



Nyainbo Yuze Massif: Le Petit Géant and Jaoma

China, Qinghai

Inspired by an article in AAJ 2014, Jessica Keil and I traveled to the Nyainbo Yuze range of Qinghai. In late September we flew to Chengdu and were soon en route to the mountains in a hired car. A 10-hour drive brought us to Jiuzhi, the nearest town to the range. Armed with only a crude Google Earth map and a severely perplexed Chinese driver, navigation became difficult. I couldn't blame him; I also would have been puzzled on realizing that I was dropping off two young American girls in the middle of nowhere. Access deeper into the range came by way of dirt roads used by the local yak herders. Our driver faithfully continued until the road turned to mud and became impassable. We helped unstuck the car and waved good-bye.

We could now opt to move into one of three valleys. We were drawn to several rocky peaks in the northernmost, which to our knowledge had yet to be explored by climbers. While shuttling loads I ran into a yak herder, and through a series of charades tried to explain that we wished to climb in the mountains. I am not sure what he understood, but the interaction ended with smiles and him granting us passage to our intended valley. Yak dung and game trails made it clear that the scope of the herders' working land was far more extensive than we had presumed. We tried to put our tent as out of the way as possible and began picking suitable objectives. Our camp sat at 4,300m, above the outflow from a large lake, with most of our targeted peaks seemingly a short approach away.

Our first goal became a spire we later called Le Petit Géant, after the prominent feature above Chamonix's Valle Blanche. We initially attempted its north face, which housed an aesthetic line, but after a battle with an ice-choked corner system we opted to revise our tactics, hiking uphill and around to the sunny southeast aspect. There, a vegetated diagonal seam appeared to be the most feasible option. A pitch of gardening and horn lassoing on less than ideal rock led to two pitches of moderate free climbing and ultimately the summit. We opted for a rating of 5.7 C2, topping out at 4,744m.

The following day we made our way to a peak the locals call Jaoma. We climbed two moderate pitches on the northeast ridge before reaching an impasse at a wide crack with poor rock. We opted to make a rappel onto the south face, where we found a pitch of excellent quality (5.8) leading to the 4,727m summit.

Back at camp we received a weather report showing precipitation for the foreseeable future—10 days minimum. Day after day of rain and snow completely coated the peaks in rime.

On our 13th day in the range we were awoken to the sound of yaks and soon discovered that two herders had moved their camp within 100m of our own. Over the next three days we spent much time with the couple, Matsu and Yaoushu. They spoke only Tibetan and us only English, but we managed to communicate. They fed us all sorts of interesting foods and let us warm by their yak-dung stove while the storm raged outside. We tried to return the generosity, but nothing can repay the kindness that they showed us, considering they also facilitated our exit from the range. Unfortunately the storm never broke enough to give suitable climbing conditions, and after 18 days we had to begin our journey home. The herders ensured a safe and fast return to Jiuzhi, by way of their horses and their father's old station wagon, an incredible gesture on their part. From Jiuzhi we had a cramped bus ride back to Chengdu.

We entered the range on September 29 and exited on October 16. After talking to some of the local climbers it seems as though the weather is a real hit or miss in this region. Although other times of the year are possible, it's likely you'd be chancing the weather just as much.

Overall, the Nyainbo Yuze massif has the potential to be a mecca of moderate alpine rock climbing. While the peaks are relatively high in elevation, none of them seem to boast a huge amount of vertical relief. The rock was of a reasonable quality in the valley that we visited, though we have heard lesser reviews of the valleys to the south. There are still countless lines to be had in the valley that we explored, and that is only a fraction of the entire range. The potential for good ice, mixed, and ski lines is also promising. With ease of access and the majority of the range still unexplored, I believe there are lots of adventures to be had in the Nyainbo Yuze. This expedition was funded in part by AAC Mountaineering Fellowship Grants.

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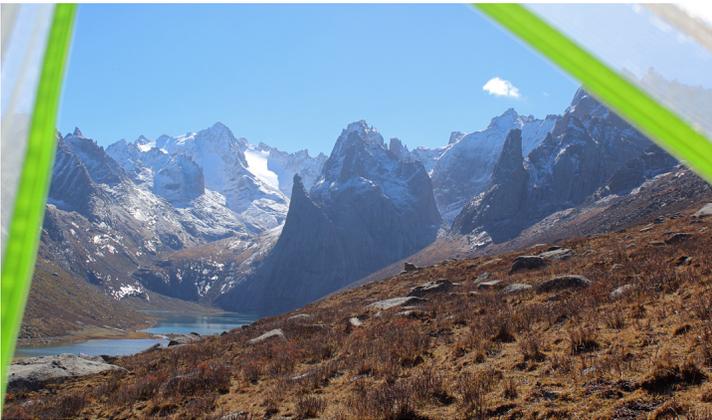
Images



(A) Le Petit Géant. (B) Jaoma. (C) Nyainbo Yuze. (D) "Grant Peak." Base camp was off-picture to left.



Jessica Keil starting up the northeast ridge of Jaoma, with unclimbed peaks and walls behind.



Looking southeast from camp. Le Petit Géant is the prominent rock tower on the right, while Jaoma is the lower tower to the left, directly above the lake. Both ascent routes are hidden. Nyainbo Yuze (5,396m) is the large, snowy peak in the background, left of center.



Tess Ferguson leading the first pitch on the southeast face of Le Petit Géant.



Rock Spires In China

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