

**Canadians in the Kondus Valley  
Alpine Routes on Newly Opened Peaks in the Karakoram**



**K13 (6666 m)**



**Sherpi Kangri (7380 m)**

**John Lauchlan Memorial Award  
c/o The Alpine Club of Canada  
PO Box 8040, 201 Indian Flats Rd.  
Canmore, Alberta, T1W 2T8**

## **Introduction:**

We are applying for the John Lauchlan Memorial Award, seeking funding to take Canadian alpinism to the Karakoram of Pakistan. We feel we are a very strong team. Two members of the team have previously received the Lauchlan Award, which resulted in a number of first ascents (CAJ 2010, pp. 153-154). For two members of the team it would be their first time receiving the award, though they are respected as two of the brightest stars of Canadian alpine climbing. It would also be their first visit to Asia. We hope the committee will see fit to award us funding, so that we can continue to represent Canadian climbing on the world stage.

## **Objective:**

The Kondus Valley in the eastern Karakoram of Pakistan offers many unclimbed objectives, ranging from 6000-meter rock spires to Sherpi Kangri – at 7380 m one of the tallest unclimbed peaks in the world. Also worthy of mention are the spectacular unattempted K13 (6666 m) and the unclimbed north face of K7 (6934 m).

Sherpi Kangri, K13 and the north side of K7 present world-class objectives. We are not so bold as to propose definite climbing routes, as the area is largely unexplored and undocumented. However, it is clear that they promise difficult mixed climbing at high altitude.

There are many advantages to visiting the Kondus Valley. With numerous inspiring objectives it is highly likely the team will be able to go climbing – really climbing. When visiting an area where there is only one objective, it often happens that the team leaves without doing any climbing of a technical nature, getting shut down after a period of acclimatization. At the other extreme, too often international visitors select an area where they are able to summit small subsidiary peaks without engaging with the real peaks of the Karakoram, which in our experience begin at an elevation around the 6500-meter mark.

In the same region as the proposed objectives is Link Sar (7041 m), which has been generating considerable interest in international climbing circles, seeing visits in the summer of 2017 by Steve Swenson and partners as well as Tom Ballard and Daniele Nardi. We are making a point of not proposing attempting this objective out of respect for the previous visitors who plan on returning. However, it does indicate that substantial objectives of interest to the international climbing community exist in the Kondus Valley.

## **Representing Canada and the Memory of John Lauchlan:**

In 2017 Raphael was a member of the jury for the Piolets D'Or. It was due to Raphael that a special mention was given to a Korean team who established a significant variation to the Canadian Route (Blench/Lauchlan) on the South Face of Gangapurna (7454 m). It is in the spirit of this type of exploration of the high mountains of Asia that we request this funding. John Lauchlan was at the forefront of Canadian climbing in his tragically shortened career; we are eager to make do our best to keep Canadians at the forefront of world alpine climbing with our efforts in Asia.

## Lauchlan Award Criteria:

Our team has a good track record of respectful, good style ascents. We believe that in our climbing we have remained true to the spirit of alpinism, and so feel that we fit the award criteria.

**Canadian:** All team members are Canadian.

**Innovative:** We will be concentrating our efforts on establishing first ascents in the area we visit. The team has a strong track record of first ascent climbing.

**Bold:** The team has established a number of committing first ascents, which have been recognized on the global stage. The proud tradition of Canadian ascents in Asia will continue with our team.

**Exploratory:** The Kondus valley has seen few visits by international mountaineers due to its proximity to the disputed border with India. Without getting into the geopolitical situation in too much depth, this has resulted in numerous big peaks in this area still being unclimbed. Primary amongst these are K13, Link Sar and Sherpi Kangri.

**Environmentally Sensitive:** All team members make an absolute commitment to follow leave no trace practices. We have been to numerous mountain environments and strive to leave them in better shape than we find them. On our trips we have separated garbage and returned it to the villages for recycling, which the locals appreciate as some materials are worth money. Along the approaches to our basecamps we encouraged our porter staff to store their garbage rather than litter. We have encouraged them to do so with an eye to tourism, explaining future tourists' appreciation of a clean environment. We have strong connections with tour operators in Pakistan, who encourage their staff to follow the same principles.

**Lightweight and Self contained:** Once in basecamp, we are self-contained and self-reliant. The same is true above basecamp, on the mountain. In getting to basecamp we employ a number of village locals to porter, and are cognizant of our responsibilities to them. We are in the habit of tipping our porter staff up to 50% in addition to their wages. Over the years we have also tipped our guides and camp staff considerably in an effort to contribute to their wellbeing. These are some of the ways in which we attempt to benefit the local people through our expeditions.

**Non-commercial:** The fact that we are applying for funding goes to show that these trips are not commercial ventures on our part. Apart from Raphael, none of the team is a sponsored athlete. Notwithstanding the relative prior successes of the team, these trips remain expensive propositions, and any financial aid the committee is willing to grant will be very gratefully acknowledged.

## Team:

Two of the team members have substantial experience in Asia. After repeated trips to the Karakoram Ian and Raphael have gained experience in how to apply the climbing skills honed in the Canadian Rockies to the particular problems posed by the Greater Ranges. By joining on a trip with two younger, highly skilled friends, we wish to build a stronger team. Our team will be strong as we are all friends, know each other, and have personalities to get along on a two-month trip. This is an important factor in selecting a team for such a trip.

The experience Ian and Raphael have gained on repeated trips to Asia will be of benefit in steering the team away from some of the more avoidable problems associated with these trips. The recent trips Alik has been on show his ability to forge new routes in difficult conditions on very technical ground. Chris has been very active in Canada, establishing new rock routes in the Bugaboos at a high technical standard, as well as establishing new routes in the extreme environments of Patagonia and Baffin Island. He is the best-rounded athlete on the team, being a fearless skier as well as an experienced rock climber and alpinist.

**Alik Berg:** Canmore, (780)-504-9534, [alikberg@yahoo.ca](mailto:alikberg@yahoo.ca)

Making headlines in the last few years, Alik has been on a tear with successful winter ascents in the Rockies, an expedition to Alaska with a new route on the fabled East face of the Moose's Tooth, and a recent trip to Peru with two major first ascents. He is the youngest member of the team, yet with a huge background of experience. Successfully having completed 19 El Capitan aid routes, starting at the age of 15, Alik has a bright future in Canadian alpine climbing. It will be his first trip to Asia.

1<sup>st</sup> ascent: Illusions of the Raven (WI4 R 5.9 A4, 5,000'), East Face Moose's Tooth  
<http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web15s/newswire-new-route-on-east-face-moses-tooth>

1<sup>st</sup> ascent: The Devil's Reach Around (M6 5.10, 90°), East Face Chacraraju Este (6001 m)  
<http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web17c/newswire-chacraraju-devils-reach-around>

1<sup>st</sup> ascent: Nadie Sabe Nada (M6, 1000m), North Face Hualcan (6122 m)

**Chris Brazeau:** Golden, (250)-344-2669, [chris\\_brazeau@hotmail.com](mailto:chris_brazeau@hotmail.com)

Chris has a bold history of first ascents, ranging from Baffin Island to the North Face of Mount Alberta, and on to the Bugaboos where he is a resident new-router. Equally adept on granite, limestone, and in the alpine, his altitude experience on Denali (where he holds the speed record on the Denali Diamond) will come in useful on his first trip to Asia. Though hesitant to stand in the spotlight, Chris is one of Canada's most talented and dedicated climbers.

1<sup>st</sup> ascent: The Accomplice (VI 5.11+, 1100 m), Mount Stephen  
<http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web14x/newswire-rockies-stephen-apocalyptic-brazeau-simms>

1<sup>st</sup> ski descent: North Face Mount Bryce, 1000 m, 55 degrees

1<sup>st</sup> ascent: Brazeau-Walsh (VI 5.11 M6, 1000 m), North Face Mount Alberta

**Ian Welsted:** Golden, (403)-497-5324, [iwelsted@gmail.com](mailto:iwelsted@gmail.com)

Ian has made three previous trips to Pakistan and one to Nepal. His experience on these trips has taught him how to acclimate properly as well as an eye for a safe line. Recently Ian has been concentrating his efforts in becoming an ACMG Apprentice Alpine Guide, which he completed in the summer of this year. This trip will see him return to Pakistan for the first time since his successful ascent of K6 West in 2013.

1<sup>st</sup> ascent: North-West Face, K6 West (7040 m). With Raphael

1<sup>st</sup> ascent: John Lauchlan Memorial Award route (AI4+, M5, 1200 m), The Angel, Revelations, Alaska

1<sup>st</sup> ascent: Perpetual Spring (M7, 400 m), Mount Lawrence Grassi. With Alik and Raphael

**Raphael Slawinski:** Calgary, (403)-680-4377, [raphae83@telus.net](mailto:raphae83@telus.net)

Raphael is known to most in Canadian climbing circles, at this point having perhaps established more first ascents in the Rockies than any other climber. Adept at both technical drytooling and alpine routes, he has extensive experience in the Greater Ranges. On his last trip to Asia, for an attempt on the North Face of Everest, he was thwarted by an earthquake and the subsequent closing of the mountain by Chinese authorities. He is eager to return to the Karakoram for the first time since 2013, when his ascent of K6 West with Ian resulted in Canadians being awarded the Piolets D'Or for the first time.

1<sup>st</sup> Ascent: The Dogleg Couloir (VI M7 A1), Mt. Chephren

1<sup>st</sup> Ascent: West Face (V 5.10R), Mount Alberta

1<sup>st</sup> Ascent: North-West Face, K6 West (7040m). With Ian

## **Dates:**

In our experience, the best window for climbing in the Karakoram opens around the middle of July. We find that it is key to be well acclimated by this time, as the weather windows can be short-lived. Because of the complex political and logistical situation in Pakistan we leave one week at the beginning of each trip in order to get to the mountains, and one week at the end in which to return to Islamabad. Cancelled flights and geopolitical complications can easily eat into this two-week buffer. As such, we propose spending two months in Pakistan, leaving us at least six weeks for the climbing. This gives us a high chance of success, as we can both acclimate properly and have a buffer of time in which to wait for a suitable weather window.

## Budget:

All prices are in Canadian dollars.

Item	Per person	Total
Airfare to Islamabad	2000	8000
Hotel Islamabad (in+out)	150	600
Flight to Skardu return	300	1200
Ground transport	100	400
Hotel Skardu (in+out)	100	100
Guide/cook		1500
L.O.		2000
Porters		1500
Peak fees		2000
Gear	We will seek separate sponsorship	
Staff insurance		800
Gratuities	300	1200
Food	300	1200
Agency fee		1500
<b>Grand total</b>		<b>22,000</b>

## Other Funding:

In the past two team members have received substantial funding from other grants, primarily the Mugs Stump Award and the Gore-Tex Shipton Tilman Grant. It should be emphasized that the other two members have not received any climbing grants for their previous exploits. As the committee is aware, climbing expeditions to Asia are expensive undertakings, as exhibited in the proposed budget (which almost inevitably underestimates the cost).

All of the team members are amateur climbers, none making any income through their climbing. Though we like it that way, it does also mean that we are dependent on grants awards such as the John Lauchlan Memorial Award in order to go on these trips.

We thank the committee for considering our request for funding. Any financial backing you feel able to give us will be most gratefully acknowledged.