

The **Karakoram** is a mountain range spanning the borders of China, India, and Pakistan, with the northwest extremity of the range extending to Afghanistan and Tajikistan; its highest 15 mountains are all based in Pakistan. It begins in the Wakhan Corridor (Afghanistan) in the west, encompasses the majority of Gilgit-Baltistan (controlled by Pakistan), and extends into Ladakh (controlled by India) and Aksai Chin (controlled by China). It is the second highest mountain range in the world and part of the complex of ranges including the Pamir Mountains, the Hindu Kush and the Himalayan Mountains. The Karakoram has eighteen summits over 24,600 ft height, with four of them exceeding 26,000 ft including K2, the second highest peak in the world at 28,251 ft, Gasherbrum I, Broad Peak and Gasherbrum II.



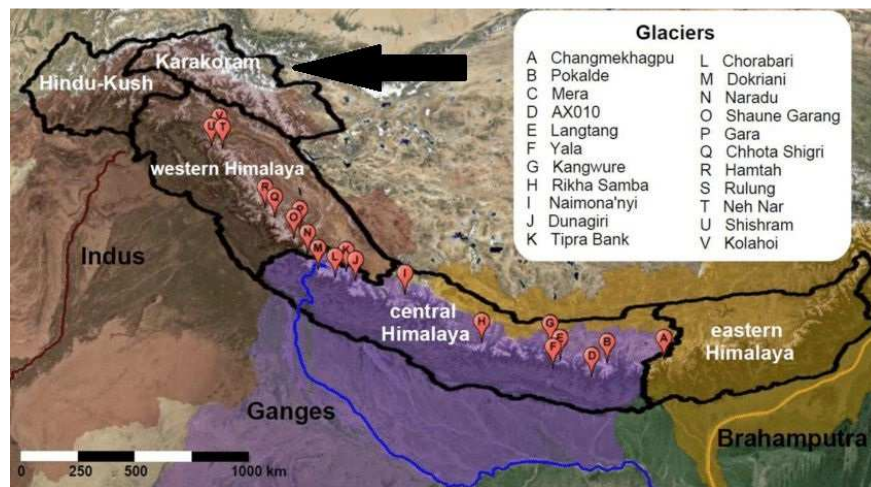
The range is about 311 mi in length and is the most heavily glaciated part of the world outside the polar regions. The Siachen Glacier at 47 mi and the Biafo Glacier at 39 mi rank as the world's second and third longest glaciers outside the polar regions.



The Karakoram is bounded on the east by the Aksai Chin plateau, on the northeast by the edge of the Tibetan Plateau and on the north by the river valleys of the Yarkand and Karakash rivers beyond which lie the Kunlun Mountains. At the northwest corner are the Pamir Mountains. The southern boundary of the Karakoram is formed, west to east, by the Gilgit, Indus and Shyok rivers, which separate the range from the northwestern end of the Himalaya range proper. These rivers flow northwest before making an abrupt turn southwestward towards the plains of Pakistan. Roughly in the middle of the Karakoram range is the Karakoram Pass, which was part of a historic trade route between Ladakh and Yarkand that is now inactive.



The black gravel of Karakoram mountains, as seen near Pakistan's Biafo Glacier. Karakoram is a Turkic term meaning black gravel. The Central Asian traders originally applied the name to the Karakoram Pass. Early European travellers, including William Moorcroft and George Hayward, started using the term for the range of mountains west of the pass, although they also used the term Muztagh (meaning, "Ice Mountain") for the range now known as Karakoram. Later terminology was influenced by the Survey of India, whose surveyor Thomas Montgomerie in the 1850s gave the labels K1 to K6 (K for Karakoram) to six high mountains visible from his station at Mount Haramukh in Kashmir Valley.



Due to its altitude and ruggedness, the Karakoram is much less inhabited than parts of the Himalayas further east. European explorers first visited early in the 19th century, followed by British surveyors starting in 1856.

