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## Karakorum – Virjerab Glacier

Almost 90 years after the first explorers

In July 2012 an expedition to North Hunza (Karakorum, Pakistan) took place. It was our second trip to this little known area. This time the destination was Virjerab Glacier, explored previously in 1925 by a Dutch married couple – the Vissers.

The expedition was prepared in the Pakistan area by “Mountains Expert Pakistan” agency, managed by Karim Hayat, who also organized our 2011 expedition to Koksil Valley. (see Japanese Alpine News vol 13 year 2012 page 48 – 53 )

Maciej Dachowski, Wojciech Dzik, Wojciech Kapturkiewicz, Marian Krakowski, Janusz Majer, Anita Parys, Jerzy Urbański, Katarzyna Karwecka-Wielicka and Krzysztof Wielicki participated in the expedition, the latter one as its leader. The base camp staff were Neesa-cook from Hunza, Farman from Shimshal, Amor Hayat and Noor Alam – both from Hunza.

As we had the previous year, we followed the steps of the Vissers. This time our aim was Virjerab Glacier, untouched since 1925. Jenny Visser-Hooft wrote the following words about it in her book “Among the Kara-Korum Glaciers in 1925”, published in 1926:

*The Verjirab remains in our memory as the very worst glacier of the whole Kara-Korum. The difficulties of the marches were not relieved by the beauty of the scenery; it was not beautiful: it was downright ugly, desolate and dreary in the extreme. There was no pleasant spot, not a single green thing, no glittering ice-pinnacles on which to rest the eye weary of gazing at the terrible chaos of stones and crumbling dirt. In fact there was no ice to be seen at all. The whole valley was filled with stones and boulders often of a tremendous size.*

I was able to buy the book in a British bookstore – unfortunately no earlier than having returned from our expedition.

### The history of Virjerab glacier exploration

Virjerab Glacier was ‘discovered’ by George Cockerill during his expedition in the years 1892 – 1893 (1, 2). The second expedition, which reached the glacier in 1925, was the one of the Dutch married couple, Jenny Visser-Hooft and Philip Visser (3, 4, 5, 6). Colonel Schomberg’s book “Unknown Karakorum” (7), published in 1936, comprised the “Map of the Shingshal Mustagh Area”. The map included Virjerab Glacier. It also reflects the then state of knowledge about the topography of the area.

Explorers who penetrated the surroundings of Virjerab glacier were:

1. Francis Younghusband, during an exploratory expedition aiming to find Shimshal pass, reaches it from the east in 1889.
2. Colonel R.C.F. Shomberg reaches Shimshal pass from the west, through Pamir-i-Tang valley, and then moves on to Braldu valley. He then describes in his book “Unknown Karakoram”, among others, Chot Pert group, constituting the northern limits of Virjerab Glacier.

3. In 1937 Eric Shipton, Michael Spender and Angtharkay, penetrate the Braldu Glacier system and make a map of its surroundings as part of exploratory exhibition organized by Shipton and Tilman. They explore the eastern surroundings of Virjerab Glacier.
4. In 1939 Eric Shipton, R. Scott Russel and Angtarkay reach / 20.09.1939 / Khurdopin Pass from the south, and see the southern and south-northern limits of Virjerab from Lukpe Lawo – a gigantic snow cirque called Snow Lake
5. The first traverse of Khurdopin Glacier, neighbouring with Virjerab glacier on the west, is performed from south to north / from Snow Lake, through Khurdopin Pass to the place of joining with Yukushin Gardan Glacier and then to Shimshal. Canadian geologists: Barry Roberts and Cameron Wake, accompanied by two guides from Shimshal: Shambi Khan and Rajab Shan, in 1986. Having reached Shimshal, after a few days of rest, the four repeated their achievement, this time in reverse order: Shimshal, Khurdopin Glacier, Khurdopin Pass, Snow Lake, Askole, Skardu. In 1987, a year after them, another traverse, this time without the help of local guides was completed by a British team: Philip Barlet, Jerry Gore, Duncan Tunstall and Stephen Venables – from Snow Lake to Shimshal.
6. In 1991 an expedition from New Zealand: Dave Bamford, Matt Comeskey, John Cocks, John Wild and John Nankervis set off from a base camp on Lukpe Lawo / Snow Lake. Having traversed Khurdopin pass and after a bivouac in the upper, snowy part of Eastern Khurdopin Glacier they climbed up the 6,500 m (according to Japanese map) high peak located over Second West Virjerab Glacier.

The glacier still remains an attractive target of exploration. Due to the objective difficulties in moving up the glacier – lack of lateral moraines – our expedition operated mainly in the lower part of the glacier. The team composed of K. Karwecka-Wielicka, M. Dachowski, K. Hayat, and K. Wielicki conquered a snow and ice peak of 5,900 m after a two day attack, carried out from a previously set advanced camp. The first conquerors called the peak Khushrui Sar, which means “Beautiful Peak” in Wakhi.

The team composed of M. Krakowski, Jan Majer and J. Urbański, together with two porters (Farman and Noor Alam) reached the side glacier marked as “First West Virjerab Glacier” on Jerzy Wala’s map. Due to bad weather we were not able to reach the connection between the two upper glaciers – the place the Vissers’ expedition reached. A. Parys and K. Hayat attempted an attack of a 6,570 m summit in Chor Pert mountain group, but they had to withdraw due to sudden weather change. Our activity within the area of the glacier has been presented on the map here, elaborated by J. Wala. His reverse map shows the access route – three days’ trekking – from Shimshal village to the base camp.

## **Expedition calendar**

30 June – Arrival at Islamabad

1 July – We reach Gilgit having traveled Karkoram Highway for 20 hours.

2 July – Journey Gilgit – Karimabad.

3 July - Karimabad – Passu (crossing Atabad Lake on the way) In Gulmit it turns out that Karkoram Highway is closed – the Chinese are laying asphalt. The forced break is spent at the saline Borith Lake. At 18 we are able to continue our journey by jeep. In Passu we are joined by the truck carrying the expedition luggage. We drive towards Shimshal. We reach the first place of crossing, but the water is too high for our truck to go through. We are forced to drive back to Passu.

4 July – Journey from Passu to Shimshal. Early in the morning the level of water in the stream is lower, enabling us to cross it.

5 July – The first day of the caravan trip from Shimshal to Baruchit Gaz, on the way traversing the face of Yazgil Glacier.

6 July – The second day of the caravan trip: on the way traversing the Yukshingarden and Khurdopin Glaciers, a bivouac in front of the face of Virjerab Glacier.

7 July – The third day of the caravan trip through Virjerab Glacier to the base camp (about 10 hours).

8 July – Arranging the base camp.

9 July – K. and K. Wielicki with K. Hayat and M. Dachowski set up an advanced camp (1 tent) at the height of 4,700 m in the side valley at the foot of Hunza Sar peak. K. Hayat returns to the base camp, the others spend the night in the advanced camp. The remaining participants go up Virjerab Glacier, but they return to the camp in the afternoon because of poor visibility.

10 July – K. Wielicki and M. Dachowski return to the base camp. K. Wielicka remains in ABC, joined by A. Parys and W. Dzik. We move the base camp about 500 m up the lateral moraine, to a place with access to running water (a stream). The geographic location is: N36 18.203 E75 35.993, altitude: 4,078 m.

11 July – M. Krakowski, J. Majer and J. Urbański, together with two porters (Farman and Noor Alam) go up Virjerab Glacier and set a bivouac (Biv.1) at the height of 4,248m, (N36 17.125 E75 38.120).

K. Hayat, M. Dachowski, K. Wielicki and W. Kapturkiewicz reach the ABC. W. Dzik and A. Parys return to the base camp.

12 July – J. Majer's team reaches the side First West Virjerab Glacier, ascending to (N36 16.518 E75 38.261) the altitude of 4,325 m. Photos are taken of the peaks surrounding the glacier. In the afternoon the team returns to the bivouac (biv.1) on Virjerab Glacier.

K. Wielicki's team sets another bivouac (biv.2) at the altitude of 5,100 m, on the way to the peak chosen as the aim of the exhibition. W. Kapturkiewicz descends to the base camp.

13 July – M. Dachowski, K. Wielicka, K. Hayat with K. Wielicki as the team leader conquer the 5,900 m peak, marked as 30 on the map, after 8 hours of climbing from the place of bivouac Biv.2 at the altitude of 5,100 m. The conquered peak is called Khushrui Sar, which means "Beautiful Peak" in Wakhi. J. Majer's team returns to the base camp.

A. Parys and W. Dzik make a reconnaissance trip to the valley marked on the map as Kut (Small) Valley.

14 July – K. Wielicki's team returns to the base camp.

15 July – Sudden change of the weather for worse.

16 July – Snowfall – all expedition members stay in the base camp.

17 July – A. Parys, K. Hayat and W. Kapturkiewicz with the porter Noor go out of the base camp in an attempt to reach a 6,570 m peak in Chot Pert mountain group. They go across Virjerab Glacier and set a bivouac (Biv.3) at the exit of a couloir running down from the summit. The porter returns to the base camp.

18 July – K. and K. Wielicki, M. Dachowski and J. Urbański leave the base camp to return to Poland. W. Dzik, M. Krakowski and J. Majer with two porters go up Virjerab Glacier and reach J. Majer's bivouac (Biv.1) of the previous attempt. A. Parys and K. Hayat go up the couloir and set a bivouac (Biv.4), at the altitude of 4,800 m.

W. Kapturkiewicz returns to the base camp.

19 July – The weather turns for worse. J. Majer's team makes an attempt to go "light" – without the tents – up Virjerab Glacier, but due to poor visibility having reached a point at the altitude of 4,290 m (N36 16.949 E75 38.319) they return and descend to the base camp on the same day. A. Parys and K. Hayat withdraw to the lateral moraine of the glacier.

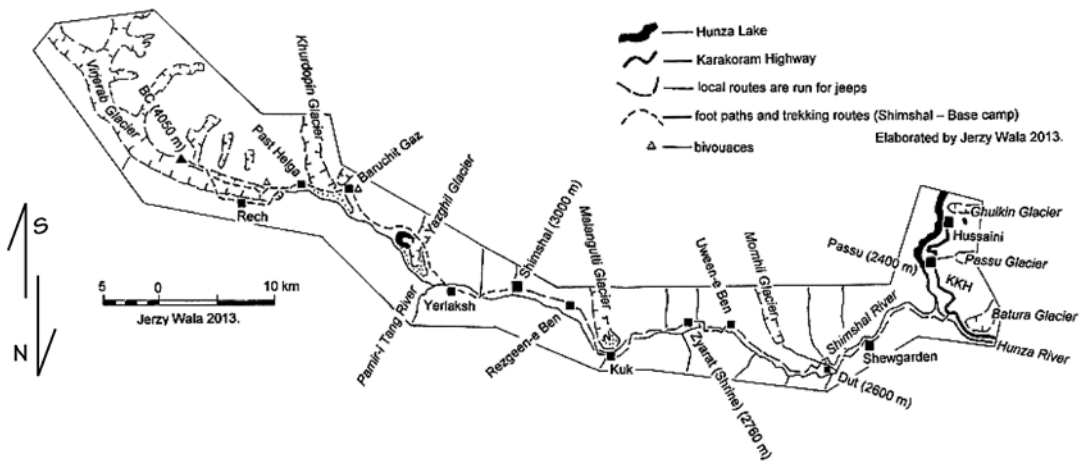
20 July – Rain. A. Parys and K. Hayat return to the base camp.

21 July – Packing the base camp.

- 22 July – We begin the descent.  
 24 July – After a three days' caravan trip we reach Shimshal.  
 25 July – Shimshal – Karimabad.  
 26 – 27 July – Stay in Karimabad.  
 28 July – Minibus journey between Karimabad – Gilgit – Chilas – Babusar pass – Narran in Kaghan Valley.  
 29 July – A trip to Saiful Muluk Lake and journey to Islamabad.  
 30 July – Return flight from Islamabad.

## Virjerab 2012 – Literatures

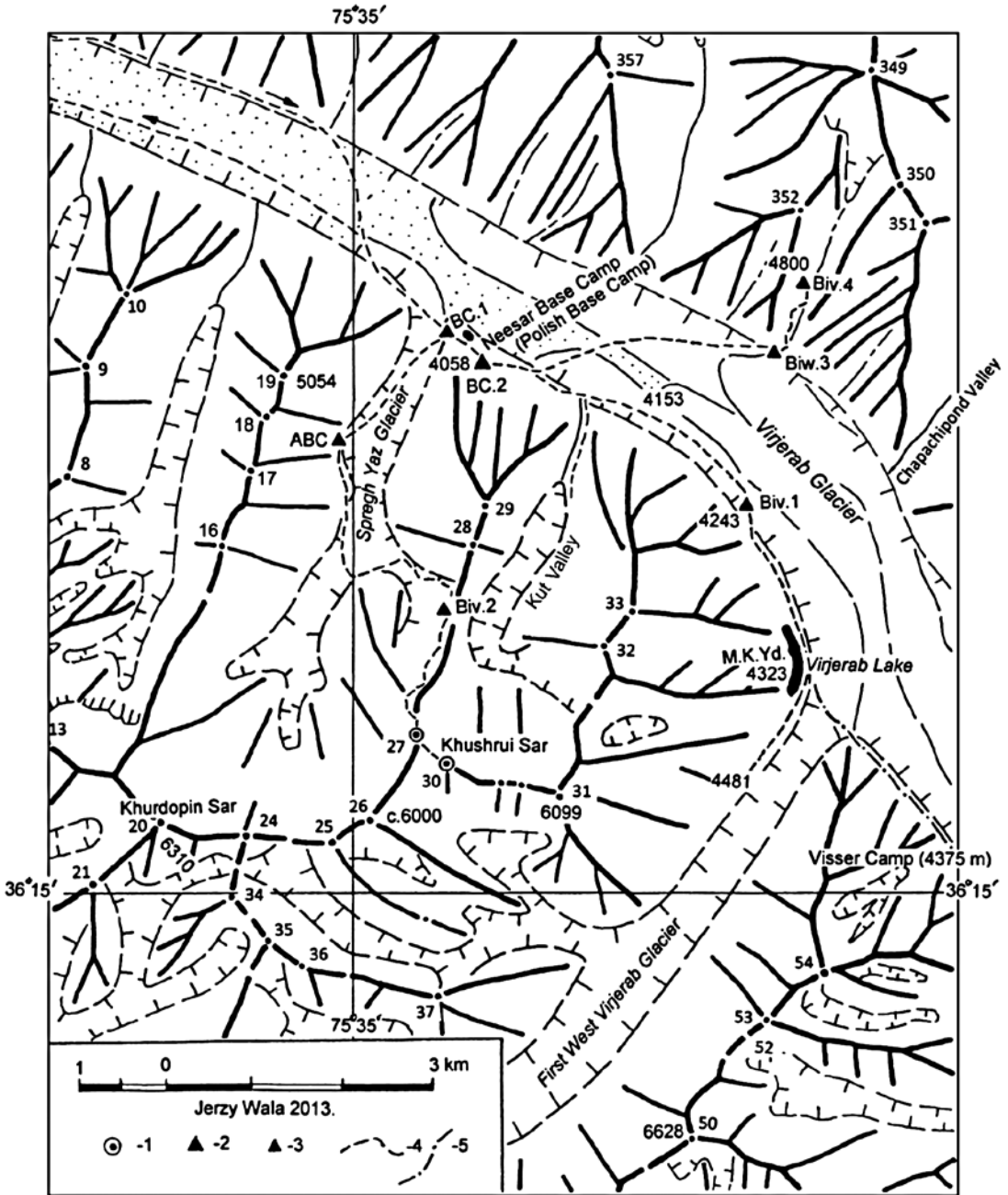
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A route of the Polish Virjerab Glacier Expedition 2012. South-Up map.



Climbing route of Wielicki's team on Khushrui Sar





Upper Virjerab Glacier from the place mark Biv. 3 on Jerzy Wala map



Upper Virjerab Glacier, Little K2 (right side)



First West Virjerab Glacier, peaks on the east side, Photo Jansz Majer



Panorama of Chot Pert Subgroup from summit of Khushrui Sal, Photo Krzysztof Wielicki



Peak 6,570 m in Chot Pert Subgroup, Photo Janusz



North Face of Khurdopin Sal, Photo Janusz Majer