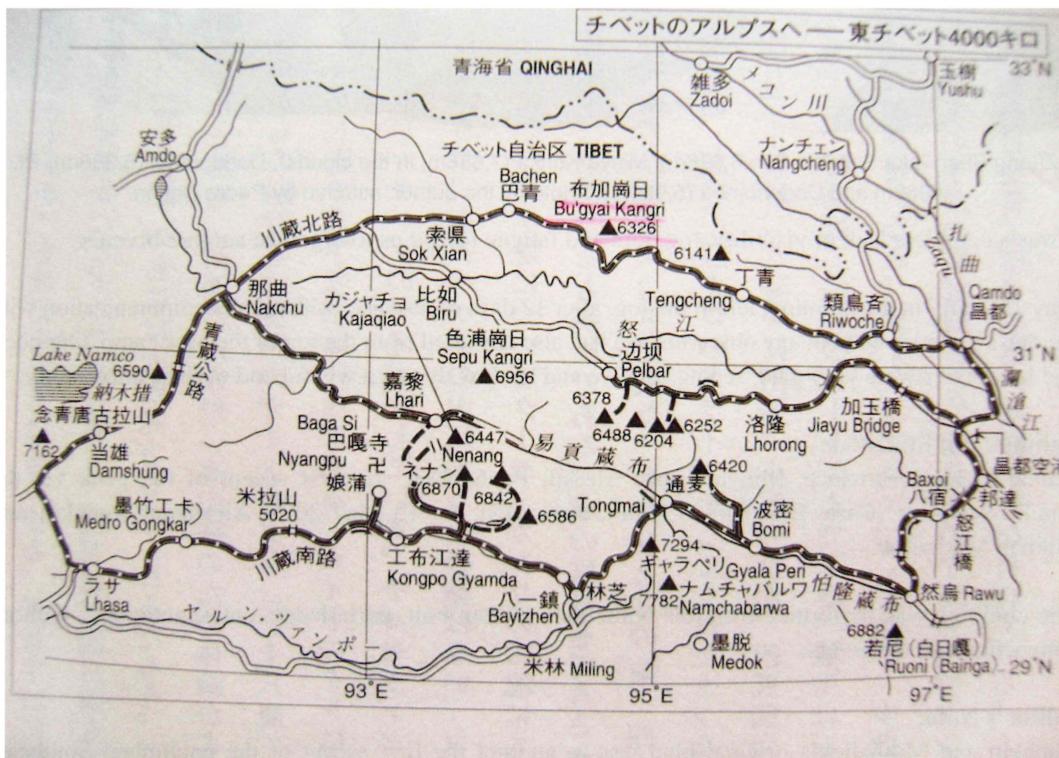


TAKAO OHE

Bu'gyai Kangri Expedition, Summer 2009 A Permission Issue in Tibet



Map of Lhasa, Nakchu, SokXian and Bu'gyai Kangri
from *The Alps of Tibet* by T.Nakamura

We attempted Bu'gyai Kangri (6,328m, unclimbed), in Nakchu District, Tibet China last July after getting the formal permission from CTMA (China Tibet Mountaineering Association) but were refused to approach the mountain at SokXian, a local town by the local police. The following is the report.

Bu'gyai Kangri

Bu'gyai Kangri (6,328m, 31°48' N, 94°43' E) began to draw our attention around a year ago. TAAV, Tohoku Akademischer Alpen Verein, had climbed successfully Nyainqntanglha Feng, the highest peak (7,162m) in the Nyainqntanglha Shan, Tibet in May 1986. Thereafter we were not in the situation of surveying the overseas mountains due to the member's busy working life. In these few years, we began again to make some climbing plans of mountains in Tibetan area through exchanging the information with Hengduan Mountains Club (www.hengduan.jp) led by Tamotsu Nakamura. Bu'gyai Kangri is located in the middle of Nakchu and Qamdo along the Sichuan-Tibet North Highway (Chuanzang Beilu) and belongs to north end of Taniantaweng, Hengduan Shan in Nu Jiang (the Salween) basin, an independent plateau ranging 40km East to West and 20km North to South, with no sharp peaks and massive presence.

In October 2008 our reconnaissance to Langnatong village, deepest Tibetan village convinced us of possibility of reaching the top through the left-side valley of Langnatong Glacier and the upper plateau. Therefore, we accelerated making the concrete climbing plan.

Until Departure

Five members of mixed team of graduates and students, eventually fixed two months before departure are Takashi Kondo (Chief Leader, 62), Sen Koseki (Doctor, 67), Takao Ohe (Climbing Leader, 61), Takanori Aihara (MC-Medical Course 6, 25), and Hiroki Oshio (MC4, 23). Considering the member's age and each climbing experience, we decided to get support of four Tibetan high porters to make sure the successful ascent. Local services like transportation and accommodation were arranged by Zhang Shaohong, Vice President, Sichuan Earth Expedition Inc, and Dou Changshen, former Office Director of Administrative Center of CTMA, China Tibet Mountaineering Association.

Following the technical training over the snow slopes at Mt. Iide, Niigata in May and the acclimatization exercise at Mt. Fuji in June, we almost completed the preparation work for climbing equipments and food by the end of June and sent 15 packs (approx 370kg) CTMA by EMS on July 5. Through these work, we felt an unease of whether the formal permission eventually would be granted or not. In addition, the positive suggestion from Dou and Shaohong encouraged us to proceed under the risk. At the preparation phase, we asked several times about the arrangement of yaks or local porters at Langnatong village with unease but did not get any answer to be satisfied.

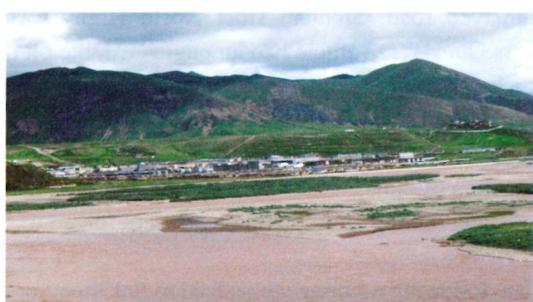
We finally got the formal permission on July 14 just four days before leaving. It was approved by four concerned agencies, Foreign Affairs Office, Operations Section of Tibetan Army HQ, Border Security Guard of Public Security Bureau, and Department of Sports in Tibetan Autonomous Government.

Beginning of Permission issue

Leaving Narita on July 18, we arrived at Chengdu via Shanghai in the evening. Shaohong and Dou proposed toast of Bai-jiu, Chinese liquor to our success with their encouragement. On the following day, we met Luobu at Lhasa Airport, designated as a Liaison Officer for this climbing team, looked virile with good English communication skill and a devout Lamaist. Tibetan Climbing School dispatched four high porters next day. Head of them, Tsiring Dorjee is one of top Chinese climbers with experience of climbing 14 peaks over 8,000m.



Bu'gyai Kangri from Angan Pass
(T.Ohe Oct 22, 2008)



Perspective of SokXian and the tributary of Nu-Jiang, where the local police stopped us.
(T.Aihara Jul 25, 2009)

Hiroki Oshio, the youngest student had a fever that night due to the altitude at Lhasa as his physical condition being not so good a few day before and Dr Koseki decided to let him go down to Chengdu for treatment. Other members spent three days there for the meeting with high porters, local procurement of food, inspection of equipments and high acclimatization. On July 22, we could not observe the solar eclipse in the sky of cloud.

Thirteen of us in all departed from Lhasa with three 4WD vehicles and one truck on July 23. We drove northward Qinghai-Tibet Highway comfortably and arrived at Nakchu in the evening. We immediately went to the PSB (Public Security Bureau) office, which has jurisdiction over Nakchu District, the largest one in Tibet Autonomous Region and registered ourselves for foreigner's entering to the unopened area, which was quickly proceeded by a young woman officer.

Leaving Nakchu after buying 15kg of raw meat of yak at the morning market, we drove over the unpaved road, Sichuan-Tibet North Highway that was an endurance test for human beings and cars. One 4WD vehicle had an engine trouble on the way to Xiakchu and we had to wait there having a Sichuan-home style lunch at the local restaurant where I visited last year and remembered even the table positions clearly. After the troubled car joined we left Xiakchu late afternoon and we had to drive with light in the dark along the right bank of Nu-Jiang tributary surrounded by the dangerous cliff. At location of 8km to SokXian, we encountered the made-in-China truck stop with trouble on the road. As it began raining around 10pm, we were forced to stay overnight in the car with a fear of landslide there.

The following morning we walked to SokXian, for it taking much time to move the truck and pass through there. Walking calmly and looking up the historical and famous Tsanden Monastery on the hill, we entered into SokXian early in the afternoon. Two police officers stood on the road and seemed to be waiting for us. Luobu and Dorjee talked with them first and they asked us to follow them to a local Tibetan restaurant in the town. We went up second floor there and then chief police officer came up together with young one. Luobu interpreted Tibetan to English and vice versa. They said as follows.

1. Local village people have opposition to our climbing Bu'gyai Kangri owing to its holly mountain.
2. Many yaks were killed by thunder and the color of the river suddenly changed in this year, which was caused as retribution by outsiders' picking cordyceps and valuable minerals. Then a serious injury affair occurred between local village people and outsiders in this spring.
3. In case of foreigners' contacting local people even though their purpose is climbing, PSB cannot insure the safety in the present circumstance.
4. PSB does not allow us climbing or driving further from SokXian even for taking pictures due to the above reason.

We were very confused to hear it and tried to explain our legitimacy by showing the formal permission that mentioned the name of Bu'gyai Kangri. They however repeated that it was a strict order from upper agency PSB in Nakchu and we must return immediately to Lhasa via Nakchu. We made calls to Shaohong and Dou in Chengdu and asked them to solve this problem by sharing the information with concerned agencies immediately.

Negotiation with the concerned agency

During the dinner, we got a reply from Dou that the new regulation was issued a few days ago and our climbing would not be allowed this time according to the concerned agency. After talking with Japan side, we decided to go back to Nakchu and negotiate with the person in charge of this decision at PSB. We were

under watch by local police officer until leaving SokXian at next noon. We camped at the comfortable grassland on the way back to Nakchu and reached there around noon on July 27. We had about one hour negotiation with chief officer of PSB in Nakchu. The point he mentioned is as follows.

1. Question: After permitted on July 23, why did PSB change their decision the next day? Answer: A responsible person was quite busy on the meeting but not able to aware of this with care. A person at the window processed it without any attention.
2. PSB in Nakchu asked local people in four villages (villages' names not disclosed) through local PSB regarding the current situation and their sentiment against climbing. Their replies were very negative. They respect Bu'gyai Kangri as a holy mountain. A serious injury incident occurred in this spring between the locals and outsiders because of the struggle of taking cordyceps (a kind of high-priced Chinese medicine) and valuable minerals. In Nakchu area, the same thing happened with Russian rafting team two years ago.
3. The formal permission was granted by the upper governmental agency but its withdrawal could be possible locally depending on the local conditions. Similar cases could be found in Japan as well.
4. In case of applying next time, the applying procedure should be through Chinese Embassy in Tokyo, CTMA, PSB in Nakchu and local PSB and the permission should be finally granted only after securing the local circumstance.
5. PSB will not put the reason of withdrawal in writing or disclose the new regulation in public. I am in charge of foreigners' registration of PSB in Nakchu but cannot disclose my name.

Talking again with Japan side, as there seemed to be no possibility of climbing Bu'gyai Kangri this time, we decided to go back to Lhasa. We stayed at Damshung on the way that night. Luobu explained generally about Tibetan character that people in four places of SokXian and Bachen in Tibet Autonomous Region and Batang and Ganzi in Sichuan Province are men of violent moods and there is higher risk of trouble with local people in such area. Japan side asked Luobu and Dorjee to visit Langnatong village for direct contact with local people. However, both flatly refused it as too much danger.

On July 28 we visited CTMA again to hear about their formal view on this incident and met Mr. DraXi GyaTso, vice director, since Mr. Li, President of CTMA was not in Lhasa (we met him later in Chengdu). Mr. DraXi GyaTso explained,

1. CTMA expresses apology for this incident with no recognition of its holy mountains. There are many mountains over 6,000m in Tibet but no exact information of which ones holy mountains are. However, generally local people at the foot of the mountains respect them as the holy object.
2. Regarding the expedition expense refunding, Dou in Chengdu should be responsible for it. formal permission fee will be refund fully.
3. CTMA understands that TAAV will make this incident public to the people with interest in mountains in Tibet.

Dorjee proposed to change the target into the mountain in the southern area of Lhasa with no permission issue. We considered that by checking the maps and materials available at CTMA but gave it up because of poor preparation and low morale of the team. On July 29, we sorted the climbing equipments to be returned back to Japan and to be left at CTMA for next opportunity, and eventually carried eight boxes of equipment to Lhasa Post Office. As the last thing to do in Lhasa, we did sightseeing as ordinary tourists on July 30, to Jokhang Temple in the morning and Potala Palace in the afternoon.

Advice for explorers and climbers to unopened area

We went back to Chengdu on July 31 and negotiated with Dou and Shaohong on refunding of expedition expense and permission fee. Dou said,

1. CTMA does not know the real reason for this incident but presumes that the territorial dispute of picking cordyceps could be a reason.
2. CTMA cannot take full responsibility for this. Not all the expedition expense paid in advance could be refunded and the expense not yet used will be refunded. CTMA cannot decide on their own about refunding of permission fee and need to talk with other organizations with some responsibility like Army, Foreign Affairs and PSB.

He works at present for the Department of Sports of Tibet Autonomous Regional Government based in Chengdu.

Although getting a formal permission, the local police refused our climbing as above described. This sudden and unpredictable incident caused us confused very much. In case of the problem existing locally, we think they should have given us any warning about the local circumstance before issuing the permission. We are not sure there was any other political reason or not in the background.

We hope this report could be helpful for explorers and climbers who plan to visit these areas in the future. We made sure that Shaohong had refunded the unused expedition expense and full permission fee on September 16.

Lastly, we would like to express our sincere thanks to all the staff of Sichuan Earth Expedition Inc, for their kind cares to Oshio during his stay under medical treatment in Chengdu. Moreover, we really hope to have the opportunity to attempt again in the near future together with these experienced and tough high porters led by a distinguished leader, Dorjee.