

JEBEL RAS AL QAYS The Snake Charmer Route 1000m++ TD-



Location:

Wadi Ghallilah. Ras Al Khaimah, UAE.

Overview:

The complex mass of steep ridges rock faces and gullies that greet you when entering Wadi Litibah make up the north side of Jebal Ras Al Qays. From this side of the mountain access to the summit appears well guarded with no obvious weak point to make progress. The question of a route up through the cliffs was highlighted in Starky's CD guide to rock climbing in the UAE where he mentions that local opinion is that no route exists. Others since who have been struck by the mountain have queried the possibility of such an approach. The objective was to discover a challenging hike/ scramble to the summit and there by add a second adventurous route to this impressive wadi. Having said that, evidence that the local Shihuh people have explored even the most remote part of these hills is ever present.

The resulting route proved to be more of a challenge that expected, gaining over 1000m in height and involved quite a bit of steep climbing and scrambling. A number of attempts were made before finally the route was completed, where the final ridges meet with the small village that marks the start of the descent route from the Stairway to Heaven walk.

Start Point:

Drive over the dam and left into Wadi Litibah, the track road which has improved greatly in recent times leads to the camera tower where many Stairway hikers chose to park. Almost directly across the wadi from the tower is a lone gradual gully that marks a weak point in the cliffs. This is the start of the route, a well water washed step exists at its half way stage. Exit out right at the top of the gully and onto well defined goat tracks that narrow in a few parts exposing the wadi floor below. The tracks lead around to the hidden gully located high above the Shady Circus (*the "UAE Rock Climbing" guidebook describes this in reverse as the descent from the cliff, p32*).



[This point is the gully above the centre of Shady Circus]

Start point to the **Lower Ridge** with approx line of ascent

Lower Ridge:

The feature called the lower ridge proved the easiest ascent route. Many short rock climbing problems need to be overcome to complete the ridge. Cross over boulders of the hidden gully and up the scree slope to where the lower ridge all but halts your progress. The ridge is not tackled head on, instead move along its base to the left where a wide crack and large chock stone give access to narrow ledges, follow these back toward the ridge and past the first of the absail stations. Good idea to make note of these! A short rock move and some scrambling back toward the ridge brings the first rock problem into play.



The pitch is maybe 8m up an offwidth crack. The second ab station is located on the ledge above to the left. Move out left of the ab station and up easy ground sticking to the ridge direct as much as possible. Moving up on the right hand side of the ridge is not an option due to air!

The next rock step is the steep ramp with the "Pecker's Poke" like crack in its corner. Climb to the ledge 6m and move left, bridging as you go over a deep crack in the ridge. Continue a short distance more left to another broken wide crack with a block overhang at its top, 5m. The way ahead is easy scrambling, making your way back towards the ridge.

First of the short steps on the lower ridge



Second rock step on the lower ridge: the steep ramp with the bomber crack.

I have no photograph of the following problem on the ridge. Higher steep rock blocks progress on the left side. Stick to the ridge exactly, where the cliff is at its lowest. A few steep delicate moves are the best option, alternatively move around right of the ridge between large boulders and the short corner seems an easy option. A painful and bloody experience every time so far!



The final rock pitch on the lower ridge, another steep ramp.

The last step to overcome on the Lower Ridge is situated exactly on the ridge and consists of an obvious ramp and corner on its upper half. Climb on solid rock to its end and back onto the ridge where the going gets considerably easier. Slog it out to the top of the ridge trying to stay exactly on the ridge all the way so as to line up directly for the short hike over to the Goat Gulley.



Abseil sling around a boulder high on the lower ridge.

The camera tower can be spotted just off center of the photo, where the improved road ends.

The Goat Gully:



From the top of the Lower Ridge you come across a landscape of high cliffs with no let up in both directions. A steep gully located where the mountain forms a “corner” is the key to progress up the mountain. See red arrow above.

The gully is climbed in 3 pitches with the crux section at 20m in the chimney. The water washed rock provides little prospect for pro, making the chimney a delicate undertaking. A stance at 30m with good anchors marks the end of the first pitch.

For the second pitch avoid going left away from the gully onto more inviting solid rock, this will have you committing to a high traverse to get back to the gully. Stick instead to the gully where the going is awkward but more direct. Belay on a ledge off to the right after fighting your way through a prickly bush.

The last pitch is steep but with very positive holds, the top of the pitch is barred by balanced boulders that form a small hole which no adult will fit through, instead move out right on delicate terrain and up a shoot to stand on the dive board rock. Sling and rope exist around a thread further over to the right but may be hard found.

I think it's fair to give the gully an overall grade of HVS due to the washed nature of the rock and the steep exposed higher pitch. The more gradual middle pitch also holds a few surprises.



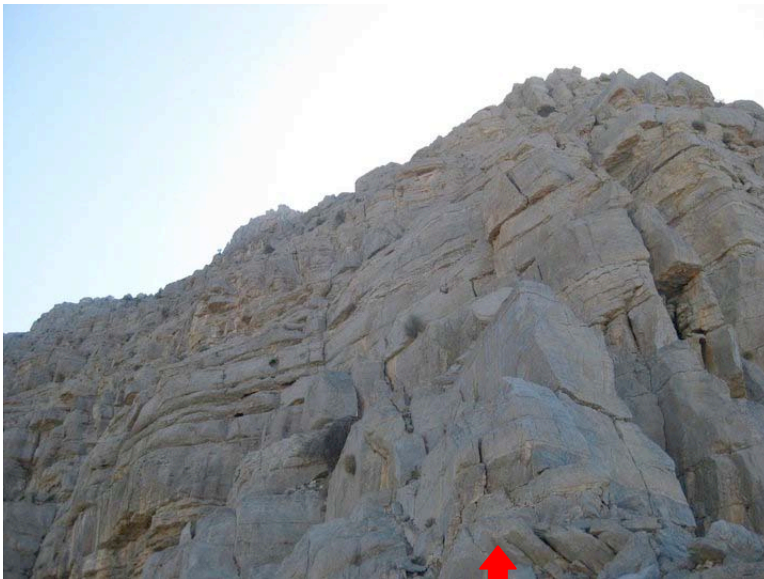
The Goat Gully, 110m

Mid-Mountain:



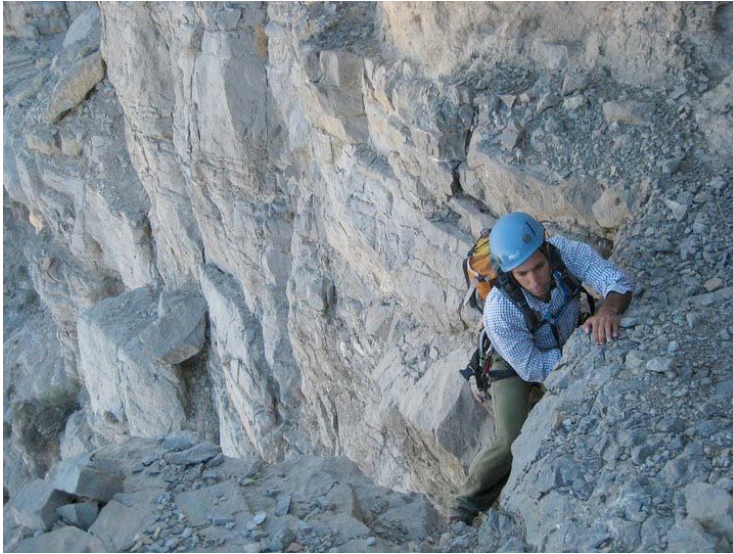
Mid-Mountain. The cave is the dark section at mid height up the gully.

Put the rope back in your rucksack for this part of the mountain. Scramble up on loose and some times steep ground to a gap in the mountains. Continue up a broad open gully until the walls on either side narrow in to help form the cave. Climb up inside to a well place ledge providing access to a small exit hole, continue on your way. The ground from here is quiet steep and prone to rocks sliding off beneath your feet. Tread easy. Finish the gully at the high col. This spot marks the start of the final or Higher Ridge. Also a good spot for breakfast or lunch as the case may be.



View from the col of The Higher Ridge

The Higher Ridge:



Climbing on the Higher ridge

The fastest and most efficient way to finish the route is by sticking to the ridge. Move first out left on the ridge and continue moving up like this until a wider spur can be spotted back on ridge, maybe 50 mtrs height gain. Move back onto the ridge and pick your way up through the "mess" before the ridge levels off and takes a left hand turn up towards the summit. A short level section separates you from the final ridge climbing. The way ahead appears steep and troublesome however the climbing is easy. The ridge becomes more defined and it rises toward the finish.



Climbing on the Higher ridge

Large boulders high on the ridge are negotiated simply before the short stairway to the village at the top comes into view. The end of the ridge marks the end of the route and for all intents and purpose the "summit", although don't expect a wonderful view down the other side.



Climbing past the final large boulders on the ridge

Descent:

The descent is the same as that for the Stairway to Heaven climb. That is after completing the full horse shoe and descending from the opposite side of the stairway! So NOTE - The summit is only half the mountain, now you gotta get down. The only option is to have a good personal knowledge of the decent. The only option!

First Ascent: Aiden Laffey, Shahan A. Contractor, January 7th 2011