



Chatyn-tau, North Face, First Free Ascent

Georgia, Caucasus

From July 24–27, 2016, Maciej Bedrejszuk, Piotr Sulowski, and I made the first free ascent of the Rhombus, the outstanding north-facing feature on Chatyn-tau (4,412m). Around half a dozen routes climb the 600m-plus rock wall of the Rhombus, and we chose the 1959 Mishliaev Route (6A), which follows a chimney system toward the right side and was used to make the first winter ascent of the north face (AAJ 2007).

Sustained difficulties on loose rock with poor protection pushed us to our limits. We climbed alpine-style with two bivouacs (no tent), the first about halfway up the Rhombus and the second below the upper pillar leading directly to the main top. From that second bivouac, we traversed right and climbed to the col between the west top (4,310m) and main summit. From here we followed the west ridge to the highest point and descended to the Ushba Plateau, where we made our third bivouac.

We climbed the 1,160m face at M6+ 6c 70° R. It's worth noting that the north face of Chatyn-tau is isolated from civilization by an approach of two long days up the chaotic and complex Chalati Glacier. [Although Chatyn-tau lies along the frontier with Russia, the border bends sharply here and the peak's north face is entirely within Georgia.]

One year later (July 10–13, 2017), the same team attempted to make the first free ascent of the 1972 Grigorenko–Prigoda Route (6A) on the west face of Ushba (4,710m), the only established route that climbs directly up the middle of this Georgian face to the main summit. The first alpine-style ascent of the route was not made until 2015 (AAJ 2016). We completed our ascent alpine-style with two bivouacs on the face and a third in the col between south and north (4,694m) summits. Unfortunately, when we reached the crux at around 4,400m on the headwall, we found water streaming down the face from the melting summit snowcap. The only time we could climb free was during a brief period after the cold temperatures of the morning had left the face and before midday. Any later and the rock would start to get wet again. To overcome the crux section, we climbed four pitches on aid and reached the summit by late evening. The technical grades of our 2,300m ascent were 6a A2 M5 WI4 70°.

– Pawel Karczmarczyk, Poland

Images



The Rhombus on the north face of Chatyn-tau showing the line of the Mishliaev Route, belay points, and the first bivouac site in 2016.



The Mishliaev Route on the north face of Chatyn-tau. The Rhombus, seen here, has at least three routes to the left of the Mishliaev and one to the right.



Pawel Karczmarczyk climbing the great chimney system of the Mishliaev Route on the north face of Chatyn-tau.



The Grigorenko-Prigoda route on the west face of Ushba, as climbed in alpine-style by a Polish team in 2017.



Climbing the steep granite headwall of the Grigorenko-Prigoda route on the west face of Ushba.



Piotr Sulowski on the headwall during an attempt to free climb the Grigorenko-Prigoda route on the west face of Ushba.



The north face of Chatyn-tau. (A) Main summit (4,412m) and (B) west summit (4,310m). (1) East Ridge (5B, Garf team, 1952). (2) Original finish to the Mishliaev Route (6A, 1959). (3) Polish finish in 2016. Other routes on main face not shown. (4) West Ridge (3A, Helbling team, 1903).

Article Details

Author	Pawel Karczmarczyk
Publication	AAJ
Volume	61
Issue	93
Page	0
Copyright Date	2019
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions