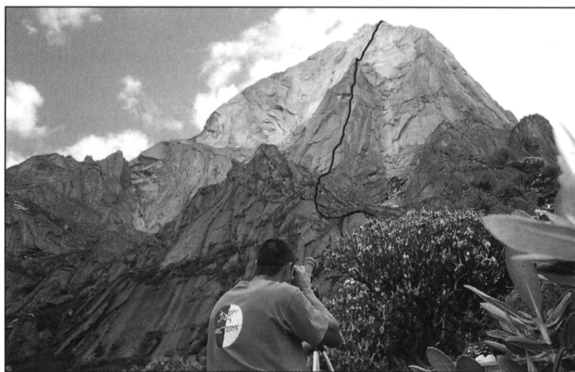


Despite mixed weather, the team had enjoyed their first taste of new ascents in the greater ranges and is grateful to the Mount Everest Foundation and The British Mountaineering Council (U.K. Sport) for supporting the expedition.

JEREMY THORNLEY, U.K.



The southwest face of Siguniang IV (the Fourth Sister of Siguniang Shan, a ca 4,950m summit on the long southwest ridge of 6,250m Siguniang) rises out of the jungle above the east side of the Changping Valley. Marked is Suffering First Class (ca 450m, V A3 5.10).  
*Cosmin Andron*



Cosmin Andron following the initial cracks of Suffering First Class (V A3 5.10), the first route climbed on the southwest face of the ca 4,950m Fourth Sister of Siguniang, Qonglai Shan. *Wai Wah Yip/Cosmin Andron collection*

*Siguniang IV, southwest face.* Our initial team of four, which intended a leisurely trip to Siguniang National Park, saw itself reduced to two: Steve Wai Wah Yip (Geordie) and I. We decided to play on granite faces in the Changping Gou, walls that I remembered from a trip the year before. However, our visit turned out jinxed, and it appeared that disasters ready to happen were lurking around every corner. First we missed our flight. Then our luggage was rejected. We were sent to board the plane with ice axes, were turned back again, and missed the next two flights fighting with the challenging-to-deal-with staff of Sichuan Airlines. Then our local fixer didn't show up as agreed, and we ended up overcharged and dumped halfway to base camp by charming porters and their lovely horses. We had to randomly choose a wall, pay more money to have our gear ferried there, and then the weather crapped out. I then got sick. It seemed as though we'd got the perfect recipe for disaster, but we managed to improve on it.

We got onto our wall, a splendid blank face with two parallel cracks running for 200m. Too

bad they were off-width, and for most of their length we only had two pieces of gear that would fit. Geordie leapfrogged a Camelot 5, cute and cozy, and a wobbly, screeching 4.5. Above this section we had a roof, then a system of overhangs and chimneys, all seasoned by a several-days downpour, a sprinkle of high winds, and a fist-full of mist.

Ours was the first ascent of the southwest face of Siguniang IV (the Fourth Sister of

Siguniang Shan, a ca 4,950m summit on the long southwest ridge of 6,250m Siguniang). The wall topped out on the ridge, where at 2:45 a.m. on June 8 we intersected a previously climbed route. However, we were unable to follow it to the summit due to time constraints. We climbed the 400-450m wall bolt-free (and in places brain-free) and left behind only a few pegs, nuts, and slings for rappel anchors.

We named our route Suffering First Class and graded it V A3 5.10. However, getting to and back from the route got A6 in my book. I'm entirely to blame, because when our teacher was instructing my classmates to the meaning of "monsoon," I was playing truant and bouldering on the school's wall. As she said, "You can learn things the easy way or the hard way." I made my choice.

As we descended the wall after a 24-hour day, a belay in an expando crack blew, nearly sending me to the valley floor air express. Somehow we got off the wall with all limbs attached, to find out that we were again hijacked by our porters, who refused, halfway through the descent, to take us to the nearest village. This would have meant we were doomed, once again, to miss our flights. For me this included the one back to my home country, Romania. Finally, after a shouting championship, we concluded our 36-hour day in the van taking us to Chengdu's airport. To top it all we received a \$300 fine for not having a climbing permit (which our fixer was supposed to have arranged) and later realized that the porters had lost some of our precious gear. The last mix-up that befell us was that by mistake we ended up flying...first class. Somehow this made for a happy ending.

So, I'm writing this report sitting on my Zion haul bag, which I'll be sending this afternoon to Chengdu. And guess where are we headed next Saturday? Yep! But I've heard that in winter it doesn't rain.

COSMIN ANDRON, *Guangzhou, China*

*Siguniang, south face to southwest ridge, not to summit; Siguniang North, first ascent, southwest face.* I'm at 5,500m. The ice is hard. My crampons rebound, blunted after three weeks. For the last eight years in Haute Savoie the Committee of the French Alpine Club has selected people 16-26 years old for a "young alpinists" group. For two years the young men and women are trained in various aspects of mountaineering by a professional guide, and at the end of this period they organize an expedition. In 2006 the project was a new route on Siguniang (6,250m) in Sichuan, an area still ignored by many Europeans but having exceptional potential.

Our flight landed in Chengdu on October 9. Chengdu is a model of the modern Chinese city, soaked in Western culture. With McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, posters for Oréal, Cartier, Vuitton, Sony, it doesn't correspond to my image of a communist country; the Cultural Revolution seems far away. The city appears to be under construction, with 40-floor apartment blocks. There are many cars: Is Audi the symbol of the new Communism? Is China becoming modernized too quickly? Economists calculate that if the 1.2 billion Chinese had the same amount of stuff as Westerners, there would be no more oil on the planet in 20 years.

The road to Rilong has been greatly upgraded since the Siguniang National Park became a World Heritage Site. In Rilong, Audis are replaced by horses and yaks. The walk to our base camp at 3,500m in the Changping Valley takes four hours. Our site is next to a wooden hut, where two Tibetans live. They have no running water or electricity, just a wood stove. They have a few pigs and yaks, and sell kebabs to Chinese tourists.