

Kondus Valley, Pakistani Karakoram 2017

Location: Kondus Valley, Pakistan
Dates: July 2nd to September 2nd 2017
Aim: The FA of Link Sar (7041m)
Expedition Reference: 17-13
Author: Graham Zimmerman
Year: 2017

Introduction

Steve Swenson, Chris Wright and Graham Zimmerman spent the summer of 2017 on an expedition to the Pakistan Karakoram's Kondus Valley. They spent their time in the Kondus attempting the East Face of unclimbed Link Sar (7041m).

On these attempts they were ultimately unsuccessful due to a lack of weather windows of an appropriate size for climbing such a large, complex and technical face. Regardless of the lack of success the team had a great trip.

Expedition Members



Graham Zimmerman, Leader (NZ/USA)

30 years old, Bend, OR, Film Producer and Geophysical Surveyor

15 years of experience alpine climbing with 14 expeditions to technical routes in the greater ranges

- 2014 Finalist, Piolet d'Or (France)
- 2010 NZ Mountaineer of the Year (New Zealand)
- FA West Face Direct, (M6 5.10x A2+ 95°, 6,000'), Celeno Peak (13,395'), Saint Elias, AK May 2016
- FA Southwest Ridge (M6, 90°, 6000') of K6 West (7040m), Pakistani Karakoram, August 2015
- FA Changi Tower (6500m) via the North Ridge (M6, 5.10 A2, 2,800'), Pakistani Karakoram, Aug 2015
- FA Northeast Buttress (V, M7, WI4, A1, 4,700') of Mt Laurens, Lacuna Glacier, Alaska, May 2013
- FA Vitalogy (V, WI5, M6+, 5.9, A1 4,600'), SW Buttress of Mt Bradley, Ruth Gorge, Alaska, April 2010
- Numerous other FAs in Alaska, WA state, CO state, British Columbia, Patagonia, Kyrgyzstan and New Zealand
- Ascents of 5.12, M9, WI6+ and A3+



Chris Wright (UK/USA)

33 years old, Bend, OR, Mountain Guide

12 years of experience alpine climbing with 10 expeditions to technical routes in the greater ranges

- IFMGA Mountain Guide (93rd American), February 2014
- FA West Face Direct, (M6 5.10x A2+ 95°, 6,000'), Celeno Peak (13,395'), Saint Elias, AK May 2016
- FA (solo) Wish You Were Here (IV WI4 M6 A0, 1,400'), Abrahamstind, Lofoten Islands, Norway, February 2016
- FA Daily Bread (III WI5 M6 1,200'), Falkfjorden, Lofoten Islands, Norway, March 2015
- Schmid Route (TD WI4 M5 4,200'), Onsite solo in 4 hours Hörnli to summit, Matterhorn, Switzerland, Oct 2014
- FA (route and peak) Purgation (VI WI6+ M6 3,600'), Pangbuk North (6,589m), Khumbu, Nepal, Oct 2013
- FA Terror (VI WI6 M7 R/X A2 5,000'), Mooses Tooth, Alaska, April 2013
- Numerous other FAs in Alaska, OR state, CO state, Nepal and Norway



Steve Swenson (USA)

63 years old, Seattle, WA, Retired

40 years of experience alpine climbing with 30+ expeditions to technical routes in the greater ranges.

- Winner of 2012 Piolet d'Or
- FA Changi Tower (6500m) via the North Ridge (M6, 5.10 A2, 2,800'), Pakistani Karakoram, Aug 2015
- Sasser Kangri II in Indian Karakoram 7518m First ascent via south face. 2012
- Latok 2 7108m in Pakistan Karakoram - 2nd Ascent of S Ridge, 1st alpine style ascent 2006
- K2 8611m in Chinese Karakoram North Ridge – w/o oxygen. Led expedition, second US ascent of K2. 1990

Adventurous Activities

Destination Area



Satellite Imagery of general area (google maps)

GPS coordinates

Basecamp - 35°25'21.2"N 76°39'37.5"E

Link Sar - 35°26'51.5"N 76°35'54.2"E

Research materials and Information Sources

The research for this trip was thorough and took place through the American Alpine Journal, the Alpine Journal, the British Alpine Club's Himalayan Index and direct contact with alpinists who have been in the area including Steve Swenson (a member of this expedition who has spent extensive time in the region and did the vast bulk of the research for this trip). These resources provided a very strong idea of what the team should expect in terms of costs, timing, logistics and weather. The route itself remained fairly unknown as the only attempts were either by Swenson (in 2001 with little success) or in the 1970s.

Consultations with other alpinists as well as individuals familiar with the political situation in Pakistan allowed the team confidence that they would be able to maintain security while in country. Just before the expedition departed a wealth of beta was procured from the Polish Alpine Club which was very helpful in accessing Changi Tower.

Training

In order to prepare for the expedition the team members adhered to a rigorous training regime which involved aggressive circuit and cardiovascular training as well as time in climbing gyms. Training in the form of climbing itself was of course also undertaken by the team. This included ascents in Canada, USA, Alaska and New Zealand.

Permission and Permits

The climbing permit for Link Sar was applied for in January, it was assumed that this would provide a large amount of leeway in terms of time to get the visa (in most cases the approved permit is required for the visa application to be processed). Within weeks, the team was advised that this permit application was very unlikely to go through and the team started looking into other objectives, eventually settling on the South Face of unclimbed Muchu Chhish.

After months of waiting, the team was advised in late May (less than 6 weeks before departure) that due to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that peaks on the Western side of the Hunza (where Muchu Chhish is located) were closed to climbing and that we should in fact focus on permitting Link Sar.

One week before departure, the team received the permit for Link Sar.

Then, while the team was in transit, the permit was revoked. With travel already underway,

Finally, it needs to be noted that the requirements for the Liaison Officer have remained the same as in 2015. Before 2015 it was required that the team outfit the LO, now it is simply required that the team give the LO a 1500\$ stipend to purchase his own equipment. Seeing as most of the LOs have no experience with mountains (let alone with the snow) it needs to be ensured that they are adequately prepared for their time in the mountains (there is a lot of used climbing equipment available in Skardu). They are also paid a stipend during their time with the team of 30\$/day in Islamabad and 15\$/day in Skardu and beyond. This should not be paid for days the team is covering their expenses since it is to cover food and lodging. Many larger commercial expeditions will simply give the LO their food stipend for the whole time as well as the equipment stipend while also giving them equipment and paying for all their food and lodging.

It is important that smaller expeditions hold a hard line with these stipends since they incur huge additional costs to the small budgets of smaller teams. A precedence must be maintained that small teams only pay the stipends for days when the LO is paying for their own food and lodging and do not bring the LO additional equipment and rather allow them to purchase their own with the equipment stipend.

In Country Logistics

For climbing expeditions in Pakistan it is highly recommended to hire a local service provider to help with logistics. In this case the team hired the highly reputable Nazir Sabir Expeditions. The owner Nazir is deeply connected and has been running expeditions in Pakistan for decades.

In the case of this expedition the team opted to deal with many of their own logistics, including hiring and paying cooks and transportation. Many expeditions these days chose to have their

logistics support company take care of all of this with a lump sum. This team chose to deal with this themselves due to Steve's experience in the area and his personal connections. It is also the best way to ensure that all those involved with the expedition are paid fairly.

Security

The team took a few major considerations due to security concerns.

The first was to not take the land route from Skardu to Islamabad (via the Karakoram Highway). The team felt that this drive would expose them to areas they felt unsafe and therefore decided to wait for the flights between these two cities. Luckily for this team the weather was good and the flights were running on schedule when they needed them, this should not be considered the norm.

The second was to keep a low profile in Islamabad, utilizing private drivers to get around when needed and staying in a nice hotel which had it's own security detail.

In Baltistan (Skardu and beyond) the team was far less concerned about security, despite this the government was supplying police officers for foreign teams. The armed guard was not felt to be necessary but was by no means unwelcome.

The final note needs to be that this team felt at no point were they threatened during the trip.

Transportation

Seattle -> Islamabad - All team members congregated at Steve's house in Seattle and caught a direct flight from Seattle to Dhuhai followed by a second flight to Islamabad. Both legs were with Emirates, were on time and were very comfortable.

Islamabad -> Skardu - The team flew from Islamabad to Skardu due to security issues. This flight was taken with Pakistani International Airlines. While the team had no issues with weather delays on this flight, this should not be considered the norm, long delays are a regular occurrence.

Skardu -> Basecamp - The team hired jeeps to carry all of their equipment, food and gas to the basecamp which was situated on the road in the Kondus Valley.

On the exit from the mountains all of the same methods were used in reverse.

Insurance

All team members carried rescue insurance through Global Rescue. They made sure that GR was well aware of the plans for the expedition and had the gps coordinates of Link Sar and basecamp.

On top of this it is required of any expedition going climbing the in the Pakistani Karakorum to make a 15,000\$ cash deposit with Askari Aviation (note, the deposit was increased by 5,000\$

this season). This is to cover the initial costs of a helicopter rescue. At this time there appears to be no way around this even with a 'guarantee of payment' from Global Rescue.

In Pakistan it is required to purchase insurance for all personnel. This was purchased to cover all porters and cooks. This was done by way of Nazir Sabir Expeditions.

Travel Transport and Freight

All equipment was carried with the team members on their plane flights.

Food and Accommodation

All specialty climbing food was transported from the United States. This included bars, freeze dried meals and recovery powders. In Islamabad there is a 'western store' where many items can be purchased including peanut butter, chocolate, pasta and jams. All the most basic meal items (flour, sugar ect) were purchased in Skardu.

Communications

The team carried a Iridium Sat phone for forecasts and in case of emergency.

Medical Arrangements

On this expedition Graham was appointed the medical expert due to his experience as a EMT on the Yosemite Search and Rescue team.

An extensive medical kit was carried that included equipment and medicine for dealing with both trauma and sickness. Special equipment worth mentioning are a stethoscope (for monitoring lungs for liquid indicating HAPE) and a pulse-ox (for monitoring both recovery and blood o2 saturation).

Below is a list of medications carried, it is also noted whether they were purchased in country (at a chemist in Islamabad) or brought from the US (in most cases they were both brought from the states and more was purchased in country, the notes below are to serve as a reference for what can be bought in country since it can incur a significant cost savings to purchase drugs in country).

- azithromycin (Pakistan)
- ciprofloxim (Pakistan)
- amoxicillin (Pakistan)
- diamox (Pakistan)
- Dexamethazone (USA)
- naproxen (USA)
- ibuprofen (USA) (note, a large amount of ibu was brought since it can be helpful to porters)
- paracetamol (Pakistan)
- peptobismol (USA)
- Dramamine (USA)
- vicadine (USA)
- OxyContin (USA)

Beyond this it should be noted that all team members were well versed high angle and glacier rescue techniques.

Environmental and Social Impact Assessment

A strict 'leave no trace' policy was followed on the entire expedition. In town the teams was careful to be respectful of the local Muslim culture by wearing pants and not eating pork.

Diary/log

July 2-12:

Travel from Bend and Seattle to Basecamp. This sequence was significantly extended by permit issues described elsewhere in this report.

July 13-22:

Acclimatization and scouting of route. Due to the steep nature of the valley and the complex/ unknown nature of the face, the team preformed their acclimatization on the route itself. During this time reaching 5100m.

July 22-28:

Further acclimatization and progress up route, reaching 5300m and finding a route through the lower complexities on the face.

July 29-August 15:

Bad weather kept the team pinned in basecamp. Lots of good Bouldering

August 16-19:

Attempt on route, reaching 6000m, shut down by bad weather.

August 20-24:

Waiting out bad weather in basecamp.

August 25-27:

Second Attempt on peak ending at 5500m due to storms.

August 28-September 4:

Travel home, which proved to be uneventful.

Conclusions

The Kondus Valley, Pakistani Karakoram 2017 Expedition was a success in the sense that everyone came home healthy and as friends. Unfortunately, due to the terrible weather experienced in the Karakoram this season no opportunity was afforded the team to make a proper attempt on a route the East Face of Link Sar. The team is very excited to return for another attempt as soon as is feasible.

Huge thanks to the Mount Everest foundation for their gracious support.

Appendix 1 - Budget

Date	Expense	Graham	Chris	Steve	Roper	Comments
5/22/17	Rescue Insurance	USD		401.30		
5/22/17	Flight	USD		1,441.00		
5/22/17	Cashier's check for visas	USD		575		
5/22/17	Cashier's check fee	USD		5		
5/28/17	Postage for visas	USD		14.5		
5/28/17	Sport drinks	USD		77.97		
5/28/17	Postage for visas	USD		37.64		
6/16/17	Sport Foods	USD		261.00		
6/20/17	Rescue supplies, sunscreen, etc.	USD		171.00		
6/24/17	Rescue Insurance	USD		467.55		
6/27/17	Flight	USD		1,313.06		
6/28/17	Petzl - ropes, slings, headlamps for the boys	USD		275		
6/28/17	Fire Woodmenz	USD		400		
6/28/17	Repair tape	USD		17.5		
6/12/17	Amazon - food	USD		390.33		
6/12/17	Snags	USD	384.17			
5/27/17	Flight	USD	303.06			
5/27/17	Rescue Insurance	USD		467.55		
6/27/17	Deliver Snags and Relay Devices	USD	513.83			
6/28/17	Amazon-Order (tip fee, recovery/mile)	USD	40.82			
6/28/17	WD, shoe gas, water bottles, sunscreen etc.	USD		78.34		
6/28/17	Hardware store - tape, file, glue	USD		73.37		
6/28/17	coffee	USD		70		
6/30/17	Dinner	USD		188.73		
7/1/17	Trader Joes	USD	206.66			
7/1/17	Gas/tolls for the boys	USD		13.03		
7/1/17	RE Graham and Chris	USD	184.7			
6/28/17	ice cream	USD		14.97		
7/1/17	Haribo's	USD		61.40		
7/1/17	Excess Luggage	USD	613.83	460	200	
6/30/17	Leathered friends	USD	6.25			
7/6/17	scotch in Dubai	USD		119.16		
7/6/17	snack	Ru			340	
7/6/17	Western Store	Ru			904.6	
7/7/17	Dinner w Nadir	Ru			2350	
7/8/17	Royal Crown w JD	Ru			5800	
7/8/17	food at airport	Ru			1400	
7/8/17	tip for Skardu airport driver	Ru			200	
7/8/17	tip for luggage driver	Ru			1500	
7/8/17	salvat, champagne, fruit, taxi	Ru			3000	
7/10/17	Rawid vegetables and misc	Ru			3882.6	21000 from Roper. Paid Rasool 11826
7/9/17	Ruslin Diner a shirt	Ru			9049	
7/9/17	Skardu Hotel	Ru			59810	
7/9/17	laundry	Ru			2500	
7/9/17	Jeep to Kandju	Ru			40,000	
7/11/17	Dasas hotel, food	Ru			4400	
7/11/17	Dajak Indig	Ru			1200	
7/11/17	Chickens	Ru			1860	
8/12/17	3C Alva and resupply	Ru			6000	
8/26/17	Jeep to Skardu incl tip	Ru			26000	
8/26/17	Dinner in Skardu	Ru			4000	
8/26/17	Alsons	Ru			800	
8/26/17	maps	Ru			700	
8/26/17	portacans	Ru			480	
8/27/17	Patricia	Ru			450	
8/27/17	Money to Dong for storage					already included in cash input tab
8/27/17	for Rasool					already included in cash input tab
8/27/17	for Nadhem					already included in cash input tab
8/18/17	Hotel Skardu incl tip	Ru			66000	
8/27/17	Asian fee	USD	100	100	100	
8/31/2017	Beer	USD			500	
7/1/17	Excess baggage	USD	-474			
7/1/17	Excess baggage -skardu					31,000 23000 is Julian gave to Rasool already included
7/1/17	Excess baggage-skardu					21000
7/1/17	Royal Crown w JD					16217
8/18/17	misc in Skardu					2400
10/1/17	Fire Woodmenz final bill					1080