

Sulle Tracce dei Ghiacciai



SQUINTING IN THE LIGHT OF THE KARAKORAM, the photographer Fabiano Ventura compares an eighty-year-old image to the gold and cinnamon peaks surrounding him. A distinct outcrop occupies the foreground of the photo, but no such monolith appears in the modern landscape. Has nearly a century of wind and water destroyed the rock? Or is he in the wrong place? A wasteland of crushed stone and broken boulders tumbles out to distant summits on the horizon. Could one of those fragments have been part of the outcrop? Or perhaps that stone lies still farther upstream?

Hours spent pouring over faded journals and staring at digital elevation maps have led him and a team of scientists to this Karakoram ridge. But he can't get his perspective to match the old photograph precisely.

As he examines the historical picture again, even the background peaks seem different from those in the panorama before him. The team vacillates, uncertain. Another look at the mountains. They have climbed too high. The rock in the photo lies downstream. Ventura surveys the land below with a surge of hope: That large rock? Could it be? It is.

There among the rocks, the same stone still stands despite eighty years of erosion, receding glaciers and landslides. Ventura unfolds his Linhof camera and begins to frame the exact shot that Massimo Terzano captured on the 1929 Italian Geographical Expedition to the Karakoram.

Ventura's *Sulle Tracce dei Ghiacciai* ("On the Trails of the Glaciers") represents an artistic and scientific project to reproduce early twentieth-century views of remote landscapes by illustrious explorers and photographers like Terzano and Vittorio Sella. While the original

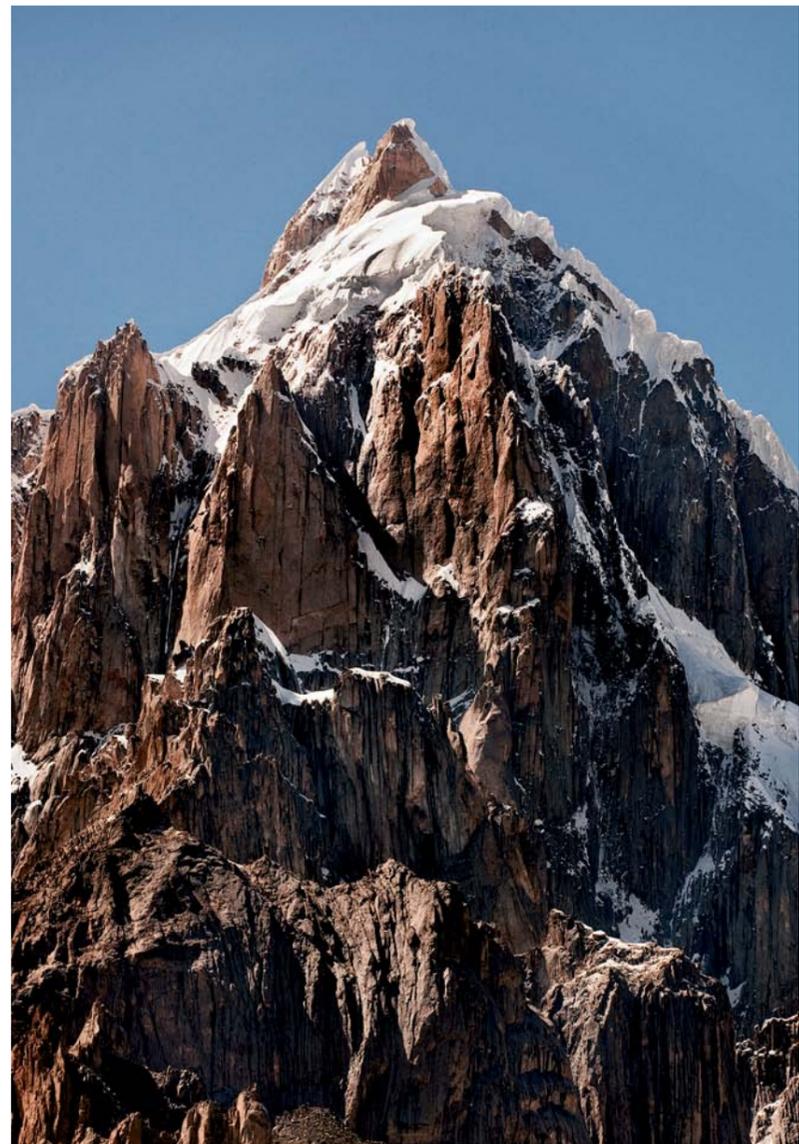
expeditions sought to determine the heights and locations of mountains and passes, Ventura's team now uses the pictures for a different purpose: to study climate change, highlighting the transformations in the environment that surrounds these famous peaks.

The juxtaposition of old and new photos shows the deterioration in the glaciers that carve through the Karakoram and provide much of the freshwater to the region, making visible a metamorphosis that otherwise, Ventura says, "the slow flow of time [would leave] imperceptible even to the most careful viewer." ■



[Opening Spread] Two images, one historical and one modern, showing the confluence of the Baltoro Glacier and the Godwin-Austen Glacier from above Concordia Camp (4650m). Massimo Terzano took the black and white photo in 1909; Fabiano Ventura captured the color one a hundred years later. Massimo Terzano, 1929 © Associazione Ardito Desio / Maria Emanuela Desio. All color photos by Fabiano Ventura, 2009 | [Opening Spread (portraits), top to bottom] Fabiano Ventura, 2009. Vittorio Sella on the Baltoro, 1909. In addition to first winter ascents of the Matterhorn (4478m) and Monte Rosa (4364m), Sella explored the Greater Ranges as the expedition photographer for the Duke of the Abruzzi. Massimo Terzano in

1929. Born in 1892, Terzano began as an assistant cinematographer at age fifteen. In 1929 he documented the Italian Geographic Karakoram Expedition. Vittorio Sella, 1909; Giuseppe Chiardola, 1929 © Associazione Ardito Desio / Maria Emanuela Desio | [Facing Page] Though the terminus of the Baltoro Glacier (pictured here) has remained largely constant over the last eighty years, it suffered a noticeable decrease in mass. Massimo Terzano, 1929 © Società Geografica Italiana | [This Page] According to the American Foundation for International Mountaineering, Exploration and Research, the Liligo Glacier (visible in this photo) has lost half its thickness in some places since 1909. Vittorio Sella, 1909 - © Fondazione Sella



[This Page] A telephoto image of Paiju (6610m) taken from the Liligo Glacier. The mountain's name (the Balti word for salt) derives from deposits near its base. Legend claims that at one time locals believed that the summit glacier was made from salt. Ventura's modern photo demonstrates that the mountain's hanging glaciers are now either deteriorating or have already disappeared completely. Vittorio Sella, 1909 - © Fondazione

Sella | [Facing Page] The 1909 expedition's campsite under the Trango Towers (6286m), an area rich with climbing lore, including Martin Boysen's famous jammed-knee epic (see *Alpinist* 11) the year before he joined the 1976 first ascent of Nameless Tower (6239m). This pair of photos displays the changes over the last century: the glacier has receded by some fifty-sixty meters, a full ropelength. Vittorio Sella, 1909 - © Fondazione Sella



[Spread] A 200° view of Concordia Circle, showing the tip of Mustagh Tower (7284m) on the far left and the needle point of Savoia Kangri (7286m). The Godwin-Austen Glacier curves around Crystal (6252m) and Marble (6256m) peaks; past the white outline of Angel Peak (6858m) toward the mountain that once shared its name, K2 (8611m). The Baltoro Glacier continues under the central form of Broad Peak (8051m); the

sharp ridges of Gasherbrum VI (7003m), IV (7952m), V (7174m) and III (7952m); and the obscured top of Hidden Peak (8080m). Sia Kangri forms the backstop for the Baltoro Glacier. | [Facing Page, Low] A higher-definition selection from the panorama demonstrating the recession of the glacier below Crystal and Marble peaks. Massimo Terzano, 1929 – ©Associazione Ardito Desio /Maria Emanuela Desio



[These photos have been exhibited in several shows in Europe, and a documentary of Ventura's work is set for worldwide release. Currently Ventura is planning the second stage in this project with a trip to the Caucasus, followed by trips to Alaska, the Andes and the Alps. More information can be found at sulletraccedeighiacciai.it.—Ed.]

Read an exclusive interview with Fabiano Ventura at alpinist.com/glaciers