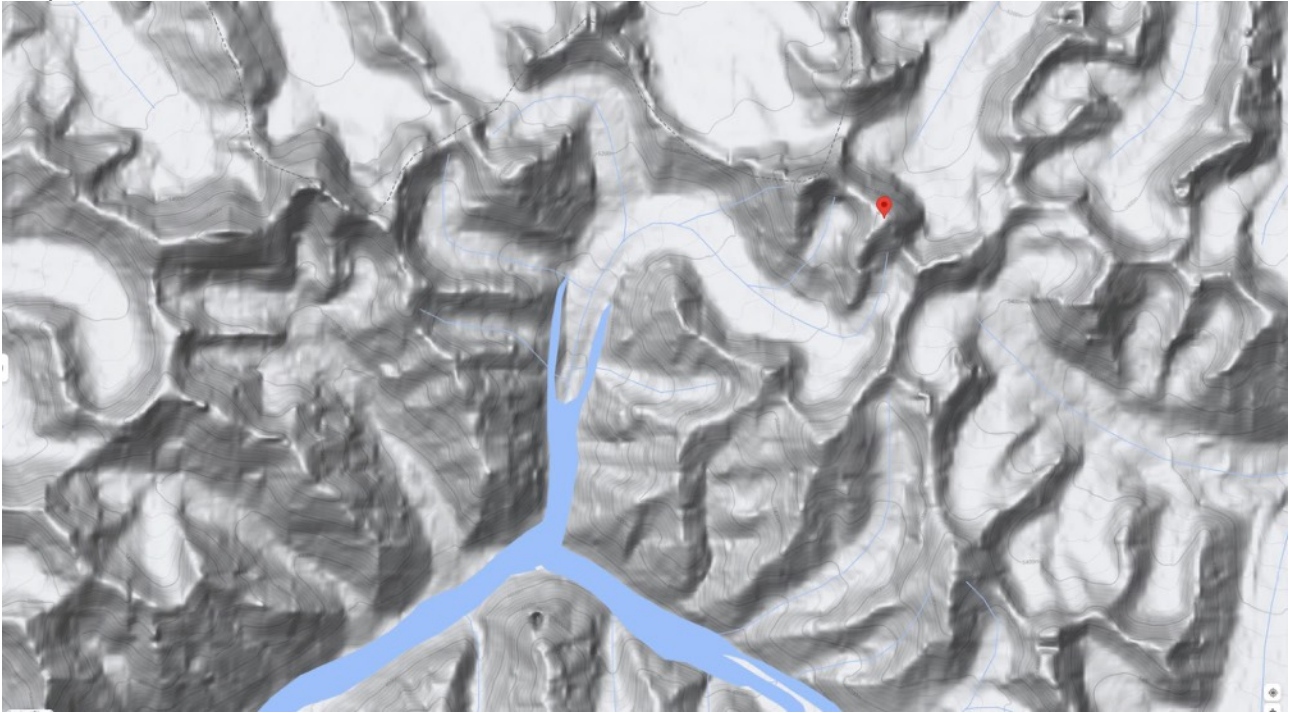
Map 1. Yawash Sar I, III & IV and Basecamp:



Map 2. Yawash Sar I:



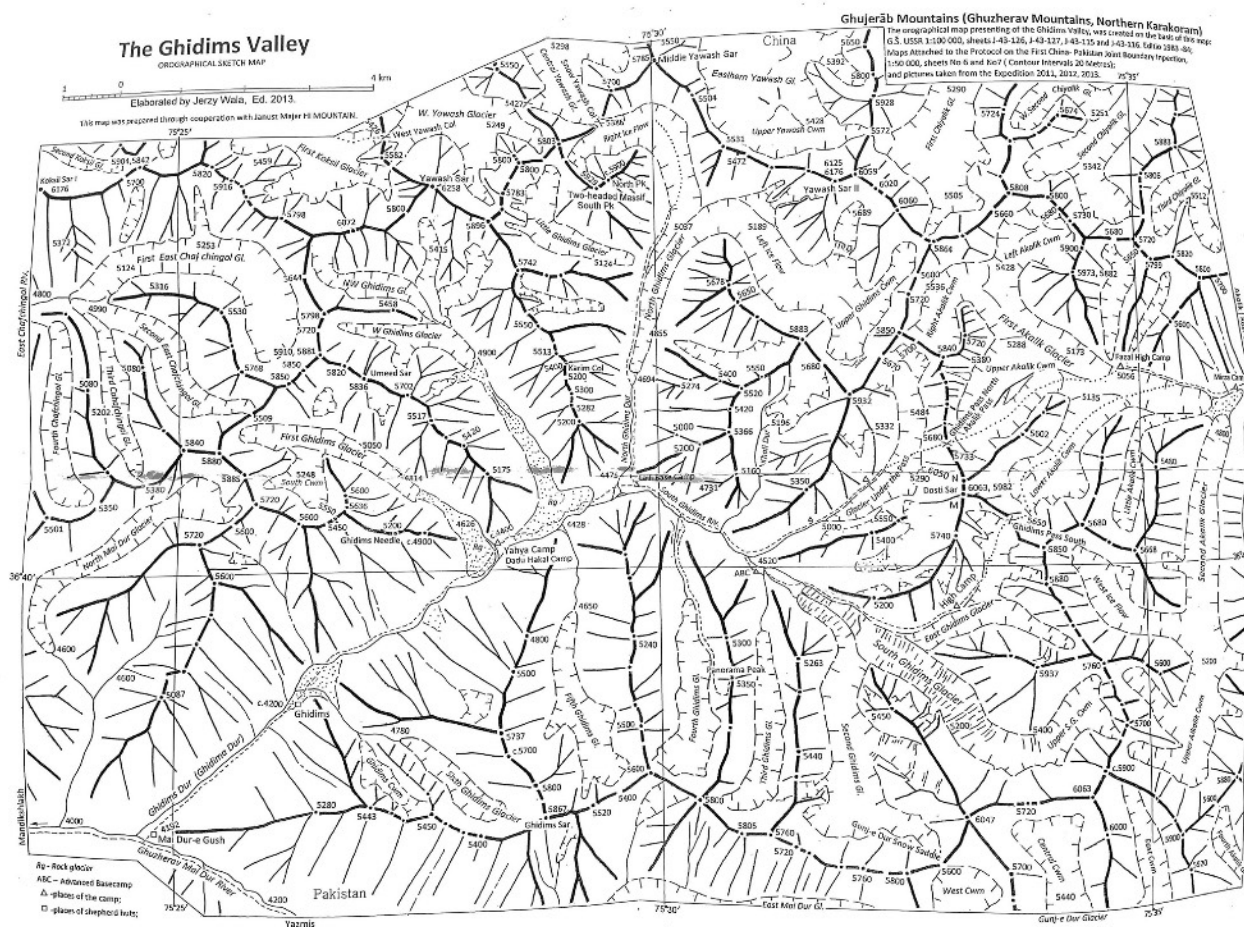
Map 3. Yawash Sar III:



Map 4. Yawash Sar IV:



Map 5. Jerzy Wala: 'The Ghidims Valley':



Every effort was made to establish details of the copyright for this map, but without success. If anyone can supply information, then we will be happy to address this.

Expedition members

The team consisted of members of the Alpine Club with good all-round mountain experience in the Alps and Greater Ranges, and a member of a previous expedition to the area. For one member, this was their first trip to the Greater Ranges. Basecamp staff included a chef and two assistant chefs.

Nicholas Hurndall Smith. British, Musician. AC, FRCC & AAC member. Expedition leader and climber.

Nigel Bassam British. Engineer. AC, AAC & CC member. Climber.

Tom Bell British. Paramedic. AC and AAC member. Climber.

Paul Winder British/Irish. AC & CC member. Climber.

Ross Bell. British, Engineer. AC & AAC member. Climber.

Karim Hayat. Pakistani. President, Gilgit-Baltistan Mountaineering Council. Climber, local guide and logistics.

Destination area and monsoon flooding

The months before the expedition saw rainfall in Pakistan nearly 3 times higher than the national 30-year average, with some provinces receiving more the five times as much rainfall as their 30-year average. The Gilgit-Baltistan Region and the route from Islamabad

were amongst the least affected areas, suffering relatively little damage to infrastructure. After consultation with local agencies and representatives at the British High Commission in Islamabad, it was decided to go ahead with the expedition.

Research and information sources

An Alpine Club member Nick Berry, and Karim Hayat are based in Islamabad, and discussion of potential objectives quickly identified this area of the Ghujerab Mountains as having excellent potential. Karim Hayat was born in Gilgit-Baltistan. A recce in 2021, and Karim's previous experience of climbing and first ascents in the area confirmed this. Explorations in 2011, 2012, 2014, 2018 and 2021 were made by Polish, German and Austrian teams. 2021 saw the first ascent of Yawash Sar II (6178m). An extensive search of expedition reports, journal articles, and newsletters published by Mount Everest Foundation, the Alpine Club and American Alpine Club, and Asian Mountain News was conducted to draw on the experiences of previous parties and identify appropriate objectives for the expedition. The Himalayan Index was also consulted to identify recorded ascents in the region.

Permissions and permits

No permits are required in Pakistan for peaks below 6500m. Fees for the Shimshal Nature Trust for Camping & Bridges were arranged by Karim Hayat.

Fund-raising

Applications for funding were made to the MEF, MACCF, AAC, BMC and FRCC all of whom were able to offer significant support. Without this help, the expedition would not have taken place. For full details of finances, see below. Support was also gratefully received from Expedition Foods and Black Diamond.

Insurance

Team members took out personal travel insurance and policies with Global Rescue. All porters and basecamp staff were insured through Alpha Insurance Company, Islamabad, for medical expenses and compensation in case of injury or death.

Travel and off-setting

The carbon footprint of the expedition was calculated in advance to be a total of 10.68 tonnes of CO₂. These calculations assumed the fuel efficiency of an average large petrol car and represented the worst case scenario as some journeys were done via public transport. It was calculated that the team would produce significantly less carbon than in the UK once at basecamp.

Steps taken to minimise greenhouse gas emissions from travel were:

- 1) Selection of departure airports closest to the home base where possible for UK-based team members
- 2) Car sharing for travel within Pakistan and where possible in the UK to minimise the number of vehicles used
- 3) Use of public transport where possible
- 4) Use of porters from Shimshal, with no travel emissions

The expedition's carbon footprint was off-set by contributing £112.14 to a portfolio of 'Gold Standard Community Based Verified Carbon Reduction Projects' offered by Carbon Footprint Ltd.

Porters, food and accommodation

There were 24 porters for the trek in. These were mainly from Shimshal, and carried a maximum of 20kg each, many with the help of donkeys.

Food for the trek in and out, and time at basecamp was carried by the porters and their donkeys, and prepared by a chef and two assistants. Above basecamp, Expedition Foods dehydrated meals were consumed.

On arrival and before departure from Pakistan, the team stayed with Nick Berry at the British High Commission in Islamabad and at guest houses in Gilgit and Shimshal. Beyond Shimshal tents were used.

Communications

Once in Shimshal and beyond, there was little or no mobile phone coverage. The team had the use of two Garmin InReaches satellite messaging devices borrowed from the Alpine Club. One of these proved faulty, but the other one was successfully used to obtain regular weather forecasts via an AC member, Nick Simons, in the UK. It was planned to have walkie-talkies, but these either went missing or were broken in transit.

Medical arrangements, acclimatisation and medical issues

All climbers carried personal first aid kits. One of the team is a medical professional who had recently completed a wilderness medical qualification and was able to purchase medications in advance of the trip. Medications to treat cerebral and pulmonary oedema and altitude sickness, along with codeine and anti sickness medication, were bought in advance.

Only over-the-counter pain killers were used and one dose of antibiotics for giardia (purchased in country). Three members of the team suffered diarrhoea in the first week which delayed the trek in by one day. Thereafter three members acclimatised quickly and three did not. This meant that there were only three climbers operating at full strength throughout the two weeks at basecamp, which made it difficult to achieve the desired team objectives. One team member (Ross Bell) experienced unusual pins and needles in his arms and chest on more than one occasion in the region of 5000m, which was remedied by making a quick descent.

Covid protocols

All members of the team were fully vaccinated for Covid-19. On arrival in Shimshal, the team members all took a Covid test which was found to be negative.

Weather

Post monsoon is an excellent time to visit the Ghujerab Mountains, and in the main there were cloudless skies with little wind. Karim Hayat came in September in 2013, and also had good weather. The monsoon seems to have little affect in this area. There were occasional snowfalls of up to 40cm, which meant there was the risk of avalanches.

Detailed Itinerary

11-12 Sep Flight to Islamabad

13 Sep Travel to Gilgit by plane (1.5hrs) then to Karimabad by jeep (4hrs)

14 Sep Travel to Shimshal by jeep (6hrs)

15 Sep Day off to acclimatise / recover from illness

16-18 Sep Three-day walk in to basecamp at 4100m on northwest bank of the Ghidims Dur

19-20 Sep Climbed up the W Ghidims Glacier and established advanced basecamp at 5200m on the moraine below an icefall which emanates from a hanging glacier shelf which leads to the base of the S Face of Yawash Sar I. Reccied a route up the icefall which included climbing up to WI4.

21 Sep Attempt 1 on Yawash Sar I. Nicholas Hurndall Smith, Nigel Bassam and Karim Hayat climbed to 5500-5600m below the S Face, turning round at 08.30am when the sun hit the face and started causing rock and ice-fall.

22 Sep Attempt 2 on Yawash Sar I. Nicholas Hurndall Smith and Nigel Bassam attempted the SE Ridge, which involved steep snow/ice, up to 60°. Once on the SE Ridge itself the weather started to worsen and dangerously loose rock was encountered. Retreat via multiple abseils using slings and abalakov threads. Total time 13.5 hrs. Climbing to D+ or harder.

23-25 Sep Return to basecamp to recover

26 Sep 1st ascent of Pk 5742m Karim Hayat and Waseem Shah (assistant chef), East of ABC. Alpine style, graded PD.

27 Sep Attempt 3 on Yawash Sar I. Nicholas Hurndall Smith and Nigel Bassam left ABC at 2am, this time to attempt the S Face direct. Made such good time initially in the dark that, we ended up further West than intended, in a steep gully which in fact led to the SW ridge, and served better as an approach to Pk 6072m (thought to be higher). This involved steep snow/ice, up to 70°. Once on the ridge itself, reached at 8.30am, we again encountered dangerously loose rock and again decided to retreat via abseil. This time the rotten snow below the ridge didn't allow for abalakovs so we abseiled via a mixed route which took a long time, and one rope was damaged by falling rock. Total time 16hrs. Climbing to D+ or harder.

28-29 Sep Return to basecamp to recover

30 Sep 1st ascent of Pk 5798m (West of ABC) Nigel Bassam, Nicholas Hurndall Smith, Karim Hayat. We planned to continue along the ridge towards further unclimbed peaks, but were all suffering from cold hands and feet. Alpine style, graded PD+. Total time 6.5hrs.

1 Oct Return to basecamp after 40cm fresh snow

2-4 Oct Walk-out (one day early due to bad weather). All waste was carried out.

5-6 Oct Days off in Karimabad

7 Oct Travel to Gilgit by jeep (5hrs)

8 Oct Travel to Islamabad overland due to cancelled flight (16hrs)

9 Oct Flight home

Achievements and conclusions

After establishing a basecamp at 4400m in the Ghidims Valley and an advanced basecamp at 5200m on the Northern spur of the NW Ghidims Glacier, the team made three attempts on Yawash Sar I (6258m), only to be turned back by technical difficulties and loose rock and ice. The three different routes, attempted in alpine style, involved navigating an icefall with climbing up to WI4, north face style snow and ice of up to 70°, and grade IV rock climbing on bad quality rock on both the SE and SW ridges. The highest point reached was about 6000m. Descents were made via multiple abseils.

In the end, events conspired against the team summiting via the one route which we felt, in retrospect, would lead up Yawash Sar I. This was directly up the S Face. The two-week window for climbing was tight, and we concluded that a glacier camp at 5400m below the S Face might provide a better platform, and that it would be worth carrying bivvy kit above that, something we did not consider on this trip. This route would be safest before 8am due to its aspect.

Once the focus shifted away from further attempts, the team was happy to come away with two 1st ascents of easier peaks accessed from the same ABC, both of which were graded PD, and in the region of 5800m. These were named Ingo Isagun Sar (Uncle & Nephew Peak) 5742m PD by Karim Hayat & Waseem Shah (26 Sep 2022) and KNN Sar 5798m PD+ by Karim Hayat, Nicholas Hurndall Smith & Nigel Bassam (30 Sep 2022).

Three members of the team were unable to climb higher than ABC due to illness and slow acclimatisation. The team investigated access to Yawash Sar III & IV but decided against attempting to set up a higher camp. Yawash Sar III & IV were therefore neglected on this expedition due to the wealth of potential found at our main ABC, in particular for summits just below 6000 metres, most of which are unclimbed. The approach is comparatively easy along the glacial moraine, offering good advanced base camp options from which to attempt these summits. There is a series of glacial valleys extending off the Ghidims Valley, many of which have had little exploration.

All members came away from the trip with a renewed sense of awe for the beauty of this part of the world, and the resourcefulness and kindness of its local people. Whilst the team encountered considerable difficulties accessing these remote untrodden valleys and the peaks above them, it was inspired to explore further and climb higher, to continue to learn about the area, and to forge closer relationships with those that work here.

Finances

International travel £3000

Domestic travel, accommodation, trekking food and gas £11,020

Visas £420

Tips £1200

Group medical equipment £60

Communications £100

Offsetting £110

Bank charges £18

Total: £15,928

Grants:

Austrian Alpine Club £1500

British Mountaineering Council £600

Fell and Rock Climbing Club £500

Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund £1800

Mount Everest Foundation £4000

Total £8400

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to:- Mount Everest Foundation, Fell and Rock Climbing Club, British Mountaineering Council, Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund, Austrian Alpine Club, Expedition Foods, Black Diamond Equipment, Swaledale Outdoor Club, Karim Hayat, Nick Simons, Nick Berry, Catriona Clucas, Victor Saunders, Nigel Buckley, Jerzy Wala, Hannah Marsden, Rachel Smith, Issakarim, Bulbul, Abbas, Waseem, Sajit, Naseer, Jalal, Aziz and all the porters. Also to the donkeys.

Yawash Sar I 6258m S Face



Route through the icefall to upper glacier for all attempts



Attempt 1 high
point circled



Yawash Sar I 6258m

Attempt 1 high
point circled

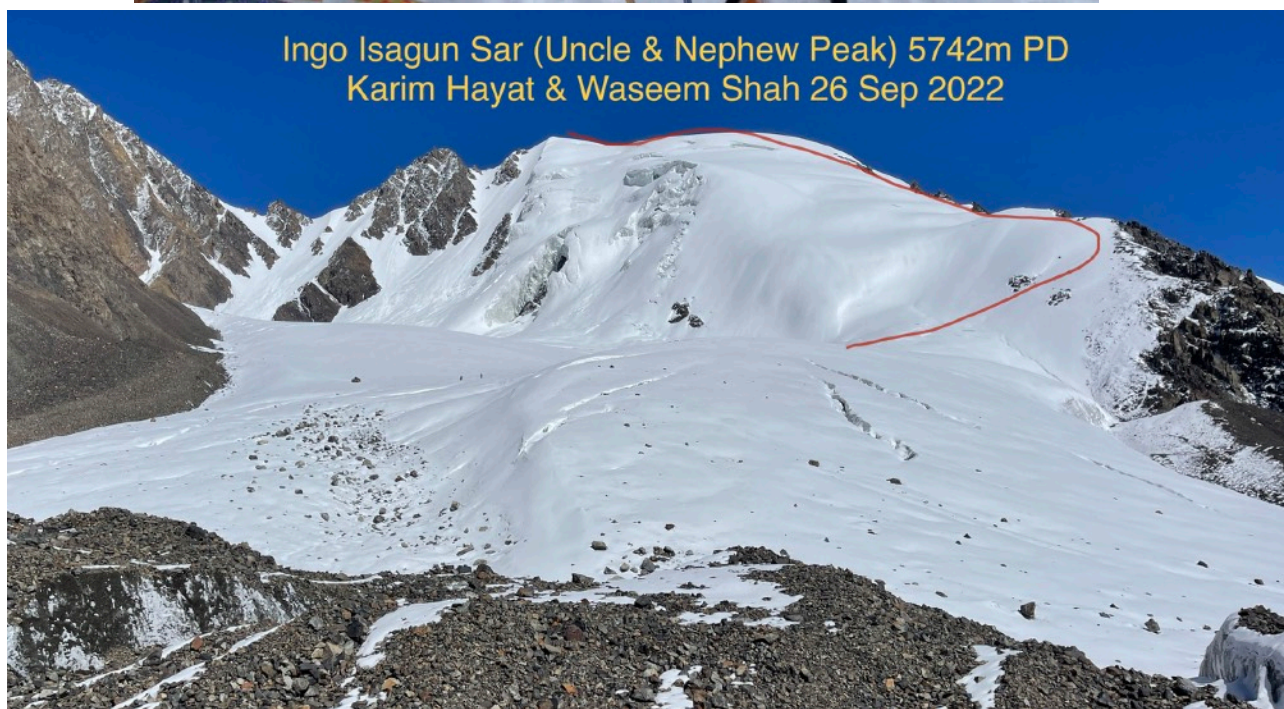
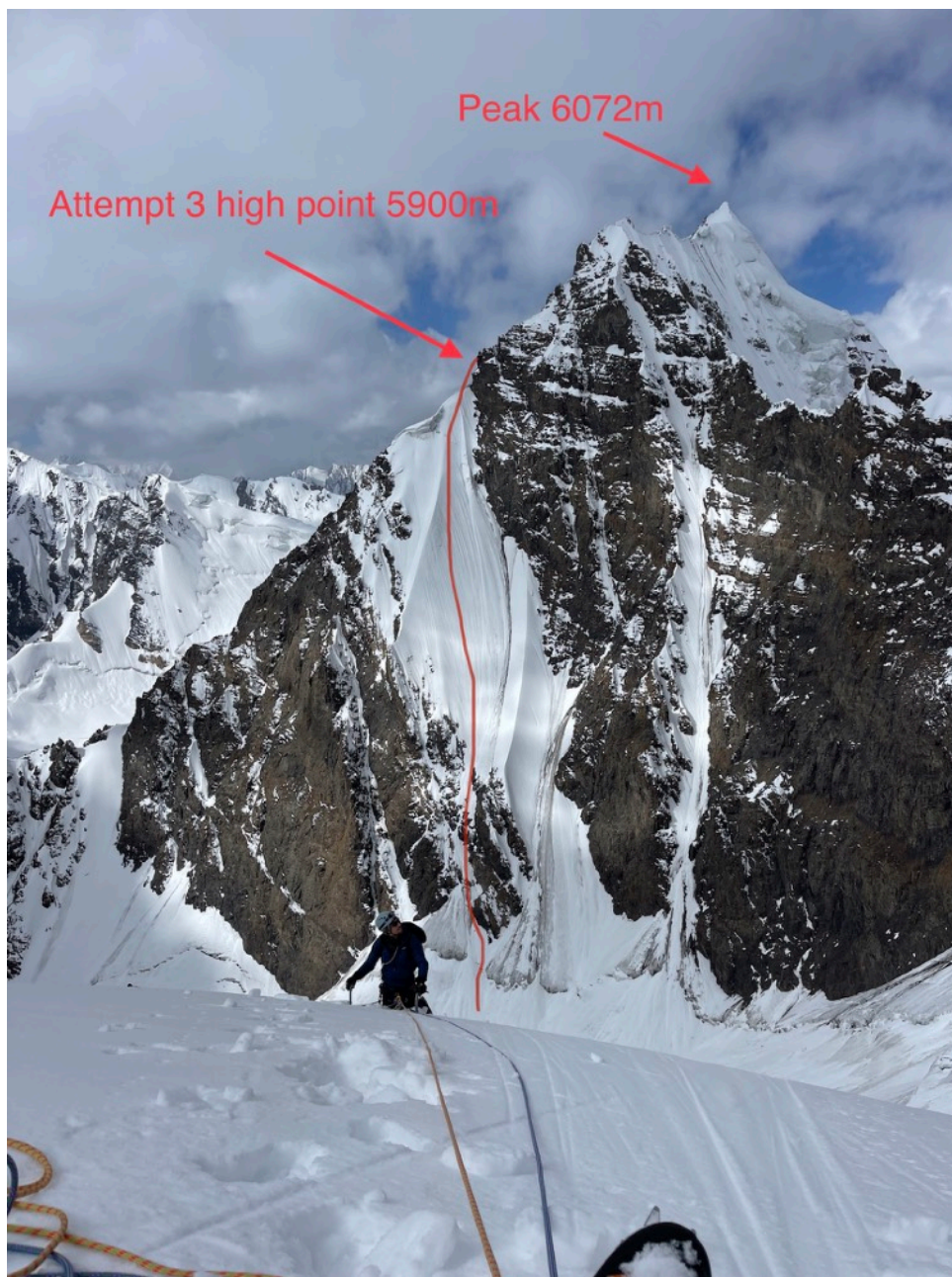
Yawash Sar I 6258m

Attempt 2 high point
6000m circled



Attempt 2
High point 6000m circled





KNN Sar 5798m PD+ Karim, Nick & Nigel 30 Sep 2022



KNN Sar 5798m: from summit looking South





KNN Sar 5798m:
from summit
looking East



Team members: Tom, Ross, Nick, Nigel, Paul, Karim and Waseem