

Djebel Nassrani - summit N : Hiker's Road 30 November - 1 Dec 2016

 Lulu002 , Nolan

Activities: rock climbing

Ratings: TD 6a P3

Number of participants: 2

Weather

Beautiful weather, then wind, then rain, then a sandstorm, then night and more rain.

Timing

8:45 am - 7:00 pm (!!)

Personal comments

Wow, wow, wow, this is just THE ADVENTURE of the trip: well, I hope so, because days like this, even if they're crazy in retrospect, we'd rather not repeat them every day!!!!

The forecast was for rain, so we didn't get up early, and, in fact, the weather was glorious! It seems the weather hadn't quite "caught" the weather, as they say here...

Well, so, his ambition was rekindled, and off we went to this monument!

A monument indeed, a true mountain route, with very little fixed gear, route finding at its finest (one mistake and you're in trouble, especially after sleeping in), a descent almost as challenging as the climb, in short, all the ingredients for an adventure to be taken seriously!

After that, the climbing is so beautiful, varied, on often sound rock, the setting so exceptional, that it's just pure bliss (even more so when you know you'll be sleeping on a mattress tonight and not freezing on a bad ledge...).

Gear-wise, we had a full set of Friends up to size 4, doubling up on sizes 0.5 to 3, plus 3 Aliens and some nuts: the nuts were only good for the climb, we only used one Alien twice, and that would have been enough without doubling up on 0.5 and 3. We had two 60m ropes, comfortable for long pitches, making loops in the easier sections. Comfortable for the descent too; it saved us from having to bivouac, the little devil! We had

the guidebooks from c2c, Arnaud Petit, and Howard in our pockets: the one from camp is often clearer than Petit's, even if you can still find your way around in hindsight; my pitches will be based on his.

Quick approach, obvious attack: he even built a cairn for those who might not be lucky enough to have the traces of pof that reassured us.

L1 with the bolt at the start of the chimneys, insane chimneys!!!

One of the most beautiful pitches of the route, climbing that's never difficult but in 3D, absolutely excellent!

Don't fall at the start, after that it pretends to be protected but between loose blocks, gulp!

A good rappel anchor on the right for R1.

L2 + L3: We advance through this gaping chimney before veering right, a safety harness in place on a sling (they know how to salvage things here!).

Continue on to the right, but it's not ideal with the draft, it seems; it's better to set up an intermediate belay.

L4, this is where the detour begins... Starting by checking out the right-hand ledge, I spot a cairn, but since I'm not quite awake yet, I decide to follow Petit's description, which seems to lead straight up after R3. So I do that, a nice sculpted wall, before traversing to the next large ledge.

He joins and climbs the wall directly above, feeling as if he's about to explode (surely not many people come this way), to the right of a slightly sloping dihedral. He continues, then climbs some easy ramps, belaying on the next ledge, near a cairn.

We think we're already at the famous dihedral so often mentioned, but above it looks completely closed off and the dihedral isn't at all well-defined, so I go to check to the right. Ah, look, a rappel anchor! Let's see where Petit places it: well to the right of the

line. No problem, we'll find it on the left! Except that on the left, after walking 80-100m along this ledge topped by a smooth 12b+ wall, we only find the beginnings of a dihedral... Ah, yes, look, here's one that's more of a dihedral, and that's perfect, there's even a sling in place to reach it! Except that it was an escape sling: it's incredibly exposed and impossible to reach the famous dihedral: something I only realize 5m above the famous sling, stubborn or foolish, probably a bit of both... Anyway, back to square one, diligently re-studying the guidebooks which still don't enlighten us, so back to the cairn where we were a good hour and a half ago.

And then, continuing towards the rappel anchor, I discover that it's not one at all, but the famous bolt from the exposed traverse, on which everyone has left a bit of rope dangling to lower themselves!

And further on, there's even the pierced lunule: a great moment, that instant when we see the light again, we're on the right track, now we can't dawdle because with my foolishness, there's no guarantee we'll reach the summit...

After this traverse, which didn't traumatize us at all because we were so happy to know we were on the right path, a good, obvious ramp quickly leads to the base of the large, quite distinctive dihedral, which we only see after the traverse!

L8 then, according to Arnaud Petit: simply fantastic, this gigantic dihedral that you climb sometimes as a spread, sometimes as a wall, sometimes as a wall, just brilliant!

Plus, it's really well protected, and even if it often seems quite overhanging, all the holds are secure, no traps in my opinion, gentler than the previous V+ routes of the trip!

A 60m pitch for me to a good cairned ledge. (remember to look for the rappel anchor just 8m to the left with a large white sling to protect the approach traverse).

Easy wall then large ledge on the left well cairned, with the crack easily identifiable thanks to its tree and an explosion of powder at the foot (our over-powdered predecessors marked the way for us!).

L9 + L10: Wow, it's beautiful, it's easy to climb, but it's definitely not 4c/4b as Petit advertised!

There's a crack where you don't really have a choice, you have to crack (meaning: climb in cracks, and I haven't learned that since yesterday), then, after the tree, there's a dihedral where you don't really have a choice, you have to use a Dulfers (that's where I'm slowly starting to perfect my technique).

All of it is well protected, even though since our mishap I've switched into "mountain mode": you switch off your brain, you just keep going, you're not going to protect every meter and you're going to avoid falling.

Another beautiful 60m pitch!

L11: Without realizing it, I set up a belay right at the base of the infamous exposed traverse, so there's nothing left to do but go for it. Just reaching the first fixed sling is mentally taxing, but arriving at the second is incredibly reassuring. All that's left is to follow the small, well-placed crimps with super low footholds, and not think about the ledge below, because it's a real bumpy ride all the way to the end!

I continue up the crack, drawn by the famous piton: another tricky move where you really want to pull on the route's one and only bolt, but I manage without, great.

Belay on the rappel anchor just above: comfortable, solid, and no rope drag to hear it suffer in turn from this traverse.

L12 and L13: according to Petit's guidebook, there are still two pitches of grade 4 left, so even though it's 2:30 pm, the deadline set this morning to start the descent, we're really keen to go see the summit if it's so close!

It will actually take us three long pitches to reach it, never extreme, and of such beauty and variety that we'd rather not dream about it, exhausted as we are!

Narrow cracks, then chimneys, narrow passages, insane!

Then more cracks and dihedrals, and a psychological exit to the right with flakes held together by the power of the Holy Spirit (which often followed us that day), before a superb final white slab, which leads to the mega-mushroom exit: an insane view of the landscapes in all directions, pure bliss for the day.

We won't linger too long either, the hardest part is yet to come!

Especially since, after the strong gusts of wind that have been blasting sand into our eyes for several lengths, the rain is starting to fall gently...

For the descent, our only advice: don't blindly throw the rope down; it can get stuck anywhere and everywhere. Lower it with you. For the rest, pray, and/or arm yourself, like me, with a bruised partner!

Hooray for the large cairn marking the first rappel anchor 2m below the plateau: secure yourself to reach it!

Two slings connected to a bolt, itself connected to a quick link by a single sling: we will later realize that we have put our lives between its strands, remember to change it!

A belay less than 30m lower, hard to pull: bad passage of a gorge.

Short rappel to the next belay spotted on the way up: after the exposed traverse, right at the start of the crack.

The next traverse to the right after the first crack above the ledges will lead us to the large ledges.

Descend as best you can to the exit cairn of the large dihedral, traverse to reach it, and then rappel down.

Next, at the base of the dihedral, which leads to a final off-route belay to reach the siq: here, with 60m of rope, we avoid a section of downclimbing.

Night has caught up with us; the rest will be even more adventurous by headlamp...

We'd love to see the chimney descent in a sideways fashion!

Even with the rappel on the stuck block, it's quite a comedy sketch: especially when I have absolutely no energy left, especially not enough to pull my own weight upwards to unclip myself... A good moment of unbearable behavior on my part, and of zen-like calm from my partner in the face of my tears and whining (but I still lost both my knees in the process, that chimney is so smooth, horrible).

The descent through the sand was obvious, then we found a belay adorably placed for a treacherous gully.

We descended a ramp, then searched for the famous 3c slabs of Arnaud Petit on the right bank, but only found smooth, steep, and very exposed terrain (perhaps that was the reason, knowing him, but we considered ourselves too young to die).

A providential belay appeared in the beam of our headlamps on the left bank: just climb a ramp and traverse across a good ledge to reach it. It led in less than 25 meters to a fig tree, the continuation of the canyon descent, and then nothing again...

We wandered along various ledges, looking for a good sling to place our own belay, when a sort of pile of rocks made me shout "cairn" (but was it really one?), and a providential belay on the lower ledge made us shout with joy!!!

In the valley, we're met with a constant "problem?". We've been spotted, but it's still nice to know we're being watched!

I won't bore you with the details because we spent at least an hour and a half on it, but that damn rope just wouldn't budge.

He'd descended to what looked like solid ground, asking me to set up the intermediate belay... But my puny arms were useless, and his, even with a rock-solid pulley system using cams and a micro-trace, weren't any better...

So, before checking if we had enough energy to climb back up the rope or just enough strength to bivouac there (at that point, the doubt remained), he tried to reach the actual ground...

And then, after all the calls to prayer we'd heard that day, I think we can thank the desert forces, because the rope finally reached a meter above the ground, yeah, saved!

We'd had our fill for the day, we'll come back for it tomorrow!

Down below, our kind and concerned host's 4x4 was waiting for us: a lovely gesture, especially since we hadn't asked for anything!

He even sent his brother to the foot of the Holy War in case we had chosen that descent, and prepared a roaring fire and a gargantuan meal to comfort us: pure bliss to conclude this fantastic EPIC that will stay with us for a long time!

Especially since we don't even have to think about tomorrow's program: it'll be a big lie-in, big laziness, with 60m of rope climbing to keep us busy...

Exhausted, but happy, that's an understatement...!

The following day:

A slightly restless night due to the downpours hitting the roof, poignant thoughts for the rope, which must be soaking wet, for the rappel cords, which were already showing their age, for the large lunule, which, as big as it is, remains a white pebble with a slightly yellow-pink hue: what will become of all these elements of our survival for the day?

We set off again in the rain, but without singing: the epic journey isn't over, and retrieving the ropes doesn't seem like the easiest task.

The rain just gives us time to devise an attack strategy, and it's once dry that we implicitly agree on the division of labor: while he handled the system engineering, I will attempt to fulfill my mission as the guinea pig, exploring these 60 meters in the opposite direction.

With a bit of protection on the rope, it finally allows for climbing and it's not even bad: if this is a first ascent, we'll christen it "Bad Weather for Your Rope!"

Warmed up, I discover the little gully that caused us so much trouble last night, extend the belay, and now it's just a matter of relying on my well-seasoned biceps.

Attention: if you only have 50m, this belay doesn't lead to the ground; there's a sling with a sling to change in the middle.

The rope finally agreeing to come out brings a tear to my eye: that was enough emotionally for today, we've certainly earned a bit of relaxation and the joy of having brought this fantastic adventure to a happy conclusion!

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