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Autor: Normand, Bruce
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BATURA EXPEDITION 2006

Bruce Normand and Markus Walter planned an attempt on Batura II, 7762m, considered by some the highest unclimbed peak in the world, in early summer. The "Saxon-Scottish Batura Expedition 2006" benefited from the generous support of the AACZ. It also benefited from a new rule exempting all expeditions in the Hispar/Batura region of the Northern Areas of Pakistan from the need for a military liaison officer, and from peak fees now set semi-permanently at 10% of their traditional value (meaning US\$400 for a peak between 7500 and 7999m). As for Walter's last 11 years of expeditioning in the Karakoram, the real organisation was in the hands of expert sirdar, base-camp manager and cook, Jehangir.

Unseasonable rains in the Hunza at the beginning of June delayed the approach up the Muchuar Glacier, where base camp (BC) is located only two days' trek from Aliabad on the Karakoram Highway, and brought 30-50cm of snow even at 4000m. The pair began to work in bad weather and deep snows on the mountain, but when good weather came after five days it was very good indeed. Thus the two made rapid headway to a Camp 1 at 5200m and a Camp 2 on the Batokshi Col at 5900m, which they stocked with considerable amounts of food and equipment. Camp 3 at 6600m was established equally quickly, but beyond this the team foundered. Their intended route through the summit headwall was washed by spindrift avalanches, hard to protect, difficult to exit and led to dangerously unconsolidated summit slopes. Even after two weeks of excellent weather, there was no discernible change in the snow conditions above 7000m. The alternative of crossing the increasingly se-

rac-threatened slope beneath and around Batura I, to approach from the north side, was possible only by following the foot of the headwall, and here the climbers were forced to abandon their efforts in knee-deep powder snow suspended on 45-degree slopes. Reluctantly, they conceded that this was not the year for Batura II.

While clearing the mountain and BC, the pair decided to use their two remaining weeks for a rapid sortie into the Yashkuk Glacier basin, on the north side of the Batura range and reached from the Chapsuran Valley. The Yashkuk Glacier is quite smooth and straight, and is rock-covered for its 20km length between the snout and the confluence of the East and West Yashkuk Glaciers. These two diametrically opposed forks are each predominantly ice-covered, approximately 5km in length, and ringed by 6000m peaks. Despite its size, the basin has been visited only twice in recorded climbing history, in 2001 by a solo Japanese explorer and in 2005 by a Russian team. For different reasons neither expedition was able to climb any significant summits, leaving an area the size of the entire Aletsch Glacier basin completely untouched.

The mini-expedition reached the idyllic BC at Pamri (4040m) in two short days from Aliabad, the trekking portion of the approach requiring 6 hours on a grazing trail following the true left side of the glacier. After waiting out 2 days of bad weather the team was treated to another 8 of sunny skies and high temperatures. The two climbers formulated the ambitious plan of making the in-situ reconnaissance and alpine-style ascents of 3 unclimbed 6000m peaks, one in each of the three major bran-



M. Walter above C2 on Batura II; Hackindar Chhish behind Foto: Bruce Normand

ches of the Yashkuk, and then proceeded to do exactly that. First came Nadin Sar (6211m), the dominant peak of the upper Chapursan and located directly west of Pamri. The pair ascended a straightforward glacier curving beneath the east face to attain a high camp at 5400m, and the following day climbed snow slopes beside the northeast ridge to the summit crest, finishing in deep and unconsolidated powder. The following morning saw a brief ascent of an outlying 5800m summit, which afforded further valuable views over the Yashkuk basin, and was named "Jehangir Sar" in honour of their faithful friend in BC.

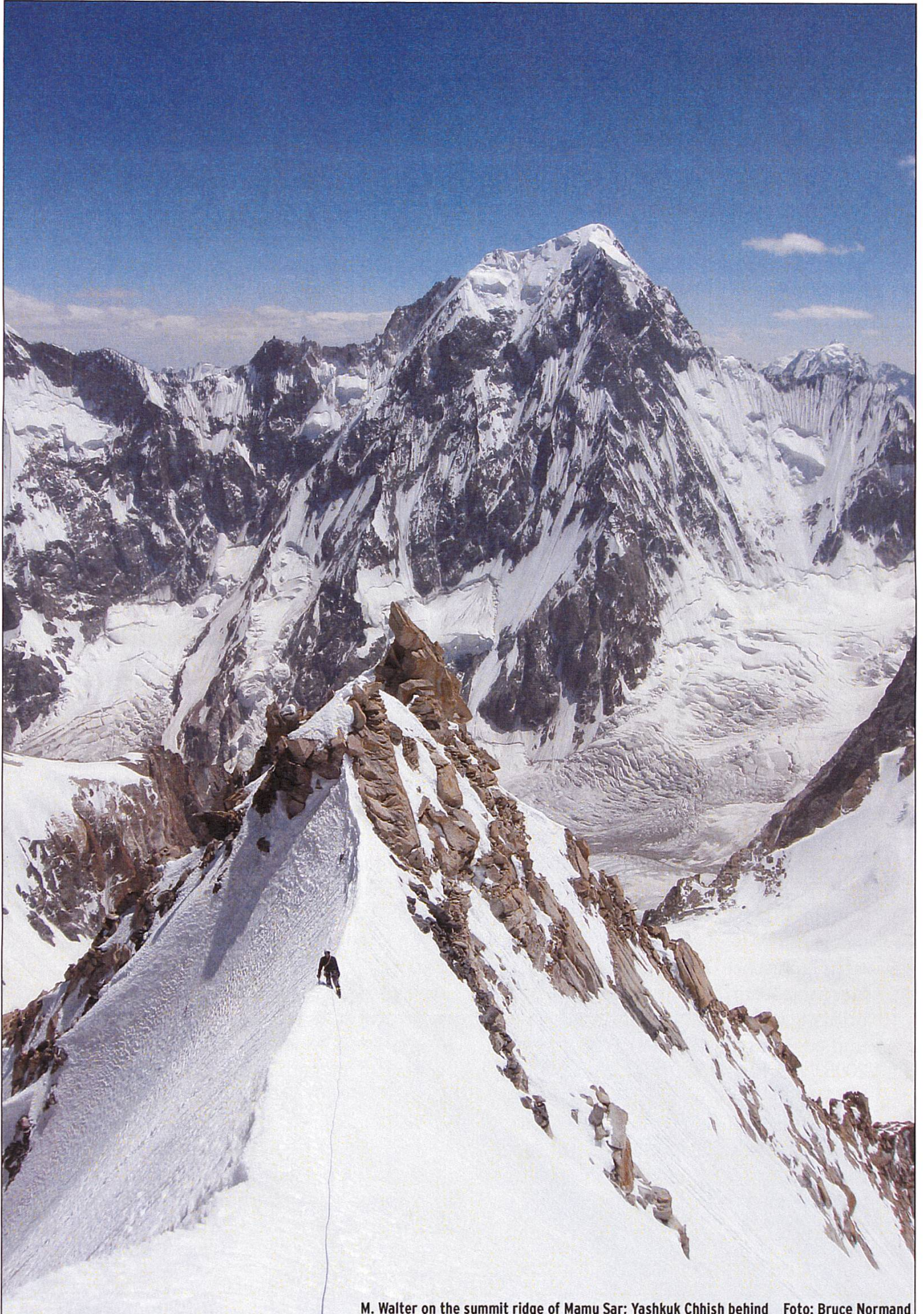
After a single night in BC, the next peak on the list was the shapely Caboom Sar (6186m), which is located directly opposite Pamri and best approached from the south by the East Yashkuk. The approach to this glacier fork is a lengthy but simple exercise, and the climbers placed a camp at 4600m. In another long day they then climbed southeast-facing snow slopes to attain the corniced east ridge, finding firm conditions except for the last 300 vertical metres. Views from this strategically placed peak are dominated by the northwest faces of Pamri Sar and Kampire Dior, but include the full West Yashkuk basin.

The last summit of the trilogy was a granite peak known only as 6096m, well hidden at the back of the West Yashkuk cirque,

where a camp was placed at 4700m. The peak is accessible only by a rather broken side glacier which the pair navigated before dawn, finding easy going as far as the col between 6096m and Sax Sar (6240m, climbed from the opposite side by Walter and colleagues in 1998). A fine viewpoint (5780m) clearing the col by some 50m on both sides provided excellent views in all directions. From this upper basin the summit was then reached by a snow-ice couloir through the east face, where extremely unconsolidated conditions necessitated several hundred metres of belaying. The climbers chose to name the peak Mamu Sar as a tribute to climbing colleague "Mamu" (Uncle) Guenter Jung, lost tragically on Nanga Parbat in 2004.

Strong, cold winds on the summit of Mamu Sar signalled the end of the stable weather, and 48 hours later the team was walking out in thick cloud, snow and rain. The main Chapursan Valley road was closed by the resulting landslides, and a further two-day delay ensued before the expedition could be declared formally at an end in Aliabad. The climbers would like to thank the Saechsische Bergsteigerbund and the Akademischer Alpenclub Zürich. They would particularly like to acknowledge the tireless assistance and friendship of Jehangir, who lost his life in a bus accident on the Karakoram Highway in December 2006.

By Bruce Normand



M. Walter on the summit ridge of Mamu Sar; Yashkuk Chhish behind Foto: Bruce Normand