



AAC Publications

Pumori, Southeast Face, Le Voyage du Petit Prince

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal – Khumbu Section

THE IDEA of a new line on the southeast face of Pumori (7,161m) had been in my mind since 2015, when I had a chance to study the face in person. I tried it in 2017 with Vlad Capusan (AAJ 2018), but we were defeated by poor weather and avalanches. In the autumn of 2018, I returned with Romeo Popa and Teofil Vlad. We acclimatized by climbing nearby Lobuche East and spending two nights at 5,900m, and then installed a camp at 5,660m, at the bottom of the steep glacier below the southeast face. We left this camp at 2 a.m. on October 13, ascended the glacier to the bottleneck where our line began. [The Romanian line ascends a distinct mixed shield to the left of the 1986 Scottish Route and all other climbs on the southeast face.] We then climbed through funnels, sometimes with vertical or overhanging steps, to the first icefield, reaching it via a section of M4. Our strategy when it came to bivouacking was to look for a suitable place in good time, rather than pushing on into the dark. However, on day one we didn't find any good place; in fact our bivouac at 6,050m was wretched, with hardly any room, and we spent a difficult night.

The next day started well and we progressed pitch by pitch up less steep ground, heading for the much feared Ramp, the key passage of the route situated in the upper third of the face. The difficulties soon increased—this was the most satisfying part of the route, spectacular and technical (M5). We entered the Ramp and found an ideal bivouac spot at 6,250m, sheltered by a large rock overhang, and with enough space to flatten snow and create a good place for our two-man tent. It was the only good bivouac site on the whole route. Next morning we started up the Ramp with renewed energy. The Ramp gave climbing to M6 and spectacular ice. Exiting the Ramp was the hardest section—the ice came to a halt and there was little or no possibility of placing protection in the rock. We slanted left and after another 60m pitch reached the Spider, a 60–70° icefield at 6,450m that offered one place for a tent. We were now above our 2017 high point. This bivouac was not exposed to avalanche, but we failed to consider the wind, which released ice and snow from the walls above. We were not hit but kept our helmets on throughout the night.

Getting out of the Spider next morning gave us the final crux pitch (60m, M6). It was really taxing, as the sun had melted most of the ice. Above, four more pitches up steep, large, organ-pipe ice runnels, with a small section of M4, brought us to the southwest ridge at 6,776m, where we made our fourth bivouac.

On day five we were tired and the weather was poor, so we rested. We set out after dawn on day six, October 18. The sky was relatively clear, but the wind was strong and the temperature low. We struggled to the summit, which we reached at 3 p.m. and then enjoyed 40 minutes of surprising calm. We regained our tent that evening, finding later that the wind that day had reached speeds of 105 km/h.

The following day we descended the southwest ridge and west face in 13 hours, leaving Abalakov anchors, ice screws, snow stakes, and slings over flakes during 1,000m of rappelling. We camped that night at 5,760m and on day eight worked our way through a labyrinth of detritus on the right side of the glacier to reach the valley. We then continued down for eight more hours to Gorak Shep.

We named our route Le Voyage du Petit Prince (ED, M6 AI4 R). The face was committing and comparable to the Eiger north face, with similar features but at high altitude. As Teofil remarked, "Some time ago, establishing a new line on a 7,000er was science fiction, something I read about in

books by the early pioneers. I have now lived a dream I hardly had the guts to contemplate."

– Zsolt Torok, Romania

Images



Romeo Popa climbs difficult mixed terrain on day four of the ascent of Le Voyage du Petit Prince, Pumori southeast face.



Zsolt Torok on the summit of Pumori with, to the left, Changtse, and to the right Everest, Lhotse, and Nuptse surrounding the Western Cwm.



Detail of the 2018 Romanian route Le Voyage du Petit Prince on Pumori's southeast face, leading to the crest of the southwest ridge.



Zsolt Torok leading on day two on Pumori's southeast face, with Everest, Lhotse, and Nuptse in the background.



The southeast face of Pumori and the line of the 2018 Romanian route Le Voyage du Petit Prince. The 1986 Scottish Route and other lines up the face are all to the right of the big rock pillar. See photo in AAJ 2018.



Zsolt Torok climbing steep ice during the first ascent of Le Voyage du Petit Prince, Pumori southeast face.



Romeo Popa followed by Zsolt Torok in snow/ice runnels during the 2018 ascent of the southeast face of Pumori.



Pumori from the southwest showing the 2018 Romanian ascent (right) on the southeast face and their descent of the southwest ridge and west face. Where the two lines meet is the site of their highest bivouac.

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