



AAC Publications

Paradise Lake, Dry Martini and Other Ascents

China, Xinjiang, Tien Shan

On the first ascent of Dry Martini, looking east across Paradise Lake toward unclimbed rock. Photo by Zhen Wang.

As the proverb goes, you won't know how big China is until you arrive in Xinjiang. The long journey to Paradise Lake proves this saying is accurate.

Paradise Lake (a.k.a. Akekule Lake, 3,050m, 42°34'48.77"N, 82°23'32.68"E) lies on the Wusun Ancient Road, a former north-south migration route across the Tien Shan that is now a highly popular yet serious trek of about 120km. The lake is nearly surrounded by unnamed 4,000m peaks, some of them glaciated and all apparently unclimbed until 2024.

A few years ago, Yang Guang showed me a photo of the area. I was shocked: Towering limestone walls surrounded a turquoise lake, green grass, and herds of sheep and cattle. He had not climbed there but was keen to go. COVID-19 prevented it at that time, but we decided to try in 2024, choosing the best time of year for this area: early July to early August. Accompanying us was regular climbing partner Hongshu Qui and longtime climbing photographer Zhen Wang.

The lake can be accessed from the north by flying in a sightseeing helicopter for around 30 minutes or taking an off-road vehicle for around six hours, then walking for another five hours. We chose the latter. This hike involves seven or eight river crossings, requiring wading or riding a horse. There are organized camping areas at the lake, but due to the passage of many tourists, the environment has been damaged, and garbage is rife. Another problem of this area is the unstable weather: In our 20 days, there was only one period of 48 hours without rain.

While the rock on the high alpine peaks is not good (see related report here), the lower rock walls are of an unusually high-quality alpine limestone, and there are hundreds of excellent boulders scattered around the alpine meadow. The area is currently open to climbing, providing you register in advance and your climbing plan is approved by the local authorities.*

On the west bank of the lake stands a cluster of rock peaks rising to around 3,800m. We chose the nearest and smallest (approx. 42°35'13.09"N, 82°22'37.93"E) and spent ten days putting up Dry Martini (450m, 11 pitches, 5.11a) on the southeast face. The route has a mix of bolted and traditional protection, and we completed the ascent on July 23. On the last pitch, Zhen turned to Yang and said, "How long have you been looking forward to reaching this summit?" Yang replied, "Twelve years. The first time I saw a picture of this face was 12 years ago."

Dry Martini (11 pitches, 5.11a) above Paradise Lake. Photo by Zhen Wang.

We also created a number of sport routes, from 5.9 to 5.12, and some boulder problems of V2 (we had not expected boulders, so carried no pads). Our climb was just the beginning. I believe that as time goes by, more rock climbers will come here and open new routes, making Paradise Lake a destination for climbers from across China and even from around the world.

—Zhiming Wang, with assistance from Zhan Fang, China, and Xia Zhongming, Germany

* The management of the Tiantang Lake area is by Yidingxing Cultural Tourism, currently the only

designated operator of Wusun Ancient Road. The management is currently open to climbing. To enter the area for climbing activities, you must register in advance so that the management can review the climbing plan, provide logistical services, and carry out emergency rescue. For more information, contact Guo Tao of Yidingxing Cultural Tourism, WeChat ID 18999178555, mobile phone number 13201366999.

Images



During the first ascent of Dry Martini above Paradise Lake, Xinjiang.



On Dry Martini, with the eastern arm of Paradise Lake and unnamed peaks behind.



During the first ascent of Dry Martini above Paradise Lake, Xinjiang.



On the first ascent of Dry Martini, looking east across Paradise Lake toward unclimbed rock.



Dry Martini (11 pitches, 5.11a) above Paradise Lake.

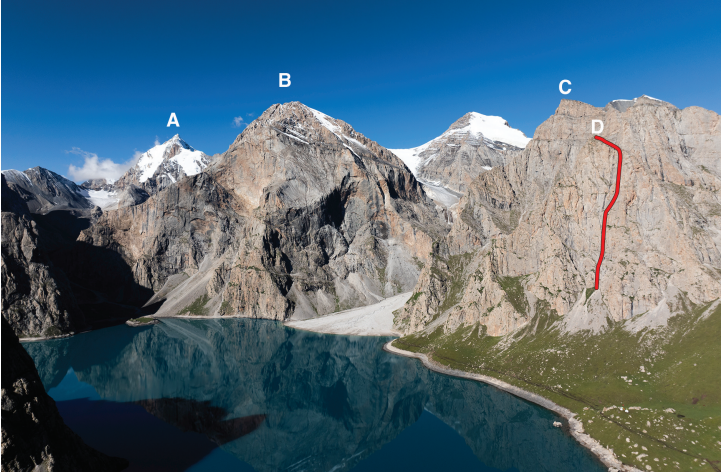


Unclimbed rock walls by Paradise Lake, Xinjiang. The rock is limestone, generally of high quality at

lower elevations.



Unclimbed rock close to Paradise Lake, Xinjiang.



Looking southwest across Paradise Lake (a.k.a. Akekule Lake). (A) Peak 4,539m, climbed in 2024. (B) Peak 4,359m, unclimbed. (C) Peak 4,171m. (D) Peak 3,700m, showing the line of Dry Martini, climbed in 2024.

Article Details

Author	Zhiming Wang
Publication	AAJ
Volume	66
Issue	99
Page	94
Copyright Date	2025
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions