



AAC Publications

Paiju Peak, South Pillar, Via 2T

Pakistan, Karakoram, Baltoro Muztagh

On June 30 Spanish-Basque mountaineers Alberto Iñurrategi, Juan Vallejo and Mikel Zabalza arrived at their 3,400m base camp below Paiju Peak (6,610m) for a second attempt at the south pillar. In the summer of 2013 they had climbed the first 500m of the pillar, but bad weather and poor conditions prevented further progress.

The south pillar rises steeply from 5,000m to the top of a distinct granite tower at ca 6,100m. Above, snow slopes and steeper mixed terrain lead to the main summit. Paiju has only been climbed once: In 1976 an Alpine Club of Pakistan expedition placed Raja Bashir Ahmad, Manzoor Hussain, and Nazir Sabir on the summit via a route from the north, approaching up the Uli Biaho Glacier. Allen Steck joined the expedition to advise on technical climbing and reached a point 60m below the summit. In 1981 Italians climbed a difficult partial line on the left edge of the south face.

The three Basques established Camp 1 below the face at ca 5,000m and eventually climbed the pillar, capsule style, in a 10-day round trip from base camp. The route was difficult and sustained in the upper section, with climbing of 6b A3 M5. It was also threatened by stone and ice fall. Two camps were made on the wall, at 5,500m and ca 5,750m. The team climbed for 10 to 12 hours each day, and Zabalza felt the route to be the most demanding alpine climb of his career.

On July 26, as the climbers were approaching the top of the tower, a rock the size of a “medium microwave oven” hit Vallejo on the shoulder. The other two continued to the top of the tower, where they saw that the way ahead looked “suicidal.” A difficult snow slope and ridge led toward a large serac barrier that was continuously disgorging chunks of ice. Two days later, all three exhausted climbers were safely back at base camp. The 1,100m route to the top of the south tower has been named 2T.

From Information Supplied by **Ana Larizgoitia**, Spain

Images



Paiju Peak from the southeast with the approximate line of the upper part of the Basque route on the south tower.



The Basque route up the south face of Paiju south tower. The summit of Paiju is hidden behind, though part of the serac barrier that was deemed suicidal to approach can be seen right of the upper tower.

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