



AAC Publications

Abi, South Face and Southeast Ridge Variant, Graduation Exam

China, Qionglai Shan, Siguniang National Park

In September I made a solo ascent of Abi (5,694m) at the top of the Shuangqiao Valley, climbing some new ground left of the southeast ridge before following a previously climbed route to the summit.

I'd planned to spend several days acclimatizing, hoping to make the ascent sometime between the 20th and 25th. However, on checking the weather forecast, I found September 19 to be the only sunny day, so on the 18th, after acclimatizing only as far as 4,200m the previous day, I hired a few local people to carry gear to a base camp at 4,600m. It rained the rest of the day, and I suffered badly from the altitude. It wasn't until lunchtime on the 19th that the sun came out, and then I walked up to the base of the glacier to check the route. Later I vomited and wondered whether I was in good enough shape for an attempt the following day. Nonetheless, I set the alarm for 4 a.m.

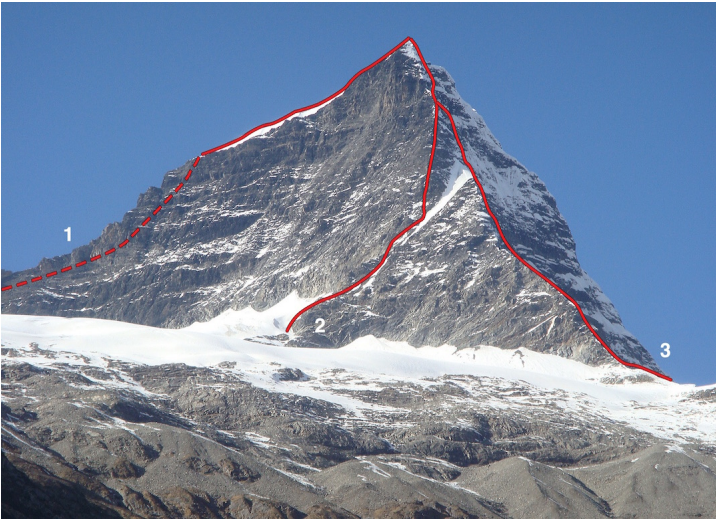
The following morning I felt better. It took one hour to reach the glacier, which fortunately had only few, obvious crevasses. The lower part of the rightward-slanting gully on the south face is split by a rock rib. I began on the left, eventually crossing the loose rib to the right side. The hardest part was about AI2+.

My plan had been to follow this gully to the southeast ridge. [On the original ascent of Abi, in 20014, French climbers followed this same gully to the crest of the ridge and then moved onto the east face, rejoining the southeast ridge toward the top. The ridge has been climbed direct and certainly was repeated in 2012 by a four-member Chinese-French team (AAJ 2013), and mostly likely on other occasions]. **However, as I climbed higher and the mountain warmed in the sun, I began to experience serious rockfall. The rock buttress on the right side of the south face (left of the upper gully) looked safe, not vertical, and composed of relatively sound granite. I climbed this to the crest of the southeast ridge and continued to a big step. Toward the right side of this was a chimney, which had been taken by previous parties. From two in-situ pitons at the bottom of the pitch, I back-roped the steep chimney, climbing mixed with axes and crampons. Above, I was able to take off rope and crampons, and rock climb more easily to the summit, which I reached at 1 p.m. I descended the southeast ridge, making many 20m rappels, and reached my tent by 7 p.m.**

I named my variation Graduation Exam (1,100m of climbing, 5.9 M4 AI2+ 50°), as I found I matured my mental processes by climbing solo. I wanted to face the challenges alone, in a purer fashion, in order to understand myself better. There are other possible routes on the main wall of the south face.

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Images



Abi from the southeast. (1) West face and southwest ridge: Shivering (5.7 M3 AI2, AAJ 2011; this route was repeated in February 2011). (2) Graduation Exam. On the original ascent of Abi the climbers followed this couloir all the way to the southeast ridge, then moved onto the east face. (3) Southeast ridge (700m, D+ M5, as graded by the 2012 climbers).

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