



AAC Publications

Risht Peak, Northwest Face

Pakistan, Hindu Raj, Yarkhun Valley

Between April 26 and May 31, I visited the remote border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan with three French friends, Pierrick Fine, Antoine Rolle, and Aurélien Vaissière. We had looked on Google Earth for wild places where we could climb mixed terrain and found our dream spot in the Yarkhun Valley. [Editor's note: In its upper section this large valley lies immediately south of the border with Afghanistan, and while expeditions were relatively active in the area during the 1960s and '70s, it became more or less off limits to climbers and tourists after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Events after 9/11 acted as a further deterrent, and very few "tourists" have been here ever since.]

To acclimatize, we ascended the Risht Gol (Risht Valley) and its glacier. We believe we were the first to reach this glacier. The mouth of the Risht Gol can be accessed by roads leading up the Yarkhun Valley. From a base camp at 3,000m, we skied for six days up the valley, finishing on the col at the head of the glacier at 5,600m. We managed to descend the entire glacier on skis in perfect snow.

With windows of good weather too short to return to our high point, we visited a good bouldering area we had seen on our approach to base camp. There, we discovered numerous problems from 6a to 7b—the people living near these boulders were amazed to see foreigners, and even more amazed to see them climb on their small rocks.

After two days of rest in base camp, we learned of an upcoming weather window of three and a half days. In two days we raced back up the valley, reaching 5,400m—it had taken six days to gain this point before. On May 22 we were at the base of a 500m line of rock and ice on the northwest face of an unclimbed peak (36°40'40.26"N, 73°4'12.18"E) at the head of the glacier.

Easy snow slopes led to more difficult terrain and a pitch of WI5 (90°). I led the following pitch, which proved to be the crux: tricky M6 with poor protection. Sustained but slightly easier ice pitches then led to the southwest ridge. Here, snow conditions were awful and we had to dig deep—into our bodies, minds, and the snow—to gain elevation and reach the top of what we had decided to call Risht Peak. From the readings on our GPS units and watch altimeters, we estimated the summit altitude to be 5,960m. We rappelled the route in a storm and returned to base camp the following day.

After resting, we wondered how to end the trip in style and opted to visit a beautiful gorge southwest of our base camp, on the west side of the main valley. The rock walls were split by cracks from top to bottom. We opened two routes: Antoine and Aurel made the first ascent of Sueurs Chaudes (150m, 6c+), while Pierrick and I climbed Removable Crux (250m, 7b+). The latter route had many pitches of nice crack climbing with good protection, but on some pitches, especially the fifth, the rock was poor, adding spice to the day. Routes were climbed using trad gear only. This trip was by far my best expedition experience to date.

– Symon Welfringer, France

Editor's note: The main peak of the Risht Glacier basin is Thui Zom II (6,523m), but it has not been climbed from this glacier. The peak was first climbed in August 1978 via the southeast ridge, approached from the Qalandar Glacier to the south, by the British trio of Chris Griffiths, Chris Lloyd, and Nick Tritton.

During attempts on this peak in 1969 from the Shetor Glacier to the east, another British expedition climbed Pachan Zom (6,126m), a summit on the northwest ridge of Thui Zom II overlooking the Risht Glacier.

Images



Aurélien Vaissière heading for steep ice during the first ascent of Risht Peak.



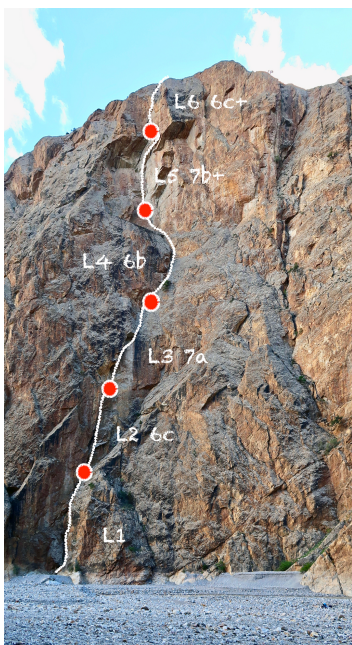
At the top of the snowfield below the start of the difficulties on the north face of Risht Peak.



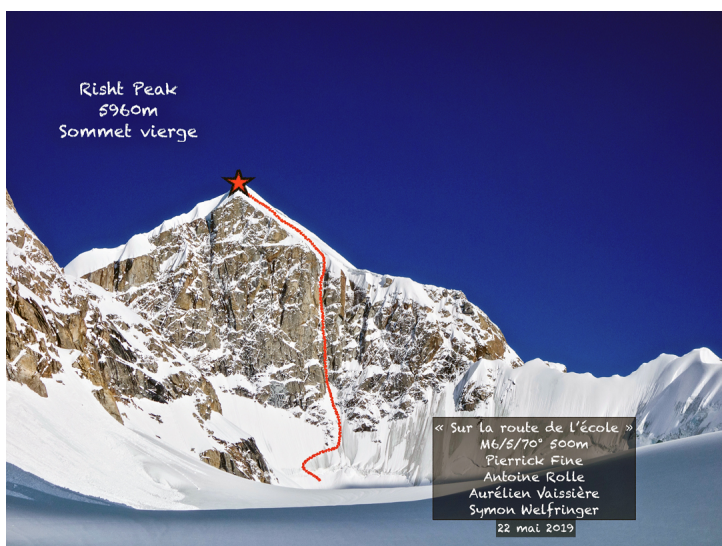
Symon Welfringer on the first ascent of Removable Crux (7b+), Yarkhun Valley.



Aurélien Vaissière and Symon Welfringer on the first ascent of Removable Crux, Yarkhun Valley.



Removable Crux (250m, 7b+), Yarkhun Valley.



Risht Peak and the line of the 2019 French first ascent.



Aurélien Vaissière on the summit (southwest) ridge of Risht Peak. The view is south down the Zhang Tek Glacier with little-known peaks of the Gazen Group. The high peak marked in background left is Blatts Yaz Zom (6,191m).



Moving up the Risht Glacier. The large peak on the left is Thui Zom II, while the pyramid right at the head of the valley is Risht Peak. The summits to the right are unclimbed.



Unclimbed peaks of ca 5,600m to 5,900m on the west side of the Risht Glacier.

Article Details

Author	Symon Welfringer
Publication	AAJ
Volume	62
Issue	94
Page	0
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions