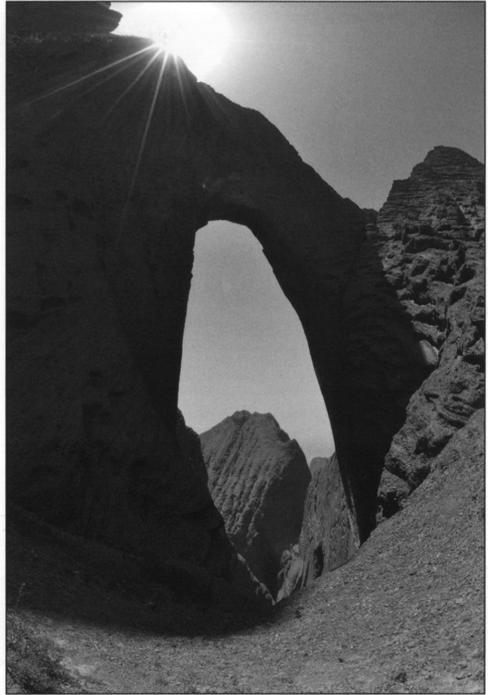


to drive me to the mountains, and proceeded to explore. There were steep, big walls up to 900m, made of mud and river stones. In the end I climbed three routes on Shipton's Arch and connecting formations. I repeated, rope solo, the west face of the Arch (5.10, 240m). There were in-situ anchors showing that it had previously been climbed. [The west arm of the Arch was climbed by Americans in 2000. They placed bolt anchors and climbed 180 vertical meters of generally loose conglomerate at 5.6 to reach the summit, for the first known ascent. *AAJ 2001.*] I then climbed the northeast face of a connecting summit, most likely a first ascent (5.10 A2, 270m). There were some strange rope-solo shenanigans with a cool chimney/tube. Finally, I climbed the north face of another connecting summit, which proved scary 5.10 A2 (270m) due to the need to overcome mud climbing on my own. These routes, on different walls, led to different summits. But the formations are connected at the base, and I refer to them all as part of Shipton's Arch.

It was a wonderful solo expedition. I plan to go back to the Chinese western Kokshaal-too as soon as permits become available. My chosen area has some of the most amazing untouched granite walls left on the planet, and I know of three formations that have faces at least 1,500m high, all waiting for a first attempt.

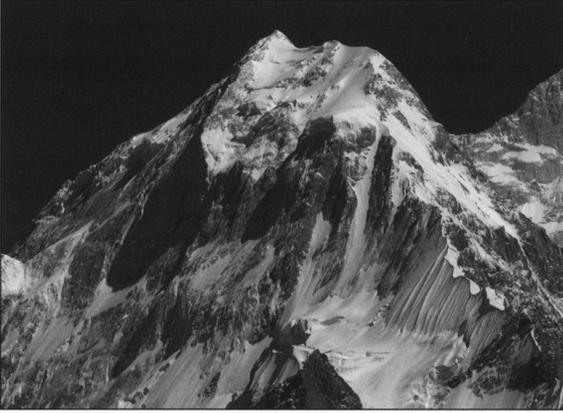
MIKE LIBECKI, AAC



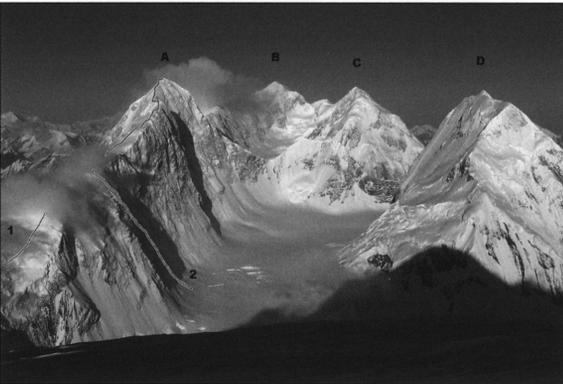
Seen from north, Shipton's Arch in Kara Tagh, ca 40km northwest of Kashgar. *Mike Libeck*

TIEN SHAN

Xuelian massif, various ascents. Following exploration of the north side of the Xuelian massif in 2008 (*AAJ 2009*), Bruce Normand (Scotland) returned in August 2009 with Americans Jed Brown, Kyle Dempster, and Jared Vilhauer. Goals were the major satellite peaks of Xuelian Main (Xuelian Feng, 6,627m), all of which remained unclimbed. On August 3 Brown and Normand established an advanced base on the side glacier that runs below the northwest face of the Xuelian's west satellite (6,422m). On the 6th they made an acclimatization climb of a 4,000m summit directly north of the west satellite and the following day climbed the west ridge of Xuelian's north satellite (6,472m). A 600m snow couloir (50°) led to the crest, where the team pitched a tent at 5,300m. On the 8th they continued up largely rotten snow and then over the 6,150m fore-peak to reach the summit. They noted that the continuation ridge to Xuelian Main would offer 300m of technical rock climbing, and sported considerable cornice formations.



6,150m forepeak below 6,472m north satellite of Xuelian. Brown-Normand route follows obvious large snow couloir to reach broader snow slopes of west ridge above narrower section. It then continues up these, along skyline ridge, and over forepeak to (hidden) north satellite. Visible top right is north ridge of Xuelian Feng. *Bruce Normand*



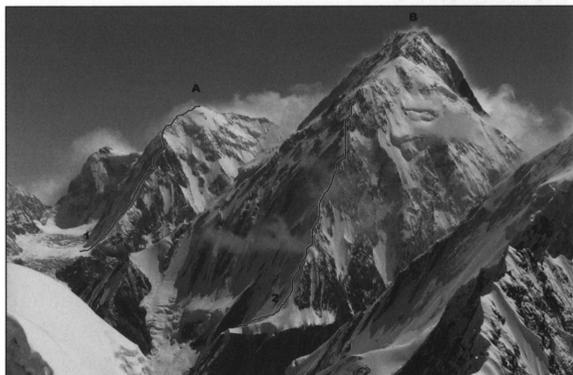
Looking west from Yanamax (6,332m) to main summits of Xuelian Massif. (A) east sub-summit (ca 6,400m). (B) main summit (6,627m). (C) north satellite (6,472m). (D) northeast sub-summit (6,231m). Approximately marked are lines followed by Brown and Normand on east ridge (1) and Dempster and Vilhauer on north face to east ridge (2). Distant peak at far left is Muzart (6,571m). *Bruce Normand*

On the 12th the pair reached the foot of a snow ramp leading to the crest of the east ridge of Xuelian's ca 6,400m east sub-summit. Next day they made a 1,700m push to the top, first climbing the ramp via a very thin ice pitch and a long section of unprotectable snow-covered rock to the crest and then strenuous wading through deep, rotten snow. Once on the ridge they were surprised to meet Dempster and Vilhauer, who had climbed a harder line up the north flank, involving much steep ice and difficult snow-covered rock in the last 500m. The pairs operated largely independently throughout the trip, but on this occasion they all combined forces for the last 800m.

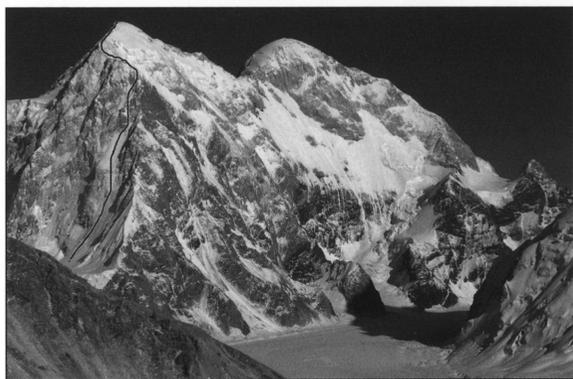
Brown and Normand had planned a one-day round trip, but when the four were hit by bad weather during the descent, they crammed into a small bivouac tent brought by Dempster and Vilhauer. The storm produced the worst weather of the trip, and the tent saved the climbers from possible frostnip. The four climbers descended the Brown-Normand line on the 14th. The American-Scottish pair returned to base camp next day, but Dempster and Vilhauer remained on the upper

Muzart Glacier for a further week, climbing a 1,600m ice route up the impressive northwest buttress of Yanamax, stopping on its 6,180m sub-peak (virtually a separate summit), which they named Yanamax II. The route, which took three days and had difficulties up to M4, they named Yanamaniacs.

In the meantime, on the 21st and 22nd, Brown and Normand tackled the west ridge of Xuelian's northeast sub-summit (6,231m). Bad snow conditions, together with knife-edge and rocky sections, made this particularly time-consuming, and that night they pitched camp below a hard rock section at 5,000m. Next day Brown led five tenuous snow-covered slab pitches, and by the time the pair reached 5,400m, it was obvious that the route would require



(A) Yanamax II (6,180m) and (B) northeast sub-summit of Xuelian (6,231m), seen from west-southwest. Marked are approximate lines of (1) Yanamaniacs and (2) west ridge attempt. *Bruce Normand*



Yanamax II (6,180m, left) and rounded summit of Yanamax (6,332m) from west-northwest. Marked is Yanamaniacs. *Bruce Normand*

considerably more time than was available. They retreated.

On the 24th Brown, Dempster, and Normand returned to the previously established advanced base below Xuelian's west satellite (6,422m), Vilhauer prudently opting out of further climbing after frostnipping a toe during the Yanamax II ascent. Over the next four-and-a-half days they climbed the fine 2,650m marble prow that separates the north-northwest and north-northeast faces. They descended the west ridge, then the southwest ridge, and finally rappelled onto the southwest face, regaining the west ridge at 5,200m, below its steepest section. Down-climbing the northern flank they reached advanced base that night. Kyle Dempster's account of this route, named *Great White Jade Heist* (5.7 WI5 M6 R), appears earlier in the *Journal*. The three climbers were recipients of one of the 2010 Piolets d'Or.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *Mountain INFO*

ALTAI

Keketuohai reconnaissance. Keketuohai or Koktokay lies in the southern Altai Range of China's Xinjiang Province, close to the border with Mongolia and 600km north-northeast of Urumqi. For three years I have attempted to travel to the area on the recommendation of non-climbing friends in China. In autumn I was finally successful and discovered a wealth of granite towers and walls that have yet to be visited by rockclimbers. I was told that there are 108 granite peaks here, and I estimate rock faces to reach a height of ca 300m, though I only saw part of the area. These walls are situated along the gorge of the Iyrtish River, and some reach the valley floor. Of all the valleys I have seen during world travels, Keketuohai compares closest to Yosemite, and locals assured me that no one has ever climbed there. Spring and autumn would be the best seasons: summer is just too hot, and in winter the temperatures regularly fall to -40°C and lower; it is one of the coldest places in China. While there is certainly no El Cap or Half Dome, the volume of rock is possibly greater than Yosemite, and there are also many good boulders in the valley bottom.