



AAC Publications

Tetnuldi, West Face, First Wintertime Ascent

Georgia, Caucasus Mountains

Tetnuldi (4,860m) is a beautiful peak in the Svaneti region of Georgia. The mountain's classic route is the south ridge, and the pyramidal west face is very attractive; its white profile can be seen from many places, even from Svaneti's administrative center in Mestia. For such an aesthetic face, it seems strange it was only climbed for the first time in 2011, by a large Georgian team.

After a lot of research on winter attempts on Tetnuldi, I discovered a single sentence in an Ivane Japaridze book describing an ascent in February 1958, following the original route up the south ridge. The mountain is well defended in winter by large amounts of snowfall, avalanche-prone slopes, and high wind.

Giorgi Tepnadze and I tried to climb Tetnuldi in February 2019. We nearly got trapped at around 3,550m after two heavy snow days, and, still far from the summit, started our retreat. In the key couloir we triggered two avalanches, and with great effort we skied down hip-deep snow in the direction of Adishi village. To ski from 3,550m to 1,650m took two days.

In December 2021, I observed that recent stable weather likely had brought good conditions to Tetnuldi. I called Giorgi and Baqar Gelashvili, and we drove to Mestia. According to the old Georgian Orthodox calendar, it was the first day of winter.

On the 14th, starting at 2,600m, Giorgi and I snowshoed up the approach, while Baqar skied. It took us a day to reach 3,600m. On the second day we reached the bottom of the west face at around 4,000m. We decided we would climb the remaining 850m of the face directly by a steep, icy line first climbed in 2013 by Czechs.

We left behind our bivouac gear, hoping to make a round trip in a day. I led the first half of the face, and we all simul-climbed. We could see Mestia waking up at first light as Giorgi started to lead a diagonal traverse to the left, into the upper face. We climbed several pitches of steep ice (60–65°), really hard to penetrate. The wide upper bergschrund led to a continuously steep face, loaded with snow at first, then ice all the way up to the summit ridge.

A forecasted storm had arrived, and we suddenly were exposed to snow blowing from the northeast. The remaining 150m up the ridge were climbed in very poor visibility. After a total of nine hours, all three of us reached the top at 2:15 p.m. on December 16.

We climbed down the south ridge quickly but carefully to the shoulder and then to our bivouac. Baqar skied all the way down from 4,000m to 2,600m non-stop and very fast. Meanwhile, Giorgi and I put on our headlamps and struggled for the next several hours to find the way in blizzard and snow. By midnight we reached Baqar, who had waited for us, and drove together to Mestia.

— **Archil Badriashvili, Georgia**

Images



The west face of Tetnuldi (4,860m), showing (A) bivouac at the base of the face, (B) bergschrund, and (C) junction with the south ridge. The climbers in December 2021 followed the Czech Route (2013), mostly just left of the central rock spur. They descended the south ridge.



During the December 2021 ascent of the west face of Tetnuldi.



Approaching the west face of Tetnuldi at ca 3,400m.

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