



Piolets d'Or 2017

An International Celebration of Grand Alpinism

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Press Release # 4 | April 2017

Piolets d'Or 2017 : two ascents awarded and two special mentions

The Piolets d'Or try to bring to the "stage" a superb representation from the previous year of bold, technical, innovative, imaginative climbing, executed in what is felt as the best possible style. Whilst competition climbing is now an Olympic sport, and has a standardized playing field, Alpinism is not, so trying to compare one fine ascent with another is at best subjective. There is also the question of commitment, and it is notable that the main ascents awarded this year went over the summit, descending by a different route, in one case over completely unknown ground.

This year's international jury was also pretty representative of those who know what they are talking about when it comes to cutting edge mountaineering. Kazu Amano (Japan), Valery Babanov (Russia, now living in Canada), Herve Barmasse (Italy), Kelly Cordes (USA), Andy Houseman (UK), Thomas Huber (Germany), Sebastien Ratel (France), and finally Raphael Slawinski (Canada).

There were many great ascents this year, and as usual there was much interesting discussion amongst jury members to arrive at a fair representation. In the end it has been decided to make only two awards of the Piolets d'Or this year, but to make also two special mentions.

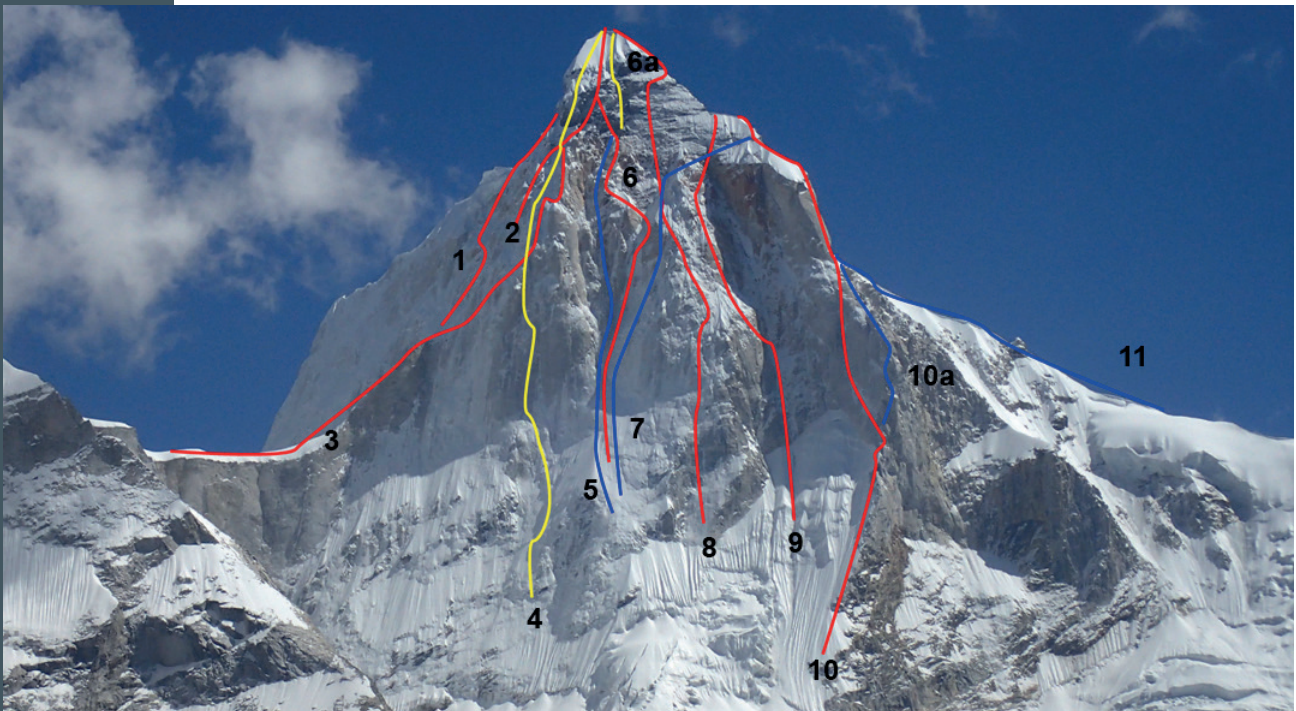
NYANCHEN TANGLHA (7,046M - TIBET) | *Nick Bullock & Paul Ramsden*

Nyanchen Tanglha is a 7,000m massif in central Tibet. A rarely visited mountain, with currently difficult bureaucratic access, virtually no one had seen the north side of it, let alone been there. A distant photograph by the Japanese explorer Tom Nakamura led to the first ascent of the 1,600m north face of the 7,046m southeast summit by British climbers Nick Bullock and Paul Ramsden. This was highly exploratory, technical climbing (ED+), with a tricky descent in poor weather of the previously untouched east ridge into a completely different valley system.



THALAY SAGAR (6,904M - INDIA) | *Dmitry Golovchenko, Dmitry Grigoriev & Sergey Nilov*

• The second award goes to a different type of exploration; a high peak with a north face that has received many different lines, but still had remaining a virgin buttress, both elegant and direct. For the Russians, Dmitry Golovchenko, Dmitry Grigoriev, and Sergey Nilov, a tried and tested team on the big mountains for half a dozen or more years, the North Buttress of 6,904m Thalay Sagar in the Indian Gangotri gave a really sustained alpine style ascent requiring eight bivouacs and with an overall difficulty of ED2 and pitches of 5c A3 WI5 M7. And as other parties have found on the north face, one of the most taxing sections comes right at the top, climbing through the overhanging shattered shale band. From the summit the Russians then went down the normal route on the west ridge.



SPECIAL MENTIONS

• The Piolets d'Or would like to mention the ascent of a new route up the south face of Gangapurna (7,455m) in the Annapurna Sanctuary, by the accomplished Korean trio of Cho Seok-mun, Kim Chang-ho, and Park Joung-yong. Although this might be seen as a direct variation on the quite remarkable and possibly little known 1981 Canadian ascent, the Korean's style, the fact that they almost made the first ever ascent of the 7,000m Gangapurna West as a warm up, the speed on the face given the highly complex approach, the difficult technical climbing above 7,000m (overall grade of ED+), and the fact that it is the first new route at that altitude climbed by Koreans in alpine style, merits a mention.



• The second is again a entirely different form of exploration, and that is the exploration of athleticism. Whilst there is no geographic exploration and the event was arguably a culmination of rehearsal, the sheer technical accomplishment of Americans **Colin Haley and Alex Honnold of being able to complete the Torres Traverse in what is for more or less everyone else is an almost incomprehensible fast time**, a single day, has greatly impressed much of the climbing community.



As a reminder, Part Two of the 2017 Piolet d'Or will take place in November, during the Rencontres Ciné Montagne film festival in Grenoble. An entire evening will be dedicated to celebrating the winning 2016 ascents.

For all of the latest updates about the 2017 Piolet d'Or, please visit the website: www.pioletsdor.net.



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