



Great Walls of China, East Face, Tears of the Dragon

China, Xinjiang, Western Kokshaal-too

From July 20–23, the Russian expedition of Olesya Babushkina, Marina Popova, Denis Prokofyev, and Vladimir Sysoev made the first ascent of the east face of the northern summit of the Great Walls of China. The team had planned to attempt a new line on Kyzyl Asker, but when they arrived on the unnamed glacier south of the peak, two weeks of bad weather had covered the big southeast face in unstable snow and ice. In contrast, the east face of the Great Walls was relatively clear, so they opted for a line attempted in 2013 by Vincent Perrin and Bas Visscher (Netherlands). These two had struggled with wet rock, difficult aid, and icefall before retreating from about one-quarter height on the wall.

The Russian team progressed up the wall with portaledge camps, finding the rock generally monolithic, with lots of overhanging sections and roofs. Once above the initial 200m section, which was subject to falling rock and ice, the steepness made it safe from falling debris. When the sun was out, the team could climb in rock shoes for the first few hours of the morning, but from early afternoon on, water would stream down the wall, even though the sun had left it.

Above the dangerous first section, 600m of very steep rock, with a roof every 30m or so, led to a series of offwidths choked with ice. At one point here the team had to rappel 50m to reach another line farther right. On the fourth day of climbing, July 23, the four reached 45–60° snow and ice at the top of the wall and continued up the ridge above to gain the summit by evening. They returned to the portaledge that night and rappelled the route to the glacier on the following day. Bolts were left at 60m intervals. The 810m route (1,150m of climbing) was named Tears of the Dragon (Russian 6B, A3 M5), the “tears” being the water constantly running down the wall in the afternoon and the “dragon” the symbol of China.

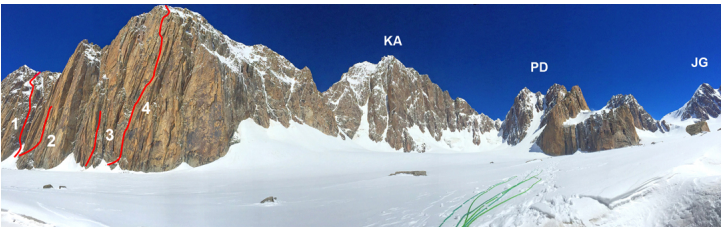
This formation, dubbed the Great Walls of China in 1997, has a high point of 5,186m at its northern end. This high point is near the middle of a long, almost horizontal summit ridge running northwest to southeast. In 2013, Vincent Perrin, Bas van der Smeed, and Bas Visscher climbed the north face to a 5,120m summit toward the northern end of this summit ridge. The summit reached by the Russians sits more toward the southern end of this ridge.

Lindsay Griffin, with information supplied by Elena Dmitrenko, Risk.ru, and Anna Piunova, mountain.ru

Images



The east face of the main summit of the Great Walls of China and the route Tears of the Dragon, with portaledge bivouacs shown.



A panorama of the unnamed glacier basin below Kyzyl Asker. On the left are the Great Walls of China. (1) Border Control (Robinson-Tressider, 2004). (2) Dutch attempt, 2013. (3) Dutch attempt, 2013. (4) Tears of the Dragon (2016). (KA) Kyzyl Asker. (PD) Panfilovski Division. (JG) Jerry Garcia.



On the upper wall of Tears of the Dragon on the east face of Great Walls of China.



Tears of the Dragon on the east face of the Great Walls of China.

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