



AAC Publications

Taghia Gorge, No Rest for the Wicked

Morocco, High Atlas

Four climbers and two Moroccan Berber friends sat with feet dangling over a dizzying precipice, slaking our thirst with a Flag beer and finally resting our shredded hands. Mohammed's beat box chanted melodic Berber tunes, which competed with the screeching of a bearded vulture soaring overhead. A juniper-wood fire threw up high flames, warming freezing hands as the cold, clear night encroached. The vast, rolling, and silent panorama glowed orange as the sun melted over the horizon, and our team stared down from our precarious perch—atop the 850m north face of Tagoujimt n'Tsouiannt (2,982m) that we had just climbed.

This was my ninth trip to Taghia. Fifteen years earlier, in 2004, I had visited for the first time and marveled at the twisting rivers carving deep gorges and clean limestone walls, the biggest and most impressive of which is the north wall of Tsouiannt. Rising directly above the tiny village, its challenge and difficulty were all too obvious. It had to be climbed!

Climbing ground-up in 2007, Stéphanie Bodet, Fred Gentet, Nicolas Kalisz, and Arnaud Petit established Babel (800m, 7c+) on the left side of the wall. Featuring a mix of trad gear and bolts, the route rightly gained notoriety for quality and seriously run-out pitches. I had previously spotted the long tapering pillar that ran the full height of the wall 50m to the right of Babel, and mused at creating a modern, safer route for many climbers to enjoy.

In 2018, fellow mountain guide Mark Thomas, sculptor Simon Hitchens, and I spent 12 days establishing the route, each day starting and finishing in the dark, drilling and climbing from the ground up. After placing over 300 bolts, we eventually reached the summit but failed to finish the climb during this two-week trip.

We returned in October 2019, and this time photographer Mike Hutton joined the crew to help and document the climb. After 20 eventful days of bolting, cleaning, and climbing, the four of us climbed the final 6c pitch and scrambled 500m to the summit of Tsouiannt.

At 850m, No Rest for the Wicked (7c+) is the longest sport route in the Taghia Gorge and in Morocco, and arguably the whole of continent of Africa: 25 pitches of fully bolted climbing from the riverbed to the summit plateau. The route has 13 pitches above 7a, with most pitches worthy of three stars at any sport climbing destination. Aficionados of big-wall free climbing will love the challenge of a one-day ascent or climbing over two days and enjoying the luxurious cave bivy at half height.

Met atop the summit by our Berber friends Mohammed and Abdur, with a strong donkey carrying provisions, a memorable night unfolded with stories, banter, and laughs under a huge Moroccan sky. To return again is inevitable. Inshallah!

– Mike “Twid” Turner, U.K.

Libertà Berber: In October 2019, an Italian party climbed a new line on the right side of the north face of Tagoujimt n'Tsouiannt. Over eight days, Lorenzo Gadda, Vincenzo Mascara, and Alessio Miori established Libertà Berber with a mixture of bolts and removable gear. They then returned to free the entire route (17 pitches, 7b+) in a day.

Images



Mike "Twid" Turner leading the crux second pitch during the first ascent of No Rest For the Wicked (850m, 7c+). The route took two trips to complete and is possibly the longest fully bolted route in Africa.



Mark Thomas leading the third pitch (7a) of No Rest For the Wicked (850m, 7c+). This route climbs 25 pitches up the north face of Tagoujimt n'Tsouiannt (2982m), approximately 50m to the right of Babel (800m, 7c+).



Mark Thomas leading a 7b pitch above the bivy ledge, halfway up No Rest For the Wicked (850m, 7c+) on the north face of Tagoujimt n'Tsouiannt in Taghia Gorge.



Mike "Twid" Turner climbing a 7a pitch about two-thirds of the way up No Rest For the Wicked (850m, 7c+) on the north face of Tagoujimt n'Tsouiannt (2982m) in Morocco's Taghia Gorge. The 25-pitch route took Turner, Simon Hitchens, and Mark Thomas two trips to complete.

Article Details

Author	Mike Turner
Publication	AAJ
Volume	62
Issue	94
Page	
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions