

cracks tend to be very shallow and thin, and only take knifeblades, which were difficult to place, and occasionally an angle piton. We placed one bolt and one piton in each belay, which in turn we used on the descent, and placed only two other bolts in between pitches.

In bad weather we fixed the lower 200 meters, and camped in a broad grassy ledge that we dubbed “il giardino” (the garden). In less than ideal weather we fixed another 120 meters of rope above this point, and on the 13th, under a bright blue sky, we climbed the remaining 430 meters to the summit.

We named the route *Hasta la Vista David* (750m, VI+ A1) in honor of a climber on an expedition from Navarra (Spain) with whom we shared basecamp; he died during an attempt on Drifika (6,447m)

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Zang Brakk (4,800m), *Ali Baba*, *Ali Baba's Hadsch Variation*; *Shingu Charpa* (Great Tower), attempt. At the end of June our team of Ines Bozic Skok and Janez Skok (Slovenia), and Hannes Mair and I (Austria), established base camp under the Great Tower (Shingu Charpa).

After a few days of acclimatization and rock scouting, we carried a tent and equipment under the 600-meter wall of *Zang Brakk* to climb in two independent parties. My intention was to climb a new route in pure style, free, in one push, and not using any bolts or fixing any ropes. We knew of four routes, all put up in at least nine days, and mostly aid climbing. For Hannes and myself our first pick was a steep, impressive line right of the Spanish Route. Ines and Janez decided to try an easier looking line on the southwest face.

The cracks were looking great and appeared to give way to free climbing. But after the first pitch I realized it would be much harder than expected. The rock quality did not have so much in common with my anticipated dreams of great Karakoram granite—I had heard it was like *El Cap*—but what was this first scary layer on the rock's surface? Often loose and sandy, and why did Mother Nature fill so many cracks with dirt? Lastly, why did so many nice finger and hand cracks end in a thin knife blade seam or, even worse, in a blank section?

I guess that's the adventure part of the game. I gave it my best and climbed some demanding pitches up to 7c onsight. Then we bivvied in a corner halfway up. The next day started with a scary chimney, which led after 30 meters into an even scarier offwidth crack, in which a #6 Friend sometimes refused to work. After all this struggling the crack turned out to



Zang Brakk (4,800m), showing *Hasta la Vista David*.
Elena Davila



Zang Brakk: (1) Hasta la Vista David (6a A1, 2004). (2) Ali Baba (6c+/7a A1, 2004—free until the Korean route Left Hand). (3) Ali Baba's Hadsch (7b+, 2004). (4) Ramchekor (5.10 A2, 1998). (5) Left Hand (VI 5.9 A4-, 2000). (6) Right Hand (VI 5.9 A3+, 2000). (7) Ganyips (6a A3, 1998). (8) Free attempt (7c, 2004). Photo, lines, and information from Hannes Mair and Michael Mayer

be a damned knife blade seam. Aiding was not an option for us, so after I down climbed the pitch we decided to bail.

Our cook Ali welcomed us with all his warm hospitality, a cup of chai and the question, "Summit? Success?"... "No summit, no success." He told us he would pray more for us.

Janez and Ines were successful on their new route, Ali Baba. The top four pitches were shared with the Korean Route. They reached the top of the Korean Route in the afternoon of the second day; it ends several meters under the real summit because of a blank section. Janez onsighted new ground up to 7a, and used some aid only on the last four pitches (Korean Route).

Two days later, on July 3, Hannes and I were again under the wall with a big dream: to free climb the southwest face in one day. We started early and climbed the first easy pitch of Janez and Ines's new route Ali Baba in unstable weather. For the next 300 meters we headed up a crack system to the right of Ali Baba; it seemed to be slightly harder, with one 7a+ and a few 6c and 6b pitches. Before the traverse to the Korean Route it started drizzling again, but maybe Ali's praying helped our luck because it stopped. Inshallah!

The hardest part was still in front of us and Janez's suggested grading was three pitches of 6c/A0 and one A1. A one-day onsight ascent was enough of a challenge, but the real challenge was to ignore this unreliable layer of rock—laybacking without trusting your feet or the friction makes life as a free climber much harder. Hannes put it to the test seconding a 7a+ pitch when a TV-sized block, which he was using for a handhold, let loose, taking him along for the ride.

After this close call we pushed upward, climbing three more long pitches (7a+, 7b, 7b+). After these tenuous pitches we reached the prayer flags and there I realized that a small dream had come true. I looked over and took in the small Nangma Valley, and then I looked to the big north ridge of the Great Tower...yet to be climbed.

The next dream laid in front us. A few days later, together with the Slovenians, we found ourselves attempting the north ridge, only to be weighed down with heavy loads and volumes of loose rock. We scrambled and traversed our way up, and as we stared at the rock that loomed over us we woke up from our free climbing dream. Sadly, not all dreams are what they seem.