

British Mazeno Ridge Expedition 2012 REPORT

Members: Sandy Allan (Leader), Rick Allan, Cathy O'Dowd, Lhakpa Rangdu Sherpa, Lhakpa Zarok Sherpa and Lhakpa Nuru Sherpa

Nanga Parbat, the most westerly of the Himalayan giants is the 9th highest eight thousand metre peak. Isolated from both the Karakoram peaks to the north and from the Himalayas (to which, geologically, it belongs) to the east, Nanga Parbat stands alone, reflecting the likely derivation of its name from the Sanskrit Nanga Paravat, "naked mountain". Rising from the gorge of the Indus river its Rupal face forms the greatest vertical interval from valley floor to summit in the world. The earliest true attempt to climb it was in 1895 when Albert Mummery, with Geoffrey Hastings and J. Norman Collie first made a reconnaissance of the huge Rupal Face, which they thought unclimbable. They then crossed the Mazeno Pass and prospected the Diamir Face. Holding the opinion that the Diamir Face looked more promising, Mummery explored a feature now known as the "Mummery Rib" with two Ghurkhas (Ragobir and Goman Singh), who had arrived with Major Charles Bruce to offer support to the other three men. Mummery's team was forced to turn back at 6100 m. Mummery felt that one more long day would have been sufficient for them to force a route to the summit, which perhaps showed that he did not truly appreciate what they were up against, but then again perhaps reflected his positive attitude and optimism. Mummery and his two Ghurkhas then set off to cross the Diamo pass and were never seen again. The first ascent was achieved by Herman Buhl in 1953. Since then most of the ridges and faces have been climbed however the Mazeno or west ridge, has been such a formidable undertaking that it has remained unclimbed in its entirety until now.

Attempts on the Mazino Ridge:

1979: Jean Pierre Fresafond, led a group of 23 French climbers and two Pakistani s fixed lot of rope and apparently reached a minor peak above the Mazeno pass.

1986: Three Basque climbers, Jose Luis Zuloaga, Kike de Pablo and Alberto Posada reached 6950m. almost to the summit of the highest seven Mazeno peaks by the North West Flank , they climbed for nine days but were turned back by bad weather.

1992: Doug Scott lead an international team with Valeri Pereshine, Serge Efimov, Alan Hinks, Sean Smith, Ang Phurba and Nga Temba where they climbed: Pt. 6880, Pt. 6825 and Pt. 6970 then retreated. Prior to this they climbed the Schell route to above the Mazeno gap and left a small stash.

1993: Doug Scott tried again with no further ground gained.

1995: Doug Scott led another expedition with Sandy Allan, Wojciech Kurtyka, Andrew Lock and Rick Allan. The expedition managed to traverse the first part of the ridge.

1997: Wojciec Kurtyka and Erhard Loretan climb high in a day and a half but retreated with no new ground gained.

2004: Americans Doug Chabot and Steve Swenson traversed all the Mazeno peaks to the Mazino Gap taking in all the main summits but stopped by exhaustion they descended the Schell Route.

2005: A Swiss expedition led by Jean Troillet made a failed attempt.

2008: Luis Stitzinger and Joseph Lunger from Germany ascended from the Diamir side and climbed through to the Mazeno Gap. Deep snow and lack of supplies forces them down by the Messner solo Diamir route.

2011: Basque climbers led by Alberto Zeerain approached from the Diamir side, but did not manage to crest the ridge.

Time line and description:

In the early morning of the 10th June 2012 all the British Mazeno Ridge Expedition 2012 members met up in Islamabad, Sandy Allan and Cathy O'Dowd had just flown in from the UK. Rick Allan had arrived from his home in Australia several days before and the three Sherpas, Lhakpa Rangdu, Lhakpa Zarok and Lhakpa Nuru had flown in from Nepal. With Rick Allen assisted by our Islamabad agent they assembled all our expedition equipment ready for departure and loaded it into a private bus. We drove along the Karakorum Highway to Chilas arriving at 10.00pm.

On the 11th June we drove by Jeep from Chilas to Tareshing and on the 12th we recruited porters and trekked to Latabo camp. By the 14th June we arrived at the Mazeno ridge high base camp which was at an altitude of 4900 meters experiencing some difficulty with the mules in the deep late season snow.

Note: This was change to our original plans, as previously we intended to go to the Diamir side of the mountain and climb the Diamir face to 6600 meters approximately. Where we hoped to acclimatise and then move around to the Mazeno base camp. However several days before departure we decided that this would be unproductive and very costly, so we decided to go direct to the Mazeno side of the mountain. The only slight problem with this change of plan was that we the western members (S. Allan, R. Allen, and C. O'Dowd) of our team had to acclimatise and due to deep snow and lack of time, it was simpler and more efficient to focus our attention on the Mazeno ridge rather than climb on other peaks.

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We realised that it would mean that we could no longer have a pure alpine style ascent, although it remained our intention and we did endeavour to keep our expedition as light and as close to Alpine style as was safe and reasonably practical to do so. On the 17th June we made our first main foray on the mountain and climbed to the first col at about 5650m, took a tent for future use and returned to base camp. On the 18th the three western climbers went back up to a high point and then slept at 5650m metres and descended the next day.

As we were going up and down to acclimatise we decided to fix some rope on the steeper technical section of our approach and the Sherpa's did much of this work fixing isolated sections up to camp 1. Above camp 1 no fixed ropes were used although on some of the technical pinnacles on the Mazeno ridge we utilised two 50m dynamic ropes to temporary fix sections with deep unconsolidated snow or very exposed ground, the team in front fixing 50 to 80 metres at time of our dynamic climbing rope and then the last team clearing the ropes and anchors as they came along in a sort of capsule style. Mainly we climbed in three teams of two people with a separate 50 meter dynamic rope per team of two, always keeping all teams in sight and usually we were all close and moving together apart from the steep technical sections where we belayed each other.

By the 21st June we (the western climbers) had gone up to 6200m and the three Lhakpa Sherpa's helped with breaking trail and fixing some short sections between pinnacles. The Sherpa's descended back to Base camp and the three western climbers spent another night at the temporary acclimatising camp at 5650m before moving up and sleeping at Camp 1, 6150m on the night of the 22nd June. On the 25th June the Sherpa's went up to 6400m and took some equipment and left a stash there. On the 26th June The three western climber members then went up to 6150 m camp and then 6400m camp 2 and on descent struck the temporary acclimatising camp at 5650m and took everything back to base camp. We then rested at base camp, did some bouldering and relaxed and after a day or two felt that we were acclimatised, rested and ready for the main attempt.

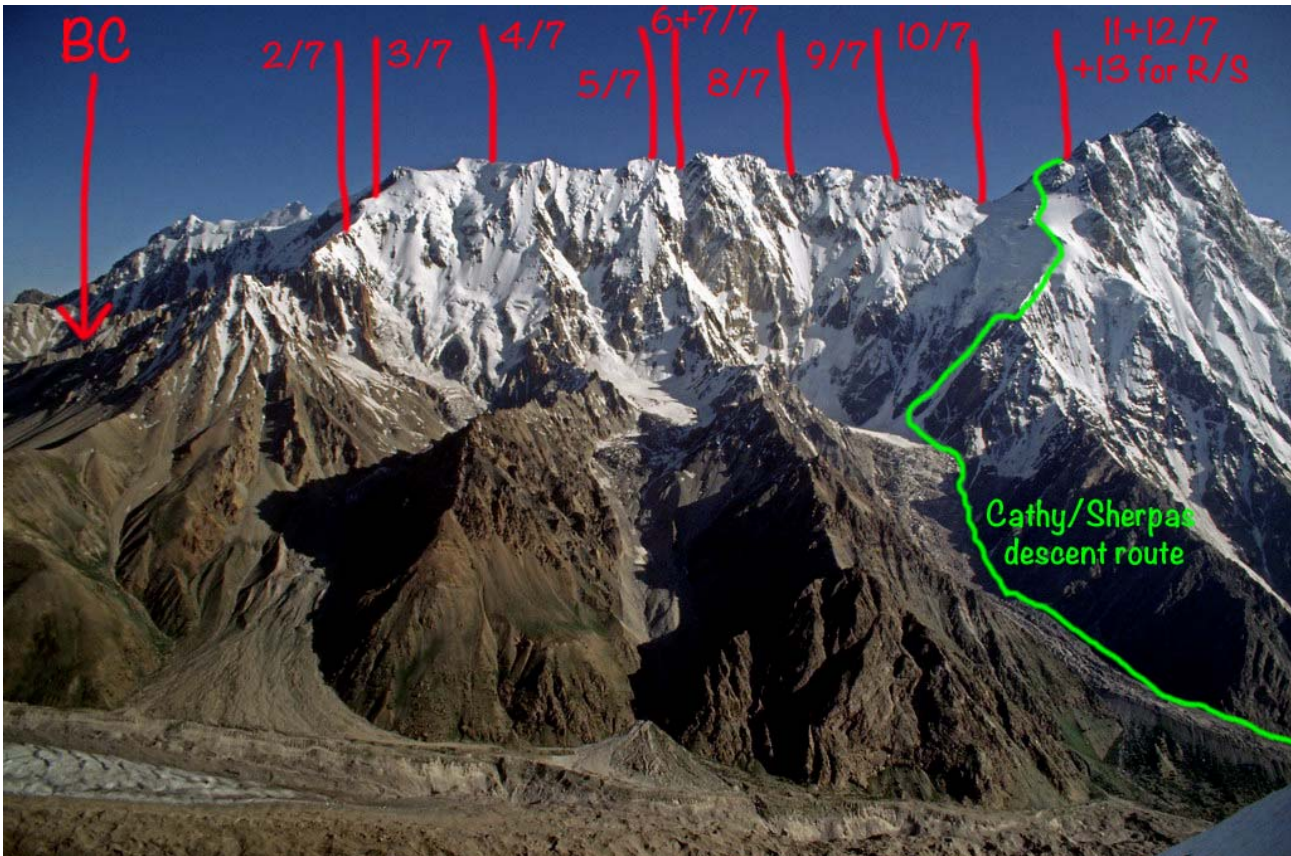
On the 2nd of June the three western members of our team Sandy Allan, Rick Allen and Cathy O'Dowd moved up to C1 and slept there at 6150m.

The Sherpa's left base camp and moved up to camp 2 and were joined on the 3rd by S. Allan, R. Allen and C. O'Dowd and all slept at Camp 2, 6400m. From now on we would call the new camps, bivouac camps, as they were only there when the climbing team were there and stripped and carried along each day movement was made. Due to the depth of snow and to avoid having to carry the ropes we decided to move in teams of two. Cathy O'Dowd paired up with Lhakpa Rangdu Sherpa. Lhakpa Nuru and Lhakpa Zarok paired up together and Sandy Allan and Rick Allen climbed together with the three teams of two persons using one 50m dynamic rope per team. In addition we carried two more 50m ropes and some abseiling accessory cord and a small rack of chocks, some titanium pegs and ice screws, plus 32 Cylinders of gas and approximately 25 Kg of food. In addition we carried our personal daily equipment and cameras etc. Cathy O'Dowd carried the necessary equipment, satellite phone and spare batteries to receive weather forecasts and update our web site www.mazenoridge.com.

For the next days we all moved as one team, getting up in the morning around 5.00-6.00 am. , striking the three two person bivouac tents, packing sacks and usually we were moving by around 7.00 to 9.30 am. Initially the climbing was straight forward on a whale back ridge but with deep snow, Rick Allen fell into a bergschrund but was roped to Sandy Allan who helped to extract him. At one particular location on the ridge we experienced static electricity which caused us stinging heads and scalps and some alarm but we simply kept moving and got away from it.

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We tried to plan our camp sites so that they were on flat and sheltered areas but as the climbing got more complex on rock ridges this became hard to do. As a consequence some days we only moved for four to six hours as initially were more concerned with preserving our energy and tried to prevent ourselves from getting over tired by doing repeated long hard days. We had decided at the outset that it was going to be a long hard climb and that to reach the Mazeno gap we would need to look after our selves so that we hoped to have suitable energy so as to continue on to the summit assuming we were able to reach the Mazeno Gap. We endeavoured to do this by having reasonable mountain days so that we would have time to pitch good tent sights, eat and drink well.



This picture (Image 1) shows the approximate bivi locations prior to S. Allan and R. Allen moving onto the Diamir side of the mountain (these other bivis are shown in an image below)

BC – Base Camp

The point shown as 2/7 and 3/7 are the sights of Camp 1 and Camp 2 and these were used for acclimatisation purposes and are consequently referred to as camps rather than bivis.

2/7 is the date: eg. 2nd of July 2012 and the dates follow along thereafter.

The line in green is the approximate route that the three Lhakpa Sherpa's with Cathy O'Dowd descended on the 13th July from the site of our bivi marked 11/12/13/7.

Note: In this report we have been referring to this green line as the Schell route however it should be noted that it is not actually the exact line of the climb.

Bivi marked as 11/12/13/7 is the location of the bivi from where we launched our first summit attempt as a whole group of six climbers. We then all slept at that camp again on the night of the 12 and then on the morning of the 13th June 2012 S. Allan and R. Allen decided to stay high while the three Lhakpa Sherpa's and C. O'Dowd descended. This is detailed later in this report. On the 14th July Sandy Allan and Rick Allen abandoned this bivi tent and went for their second and successful summit attempt.

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Image 2 below: the Mazeno ridge viewed from the Diamir face of Nanga Parbat.

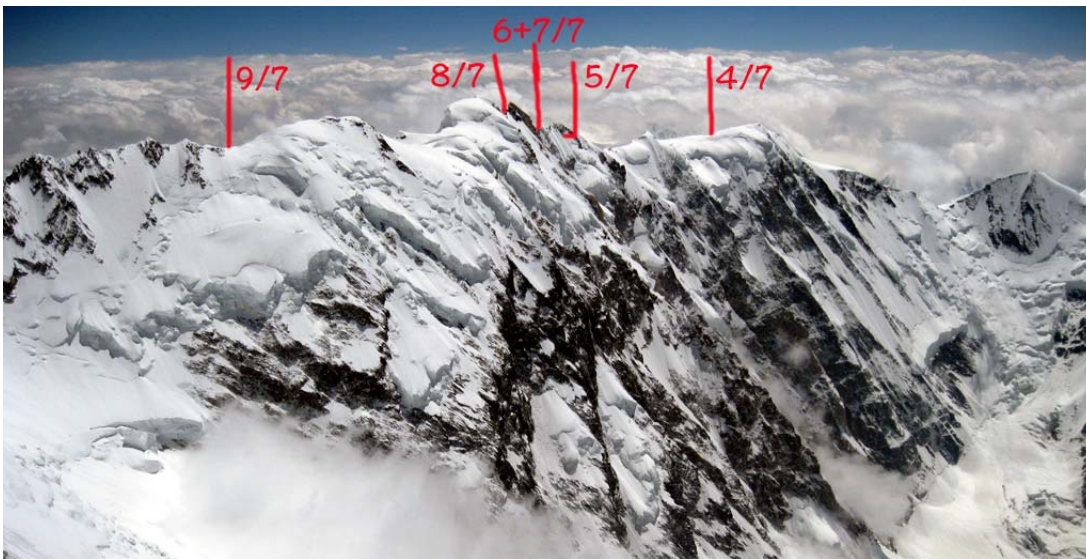


Image 3: shows the location of bivis and routes taken by this expedition.

- Orange line shows the first summit attempt on the 12th July with Sandy Allan, Rick Allan, Cathy O'Dowd, Lhakpa Rangdu, Lhakpa Zarok and Lhakpa Nuru.
- Yellow line shows approximate line of retreat back to bivi 7160m.
- Red Line shows route taken by Sandy Allan and Rick Allen on the 14th and 15th July with a snow cave bivi at 7720m which was used in ascent and descent.
- Green Line shows the descent route taken after the successful summit attempt and is the Kingshoffer route on the Diamir face.
- Yellow arrows indicate bivi sites at 7160m and 7720m.

DIARY ENTRY

04 July 2012: In three ropes of two climbers as described above we moved from camp 2 to bivi 1 at 6800m.

05 July 2012: from 6800m bivi 1 we continued along the ridge, got into technical ground on steep unconsolidated snow. While in the lead Lhakpa Nuru lost his footing and fell. He was roped to Lhakpa Zarok who was being rather casual with his belaying skills and Lhakpa Nuru slid almost the full 50m rope length into very deep snow. He was not hurt and climbed up around 20 meters but the snow was very deep and unconsolidated so we decided to meet him half way. This used up quite a bit of time and we still found us climbing on very technical and steep ground at 5.30pm. We decided to bivi and had a forced bivi at approximately 6800m. With considerable determination a ledge was carved out to provide a platform to erected one bivi tent used by S. Allan and C .O'Dowd. R. Allen and Lhakpa Rangdu managed to dig a open snow shelter and Lhakpa Zarok and Lhakpa Nuru slept on a small ledge using the tent fabric as a cover over their sleeping bags.

06 July 2012: A poor night was had by RA, LR, LZ and LN. C. O'Dowd was vomiting and did not have good night. We woke around 7.00 am and lost some time de-rigging our climbing ropes around the various bivi locations and then technical steep climbing led us to a col in about four hours. A short day, we pitched the three bivi tents and rested. According to Cathy's "Spot" meter the latitude was 35.22116/ Longitude 74.53846 altitude 6840m (Note:this information was not available to us at the time and could only be down loaded back in Europe/UK where we had ample facilities.eg. computer, electricity and internet)

07 July 2012: bad forecast with high winds so we did not move and remained at the same bivi site.

08 July 2012: From the col 6840m we continued on difficult ground with some climbing, abseiled down a very awkward rock step, leaving our spare rope hanging down the line of our abseil in case of future retreat and continued on to bivi, a long hard day. We referred to this bivi as the pre Mazeno peak bivi.

09 July 2012: pre-Mazeno Peak bivi to pre-pinnacles bivi

Woke up at 7.00 and had a slow start. Crossed over Mazeno peak and both Ricks and Cathy's altimeter showed it to be just over 7000 metres but we had now been climbing for a number of days so were not convinced that our altimeters were accurate. Our weather forecasts from Andorra met office were forecasting winds and some snow fall so the pressure was probably quite variable. We pitched the three bivi tents at around 1300 hours, later heavy snow fell. According to Cathy's "Spot" meter the Latitude was 35.22703/ Longitude 74.55848 Altitude 7040m

10 July 2012: pre-pinnacles bivi to Mazeno gap bivi.

It took us eleven hours to get through the pinnacles; we followed the crest all the way. As there was six of us in our team with heavy rucksacks we utilised some capsule style rope work with two 50 m dynamic ropes with the leaders semi fixing rope and the followers stripping it .We had two abseils of 50 meters. We did find one piece of old accessory cord /tat along the way. Arriving at our new bivi site just before the Mazeno gap just as the sun set.

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We did not find the climbing easy, up to Scottish grade IV (Alpine, ED) and was not as hard as reported by Chabot and Swensen (2004 attempt) and assume that this was mainly due to the good snow cover. (At the time of writing this report I have not read anything referring the grade of climbing from the 2008 German team Stitzinger and Lunger).

11 July 2012: Mazeno gap bivi to bivi at 7160m

We woke around 08.00am and were moving by 10.30am. The ground was relatively straight forwards initially but higher there was some technical climbing over rock steps and up a steep couloir to reach our bivi site at around 2.30 pm. We pitched the three bivi tents. Our food supplies were becoming very low and these Sherpa's complained about this.

12 July 2012: We woke up at 11.30pm on the night of the 11th and then were ready to leave our bivi at around 1.00am on the 12th. Leaving our tents, sleeping bags, stoves etc. at the bivi site the team chose to take a steep, technical line trying to follow the min summit ridge to the summit. With Lhakpa Nuru and Lhakpa Rangdu initially front, by head torch light moving together in our three ropes of two persons we headed steeply upward, initially on snow but with some mixed climbing, once onto the rock ridge we traversed steeply up with amazing exposure over the Rupal face. Steep couloirs took us to a summit arriving in the first light of morning. In the daylight we could see that if we tried to follow along the ridge crest it would be difficult, exposed and hard climbing. Lhakpa Nuru was despondent and Cathy O'Dowd felt similar and was also cold, quite exhausted and wished to retreat. Lhakpa Rangdu then unroped from Cathy and then Cathy roped up with Lhakpa Nuru. Lhakpa Rangdu teamed up with Lhakpa Zarok. We could see a couloir down and ahead and all members descended this with some difficult exposed down climbing. Lhakpa Nuru and Cathy were not getting on well as a team and Cathy was very tired and they retreated back to bivi 7160m, arriving there by around 0930am. The remaining four climbed on, finding some difficult very exposed climbing on a steep rock wall with loose rock, we then came to a high glacier and traversed this reaching our high point, (refer to Orange line shown in Image 3 above). It was around 11.00 am and the rock wall above was very steep and technical and still did not lead directly to the summit so we decided to abandon our attempt and return to camp 7160m. We were not sure of the best return route but knew it would be difficult to descend the steep loose rock wall and route we had taken on ascent. The yellow line in the photo above shows our descent route which involved a tricky traverse down climbing on a narrow bench (some old pegs and aged rope were seen) with insecure axe and crampon placements. It was then a relatively easy traverse back to a high col above the site of bivi 7160m. During this traverse at the point marked with an X on the above photo Lhakpa Zarok was seconding Lhakpa Rangdu. Lhakpa Zarok missed his footing and fell, and his sliding fall pulled Lhakpa Rangdu who had efficiently kicked his feet in to a stance to try to hold the fall. The force of the fall catapulted Rangdu off his feet and both slid down about 350 - 400 meters bringing them close to the line Messner solo route on the Diamir face. Watching, I thought, that they were not going to come to halt and continue their fall all the way down, however their line of slide took them to a hollow where they stopped sliding. They were not hurt and could move. Rick and I continued on our traverse and moved lower so as to help the two Lhakpa and when we met up they were badly shaken and appreciated their good fortune! We continued to the col where we found the remains of an old stash which contained some very old dried fruit and a few tinned goods. We then crossed the col and down climbed with a short abseil on very loose rock back to the bivi at 7160m just on darkness. Discussions in our bivi tents indicated that we were all tired. The three Sherpa's and Cathy O'Dowd had their mind made up to descend the via the Schell route with all its dangers. Rick and I agreed and then we settled for the night.

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13 July 2012: The three Lhakpa were up early and wanted to descend, and woke us up. I had slept well so discussed this with the other and they decided that Cathy O'Dowd and the three Lhakpas would descend via the Schell route and Sandy Allan and Rick Allen would remain at 7160 and they would either rest and descending later or continuing for another summit attempt. We struck two of the bivi tents and Rick moved into share the remaining bivi tent with Sandy Allan. Cathy O'Dowd gave Sandy Allan her Satellite phone. The batteries were low so it was agreed that we would only use it for minimum communication to base camp where there was another satellite phone discussing that we would only need three calls or texts. One to say what S. Allan and R. Allen's intentions were (retreat or try again for the summit). A second call or message to say if the summit was reached and finally a call to confirm our descent route and where to send shoes, valley clothing and some food for the walk out.

The others began their descent around 10.00 am. There was very little food left.

14 July 2012: The three Sherpa's and Cathy O'Dowd reached base camp which had been move from the original Mazeno col base camp site down to Latabo village near the foot of the Schell route. They had encountered some huge avalanches C. O'Dowd lost the memory card from her camera in an avalanche. Lhakpa Rangdu had twisted his ankle (it was later established on his return to Kathmandu that it was broken)

Sandy Allan and Rick Allen woke up early at 7160m and leaving the bivi tent and insulating mats behind (as they had not decided on their descent route at this time but were thinking mainly about descending via the Kinshofer route on Diamir side of the mountain which they hoped was partly fixed to allow a rapid descent). They set off by head torch light to the col above the bivi site and took the Red line shown in the above Image 3. It had snowed and had been windy so all the tracks from their descent of the 12 July were covered. It became obvious that the summit was a long way away so on joining the line of Kinshofer route, they continued to climb and at 7720m on the Kinshofer route by 5.00pm and dug a snow cave with ice axes and spent the night there.

15th July 2012: The three Lhakpas, C. O'Dowd and the base camp staff walked to Tareshing, took Jeeps to Chilas arriving at the hotel at midnight where they remained until the 21 July. From the snow cave at 7720m with the remaining one biscuit each for breakfast Sandy Allan and Rick Allen continued in deep snow to the summit of Nanga Parbat. The going was very difficult in deep snow. Arriving at the summit area at around 2.00pm in poor visibility they could not find the true summit. (Note: they had both summited in 2009 and new the area) . They wandered about descending and ascending several tops but could not find the actual true summit. The clouds cleared and eventually after a lot of ascent and backtracking located the actual summit with the peg and wire at 1812 hours. After some photographs including some with a self-timer, descended back to the snow cave at 7720m. The last half hour of the descent was by head torch light. Once settled in the snow cave they could not get the stove to light and food was down to biscuit crumbs only and couple of boiled sweets.

16th July 2012: Sandy Allan and Rick Allen descended in very difficult snow down to the approximate site of Kinshofer camp 4. Visibility was bad and Sandy broke trail and navigated by compass. We passed the camp location and climbed to a small ridge as it was also snowing and there were many small avalanches threatening the camp 4 site. This descent took 6 hours or so, which was very slow due to the deep snow and fatigue from not having anything to drink or eat.

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A snow cave bivi was dug at 7400 m approximately which was very small and the satellite phone batteries died. There was no food or water.

17 July 2012: From the snow cave at 7400m they descended in very deep and unstable snow to above several hundred meters above the Kinshofer camp 2 site. Their 50m dynamic rope was used for some 25 m abseils down hard bare glassy ice below the Kinshofer camp 3 site and bad visibility prevented further descent as they could not see which way to descend. A bivi ledge was cut at around 6300m in failing light. Secured to ice screws they spent the night there. It was cold with some spindrift and they were without food or drink.

18th July 2012: Visabilty had improved and we abseiled two abseils and then down climbed to the site of Kinshofer camp 2 where Sandy Allan changed out of his down suit and let Rick Allen slept for almost an hour. Continuing down climbing together roped up we came to the belay at the top of the Kinshofer wall. There we met a Mark Holecek and Zdenek Hruby .They gave us a drink from their flasks and Sandy Allan borrowed a lighter and melted snow which both drank. The Czechs gave us two snicker bars and a high sugar bar which we ate . The Czechs continued up to camp 2 where they wanted to acclimatise for another climb they were planning on the Rupal face later in the season. Sandy Allan and Rick Allen abseiled down the Kinshofer wall and then down climbed to the Kinshofer camp 1 arriving at 11.45pm. The technical climbing all over on descent they were please to reach camp 1. Our Pakistan staff had reached camp 1 and pitched one tent and prepared soup and tea. The night was spent there.

18 July 2012: Awake at 0500 hours after a quick breakfast of tea and biscuits we struck our tent and walked back to base camp. En route we met our Sirdar and cook boy who presented us with garlands of flowers and soon after we arrived at the Czech base camp at 08.00am. There were other Czech climbers and their Pakistani staff who were extremely kind to us, providing food and drinks and some medical treatment for our semi frozen toes and fingers.

The day was spent resting and feeding. We sent our Sirdar to buy a goat at the local village to show our appreciation for the Czechs help. Late that evening the two Czech climbers Holecek and Hruby returned from camp 2 and we enjoyed a huge dinner party prepared by all the Pakistani staff.

20 July 2012: Up at 0500 hours, walked out in 12 hours which is very slow on partially frozen and numb feet to Halal bridge, took jeeps to the main road side and transport back to Chilas where we met the rest of our team including Cathy O'Dowd and the three Lhakpas.

21 July 2012: Departed Chilas by private bus arriving at Islamabad at 11.00pm.

22 July 2012: Sandy Allan and Cathy O'Dowd flew back to UK.

23 July 2012: Rick Allen and the three Lhakpas departed Islamabad on flights back to their homes.

We take this opportunity to thank:

- Mohammad Ali of Adventure Pakistan: our agent and good friend who providing all local arrangements and excellent staff.
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- Cathy O'Dowd for an excellent expedition web site and continual news updates.
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