

## China

### TIEN SHAN

*Western Kokshaal-Too, first ascent of "Tombstone Tower." Fermented horse milk is a delicacy not to be missed. Especially if accompanied by freshly beheaded, blood-boiled lamb, goat yogurt, and yak butter on homemade*

*fry-bread. The boiled goat head and intestine stir-fry topped off the gourmet meal. We devoured the food with sloppy slurps and grunts of delight. Our gracious hosts were two Kyrgyz families, living at 3,300m at the foot of the Tien Shan/Western Kokshaal-Too Mountains in northwestern China, in Xinjiang Province near the Kyrgyzstan border.*

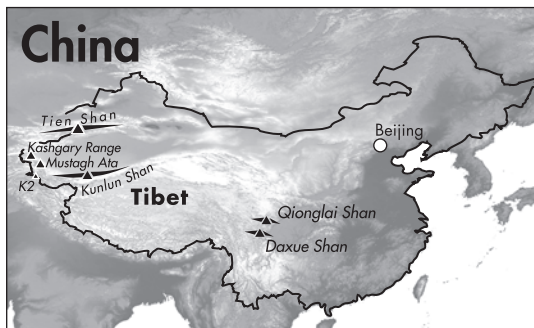
In 2000 I had received permission to enter one of China's most restricted regions of the Tien Shan Mountains. On that amazing journey, while on an untouched nearly 5,700m peak [Grand Poobah, a.k.a. Pik Byeliy; see *AAJ* 2001, pp. 400-401—Ed.], I got a glimpse of a huge valley of granite over the next ridge to the west.

We returned last July and August. We flew via Beijing to Urumqi, where our team of six Chinese officers loaded our 15 haul bags into two 4x4s and then had us heading west for three days over dusty, sandy roads. We skirted the Taklamakan Desert and slept in the Uygur-Muslim towns of Kurla, Aksu, and finally Ahqi. There, our liaison officer presented our permission papers and passports to the local military. After three hours he came out with good

news; access was granted. However, we acquired a new team member, a local military officer who was armed and in full camouflage dress. We then all drove toward the snow-capped witch hats in the distance, toward the virgin valley of granite I'd discovered through secret channels.

Above base camp we carried hefty loads for five days, 18km a day. We then took a day to scope routes, stretch, and eat. The wall we decided to climb reminded me of Sentinel in Yosemite, except that it was bigger, steeper, and completely virgin. All I could think about were sweet splitter cracks, snuggling on portaledge in storms, and standing on a tiny ca. 4,700m summit in China looking into Kyrgyzstan.

My younger brother Andy is an amazing musician, whose ability to rip up the banjo is astounding. When we first talked about this expedition, we made a deal: I would show him the experience of a big-wall first ascent, and he would show me how to play the banjo. This would be



"One of my goals was to stand on the summit with my brother, completely naked wearing only a Year of the Cock mask. Well, considering the temperatures, maybe one sock each." The Libeck brothers on top of Tombstone Tower, West Kokshaal-Too.

only his second climb ever: his first was a first ascent in Greenland.

I also had two goals regarding the tombstone-shaped tower we were about to climb: to come down alive, not necessarily without pain or injury but alive; to stand on the summit with my brother, completely naked wearing only a Year of the Cock mask. Well, considering the temperatures, maybe one sock each.

The first pitches were super-fun free climbing and, for a first ascent, surprisingly clean with little loose rock. But the smile-inducing 5.10 cracks turned into A3 seams and rotten A3/A4 pitches of kitty litter. Finally, after some tedious birdbeaks, I fixed to a high point about 300m off the deck.

Climbing capsule style gave my brother a chance to practice juggling, digest the exposure, and go through rescue scenarios. Climbing in an out of snow showers we fixed lines for a week and then committed to the wall. I needed to show my brother some additional techniques: how to go Number 2 on the wall; how to jug in space and horizontally. I taught him double hauls, Munter-mule knots, 'biner rappels, and hundreds of other variables in the big-wall equation.

From our highpoint, I was able to fix several more pitches. I decided that the extensive work involved in fixing all of our ropes as high as possible, and then do a push to the summit, would be safer and give us a higher possibility of success than doing another big haul. The upper part of the wall was treacherously loose. Flakes the size of pool tables looked like they could go. I spent an extra day rigging the fixed lines away from sharp edges and loose rocks.

We had now been climbing the wall for just over a week and had endured snow showers daily. Fast moving, time-lapse clouds threatened another storm at any time. I climbed a frightening pitch through a maze of giant leaning flakes and fractures, all relying on each other for stability. Once we were past this nightmare, an easy, unroped, 4th class scramble led us to the breakfast-nook-table-sized summit.

Thunder brought worry. I have no problem sitting out a storm, even if it lasts days. Storms offer time for rum, hot chocolate, and fantasy novels. But thunder changes everything. If lightning strikes home, everything will melt and our last few seconds of life would abruptly end with the sudden arrival of the ground. Even rum and hot chocolate won't ease minds if thunder roars. This is not the first electrical storm I have experienced here, and most likely not the last.

At base camp our sweet new Deering banjos waited. The goals of this expedition were soon fulfilled. My brother got the big-wall first-ascent experience, with thunderstorms, vertical toilets, plenty of hanging in space hundreds of meters off the ground, and summiting a virgin peak. Complete and utter satisfaction. By the time we got back home, I could play all of "Dueling Banjos." Squeal like a pig boy!

We named our route Libeckistan (500m, 5.10d A3+).

MIKE LIBECKI, AAC

*Tomurty, far eastern Tien Shan, first ascent.* The National Defense Academy Alpine Club of Japan organized an expedition to the Tien Shan to commemorate its 50th anniversary. The objectives were to climb Tomurty (4,886m), the highest virgin peak in the Karlik (Harlik) Shan and to explore the neighboring mountains of the far eastern Tien Shan, a range some 2,400km long.

Tomurty is located about 70km northeast of Hami in Xinjiang Province [a.k.a. Tomort and situated well east of the Bogda Shan at 43.1 N., 94.3 E—Ed.]. Although its height does not exceed 5,000m, it is well glaciated, and despite easy access, the little-known Karlik massif

remains almost unexplored. The summit of Tomurty is a table-top ice-snow plateau, with glaciers several kilometers long descending on all sides.

Takashi Kawakami of our alpine club first reached the area near the mountain in the summer of 1996, and a Chinese party made a reconnaissance in late 1996 and early 1997. A Japanese party from Niigata Prefecture made an attempt in 2000, but they made a mistake on the approach and ended up in a valley from which they were not able to reach any of Tomurty's glaciers.

In the summer of 2004 one of our club members, Koichiro Takahashi, reconnoitered a possible climbing route, finding a way into the Kazantapute valley and a suitable line onto the glacier flowing southwest from the main summit.

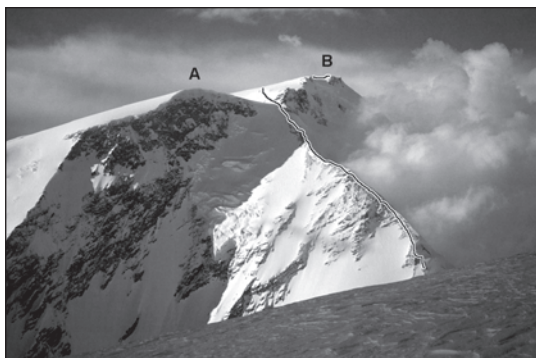
Our 2005 expedition comprised I, Isao Fukura (57) as leader, Hiroyuki Katsuki, (25) and Koichiro Takahashi (43), plus a liaison officer, interpreter, and cook from the China Xinjiang Mountaineering Association. We arrived in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, on August 7 and the following day reached the village of Badashi (1,800m) by road.

We reached base camp at 3,800m on the 9th, with the help of camels and mules. Over the next few days we ferried loads up the glacier and established Camp 1 (4,200m) on the 12th. On the 15th, after a reconnaissance the previous day, Katsuki and Takahashi left this camp at 7 a.m. in fine weather with a light wind and a temperature of -9°C. A crevassed glacier led to a 50° snow/ice face and eventually the summit, which they reached at 3:40 p.m. A GPS reading indicated an altitude of 4,892m. They returned safely to base camp the following day

ISAO FUKURA, *National Defense Academy AC, Japan*

## KUN LUN

*Muztagh Ata (7,546m), south ridge.* On August 24 Valery Shamalo and I from St. Petersburg reached the main summit of Muztagh Ata via the south ridge. As we were well acclimatized after our ascent of Koskulak and had previous experience on the Kalaxong Glacier, we were able to reach the 6,100m col between Koskulak and Kalaxong in one day from the standard Muztagh Ata base camp. We made our first camp on this col at the head of the Kalaxong Glacier. The next day we climbed the ridge above to ca. 6,800m for our second night and by the following night had reached 7,200m, just below the saddle between Kalaxong and the main summit. The route had involved snow climbing almost throughout, though at two points we climbed rocky sections, as it appeared easier to progress on rock than break trail through difficult snow. Next day we reached the summit of Muztagh Ata, our biggest problem being cold temperatures and a strong wind, giving the feeling that autumn



The south ridge of Muztagh Ata (B; 7,546m), seen from the summit plateau of Koskulak at c7,000m. The route of the first ascent by the St. Petersburg team is marked. On the second ascent, less than two weeks later, a Russian party also climbed Kalaxong (A; 7,277m). *Alexey Gorbatenkov*

was upon us. From the summit we descended the old Classic (1956) Route. Visibility was far from perfect, but the trail was well marked with red flags and easy to follow.

We passed below Kalaxong (7,277m; sometimes referred to as Muztagh Ata South), but on September 4 three members of another expedition, Dmitry Chijik, Vladimir Kagan, and Petr Yudin from a large Russian expedition led by Andrey Lebedev, repeated our route and also climbed Kalaxong.

ALEXEY GORBATENKOV, *Mountainguides.ru, Russia*

*Editor's Note: The Lebedev expedition made the first ascent of Kalaxong via the South Ridge. The summit can be reached by an easy detour from the Original Route up Muztagh Ata, a route that is rarely followed today (climbed by the Sino-Russian expedition of 1956 but nearly completed in 1947 by Shipton and Tilman). In the early 1980s the Chinese moved Muztagh Ata base camp some distance further north and opened a new and more direct line to the summit, which has since become the established Normal Route. Who made the first ascent of Kalaxong is unclear, though it may well have been Shipton and Tilman. In more recent times there are unconfirmed reports of a Chinese ascent in 2000, when the team became badly lost on the descent.*

*Muztagh Ata, second ascent of southeast ridge, alpine style.* In order to be well-acclimatized for their alpine-style attempt on Shivling during the autumn, 26-year-old Kazuya Hiraide and 33-year-old Kei Taniguchi climbed Muztagh Ata (7,546m), making the second ascent of the southeast ridge. This elegant line above the so-called Potterfield Glacier was first climbed in July 2000 by Americans Walter Keller, Dan Mazur, and Jon Otto in an eight-day alpine-style push, after they had first climbed the Normal Route. Hiraide and Tanaguchi initially acclimatized on the Normal Route (west flank) and then reached base camp at 3,900m on August 29. They established an advanced base camp at 4,500m on the 31st and then four high camps on the ridge as the two made their alpine-style push: Camp 1 at 5,400m on September 1, Camp 2 at 5,850m, Camp 3 at 6,450m, and Camp 4 at 7,200m. On September 5 the pair reached the summit at 3:30 p.m. They descended the Normal Route, on the far side of the mountain, as far as 6,800m (usual site of Camp 3). On the 6th they reached the standard west-side base camp. Hiraide had carried skis up the southeast ridge and was able to use them to descend the west flank.

The two then crossed the Kunjerab Pass into Pakistan and made their way to the Indian border at Wagah, eventually reaching Delhi on September 19 and starting the second phase of their expedition.

KAZUYA HIRAIDE, *Japan*



The northern part of the Muztagh Ata Massif rising above the Kuksay Glacier. (A) Kalaxong (7,277m), (B) Muztagh Ata (7,546m), (C) Kuksay (Muztagh Ata North Peak; 7,184m). The line and camps of the Japanese alpine-style second ascent of the southeast ridge are marked: C1 (5,400m), C2 (5,850m), C3 (6,450m), C4 (7,200m). *Kazuya Hiraide collection*





The lower section of the north face of Koskulak (7,028m) seen from the lower Kalaxong Glacier. The first section of the new route climbed by the St. Petersburg team is marked. *Alexey Gorbatenkov*



The upper north face of Koskulak (7,028m), seen from the south ridge of Muztagh Ata: (1) The upper section of the northeast ridge (Moscow Aviation Institute expedition, August 2005), (2) north face (St. Petersburg team, August 2005), (3) west ridge (Moscow expedition, August 2005). *Alexey Gorbatenkov*

*Koskulak (7,028m), first and second ascents by the west ridge and third ascent by the north face.* Koskulak is situated in the Muztagh Ata Range and can be reached by the same route and logistics as Muztagh Ata itself. Until 2005 it remained unclimbed, neglected as other lower-altitude neighbors of Muztagh Ata and Kongur have been. The easiest route to the summit is quite obvious and does not require technical skills.

During the summer several expeditions attempted the mountain. The first to summit were Russians Leonid Fishkis, Dmitry Komarov and Alexandr Novik, who reached the top on August 10 via the west ridge. Two days later their route was repeated by seven members of another Russian expedition, from the Moscow Aviation Institute (they climb mountains as well as make airplanes).

At the same time two Russian climbers, Valery Shamalo and I from St. Petersburg, were attempting a more difficult route on the north face, from the Kalaxong glacier. This route had three distinct sections: an initial glacier and snow slopes; a rock barrier; steep snow slopes, followed by a large cornice and summit plateau. It was obvious that the main technical difficulties would be found on the rock barrier, but it was not clear from below how or even if the capping cornice could be climbed.

Above base camp and the Kalaxong Glacier was a long, steep slope of deep snow. Progress was strenuous and slow, requiring physical exertion rather than tech-

nical skills. We spent two nights out on this section, sheltering in crevasses. Above this slope lay the rock barrier, with an angle varying from 60-90°.

The main difficulties on the barrier were caused by thin ice or snow over rock, which made the climbing insecure and finding good belays difficult. We did not find any good bivouac sites in this section and had to make three consecutive sitting bivouacs. This section could be climbed faster, but we were not properly acclimatized and also had to haul the leader's rucksack. The barrier finished with steep snow slopes and scattered rock outcrops; here we established our last camp before the summit push. It was also our first comfortable night.

On our summit day, August 17, we had more strenuous deep snow before reaching the cornice, ascending only 100m per hour. The cornice was the last challenge. It was not possible to climb it with normal ice equipment, as the snow couldn't hold the weight of a climber, so we resorted to aid-climbing it using two snow anchors with ice gear. The cornice took two hours to complete, but from its top the summit was just 300m across a large snow plateau, which we crossed in an hour.

Although there may be other possible routes on the north face, we felt ours was the most logical and direct. We were also lucky with the weather. The nights were not very cold, which allowed us to be relatively comfortable during our sitting bivouacs.

ALEXEY GORBATENKOV, *Mountainguides.ru, Russia*

*Yume Muztagh, first ascent.* At 11:05 a.m. on August 1 all four members of our expedition succeeded in making the first ascent of an unnamed 6,345m peak in the Kun Lun Mountains. Although our average age was 61, all participated in every aspect of the climb, including load carrying, reconnaissance, and route selection. We did not employ local porters, horses, donkeys, or camels. Moreover, we received no outside financial and material support; the expedition, including a reconnaissance trip in 2004, was financed solely by its members. The party comprised a group of friends who have climbed together for decades and are well aware of each other's abilities and limitations.

The Xinjiang-Tibet Highway runs southeast from Kashgar along the southwestern edge of the Taklimakan Desert. At Yecheng the road splits, with the Highway running south, then southeast into the Lingzi Thang Plains, while a left branch continues east along the edge of the desert. We drove along the Highway for ca. 530m and made our base camp at one of the truck stops at Dahongliutan. Our proposed virgin peak was located 16km northeast of this point at N 35° 41'; E 79° 41' [These mountains are often referred to as the Aksai Chin—Ed.]. Our peak, the highest among a group of 6,000m mountains, lay at the end of a broad valley that curves towards the southeast. It is not visible from the road.

Because of the rich history and romance associated with the Silk Road, we were interested in the Kun Lun Mountains, rather than the better known Himalaya or Karakoram. A reconnaissance team in 2004 chose the mountain for its easy approach and, out of consideration for our ages, lack of great technical difficulty. So it was that on July 21, 2005, I (66) as leader, Hiromitsu Izutani (61), Toshikazu Kurimoto (56), and Eizo Maeda (61) arrived at Dahongliutan (4,265m). Although basic and without toilet facilities, the truck stop provided us with spacious and luxurious living quarters (compared to a tent), hot water, and a warm environment for recovery.

Conditions were such that we were able to drive eight kilometers across the desert and

establish our advance base camp at 5,440m. The next day we placed Camp 1 on the shoulder of a scree-covered ridge at 5,800m. Above, a mixture of snow and rock led over a small top at 6,100m to a col on the far side at 6,010m, where we placed our second camp. We left here on August 1 and followed the snow-covered ridge crest, with a large cornice to one side, until a steep snow slope led to a junction with the north ridge. A gentle plateau extended toward the summit, which was a broad snow dome. We reached this easily and returned to Camp 1 the same day. We christened our mountain Yume Muztagh, a name that was later approved by the Kashgar Mountaineering Association. *Yume* means “dreams” in Japanese, while *Muztagh* is a snow- or ice-covered mountain in the local language of Uighur. All four of us are alumni of Kyoto University Alpine Club (KUAC) and members of the Academic Alpine Club of Kyoto University (AACK).

TOSHIO ITOH, *Japan*

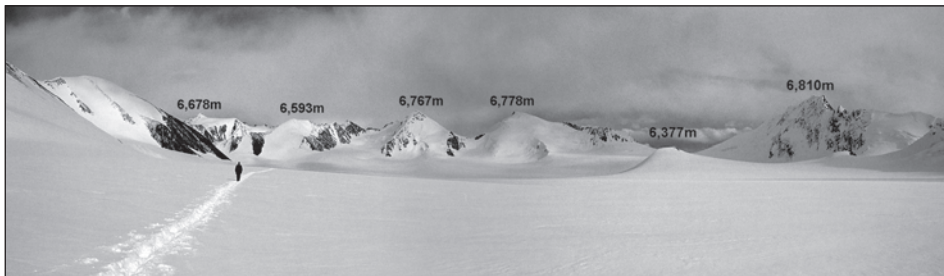


Looking northwest into a high cirque close to the head of the Western Yurung Glacier, Kun Lun. The Russian expedition that attempted Pt 6,903m (a.k.a. Chongce Peak) thought all the visible peaks, which rise a relatively short distance above the glacier, were unclimbed. However, it appears that Pt 6,903m was climbed by two Japanese in August 1988, approaching up the East Chongce Glacier. *Otto Chkhietiani*

*Unsupported crossing of the Western Kun Lun and attempt on Pt. 6,903m.* In September a Russian team jointly led by Boris Malakhov and me, with Michael Bertov, Paul Demeshchik, and Sergey Zajko, made a northeast-to-southwest crossing of the Western Kun Lun. In this report we use the names that appear on old Russian maps from the end of 19th century. We have been on expeditions to Xinjiang since 1998, and our experience is that these names are much closer to local nomenclature than names on other maps. When it comes to glaciers, we have used names given by Chinese glaciologists.

We first traveled along the southern Taklamakan road to Keria (Yutian on Chinese maps) and then went south 75km to the village of Polu, which has been known to the outside world since the visits of Grabczewski and Przhewalsky. We hired donkeys and on September 9 left for a two-day journey to reach the Kar Yagde tributary. For the next month we did not meet a single person. The continuation through the Kurab-Darja Gorge involves approximately 50 river crossings and is described by Mark Newcomb in his article “Ultima Thule” (AAJ 1997 p. 129).

This was our second expedition to this remote area. In autumn 2003 Andrey Lebedev, Malakhov, Alexander Zazhigin, and I left Goubauluk and travelled southwest over the Kudzhik-Bulak Pass, then on down alongside the Zejlik-Darja River to Yurung Kash. At this point we could neither travel along its banks nor ford the river. We retreated north, crossing a 5,880m



Looking southeast across the head of the Western Yurung Glacier, Kun Lun. All peaks in this photograph are thought to be unclimbed (and unattempted). Pt 6,778m is marked on the Chinese map as Yurung Peak. The 6,360m col, giving access to the East Chongce Glacier and crossed by the Russians, is situated directly behind Pt 6,377m. *Otto Chkhetiani*



The enigmatic Aksai Chin (7,167m), rarely seen from such close proximity and even more rarely visited by mountaineers. In this view from the southwest, the south ridge descends from the main summit toward the camera and the slightly lower north summit, Doufeng (6,957m), is visible behind. Both summits were climbed in 1986 via the south face to southeast ridge, which connected with the upper section of the south ridge. The main summit was reached again in 1997 by Japanese, and the north summit climbed from the southeast by French in 2006. *Otto Chkhetiani*

snow-covered pass and passing through two canyons before we regained civilization. We had to descend waterfalls, climb cliffs, and negotiate huge boulders. Steep walls towered 150-200m above us. We finally reached the large settlement Nur (southwest of Yutian).

Our 2005 way led much farther south than our 2003 explorations. After reaching a 5,140m pass, we headed south for 1.5km to visit an old volcano some 5,280m high. Below us lay the gravel floor of the Goubailyk Valley with its salty lakes, Achik Kel, Segiz Kel, and Ulug Kel, surrounded by a ring of 6,000m peaks and smaller volcanic cones. Later we climbed the 4,904m volcano, Achik Shan,

which erupted in May 1951: we saw fields of volcanic ash and some freaky stone figures on the western banks of the Ulug Kel lake. Beyond, our route went down the left bank of the Yurung Kash (White Jade River), where we were lucky to find beautiful pieces of this fine stone on sandy terraces. This area is a paradise for animal lovers: we saw numerous herds of mountain sheep, goats, and yaks, while packs of wolves passed close to us.

We had planned to ascend the Middle Yurung Glacier, but it was obviously in surge. The badly fractured tongue had advanced 1.5-2km, cutting off the river valley. As far as we could see, travel up this glacier did not look feasible. Instead, we moved to the adjacent Western Yurung. This was also badly broken in its lower reaches, but we managed to ascend between the right edge and the moraine. Above 5,460m we continued on the glacier, where farther up we found fresh snow. This allowed us to use plastic sledges, but as we were often breaking trail through 60cm of snow, progress was still slow.



Finally, we reached the northern flanks of Pt. 6,903m and managed to climb to a height of 6,500m on this snowy mountain. Above was 300m of ca. 40° ice, accessed via a short snow slope. Unfortunately, fresh snow, the onset of stormy weather, and a resulting high avalanche danger forced us to retreat. [Pt. 6,903m is situated some distance west of Qong Muztagh, climbed by Japanese in 2000. The Russians believed Pt. 6,903m to be virgin, but it was climbed by Japanese in 1988; see *AAJ* 1989, p. 289 and *AAJ* 2001, p. 406—Ed.]

We continued through a 6,360m col between Peaks 6,775m and 6,840m and began our descent (toward the Lingzu Thang Plains) via the East Chongce Glacier. This was a fantastic journey with snowy peaks to the south and the impressive mountains of the Aksai Chin to the north. Close to the waters of the Gozho Tso were herds of Orongo antelope, yaks, and small groups of kiang. On October 7, having traveled unsupported for 28 days over a distance of ca. 400km, we reached the Xinjiang-Tibet Highway

OTTO CHKHETIANI, *Moscow, Russia*

## SICHUAN

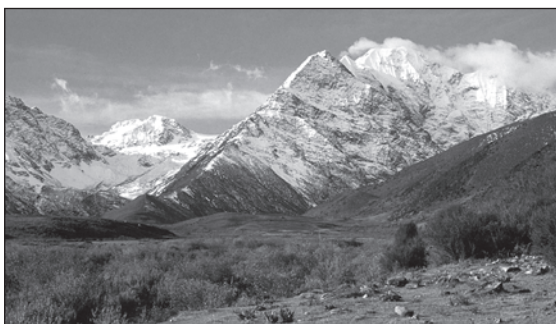
### SHALULI SHAN

*Xiashe (5,833m), first ascent.* On October 13 Patricia Deavoll of New Zealand and I made the first ascent of Xiashe, via the south face and southwest ridge. We arrived in the region on October 1 accompanied by an interpreter, Zhengling Cheng (Lenny), and staff. Access to the area involved a three-day drive from Chengdu over very rough, uneven roads that crossed several 4,000m passes.

Our initial plan was to climb the north face of Xiashe. However, we discovered the north face to be

“dry” and apparently out of condition. While acclimatizing we changed our goal to the longer, more aesthetic, rock-and-snow east ridge. These plans too became thwarted with the arrival of a weather system that brought frequent thunderstorms, which deposited up to 60cm of fresh snow. We maintained hope that the snow would melt, leaving the rock on the east ridge dry.

On October 8 a three-person British team arrived at base camp with the same climbing objective. [The British team reached the summit on October 17 via the north face, see below—Ed.] The arrival of a new team and the deep snow were just the incentive for us to try the peak via another route. We left base camp on October 10, collecting equipment from caches and making carries farther up the valley. It took two further days, wading through deep, unconsolidated snow, to get established at a 5,300m col on the southwest ridge, from which we felt we could make a summit bid.



Xiashe (5,833m) seen after fresh snowfall during the approach from the Zhopu Valley to the north. The long unclimbed northeast ridge, rocky in its lower section, falls left from the summit toward the valley. The route of the first ascent follows the hidden valley to the right, in front of the north face, and crosses a col on the southwest (right skyline) ridge to reach the south face. This face was climbed to the upper section of the southwest ridge some distance right of the summit. The small peak in the left background is probably Pt 5,328m and unclimbed. *Karen McNeill*

We left high camp at 1 a.m. on October 13, descending ca. 300m to a glacier on the south face. We spent several hours in the dark ascending the snowy face. Fortunately, we'd brought snowshoes. We gained the southwest ridge around 5 a.m. and once on the crest we followed it directly to the summit. Daylight arrived at 7 a.m., and we reached the summit at 8:45 a.m. The fine weather afforded spectacular views of the Daxue Shan to the east and many other mountains in every direction. We descended the same route and arrived back at high camp by 2 p.m.

After returning to base camp, we spent the next four days resting and deciding on another objective. On October 19 a staff member drove us across the Zhopu pasture, getting as close as possible to the base of Jarjinjabo, a striking 5,812m peak ca. 15km northwest of Xiashe. After four days we established a high camp, but a storm arrived and lasted for over 50 hours. Unable to wait any longer, we abandoned our plans and on the 25th returned to the Zhopu Monastery, where the staff was waiting. The team was back in Chengdu on October 30.

The expedition was awarded a 2005 Shipton/Tilman grant by W.L. Gore.

KAREN MCNEILL, *Canada*

*Xiashe, north face; Peak 5,690m, northeast ridge, attempt.* It was Tamotsu Nakamura's telephoto of Xiashe's north face appearing in the AAJ that persuaded us to visit. We were looking for an objective that would require little acclimatization, was accessible, and not too difficult. The north face seemed to fit these criteria. However, we had also heard rumors of a previous unauthorized expedition, and these were later confirmed: a Korean team had indeed been to Xiashe in the late 1990s but was unsuccessful.



The north face of Xiashe (5,833m), seen from the northeast ridge of Pt 5,690m. The solid line shows the Douglas-Tunstall route and bivouac sites, while the dashed line shows their descent (southwest ridge to south face then back over to the north flank), which simply reversed the route followed by Deavoll and McNeill earlier the same month for the first ascent of the mountain. *Tom Prentice*

After three days' acclimatization and two days of driving at altitude to reach the Zhopu Valley, Duncan Tunstall and I left base camp on October 13 with three gas canisters and food for three evening meals. At 5 p.m. we reached a flat area at ca. 4,500m on a moraine ridge below the north face. Alarm clock issues meant we didn't start until 8 a.m. on the 14th. An easy snow slope followed by 10m of Scottish 3 and a long, rightwards-leading ramp led into the gully that runs the entire length of the face. Reaching this point, at an altitude of ca. 5,200m, took most of the day and involved punching up a mixture of consolidated and unconsolidated snow over loose rock. Stopping at 4:30 p.m., we dug a ledge for the tent and after a surprisingly bad night, made worse by spindrift avalanches, started again at 8 a.m., trailing the rope. The angle of the face steepened from 45°-50° to something more like 70°, and the climbing consequently became harder. We climbed a lot of Grade 3/4, but as we ascended, the covering of snow became less consolidated. Eventually, we broke out of the gully, to reach the crest of the spur that forms its left edge. This gave steep mixed climbing on rotten rock with sections of

Scottish 4 and 5. In fact, overall the route was quite serious with weird, fractured blocky rock and poor belays. On several occasions cracks split when torqued. Even when the climbing was not hard, there was no room for falling. With the summit ridge 150m above, it began to get dark. We eventually stopped at the right edge of a serac barrier extending from the summit and dug out half a ledge. The night passed very slowly.

Next morning was cloudy, and a little snow had fallen. After a brew, Duncan led a steep pitch of 4/5 on good ice and névé. I led a pitch on less solid but easier ground, belaying a few feet below the cornice. Duncan cut through this on solid ice, reaching the crest of the west ridge and the steps of the New Zealand and Canadian women who had made the first ascent of Xiashe several days previously. Less than five minutes later we reached the 5,833m summit and after a quick inspection of the east ridge, chose to follow the steps of the two women down to the west. By 4 p.m. we had reached the base of the ridge and pitched our tent. Next morning we made the long climb back up to and over the west col and slogged down through new snow to base camp.

Tom Prentice, our third team member, opted not to go on the north face and instead made a determined solo effort on the neighboring Peak 5,690m via its long northeast ridge. This peak, which is well seen from the silver mine on the road to Zhopu Monastery, faces Xiashe and, with it, encloses the west valley in a horseshoe. On the 14th Prentice set up camp at 4,600m in the hanging corrie clearly marked on Nakamura's map; the corrie forms the west side of the west valley. The following day Prentice ascended deep snow over boulders and scree to gain the northeast ridge. He followed the snow-covered crest around various towers until stopped by a prominent gendarme, where a western spur marked on Nakamura's map meets the main ridge at ca. 5,300m. Loose, unstable ground covered with unconsolidated snow, the lack of a rope, and diminishing daylight combined to force a retreat. Above, a long snow ridge appeared to lead all the way to the summit, and the route, which gives an excellent view of Xiashe's north face, should prove relatively straightforward for a pair of climbers.

The weather had been snowy prior to our arrival, and on our first night it snowed heavily, threatening our bargain basement Chinese tents with abject failure. However, this snow cleared quickly during the day, and although temperatures were never high, life was pleasantly warm in the sunshine. Good weather prevailed throughout our climb, ending during the night of October 16-17 with a big storm and a dump of fresh snow.

This region is as interesting for the strong Tibetan nomadic culture as it is for the climbing. Undermining this culture in the future will be a new village planned for the grassland. In addition, the presence of a silver mine and plans to upgrade the service road will also damage both the way of life and the area's considerable natural appeal.

ED DOUGLAS, *United Kingdom*

*West Sichuan Highland, an exploratory visit and first ascent of Peak 5,160m.* On the advice of Tamotsu Nakamura, a party from the Yamanashi Mountaineering Federation visited the unknown mountains of South Kham, Sichuan, from October 1 to 16. The area is located at the west end of the Litang High Plateau at approximately N 30° 10', E 99° 30'. It lies south of the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, north of the Genyen Massif (6,204m) in the Shahluli Shan and east of the Upper Yangtze (Jinshajiang or River of Golden Sand). To the best of our knowledge and that of Mr. Nakamura, there was no record of foreigners visiting the area since Brigadier George Pereira's tragic journey in 1923. However, Pereira didn't go to the mountains that we planned to explore.

The party consisted of me, Shigeru Aoki, as leader and six other members, including four from a university alpine club. We focused on exploring the region around a hidden glacier lake, Tsonahou Tso, in particular a group of unknown 5,700-5,800m peaks southwest of the lake. The highest, which is nameless, has an elevation of 5,870m. The second highest is called Xiangqiuqieke (5,863m), and there are two 5,700m peaks. The lake, which lies in Batang County, is comb shaped, 3.5km long, 600-700m wide, and 8km in circumference.

On October 5, after a four-day drive from Chengdu, we left the Sichuan Highway at road maintenance office 283 (4,392m) on the Litang Plateau and began our caravan towards the southwest. Four horses, 11 yaks, and 3 Tibetan muleteers dealt with our loads. We crossed a 4,950m pass and walked 20km the first day. This took us to a good camping location near the lake. We set up a base camp on a grassy spot at 4,600m, looking down on the lake. Beyond and to the southwest, 5,000m peaks were visible, as were snow-clad 6,000m peaks farther west. We stopped here for four days, during which the weather was bad, with snow every afternoon.

On the second day we explored Tsonahou Tso. It is a glacier lake damming a U-shaped valley at a height of 4,300m. The water was a beautiful emerald green. Prayer flags of local Tibetan Buddhists were fluttering on the bank and in the valley. On the third day all members ascended a nameless 5,160m peak from the north and studied neighboring high peaks, with Himalayan fluted ice, for as long as time allowed. The enigmatic 5,800m Xiangqiuqieke and other outstanding peaks were revealed to us. On the fifth day we started our return journey.

SHIGERU AOKI, *translated by Tom Nakamura of the Japanese Alpine News*

## GONGKALA SHAN

*Gongkala Shan, foiled attempt to gain the mountain; Haizi Shan, attempt.* In September and October Toto Gronlund, Peter Rowat, Dave Wynne Jones, and I attempted the peaks of Kwarani I and II (5,992m and 5,928m) in the small Gongkala Range of Western Sichuan. In two days by road from Chengdu we reached the town of Garze and spent three days reconnoitering the north and south sides of the Gongkala peaks. There were possible routes from the north, but they did not appear easy, and we decided the south side offered better prospects.

A good grazing trail led from the village of Khur Chong into the gorge of the Yalung Jiang River and around the hillside to a hanging valley directly below the southern glaciers of Kwarani I and II. From there it appeared possible to reach the ca. 5,500m col between Kwarani I and II. From the col there seemed to be routes to both summits.

Below the village were two or three apparently inactive monasteries. We stopped at the principal one but found no one to talk to. We continued to the village, where we found the people friendly and cooperative. We explained our plans and learned they were happy to assist us, making horses available to carry to base camp. On the afternoon of our first visit there was a thunderstorm with lots of large hail; this was not unusual, as it appeared the monsoon was not yet over.

Two days later we returned with our gear and had an uneventful journey to a base camp at 4,200m. The monastery showed its good will by providing a monk leading a large white yak at the head of the column. We were told he had been sent to bless our climb. There was no evidence that any climbers had been in this area before, so we could hardly have gotten off to a more auspicious start.

Four days later we had just completed carrying to a second camp at 4,800m when a del-



egation of around 40 monks came up the hillside and insisted we leave at once. They were from the same monastery that had assisted and blessed us earlier. They simply said that they had changed their minds as a result of two thunderstorms, which they believed we caused. They had no respect for our permit from the Sichuan Mountaineering Association and were thoroughly confrontational and unpleasant to deal with. We were clearly outnumbered, and after a long and unproductive discussion, during which distinctly non-pacifist attitudes were repeatedly displayed, we decided we had no alternative but to go down.

We spent part of the following day retrieving our gear from the depths of the monastery. Nothing went missing, but money had to change hands to get it all back. A protest to the civil administrator of the Garze Tibetan Ethnic Group Autonomous Prefecture, which governs this area from Kangding, drew only the comment that these monasteries can be difficult to deal with. (This gentleman himself is a reincarnate Lama.)

We are not the only party to have encountered difficulties of this kind in Western China. See, for instance, *AAJs* 2001, p. 408, and 2003, p. 410. Part of the problem may be the relative independence of the Garze Tibetan Prefecture from central control. The monastery's stated reasons for their actions have little credibility, as thunderstorms and hail were regular events in the area. Possibly the simple fact that we were the first outsiders to go into these mountains was enough to spook them, but it seems more likely that we got into the middle of a feud between monastery and village, which we could hardly have foreseen. (There was some fragmentary evidence for this.)

We were able to get our permit switched to Haizi Shan (5,833m) and spent our last 10 days attempting to complete the route which Geoff Cohen and I had tried on the north flank in spring 2004 (*AAJ* 2005, p. 415). Unfortunately, the weather was poor, and on October 10 we retreated in a foot of new snow from the bottom of the northern glaciers at 4,800m. The peak, we believe, is still unclimbed despite several attempts.

DICK ISHERWOOD, *Alpine Club*

## DAXUE SHAN

*Yala, west-southwest ridge, attempt.* From October 20 to November 1 the GORE-AAIC First Ascents team attempted a new route on the west-southwest ridge of Yala (a.k.a. Yala Xeushan, Zhara, Ja-ra, or Haizi Shan, the King of Mountains, 5,833m). Our expedition started in Chengdu, as do all expeditions climbing in Sichuan Province. On the 20th we drove all day to a small town named Bamei, stopping briefly in Kangding to have the Ganzi Prefecture Mountaineering Association stamp the official red seal on our permit.

Bamei is a small, grubby place at the junction of three roads. Small, shabby auto repair shops, stores, and other hole-in-a-wall businesses necessary to the trucking industry have developed at this junction. Among this sprawl the old town still maintains some of its charm, and there is even a lovely Tibetan home, bequeathed with a courtyard flower garden. We stayed there that evening.

On the 21st we drove the short distance to the Taizhan Valley and from the roadhead employed horses to carry equipment to the natural hot springs. After a four-hour walk, we made base camp at 4,050m on grassy fields near the hot springs.

We then had almost 30cm of snowfall, but on the 24th it stopped and the sky cleared. I

became restless and walked up to Camp 1. The route followed small, skinny couloirs. I placed camp in a large boulder field on the north side of the west-southwest ridge. The following day the entire team made the trip to Camp 1.

On the 26th Chen Cheng, Su Rongqin, Ma Yihua, and I, all guides working with the Arête Alpine Instruction Center in Chengdu, climbed to Camp 2 at 5,010m. The route followed the north face of the west ridge. When we reached the crest, the wind was howling, blowing directly from the south. We made camp on the leeward side, and Su Rongqin descended to base camp that evening.

A two-day storm had deposited a thick layer of unconsolidated snow on the primarily rocky ridge above, where initially the solid-granite crest was stepped, a horizontal section generally being followed by a steep rock face. Wind and blowing snow plagued our entire ascent, and the route proved very time-consuming. Two sections involved sack-hauling, while a few others required the leader to climb without a pack, then rappel and jumar back up with his sack.

We spent the night of the 27th in a half-erected tent on a small ledge at 5,250m. The next day we only managed to climb 147 vertical meters. The following morning we avoided the crest by a snow slope on the right, but when forced back to the ridge, were surprised to find it changed in character: narrower, steeper, and composed of large unstable blocks. Progress on less-steep sections often involved gingerly crawling along the crest, while the vertical parts involved climbing difficult rock in boots and crampons. One small section required easy aid.

We sited the last camp at a little over 5,500m, but by the afternoon of the following day, with obviously looser rock above, we realized we were not going to make the summit by the ridge. At 6 p.m., a little more than 200 vertical meters below the summit, we decided to rappel into the gully on the left. The gully would not only provide a campsite for the night, but hopefully we could downclimb it to a point where it met other couloirs, one of which we might be able to follow directly to the summit ridge.

We did not make a conscious decision to abandon our route that evening, but once we'd started rappelling, we kept going down. We descended for 15 hours through the night, enduring a storm with erratic, bitter cold winds and whipping spindrift, and finally reaching base camp at 9 a.m. on the 31st. Concentration during the descent was so great that at 10:47 p.m. an earthquake measuring 4.2 on the Richter Scale, with an epicenter just 20km away, occurred unnoticed. We rated the climb to our high point Alpine TD 5.10 A0. Despite a number of attempts to date, Yala remains unclimbed.

JON OTTO, AAC and Arête Alpine Instruction Center, Chengdu, China

## QONGLAI SHAN

### SIGUNIANG NATIONAL PARK

*Jiang Jun Feng, Bipeng Valley, first ascent.* Chris Chitty, Pat Goodman, Ari Menitove and I were to travel to the Qionglai Range to explore and make first ascents in the Shuangqiao Valley. However, during planning before we left for China, we heard about an adjacent valley called the Bipeng, which had only become easily accessible two years ago, because of a new road. This valley lies north of the Shuangqiao and just across a ridge from our primary objectives, but is

approached from the other side of the range. This area was written up in *AAJ 2005* by Jon Otto, who gave us what information we had. When we got to China in mid-September, we met Jon and saw more photos of this valley. With the prospect of at least 10 unclimbed 5000+m rock peaks, we deemed it worthy and went there first.

We arrived at the trailhead in one day from Chengdu and stayed at a local hostel/guest-house. The weather was good the next day, and we were impressed with the valley and its offerings. We located a decent camp along the trail going up and over into the Changping Valley, right below one of the more striking peaks (Jiang Jun Feng, 5,202m) and a promising-looking wall of granite spires. The weather was good for two or three days, allowing us to acclimatize and make a reconnaissance. The northeast face of 5,202m was the obvious big objective for us, but as we prepared to begin a route, bad weather set in. For the next five or six days, rain, snow, and fog kept us in our tents or under the boulder we used as a cooking shelter.

When the weather began to clear on September 28, Pat and I made a quick unroped ascent of 5,202m, via the ca. 900m northwest buttress, a low-angle fin of rock just left of a giant talus field. We carried a rope and some gear but never even put on our climbing shoes. Most of the terrain was scrambling, but a few steps required climbing up to about 5.7. We climbed to the west summit, which we believe to be the tallest point on the massif. As it turned out, this was also the best day's weather of the trip.

Ari and Chris began a route on the northeast face. They came across a fair bit of loose rock and incipient features, interspersed with sections of good 5.10-5.11. They were climbing with no bolt kit and only a few pins. Ultimately they would have needed more of an aid rack to continue. As the weather window was again starting to close, they came down after five pitches. That same day Pat and I explored the wall of granite above camp and adjacent to Jiang Jun Feng. To our amazement this wall was made up of beautiful compact granite, covered with splitter cracks. Unfortunately, the cracks were completely filled with dirt and grass. Cleaning even one pitch would have taken hours. We did find a few clean cracks on a detached pillar at the base of the wall and installed anchors above three very good lines. Pat climbed the first splitter offwidth to place anchors, and we intended to return the next day to finish the other two, but we had neither time nor weather for cleaning the walls above. Bad weather set in, and we spent the rest of the trip toiling in the squalor of our tents or the cooking cave. This expedition was supported by the AAC Lyman Spitzer Grant and Cascade Designs. Thanks to both for their generous assistance.

TOMMY CHANDLER

*Editor's note: Tom Nakamura was probably the first foreigner to travel and photograph the Bipeng Valley. In 1998 he crossed from the Bipeng to the Changping via the 4,644m pass one kilometer west of Jiang Jun Feng. In AAJ 2005, p. 423, we reported an ascent of both Camel Peaks by Tom Chamberlain et al (first climbed by Charlie Fowler in 1994) as Pts. 5,202m and 5,484m. In fact 5,484m is a double summited peak (the Camel Peaks) with both tops roughly the same height. On the 1:50,000 Chinese People's Liberation Army Map, Pt. 5,484m is West Camel Peak.*

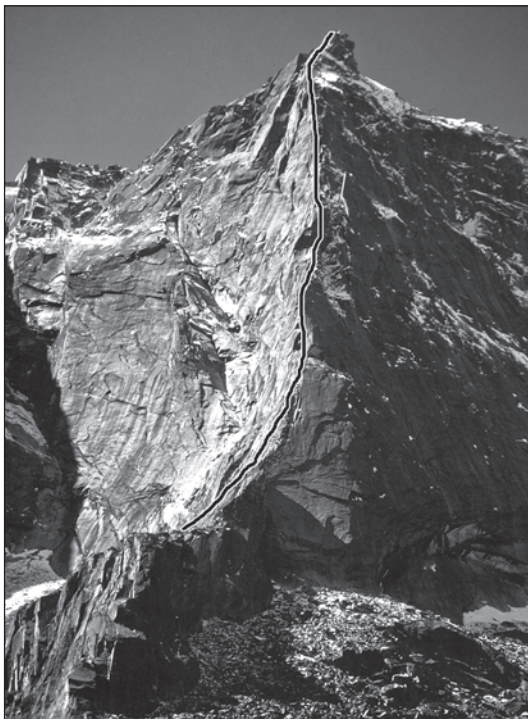
*"The Angry Wife," first ascent, via north ridge (Raindog Arête); Daogou, first ascent, via south face (Salvage Op). In early September Jay Janousek, Joe Puryear, Stoney Richards, Paul Saddler, and I left Seattle for the Qionglai Mountains, with our main objective a new route on Siguniang (6,250m). After establishing ourselves in the Changping valley we climbed the west summit*

of Camel Peak (a.k.a. Luotou, 5,484m), then set our sights on the northwest face of Siguniang, a 900m rock wall rising straight out of the glacier just right of the 2002 Fowler-Ramsden ice couloir. This magnificent wall tops out at nearly 6,000m; above, the summit of the mountain is guarded by seracs. Due to the height of the route and the fickle weather, we planned to adopt capsule-style, big-wall tactics.

Puryear, Richards, and I ferried loads up 1,500m to an advanced camp across from the base of the route at 5,100m. During a brief two-day weather window, Joe and I led the first four pitches up a corner system, which appeared to offer the least objective hazard. A series of troughs then blew into the Siguniang region. Joe, Stoney, and I took shelter in a portaledge at the base of the route for the next nine days, until it became obvious there was no chance of reaching the summit via this route. Having spent nearly four weeks working and waiting, with only a week left in our trip, we decided to retrieve our gear. While double carrying loads back to base camp, we met a Russian team making a reconnaissance. The Russians were interested in a winter ascent of the northwest wall.

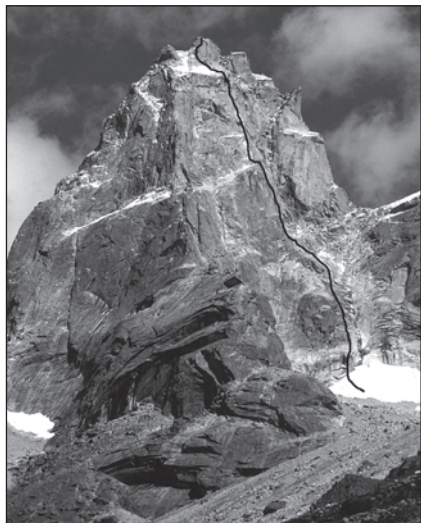
Back at base Stoney, Joe, and I decided to hike up the Chiwen Gorge for the remaining six days. As we passed west of Celestial Peak (a.k.a. Pomiu, 5,413m) the weather began to improve, and we set our sights on an attractive north-facing rock ridge higher up the valley. Dropping our packs under a large boulder, we began rock climbing in earnest at 4,500m. I led the first block of four pitches, the last of which was 5.10. Stoney led the next four pitches, following the line on the ridge between sun and shade. On his fourth pitch Stoney solved the 5.10c crux, which involved climbing thin, weaving, moss-filled cracks. Joe led the last two pitches to gain the summit at dusk. There was no evidence of a previous ascent, and we named the peak The Angry Wife (5,005m). Nine rappels down the east face led to the base of the route, which we named Raindog Arête (550m, 5.10c). We left only single pitons and stoppers on the descent.

The following day we hiked to the top of the Chiwen Gorge and reached a pass leading down to the Shuangqiao Valley. Knowing little about the valley into which we were descending, we were fortunate to discover a goat trail across the base of Chibu (5,450m) that shortened our descent considerably. As we rounded the base of Chibu, large rock towers emerged at the head of the valley. Of the three stunning rock summits, the main peak of Daogou, which had been attempted previously by Americans from the north, looked a particularly formidable challenge.



The Angry Wife (5,005m) in the Chiwen Gorge, Siguniang National Park. The line of Raindog Arête (550m, 5.10c) on the north ridge is marked. Joe Puryear





The south face of the main peak of Daogou (5,466m), east of the Shuangqiao Valley, Siguniang National Park. The line followed on the first ascent, *Salvage Op* (650m, 5.10d), is marked. *Joe Puryear*

On the cloudy morning of October 13 we hiked to the base, keeping right of a south-facing buttress. At ca. 4,700m we reached the head of a small, talus-filled cirque and began to climb a prominent drainage, where we found a direct line up the south face. The route began with a deep 5cm-8cm hand crack, but then the terrain eased, and we soloed low-to-mid-fifth class rock for the next few hundred meters, until the headwall steepened. The granite was excellent and on the headwall gave sustained 5.10 climbing above 5,000m. The crux was the summit block.

Joe describes the final pitch: "Unsure of which block was the actual summit, I led a difficult pitch on the east side, only to find that I had gone the wrong way. I rappelled back to a ramp and climbed around to the other side, where I found a horrifying series of ice-filled off-widths and chimneys. A 5.10d off-width over a bomb-bay chimney led to another chimney, with an overhanging chockstone. The mental crux came at the

final block, where I had to chimney up a one-meter-wide gap, nearly 20m out from my last piece, and mantel onto the sloping summit edge." This lead was testament to the climbing skill Joe has developed in the Alaska Range.

We stood on the 5,466m summit before dusk, concerned that Joe had frost-nipped his toes. Stoney set the anchors as we rappelled 17 pitches to the base of the route, which we named *Salvage Op* (650m, 5.10d). We left only single pitons and stoppers on the descent.

CHAD KELLOGG, AAC

*Changping Valley, first ascents of Chiwen, "The Little Prince," and Chibu.* On September 11 Katy Holm, Aidan Oloman, and I left Vancouver for Rilong, a growing mountain town and access point for the Siguniang Shan National Reserve. From there we made reconnaissance hikes in the Changping and Shuangquao valleys. In the latter the walls are steep, with interesting architecture: fluted ridges and featured faces. However, it rained throughout our trip, and the granite looked slick, mossy, and unappealing. In contrast, our walk through the Changping was bright and sunny. We found an easily accessible



Aidan Oloman bouldering in the valley below Chibu (5,466m), Siguniang National Park. *Katherine Fraser*

hanging valley ringed by unclimbed granite peaks. It was an easy decision.

Back in Rilong we located Mr. Mah. He is a local horse packer, who has served multiple climbing teams; his trophies are fleeces and hats from past expeditions. Mr. Mah is a bargaining tactician who uses the language barrier to his advantage. He upsized us to four horses, yet he was fair, reliable, and entertaining. He dropped our gear by the river below our valley (two drainages north of Celestial Peak and the last main side valley to the west of the Changping before it starts its big bend to the west), and we carried loads up to a high camp.

We waited through four rainy days before attempting Chiwen (5,250m) on the south side of the valley. We climbed 10 long pitches in poor weather to the summit; some were 4th class (400m, 5.9). We attempted a 5,006m peak northwest of Chiwen, on the ridge towards Chibu. We first called the peak The Little Guy, but after he thwarted us three times we upgraded him to The Little Prince. We then bivouacked below Chibu (5,466m), the aesthetic prize of the valley. In a long day we climbed 14 pitches of sustained 5.9-5.10+, linking the steep gendarmes up the left side of the east face. The granite was good, and cracks were continuous. We descended our route in the dark. After waiting out a snow storm we finally summited The Little Prince (300m, 5.10+). We left the valley in slashing rain. In the 16 days we spent there we did not see anyone else.

The weather was poor to fair. It rained almost every second night, but when the sun does come out it dries the rock quickly. From local reports it seems that October is colder but has more consistent high pressure.

There is not a lot of unclimbed technical alpine rock left in the Changping, which is the more popular of the two parallel valleys for Chinese hikers and trekkers. However, a more thorough investigation of the Shuangqiao is warranted, a valley that has the advantage of being accessible by bus.

We acknowledge the support of the John Lauchlan Award and the Jen Higgins Fund.

KATHERINE FRASER, *Canada*

*Editor's note: Aidan Oloman was killed by an avalanche in interior British Columbia in January 2006.*



The east face of Chibu (5,466m), showing the line of the first ascent by Canadians Katherine Fraser, Katy Holm, and Aidan Oloman. The climb gave 14 pitches on good granite to 5.10+. *Katherine Fraser*

*Putala Shan (5,428m), north face, solo.* The north face of Putala Shan is an impressive big wall, which I have tried twice. I have not attempted the same mountain twice since 1990, when I made my last winter solo attempt on Fitz Roy in Patagonia. My first attempt on Putala did not go well. I hoped success would be the sign of my comeback, and I wanted to prove to myself that I was not finished as a climber.

I first saw Putala Shan in the autumn of 2003. I was trekking as part of my rehabilitation a year after my accident in Gyachung Kang. [In 2002 Yamanoi lost a total of five fingers on both hands and all of the toes on his right foot as a result of bad weather during an alpine-style



Seen from the northwest across the Shuangqiao Valley: the unclimbed Pt 5,592m (a.k.a. Barbarian Peak; left) and Putala Shan (5,428m). (1) Jiayou (north face) (850m, 18 pitches, 5.8 A3+, Yamanoi, 2005, not to summit). (2) Dalai Lama (west face) (800m, 22 pitches, VIII-, Grmovsek-Grmovsek, 2003). *Andrej Grmovsek*

ascent and descent of the north face of Gyachung Kang—Ed.]. Even compared to the big walls of places like Yosemite, the face on Putala seemed most attractive. In fact, I noticed many beautiful crack lines extending up to the crest. Although I made my final attempt after carefully evaluating my physical condition and cold weather equipment, the climb was as difficult as expected.

On June 25 we established base camp in a beautiful meadow at an altitude of 3,700m. My wife Taeko Yamanoi supported me as base camp manager, with a cook

and an interpreter. On the 27th I carried equipment and provisions to the bottom of the wall, at approximately 4,500m, then spent a week fixing rope on the first 300m, in weather as bad as on my last attempt. Progress was difficult due to continuous rain and snow. As I chose a route following a large corner, ice fell on me frequently.

On July 13 I began in earnest my capsule-style attempt with a portaledge. The rock, especially on the lower part of the route, is solid granite, but as I climbed higher expanding flakes slowed my progress to about one pitch a day. Ice coating the rock prevented free climbing, so I was forced to use aid. Shortly after beginning, I got slight frostbite on my hands and feet, which are now my Achilles heel after my accident in 2002. Both my down jacket and sleeping bag were soaked, so my extremities were unable to recover, and as I was unable to sleep, I also began to suffer from exhaustion. To make matters worse, the sun never reached the face, and the snow and ice sticking to the upper part of the wall made the climb very stressful. However, on the 19th, the seventh day of my climb, I topped out on the crest at an altitude of 5,350m. I needed two more days to rappel the route and return to base camp.

Summary: first ascent of Putala Shan north face (not to summit) via Jiayou (Chinese for “come on” or “do your best”); 850m, 18 pitches, 5.8 A3+.

YASUSHI YAMANOI, *Japan*

*Eagle Rock Peak, first ascent.* A man wearing a leather jacket with a bloody knife in his hands stands by the roadside, digging inside the body of a slaughtered yak. We realized we were in China.

Christof Looser, Martin Ruggli, and I started out for the now-famous Quonglai mountains, 280km east of Chengdu, on September 25. Our goal was to establish a new route on one of the rock peaks north of Siguniang. Our information came from Tamotsu Nakamura.

After reconnaissance we set up base camp in the Shuangqiao Valley (Double Bridge Valley) at an altitude of ca. 3,500m. Recently a (horrible) road has been built into this valley to bring hundreds of Chinese tourists from one scenic spot to the next. The tourists stick pretty much to the road, leaving the rest of the valley quiet.

After a few days we discovered the beautiful, interesting, south face of Eagle Rock Peak (ca. 5,300m) south of Putala Shan. The summit looks like an eagle's beak and can be seen from the valley floor, but the south face is hidden.

Sichuan does not seem to be a place for those who like stable weather, and we had to deal with a mix of snow, rain, and clouds, with only a few spells of sunshine. During changable weather we set up high camp at 4,500m and ferried everything we needed. We had five 60m ropes: two twins and three singles. Due to continuing poor weather we fixed the first 240m (eight pitches). After 12 days (five days ferrying loads, three days fixing, and four days of bad weather) we set off for the big push. On the first day we juggled our ropes and climbed to the top of pitch 13, where we could fit a small tent. The next day we fixed three 60m ropes on the head-wall. On the day after, October 14, we reached the previously virgin summit in evening light and returned to the tent, before starting our descent the

following morning. In all, we spent seven days on the wall. Our route, which we named I Hate Camping, is about 700m long, 21 pitches, with difficulties up to 7a and A3. We placed a total of 13 bolts. The east side of Shuangqiao Valley sports many rocky peaks with big granite walls. There is great potential for future climbs, but many faces are slabby and lacking in features. As far as we are aware we were the only climbers in the valley during our time there in October.

LUKAS DÜRR, Switzerland



The south face of Eagle Rock (the ca. 5,300m South Summit of Putala Shan), showing the first ascent route, I Hate Camping (700m, 7a A3; Dürr-Looser-Ruggli, 2005). Lukas Dürr

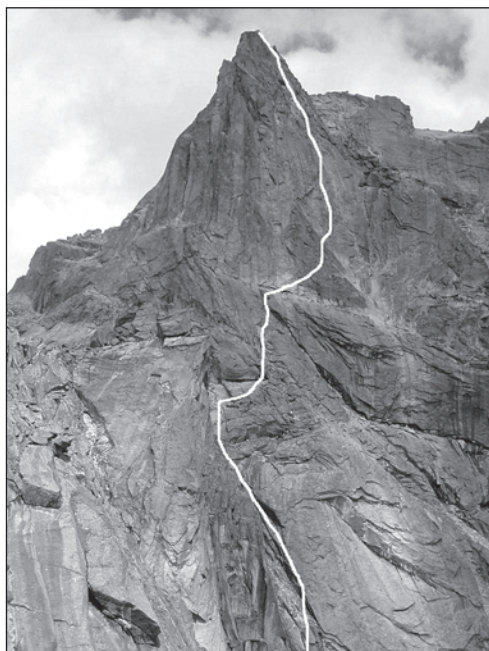
*Editor's note: Eagle Rock Peak is the south summit of Putala Shan. The latter has three summits. The highest (5,428m) is the most northerly and was climbed in 2003 by Andrej and Tanja Grmovsek (see AAJ 2004, pp. 420-2).*

*Shuangqiao Gou, first ascents of "Pakla Shan," "Shuangqiao Peak," and the northwest face of Tan Shan.* The Croatian Mountaineering Federation, to celebrate its 130th anniversary, organized a small expedition to Siguniang National Park. There were four of us: Darko Berljak as leader, Dubravko Markovic as doctor, and two climbers, Ivica Matković from Split and I, Boris Čujić, from Zagreb. Our trip lasted from September 13 to October 15. After reaching Rilong by bus, we took a ride into the Shuangqiao Gou (Two Bridges Valley), where we set up base camp. We then chose to climb in a smaller valley, a three-hour walk away. It was the valley where Slovenians





The northwest face of Tan Shan (4,943m) to the east of the Shuangqiao Valley. Marked is the new Croatian Route (450m, 6a+). This peak was first climbed in 2003 by Slovenians Andrej and Tanja Grmovsek via the south face (Don't Fly Away, 450m, VIII/VIII+). *Boris Cujic collection*



The south face of Shuangqiao Peak (5,100m) showing Kingdom of Heaven (780m of climbing, 6c+, Cujic-Matkovc, 2005). *Boris Cujic*

Andrej and Tanja Grmovsek had climbed in 2003 (see *AAJ* 2004 pp. 420-422).

On the day after our arrival at base camp, Ivica and I set off for the first of our objectives: the northwest face of Tan Shan (4,943m), a peak first climbed by the Grmovseks via a hard route on the south face (Don't Fly Away, 450m, VIII/VIII+ obl). We climbed a new 450m route up a big dihedral system, with difficulties up to ca. 6a+. We rappelled the line, using only two bolts for anchors. A long period of bad weather then confined us to camp, even forcing us down to Rilong for a beer.

After 10 days we returned to our advanced base, but the following morning it started raining, and we couldn't even see the wall. At 11 a.m. it began to clear, and we started up a new route on a small wall 100m from camp, facing the route we had previously climbed on Tan Shan. The rock was wet, but after four hours we reached a 4,600m previously unclimbed summit. We christened the peak Pakla Shan (in honor of our own famous crag, Paklenica) and the route up the southeast face For Sanja and Adela (after our wives, who always support us). The length of the route was 450m and the difficulty 6b.

The next day, at last, was beautiful, and we started up our main goal, unclimbed Shuangqiao Peak (5,100m). We chose a fairly direct line up the south face. The rock was bad in the lower part but very good in the upper part. However, with a drill it would have been possible to make a nice route in the lower section. Our new route, named Kingdom of Heaven (the old Chinese name for Sichuan) was 780m long, with difficulties of 6c+. We rappelled the line of ascent.

The potential for long, hard big wall routes in this area is huge, even extremely hard climbs. Everything is cheap, and access is good, with approaches of from two to six

hours from the vehicle. The best months are September and October, but rain or snow is normal. In winter there are nice waterfalls for climbing.

BORIS ČUJIĆ, Croatia

*Editor's note: very recent information suggests that the south face of Shuangqiao may have been climbed in 2000 by Italians Gianluca Belin and Diego Stefani (850m: 6c and A1). They refer to the summit as Wong Shan.*

## CHENGDU REGION

*Daxuetang (5,364m), first ascent.* Daxuetang lies almost due south of Siguniang and is the highest peak within the boundaries of Chengdu city. It borders Wolong Giant Panda Nature Preserve, and we approached and climbed the mountain from that side. From Chengdu the Sichuan-Tibetan Highway leads through Wolong (the Giant Panda Research Center) toward Xiaojin and Siguniang. The trailhead is at Dengsheng (2,730m), right before the road starts switchbacking up toward the Balang Pass.

Daxuetang has several peaks, and the topography is confusing. Two are fairly close in height. In Spring 2002 Liu Jian, a newspaper reporter from Chengdu, claimed to have made the first ascent. However, it turned out that he summited Daxuetang's northernmost peak (Pk. 2), which is about 10m lower than the main peak, immediately to the south. In October 2003 a joint Japanese-Chinese team climbed the mountain, also thinking they were making the first ascent. However, they reached the same summit as Liu Jian.

The Goretex-Arête Alpine Instruction Center First Ascents team comprising Chen Cheng (Chengdu), Ma Yihua (Chengdu, leader), Su Rongqin (Fujian), Tselantou (Heishui County), and Zhang Jian (Chongqing) left Chengdu on May 21. From Dengsheng they walked up the Yeliu Valley and camped below the Baishuitai waterfall at 3,600m. On the 23rd they established base camp at 4,700m. Their route then followed the "Bowling Alley" on the north-east face of Daxuetang to Camp 1 at 5,250m. On the 27th Ma Yihua summited Pk. 2. But then two large rocks hit the tent at Camp 1, and the team retreated to Chengdu for a replacement.

On June 1 they again left Chengdu, to attempt the main summit. They followed the same route to Camp 1 but then traversed around the left side of a small pinnacle to reach a knife-edge ridge connecting Pk. 2 with the main summit. All five Chinese climbers followed the ridgeline southeast for 200m and reached the summit dome late in the afternoon. Due to the late hour they bivouacked on top before descending the following day.

JON OTTO



Boris Cujic high on Kingdom of Heaven, south face of Shuangqiao Peak (5,100m). Below and to the right, with the obvious smooth slabby wall, is Pakla Shan (4,600m), also climbed by Croatians Cujic and Matkovic. The new road up the Shuangqiao Valley is clearly visible far below. Boris Cujic collection