



AAC Publications

Pumori, South Face, Attempted New Route

Nepal, Malahangur Himal, Khumbu Section

OUR EXPEDITION was an adventure from beginning to end. Our proposed route on Pumori (7,148m) followed a direct line up the central section of the south face, left of the 1986 Scottish Route. The project felt ambitious and would be totally reliant on the weather and mountain conditions, in an area known for heavy spring snowfall.

Zsolt Torok and I started acclimatizing on April 20, and for the next two weeks enjoyed almost perfect weather, so we managed to acclimatize really well. On the 30th we climbed to 6,200m on Pumori's normal route, the southeast ridge, which we planned to use as our descent, and we deposited some gear on the ridge. In early May we received news of a short weather window, and our meteorologist said this might be the only chance we would have that season, due to thermal instability and snow accumulation in the area. We decided we couldn't risk waiting for another clear spell, so we set off at 2 a.m. on May 6.

Reaching the glacier, we discovered it cut by a giant crevasse, blocking our route to the south face. It took four hours of exploration before we finally managed to find a place where we could cross. Above, the snow was unexpectedly deep, and it was only toward the end of the day that we reached the base of the wall and found what we hoped would be a protected bivouac site at 6,000m. However, there was frequent spindrift, and we had to clean the site every two hours. It was not the best night.

On the morning of the 7th we started up a chimney giving access to the main couloir/depression left of the spur climbed by the Scots. We began by following a large dihedral. There was powder snow everywhere, and at each step we had to clean snow crust from the rock beneath. We found no in situ gear or sign of previous passage in the short icy chimneys and passages of M5+. [At this stage, the Romanians thought they might be following the initial pitches of a supposed Croatian route from 1986, which in some references is marked as using the same entry to the face, before possibly moving left to the southwest ridge. However, these sources generally are based on an erroneous report in AAJ 1987 of a new Croatian route on the south face of Pumori. This was corrected to the south face of Ama Dablam in AAJ 1988.] We bivouacked that night under a large rock at 6,400m. I remember it being quite cold, but our motivation was still high.

We woke at 3 a.m. on the 8th and continued climbing, encountering the hardest pitch so far. The weather was good, and it even improved during the morning, but by 2 p.m. a storm had arrived and we enjoyed it to the full for the rest of the day. We reached 6,580m, close to the start of what we dubbed the Ramp, before the weather finally stopped us and avalanches began to flow. It snowed about 10cm and did not stabilize.

Because the face is steep, it would take a few hours at the end of each day to find and excavate a bivouac. That night, just as we had managed to erect the flysheet, an unexpected avalanche buried me inside. The poles broke, but fortunately I was anchored and managed to extricate myself. We had to find another place to sleep—that night was the hardest of all.

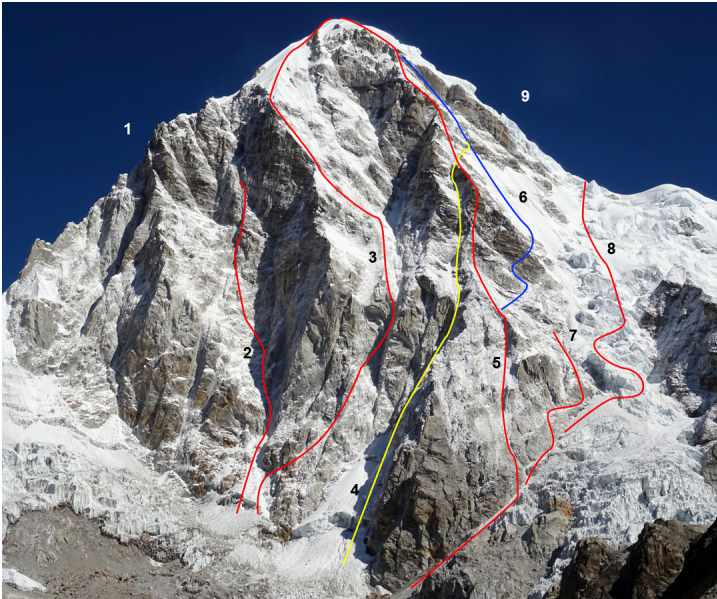
On the 9th we woke at 2 a.m., with the aim of climbing the Ramp through the White Spider to a bivouac on the upper southwest ridge. However, at 5 a.m. black clouds swallowed the face, and soon it was snowing heavily. Despite this, we reached 6,800m, determined to push to the ridge.

Unfortunately, at this point a large avalanche from above caught us in the middle of the Ramp. In the lead, I was swept off the wall and fell around 10m, but fortunately didn't suffer any real injuries, as my protection was good. However, I was coughing badly, our bivouac site at 6,580m had disappeared (the tent platform swept away), and the Ramp had been transformed into a huge avalanche funnel. We were sitting ducks.

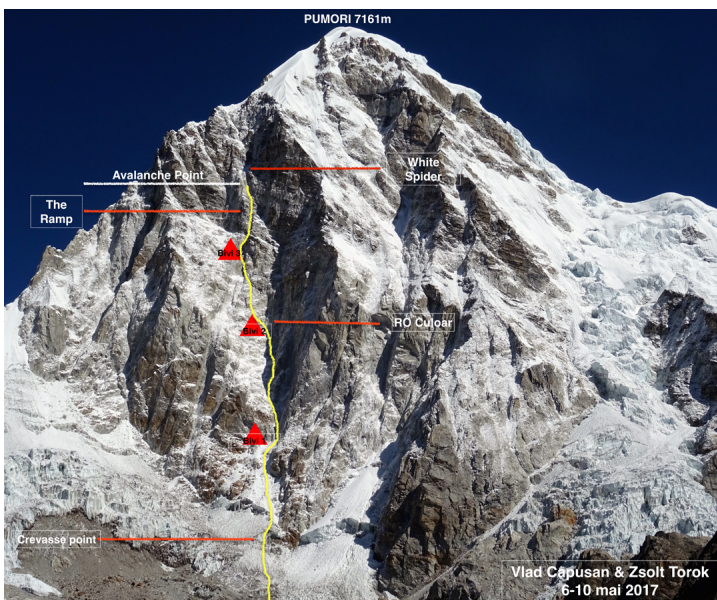
It was clear that conditions would not change and to continue could easily land us in a fatal trap. We made the difficult decision to retreat and began 900m of rappels (often from single pitons, but also slings and cams). It was night by the time we reached the foot of the face, and 3 a.m. on the 10th when we arrived at base camp (5,300m), completely exhausted. This expedition brought us to the limit of human condition. We froze, were taken by avalanches, and suffered, but we also laughed and each morning woke up visualizing stepping onto the summit. The real summit is always back home; the rest is pure adventure. We will return.

– Vlad Capusan, Romania

Images



South face of Pumori (7,148m), showing (1) Southwest ridge, Japanese 1973; (2) Romanian attempt, 2017; (3) Scottish Route, 1986; (4) Czech Route, 1996; (5) French Route, 1972; (6) Jeff Lowe, solo, winter 1983; (7) British attempt, 1996; (8) Australian-American-Nepalese Route, 1984; and (9) normal (original) route, German-Swiss, 1962.



The 2017 Romanian attempt on the south face of Pumori, showing their bivouacs and other landmarks.



Vlad Capusan at around 6,300m on the second day of an attempted new route on the south face of Pumori.



Vlad Capusan above the second bivouac, at around 6,450m, on the south face of Pumori.



Vlad Capusan on mixed ground at around 6,500m, below the third bivouac on the south face of Pumori.



Vlad Capusan starting up the couloir above the first bivouac on the south face of Pumori.

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