



Zhawuduo, Welcome to Zhagana and Gate to Asgard

China, Gansu Province

In May, He Chuan (China), China-based Ola Przybysz (Poland), who led the trip, and I visited the Tibetan village of Zhagana (2,800m) in southern Gansu to explore the surrounding peaks. The area is becoming popular with Chinese tourists, but we learned of it from a photo on a climbers' online chat group in summer 2016. After seeing the photo, Ola began planning for an expedition. Supposedly, an inexperienced Chinese climber had visited; Ola contacted him, but he was of little help in terms of approach, the quality of the limestone, and potential route lines, and on our arrival locals said we were the first climbers to visit the area.

Our primary objective was the area's iconic peak, towering above and to the east of the village. We learned on arrival it was named Zhawuduo (34.239956°N, 103.212854°E). Our first two days were spent reconnoitering the peak, finding the west and east faces very steep off the deck and with little obvious natural protection. However, a crack system on the south face, beginning higher up the hillside, appeared to offer more moderate climbing and better opportunities for gear placements.

We opted to make the 1.5- to 2-hour uphill approach each day, returning to the village to eat and sleep. Fresh food and warm beds in the local guesthouse offered comfort and better recovery than multiple bivouacs in the cold. During the hike back in late afternoon, views of the idyllic village and terraced hillsides were an added bonus.

Chuan started up the first pitch on May 15, finding moderate climbing but rather sparse protection. He placed two cams and slung two questionable bushes in the first 30m, before drilling a bolt. Another 20m finished the pitch, by which time it was snowing. With Ola sliding around as she followed, we decided to call it a day, fix the rope, and head back to town.

Leading pitch two the following day, Ola found only slightly better protection and opted to place a bolt before making an exposed, sporty sequence of face moves midway through the pitch. Pitch three—my lead—offered better protection in its first half, up an obvious corner crack. However, above, a wet and mossy section leading into an alcove produced a short fall when a small moss pod collapsed under my foot and my hand came out of a slimy, flaring jam. I resorted to several aid moves to get through this section, finally placed a bolt, and as daylight waned Ola and Chuan convinced me to come down and save the remainder of the pitch for a new day.

Rain in the forecast provided a good excuse for a rest day, but we were back on the 18th, and after jumaring to my high point, I completed my lead through the alcove to a large mossy ledge. Chuan took pitch four up an obvious corner, though unfortunately without an obvious crack. He again encountered multiple run-out sections and eventually placed a bolt, which also served as a foothold on a particularly blank section. We joined him on a large open ledge, moved the belay 15m up grass and scree to the base of the upper wall, and from there Ola led the easiest pitch on the route.

The last three pitches were, overall, easier than those below, and we topped out on the 19th, having averaged two pitches per day. An additional 100m of bushwhacking and boulder scrambling up a gentle slope led to the higher, eastern summit at 3,800m. We named the route Welcome to Zhagana (300m, seven pitches, 5.10+ A1). Individual pitch grades were: 5.10 A0; 5.10 R; 5.10 A1; 5.10+ A0; 5.8; 5.10; and 5.9. While the climbing had been a little scary in places, the rock on this face has generally

decent friction and is quite featured, which helped.

On our way down we bolted the upper pitch of a new sport route, 40m to climber's right of Welcome to Zhagana, fixing ropes the rest of the way down. Chuan had to go back to Beijing for a few days, but in the meantime Ola and I bolted the remainder of the route. After Chuan returned, he and Ola climbed the nine-pitch Gate to Asgard (5.12a) all free, while I shot photos. With the exception of a hard sequence of moves on the first pitch, the pair agreed the route offered moderate, enjoyable sport climbing in the 5.10 to easy 5.11 range. Pitch grades were: 12a; 11a; 10a; 10; 10c; 10b; 10a; 10; and 11a.

Zhagana is surrounded on three sides by towering limestone peaks, with a concentration of mountains to the north and northeast. Zhawuduo, the main peak, still has numerous unclimbed lines on the south face and steep sport climbing potential on the east and southwest faces. The area has much more to offer, and while the peaks up valley to the north will require a longer approach, they will likely provide bigger walls and longer routes.

– Garrett Bradley, USA

Images



Ola Przybylski leading pitch two (5.11a) of Gate to Asgard on the south face of Zhawuduo.



He Chuan leading the last pitch (5.11a) of Gate to Asgard, south face of Zhawuduo.



Looking east over Zhagana, nestling among terraced hillsides, to the dramatic peak of Zhawuduo standing guard over the village.



The south face of Zhawuduo near Zhagana in Gansu Province. (1) Welcome to Zhagana. (2) Gate to Asgard.



Looking north-northwest up the valley that runs to the west of Zhawuduo. It appears to hold some of the best walls in the area, but would require a longer approach from the town of Zhagana.



He Chuan starts up the first pitch of Welcome to Zhagana, south face of Zhawuduo. He was soon to find very little gear placements and consequently bold runouts.



He Chuan follows pitch three (5.10 A1) into the alcove traverse on the first ascent of Welcome to Zhagana, south face of Zhawuduo.



Ola Przybysz follows pitch four (5.10+ A0) of Welcome to Zhagana, south face of Zhawuduo. Behind the pinnacle, in the valley below, is part of the village of Zhagana.



Garrett Bradley on pitch three (5.10 A1) of Welcome to Zhagana, south face of Zhawuduo. He is about to embark on a damp and mossy ascent into the alcove above.



Gorgeous Chinese Limestone

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