



AAC Publications

Liushen Tag, South Face, Attempt

China, Xinjiang, Kun Lun

In September, Zaheer Durrani, Stefan Jachmich, Susan Jensen, Gus Morton, Alison Stockwell, and I attempted unclimbed Liushen Tag (6,595m, 35°59'38.07"N, 81°35'38.73"E), south of the town of Keriya (Yutian) in Hotan Prefecture. The northern slopes of the massif are heavily glaciated, and the topography makes access difficult. To its west lies the deep gorge of the Kurab (Ak Su) River, which cuts through the Kun Lun and gives access to the Tibetan Plateau. Since the 19th century, traveling this gorge has proved difficult and time-consuming, with numerous river crossings for pack animals. In the early 1960s a road was built by prison labor, but it disintegrated quickly, leaving things as before.

We expected a five-day walk up the gorge from the village of Pulu, but on arrival found that gold miners had recut the road; it is now possible to drive up to 5,000m in less than a day, given suitable vehicles. Traffic is normally restricted to mine employees and the police, but we were permitted to continue.

The southern aspect of the range is particularly dry and cold, with a very high snow line. Above 5,000m during September, even large streams froze extensively each night, deterring early starts. Toward the end of the month water sources higher on the mountain had disappeared entirely. The weather was generally good, with occasional light snowstorms.

Limitations on the availability of transport meant that we had to drive from Hotan (1,380m) to the head of Kurab Gorge (4,500m) in one day, then on to Base Camp (4,950m) the next morning. All but myself, who took Diamox, suffered from varying degrees of acute mountain sickness, and Alison had to descend the following day.

Members thoroughly explored possible approaches to the upper part of a prominent spur on Liushen Tag's south face, which leads to the southwest ridge at a height of ca 6,300m. The southwest ridge then leads to the south top (6,500m), which lies about 1km south of the main summit. We were prevented from placing a camp immediately below the "Tower" at 5,800m, at the start of the technical difficulties, by the absence of water. Camp 1 was placed instead at 5,400m alongside the highest water source.

Susan and Stefan reached a high point of 5,900m on the left flank of the Tower but were forced to retire because of illness and lack of time. Zaheer subsequently soloed to the same level.

Zaheer and Gus made the first ascent of the snow-covered 6,004m peak situated south of base camp (35°55'14.72"N, 81°34'33.22"E. The altitude quoted is the average of three GPS units, but the Russian map gives a height of 5,970m). This was repeated some days later by Susan and Stefan.

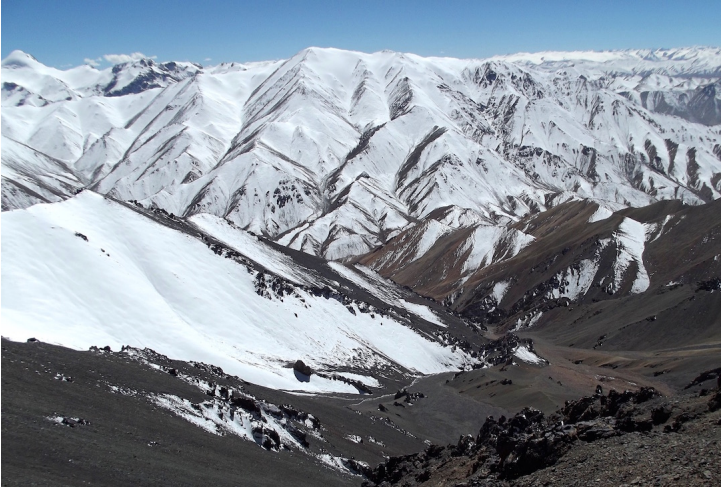
The mining company withdrew all its staff in mid-September, and by the time of our departure on THE 26th the large stream at base camp had disappeared completely as the freeze set in.

Access to the area is particularly difficult, with numerous permits required at a local and regional level, partly as a reaction to the death of three Russians a few years ago in an unofficial rafting expedition. We were given a lecture on safety from the local police chief in Keriya, asked to carry a

satellite phone, and made to delete data from a GPS unit before departing for home. Permits for the mountain totaled an exorbitant £9,500 (\$14,000).

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Images



The view south from the flanks of Liushen Tag. The highest point on the long transverse ridge in middle distance is Peak 6,004m, climbed by four members of the Liushen Tag expedition.

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