

Aalam Kuh

July 6 and 7 & July 19 - 21, 2006

I can't believe that I had almost completely "forgotten" about **Alam Kuh** for over a quarter century. During all these years, I only paid a short visit to Mash Safar¹ a few years ago on the way back from another mountaineering trip in the Caspian area with my friend Fred G. (see my report "*Shah Moalem*" in my site²).

Alam Kuh is the highest peak of the **Takhte Soleyman**³ range in the central **Alburz**⁴ chain of mountains. The **Alburz**⁴ chain of mountains, running practically all the way from the west to the east in the north of the country is the highest mountain chain in Iran.

At about 4850 meters, **Alam Kuh** is the highest non-volcanic peak in Iran; the absolute first is of course *Damavand*² at 5680 meters.

There are more than 30 summits of above 4000 meters in the **Takhte Soleyman** area.

Today, I incidentally read an article in one of our local papers that put the figure at 150. It is a little far-fetched but it's not technically untrue if you count all the mini summits on the ridges.

I had climbed the **Alam Kuh** twice about 25 years ago:

- First, with my cousin Fereydoun A via **Siah Sang** in 1979.
- Then, via **Hesarchal** with my friend Fathali G and Khayam Naghavi⁵ in 1981.

Somehow, after 25 years, I remembered that there is a route called the "**German Flank**⁶" which I always wanted to climb.

Somehow, after 25 years, I suddenly zoomed on **Alam Kuh** and the **German Flank** – can't brag about my quick reaction time!



¹ Now 85, the old guide of Alam Kuh. Rassul's father. He is a personality

² www.amanieh.com

³ Not to be confused with the archeological site of the same name – see my report "*Sahand...*" in www.amanieh.com

⁴ Also known as Elburz

⁵ Rassul's younger brother

⁶ Also called the German Ridge it is the easiest and oldest of the hard technical routes of the North face "High angle cliffs with severe exposure. Protection placed by leader. Technical climbing experience is necessary"

PART I - July 6 and 7 “Reconnaissance”

Majid S⁷ and I drove on Thursday from Amanieh to **Rudbarak**⁸.

After a drive of about four hours and a short rest at Rassul's⁹ place, we drove together with Rassul and Mash Safar for about 25 km to **Tange Galoo**, which is at about 3400 meters and as far as one can go with a 4 x 4 vehicle now. 25 years ago and until not so many years ago, you had to walk most of this way from **Rudbarak!**

The Tehran subway company built this road a few years ago to mine very large stones (about 20 mt each) in the area. The project is now abandoned because of ecological reasons and the opposition of the local population - yes, there is some democracy in Iran!



We left Mash Safar at **Tange Galoo** to his memories.

Rassul, Majid and I walked briskly to **Hesarchal**¹⁰, which is the southern base camp from where one can climb **Alam Kuh**.

From here, it is the easiest route to the top.

The **Hesarchal** plateau has a gentle slope from the valley to the base of the peaks surrounding it. The altitude is from about 3600 to about 3800 meters.

Mount **Lashgarak Bozorg**¹¹, I noticed, had enough snow to ski on. I consulted with Rassul and Majid and

chose to postpone the mountaineering and even the coveted **German Flank** until the end of the summer when there would be no more snow left to ski on!

Majid and I decided to come back next weekend and ski down **Lashgarak Bozorg's** North face down to **Hesarchal**. Unless, of course, we found something better the next day on the other side of **Alam Kuh**.



We didn't want to leave Mash Safar alone for too long so we promptly returned to the car and drove back to Rassul's place for dinner and to spend the night.

⁷ A friend and mountaineering partner, he is one of the top ski instructors in Park City and also coaches our Olympic skiing team during the summer when he travels to Iran

⁸ About 170 km from Amanieh via the Shemshak-Dizin road in the summer. During the winter, you cannot take this route because it goes through the Dizin ski piste. **Rudabarak** is the last village before the way up towards Alam Kuh. Home of Mash Safar and Rassul

⁹ Mash Safar's son and successor, a first class mountaineer, he was part of the Iranian team ascending Mt. Everest in 1998

¹⁰ In Persian a protected, fenced area, cirque

¹¹ Literally Big Lashgarak, about 4200 meter

The next day Majid, Rassul and I hiked towards **Alamchal** to **Sarchal's** shelter. Here one can also drive part of the way to **Barir** at about 2350 meters and from then on its a good four hours hike to the **Sarchal's** shelter at about 3730 meters. There are excellent skiing possibilities here too but the hike up takes more than 2 times longer.

While from **Hessarchal** we see the Southwest face of **Alamkuh**, from here one looks directly at the North face which rises straight vertically 5 to 600 meters from **Alamchal's** glacier, making the "wall" very impressive. Here it is even more of a high alpine landscape than in **Hesarchal**.

We drove back Friday evening to Tehran. The difficulty of the traffic then is a good 5.11 based on the highest mountaineering GMS classification system where the maximum difficulty rating is 5.14!

PART II - July 19, 20 and 21

I was held up by work the next weekend and although the snow was melting rapidly so late in the season, we took our next trip not the week after but two weeks later.

Majid and I, having spotted the skiing possibilities on our previous trip, we finally decided that the **Hesarchal** option would be more practical and less strenuous for our very last skiing tour of the season.

Majid S, Marco D and I drove on Wednesday afternoon to **Rudbarak**. On the way, in Shemshak, we picked up our young friend Hessam Shemshaki¹², who is a member of our national alpine skiing team.



We spent the night at Rassul's¹³ and hiked to **Hesarchal** the next morning.

Hesarchal, is an ideal camping site with plenty of meadows and a running stream of drinking water. You can set up your tent practically anywhere in this vast plateau.

We set up camp.

Majid, Marco, Hessam and Rassul went on a short tour while I lazily stayed behind in the campsite relaxing and just enjoying being there.

¹² ShemshakI in Farsi, means of Shemshak, from Shemshak; as New-YorkER for New York. In this case, it has become a surname

¹³ I have to compliment Rassul for his excellent lodgings and of course, the very special hospitality that he extended in his own house. There is also a very good guesthouse available to non-VIPs!

The next morning Rassul and I started very early at about 5 am. I thought I would get better lighting for the photos; if possible and I have my way, I like to start walking at daybreak anyway!

So, even taking our time and stopping a few times to take photos, etc..., Rassul and I reached the peak of **Lashgarak Bozorg** a couple of hours before the rest of the pack.

We skied down from about 4200 to 3700 meters. The snow was hard packed but the deep longitudinal channels caused by melting snow during the afternoon made the descent a little tricky. You had to be careful not to get the tip of your skis caught!

Still, we made it safely to the bottom of the slope and the additional challenge made the descent even more enjoyable.

Back in **Rudbarak**, we spent some time with Rassul and his family and then got into our car to tackle the most difficult part of the journey: the return trip to Tehran on a Friday evening!



I had a couple of business and personal trips coming up so the **German Flank** ascent was postponed till the end of the season or maybe even next year...



Photos

- Page 1 top to bottom: - Crossing the Sardabrud¹⁴ River, on the way to **Tange Galoo**,
- Rassul, Mash Safar and I at **Tange Galoo**
- Page 2: - View above **Tange Galoo**
- Rassul and Majid at **Hesarchal**
- Page 3: - Our campsite at **Hesarchal**. In the background **Lashakarag Bozorg**
- Page 4: - Majid and Hessam on the way up
- The mountain, which we skied down. The channels are visible but the photo doesn't give you a good idea about how steep the slope was

Links

www.amanieh.com
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/E/Elburz.asp>
<http://www.summitpost.org/parent/150420/alam-kooch.html>
<http://www.summitpost.org/route/165580/german-s-Flank.html>
<http://www.summitpost.org/mountain/rock/152983/siah-gook-north.html>
<http://www.summitpost.org/image/121200/click-to-zoom-out-to-map-of.html>
<http://www.summitpost.org/image/81977/aerial-photo-of-a-portion-of.html>
<http://www.summitpost.org/mountain/rock/152813/shaneh-kooch.html>
<http://www.summitpost.org/fact-sheet/174579/glacier-national-park-rock-and-grading-systems.html>

Notes:

On the following pages, I have included our entries of about 26 years ago in Mash Safar's guestbook

Thank you

Fred G: for his help with editing and proofreading
 Massoud G: for his help with editing, proofreading and formatting

J-M Houtcieff

PS

It took me so long to finish this report that by now, I have climbed **Alam Kuh** via the **German Flank** – Report will follow soon inshallah.

I can already tell you that the ascent was really something for someone with practically no rock-climbing experience like me!

¹⁴ Literally “cold water river” in Persian

Expedition Fred Grenke and
 Tereydam Palam of 27.4 to 30.4. 1978

- 27.4. - arrival in loud barak 19⁰⁰ hours
 - were received very friendly by Zafar Nazki.
- 28.4. - start at 7³⁰ with one mule carrying
 rucksacks on skis (1300m)
- mules stopped at 2300 m because of
 one isolated avalanche passage. time 11³⁰
 - carry rucksack and skis (approx 30 kg each)
 up to 3100 m (17⁰⁰ hours) where we finally
 put on skis and continue on walblains
 - arrival at shelter 3600m 18⁴⁵ hours.
 30 minutes of snow shoveling to open
 inside doors.
- 29.4. - late start at 8³⁰ because of poor
~~the~~ weather, towards ALAM KUH.
- on ski across glacier
 - arrive on top of gully on the ridge
 at 12³⁰. Ski depot.
 - climb toward Siak Sang in stormy
 weather up to 4450 m (40 m below
 summit. forced to return because
 of storm.
- back at shelter at 19³⁰ hours.

C. Palam

Fred Grenke
 + Time (hour)

8/23 20 km arrived at Roadbarak
 8/24 7 a.m. leave for Sialchaloon
 5 p.m. arrived Sialchal and pitched tent.
 8/25 5:30 a.m. leave to Alam Kuch
 12:30 p.m. reached the summit. Alam Kuch
 12:30 p.m. returned to base camp. Sialchal.
 8/26 7.00 leave Sialchal for Roadbarak.
 12.00 p.m. ~~leave~~ ^{arrive} Roadbarak

Members of group

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Ferry Alam
attempted the
Peak summit
of 8/25 and
came back
to the camp
at 5:00 p.m.
and left for
Red Brack. | 1. Arlene Dattelton | 1. مریز آرلین دالٹن |
| | 2. Mikei Hantchieff | 2. میکی ہانتچیف |
| | 3. Feridoon Saffiezedel | 3. فریدون صافیزدیل |
| | 4. Babake Amiri | 4. باباک امیری |
| | 5. Majid Amiri | 5. مجید امیری |
| | 6. Jon Katz | 6. جان کاتز |
| | 7. Hamid Amiri | 7. حامد امیری |
| | 8. Feridoon Alam | 8. فریدون آلوم |
| | 9. Henry Dattel. | 9. ہنری ڈائل |

•••••
 It was a great climb with great weather. We had no
 obstacles. The peak of Alam Kuch was reached at 12:30 p.m.
 by Miss Arlene Dattelton, Feridoon Saffiezedel and Henry Dattel
 with Rassoud Nopari as guide. Feridoon Alam and Mikei
 Hantchieff made it to Shatehake peak, ^{which} involved more rock climbing.
 "I'll be back!"

Handwritten notes in Urdu/Arabic script, including a signature and some illegible text.

Besmi taala

Après 4 essais le 29 Shivar à
12h20 nous sommes finalement
arrivés au sommet de l'Alamkouh
d'après mon altimètre 4730m
mais d'après Safar 4850m.

Cette fois nous avons attaqué
l'Alamkouh par le côté Est c'est
à dire par Hesarchohl.

Besmetlak Rahman vahim va
rahmatollah va barekoto

Micky Houtieff
Kabali Gohramani
Khaïam Nagavi

This was my fourth trip thru this region
my first was with four other friend six years
AGO since then I've been thru this beautiful
region at least once a year.

Chal
Sept 80