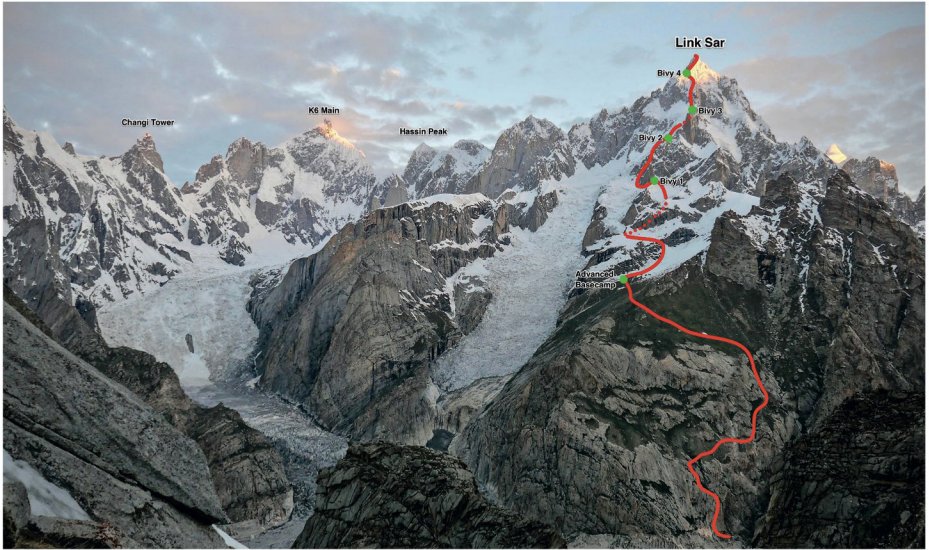


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ALEX MATHIE

## Pakistan 2019



The line of the first ascent of Link Sar (7041m) and high on the peak during the climb. See p258 for an account of this Piolet d'Or-winning climb.  
*(Graham Zimmerman)*

Teams from around the world continued to capitalise on improved access in the Pakistani Karakoram, with expeditions to the rarely-visited Hindu Raj and the Yarkhun valley as well as to more popular destinations like the Charakusa and Baltoro Muztagh, and of course perennial attempts on 8,000m peaks in both summer and winter. Particular highlights of the 2019 season included a new route on Gasherbrum II, the first ascent of Link Sar via the south-east face, and the first ascent of Koyo Zom's west face.

In May, a French team visited the Yarkhun valley, where they made the first ascent of **Risht Peak** (5960m). They found good quality rock with excellent protection, and noted the number of unclimbed peaks in the area and the potential for new routes.

The team comprised Symon Welfringer, Aurélien Vaissière, Pierrick Fine and Antoine Rolle. Risht Peak sits right at the end of the Risht glacier and has hardly been visited since the 1980s and an increase in regional conflicts. Starting from a base camp at 3,000m, the team ski toured up the glacier for six days finishing at 5,600 before skiing down. They then found an excellent bouldering venue before returning back up the glacier, this time in two days,



High on Link Sar during the first ascent (*Graham Zimmerman*)

taking advantage of a short, three-day weather window to make two new routes climbing in two pairs. While Rolle and Vassière made the first ascent of *Sueurs chaudes* (150m 6c+ max) Fine and Welfringer discovered an incredibly beautiful and committing line. 'After the first part up easy snow slopes,' Welfringer reported, 'we encountered more difficult terrain with a pitch of ice up to 90° that we graded 5. The following pitch was the crux of the route, I managed to lead this and we estimate M6 with some tricky section past poor pro. Then followed amazing ice pitches were a bit easier but still really sustained up to the final ridge.' See Nepal notes for Welfringer's success on Tengi Ragi Tau.

In late June, Simon Messner made the first ascent of **Geshot Peak** (6200m), also known as Toshe III, solo, climbing from an advance base camp at 4,600m to the summit in just five and a half hours, in spite of having to break trail alone in knee-deep snow. The 29-year-old South Tyrolean mountaineer travelled to Pakistan with Günther Göberl, Robert Neumeyer and his father, Reinhold Messner, with the initial plan of climbing the mountain together, but due to difficult snow conditions the others chose not to continue. Messner said the weather was poor in June, with rain or snow almost every afternoon. 'What a beautiful mountain,' he said afterwards. 'The great thing was how happy the locals of Bunar valley were that their mountain had been climbed. On the way back I received wreaths of flowers in every village, that really made me happy!'

In July, Simon Messner joined Martin Sieberer, Philipp Brugger in the Bal-toro Muztagh, where they aimed to make the first ascent of Muztagh Tower's



Three view of Messner Junior. Simon Messner, right, with Martin Sieberer before their ascent of Black Tooth, the same pair on the summit, and Messner on the summit of Geshot Peak following his solo ascent. (*Simon Messner*)

**Black Tooth** (6719m) via the south-east ridge. They found the rock quality low on the ridge to be extremely poor, and instead reconnoitred a way to gain the upper south-east ridge via the south face of the Black Tooth. Brugger did not feel sufficiently acclimatised to attempt the route, so after resting in base camp, Sieberer and Messner climbed their chosen line in a five-day roundtrip, encountering difficulties up to M5. At the final bivouac before the summit, it became apparent that the route they had climbed could not be descended by means of abalakovs. Instead, they chose to traverse the summit and descend the French route, abandoning their tent and other equipment at the bivouac.



The line of Messner's route on Geshot Peak (6200m). (*Simon Messner*)

In September, a British team comprising Tom Livingstone, Will Sim, Uisdean Hawthorn, Ally Swinton and John Crook visited the Hindu Raj, with the aim of climbing new routes on **Koyo Zom** (6877m). Sim, Hawthorn and Crook spent five days attempting a new line on the north-east buttress, but were repelled by poor conditions. Livingstone and Swinton made the first ascent of Koyo Zom's west face over five days, overcoming extremely technical mixed terrain to forge a path through the headwall. The pair then descended Koyo Zom's eastern flank where, on their sixth day out from base camp, Swinton took a large fall into a hidden crevasse at 5,900m on the Pechus glacier, necessitating an emergency rescue by the Pakistani air force. Fortunately, both climbers were fine. They called their line *The Great Game* and graded it ED+ 1500m.

Arguably the most impressive feat of the 2019 season, however, was the first ascent of **Link Sar** (7041m) by a strong international team made up of two Himalayan veterans, Americans Steve Swenson and Mark Richey, and two young guns, Graham Zimmerman and Chris Wright. This was Swenson's third attempt on Link Sar, having tried it once in 2001 with George Lowe, Joe Terravecchia, Steve Larson, Andy Tuthill and Eric Winkelman, and again in 2017 with Zimmerman and Wright, when atrocious weather turned them around at 5,900m on the south-west face. This time, armed with a greater understanding of the mountain, the team opted for a line on the south-east Face, which Swenson and Zimmerman had spotted



The line of the first ascent of Black Tooth (6719m). (*Simon Messner*)

in 2015 while making the first ascent of nearby Changi Tower (6500m) with Scott Bennett. The south-east face weighs in at M6+, WI4, 90° and 2,300m. Swenson calls it 'one of the most complex and difficult routes I have ever climbed,' which is something coming from someone with Swenson's resumé.

Link Sar has been a sought-after prize for many talented alpinists over the years, being the target of some nine expeditions ranging back to 1979. Jonathan Griffith (who himself undertook three expeditions to Link Sar) reached the west summit (6938m) with Andy Houseman in 2015.

Perhaps the most impressive ascent on a Karakoram 8,000er this summer was Denis Urubko's new route on **Gasherbrum II** (8035m) in July, completed in an extremely minimalist style: largely solo, without supplemental oxygen



The British team under the impressive Koyo Zom (6877m). See page 3 for Tom Livingstone's account. *(Tom Livingstone)*

and in a 24-hour push from 6,350m to the summit. Urubko, now in his mid 40s, hit several obstacles that threatened to foil his plans, including a successful rescue on nearby Gasherbrum VII. Following that effort, Urubko participated in not one, but two further rescues, bringing his rescue total for the season to three and raising question marks about whether he had sufficient reserves to attempt a new route. To complicate matters further, Urubko's partner, María Cardel, injured her back earlier in the expedition. She was unable to join him.

Nonetheless, Urubko decided to go for it. He was certainly well acclimatised, having already summited once on 18 July. On 30 July, his birthday, Urubko made his way to camp one, accompanied through this

dangerous and unstable section by Canadian Don Bowie, the Finnish climber Lotta Hintsa and American Matthew James. During the evening of 31 July, Urubko continued up alone taking no satellite phone or radio.

July also saw the second phase of Nirmal Purja's astonishing ascent of all fourteen 8000ers in a single season. Across just 20 days, Purja made lightning-fast ascents of **Nanga Parbat** (July 6), **Gasherbrum I** (July 15), **Gasherbrum II** (July 18), **K2** (July 24) and **Broad Peak** (July 26) in a slightly less minimalist style than Urubko, using supplemental oxygen above 7,500m and helicopters to fly between base camps. See Nepal notes for further details.

The winter season was markedly less successful on the Karakoram 8,000ers. Simone Moro and Tamara Lunger abandoned their winter attempt on Gasherbrums I and II after Moro took a major fall into a crevasse, and Don Bowie and Lotta Nakyva were rescued from 6,600m on **Broad Peak** by the Pakistani air force. Denis Urubko, also on Broad Peak as part of the same expedition, abandoned his attempt at 7,400m after encountering high winds. A Polish team, attempting to make the first winter ascent of **Batura Sar** (7795m), turned around at 6,600m due to heavy snowfall and high winds.