



AAC Publications

Nyainbo Yuze, Mantou Spire and Various Attempts

China, Qinghai

The Nyainbo Yuze has held a special place in my imagination since opening AAJ 2014 and seeing Tamotsu Nakamura's photos of the spiky granite peaks. I visited the range in 2016 (AAJ 2017) and soon began planning a return expedition. On September 25, 2018, photographer Rachel Ross, Catherine Tao, and I rendezvoused in the city of Chengdu. From there we made a long drive via Jiuzhi to a road head giving access to a large west-east valley that splits the Nyainbo Yuze. After caching gear with a nomad family, we began shuttling loads east into the range.

The main valley was surprisingly populated, with nomads inhabiting a plot of land every 500m or so, and we soon found that much of the area was their private property. However, the culture of these people is so incredibly warm and welcoming that they not only let us travel, camp, and climb on their land, but also invited us for tea, meals, or to sleep. Many of the younger herders spoke Mandarin, and with Catherine translating for us, we were able to learn much about them and their way of life.

After staying the night with one family, we employed their horses to get our remaining gear into the valley and our base camp at 33°14'23.88"N, 101°2'43.50"E. To the northwest lay a beautiful peak of around 4,940m (33°15'11.37"N, 101°2'13.71"E), which we chose as our first objective.

After a day of poor weather, Catherine and I began climbing. We moved slowly, climbing through powder snow, icy cracks, and frozen moss. (I now know, officially, that September is the month to be in the Nyainbo Yuze, not October!) After five pitches, with difficulties up to perhaps 5.8, we reached an impasse of stacked flakes. We rappelled half a pitch and poked around for alternatives, but ultimately it was too late in the day to make the change of course needed to continue upward. A new blanket of snow settled in as we continued rappelling.

The weather remained unstable and generally snowy for the subsequent week. On October 7 all three of us attempted Peak 4,955m (33°14'41.10"N, 101°2'10.76"E), where a snow-covered slab turned us around a pitch below the summit. A few days later, on the 10th, Catherine and I climbed a tower we named Mantou Spire (33°14'30.21"N, 101°1'52.37"E). Five short pitches of fun, snowy chaos brought us to the 4,750m summit. The difficulties were perhaps around 5.6, with a few points of icy aid, but I'm sure it would be nothing more than a romp in dry conditions.

On the 13th the three of us departed camp in search of the driest line we could find. Traversing into an adjacent valley, we found a lovely little peak at 33°14'49.71"N, 101°3'20.54"E and began climbing its east face. For the first time on the entire trip, the leader could wear rock shoes. A pitch from the summit, we ran into ice and snow, and after circumnavigating nearly the entire mountain, we simply couldn't make our way to the top. We did, however, find a nice walk off the west side of the peak and returned to camp. Two days of load shuttling (and another ride on the horses) took us back to the road, where we were picked up by our driver on October 16.

In comparison to the valley visited on my 2016 expedition (on the northeast side of the range at 33°18'34.71"N, 101°3'6.63"E), this area seemed much more promising. It had overall better rock quality and access to many more features. However, climbing here still leaves much to be desired: The length of technical climbing is short, the lines not particularly continuous or aesthetic. From a

distance, many peaks look like fantastic objectives, but they are full of dead ends, random chasms, sneaky gendarmes, and false summits. That being said, it is an incredible playground, particularly for those of us seeking a remote new-routing experience at more moderate grades.

It is also worth mentioning that should this region ever become more popular with climbers, some form of recreation management would have to take place. The nomadic families were gracious in letting us climb, explore, and live on their land. We tried our best to repay them by employing their horses and giving them old ropes and gear. We were never given the impression that we were unwelcome, but it's impossible not to intrude on their culture. Our expedition was only possible by their grace. It would be irresponsible for us, or any future expedition, to expect indefinite hospitality and access. It is also important to come with the means of basic communication, through knowledge of either Mandarin or Amdo Tibetan, in order to ask permission from the herders and to maintain positive relations.

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Images



The eastern aspect of unclimbed Peak 4,940m in the Nyainbo Yuze Range.



Riding out of the Nyainbo Yuze, looking east into the middle part of the range. This main valley was heavily populated with nomadic families.



On the initial pitches of an attempt on Peak 4,940m.



Attempting the east face of a peak in the valley east of the 2018 base camp in the Nyainbo Yuze. These were the driest conditions experienced on the trip. In the background are the main Nyainbo Yuze peaks I to V; the highest is 5,369m

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