



## AAC Publications

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### **Xialong Rezha, West Face**

China, Sichuan, Shaluli Shan

**In early November, Rob Baker, Mitch Murray, and I reached a point about 20m below the top of the previously undocumented Xialong Rezha (5,625m, based on two altimeter readings). The peak lies at 29.886444°N, 99.511519°E to the west of the Genyen massif and to the southeast of the Yangmolong group. A quintessential Eastern Himalayan peak, Xialong Rezha is the closest mountain above 5,500m to the nearly completely closed border with Xizang (Tibet).**

We accessed the western side of the Genyen Massif in four days from Chengdu, traveling the Sichuan-Tibet Highway through Kangding, Xinduqiao, the Tibetan "Disneyland town" of Litang, and the border town of Batang, from which a small road leads over a 5,000m pass that is almost unknown, even to locals. Xialong Rezha, which translates approximately as the "place of big horned animals and large boulders," is clearly visible from a small hamlet at the end of this road, 25km from the upper Yangtse River, which forms the administrative border.

With the aid of organizational legend Zhang Jiyue and of Alex Tang, who was instrumental in getting us to base camp, we planned to make our ascent with no additional support, a practice we have developed over many previous trips to western Sichuan and eastern Tibet. [The author has climbed in this region for around 20 years.] Our only limitations were the loads we could carry, acclimatization, and weather. With the latter we banked on a dependable early winter window, directly after the end of the last squall of the Asian monsoon and before the winter snows. We were not disappointed: There was an unbroken string of 15 days with no precipitation. We made base camp at 4,200m, a few kilometers above the hamlet, and then moved camp over marsh, boulders, and scree to 4,900m. There was no sign of visitation; temperatures ranged from 20°C to -10°C.

It was clear the prime route on the west face of Xialong Rezha was the offset central couloir. After climbing unroped up the 90m glacial snout to the cone below the couloir, we led in blocks, with the two seconders moving together for speed. The good, featured granite typical of the western Genyen, snow climbing, and teamwork made this successful and efficient. Rob's run-out five pitches on snow of decreasing quality got us to the summit (north) ridge. I led a further half pitch along the ridge to a point where serious fall potential, with even worse snow on top of smooth slabs, offering no protection, deemed that we leave the bizarre summit formation unclimbed. We were always going to stop below the top anyway, out of respect for local Tibetan lore, so crossing the last bit of dangerous, low-angle terrain didn't seem worth it. I stopped about 20m below the highest point.

From our high point we could clearly see the main peaks of Genyen to the east and southeast, while west and northwest lay long ranges of robust peaks over 6,000m, beyond the closed border with Tibet. At 4 p.m., we began the many rappels that would get us back to camp by 10 p.m. On return to Batang we ate the hotel's entire supply of roast duck. We named our route to the high point Standing Room Only (650m of climbing, Scottish IV M4). The expedition was entirely self-funded, with no sponsors, no grants, no awards, and no film deals.

Ed Hannam, Australia

## Images



The west face of Xialong Rezha (5,625m) and the line of Standing Room Only. The top eight pitches are visible. The line stopped on the summit ridge, 20m below the highest point.



Ed Hannam on mixed ground below the traverse to the upper pitches at 5,350m on Xialong Rezha.



The unclimbed summit formation of Xialong Rezha seen from the high point: Dangerous unconsolidated snow atop smooth granite slabs, along with respect for local Tibetan lore, caused the 2016 team to turn around here.



Rob Baker and Mitch Murray at the final belay on Xialong Rezha, at over 5,600m. The upper base camp was situated in the moraine by the lake, 700m below.

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