

A ADVENTURE IN THE KARAKORAM

ALPINISM AND BIVOUCAC FLYING



ALPINISTS

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PILOTS

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A GREAT ADVENTURE IN THE KARAKORAM by Sebastián Alvaro ("On The Edge Of The Impossible").

Introduction

The Karakoram which etymologically means "black rock", is the name of the most important and majestic mountain range on Earth. Everything started with a monumental creative act made by Nature about 40 million years, when the current Indian Subcontinent collided with the Euroasian Plate. Very near K2 summit, the highest in the Karakoram and the second highest in the world, it is possible to find marine fossils. The explanation to this apparent paradox is that in the place that nowadays is occupied by the Karakoram there was for several hundred million years the bottom of the Thetis Sea. The teluric forces of the Earth's crust, in a process of millions of years, made the rocks from the bottom of the sea rise above the clouds, forming, with the slowness required for works of art, the biggest concentration of high mountains in the world. It is one of the most prodigious results of continental drifting, and one of the best examples of the living and dynamic planet on which we are.



The Karakoram is situated at about 1.500 kms of the Indian Ocean, on the point where the borders of Pakistan, China, Afganistan, and India converge, although the vast majority of its surface, about 480 kms long for 250 mtrs wide is located on Pakistani territory. In no other part of the planet rise so many high mountains in such a small surface. Five peaks out of the area we will visit surpass 8000 meters (although one of them, 8125m Nanga Parbat, geographically speaking belongs to the Himalayan Range, which it closes on the west). Also, more than a hundred peaks surpass 7000 m and many of the hundreds of peaks above 6000 m have not even been named yet. In no other place on Earth outside the polar regions and its influence areas there are so elongated and espectacular glaciers such as the ones that spill over -and by erosion they shape them- their valleys. This territory is dominated nearly exclusively by rock and ice. All these features make the Karakoram a mountain scenery without comparison on this planet so it inevitably awakes emotions on its visitors , it is a place with virtually neverending chances to live mountain adventures. That is the reason why this massif is the place of this planet that I have visited the most, because someone would need many trips and treks to watch all its natural treasures. It is one of the last places where you can feel the greatness of the planet that takes us in. Therefore to visit the Karakoram is to accomplish one of those unrepeatabe travels, after which the traveller will never be the same again, enriched by the difference, shaken by the contemplation of the mountains, rivers and deserts most beautiful and ferocious on Earth. On the same level as its landscapes, we find the iron character of the men in this "Land Of The Pure" which is what the word Pakistan means. For centuries its deep narrow and isolated valleys, have taken in people that have developed a peculiar culture with hardly any outside contact, creating great linguistic, cultural and religious diversity as well as ample variety of ways of living. This combination of quiet and hospitable people, settled on a wild and desolate place, on the foot of the most beautiful mountains of the planet, makes mountaneering on the Karakoram an extraordinary experience. An experience that its shared with hardened and loyal men, cast in the most rugged and bleak environment, where unique moments are lived.





The Karakoram is so singular, unique and majestic, that you would need many trips to contemplate and understand it in all its extension. That is the reason why since 1981 I have made more than 40 trips managing expeditions that have climbed the most important summits, amongst which, the five higher than 8000 m that are on Pakistani territory and others so well known as The Great Trango Tower, The Unnamed Tower, The Chogolisa, The Gasherbrum IV, The Gasherbrum III, and many others. We have climbed K2 on four different faces, reaching the summit twice on its north and on its south faces. We have climbed three times the Hidden Peak, three times Gasherbrum II (8035m) (opening a new route on its virgin north face), four times the Broad Peak and three times the Nanga Parbat. We have also accomplished alpine kayak descents on the three most important rivers in the region: The Hushe, The Syok and The Indus.

Talking about flights we have made some of the most important in the Karakoram. Amongst them a launch at 7000m from the Chogolisa and with a paraglider from The Broad Peak and The Gasherbrum II. In paramotor, Ramon Morillas has beaten twice the altitude world record in Nanga Parbat and the Masherbrum (7821m) which peak, clearly visible from the Baltoro Gacier and Hushe Village, he flew over. All these experiences have bound us with the most beautiful mountains on Earth as well as with its people, that is why from a few years ago we have been developing several help and cooperation projects. For eleven years, thanks to the Sarabastall Foundation we are developing an integral project in Hushe Village -village where the Baltoro trek ends- that is giving better quality of life to the inhabitants of the valley with the same name. With this background and probably the most extensive experience on adventures in this area, we come back to the Karakoram to develop a project of paramount importance on mountaneering and free flight. Our objective is to traverse the Karakoram on its highest elevation line on a trek that combines free flight and aventure alpinism. Two people (Ramón Morillas and Simon Elías) on a tandem paraglider and another pilot (Thomas de Dorlodot) on a solo paraglider. They will try to fly across the Hispar-Biafo glaciers, altogether about 120 kms fly and climb. When they can't continue flying they will try to climb a mountain to launch their paragliders again and carry on flying. It is a challenge that has never been accomplished before. A true adventure "On The Edge Of The Impossible".

THE MOUNTAINS OF THE TRAVERSE HISPAR-BIAFO.

By Simón Elías, alpinist and mountain guide.

On the past two years I have travelled to The Karakoram directing both the male and female Spanish Federation of Mountain Sports Team, making a first scouting trip of the valleys around Hushe Village and afterwards climbing virgin rock and ice mountains above four thousand meters. Altogether during these three months of work, divided in two consecutive seasons, seven virgin peaks have been climbed, all between 4000 and 6200 approximately, nearly all of which have been reached by technical climbing routes .

Continuing with this adventure spirit, that joints together classic exploration with the modern high sportive performance, this 2012 summer we have thought an ambitious objective, innovative and pioneering. The challenge is to cross the Karakoram on its central part, making the traverse of the glaciers Hispar-Biafo supporting Ramón Morillas' project, who has got some of the most impressive flying world records, together with the ascent of several virgin peaks in the area. The Hispar and Biafo glaciers are surrounded by some of the most impressive and prestigious summits like the Latoks, that reach 7000 metres, some of them still virgin or with very few climbs. It is not our intention to look for big mountains or technical difficulties but to try to reach as many virgin peaks as possible to take off from.



To start this activity we will look for a mountain above 5000 meters on the Hunza valley. During the initial exploration of the mountain we will acclimatize and after, with the arrival of favourable flying and climbing conditions, we will reach the virgin summit from which to take off and start the flight to the interior of the Hispar Glacier. With good flying conditions we can cover a maximum of 70 kms.





During the flight and after the improvised landing on the glacier we will choose another mountain to climb next day and launch to reach, on another flying day, the slopes of the Snow Lake, a pass over 5000 meters asl that joins the Hispar and Biafo glaciers creating one of the biggest glacier masses in the Karakoram. At night we will look for places to bivouac since flying tandem prevents us from taking a lot of weight and carrying a tent. On the lower part of the glacier we will bivouac under rocks protected with an awning and in the upper part we will be able to sleep inside the crevasses.

From the Hispar saddle, next to Snow Lake, we will climb another mountain in the vicinity to take off from, this time towards the Biafo Glacier. Our idea is to climb as many mountains as possible to use them as launch points. If weather conditions are good we reckon that in two or three flying days we will reach the Baltoro glacier entrance. But an adventure like this, full of uncertainty and risk, is open to multiple possibilities and setbacks that will demand from us all our free flight and alpinism experience to be able to improvise and reach our objective. In the Baltoro Glacier, depending on the weather, we will continue travelling alternating ascents with flights.



CROSSING OF THE HISPAR BIAFO AND BALTORO GLACIERS BY BIVOUAC FLYING AND ALPINISM.

By Ramón Morillas, free flight pilot.

During the expeditions of the last years to the Pakistani Karakoram, we have checked the good quality of flying conditions that this area of the planet has got. What is most impressive and different from other big mountain zones is that we can get into glaciers and high altitude slopes, finding very good thermals. Proof of it are the altitude records got in 2009 in the Nanga Parbat and Masherbrum in which we nearly reached 8000 metres with paramotor and over 7000 flying a paraglider without engine. During 2010 we surpassed several times 7000 meters near The Broad Peak over the Baltoro Glacier. During both expeditions we made aerial exploration of areas where nobody had flown paragliders before. For 2012 our plans are very innovative, we want to joint two mountain sports: Alpinism and Paragliding. Basically the intention is to make long distance flights using thermal conditions, entering areas where without alpinism skills it would be impossible to consider going flying. We will fly right in the direction that no pilot would.





On the controls of the tandem paraglider will be Ramón Morillas, bivouac flight specialist and paramotor recordman, among many other aspects of his sportive career. As copilot and leader on the mountain side will be the alpinist Simón Elías. One will be in charge of flying as far as possible and the other of progressing on the glacier and of guiding the climb to mountains that will allow us to take off again. With us will be the Belgian pilot Thomas de Dorlodot. Our challenge will be to traverse on this bivouac flight fashion the Hispar, Biafo and Baltoro glaciers, and, weather permitting, to try to reach the highest altitude on a tandem paraglider. As a culmination we will try to fly near the west face of K2.

Speaking of the technical difficulties on this project, it has to be said that both athletes will have to be very well coordinated both in flight and over land, so we will perform several training sessions in Sierra Nevada, so that Simón can pilot a paraglider, as well as bear hours in flight with strong thermal condition. On his side, Ramón will have to be able to follow Simón roped to him and to know the techniques of glacier progression. To land on a glacier at a high altitude is no mean task, on top of the wind conditions influenced by the big masses of cold air. You have to know well the terrain to choose the best landing areas. These were a few samples of the symbiosis that the sportsmen will have to reach to fulfill their challenges. As expedition leader and giving support on the glaciers, Sebastian Alvaro will coordinate the whole adventure and will be in charge of the logistics and communications of the expedition.