



AAC Publications

Arwa Spire (6,193m), north face, Fior di Vite, first free ascent

India, Central Garhwal

On September 28 Simon Gietl and I stood on the summit of the Arwa Spire. Only 10 days previously I had been walking the long exhausting path from the last villages to the foot of this mountain. It was my third time.

In 2002, as a young alpine guide, I made the first ascent of the north face of the spire with the older and more experienced Stephan Harvey and Bruno Hasler (Switzerland). Back then, as a 23-year-old, a lot of this stuff was completely new to me and everything was exciting. We fixed some rope up the prominent north couloir of the then virgin central summit, and set off with a portaledge. From the top of the couloir, we found the rock too cold and snowy to free climb in rock shoes, so aided four pitches to reach easier ground and the summit, which we felt was possibly the highest of the three. We celebrated with the Italian Grappa, Fior di Vite, which became the name of the route. The line was 800m in length and the difficulties UIAA VI+ A2 80°

In 2011 Simon and I wanted to transfer our vision of alpine-style climbing at lower altitudes to the massive rock faces of the Himalaya. Our goal was a free ascent of Fior di Vite and after training, both mentally and physically, we felt ready. We reached the area with cameraman Daniel Ahnen, but in the early stages of the expedition, Daniel and a companion were walking toward the face in order to capture pictures, when at ca 5,400m Daniel fell 50m into a crevasse. For five days, with the help of the Indian military, we tried to rescue him but were unable to make any voice or visual contact. The expedition was abandoned.

Ten years after the first ascent I was back again. The climbing proved challenging, route-finding extremely difficult, and placing solid nuts and cams often impossible. It was a cruel struggle with cold fingers and toes. We were thirsty and felt the altitude, so staying focused was a demanding task. I carried a medallion in memory of Daniel, and fixed it with a sling on the summit. Those weeks after his tragic accident were among the most difficult in my entire life. Simon and I climbed the entire route free at 7a M6 90°. None of the rock pitches on the headwall was less than 6c.

The success of this expedition took a lot of patience and the right team of friends. Apart from the ever-reliable Simon, I was accompanied by experienced climber and cameraman Frank Kretschmann, guide Andrea di Donato, and my girlfriend Yuri Kato, who gave great mental support.

Adapted from information supplied by Roger Scháli, Switzerland

Editor's Note: the Arwa Tower has three summits, the east top sporting a small but spectacular rock monolith. Andy and Pete Benson made the first ascent of the east summit in 2000 by the east ridge (TD/TD+, UIAA V Scottish 5). They used aid on one pitch and did not climb the rock monolith. Kenton Cool and Ian Parnell repeated the ascent shortly after, free climbing the aid pitch at VI and making a determined effort on the final four-five meter section of the summit block (which they felt would be British E5 with a 10m fall potential). Both parties thought the east top to be the highest (just). During this expedition Cool and Parnell also attempted the central buttress direct, making little progress, while Al Powell and Dave Wills made a determined effort on the righthand couloir (Scottish 7 with a little A1+), retreating high on the line. In 2002 Harvey, Hasler, and Scháli also climbed the lower west summit, starting up the couloir attempted by Powell and Wills, and then moving right onto the north face (Capisco, A3 M6+, siege style). The Huber brothers had a vision of free climbing Capisco in 2005, but

although they were able to make the second ascent, poor weather forced them to use aid.

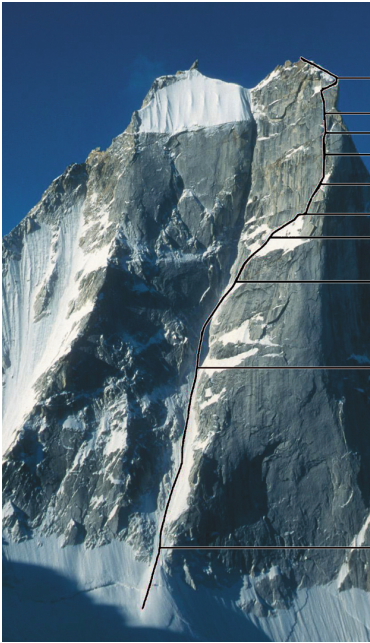
Images



The north face of Arwa Spire. (1) East Ridge (first ascent). (2) Fior di Vite. (3) 2000 Cool-Parnell attempt. (4) 2000 Powell-Wills attempt. (5) Capisco.



Roger Scháli high on Fior di Vite. The final snow slope on north face of east summit visible left.



ARWA SPIRE (6193m)

Route: Fior di Vite, 800m (90%, M5, 7a)
1st Ascent: 2002 (Hasler, Harweg, Schall)
FFA: 2012 (Schall, Gietl)

6c+ 50m
M5 20m
6c 30m
7a 45m
6c 50m
60° Quergang 80m
90° M6 70m
80° 70 Meter
60° 200m

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East (left) and central summits of Arwa Spire with topo of Fior di Vite.

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