

Pumari Chhish Expedition 2000

Press release: 18 June 2000

Avalanches hit Pumari Chhish team

For the second year running Julie-Ann Clyma and Roger Payne came face to face with extreme avalanche conditions while trying to make the first ascent of the South Face of Pumari Chhish in the Karakoram. On the first foray of the expedition onto the face the team were held up by bad weather. While trying to descend both climbers were swept off their feet by avalanches on several occasions and only careful belaying prevented them from being swept away or buried. To get out of the danger zone and rapidly deteriorating conditions the climbers had to re-ascend to a safe bivouac site and continue their descent the next day.

Julie-Ann Clyma said: "We had waited for the fresh snow to clear and were carefully descending a shallow coulior where the snow was reasonably stable. In the conditions it was difficult to find belays but the coulior was easy ground leading down to a steep wall. Having found one good rock belay we joined an extra 40m piece of a rope to one of our 60m ropes so we could create a belay point 100m lower down. From this point I was belaying Roger on our other 60m rope. Roger was about 40m below me trying to find a good anchor to abseil down the steep wall when unexpectedly the clouds parted allowing direct sun to heat the rock slabs above us and to our right. The temperatures rose dramatically triggering avalanches on the slabs above us. I disappeared under the first avalanche as the 100m of rope above me stretched and held. When I came up I was still holding the belay rope to Roger."

Roger Payne said: "With loose flakes lying on slabs and very thin ice under feet of old unconsolidated snow I was having difficulty finding a sound belay; then suddenly the whole slope above and around Julie-Ann avalanched, which was alarming to say the least. We went from a situation requiring sound judgement to minimise danger to a survival situation. Continuing down was not a wise option as the avalanches were being funnelled onto the descent route below, which traversed between steep rock walls above a multiple bergshroud and chaotic crevasse area. Hence, the only way to safety was to get above the avalanche release point which meant climbing back up the coulior and onto a ridge. As we went back up avalanches continued to hit us and I was partially buried once. We were very relieved to get back onto the ridge."

Next day the pair descended without further incident. Although there were two big releases from the serac bands that overshadow the approach to the South Face. Frustratingly for Clyma and Payne bad weather persisted throughout the entire expedition with snowfall literally every day and on many nights. Despite the bad weather Clyma and Payne explored the North branch of the Jutmal Glacier looking for alternative safer routes onto the East side of the peaks of Pumari

Chhish; but only found more avalanche swept slopes and dangerous seracs. Having explored all the options on Pumari Chhish from their base camp on the Jutmal Glacier the pair decided the best available option was for them to return down the Hispar and walk around Khunyang Chhish to try and reach Pumari from the North; and meanwhile for the Liaison Officer and Cook to organise porters and walk out with the base camp equipment. With very heavy loads of food and climbing equipment the pair trekked for some 80km around the Khunyang massif before accepting the persistent low cloud, rain and snow signalled the end of the expedition.

Julie-Ann Clyma said: "It is very frustrating on an expedition when you do not get a period of good weather lasting more than a few hours; and in continuing bad weather it is impossible to safely attempt a climb as long and difficult as Pumari Chhish. However, on an expedition all you can aim for is to try everything to get to the top as the weather and conditions allow; but to always make sure you can get down safely. It is disappointing not to have completed the route on Pumari Chhish, but for two years we have worked incredibly hard on this mountain and we have encountered some very dangerous conditions."

Roger Payne said: "No amount of good planning and preparation allows you to ignore the laws of nature: you simply cannot negotiate with bad weather and avalanches. However, it would be helpful if the regulations for expeditions were more flexible so that it is easy to accommodate changes in plans if prevailing weather and conditions make a particular objective un-advisable. Having said this, in this instance, because of the daily snowfall and avalanche conditions it would not have been possible to climb another nearby peak. Julie-Ann and I are very grateful to all those organisations and individuals who have supported and helped our two trips to Pumari Chhish."

Notes

- Clyma and Payne are grateful to the following for assistance and support:

British Mountaineering Council	Petzl
Mount Everest Foundation	Rab
UK Sport	Scarpa
Berghaus	Troll
Charlet Moser	Nazir Sabir Expeditions
Lyon Equipment	Pakistan International Airlines
Marmot	
- Pumari Chhish is a group of at least three separate summits on the North side of the Hispar Glacier. The main summit (7492m) has been climbed once in 1979 by a Japanese expedition that approached from the West and North and used nearly 2300 metres of fixed rope. Neither the South summit (c.7350m) or South-east summit (c.6800m) have not been climbed. Clyma and Payne placed an advance camp below the South Face at around 4500m almost 3000 metres below the summit. The high point reached in 1999 was c.6300m when the pair became stuck in heavy snowfall and avalanches. The high point in 2000 was c.5300m.
- The pair also used their return visit to the area to see if they can get support for a local education project and assistance to repair a micro hydroelectricity scheme at the remote village of Hispar.
- Julie-Ann Clyma is a Research Co-ordinator in the Department of Occupational Health at Manchester University. Roger Payne is the General Secretary of the Manchester based British Mountaineering Council. Contact details are: 101 Carrhill Road, Mossley, Lancs, OL5 0SA, tel/fax: 01457 835858, e-mail: julie@clyma.u-net.com

TIME CHART

Pumari Chhish Expedition 2000

May 2000	16	Depart Manchester.	
	17	Arrive Islamabad 0630. Briefing at Ministry. Start road journey mid-afternoon. Arrive Besham 10pm.	
	18	Besham - Karrimabad (Hunza Valley). Shopping for provisions.	
	19	Karrimabad - Hispar by jeep. Hire porters.	
	20	Hispar c.3000m - Bitanmal c.3640m	
	21	Bitanmal - Dachingan - Schacumbarese c.3925m	
	22	Schacumbarese - Jutmal - Yutmaru Glacier. Establish BC c.4250m	
	23	BC - sort out kit.	
	24	Carry load to ABC c.4425m. Return to BC.	
	25	BC - ABC.	
	26	ABC - Camp 1 (c.5100m)	
	27	Rest at Camp 1 - bad weather.	
	28	Camp 1 - attempted descent - avalanche - reascend to camp.	
	29	Camp 1 - ABC - BC	
	30	BC - North Yutmaru Glacier: Reconnaissance.	
	31	North Yutmaru Glacier - North East Yutmaru Glacier - BC	
	June 2000	01	BC: rest day
		02	BC: bad weather
		03	BC: bad weather. Pack loads.
		04	BC - Jutmal.
		05	Jutmal - BC. Dismantle tents. Pack last loads. Return to Jutmal.
		06	Jutmal - Bitanmal (JAC/RP). LO and cook wait at Jutmal for porters.
		07	Bitanmal - Bularong (JAC/RP). Porters collect kit from BC.
		08	Bularong: JAC/RP rest in bad weather. Porters descend to Bitanmal.
		09	Bularong - Kunyang Glacier. Return to Bularong and descend to nr Gurban. Porters descend to Hispar.
		10	Nr Gurban - Hispar. JACC/RP meet up with LO, cook and porters.
		11	Hispar - Karrimabad by jeep. Travel overnight to Islamabad.
		12	Arrive Islamabad mid morning.
		13	Islamabad
		14	Islamabad: debriefing at Ministry.
		15	Islamabad - Birmingham.