



THE SWAT PROJECT



The Swat District includes, in its northern section, the southernmost ridges of the Hindu Raj. In contrast with the northern Hindu Raj, the Swat mountains, overlooking the great plains of Punjab, fall within the monsoon belt and as a result are lushly wooded.





These valley forests, dense with fir, himalayan cedar and birch trees, are surrounded by peaks that, despite not being particularly high - at least by Himalayan standards - are quite impressive nonetheless.





Thanks to studies by renowned professor Giuseppe Tucci, Swat has been identified with the legendary Uddiyana of Buddhist texts.



The mystic monk Padmasambhava moved from Uddiyana to Tibet to convert a large majority of its inhabitants to Buddhism.

There he is
still
worshipped
under the
name of
Guru
Rimpoche.



The central area of Swat has known the presence of Italian archaeologists since the 1950s. Thanks to their surveys, excavations and restorations, the region has been recognized as one of the most extraordinary centres of Greco-Buddhist art of the Gandhara.









Research
that
continues
to this day
with
increasing
success.



In the distant past, a constant flow of merchant caravans, Buddhist pilgrims and freebooters coming from Central Asia, crossed the high passes of northern Swat to reach the wealthy plains of Punjab and India.



Surely all of them were struck by the beauty of these green mountain valleys surrounded by many fascinating peaks.

The same happens to today's modern visitors.



Mountains of Swat



FALAK SAR

5.950 mt

the mighty king of the upper Swat



MIANGUL SAR

5.790 mt

hidden between the valleys of Ushu and Gabral



KAHRAKALI 5.949 mt

Faisal Arfeen

on the border between Swat and Chitral,

karakali

THALO ZOM

5.990 mt

towering above a huge glacier.





BATIN PEAKS

5.600 mt

shaping the skyline of the village of Matiltan

SIRRI DARRA

5.700 mt

K. Sighi Visitant





MANKIAL 5.710 mt
a fairy vision visible even from Lower Swat.



The north face
of Mankial,
picturised by
me in the
summer of
1964. Why I
was there in
those days?



During that
1964
Professor
Tucci invited a
group of
young
mountaineers
from the
University of
Rome to
attempt a first
exploration of
the Swat
mountains.

The goal was offering to the government authorities of Swat (still semi-independent at the time) a plan for developing high mountain adventure tourism in the area of Swat Kohistan.



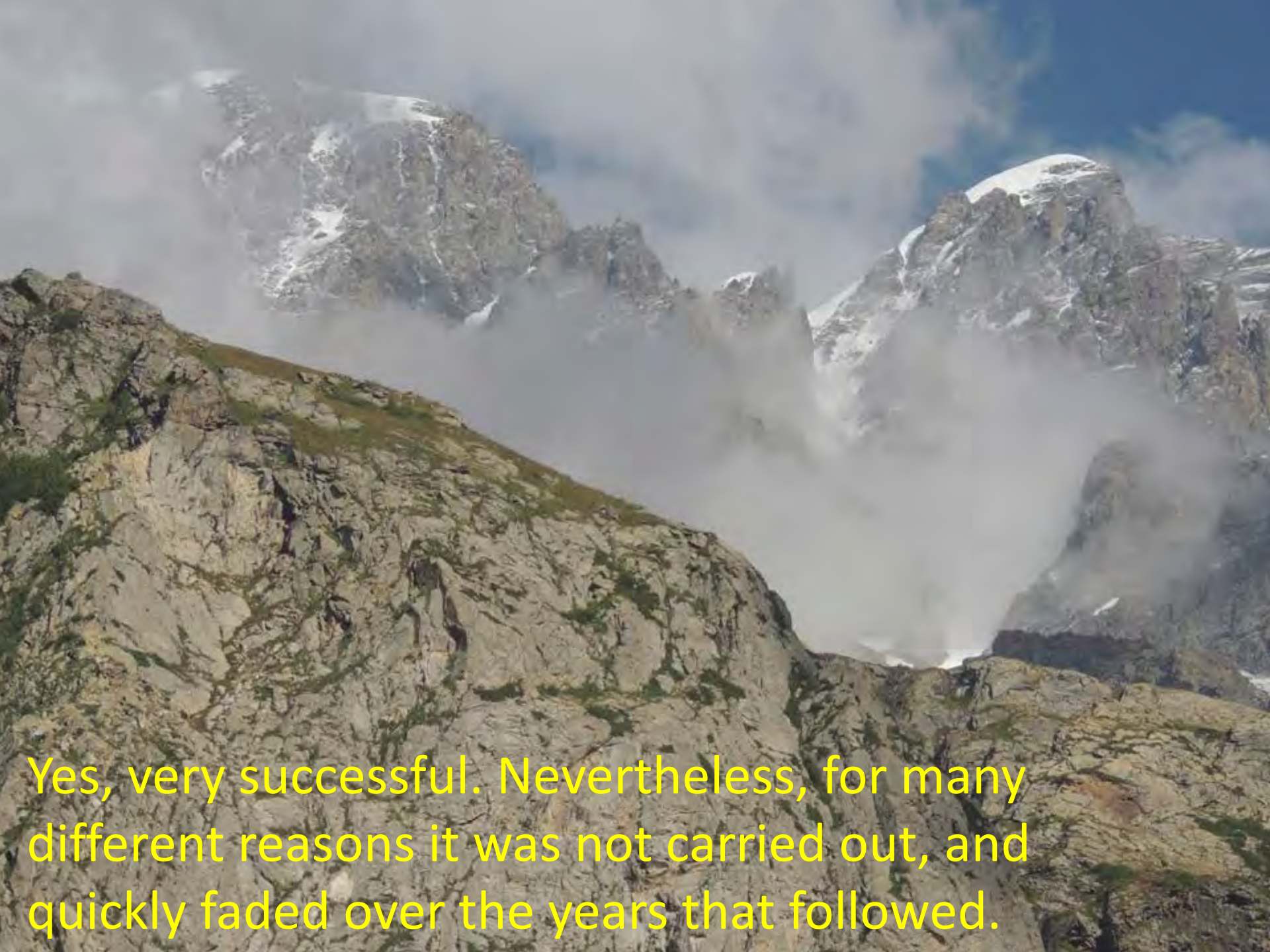


Although we were not blessed by constant good weather the project was successful.









Yes, very successful. Nevertheless, for many different reasons it was not carried out, and quickly faded over the years that followed.



In early 2017, we were contacted by prof. Luca Olivieri, director of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Swat

He requested us to explore the possibility of reviving professor Giuseppe Tucci's project more than half a century later.

Mountain Wilderness International accepted the task enthusiastically and immediately went about giving the old project greater breadth and detail....



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WILDERNESS

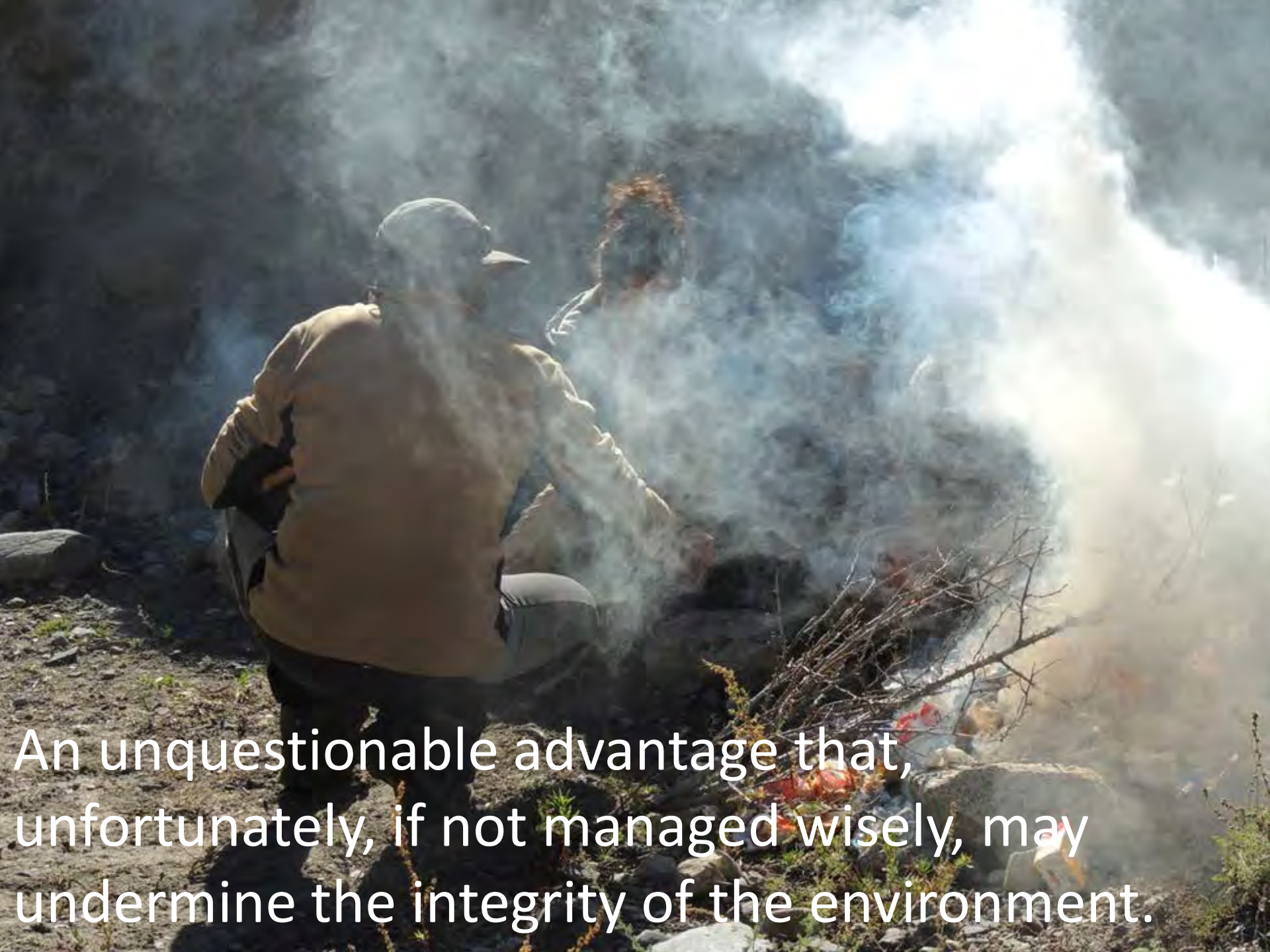


... keeping pace with the modern ecological/environmental awareness in which our Association is deeply rooted.

Due to the relative proximity to the major urban centres of the plain, the Upper Swat valleys are today the only ones of the huge Himalaya range that can be accessed, hiked and climbed without the need to organise classic complex expeditions consisting of long approach marches and numerous porters.







An unquestionable advantage that, unfortunately, if not managed wisely, may undermine the integrity of the environment.



We want more tourists to enjoy the unique experience of these unspoiled hills; but not to the detriment of the mountain's true message.

We are ready to use our experience to help in the definition of a set of rules and regulations, to be implemented by the KP Government in accordance with the local population.

For this purpose we planned a project divided in three steps.

Mountain Wilderness has solid experience in organizing mountaineering courses that combine technical climbing skills with environmental awareness.









THE SWAT PROJECT

Environment friendly mountaineering course for trekking Guides
Swat Kohistan, August - September 2018



The Swat Project **STEP ONE:**

Training of a group of young locals as reliable trekking guides that may, at the same time, work with us to develop a hiking / mountaineering **GUIDE BOOK** of their mountains.

A photograph showing two hikers in a natural, rocky outdoor setting. The hiker in the foreground is wearing a white bucket hat, a teal long-sleeved shirt, and light-colored pants, and is writing in a small notebook. The hiker in the background is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and black pants with white stripes, also writing in a notebook. Both are wearing large backpacks. The ground is rocky and covered with dry pine needles. Other hikers are visible in the background.

The exploration of new itineraries and their careful description is of paramount importance.



We wanted our trainees to become good trekking guides as well as local sentries, ready to counter any attempt to spoil the integrity of the environment.

The planned guidebook, inspired by the principles dear to Mountain Wilderness, may have a positive influence on future tourist choices, also at an international level.



In September 2018 – with the agreement and help of the KP Government - , Mountain Wilderness already completed this first step by holding an Environment Friendly Mountaineering course. It was attended by 21 local trainees with no previous climbing experience.

Their trainers were from Europe and Pakistan.





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environment friendly mountaineering course for trekking Guides
Swat Kohistan, August - September 2016



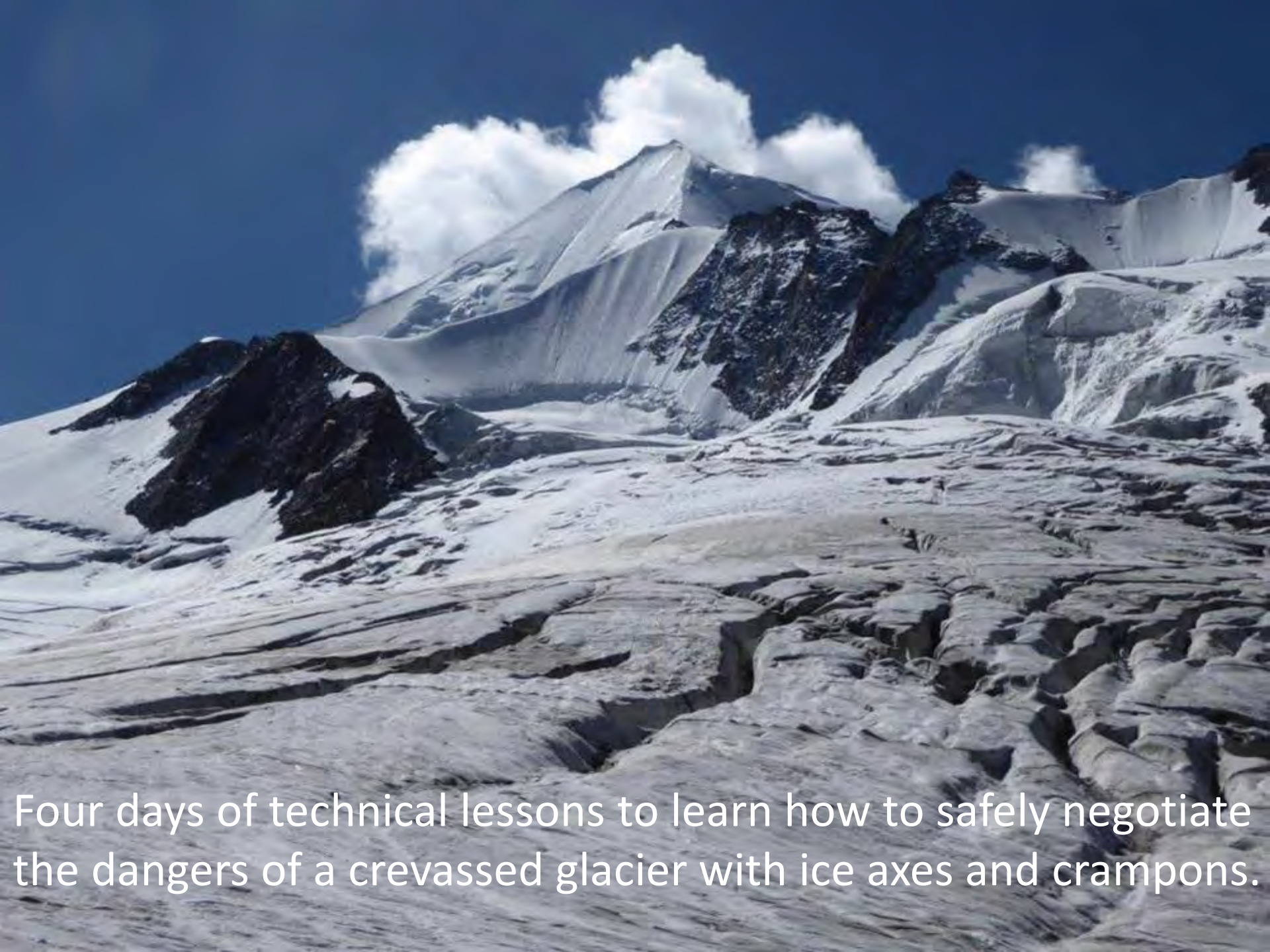


The course, which lasted two weeks, began with theoretical lessons and rock climbing exercises.

Then we pitched our second camp at the foot of the faraway glacier of Falaksar.

Altitude 4000 meters.





Four days of technical lessons to learn how to safely negotiate the dangers of a crevassed glacier with ice axes and crampons.









STEP TWO

The exploration and description of possible trekking itineraries in the principal mountain valleys.







A first selection of trekking itineraries were successfully explored in the second half of August 2019 by small groups of Mountain Wilderness supporters, with the assistance of our best former local trainees who acted as guides, facilitators and organisers.





















Trekking activities were conducted along with some more strictly mountaineering achievements.



Three mountaineering European instructors, accompanied by three Pakistani ex-trainees, succeeded in climbing Thalo Zom (5990 metres), an imposing peak situated between the upper Swat and Chitral districts











These initial explorations did not exhaust the trekking/mountaineering potential of the upper Swat;

Thus we are planning to add an additional phase in 2021, bringing in Pakistan only tourists vaccinated against Coronavirus 19.

STEP THREE

Collation of the material produced thanks to step two; editing and publication of a printed **GUIDE BOOK** in English, Urdu and Italian.



It is of paramount importance that this guide be seen by the recently trained local youths as an achievement in which they themselves were co-protagonists.

The book will also include itineraries for visiting the “romantic” ruins of the Buddhist monuments tucked away among the lower Swat valleys.



The book will be useful to teach to local and foreign visitors , looking for the experience of wilderness and adventure, not only how to move in these mountains – led by trained guides -, but also how to behave avoiding to spoil the beauty of the natural landscape.

What emerges from the above outline of the Swat project is not only its cultural/ecological and outdoor sports nature....





.... but also how it can raise awareness of and sensitivity to cultural heritage and self esteem identity by encouraging the active and long-term involvement of the mountain valley communities.









THE END

