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One of the advantages of living in the Himalaya is that you can organize your climbing trips fairly casually. The expense is relatively small, and you have the feeling that if you fail this year you can always come back next year if you so desire. It encourages a more light-hearted approach to things than most people can afford to take when they plan a trip from England.

Joe Reinhard and I went to Buni Zom (6551 m) in the summer of 1979 in this way. I had a long-standing interest in the area since I had walked by both sides of it at different times and had never even seen the highest peak. The height seemed right for a light 2-man party and, we thought, it was far enough W to have reasonable weather even in August.

We had access to a few journals in Kathmandu, and we read what we could about the climbing history of Buni Zom, which was not much. Dr Gruber's article in the 1970 *Himalayan Journal* lists all the peaks meticulously, but does not tell you who climbed the highest one, or how. His sketch map however was very useful, as our photostat copies of the 1:250,000 maps were almost illegible.

We had planned to go through Chitral, but stories in Islamabad of 100,000 refugees there, and probable restrictions on the movements of foreigners, made us opt for the longer walk from Kalam in the Swat valley, via the Katchakam Pass and Lasput. In fact, as I subsequently discovered, there were no problems in travelling through Chitral to Mastuj and Lasput, and not many refugees either.

My casual approach to the trip extended to leaving half my clothing in a Rawalpindi taxi by mistake. Fortunately the only critical thing I lost was my breeches. Pakistani pantaloon seemed less than adequate, but I was lucky to be able to borrow a pair of woollen trousers from an American friend. They were somewhat old, and I did all my climbing with a gaping fly. Joe, who had been much more careful in his planning, found himself limited to a one-month stay in Pakistan, in total contradiction of what their Embassy in Kathmandu had told him. Thus our projected 3 weeks' climbing dwindled to a rather meagre 12 days. We left Rawalpindi, inauspiciously enough, at dawn on the first day of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, with very empty bellies.

In Kalam in 1964 we had recruited porters for 4 rupees a day, and they had provided their own food. Now you pay 50 if you are lucky, and feed them as well. Ramadan was, of course, advanced as a reason for not working, or working reluctantly for very high wages. After allowing for return pay, we finally paid out over 80 rupees per man per day of actual carrying. Anyway we were able, on 27 July, to move out of Kalam with 6 Pathans, who put aside their religious convictions as soon as they had passed the 1st villages, and wasted long hours each day in leisurely chupatti-making.

After 5 long but pleasant days in excellent weather we reached Phargam, close under the E side of the Buni Zom group. Our Kalam porters were keen to go all the way with us, but the Phargam people tried to insist that we pay them off and take locals for what was described as 14 days of very, very rough walking on a trail which strangers could not possibly follow. We compromised by taking one 'guide', and next day we reached Kulaknali, our base camp site, in 5 hours easy walking up an excellent and un-missable grazing path, with the 'guide' lagging far behind. My

impression of the Phargam people as porters remained very low throughout our trip.

We intended to go to the W side of Buni Zom, via the Khorahort glacier, as we had been told that this was the easy way. This information came from a hospitable shopkeeper on the Lasput-Mastuj road who described himself as a guide but, I suspect, had not been far up Buni Zom. His story, anyway, was contradicted by another guide who assured us that the Gorooghan glacier on the E side was the usual way, and only one party of Japanese had ever been up the Khorahort. Since we had had enough of porters for a while, we decided to pay them off at Kulaknali as planned, and stick to the W route.

From Kulaknali, at around 4000m, the route to the Khorahort glacier lay through a steep, and rather continuous rock barrier. We spent a half day solving on some very loose grey granite before I stumbled on a reasonable route—3 pitches of about Alpine Grade IV up a small gully line leading to long near-vertical slopes and the upper glacier. In contrast to the other lines we had tried, the rock in this gully was excellent. The reason was brought home to us that afternoon, when rain forced an early abandonment of our carry and we had to descend through waterfalls.

Two more strenuous days saw us camped at 5025m by the glacier, with a week's food, minimal climbing gear and not quite enough fuel. Fortunately we found the remains of a Japanese camp littered with, of all things, firewood. It had been there for years and burned reluctantly, even with kerosene to encourage it, but it helped us to make our 5 Gas cans last for the climbing.

At this point the bad weather, which had been just a nuisance so far, really hindered us. Day after day storm clouds came in from the W, visibility was poor, and there was a thunderstorm almost every afternoon. Not at all what I had expected, and led Joe to expect. The Hindu Kush is supposed to have good weather.

The weather did, however, give us time to evaluate Joe's new and very expensive tent. It was a tunnel type, with a silver-plated double skin, long tapering ends and a very sleek, streamlined appearance. It looked rather like one of those exotic 4-seater Italian sports cars, but without windows. It even had air intakes below the doors at each end, as if it were meant to travel very fast. Its maker had some unconventional ideas—it was the only tent I have ever seen with an imperious upper part and a permeable groundsheet. I sat in it watching the drips gather on the ceiling and wishing I had known more before leaving my old Vango down below. The theory was that you closed the doors and put your faith in a 'chimney effect' from the air intakes at the bottom and little ventilators at the top. Unfortunately it did not work. It was days before I could persuade Joe to let me open the doors; it was nice to see the view too. In fairness, it was an excellent tent in other ways, and the hoop design was very roomy and very stable. The same manufacturer, believe it or not, also makes an impermeable, non-breathing, silver-plated sleeping bag, presumably for people born without sweat glands.

On a half-fine day we climbed Khorahort Zom (5850m), an easy snow-walk, and had our first good view of the W side of Buni Zom. The long, narrow and rocky W ridge descended straight towards us, ending in a steep buttress; it looked as though it would give a fine 2- or 3-day climb in settled weather, but at present it was plastered. To its N an easy slope led up to the col between the main peak and Buni Zom North, but the continuation to the main summit up a steep gentled ridge was uncertain. The alternative, on the S flank of the W ridge, was a steep couloir of



60 *Bunt Zorn Photo: D. Lieberwood*

snow, or possibly ice, which joined the ridge at about 6350m. We decided to try the N route first, and the next day we carried our camp to 5480m in the northernmost branch of the Khourabot glacier.

After another day of poor weather but, fortunately, little new snow, we set out at 8am for the N col. Dawn was fine, but as we ploughed up the deep snow it clouded in, and on the col we were in thick mist. The upper ridge was very narrow and corniced, the face on the far side very steep, and the snow like custard. After a few rope-lengths of waist-deep wallowing in visibility so poor that it was hard even to see which side of the ridge was corniced, we decided to give up, and floundered down. By good fortune the lower slope did not avalanche until the next day.

So, what to do? We had time for one more attempt. We really had no basis for giving up the N col route, and it was tempting to try again if the weather improved. On the other hand the upper section did not look easy. We eventually decided to give the S face route a try, even though we had not looked closely at it. We should have moved our camp round to the S side, but inertia prevailed until the snow was too soft, and I argued persuasively that we should save our energy and merely start an hour earlier in the morning. There would be a long return round the end of the W ridge—but then we might be able to traverse the mountain and come down by way of the N col.

That afternoon the weather cleared. At least the high cloud stopped moving over from the W, and we thought a real change had come. We set out at 8am under a starry sky, and hoped it would at least last through the day.

At dawn we were on a snow-ramp leading to the S face couloir, and finding reasonably good snow conditions. The sunrise was magnificent, but far too colourful for comfort. As we moved higher we could see a big mass of multi-coloured cloud to the SW with ominous dark streamers coming our way. We

were making quite good progress, we thought, and hoped to be off the hill before anything too dramatic happened.

The couloir contained more snow and less ice than we had expected, but some of the snow was unstable and the angle was sufficient to encourage us to take rock belays when possible. Ten rope-lengths up the couloir seemed to go fairly quickly, ending in some very soft steep snow, and we reached the ridge at 11 o'clock.

Here we had expected to find a pleasant picnic spot, but the col, like the ridge above and below it, was rather narrow and exposed. The weather was still clear to the NW and we had a splendid view of the main Hindu Kush from Finch Mir to Lankho. One hour to the top, we thought, but somehow it took 3. The snow-covered rock, and the final more-or-less stable snow-ridge were both quite easy, but the altitude must have been affecting us and we were both very slow.

The summit was an airy spot—the junction of 3 corniced ridges. We could see our footsteps on the N ridge, but no easy way up past the rock gendarmes. We still suspected that there was an easy way somewhere on the E side, but we could not see it. Awi Zorn, the second peak in the group, appeared fleetingly through the cloud, a fine steep rock pyramid.

A thunderstorm gathering on the Sohnyoan glacier peaks immediately to our S put paid to any ideas of traversing the mountain and we hurried down the way we knew. Before we reached the col it was snowing and the air was buzzing and crackling. I sat on a horribly exposed belay as Joe climbed the last pitch to the col, listening to my karabiner sing a song, and wishing I could hide under one of the very small rock outcrops.

It was 5.30pm and we were fairly tired. There was a doubtful bivouac site under a rock and I was in favour of stopping, but Joe persuaded me that we could get down—rightly, as it turned out. We knicked steps rapidly down the couloir, hammering ice axes in for a notional security, and trying to dodge the sprindlit avalanches. The snow was softer but actually seemed more stable than on the ascent. We found our way off the snow-ramp in gathering darkness and wallowed down to the glacier through piles of new powdered snow. Here exhaustion hit us, and it was midnight before we made our way back, in mist and wet snow, to the other glacier and the tent. Two days later we were back in Phargam and on our way to the aprons of the lower valley and the jeep road to Gilgit.

Appendix

I have subsequently traced 2 previous ascents of Bunt Zorn. The first, by Breen and Tyndale-Bisbee in 1937, climbed the N ridge, were of our first attempt, from the Gurdoghian glacier by traversing Bunt Zorn North (NZ4/1939 288). The second, by a Japanese party, reached the S face from the Gurdoghian side and took a line to the right of ours (Two-To-Take No 48 1976). There have probably been other ascents.