



South Chulebos Massif, Peak ca 5,861m, ascent and tragedy

China, Xinjiang, Central Tien Shan

On July 9 the internationally recognized Chinese alpinist Yan Dongdong was killed in a crevasse fall in the Central Tien Shan. Yan planned to make the first ascent of Chulebos (6,769m), the highest point of a 25-kilometer unbroken crest immediately to the west of the Xuelian Massif (AAJ 2009). He decided it should be possible to approach the Chulebos Massif from the south, and with two regular climbing partners, the accomplished Zhou Peng and filmmaker Li Shuang, forced a tortuous route up a long glacier north of Aksu, one valley east of the glaciers that drain the south side of Peak Pobeda (Tomur Feng).

On their fourth day the climbers explored two different cols, from which they found themselves looking down dangerously broken slopes to further long and crevassed glaciers draining north, still some 12 to 15km distant from Chulebos. Discovering a climbable peak close to the more easterly pass, they decided to aim for this as a consolation prize. They spent a full day pioneering a route up snow and ice on the northwest face, and after a bivouac on the summit ridge they reached the top and descended.

At 6:15 p.m. the three had reached 4,400m and had packed up their camp. Only 100m down the glacier, Yan fell unroped more than 20m into a hidden crevasse. Zhou lowered a rope and climbed down, finding Yan to be badly injured and drifting in and out of consciousness. Communication was poor.

Zhou helped to remove Yan's pack, unwedged him, clipped him into a rope, and then climbed out to set up a pulley system. However, Yan apparently began to panic, shouting and gathering up the rope, during which he fell a further five meters into a pool of water. Zhou descended again and managed to attach another rope to Yan, who was now unconscious and breathing poorly. Zhou reascended, but his efforts to extract Yan were to no avail, and after his pulley system stripped the remaining rope, he had no way to descend again. After spending the night by the crevasse, Zhou and Li were unable to detect any sounds from Yan, and surmised that the Chinese mountaineer had died during the night from his injuries.

The peak ascended by the three Chinese was subsequently given the unofficial name of Yan Dongdong Feng (5,861m, 42°03'15" N, 80°23'40" E). See "In Memoriam" for more about Yan, one of the foremost figures of modern Chinese alpinism.

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Images

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