



AAC Publications

Joey Shan, Jianifornia Dreaming

China, Sichuan, Qionglai Shan, Siguniang National Park

On October 11, Erik Harz, Felix Parham, and I reached the top of what we believe to be a previously unclimbed peak in the Changping Valley. Joey Shan, named for the incredible spirit of our friend Joey Hernandez, a Californian climber who passed away from cancer while we were on the mountain, is the first peak west of Bipeng Pass, on the north side of the upper Changping. We'd traveled to China as part of Fred Beckey's expedition to attempt Celestial Peak, but snowy conditions led us further up the Changping, looking for dry rock. From a high camp we hiked up steep, grassy trails made by Himalayan blue sheep, puffing hard at the elevation, to reach a nice bivouac at ca 4,500m under a massive granite boulder below the west face.

Setting off in a cold, clear dawn, we gained the southwest ridge near a prominent gendarme, via the northwest flank. We then traversed onto the south face. From there we climbed directly to rejoin the southwest ridge and followed it to the summit, a distinct perched block in a dramatically exposed location. It was 6 p.m., my altimeter read a little over 5,180m, and we had climbed 12 pitches of good alpine rock and snow in perfect weather. The wildness of the position sunk in: I was higher than I'd ever been, in a remote part of a faraway land. Siguniang glowed orange in the setting sun, a beacon towering over the countless rock towers of the Qionglai Shan. We descended to the north, walking down steep snow, then made two rappels to return to our bivouac. From our little home, we could see the lights of Chinese climbers opening a new route on Daogou West, and we wished them well before turning in, tired but extremely happy.

Our little team is proud of our California roots. To keep morale high, at base camp I flew the state flag with the great grizzly bear. To our surprise the translation of California in Mandarin Chinese is Jianifornia, so we named the route Jianifornia Dreaming (450m, IV 5.9). It reflected the sunny, warm weather and happy times we had on the mountain. Unfortunately absent were the California girls that occupied our minds during the long spells of bad weather.

During our three weeks in the Changping Valley, starting in early October, we had six days of excellent, warm weather. The rest were colder and snowy. Although conditions for climbing dry rock appeared briefly, planning for cold conditions on snow or mixed routes would make trips more flexible. The bureaucratic procedures of the Sichuan Mountaineering Association make logistics challenging and expensive when climbing in the Qionglai Shan. Our operator, Zhang Jiyue of Sichuan Earth Expeditions, did much to smooth things over and make our trip successful.

Many thanks to the legendary Fred Beckey for organizing and funding this trip. Fred's love for wild mountains, and his amazing determination over decades of alpinism, continue to inspire us. Please contact me at neilkauffman@gmail.com if you'd like further information.

Images



Joey Shan from the southwest showing the first-ascent line Jianifornia Dreaming.



Felix Parham leading the first pitch on reaching the southwest ridge. Just above this point the team traversed onto the south face.



Felix Parham just below the summit of Joey Shan, with the upper Changping Valley and Siguniang (6,250m) behind.

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