



AAC Publications

Chola Shan, Chola I, South-Southeast Spur and West Ridge

China, Sichuan, Chola Shan

In August, an American-Chinese team likely became the first to stand atop the highest point of the Chola Shan. There has been much confusion in the past as to what has been climbed in this group.

Chola I (6,168m, 31°47'7.24"N, 99° 4'21.47"E, Google Earth) has two tops, east and west. In 1988, a joint Chinese-Japanese expedition reported reaching the summit of Chola I, making its first ascent. They quoted an altitude of 6,168m, taken from the Chinese topographical maps. (A second ascent was reported in 1997 by Charlie Fowler, climbing solo, but this turns out to be a different peak—see below.) In 2003, a Chinese team led by Jon Otto (USA) repeated the 1988 route. However, it was clear to Otto that both the 1988 and 2003 expedition had climbed to the west top, which Otto measured at 6,148m GPS. (This summit is now often reached by guided parties.) Around 450m to the east, along a difficult and narrow ridge, rose another summit: the east top. Was it higher? It looked roughly the same, but only by climbing both with a GPS would it be possible to clarify.

In August 2017, Gao Jun, Liu Junfu, and Otto set a base camp at 4,060m at the southern end of the large Xinluhai lake. The normal route up Chola I heads west up the glacier, around the north side of rognon, and up the glaciated north face to the summit. The American-Chinese team opted for a new line and moved south-southeast from the lake to reach the glacier on the south side of Chola I, where they established Camp 1 at 4,900m. Moving up-glacier, they made a second camp at 5,400m and a third at 5,820m, the latter below a south-southeast-facing spur that leads to the main ridge at a shoulder a little west of the west top. Climbing this short spur (50–70°), the three reached the shoulder, then traversed below the west top to reach the col beyond via a vertical step. From the col they spent two hours crossing the sharp ridge toward the eastern top on poor snow, with plentiful rock and ice protection. The east summit was reached at 12:20 p.m. on August 9.

Chola I seen from Chola II to the north-northwest. (A) Peak 5,898m, possibly unclimbed. (B) Chola I (east top, 6,168m). (C) Chola I (west top, ca 6,150m). (D) West shoulder reached from its far side by the 2017 expedition. (1) The normal route to Chola I west top. (2) The route from the west shoulder to the east top climbed in August 2017. Photo by Bruce Normand

Two GPS readings were taken on Chola I's east top: 6,163m and 6,157m. On the return, Gao and Otto descended directly to the north glacier from the col, but Liu continued to the west top, where he made two readings with the same GPS units: 6,146m and 6,139m. This implies the east top is higher by around 17m or 18m. (The most recently available Chinese map marks 6,168m squarely on top of the east summit.)

The 2017 climb thus appears to be the first known ascent of the highest point of Chola I. It now seems certain that Fowler was confused about what he climbed—the confusion no doubt aided by the poor mapping available at the time (and no Google Earth!). Fowler's described route and photo-diagram of Chola I (AAJ 1999) are actually on Chola II (6,119m, 31°48'58.79"N, 99° 2'2.64"E), a difficult rock and ice pyramid around 3km to the north-northwest of Chola I. He climbed a steep route on the northwest face to make the first ascent of the mountain. Another route, parallel and to the left, was climbed in February 2015 by Marcos Costa, Kyle Dempster, and Bruce Normand (AAJ 2016). Both this team and Fowler approached the mountain up a valley 4km west of Xinluhai lake.

Fowler also reported climbing a peak he called Chola II, making its first ascent, but this is actually a

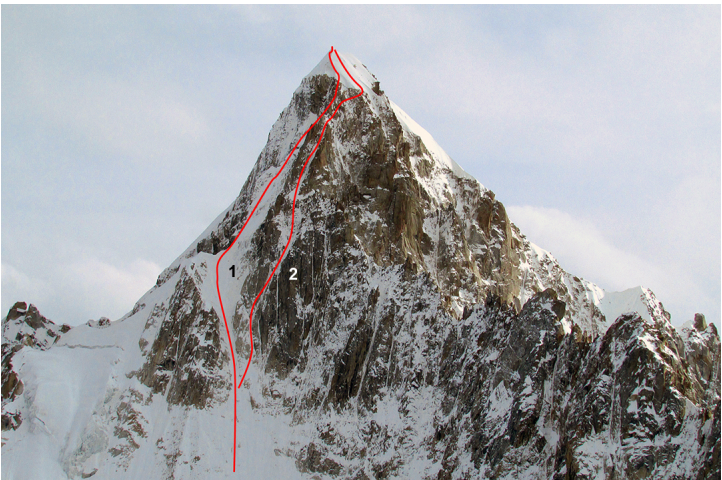
straightforward snow peak another 3km north-northwest again, with a height of 5,802m. This is sometimes referred to as Chola III (31°50'26.58"N, 99° 0'59.04"E).

– **Lindsay Griffin**, with help from Tom Nakamura, AAC Honorary Member, Bruce Normand, Switzerland, and Xia Zhongming, Germany

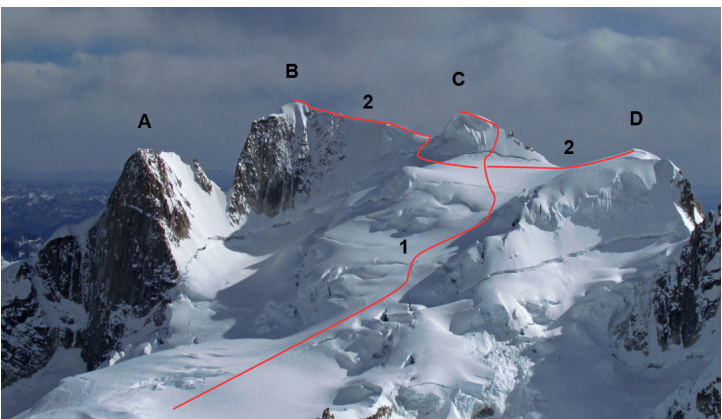
Images



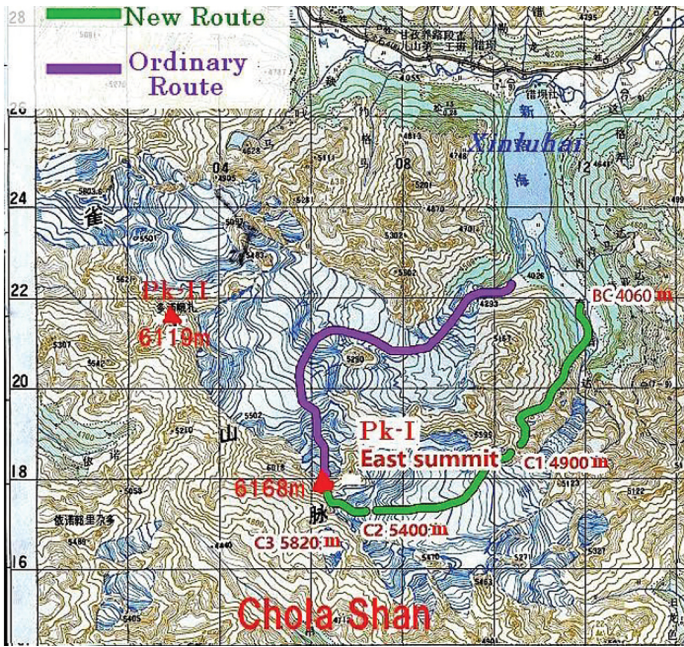
Looking north-northwest from Chola II to Chola III (Peak 5,802m). The route taken by Charlie Fowler on the first ascent of Chola III is presumed to have followed the snow slopes facing the camera, after an approach up the glacier to the right.



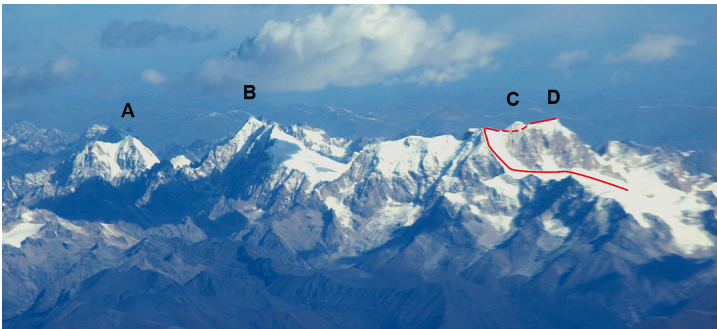
Chola II seen from the northwest. (1) Costa-Dempster-Normand, 2016. (2) Approximate line climbed by Charlie Fowler in 1997 to make the first ascent of the mountain.



Chola I seen from Chola II to the north-northwest. (A) Peak 5,898m, possibly unclimbed. (B) Chola I (east top, 6,168m). (C) Chola I (west top, ca 6,150m). (D) West shoulder reached from its far side by the 2017 expedition. (1) The normal route to Chola I west top. (2) The route from the west shoulder to the east top climbed in August 2017.



Chinese map showing the normal and 2017 routes on Chola I.



The Chola Shan from the west as seen from a Chengdu to Lhasa flight. (A) Chola III. (B) Chola II. (C) Chola I west top. (D) Chola I east top with the 2017 route of ascent.

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