

# Scottish Latok III Expedition 1999

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## **Abstract:**

19 June 1999 - 9 August 1999 this expedition aimed to attempt the unclimbed and untried North Spur of Latok III (6949m) from the Choktoi glacier in the central Karakoram, Northern Pakistan. The unexpected steepness and unhelpful lower rock faces made an Alpine style attempt unlikely and considerable aid necessary. This combined with frequent serac collapses and snow avalanches on the lower slopes and approach to the mountain meant that the attempt was abandoned.

The expedition therefore turned itself to other objectives. The first ascent of Hanispur South (6047m) via the North ridge was achieved. An ascent was made of the North West ridge of Biacherahi Tower (5800m). Members also put up a steep route on the west wall of the Doug Scott Spur, which was also climbed to the summit. Other multi pitch rock routes were created on subsidiary ridges of Latok III and Choktoi (Trident ) Peak (6166).

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*[The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purposes of private research. Photographic material is available on request. ]*

## Expedition Diary

Sat 19 <sup>th</sup> June	D-Day Flight Depart Manchester
Sun 20 <sup>th</sup>	Arr Islamabad, Meet Agent, Paradise Inn
Mon 21 <sup>st</sup>	Pre-Briefing
Tue 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Waiting
Wed 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Meet L.O. Briefing. Bus to Skardu
Thu 24 <sup>th</sup>	Arr Skardu
Fri 25 <sup>th</sup>	Skardu shopping
Sat 26 <sup>th</sup>	Skardu shopping
Sun 27 <sup>th</sup>	Jeep to Askole
Mon 28 <sup>th</sup>	Walk in- Askole to Jollo
Tue 29 <sup>th</sup>	Walk in- Jollo to Panmah
Wed 30 <sup>th</sup>	Walk in- Panmah to Choktoi mouth
Thu 1 <sup>st</sup> JULY	Walk in- Choktoi mouth to B.C
Fri 2 <sup>nd</sup>	BC sort out. TB and MM scope Latok
Sat 3 <sup>rd</sup>	MM and AC climb gully West of Doug Scott Spur
Sun 4 <sup>th</sup>	MM and DL descend with TB and L.O. who are poorly. SC, AC, NC climb to shoulder on West side of Hanipispur S. and camp.(5400m). PS and DH climb up and camp in glacier East of Biacherahi Tower. (5000m+).
Mon 5 <sup>th</sup>	TB leaves expedition due to illness as does L.O. MM and DL return to BC. SC, AC climb higher on Hanipispur S then return to BC. PS and DH attempt snow dome North of Biacherahi Tower. Deep snow prevents summiting.
Tue 6 <sup>th</sup>	MM and DL to Hanipispur shoulder. PS and DH return to BC
Wed 7 <sup>th</sup>	MM and DL climb on rocky peak W. of Han.S (VS)
Thu 8 <sup>th</sup>	Snow. DH scopes E. face of Latok III. Artillery sounds? BC resting
Fri 9 <sup>th</sup>	DH and PS cross bergshcrund on Latok III. Cache ropes / rack on lower slopes
Sat 10 <sup>th</sup>	MM, SC, AC approach face to establish ABC. Serac collapse hits approach
Sun 11 <sup>th</sup>	Despondency. All up to Hanipispur shoulder to camp. Evening snow
Mon 12 <sup>th</sup>	Snowing heavily. SC, AC, DL, NC attempt Hanipispur. Reach 5800m. Retreat
Tue 13 <sup>th</sup>	Snowing heavily. All return to BC
Wed 14 <sup>th</sup>	Snowing and raining
Thu 15 <sup>th</sup>	MM, PS, DL trog up to icefall below Ogre
Fri 16 <sup>th</sup>	SC, AC, MM climb two pitches on line on W face Doug Scott Spur. (A2, E2)
Sat 17 <sup>th</sup>	DH, MM trog up glacier to attempt ice line under Biacherahi Towers, but it has melted. Climb to foot of Biacherahi Tower.

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Sun 18 <sup>th</sup> Mon 19 <sup>th</sup>	DH, MM A3 pitch on DS spur route. PS, DH climb to glacier camp East of Biacherahi Tower ~5400m. MM, DL, NC walk up to glacier camp East of Hanispur S and bivvi ~5200m. SC, AC do pitches on DS Spur route A2
Tue 20 <sup>th</sup>	PS, DH summit Biacherahi Tower by NW ridge (5800m). MM, DL, NC attempt Han.S. NC is sick. MM, DL within 2 pitches of summit. Retreat due to bad weather and sick NC. SC, AC pitches on DS Spur A2, reach ridge.
Tue 20 <sup>th</sup> Wed 21 <sup>st</sup>	Snow, rain.
Thu 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Rain
Fri 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Snow/Rain
Sat 24 <sup>th</sup>	Snow/Rain/Cloud
Sun 25 <sup>th</sup>	Low cloud/Rain MM,DL climb on granite dome on Choktoi peak. DH, NC climb on Latok III subsidiary rock face.
Mon 26 <sup>th</sup>	Bad Weather
Tue 27 <sup>th</sup>	BC
Wed 28 <sup>th</sup>	SC, AC,MM climb fixed ropes on DS spur route to below ridge crest. Then do 10 pitches up the Spur crest, (VS/A2) to a bivvi ~5000m. PS and DH to glacier camp East of Hanispur S DL, NC rock climbing on Latok III subsidiary rock wall.
Thu 29 <sup>th</sup> Fri 30 <sup>th</sup> Sat 31 <sup>st</sup>	SC, AC, MM summit DS Spur. PS, DH summit Hanispur S Resting BC DL, MM climb granite dome on Choktoi peak. 15 pitches (VS) DH, PS recover cached gear on Latok III. Despite early morning retrieval suffer further serac and snow avalanches. Pack up BC
Sun 1 <sup>st</sup> Mon 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Porters arrive. Bail out to Panmah.
Tue 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Bail out Panmah to Korophon
Wed 4 <sup>th</sup>	Bail out Korophon to Askole to Thongal. Jeeps to Skardu.
Thu 5 <sup>th</sup>	Skardu present shopping
Fri 6 <sup>th</sup>	Bus, Skardu to Islamabad
Sat 7 <sup>th</sup>	Arr Islamabad
Sun 8 <sup>th</sup>	Debriefing Visit Faisal mosque Flight Luggage excess fine £1000. But upgraded to 1st class. Arrive back in blighty.

## 1. Introduction

Latok III is a challenging 6949m peak in the Central Karakoram in Northern Pakistan. Similar to other peaks in the area it is technically challenging on all sides. The peak has been ascended twice, both times via the South West ridge although Pakistani officials suggest that there have been over twenty attempts. The South West ridge was first climbed by the Japanese in 1979 using 1600m of fixed rope and was repeated by three Italians in 1988 climbing Alpine style with a little help from old Japanese ropes and taking 8 days. We wanted to attempt the very steep and untried North Spur from the Choktoi glacier. The Spur is approximately 1800m consisting of granite walls lower down and icy grooves and slopes interspersed with rock steps in the upper half. Objective dangers and the difficulty of the lower granite walls resulted in failure on the intended route. Although disappointing, members of the expedition were successful on a number of other objectives including the first ascent of Hanipispur South.

## 2. The Team

### "The Climbers"

The team consisted of a group of close friends based around the Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club who have climbed together for a number of years:

*Muir Morton* - Expedition leader and doctor. A firm favorite with the porters who suffered everything from sore eyes (no sunnies) to sore feet (no shoes!) and plenty of other ailments. Learned the first lesson in bedside manner - give them a pill and they'll go away.

*Sam Chinnery* - took out a mortgage on the West Wall of the Indian Spur. Seemingly enjoyed a Monday-Friday '9-5' approach to Himalayan climbing.

*Ally Coull* - divided his time equally between the Indian Spur and the larder and always managed to turn up just as dinner was served. In his spare time he slept.

*Paul Schweizer* - "Grandad" to the cook, "Gaaawwwd-damnit!!" to the rest of us. Proved resilient to the weather and poor conditions however, not so resilient to the whisky.

*Tom Bridgeland* - sadly left the expedition early after suffering badly from altitude sickness. Seemed to be exacerbated by an early peek at the North Spur.

*Dave Hollinger* - Ally's competition in the larder. This usually mild mannered Irishman confirmed that an MSG enriched diet increases aggressive tendencies. He was spotted battering a boulder with a Leki pole.

*Neal Crampton* - Affectionately known as "Cho Tabai" (Balti for Baby Spice). Neal suffered penance for being the youngest member of the expedition by being Ali's little helper. Neal responded by being ill after most meals.

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*Dan Long* - the expedition's architect and consultant engineer. Provided base camp with a patio and dining table, exquisitely sculpted from the liberal supply of Karakoram granite.

### "The Cook"

A local legend of a character. Ali Naqi was his name and cooking his game. He was provided by our agent Himalaya Treks and Tours and was very helpful and friendly. He helped put up tents, build base camp, and help climbers returning to basecamp with their rucksacks.

He cooked a good Dal and rice, lots of folded over pizza calzone type affairs full of all sorts. He made essentially anything we asked. Some communication difficulties could result in minor culinary delights such as savoury pancakes with onion and meat etc. covered in blueberry pie filling.

Drawbacks include a fear of brown bears reputed to inhabit the Choktoi although we saw no evidence. This meant however, that when our Liaison officer left there was no one to keep him company at BC. When members were about to go climbing Ali often got quite upset and asked for an assistant cook for protection.

Lessons to be learned:

1. Try and avoid taking a cook at all especially on smaller trips and where more time will be spent out of base camp rather than in. They are not a necessity, and boredom is such a big factor in basecamp that a bit of cooking might help relieve the dullness.
2. Make sure from the start that the cook is aware of where he is going and whether he may be alone much of the time to avoid stress later.
3. Ensure you arrange how much he is to be paid per day before setting out on the trip to avoid stress. Do not negotiate with "bonuses" for good service - they only become expected at the end.

Plus Points: Ali was a friendly and lively individual and good fun to have around base camp. He was rarely not breaking out into song or hammering out a beat on his bongo plastic containers. His cooking was fairly good and nothing too much trouble. He can be reached through Himalayan Treks and Tours. He also provided a good way of seeing Balti life, culture and religion.

### "The Agent"

Our agent was Mohammad Ali Chengezi, owner of **Himalaya Treks and Tours**. He has offices in Skardu and Rawalpindi. His company provided an excellent service and made life extremely easy for us. He can provide cooks, arrange porters and Sirdars, jeeps, and arrange all Ministerial briefings etc. He cost \$400 for his service and was worth pretty much every penny. He is also a local big chief and co-runs a local

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environmental group "The Himalayan Green Club" with the Japanese Alpine Club, which is responsible for fruit tree planting, the building and maintenance of local Schools and sanitation.

Himalaya Treks and Tours are on the internet and can be contacted by phone, fax and e-mail. Definitely recommended.

### "The Liaison Officer"

An interesting addition to the team. Our first L.O failed to make an appearance in Islamabad so after a days wait a new one was appointed. His name was Nadir Chaudri and he worked for the Ministry of Tourism. He was a nice friendly chap who appeared enthusiastic and helped us by agreeing to join our expedition at very short notice. He had been on two or three treks up the Baltoro and to K2 base camp.

Mr Aziz Ahmad at the Ministry told us he should accompany us on our "Summit Bid" despite the fact he had no climbing experience. Also I don't think he realised how remote and lacking in people, (other than eight well bonded British climbers) the Choktoi would be compared to the Baltoro. He left the expedition three days after arriving at base camp complaining of malaise. While wishing to respect Pakistani customs and the position of the L.O., Nadir did very little for us, took no part in the shopping, nor accompanied us on our journey from Islamabad to Skardu. To have to then provide him with expensive equipment including \$200 boots and a hefty wage packet for an essential non service created some ill feeling.

Perhaps the BMC could chat to the Pakistani Ministry about the role, ability and costs involved with Liaison officers.

Top Tip: It is useful to have your agent contact your named LO **before** you arrive in Pakistan to ensure he is in Islamabad when needed and avoid delays.

### 3. Travel

#### 3.1 Flights

We flew from Manchester to Rawalpindi with PIA. They are very keen to fly out expeditions. The cost was £484 return each. We were also given 40Kg baggage allowance both directions. Going out we had considerably more but at Manchester they do not seem concerned and never weighed it. Coming back we had a lot of excess partly because we had to bring all Tom's kit back. Despite being informed by PIA in London excess baggage shouldn't be a problem we were stung for £1000 and nearly missed the return flight. However they did upgrade us all to first class for the return which was a bonus. All in all they provide a good service and even say a prayer for your safety at the start of the flight!

#### 3.2 Rawalpindi - Skardu

We hired a "coaster" through our agent to carry us and our luggage up the Karakoram Highway. It is fairly spacious for 8 people and can be air conditioned. It cost 17000 Rupees, approximately £200. On the way back it was cheaper, about £150. The journey took 22 hours. Flights are only £25 to Skardu but there is a luggage allowance of 20Kg and they often don't fly due to bad weather. This delayed our L.O's arrival in Skardu.

#### 3.3 Skardu - Askole

Our agent supplied jeeps to take us to Askole, approx 7 hours drive. He had luggage jeeps and jeeps to carry the team. They cost about 3000 rupees each, about £35. We had 4 jeeps on the way up, 2 luggage and 2 team. On the way back we had 1 luggage and 1 team. Drivers appear to be mostly ex-military and, thankfully, seem very good at negotiating the treacherous road to Askole.

#### 3.4 Walk in

The in journey from Askole to BC took 4 days. The walk is broken down into 9 porter stages. They are also entitled to one paid rest stage every 7 stages. Each stage only takes about 2-3 hours to do and we were usually finished by about 2pm each day. An average day was 2.5 stages.

Day1	Askole to Jollo, up from the mouth of the Panmah valley.
Day2	Jollo to Panmah. This was a woody copse at the West end of a plain where the water was very dodgy. Further up across a big river is a better camp. Difficult river crossing requiring rope for the porters.
Day3	Panmah to a site at the mouth of the Choktoi glacier.
Day4	To base camp. (Arrived about 9.30am).

Beware of *bridge taxes* above Askole, 20 Rupees each for team and porters.

#### 3.5 Walk out

Return journey in 3 days, to Panmah then to Korophon then to Thongal below Askole as a landslide took out the road below Askole. Our agent warned by our mailrunner met us with jeeps in Thongal and we were in Skardu by nightfall on the third day.



## 4. Environment

### 4.1 Base Camp

Base camp was situated on the North side of the Choktoi glacier at around 4300m. It was sited on a ridge of moraine below the mouth of a glacier leading up to the East side of Hanispur South. It would have been better situated further up the glacier opposite Latok III or Latok I, but we had difficulty in getting the porters to carry any further. We had to flatten tent sites in the moraine. Watch out for large blocks perched on ice bases which melt during the Summer causing the blocks to slide off their stance. These could threaten tent sites. Water was obtained during the day from glacial streams. Washing was done in a pool below the site where water was obtained for drinking/cooking. The Choktoi seemed to be fairly free of litter from past expeditions. We found some rubbish on the south side of the glacier near the Doug Scott Spur. There was also a strong smell of excrement wafting down the glacier at times and frequent tummy upsets at base camp may be related to the toilets of previous expeditions.

### 4.2 Flora and Fauna

We were often warned by various parties that wild black bears roamed the Choktoi munching base camps. We saw no evidence but our cook got hysterical every time he thought he was going to be left alone in camp. We saw ravens, many birds of prey including the skeleton of a very large bird on the glacier. Marmots and Ibex were sighted as well as many Ibex horns adorning huts. Mice were seen on the bivvi on the Doug Scott Spur. Moraine banks and valleys up to around 4800m were covered in very brightly coloured Himalayan wild flowers. On the walk in were many tuberous rhubarb type plants, which the porters munched apparently to, ease altitude induced headaches.

The owner of the Sadpara hotel in Skardu heads some local conservation movement, which seeks to help protect birds and wildlife in the area. Our agent, Himalaya Treks and Tours owner Mohammad Ali Chengezi, co-runs the Himalayan Green club with the Japanese. This is responsible for tree planting, fruit tree planting and in helping improve the sanitation, water supplies and Schools in villages around the Shigar valley and Askole.

### 4.3 Rock

The rock in the area is composed of grey and pink granite. On Latok III it looked to be very compact with a central slabs section reminiscent of Shelterstone (with quite a bit on top). The Doug Scott Spur East face was generally good quality with a vast unclimbed wall of overlapping slabs. The west face lower down was a superb shield with the odd corner and crack line while higher up nearer the crest it was composed of very large unstable blocks. Rock fall was common in the gully to the West. Hanispur had very very loose sections on the lower slopes with better rock higher up.

There is masses of granite everywhere of variable quality. Most of the cracks are full of dirt and vegetation which makes free on sighting difficult.

#### 4.4    Glaciers

The Choktoi is a bit of a joy to move across especially later in the season. Nearer the Ogre there are more crevassed areas. Glacial streams became glacial raging torrents by the end of the trip and were often very hard to cross during the day. Ice penitentes made walking difficult earlier in the trip but these seemed to melt away. The glacier east of Biacherahi tower was straight forward early on but its east side became quite heavily crevassed later on in the trip.

Seracs provide a real threat to movement on the south side of the Choktoi. Below Latok I is a plateau from which frequent serac falls were seen, often fairly major. Debris was found extending right across the glacier. Latok III also had very active seracs on both sides and there were very large amounts of debris all over the bowl below the North face. River like snow avalanches were common during the day in established runnels on most slopes.

Latok IV looked to be a crevassed nightmare and serac collapses were very frequent especially around 6-7pm every day all over its extensive North face. (An attractive and beautiful but constantly changing and threatened face).

#### 4.5    Weather

We suffered no real storms or particularly strong winds at lower levels. However spells of good weather were limited to about 2-3 days. In between were longer spells of very low cloud, heavy snowfalls and, later in the season, rain at lower altitudes. Bad weather seemed to come from the South West with cloud building up behind the Ogre and Latok I. Temperatures were variable. Daytime sun made things very hot at base camp while at night the temperatures dropped to about -5, not too unpleasant. At higher camps approx 5400m, hoarfrost was found in the tent early on in the trip but later on nighttime temperatures were not too severe. Warmer weather later in the trip meant that ice under the tents melted away and left people sleeping on islands surrounded by three foot cliffs. The relatively mild temperatures meant that snow conditions were rarely favourable. Snow travel was a character building exercise at best and impossible at worst.

#### 4.6    Environmental Considerations

BMC environmental guidelines were adhered to during the trip. All tins and plastic were packed up and carried out. Burning the tins first reduced their size and weight. Organic waste was burnt and the ashes put in a deep crevasse. A toilet was created in a crevasse about 100m downstream of the campsite. All used toilet paper was gathered in plastic bags at the site and then carried out at the end of the trip. All expedition members including porters on arrival were asked to use the same site.

Stoves were bought for the porters to cook with. They used them on the glacier. However lower down they burnt dead wood as fires also helped to keep them warm at night. We asked the Liaison officer to stress that live trees were not to be damaged. Water supplies were often contaminated at approach march camps and it is worth repeatedly trying to make the porters do their toilet downstream of where water is drawn for drinking.

## 5. The Routes

### Hanispur (6047m). North Ridge, D+

On 20<sup>th</sup> July Morton, Long and Crampton set off at midnight from a high camp between Hanispur and Choktoi Peak at around 5200m. They approached the North Ridge via a rising leftwards traverse after an initial 100m of steep neve. Crampton suffered severe stomach upset which slowed progress. Morton and Long continued up steep snow and mixed ground, but as the weather deteriorated, they elected to descend and collect Crampton who had remained lower on the mountain. A series of abseils and a short traverse regained the line of ascent and they returned to Base Camp.

A final attempt was made on Hanispur by Schweizer and Hollinger who left base camp on 27<sup>th</sup> July and established a high camp on the obvious col below the east face. On 28<sup>th</sup> July they set out at 4am and soloed directly up 200m of relatively straightforward ice/neve to gain the North Ridge proper.

The ridge itself consisted of a long snow crest which steepened to mixed ground before levelling out for the final 100m of rocky crest. By 6am the snow was already softening considerably and the pair made slow progress "swimming" together towards the mixed ground. The first technical difficulties were encountered at around 5800m when forced to surmount a large snow mushroom. A very exposed pitch traversed the mushroom (Scottish III) and led onto the mixed ground via an overhung cornice! Another mixed pitch (Scottish III/IV) led to a large snow amphitheatre. Crossing this steep (70 degree) snow chute was one of the most serious sections of the route with negligible protection and atrocious snow conditions. Another short pitch led to the top of a false summit and the probable high point for other attempts on the peak.

The ridge extended for what seemed like several pitches (though in fact only two) but necessitated a short 20m abseil into a breche. From here they negotiated the rocky crest to reach the true summit around 4pm (100m). The crest was relatively straightforward but must jut out over the north face as both climbers collapsed snow which fell uninterrupted down the face and caused a few raised heart rates!

The line of ascent was retraced back to the snow mushroom. From there the pair descended directly down the east face. They initially followed the anchors left in place by the Morton/Long/Crampton attempt but elected to continue directly down the east face. A total of 10 abseils led to a passage of easier snow before a steep gully line had to be descended. Although only another 3 abseils, the pair's ropes found their way into a subterranean stream and subsequently froze - necessitating the reascending of a pitch to free them. The pair returned to their camp at midnight and descended to base camp the next day. *Although previous expeditions have recognised this peak as Hanispur South, the team failed to identify the independent Hanispur as depicted on the Swiss Karakoram map and are convinced there is really only one independent summit. There appears to be debate as to the exact height of the summit. Figures range between 5950m and 6300m.*

**Biacherahi Tower (5800m). North-West Ridge, AD+/D-**

After an earlier acclimatisation trek to below this prominent "shark's tooth" formation, Schweizer and Hollinger grabbed a brief weather window to ascend this impressive peak by its north-west ridge on 19<sup>th</sup> July. An early start allowed the pair to enjoy firm neve on the east shoulder leading to an obvious col between the tower and the adjacent snow dome. The north west ridge was then followed entirely on ice up to 70 degrees (250m). The summit was gained in deteriorating weather conditions and the pair abseiled the line of ascent using Abalakov threads. It is thought that this peak has been summited by at least one other expedition by the same route but no details have been found.

**Indian (Doug Scott) Spur (5200m) via West Wall. VS; A3 (800m)**

This is the 800m left hand spur of a pair that is part of the convoluted mass of ridges that run off the NE side of Latok III. The actual ridge line was first climbed in 1990 by Doug Scott and Sandy Allen.

The route climbs an obvious groove line up the left hand side of the vertical west wall of the spur. It starts 80m up the central couloir and reaches the Doug Scott spur at half height. The shallow groove was followed for 400m of continuous aid climbing up to A3 with the crux pitch involving a series of shallow blade placements. The wall was climbed over 5 days using fixed ropes to facilitate a return to base camp (one hours walk from the spur) each night.

On 27<sup>th</sup> July, Ally, Sam and Muir followed the fixed line to the ridge, cleaning all the fixed ear as they went. The original route was then followed at about VS, with one short section of A2, to reach the summit at 11am on the 28<sup>th</sup> July. Descent was by abseil down the back (SE) side of the spur until some loose scrambling takes you back to the Choktoi glacier. The rock on the west wall was generally excellent granite with the occasional large loose flake to contend with.

A one day, alpine ascent of the right-hand spur (800m) was attempted by Sam and Ally but they bailed off at half height due to an underestimation of route length. HVS.

**Hanipispor (6047m). South-West Face**

The approach to the obvious shoulder west of the main summit involved a long and arduous scramble up loose, time consuming moraine and scree (3 hours). The col makes an ideal high camp from which to attempt the summit from this side. An attempt on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> July by Chinnery, Coull and Crampton was unsuccessful due to poor acclimatisation and a broken stove.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> July the entire team established camp on the col. In deteriorating weather, Chinnery, Coull, Long and Crampton set off up the obvious snow ramp gaining their

previous high point, continuing for approximately another 300m of steeper snow (45-50 degrees) until forced onto a rock rib on the right. Two mixed pitches (Scottish IV) led to a steep wall with no obvious line of weakness. With the weather worsening, the party choose to descend. The presence of two pegs and some tat suggested this had been a high point for another previous attempt (possibly Richey and Bouchard, USA, 1998).

### **Other Rock Routes**

The weather pattern allowed a number of shorter outings on some of the fine granite slabs situated around the Choktoi Glacier. The potential for such routes is pretty limitless and most attempts involved climbing to a high point in the available light/weather and abseiling back to terra firma.

Long, Crampton and Morton climbed a 3 pitch route on a subsidiary spur west of the main twin spurs opposite base camp. The route followed a shallow groove in the centre of the wall. This led to a narrow chimney which reached the crest via a short leftwards traverse. Aid was employed on the first pitch at an overall grade of about HVS A1.

The large pyramidal face a little further up the south bank of the glacier (identifiable by a prominent spike/tower on its summit) seemed to offer a wealth of possibility. The slabby granite however was not particularly accommodating for protection and many tempting lines ended in apparent dead ends. Crampton and Hollinger followed an obvious series of grooves up the centre of the face, trending rightwards towards a large chimney system. They enjoyed 5 superbly long and varied pitches involving steep cracks, blank slabs and ribs and some entertaining overlaps (HVS/E1). The upper cracks however were quite vegetated and would require extensive gardening to be enjoyed. This seemed a shame as they contained some of the most colourful plants we saw (enjoying the liberal seepage and shade!). Long and Crampton followed a similar line but got no higher. The cracks offered perfect nut and friend protection - the rest offered bold run-outs!

There were some obvious slabs on the north side of the glacier directly beneath Choktoi Peak, about 1km east of our base camp. Beneath was a large area of flat sandy gravel. This might make a superb base camp, however access to the glacier would involve negotiating endless moraine and a continuous water supply did not appear to be readily available. Morton and Long took a fairly direct line up the centre of the slabs for about 16 pitches. They choose a line which was fairly sustained at about VS though not very well protected. They reached easier broken ground and descended by abseil.

## 6. Other Objectives

Clearly there is a great deal of potential for future expeditions to the Choktoi glacier. The big peaks on the true right (south) side of the glacier are all very steep and imposing with few, if any, "easy lines". Latok IV has an amazingly complex north face but it is riddled with hanging serac bands which frequently shed large chunks of debris. The west face of Latok III looked climable, but again a long approach through narrow icefalls and under serac bands did not inspire confidence. For a party prepared to brave the approach, the north spur of Latok III might be realistically attempted with many days of food and a big wall mentality.

Latok I's North Ridge is obvious. This impressive ridge has been tried by numerous teams and would seem to require an exceptionally long spell of good weather for a realistic bid. There is a distinct ice line to the left of the north ridge. This line looks stunning, following a large open groove/rampline but we did not study it long enough to observe how objectively safe it would be. It is likely that the line would involve some long sections of mixed ground too. Again, the approach was threatened by seracs and a gaping bergschrund.

At the head of the glacier, the Ogre stands invitingly. A couple of our team went to scope an obvious line leading rightwards onto the north shoulder. Snow conditions on the glacier prevented a close inspection but the icefall guarding the entrance to the very head of the glacier looked complicated. Getting porters to venture this far (2 days) up the glacier might prove problematic!

The north side of the glacier is much more friendly and is composed of smaller peaks with a lot more exposed granite around. There are some very nice looking peaks with sizeable east faces tucked to the west of Biacherahi Tower but we were unable to get a good look at the approaches. Similarly, there is a short chain of peaks running south from Biacherahi Tower all of which have large, steep granite faces. Rockfall may be a deterrent on these aspects. Most impressive is the east face of Biacherahi Tower itself. This is undoubtedly one of the most striking features looking up the glacier. We met two Norwegians going in to try at as we left but don't know how they got on.

Opposite this 'tooth' there is another large prominent triangular buttress which is probably unclimbed. You could easily come to the Choktoi and have a great trip just rock climbing with endless new route potential on walls and ridges up to 800metres high.

Possibly the best single objective we saw, which would be very suitable for those not wanting to do any thing too gnarly, would be the south ridge of Choktoi Peak (Possibly called Trident Peak). This is shown as a 6166 metre spot height to the SE of Hanispur on the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research map. To get on to the ridge involves a snow gully but the ridge itself looks to be perfect granite for about 800 metres. Some parts are quite steep and might require a bit of aid but we thought that about four days on the ridge might do it.

## 7. Equipment

We had pre-purchased a total of 40 gas cylinders from Frontier Remote Location Services before leaving the UK. Members of the expedition used the popular Markill hanging stoves which were temperamental at best, even after modification. The burner is the main problem - the stock version having no form of preheating. The Biblier version proved more reliable, if heavier, but everyone experienced some frustration with cartridges which were somewhat inconsistent in terms of longevity.

We took out 2 x 50m 8.5/9mm ropes per team plus two spares. We also had 100m of static 9mm. This was used to fix sections of the aid route on the Indian Spur. All fixed rope was cleaned before we left.

Each team had what amounted to a large Scottish winter mixed rack. Additional pegs and ice screws were available as were a couple of enormous camming units (which were useful). In reality, most attempts (with the exception of the Indian Spur) used a small alpine rack consisting a set of nuts, a few pegs, a few cams, a couple of ice-screws and 8-10 extenders. We probably had too much hardware in total, but this maximised the options for each team.

## 8. Equipment Sponsors

**Lowe Alpine** - the expedition was awarded £2000 worth of equipment. All members of the expedition used a variety of gear from the Lowe Alpine stable. All the Dry-Flo stuff was superb and the powerstretch gear was highly recommended.

**Vango** - we were loaned two Odyssey 300's for use on the trek and at base camp. These were perfect base camp tents being both comfortable and roomy. They seemed, however, unnecessarily complicated with many gadgety "bits" that looked like obvious points of weakness. As per usual, a more robust, albeit heavier, groundsheet would have been a benefit.

**Lyon Equipment** - through the expedition award scheme we had £500 which was spent on a variety of gear including necessities like torch batteries, ropes and hardware 'bits'.

**Rab** - as expected, all the Rab down gear kept us toasty warm when required. The survival zone bivies never really got used in earnest but provided extra assurance at high camps especially against scalding hot brews and soup.

**CCC Outdoors** - We were kindly donated a CCC Family 6. This massive family camping tent was by no means lightweight but once erected it was as good as bomb-proof, easily withstanding the rigours of basecamp. It can be thoroughly recommended as an inexpensive (almost disposable) alternative to other hotel-type base camp accommodation.

**Moonstone** - fleece, down and thermals were all used by members of the expedition. Those with the sleeping bags were particularly hard to get out of bed in the morning!

## 10. Food

Most of our food for the mountain was purchased in the UK. This included snack bars (NutriGrain, Fruit and Nut, Snickers etc), packet soups, potato powder. We managed to get a special deal on 200 flapjacks from a local bakery. We also bought a load of instant chocolate drinks and coffee along with jumbo packs of condiments (ketchup, mayo, mint sauce). These were well worth having both on the hill and at base camp. A total of around £300 was spent before we left.

Most of the rest of our food was bought in Pakistan. We bought a lot of food in Rawalpindi as it worked out cheaper and the rest (mostly staples) in Skardu. Knowing the location of a decent (big) supermarket is a great help on the "one-stop-shop" strategy. We didn't, and this meant several trips around Rawalpindi and Islamabad which seemed unnecessarily tedious. (Apparently one does exist).

We had assumed our cook would have a good idea as to how much food we should take with us, allowing for their own preferences. Do not make this assumption. We probably calculated about right - but overestimated days on the mountain. This meant there were unlimited 'treats' at base camp which promoted gluttony but at least meant none of us was short of calories.



## 14. Budget/Finance

We are very grateful to the organisations and companies who supported our expedition. For simplicity, all costings in the financial summary have been converted to £'s. It is worth noting that the value of the Rupee tends to fluctuate quite a lot and so any calculations should be used as a relative guide only. We got, on average, 85 Rupees per £1. The rate was best in Rawalpindi and we carried all our funds as US Dollars.

<u>Income</u>	£	<u>Expenditure</u>	£
Nick Escourt Award	1000	In UK	
MEF Grant	1000	Flights	3872
M C of S Grant	1500	Visas	320
Lowe Alpine Award	1000	Medical	118
BMC Grant	1000	Gas	346.50
Lyon Equipment Award	500	Food	293.70
		Insurance	1280
Personal Contributions	10000	Communal Gear	1240
(8 x £1250)		Cook/LO equipment	250
		Sundries	8.80
		In Pakistan	
		Hotels (inc.food)	518
		Buses	350
		Jeeps	210
		Exped. Food	1004
		Permit	869
		Agent Fee	280
		Agent Admin/Sundries	118
		Cook+Ass. Cook	353
		Liasion Officer	400
		Porters (inc.insurance)	2829
		Fuel	30
		Environmental Fund	179
		LO/Cook equipment	120
		Sundries	11
		Excess baggage	1000
	16000		16000

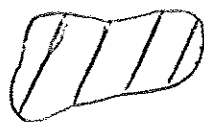
# Latok III, North Spur



Approach



Lines of constant serac collapse



Area covered by single serac fall