

The feather in our cap came on the next day with Mt. Obelisk: 45- to 65-degree mixed climbing (with one steeper ice gully) to a continuous, exposed fourth-class ridge of wind-eroded rock gargoyles. From the ridge to the summit required low fifth-class (a lot around 5.2, a few moves of 5.6) and more exposed (think a steeper, meaner, and more continuous Owen-Spalding) climbing in our plastic boots.

BRENNEN BRUNNER

*Editor's Note:* According to Damien Gildea, Obelisk was first climbed in 1970 and was later climbed twice by Colin Monteath with others. According to Colin, helicopters had apparently landed on a number of these summits before climbers. Thundergut was first climbed in 1974 and has no doubt been climbed since, as is most likely the case with Mounts Rae and Viel.

## AFRICA

### MIDDLE EAST

#### IRAN

*Bisoton, New Routes.* Pascal Dauger, Arnaud Guillaume, and I made it to Iran on May 14. Getting visas was relatively easy: three weeks' delay and 45 dollars. Nonetheless, the instability of the political situation was such that, by autumn, these visas were refused.

We set off from Teheran with no other information than a single photograph of a mountain with great appeal called Bisoton. Two days later we discovered to our delight a calcified wall facing southeast, 1200 meters high and eight kilometers wide! The rock is truly exceptional, very sculpted and rough, ready for natural protection, pitons, and chocks. A good 50 routes ascend the vast face; most have been established by local climbers, who have both talent and energy. We are speaking of an area in west-central Iran, in the heart of the Zagros Range, about 40 kilometers from Kermanshah and near the Iraqi border. Kurds make up the majority of the local population.

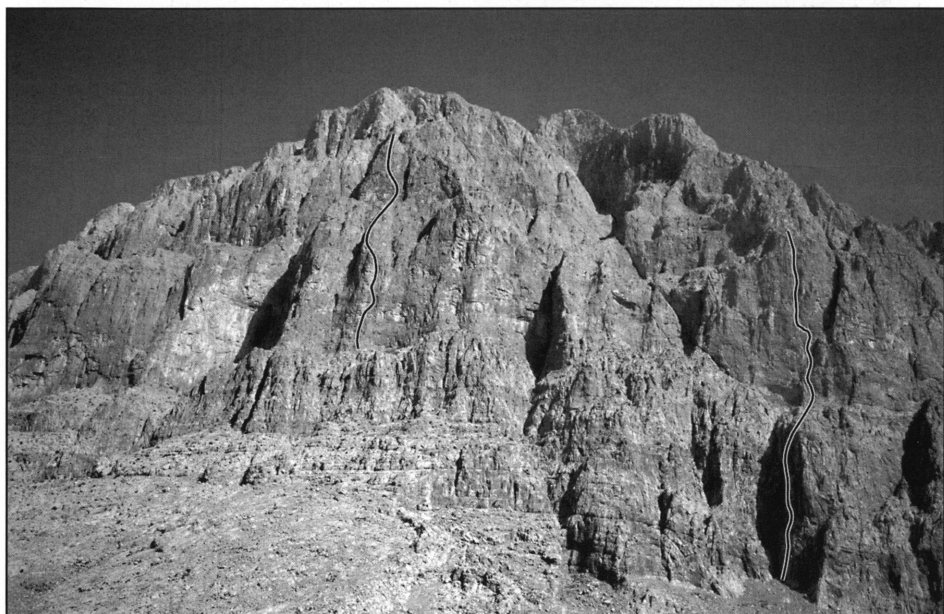
We started off with two magnificent 700-meter routes on Bisoton. Each required two days of work and a bivouac on one of the solid platforms that are easily found on the face. The routes feature occasional bolts, and present lots of free climbing with occasional pitches where aid is necessary. Friends, chocks, pitons, and cams are desirable for all routes.

*Merci M. Shirzadi* was named after the landlord of the tea house at the bottom of the face. This fellow housed us graciously throughout our visit. With pitches up to 6b A1, the route could probably be done in a single day by fast climbers. The rock is solid, with high-quality protection. The descent consists of a series of rappels to the left that join a sheltered perch in the center of the face, clearly visible from the initial belay at the base. Three or four rappels below that, one arrives at a narrow terrace that runs the entire breadth of the face; you follow the terrace toward the right and thence to the bottom.

*Du Vent dans le Voile* (Wind in the Sails) ascends a steep red pillar in the center of the main face to a narrow ledge, above which the route enters a triangular face with obvious rayed fissures. The difficulties include several tough A2 overhangs that take time to negotiate, and



ABOVE: Arnaud Guillaume on pitch 7, Du Vent dans le Voile (Dauger-Guillaume-Thivel, 2000).  
BELOW: The southeast face of Bisoton, showing Du Vent dans le Voile (left) (6b A2, 700m, Dauger-Guillaume-Thivel, 2000) and (right) Merci M. Shirzadi (6b A1, 700m, Dauger-Guillaume-Thivel, 2000). RÉMI THIVEL



pitches of 6a and 6b are common. The exposure of the initial pillar is outstanding, and the rock always solid. This route requires extra protection in the difficult upper passages. The descent goes through a canyon to the right of the route, with a bunch of short rappels and a rather adventurous trail that rejoins the same narrow ledge as *Merci M. Shirzadi*.

In May, the days are hot but tolerable, and the face is shaded in the afternoon. The sun rises around 5:30 a.m. and sets at 7 p.m. Pulling a pack up the face is difficult because of the abrasiveness of the rock. For that reason, we climbed light on each route, with the second climber on each rope taking just a minimum of water, a light jacket for the evening, and a cold meal. The face of Bisoton is immense and relatively complex, striated with ledges and cracks handy for descending but difficult to evaluate from below. A beautiful walk from the approach hike to the climbs allows you to familiarize yourself with the site: it consists of carefully following from left to right the lower ledge, situated slightly above the cracked metamorphic base. This leads you past the foot of all the climbable routes of Bisoton.

One could easily spend a day climbing on the classic route to a hanging shelter visible from the bottom. This route ascends almost directly and easily (IV+/V) up to the cabin, then falls off toward the summit along a vast and simple chimney—1200 vertical meters in the guts of Bisoton, with an easy descent through the scree and pastures to the northeast.

In the hamlet of Bisoton at the foot of the face, you'll find all the food you could wish for; there's no need for a shopping trip to a city beforehand. Buses are frequent and very inexpensive, and run throughout the countryside. All in all, the prices in Iran compare favorably to those in India or Nepal. The Zagros Range is immense and the possibilities infinite. Bon voyage!

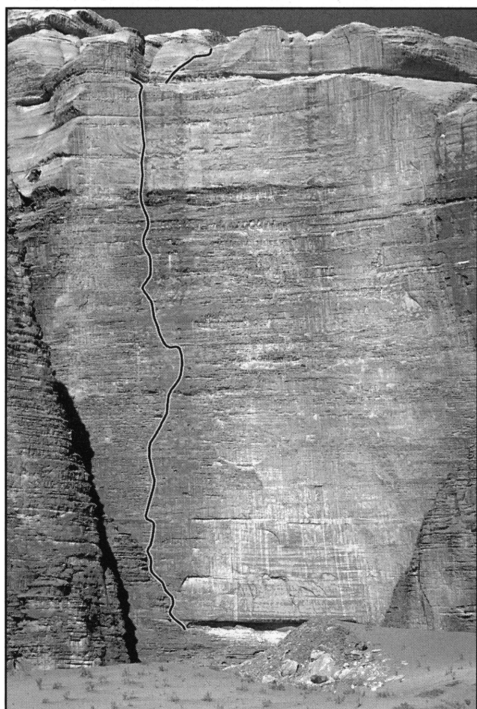
RÉMI THIVEL, *France*

## JORDAN

### WADI RUM

*Nassrani North, East Face, La Guerre Sainte.* We were a team of six: Benoit Robert, Philippe Batoux, Hervé Bouvard and I as the leading team, and Guy Abert and the Israeli Alon Hod in support. It took us five days, from November 12-16, with fixed rope to establish *La Guerre Sainte* (The Holy War, 7b+, 12 pitches, 400m) on the east face of Nassrani North. We spent our nights at the Comfort Rest House, where people can find the topo. I am very enthusiastic about this new route, a 400-meter sport free climb in the desert of Wadi Rum, close to the Red Sea in South Jordan.

This is an outstanding climb thanks to the special rock (the sandstone is sometimes more sand than rock) and the beautiful desert scenery. It's like climbing on the



*The east face of Nassrani North, showing La Guerre Sainte (Abert-Batoux-Bouvard-Hod-Petit-Robert, 2000). PHILIPPE BATOUX*