

Apart from Chris shooting off the end of a rope and breaking a few ribs, we emerged comparatively unscathed; though I think that without a liberal daily supply of luck the outcome could have been very different.

Summary

Doug Scott (leader)

Members: J. V. (Mo) Anthoine, Chris Bonington, Tut Braithwaite, Nick Estcourt and Clive Rowland.

First Ascent of the Ogre, 7285m by Scott and Bonington, 13 July 1977.

Polish K-2 expedition – 1976

Janusz Kurczab

(Translation: Andrzej Kus)

The idea of organizing an expedition to K-2 (8661m) was for very many years the most sought after venture in the Polish alpine community. The first Polish applications for permission to attack this second highest mountain of the world date back to before the war. In 1974 these efforts resulted in official consent but the Pakistani permission came to Poland too late—by the end of June 1974—and it was necessary to drop the idea of K-2 for that season.

The prepared expedition was redirected to Lhotse (8511m) in the post monsoon period and attacked the summit finally in winter of 1974/5 (*AJ* 82 28).

The international competition among applicants for permission to tackle K-2 in 1976 was again kindly decided by Pakistan in favour of Polish alpinists and the expedition of the Polish Alpine Association directed by Janusz Kurczab set out for this highest Karakoram peak. The remaining 18 team-members were: Eugeniusz Chrobak, Leszek Cichy, Andrzej Czok, Ryszard Dmoch, Janusz Fereński, Kazimierz Głazek, Marek Grochowski, Andrzej Heinrich, Jan Holnicki-Szulc, Piotr Jasiński, Piotr Kintopf (doctor), Jan Koisar (doctor), Marek Kowalczyk, Wojciech Kurtyka, Andrzej Łapiński, Tadeusz Łukajtys (deputy leader), Janusz Onyszkiewicz and Wojciech Wróż.

Our preliminary intention was to try a new route but we did not have many photographs nor the time for reconnaissance before the decision. We chose therefore the longest and exposed, but at least not very steep NE Ridge. This route was previously attacked by Eckenstein's expedition of 1902.

The Base Camp was established at c. 5000m on the Godwin–Austen Glacier on 24 June near the old Italian Base of the successful 1954 expedition. With our arrival a period of clear weather started around K-2 and lasted nearly a month. The altitude work on the Ridge, i.e. establishing the camps, supplying them with equipment, food and heavy oxygen bottles, safe-guarding the route with fixed ropes was done (without the help of high altitude porters) in turn by all team members to get equal and proper acclimatization. Camp 1 was established at 5600m on the upper part of the Godwin–Austen Glacier by 25 June. The further route of ascent continued along the lateral rib coming down from the junction-point 6821m on the main ridge. This pitch was steep, with ice and very unsound rock. Camp 2 was



3 The NE ridge of K-2 between Camps 3 and 4 (Photo: J. Kurczab)

established at 6100m (3 July) and Camp 3 just below the top of the junction-point (6750m, 7 July). Between Camps 1 and 3 nearly 2000m of fixed ropes were used. Above Camp 3 was a very hard, ice/rock ridge with cornices on both sides. It took us 10 days to overcome this part of the route. Wojciech Kurtyka fell off there 15m down through the cornice on the Pakistani side and painfully injured his leg.

Camp 4 behind the difficult ridge was finally established at 6950m on 17 July. Every metre of precipitous ridge was thoroughly safeguarded with fixed ropes but in spite of them we found great difficulties when traversing it with loads. Sometimes this 1000m required more than 10 hours to pass in bad conditions.

The latter part of July brought with it bad weather. The route to the snow dome on the right side of the 'shoulder of K-2' (7670m) where we planned to establish the penultimate Camp 5 was open but our attempts to reach it in the next days failed. We left only food and equipment in a temporary store at 7300m but the deep snow, frosty wind and a fall into a crevasse compelled us to retreat. Finally on 29 July the monsoon struck violently. The area of K-2 was invaded by stormy wind and heavy snowfall that covered the Base with more than a metre of fresh snow. The storm raged for over a week and all activity was paralysed. To make up for the delay in our schedule we needed to supply about 30 loads of 20 kg each up to 7700m. The 'total mobilization' of all team members was necessary to establish both the last high camps and to make the bid for the summit. The action began immediately following a weather improvement on 6 August but unfortunately further delay



4 Upper part of the NE ridge and the summit (Photo: Ryszard Dmoch)

occurred, when we discovered that Camps 3 and 4 were partly destroyed: we had to dig the tents out from under a 2m-deep snow layer.

Camp 5 was established in the planned place at 7700m on 12 August. It was reached by 18 alpinists during 2 days, that is by all team members except for one of the doctors who stayed all the time on duty at the Base. Next day 6 men: Cichy, Czok, Grochowski, Holnicki-Szulc, Kintopf and Kurczab established Camp 6 at 8000m at the base of the summit pyramid of K-2.

On 14 August Cichy and Holnicki attacked the summit but the bid was unsuccessful. They climbed the first lower barrier of seracs but withdrew at 8250m from beneath the main obstacle—a 60m high step of vertical ice and rock slabs. A second rope, Chrobak and Wróż, tried again on 15 August. They climbed the crucial pitch of the upper barrier which took them the major part of the day. Then they moved across the steep snow slope and climbed over the last little rocks on the easy snow fields leading up towards the summit. At about 6pm they stopped at an altitude of about 8400m. The oxygen reserve was nearly all used. They would need to keep the rest for a safe descent and for unforeseen circumstances. Simultaneously they observed a worsening of the weather. These reasons and the lateness of the hour which threatened an unexpected bivouac in descent, led them to withdraw at a time when it appeared that the summit was within easy reach. Doubts about the weather proved too well founded. Soon came a strong whirlwind accompanied by fierce snowfall. Chrobak and Wróż, rappelling repeatedly down steep slopes reached Camp 6 exhausted at 1am in darkness. After a short halt they came down to Camp 5 at about 7am on 16 August.

The expedition was prepared to undertake 2 more summit attacks; however, as many as 5 members were eliminated from further activity due to different medical troubles. The action started again on 28 August when slightly better weather returned to the K-2 area. Thirteen alpinists in 3 teams set off from Base Camp, but some of them had reached Camp 3 only when the weather became quite bad again on 2 September, and all climbers had to descend to Base Camp. This was the final end of activity on the mountain. On 8 September we evacuated Base Camp and set out for the return journey home.

A marginal outcome of the Polish expedition worthy of mention is our observation of heights of peaks and the possibility of mapping errors for certain points in the K-2 area. Assuming the altitude of K-2 summit to be 8611m (although recently the height 8760m has been put forward!) it seemed to us that the heights of the neighbouring summits on the map and differences between them appear to be quite correct. But we observed some anomalies nearest to us in the K-2 area. Thus the old Savoia Pass (6666m or 6626m on the different maps) could not be identified in the area. The only pass that could conceivably have been it is situated as we observed more to the E over the Savoia Glacier at the beginning of the NW Ridge of K-2 at a point approximately 6250m above sea level (as shown on the Italian map 1:125,000). Further, we observed that the pass called Windy Gap, Sella dei Vewti or Skyang La in a SE direction from Skyang Kangri is about 200m lower (at least) than the height officially given on the maps, ie 6233m. So we found that there are problems other than alpine still remaining to be solved in the K-2 massif and the whole Karakoram Range.