

Five more mountains in Papua

Accompanied again by Steven Drive Liwe and IMG guide, Dan Zokaites, Anthony Nightingale made a fourth expedition to Indonesian Papua, aiming to climb five new mountains.

These had been climbed six years previously by an Indonesian university expedition, one of whose leading members, Sofyan, joined our party. Broery and Arlen made up the rest of our team.

We gathered together in Timika to plan the exact itinerary.



We then flew to Enarotali (1700 meters) and spent one night there to aid our acclimatization. Enarotali is a small town beside a beautiful lake. Here we can see the villagers from the surrounding countryside coming in for market day.



We too stocked up on supplies.



We helicoptered to our base camp by the mysterious Lake Idenberg (4280 meters) in two parties. The hard work of the first party in erecting our tents was momentarily upset by the wind created by the helicopter's rotor blades.



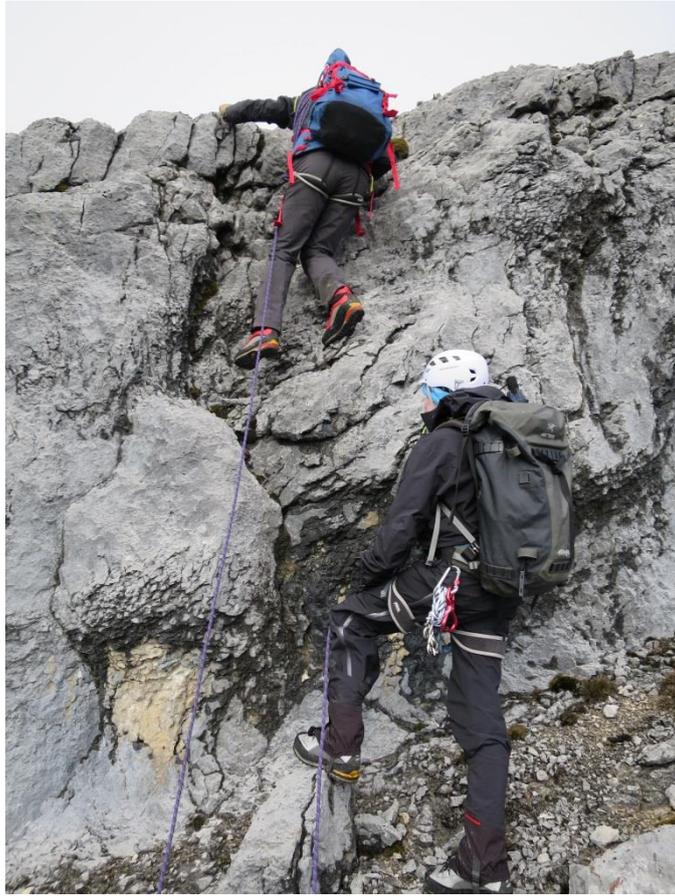
I described Lake Idenberg as mysterious since from time to time it disappears but during our stay, it was very much in evidence. Perhaps influenced by the lake and the shape of the small valley, it was a cold camp site and as always in Papua there was plenty of rain.



On the day of our arrival, we had an exploratory hike to the end of a valley where on a clear day you can see Carstensz Pyramid and the Grasberg Mine. We then prepared for the first of our climbs the next day.

At 0545 on Day 2, we set off for Mera Putih on a pleasant morning with occasional sun.





After a couple of hours, we roped up and there was some scrambling which due to the altitude still took some effort and soon we were on the top, some 4635 meters.



After a snack, we descended to the ridge between Mera Putih and Garuda. This had not been traversed by the previous expedition but proved relatively straightforward though we remained roped up with occasional belays.



We then climbed up over scree and rock to the top of Garuda (4627 meters), just slightly lower than Mera Putih.

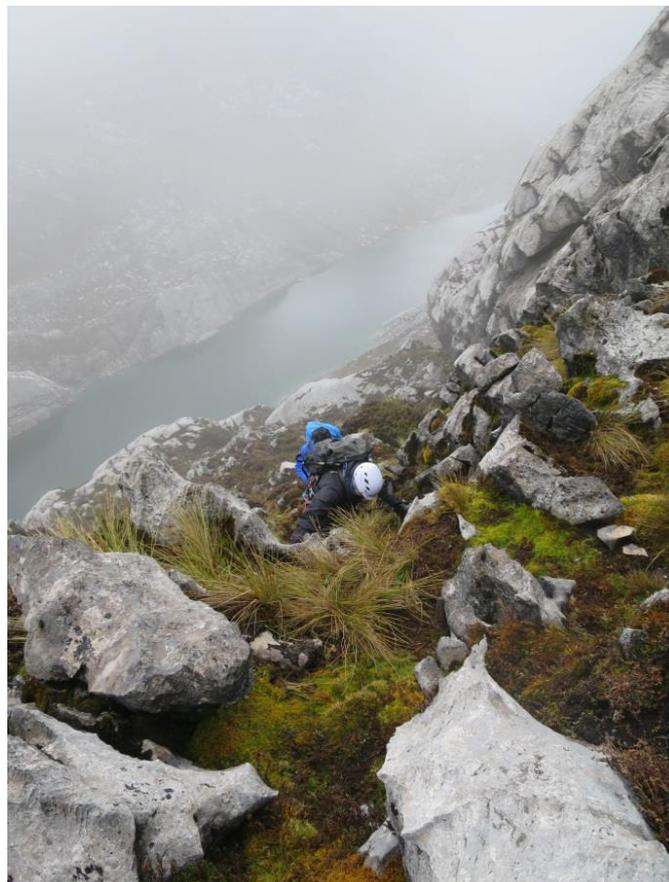


We descended by way of a long scree field, first straight down and then traversing across the mountain above the lake to return to our camp. The round trip, including breaks, took 6 hours and 26 minutes.



Having originally planned for acclimatization purposes a rest day for Day 3, we decided to bring forward the climb of our third mountain, Idenberg,

We set off around 0600 and decided to use a new route which Dan had spotted during our previous day's climb which started up a steep grassy route interspersed with rocks. While we had the rope at hand, we did not use it on this section. It was cold and windy.



The descent was relatively rapid giving us a round trip of 6 hours and 20 minutes.



Day 4, our rest day, conveniently contained the worst weather of the trip though we managed a brief sortie for some air.



The following day we set off to our fourth mountain, Mahitala, separated by quite a distance from the first three.

We began by ascending the steep gully across the small valley from our camp.



This gully, perhaps because the soil is constantly moved around by the incessant rain, contains many fossils that can be spotted by the sharp eye.



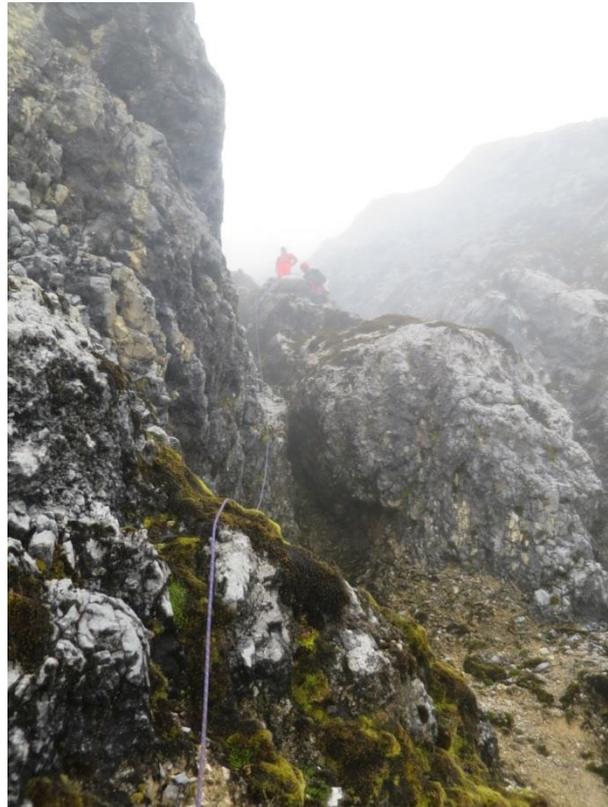
At the top of the first section, there were some rock climbing moves needed to transfer to a second section.



That took us up to the ridge which at 4636 meters was about the same height as Mera Putih and Garuda.



The down climb the other side was a bit more complicated than expected with cloud obscuring the view down to the valley below. Eventually after descending a while, we came to a step when the rope came in handy to help us securely down.

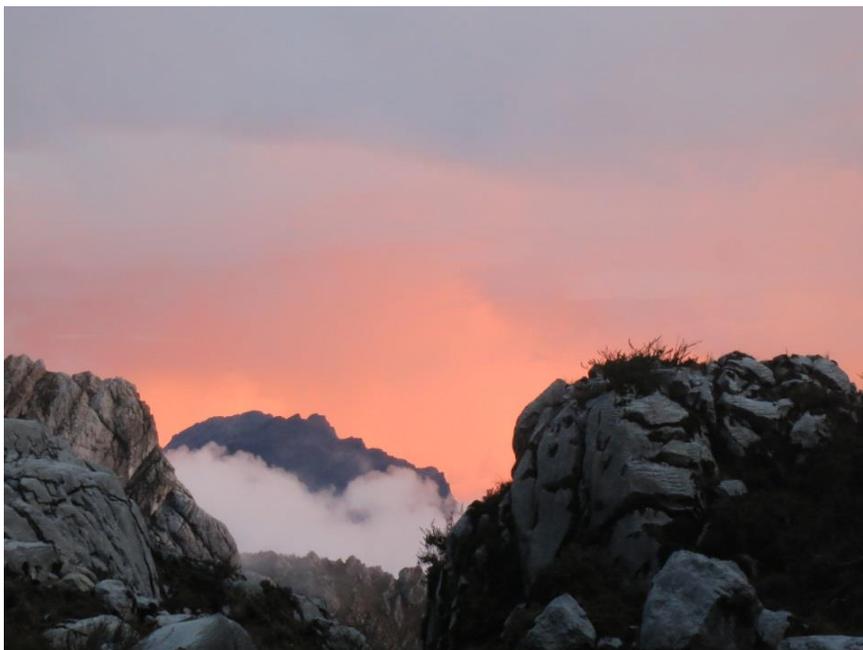


We then had some benign terrain till we found an excellent camp site close to water at 4229 meters, some 50 meters lower than our base camp at Lake Idenberg.



We had taken 5 hours and 45 minutes most of it on strenuous terrain.

In the evening, we were rewarded with our first Papuan sunset.



In the night, it snowed.



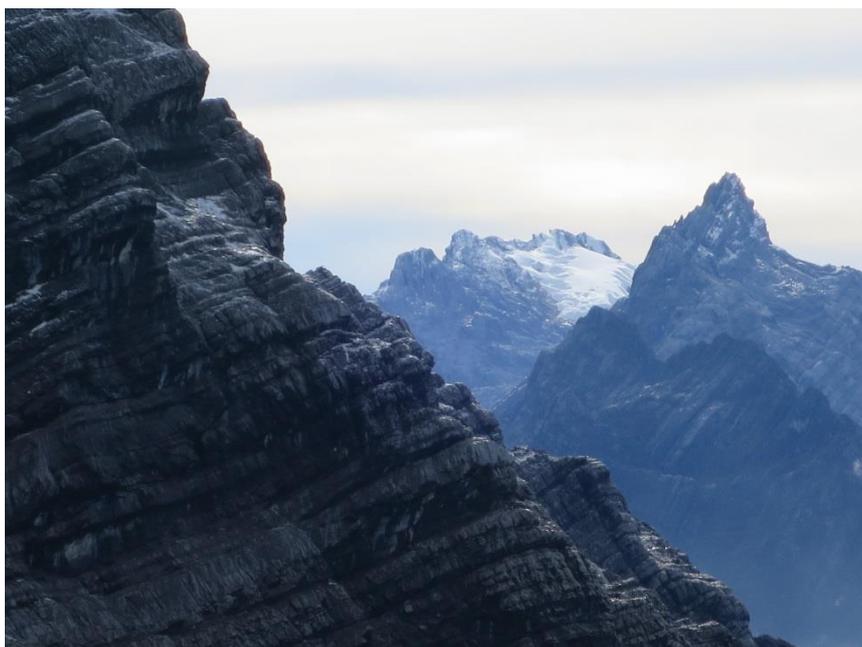
Knowing we had a long journey to Mahitala Peak, we rose early with the moon still in the sky and set off at 0500.



As we traversed the side of the hill, we needed to take care as the grass often concealed holes.



As we climbed higher, looking behind us we could see Carstensch Pyramid and East Carstensch with its glacier in the distance.



We rose to a saddle at 4444 meters, time for a rest before continuing on our way.



We then had to lose all the height we had gained and more descending to 4190 meters



before we could ascend the face of Mahitala.



Again, after deliberation, we chose to ascend a different route identified by Dan far to the left of the way Sofyan had chosen 6 years ago.



It proved a relatively straight forward ascent up the crack with some steep sections but we could move well.



After passing through a narrow passage with an overhang,



we came out on to some slabs, realizing we still needed to move a considerable way to the right to access the summit. Broery built cairns to mark our route, which proved very useful in the descent when the visibility was much reduced.



Eventually after nearly 7 hours, we reached a point just below the top needing a short belay to arrive on to the summit itself. As the photo below illustrates this was Dan and Anthony's 10th Papuan summit at 4623 meters.



As we started down from the summit, the rain came making the rock slabs slippery and treacherous and the going slow till we reached the crack where we could descend easily.



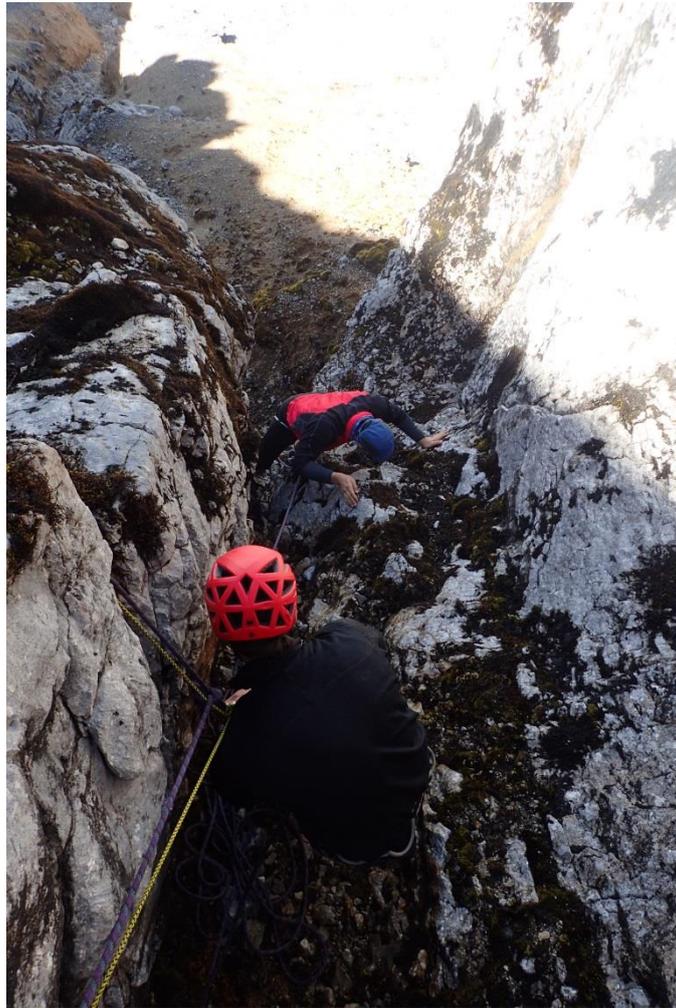
From the bottom of the valley, we needed to retrace our steps up again to the saddle at 4444 meters.



As the evening came on the skies cleared and we had some beautiful views, reaching camp some 13 hours after our departure.



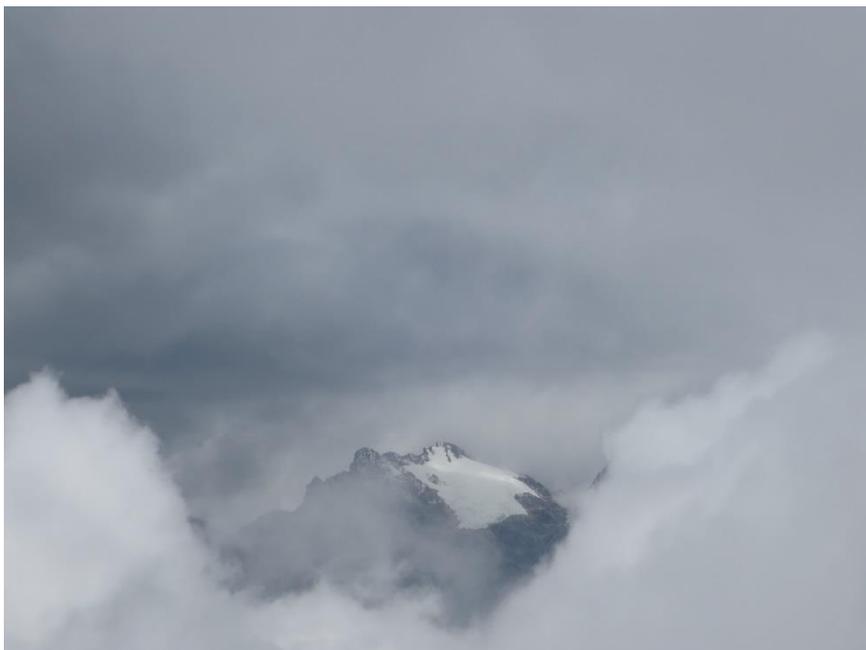
The following morning, Day 7, of the expedition, we packed up and left camp at 0715 and made our way up to the step where Dan aided by Broery did sterling work hauling up the packs and belaying the team one by one.



We then retraced our steps climbing up



till we finally reached the ridge where we caught a glimpse of East Carstensz through the clouds.



and were soon able to see down to our Base Camp.



While we were travelling to and from Mahitala, Arlen looked after our base camp and was rewarded one day with sunshine on a frosty morning.



And there were blue skies over Lake Idenberg.



On our final morning, Day 8, we packed up the camp planning, with the aide of our helpful helicopter pilots, to take in a final mountain Unpar before travelling back to Enarotali.



Anthony, Dan and Sofyan set off, realizing that we had to complete the round trip in around 2 and a half hours to catch the helicopter when it returned for us.

Although cloudy, we could see a fair distance and Carstensz Pyramid and its surrounding mountains were soon in view.



You can see from the left Sumantri, Ngga Pulu, East Carstensz and Carstensz Pyramid.



With a quick scramble, we were finally on the top of Unpar (4520 meters), a fifth peak for this trip and eleventh peak in Papua overall.

