



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Adventure Tourism in Gilgit Baltistan Region: Opportunities, Trends and Destinations**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research analyzes the pattern of adventure tourism trend temporally in Gilgit Baltistan for the last decade. The north most, mountain locked region of Pakistan, Gilgit Baltistan is known for multiple adventure tourism destinations within and outside the country. Due to peculiar mountainous land cover, as well as naturally bestowed opportunities of trekking and expedition through eight thousanders (peaks), base camps, elevated surfaces, mighty glaciers and narrow passes both the international and domestic adventure tourists visit the region both individually and in form of groups or parties. The opportunities and trend of adventure tourism is specified in a mix nature of qualitative and quantitative approaches for the current research. In both approaches, the type of data source accessed and analyzed is secondary as the acquisition of adventure tourists data is accomplished through concerned government departments of Gilgit Baltistan region. Results show that the trend of trekking parties is decreasing while the expedition parties' trend is increasing and positive in the region.

**Keywords:** Adventure tourists, Eight thousanders, Expedition, Trekking

**Introduction**

Adventure tours are professionally led tours where the main draw is an outdoor activity that makes use of local geography, typically calls for specialized athletic or similar gear, and is thrilling for the adventure tourists along with dangers and risks (Bebtley& Page, 2001; Buckley, 2017). Adventure tourism typically takes place in natural settings, where visitor immersion will have an influence on nature and the preservation of natural places in addition to financial gain (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2021). There are three categories of adventure travel: conventional, demanding, and rejuvenating. Within each of these categories, there may be survival games, physical activities (such climbing, trekking, expedition, rafting, skydiving, etc.), or even role-playing games. The surroundings, activities, finishing tasks, motivation, sensation of danger, and experience are the essential elements of an exciting journey (Beedie& Hudson, 2003; Pritchard & Morgan, 2010; Rantala, 2018).

The northern region of Pakistan (Gilgit Baltistan) is one of the most popular domestic and international adventure tourist destinations because of its exceptional landscape including highest mountains ranges and snow covered peaks, largest glaciers after the glaciers of the Polar region, narrow and elevated passes and mountain locked surroundings (Arshad et al., 2018; Nigar, 2018; Arif et al., 2019). By giving the local people possibilities for work and a source of revenue production, adventure tourism boosts the economy in this area, and the area is gaining recognition on a national and worldwide scale for adventurous activities (Israr et al., 2010). Because tourism activities are significant contributor to the economy in the Gilgit Baltistan, its growth is inevitable for the prosperity and development of the region (Fazlur-Rahman et al., 2013; Qasim& Rahman, 2022).

## Literature Review

The typical trip activities and services are no longer appealing, a person may start looking for experiences that will engage all of their senses and create more lasting memories. Adventure tourism involving various levels of thrill and survival are suggested by adventure travelers. Although the phrase "adventure" misrepresents the travel experience, the goal of the activity is to instill a sense of danger in locations that are quite severe (Guliyev & Nuriyeva, 2017; Giddy & Webb, 2018). By actively participating in a harsh setting, the voluntary aspect of this style of travel forces the adventure tourists' to test their own physical and emotional limitations. Adventure tourism has been pushed to grow into a significant segment of the tourism business as a result of the transition from self-organized adventure travel to a rising market but this sector is not signified for research purposes (Buckley, 2006).

From the end of the 19th century on, hunting and fishing drew tourists to scenic and exciting locations, particularly in the northern areas. Tourism for canoeing and skiing both developed at the same period. In the 1950s and 1960s, adventure travel became a popular style of travel that was practiced by many people, not just a select few crazy people. The popularity of adventure sports reached a new high in the 1970s, which led to the emergence of specialized service providers, new sports, and specialized gear (Sato et al., 2018; Sand & Gross, 2019). It became one of the most significant tourist niches at the beginning of the twenty-first century and is now regarded as a tourism sector. Within the previous two decades, adventure tourism has established itself and was stated as globally accepted outdoor tourism (Cater, 2006; Cheng et al., 2018).

According to research, there are over 60 million prospective adventure tourists worldwide. Adventure travelers now make up roughly 1% (five million) of all visitors worldwide, and their numbers are increasing by 20% year. Eco- and adventure-related tourism has expanded more than twice as quickly as conventional tourism (Naidoo et al., 2015). It is obvious that the emergence of environmental concerns has motivated businesses and areas to provide alternatives to traditional tourism (Pomfret, 2012). This emphasis has also influenced customer preferences for physically active and healthy holiday activities (Reims, 2002; Dziubinski & Jasny, 2017; Bui & Kiatkawsin, 2020). In addition to the basic tourism activities, several travel agencies now offer adventurous experiences as well. As a result, the market is now more competitive (Lotter et al., 2012).

## Materials and Methods

### Study Area

The study area projected for this research manuscript, 'Gilgit Baltistan region' formerly known as northern areas of Pakistan is the north most mountainous territory of Pakistan. Its absolute location is 32° 10' 0" to 37° 20' 0" N latitude, 72° 40' 0" to 80° 50' 0" E longitude (Figure 1). It borders with [Azad Jammu Kashmir](#) to the South, the province of [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa](#) to the West, the [Wakhan Corridor](#) of Afghanistan to the North West, [Xinjiang](#) region of China to the North and North East and [Jammu and Kashmir](#) to the South East (GoP, 2000).



Figure 1 Location of Gilgit Baltistan

### Area and Elevation

Total area of Gilgit Baltistan region is 72,971 km<sup>2</sup> (28,174) miles with varying elevation of 3,000 ft. to 28,250 ft. in accordance with sea level.

### Data Collection and Analyses

This research is based on mix approaches of quantitative and qualitative data techniques. Both types of data are collected as secondary data. The temporal arrival of adventure tourists including both the locals and foreigners for the study period (2010 to 2020) is gained from the concern departments; Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports Gilgit Baltistan, Directorate and Secretariat of tourism GB and Police Department GB (the tourists are registered at different Police check posts). The data covered both the trekking parties and expedition parties in the region. To determine the opportunities of adventure tourism in Gilgit Baltistan region, the mountainous landscape of the region is overviewed through five eight thousander peaks, main glaciers and famous passes. The data of such physical features are accessed from annual publications of Research Cell, Ministry of Planning and Development Gilgit Baltistan. The data is tabulated and visualized qualitatively through maps using Arc GIS (10.5). The quantitative data in term of temporal influx (expeditors and trekkers) is computed with Microsoft Excel (2020) to analyze the trend pattern for the specified time period.

### Results and Discussion

#### Adventure Tourism opportunities and destinations in Gilgit Baltistan

##### Mountain Peaks (Eight Thousanders) in the study area

Gilgit Baltistan hosts the prominent mountainous ranges and chain of the planet, comprising “Himalayas, Karakoram, Hindukush, Pamir, Pishkom, Kunlun, Tienshah and Transalay”. The congregation of deep gorges, valleys, highlands and hilly and rocky zones are the recognition of its landscape (Khan, 2017).

This region is also the dwelling of five of the “eight – thousanders” out of fourteen, having the height more than eight thousand meters (Figure 2; Table 1.).

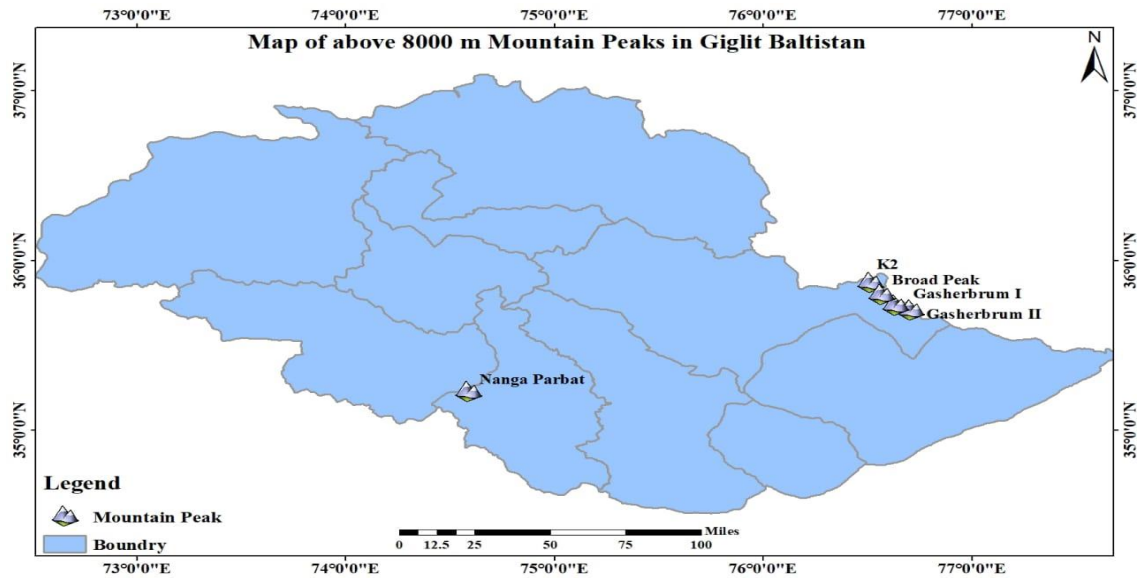


Figure 2 Locations of Eight Thousanders in Gilgit Baltistan

**Table 1**  
**Eight thousander Peaks in Gilgit Baltistan**

S. No.	Mountain Name/ Range	Height in Meters	Location	Mountain Range	World Mountains Ranking
01	K2 (Chogho-Ri)	8611 m	Shiger	Karakoram	2 <sup>nd</sup>
02	Nanga Parbat	8126 m	Diamer	Himalaya	9 <sup>th</sup>
03	Gashebrum -I	8068 m	Shiger	Karakoram	11 <sup>th</sup>
04	Broad Peak	8047 m	Shiger	Karakoram	12 <sup>th</sup>
05	Gashebrum -II	8035 m	Shiger	Karakoram	13 <sup>th</sup>

Source: (GoGB, 2020)

**Glaciers in Gilgit Baltistan region**

Gilgit Baltistan has estimated 2,200 sq. miles, (12%) of area covered with snow and glaciers (Table 2). The five main glaciers are; “Siachen, Biafo, Hispar, Baltoro and Batura” (Figure 3).

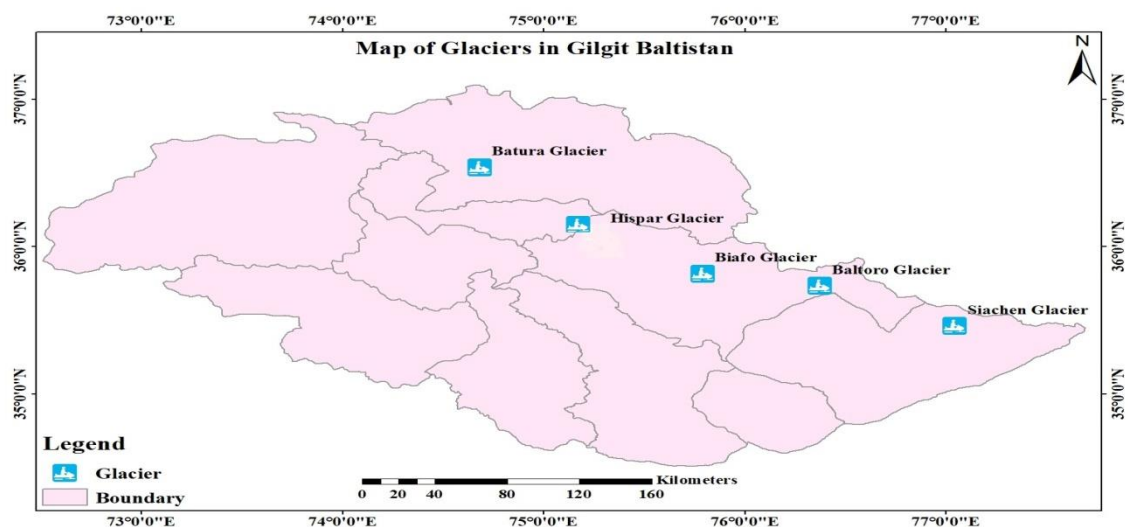


Figure 3 Locations of Main Glaciers in Gilgit Baltistan

**Table 2**  
**Main Glaciers of Gilgit Baltistan**

S. No.	Name of Glacier	Area in km	Location	Mountain Range
01	Siachen Glacier	76 km	Ganche	Karakoram
02	Biafo Glacier	62 km	Shiger	Karakoram
03	Hispar Glacier	61 km	Nagar	Karakoram
04	Baltoro Glacier	58 km	Shiger	Karakoram
05	Batura Glacier	58 km	Hunza	Karakoram
06	Gashebrum	38 km	Shiger	Karakoram
07	ChoghoLungma	38km	Ganche	Karakoram
08	Passu	32km	Hunza	Karakoram
09	Nabandi	32km	Baltistan	Karakoram
10	Baraldu	30km	Shiger	Karakoram
11	Rupal	29km	Astore	Himalaya

Source: (GoGB, 2020)

### Passes in Gilgit Baltistan Region

Passes are the mountainous, elevated and narrow routes which connect two different areas or localities. Passes play significant role in movement of human, transport of trade goods and land accessibility (Maharana, Rai & Sharma, 2000). As GB region is a mountain locked region covered by the mighty ranges of mountains of world, so the passes in the region are providing accessibility for local, inter - provincial and international boundaries (Figure 4; Derbyshire et al., 2001).

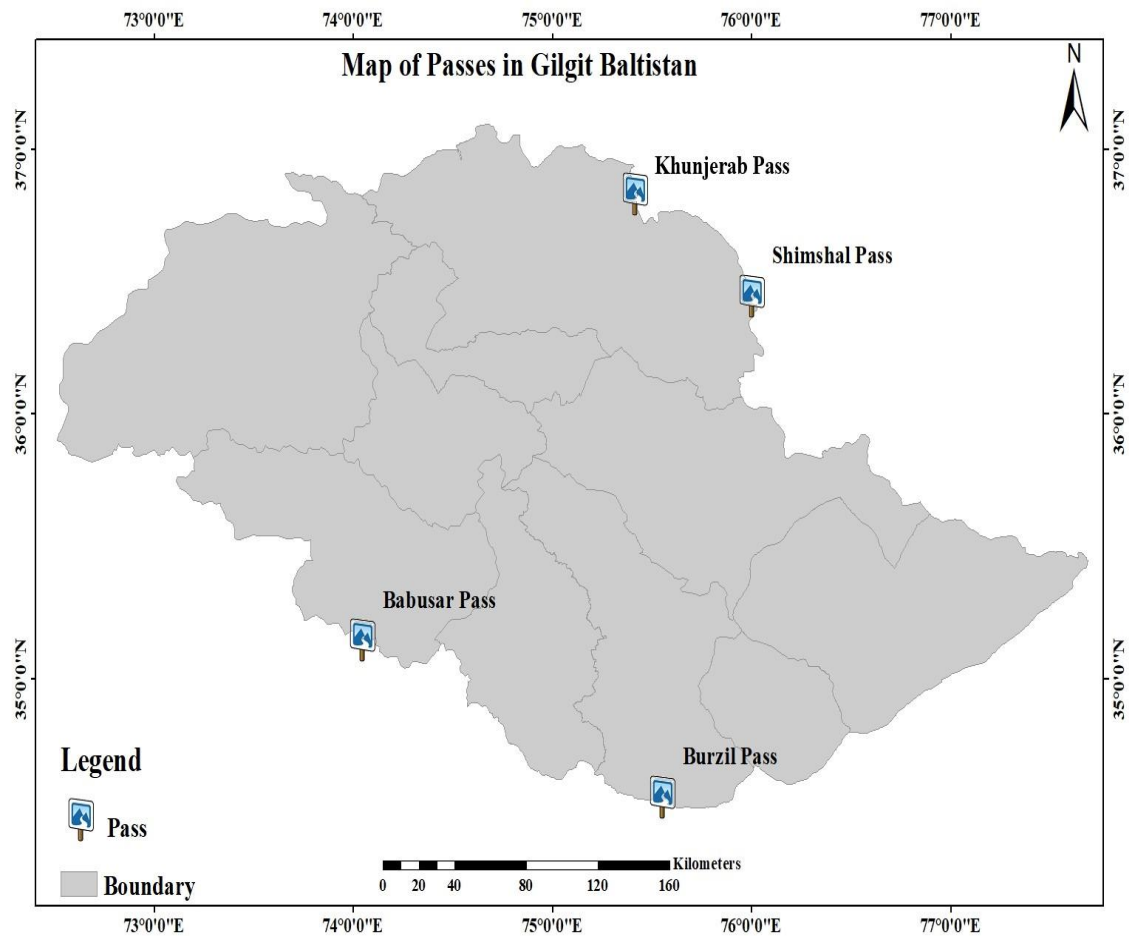


Figure 4 Locations of main Passes in GB

**Table 3**  
**Main Passes of Gilgit Baltistan region**

S. No.	Name of Pass	Connected Areas	Elevation	Division	Location
01	Khunjerab Pass	Pakistan - China	4693m.	Gilgit	Hunza
02	Babusar Pass	GB – KPK	4173m.	Diamer	Chilas
03	Burzil Pass	Astore - Srinagar	4100m.	Diamer	Astore
04	Shimshal Pass	Hunza - China	4735m.	Gilgit	Hunza
05	Karambar Pass	Ghizer - Chitral	4300m.	Gilgit	Ghizer
06	Mintaka Pass	Hunza - China	4700m.	Gilgit	Hunza
07	Chillinji la Pass	Ghizer – Hunza	5300m.	Gilgit	Ghizer
08	Gondogoro la Pass	Shiger – Ganche	5940m.	Baltistan	Shiger

Source: (Khan, 2017)

### Trend Pattern and Growth of Adventure Tourism

#### Trekking Parties in Gilgit Baltistan

The mountainous landscape of Gilgit Baltistan attracts different types of tourists in the region. Tourists arrive in the study area with separate preferences including; to view the high mountains, sighting of snow covered mountains, remote view of eight thousanders from view points and few visit to walk on mountainous tracks. The trekking parties arrive in the region to trek on mountainous arduous routes as this region is “home to world’s three great mountain range including Himalayas, Karakoram and Hindukush”. The world famous trekking adventures in GB are trekking to the base camps of eight thousanders especially towards K-2 and Nanga Parbat base camps. The majority of the trekkers who arrive in GB to trek on famous routes belong to the foreign countries. These trekkers generally visit in groups and with the help of local guides and porters they accomplish the strenuous journey.

#### Temporal Arrival of Trekking Parties in GB 2010 – 2020

The data expresses that 154 trekking groups with 578 members reach in 2010 for trekking. To facilitate these tourists, 154 tour guides and 1618 low porters are hired by the concerned tour operators. In the year 2011, a total of 145 trekking parties arrive with 723 members and these parties take services of 145 tour guides and 2111 low porters. The year 2012 records the highest arrival of 170 trekking parties including 767 trekkers. 175 local guides and 2066 low porters render their services this year. The region hosts 136 trekking groups in 2013. 140 tour guides and 1570 low porters are hired for services to these trekkers. For the next three year; 2014 – 2016, the trekking parties recorded figures are 99, 64 and 98 respectively. The hiring of guides also shows double figure numbers for these three years. A total of 130 trekking parties reach in 2017 for trekking. 132 local guides and 1747 low porters offer services to the parties. The year 2018 verifies the highest number of trekking members during the study period as 912 trekking members arrive in 157 groups. 153 trekking parties with 906 members trek on different routes throughout the region in 2019. 153 tour guides, one high porter and 2388 low porters are indulged to provide required services to these trekkers (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Trekking Parties in Gilgit Baltistan 2010 - 2020**

Year	Trekking Parties	Total members	Total Guides	Porters indulged	
				High Porter	Low Porter
2010	154	578	154	0	1618
2011	145	723	145	0	2111
2012	170	767	175	0	2066
2013	136	565	140	0	1570
2014	99	447	99	0	1237
2015	64	209	64	0	653
2016	98	473	98	0	1386



2017	130	675	132	0	1747
2018	157	912	158	0	2232
2019	153	906	153	1	2388
2020	COVID-19	-	-	-	-

Source: (Tourism Department Gilgit Baltistan, 2020)

The highest trekking group of 170 in 2012 and the lowest trekking parties of 64 in 2015 are apparent in the illustration. Although the number of trekking parties increase after 2015 but it never reaches the highest number during the study period. The trend line demonstrates the downward or decreasing trend of trekking parties. Moreover, the decreasing trend is not gentle according to the trend line. The downward trend regarding trekking parties' arrival figures from approximately 140 trekking groups and it persists between bit higher than 120 groups to nearly 140 groups. The temporal arrival of trekking parties in the region is also not stagnant according to the acquired data (Figure 5).

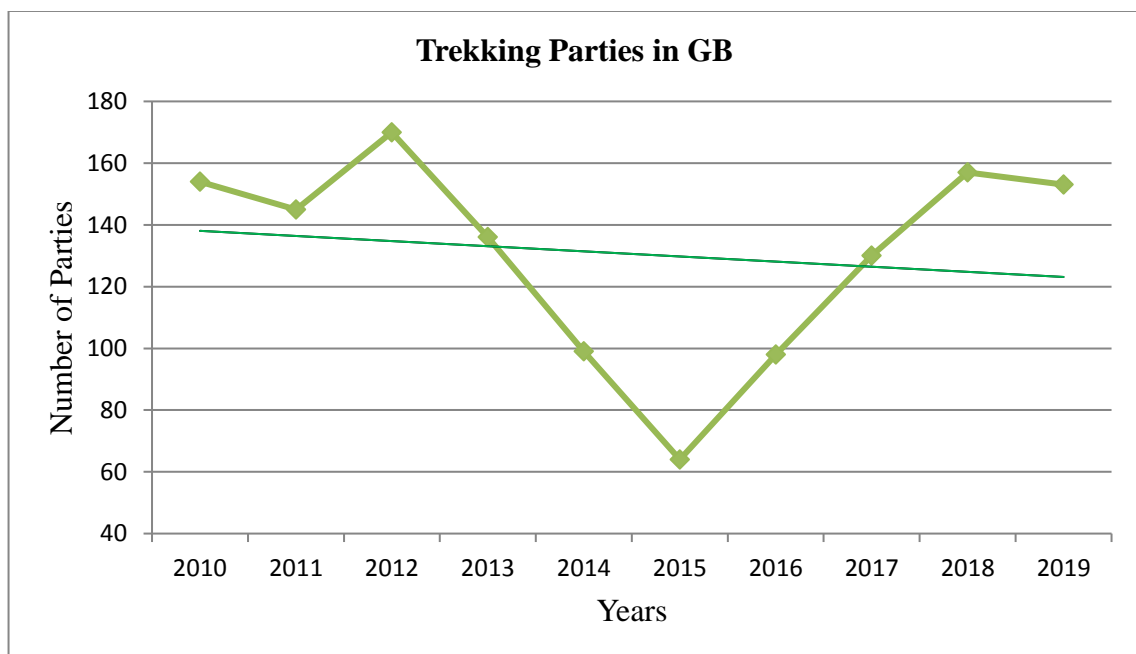


Figure 5 Trend Pattern of Trekking Parties in GB 2010 - 2019

### Temporal Arrival of Expedition Parties in Gilgit Baltistan

The expedition parties in GB arrive as part of adventure tourism activities. The members of expedition parties basically aim to expedite the “peaks of more than eight thousand meters”. There are five such peaks in GB region including;

- K-2 (8611 m.)
- Nanga Parbat (8125 m.)
- Gashebrum I (8080 m.)
- Broad Peak (8051 m.)
- Gashebrum II (8034 m.)

### Temporal Arrival of Expedition Parties in GB 2011 - 2020

The data states that 18 expedition parties with 132 members reach GB region in 2011 to expedite the highest peaks. The arrival of such parties increases in 2012 as 27 parties with 158 members try expedition in the region. In 2017, a total of 17 expedition

groups with 123 members arrive in the study area. 171 expedition members representing 26 groups from different countries of the world try to summit the peaks in 2014. The region hosts 29 expedition groups with 259 individuals in 2015. 26 high porters and 1261 low porters offer services this year to facilitate the groups. In the year 2016, 28 parties including 184 members arrive for expedition and 26 high as well as 789 low porters render services. With the increase of six groups, the number of expedition parties reach to 34 in 2017 along with 217 members. 36 high porters and 993 low porters are indulged by the tour operators this year. The highest number of expedition groups is listed in 2018 as 37 such groups with 260 members arrive in GB region. To summit the desired peaks, only 12 groups with 68 members of expedition influx towards the study area in 2019. Seven high porters and 232 low porters offer services this year (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Expedition Parties in Gilgit Baltistan, 2011 - 2020**

Year	Expedition Parties	Total members	Porters service	
			High Porter	Low Porter
2011	18	132	-	-
2012	27	158	-	-
2013	17	123	-	-
2014	26	171	6	1102
2015	29	259	26	1261
2016	28	184	26	789
2017	34	217	36	993
2018	37	260	48	1142
2019	12	68	7	232
2020	COVID-19	-	-	-

Source: (Tourism Department Gilgit Baltistan, 2020)

According to the given graph the temporal arrival of expedition parties in the region is reasonable. Except two year 2013 and 2019, the influx of expedition groups is improving temporally. The highest number of group is evident in 2018 and the lowest number in 2019 (Figure 6).

The addition of trend line to determine the trend pattern of expedition parties in GB shows that the trend is increasing and upward. This is positive sign for the promotion of adventure tourism in the region. The increasing trend of expedition parties prevails between 20 to 30 such groups during the study period. The foreign members generally dominate the expedition parties but the involvement of local climbers in recent years is also encouraging (Figure 6).

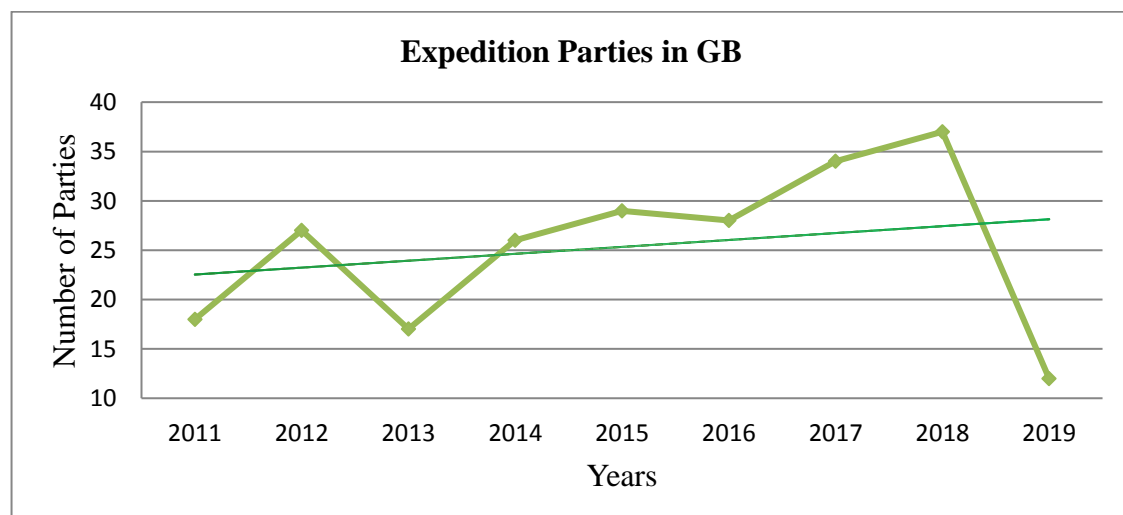


Figure 6 Trend Patterns of Expedition Parties in GB 2011 - 2019



## Conclusion

Gilgit Baltistan has extensive potential for tourism activities due to matchless and exceptional landscape. The natural mountainous setting attracts the tourists throughout the world including mountaineers, trekkers, adventurers and expedition enthusiast to trek and expedite the snow covered eight thousanders which are; K2, Nanga Parbat, G – 1, Broad Peak and G – 2. The world known mountainous passes in GB also share in making the region attractive for the tourists including Khunjerab pass, Babusar pass, Burzil pass, Shimshal pass and several others. These passes provide accessibility to the residents of GB to different areas within Pakistan and beyond the international boundaries. As Khunjerab pass is gateway between Hunza, Pakistan and Xinjiang, China. The Babusar pass connects GB to KPK province while Burzil pass where mass movement closed after independence of the region make Srinagar, Kashmir accessible from Astore, GB. Along with the mountain peaks and passes, the glaciers of GB are also strength to promote tourism activities in the region. The famous glaciers of the region are “Siachen glacier, Biafo glacier, Hispar glacier, Baltoro glacier, Batura glacier” and many others.

The temporal arrival of trekking parties in Gilgit Baltistan during 2010 to 2020 showed that the lowest of 64 in 2015 and highest of 170 trekking parties in 2012 reached the region. As far as members of the groups are concerned, the highest numbers (912) of trekking members were accompanied by 153 trekking parties in 2019. Local tour guides with hundreds in numbers and low porters with thousands in numbers rendered services to the trekking parties during the study period. The highest numbers of 2388 low porters were engaged in 2019 and lowest of 653 in 2015. The trend of trekking parties was down ward and decreasing in the region during the mentioned period.

The influx of expedition parties for the study period of 2011 to 2020 expressed that such parties reached in the region with tens in numbers. The year 2018 witnessed highest number of expedition parties with 260 members. In the year 2019, the temporal arrival of expedition parties in the region was lowest. As only 12 parties with 68 total members tried expedition at different peaks this year. Both the high and low porters rendered services to facilitate the expedition parties. The maximum of 48 high porter in 2018 and 1261 low porters in 2015 were engaged. The minimum engagement of high porters was reported in 2014 with only six and the same was 789 for low porters. The trend of such parties in GB region is upward and increasing according to the trend analysis.

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