



AAC Publications

Kange Valley, Various Ascents

India, Zaskar

Prompted by Sergi Ricart, a guide, photographer, and great friend since adolescence, Sidarta Gallego and I decided to forgo our main mountain guiding season and head for Zaskar.

Our objective was a peak we knew only as "Tapion," a photo of which had been my computer wallpaper for some time. We arrived in Leh in late June and just managed to avoid the Buddhist ceremony of Kalachakra, which would have delayed our departure. With a Muslim cook we set off for the Pensi La with food for one month.

Our goal lay at the head of a side valley immediately before reaching the Pensi La, but the river that guards the entrance was so high, even early in the morning, that we were unable to gain access. We were forced to turn to Plan B. This was the Kange Valley, situated farther east toward Padam. Here we had no problem entering the valley, thanks to a footbridge seen previously on Google Earth. We established base camp near the foot of the glacier at a place known as Rapsail Demo.

The weather was great and we couldn't waste it, so our activity began immediately. Close by, a 5,400m rocky summit, Yan Ri, provided our first route, Tempesta Nocturna (700m, 6b). The summit, situated on the west side of the valley and with no known ascents, was a splendid vantage point on our next objectives. After one day's rest, we loaded big packs and headed to the top of the valley and a peak we called Kange Ri (6,020m). We reached the top by the 1,200m north face. It was classical snow/ice climbing at TD+, and we named the route Via Grifone after our sponsor. We then descended south, which proved harder and longer than expected.

After another rest day, we felt ready to explore one of the biggest faces around, on an unclimbed summit, which we named Piri Ri (5,850m), on the east side of the valley. On the first day we climbed five pitches and went back to camp. On the second day we reached the top of pitch 20. Up to this point we had climbed good granite, although many rope lengths were very wet; we used rock shoes but no chalk! Here we made a bivouac without sleeping bags. The following day we continued over snow, ice, and rock, and then the mixed west ridge, the last 200m testing our weakened state. We reached the summit by noon, and named the route Es Falles (1,550m, VI/4 M4 6b A1).

To the right of this route is a steep rock buttress with a conspicuous pinnacle at around half height. We next climbed this lower buttress to the summit of the pinnacle, finding signs of previous passage along the way (1,080m, 6c A2+). After fixing our climbing ropes, we climbed this route with one bivouac.

With the weather still holding, there was no question of wasting time, and we headed off to Rapsail Ri, a small rock peak (5,000m maximum) on the east side of the valley, only 20 minutes' walk from our base camp. Here, on the west face, we opened Via del Luichy (300m, 7a), dedicated to Luis Alfonso, a friend and prolific author of climbing guidebooks. The route terminated before the summit. This completed 21 days at or above base camp, in an area where there are still many possibilities.

After time off in Padam, we decided to attempt our original goal in alpine style from Pensi La.

Crossing the river was exciting, but this time we got to the mountain. We spent two days walking to its base, took a day off in bad weather, and then made our attempt. Unfortunately, we were forced to retreat in a storm. We later found that this elegant peak was the twin-summitted Z2 (6,175m), first climbed in 1977 by Italians via the south ridge. Our route, the south ridge of the lower (6,080m) of the two summits, had been attempted by Italians in 1982. We climbed past the smooth granite slab that had stopped the Italians, and the way ahead looked easier, but....

Back in Leh we still had a week before our return flight, and on the recommendation of a Spanish friend who works in Leh during the summer, decided to climb the popular trekking peak Kang Yatze (6,400m) in the Markha Valley. We tried what may have been a new line on the north-northeast face, more dangerous than difficult, taking 12 hours to reach the crest of the northwest ridge at ca 6,200m, the last three pitches over tricky mixed ground. The rock was very poor at this point, so we did not continue to the summit and descended the normal route over the lower northwest top (Kang Yatze II, ca 6,200m). We called our line to the northwest ridge Palestinian Iliure (800m, VI/4+ M5).

Oriol Baro, Spain

Images



On the north face of Kange Ri.



The 1,200m Via Grifone on the north face of Kange Ri.



Piri Ri from the west. (1) Es Falles. (2) Previously climbed route to pinnacle.



Tempesta Nocturna on the east face of Yan Ri. Oriol Baro and Sidarta Gallego went over the top and descended the scree slopes left of the face.



Kang Yatze from the north showing the Spanish line (possibly new) to the northwest ridge.



Oriol Baro on pitch five (6b) of Tempesta Nocturna.



Oriol Baro on a difficult pitch close to the high point of an attempt on the south ridge of the lower summit of Z2.



The west face of Rapsail Ri and the line of Via del Luichy.

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