



AAC Publications

Xuanwu Feng, Historical First Ascent

China, Sichuan, Qionglai Shan, Siguniang National Park

In 2008, three Chinese climbers made the first ascent of Xuanwu Feng (“Black Tortoise Peak,” 5,383m), situated at 31°7′14.93″N, 102°48′45.13″E, between Tan Shan (4,946m) and Angry Wife (5,005m). The climbers were Li Hongxue, a professional mountain guide, his brother Xu Laoyao, who lives with his family in the Shuangqiao Valley, and Lao Lu.

From Xu’s house at 3,500m, it took around five hours to reach a suitable base camp at approximately 4,400m on a wide alpine meadow. Above, 300m–400m of gravel and broken terrain led to an advanced base camp at ca 4,740m, which they reached on September 15.

From here the team climbed up to a hanging glacier below the southwest face of the peak, where they camped at around 5,150m. Next day they climbed 200m up an ice wall (50°– 70°) to reach a snowfield, and above this they climbed a further 200m up a rock wall to reach a col (ca 5,300m) on the south ridge. Just before the col, they were forced to stop and shelter from a fierce snowstorm.

When they continued, another 200m up the ridge crest—a snow slope of 45°–50°, followed by mixed terrain—led to the summit. Lao Lu stopped at a small terrace just below the top, while the two brothers continued to the highest point. It was nearly 6 p.m. and their altimeter showed 5,510m. In all, there was around 700m of difficult climbing.

They returned to advanced base around midnight. The weather at the time was generally good during the day, but it rained heavily at night. The three spent the morning of the 17th drying gear before leaving at mid-day and descending all the way to the valley. Reaching Xu’s house at 7 p.m., they were just in time for a celebratory hot meal with mellow cherry wine.

This route appears to have been repeated several times since. In 2012, a French party climbed the northwest face, and the AAJ incorrectly suggested they likely made the first ascent of the peak (see AAJ 2013). Sadly, Li Hongxue was killed less than a year later on Celestial Peak.

– Lindsay Griffin, AAJ

Images



Xuanwu Feng (5,383m) from the northwest. The top section of the 2008 route is near the right skyline. The 2012 French route climbed the center of the wall facing the camera (see AAJ 2013).

Article Details

Author	Lindsay Griffin
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	350
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions