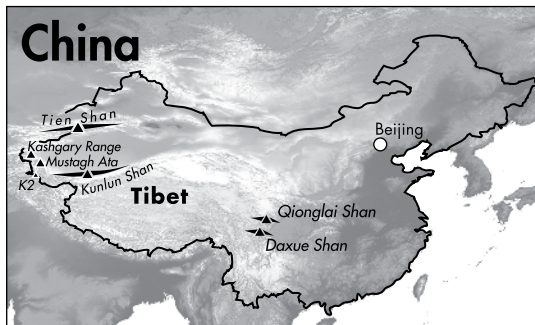


China

TIEN SHAN

On August 20 Nikolay Dobrjaev, Anatoliy Djuliy, Aleksey Kirienko, and Vladimir Leonenko made the first ascent of the nearly 2,500m-high south ridge of Peak Voennih Topograf (Army Topographers, 6,873m) east of Pobeda. They also made the first traverse of the various Vizbora summits (5,853m-5,960m) on the south ridge of Pobeda East. A full account of these climbs and an overview of this area's potential appears earlier in the *Journal*.



KUN LUN



The route and camps on the south spur of Kokodag in the Kongur group. The main summit is 7,210m on Chinese maps, the northwest summit, the rounded snow dome to the left, is 100m lower. Lev Ioffe

and 100m lower. The obvious line of ascent follows a rounded, south-facing, snow ridge (45-50° maximum) toward the snow dome, then traverses right on the upper snow fields to the foot of the final rock ridge. The part of the route between 5,700m and 6,200m is heavily crevassed, and there is avalanche danger on the upper traverse, especially after snowfall.

Our group of Ivan Dusharin, Lena Lebedeva, Sasha Novik, and I gathered in Kashgar on July 19. We set up base camp on July 22, after a day's trek from the Karakoram Highway. We established Camp I (5,400m) at the top of a scree slope on the 25th and Camp II (6,000m) on the 30th in a large, snow-filled crevasse, which offered good protection against wind and avalanches. We made our first summit bid on August 3 but had to turn back when a southwesterly wind decreased visibility to 10m. A period of bad weather ensued, with the wind

Western Kun Lun, Kokodag, first ascent. Kokodag is the summit on the ridge extending west from Kongur and is located between Kongur Tube (7,530m on Chinese maps, 7,546m on Russian) and Aklangam (6,978m on Chinese maps, 7,004m on Russian). Chinese maps show its altitude as 7,210m; our measurements gave 50-60m less. The reason for the name is unclear, and when asked which mountain is Kokodag, locals point in different directions. The main summit is a narrow rocky crest, while the northwest summit (7,129m on Chinese maps) is a broad snow dome, 2km distant

bringing humidity and dust from the Arabian Peninsula. For our next attempt, which took place on the 9th, we moved the top camp to 6,500m but still had to turn back from the upper slopes of the dome at ca 7,000m, when visibility dropped to zero. The next day, we were able to reach the foot of the rock ridge before the weather deteriorated and then proceeded to the top, disregarding the poor visibility. The last 200m involved unstable rock with unreliable protection. We reached the summit late in the afternoon of the 10th. Descent was quick: by August 13 we were back in Kashgar.



Climbing above a dust storm on the first ascent of Kokodag. Lev Ioffe

LEV IOFFE, USA

Aksai Chin, north summit, second ascent, southeast route. As reported in *AJ* 2006, p. 439, Aksai Chin (7,167m: sometimes referred to as Kun Lun, as it is the highest peak in this part of Kun Lun Range) was climbed in 1986 and 1997 by Japanese expeditions. On the 1986 ascent the party also traversed the summit ridge to the north summit. This lower summit, named Doufeng (6,957m), was climbed again in April-May by my client Bruno Paulet and me (guiding). We climbed a new route from the southeast directly to the top (900m, AD), taking two days for the glacier approach from base camp and reaching the summit on the third. However, we felt the easiest route to either summit was from the northwest, a flank that might provide a nice ski ascent.

CHRISTIAN TROMMSDORFF, France

Qong Mustagh massif, circumnavigation, reconnaissance. Our five-man team of Vasily Ivanov, Edmundas Jonikas, Alexander Moiseev, Tadeush Schepanyuk, and I arrived in the village of Polu on September 9. Polu is situated on the Kourab-darja River, a tributary of the Kerija on the northern slopes of the Kun Lun. With a team of donkeys and two local guides, we moved south through the Kourab Gorge, after which we crossed two high passes to the east, the Is-dawan (5,140m) and Tourpa-



The unclimbed and unnamed Pt. 6,470m, in the southwestern Qong Muztagh, as seen from the south. Otto Chkhetiani



Crossing the lower section of a glacier at ca 5,600m during a clockwise circumnavigation of the Qong Mustagh massif. Behind is the unclimbed and unnamed Pt. 6,710m. *Otto Chkhietiani*



The unclimbed Pt. 6,790m in the Qong Mustagh, seen from the northwest during the initial stages of a circumnavigation of the massif. This peak lies southwest of the highest mountain in the range, Qong Mustagh (6,950m). *Otto Chkhietiani*



The double-summited Qong Mustagh (East, 6,950m; West, 6,920m). The west summit was reached by Japanese in 2000 but the east remains unclimbed. *Otto Chkhietiani*

ata-dawan. We then traversed the large dry plateau of Goubaylkk, and, after six days and 100km, made a camp next to the clear waters of the Aksu, a major tributary of the Kerija. The passage through the gorge was well-described by Mark Newcomb in *AAJ 1997*, p. 129. I had also traveled through it on my 2003 and 2005 expeditions (*AAJ 2006*, pp. 438-440). Our feelings about overcoming this obstacle were no different from those of the old explorers who had passed this way: Grabzhevskiy, Przhevalskiy, and Stein.

The two guides said goodbye and left for Polu with the donkeys. Our plan was first to acclimatize in the ice-capped rocky massif to the north (5,964m or 6,198m on Shuttle Radar Topographic Mission data), then move northeast to the northern slopes of the Qong Mustagh (a.k.a. Muztag) massif. However, Moiseev suddenly developed characteristic signs of altitude sickness, and it was imperative that he descend. Moiseev's illness came as a surprise, considering his considerable high altitude experience. Jonikas accompanied him back to Polu, leaving only Ivanov, Schepanyuk, and me to continue. We had to split the essential equipment and food between the three of us, resulting in the initial weight of our rucksacks being around 55kg (28-30kg at the end of the trip). We abandoned the idea of inspecting the territory to the north and proceeded directly to Qong Mustagh.

The Kun Lun Range to the west of Qong Mustagh takes the

form of a huge arc. Maps and space shuttle images depict large glaciers. This remote range has rarely been visited, but in 2000 a Japanese expedition climbed the west (6,920m) and lower top of Qong Mustagh, a double-summited peak situated northwest of the main crest (*AAJ 2001*, pp. 406-407). According to SRTM, the east summit is 6,950m. The Japanese approached from the north and the village of Kyantokai, following the footsteps of Captain Deasy, who came this way in 1898.

Hidden farther to the east lies the unclimbed Pk. 6,946m. The map shows a valley leading southeast into the heart of the range toward 6,946m, and we decided to investigate. However, the river led to a narrow gorge, which we penetrated as far as 5,000m before being stopped. We retreated and moved around the northern and then eastern side of the range, crossing a pass of 5,800m, which we named after the Russian Geographical Society and which gave splendid views north to the 6,743m Lushtagh Ridge. We then turned south. The going was quite straightforward, but there were constant dust storms and nighttime temperatures of -22°C .

We then worked our way west around the southern slopes of the range, seeing at close quarters peaks of 6,300m-6,600m, which appeared straightforward climbing objectives, though we had no time to make any attempts. We crossed our highest pass, 5,890m, just south of the westernmost extremity of the range, and headed north, crossing a snow-covered glacier and more passes, before reaching Aksu and the Kerija River. Here we joined our outward route, which we retraced to Polu, meeting local people only when we were 5km from the finish. The three of us had spent 35 days making a clockwise circumnavigation of the Qong Mustagh massif, a roundtrip from Polu of 550km. We had only caught glimpses of the hidden 6,946m, but I plan to return in the autumn of 2007, as I now know the way to reach it.

OTTO CHKHETIANI, *Russia*

KARAKORAM

Gasherbrum II East, first ascent from China. On June 12, after two days by jeep from Kashgar to Mazar, we started our approach to base camp with 40 camels. On some of the river crossings during our trek to the Gasherbrum Glacier, the water reached the bellies of the animals, and we became anxious about our return in July, when the rivers would probably be higher and more rapid.

After five days we reached a gorgeous place for base camp at 4,300m. We then continued for a further 18 tedious kilometers across glacier and moraine, to establish advanced base at 4,800m on the East Nakpo Glacier, a safe distance from the north face of Gasherbrum II



A short but chilly river crossing on the southern fringes of the Qong Mustagh massif. The main peak in the background is Pt. 6,342m at the southwestern end of the massif, and the photograph was taken toward the end of a largely unsupported circumnavigation of this remote range. *Otto Chkhietiani*



Hard trail breaking during the first ascent of the ca 3,000m Chinese face of Gasherbrum II East (7,772m). The summit is directly above the climber's rucksack, while Gasherbrum II (8,035m) is the obvious pyramid to the right. *Hans Mitterer collection*



The summit of Gasherbrum II (8,035m) from Gasherbrum II East (7,772m). The connecting ridge has been traversed only once; in 1983 by legendary Poles, Jerzy Kukuczka and Voytek Kurtyka, who climbed the complete east ridge of Gasherbrum II over the summit of Gasherbrum II East. The normal route up Gasherbrum II slants below the rock walls from the left, to finish up the final section of the ridge. To the left and in the far distance is the Baltoro Glacier, with the Pajju and Trango groups. *Ueli Steck*

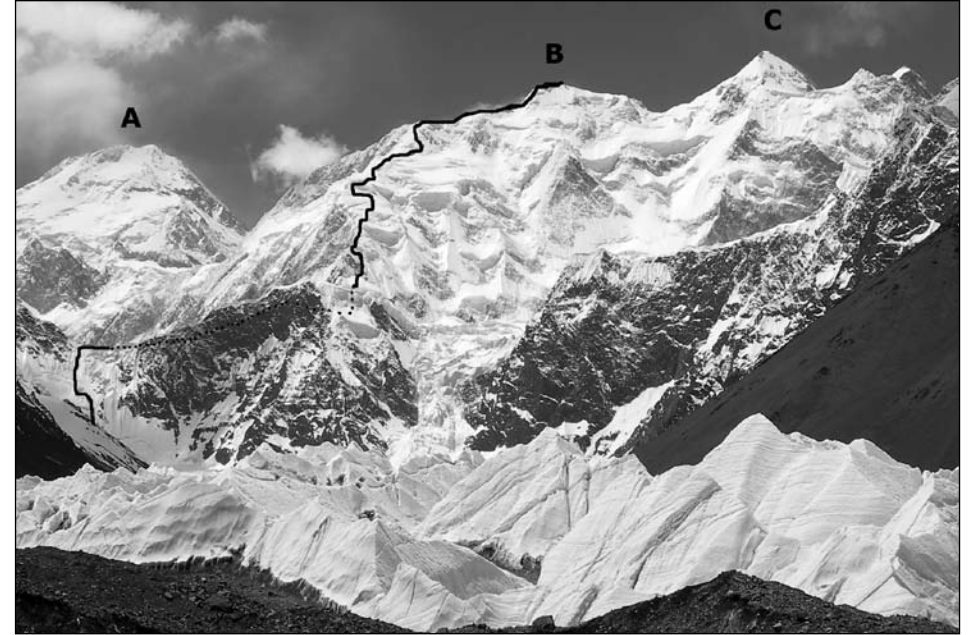
and begin immediately, but they had to give up due to bad headaches.

Unsettled weather, more snowfall, one aborted attempt, and days of endless waiting chewed on our nerves. Six members decided against a further attempt, so there were only three of us: Ueli, Cedric, and I.

On July 8 we were again in Camp 1 and the following morning at 9:30 a.m. settled down for an obligatory coffee break at Camp 2. A little later all three of us broke trail to 7,100m and returned to camp. We slept from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., thanks to a shared Dormicum pill. Half an hour later we were panting behind Cedric, as he led up our previous tracks. The pockets of our down suits were filled with everything we needed; our packs stayed behind at camp. After

(8,035m). Our aim was the "Magic Line," the northeast pillar leading directly to the summit. However, after watching gigantic ice avalanches, emanating from large serac barriers on the right and left flanks of the pillar and sweeping the approach regularly, we looked elsewhere. We opted for an objectively safer spur on the left side of the face, leading to the crest of the east-southeast ridge. An unknown route of such length seemed hard to achieve alpine-style under prevailing conditions, so we established a second camp and fixed difficult passages.

The first section included a difficult snow mushroom that we had to bypass by rappel and a tricky traverse. Then came a huge bergschrund, crossed on partially frozen snow, and an extremely loose rock barrier: delicate mixed climbing on "vertical" scree for 65m. Above, the route to Camp 2 at 6,800m was largely an exhausting trudge up poor snow. After nine days of nonstop work in great weather, we had the camp well established, and Cedric Hählen and I, now sufficiently acclimatized, descended to base camp to prepare for a summit push. Stefan Siegrist and Ueli Steck wanted to capitalize on the good conditions



Rising almost 3,000m above the Upper Nakpo Glacier is the Chinese face of the Gasherbrums. (A) Gasherbrum I (8,068m), (B) Gasherbrum II East (7,772m) and (C) Gasherbrum II (8,035m). Marked is the line climbed by Hählen, Mitterer and Steck on the left side of the northeast face of Gasherbrum II East. *Ueli Steck*

one hour the tracks ended, and the hard work began. Cedric was ill and fell behind, so Ueli and I took turns pushing through snow up to our waists. Some of the 50° passages required huge motivation.

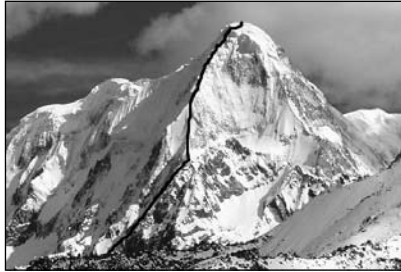
On reaching the main ridge we found perfect snow conditions—for powder skiing. We trudged slowly along the summit ridge toward the east top of Gasherbrum II, observing far-away lights in Pakistan. At sunrise we reached the last couloir. A second ice axe would have helped to calm our nerves on the 60° ice and névé, and the ski poles we carried were just in the way. At the top of the couloir Ueli and I had to wait almost an hour for Cedric. Despite illness, he had conserved his strength and followed us, and at 7 a.m. on July 10 take the last steps with us to the 7,772m summit. As the sun's rays were already striking the avalanche-prone slopes ahead, we forewent the 300m descent and 500m ascent to Gasherbrum II. Two days later, after dismantling camps and fixed ropes, we were back at base camp, celebrating with Chinese beer our first ascent of this remote mountain face. Without support from the whole team, our ascent would not have been possible.

HANS MITTERER, *Germany*

Editor's note: This appears to be first time this high summit has been reached since its original ascent by legendary Poles Jerzy Kukuczka and Voytek Kurtyka, during their traverse of Gasherbrum II. In addition, it is only the second major route to be completed from this part of the Shaksgam Valley; the other, which took place in August 1992, was the first ascent of the Chinese (east) face of Broad Peak Central (8,006m) from the North Gasherbrum Glacier by a Spanish-Italian team.

SICHUAN

SHALULI SHAN



Genyen (6,204m) in the Shaluli Shan with the route up the north spur marked. *Karl Unterkircher*



Approaching the serac barrier on the north ridge of Genyen during the first ascent. *Karl Unterkircher*

Genyen, North Spur; Sachun, east face, attempt. When we left Italy, we possessed only a few satellite photos and little information on the region we had chosen for our adventure. We traveled to the area by jeep on ever-worsening roads. The last day it took almost eight hours to cover just 91km between Zhanla and Litang. Finally, with yaks and horses we walked up the Garmunei Gou Valley (called Shuta by local monks) to the heart of the Genyen group, a massif that we had been admiring for many hours. We sited base camp near Nego Gompa (a.k.a. Lengo Gompa or Rengo Monastery) at 4,060m, surrounded by granite walls leading to snow-capped summits. In the first two days we explored the secrets of the range and climbed an easy summit of 5,000m. From this viewpoint the north face of Genyen (6,204m) looked worrisome, but the surrounding valleys held a wealth of unknown peaks. Our enthusiasm was enormous.

We became an object of exploration for the monks, who had never had contact with the Western world. Our association with them became friendlier day-by-day. They told us of the origins of the valleys, in accordance with their religion, and how the mountains that rise opposite the monastery are sacred, because they cannot be reached by people, particularly Genyen with its snow-covered north and northeast faces. Were we the men who could discover the secret of Genyen?

With a good weather forecast, Simon Kehrer, Gerold Moroder, Walter Nones, and Karl Unterkircher went up to Camp 1, under the north spur, and slept there at an altitude of 5,000 m. The following day, May 16, after a climb of nine hours, we reached the flat summit of Genyen at 5:40 p.m. Snow conditions had been awful, and there had been steep sections of technically difficult climbing. Out of respect for the mountain's sacred status, we did not stand on the highest point. We then descended the south face, getting below the difficulties before making an improvised bivouac at 1 a.m. By midday on the 17th we were back at base camp.

Enthused by our success and by our meetings with the monks, listening to their beliefs and philosophies, we continued exploring the secret valleys. We discovered that though no one has climbed these mountains, the monks have names for them all. Each name has a divine meaning, representing a god's place of residence, and we won't rename these marvelous peaks.

We were attracted to the ca 5,800m peak of Sachun (the name of a Buddhist god), particularly the sheer granite east face. The monks enthusiastically helped establish Camp 1. However, monsoon-like weather hit the valley. Was it because the gods were angry with us? No, the

monks assured us it was only a meteorological coincidence. However, it rained for a long time. Back at base camp we split into two parties. Walter and Karl decided to cross into one of the lateral valleys, accompanied by two monks, and return to camp by a different route. Gerold and Simon decided to have another crack at Sachun, where they had left their climbing equipment. Their aim was to complete a hard rock route up the east face with one bivouac.

Karl and Walter returned after three days of constant storm. They had unexpected meetings with nomads, yaks, and tropical forest. Karl thought he had broken a rib falling into a river, and the monks had turned back, frightened by the weather. However, Karl and Walter had explored the Zonag Valley, crossed an unnamed 5,160m pass and stumbled upon warm springs. Back at base camp the monks came to congratulate the pair, smiling and showing visible satisfaction. Unfortunately, Simon and Gerold's three-and-a-half-day attempt was unsuccessful, though they got a good distance up the wall.

Our last night was blessed by clear skies and excellent views of Genyen. The true north face, a great route that we did not climb, stands out. We will come back. There is too much we have yet to discover, and the new friends we have found, monks young and old, and orphan children the monks are looking after.

DR. LEONARDO PAGANI *and* KARL UNTERKIRCHER, *Italy*

Editor's note: This appears to be only the second climbing expedition to the massif. The first involved seven climbers from the Himalayan Association of Japan. On June 11, 1988, Tetsuro Itoh, Osamu Takita, and Kazuo Tobita reached the summit of Genyen. The three placed their base camp at 4,350m, below the south ridge of the ca 6,000m east peak of Genyen. They established camps on the ridge at 5,150m and 5,750m, before reaching the east peak and continuing up the connecting ridge to the main summit of Genyen. This information was supplied by Tamotsu Nakamura.

Genyen massif, Sachun, first ascent; Phurba, first ascent. In October Dave Anderson, Molly Loomis, Andy Tyson, and Canadian Sara Hueniken visited the Genyen massif. On the 20th Anderson and Hueniken climbed the long south ridge of Sachun in a 17-hour roundtrip from their high camp. They called the climb Dang Ba 'Dren Pa (5.10+ A0 M5 70°), a Tibetan phrase meaning to inspire, enthuse, and uplift.

The following day Loomis and Tyson climbed a ca 5,685m peak they named Phurba, due to its resemblance to the triple-bladed Tibetan dagger. Leaving base camp they scrambled unroped up loose rock and a steep snow couloir to gain the south ridge, then climbed eight pitches of mixed snow and rock (5.8) to the top. They called the route Naga (Serpent). Loomis and Tyson also climbed the southeast and east face of a peak they called Damaru (ca 5,655m), reaching a point 25 feet below the twin summits. A feature story by Molly Loomis appears earlier in the *Journal*.

DAXUE SHAN

Haizi Shan, 2003 and 2005 attempts. In October 2003 we traveled from Hong Kong to Sichuan by train. We were joined in Kanding by Neil Carruthers, Stephen Wai Wah Yip (Geordie), and Ron Yue, who arrived by plane.

After renting a horse train from the family at the trailhead, we traveled up the Yala Valley to the third lake. We then approached Haizi Shan via a gully leading to a scree fan below and left of the long ridge leading to the north summit. We then ascended an open couloir toward the left side of the north face. The following day we climbed up to and along the glacial ramp that runs parallel to and below the long northeast ridge. Geordie and Damian had started farther left and, early in their ascent, found old 6mm or 7mm fixed rope of the three-ply variety. We reached a rock buttress and from there headed up to the crest of the northeast ridge, arriving at a little rock outcrop and climbing past a broad col to the north summit. The main summit was not too far away, but the intervening ridge looked heavily corniced. Realizing that we would not make it to the top and back down before nightfall, we decided to call it good.

None of us was keen to reverse the route, so from the col we dropped straight down the face onto the glacier and descended this via a series of benches and a couple of rappels over seracs. A loose pitch, led by Geordie, across the little rock buttress gained the ascent route.

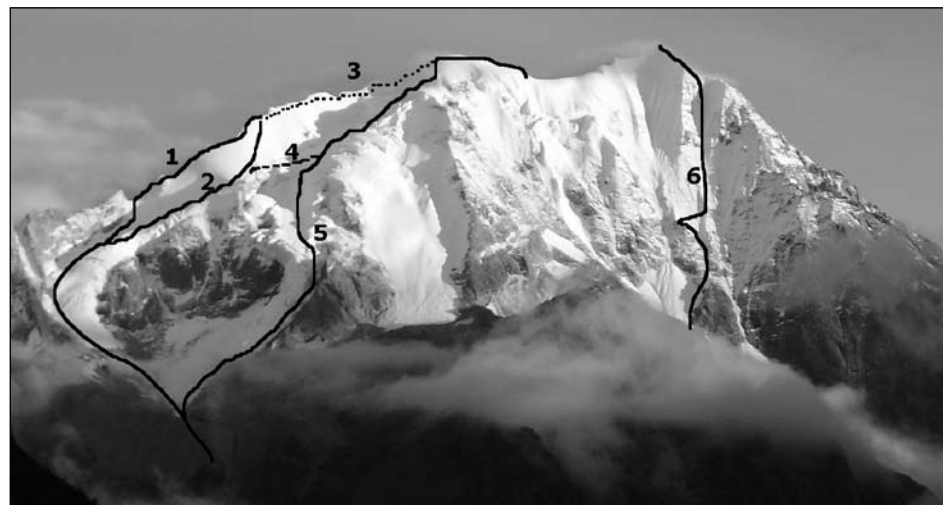
In October 2005 the two of us returned, this time with Benjamin (Benjack) Phillips and Lok Wai Keung. Ho Saam Goh from Rilong came along as base camp manager. We took the same approach to the third Yala lake but this time moved right and went to the right of the waterfall, then up a gully leading to a scree ridge. As we climbed the gully through rhododendrons behind the right side of the lake, we found the way marked by ribbons with Hongol (Korean) script. These looked to be no more than a year or two old. In the rock steps above the waterfall we also came across fixed ropes. We made a bivouac in the boulders at the base of the big rock rib that drops directly from the north summit, right of a large open snow slope. The weather then turned nasty, and we sat out a couple of nights in the boulders before bailing. We noted that this area has recently become more popular with trekkers from Chengdu.

PAUL COLLIS and DAMIAN RYAN, *Hong Kong*

Haizi Shan, northeast ridge, attempt. On April 28 an American expedition led by 83-year-old Fred Beckey arrived in Chengdu. The team included Dave O'Leske, Jeff Wenger, Ralf Sweeney, and I. Our objective was the first ascent of a 5,833m peak called Haizi Shan (a.k.a. Ja-Ra, Zhara, or Yala Peak). Beckey had been eyeing the mountain for over 15 years and had photos of the north and west faces from a trip he made several years ago. While our goal was to climb Haizi Shan, the team's overriding objective was to film Fred in his element, to use in a documentary of his extraordinary life story.

We drove overland to Haizi Shan and established a camp at the end of the valley, under the peak's north face. After several days acclimatizing, we moved the camp, with help from local Tibetan horsemen, to a large lake at the base of the north face. We then established our first camp at 4,580m. Nearby we discovered snow stakes of Korean origin stashed under a boulder. We shuttled gear and food to this camp over several days and then made a summit attempt via the northeast ridge. We were halted by deep snow and the heavily corniced crest. One week later, after waiting out a three-day storm that dropped a few feet of snow accompanied by strong winds, we pushed a weaving route through the icefall directly under the north summit, establishing a second camp at 5,425m. The next day we climbed to the ca 5,700m north summit, experiencing deep snow and hard ice on steeper ground.

Dave and Jeff attempted to traverse across the saddle to the main summit but were stopped by a giant crevasse spanning the ridge and effectively separating Haizi Shan into two peaks. We



Haizi Shan (5,833m) from the north. (1) The first attempt by the 2006 American expedition, which descended from its high point via (2). The combination of (2) and (3) marks the first ascent of the north summit, by a party from Hong Kong in 2003. They descended via the top section of (5) and followed (4) to regain their ascent route. A British party repeated the route in 2004, two climbers continuing toward the main summit as marked. (5) The second attempt by the American party in 2006, climbing the north summit and to the British high point on the connecting ridge to the main summit. This line is believed to have been attempted previously by a Korean expedition. (6) The north face direct, the first ascent of the mountain (Bass-Deavoll, 2006). *Malcolm Bass*

descended from the north summit to Camp 2 and continued down the next day. The weather turned bad again and never gave us an opportunity to mount another attempt. The climbing had been mostly moderate but was made difficult by fresh snow and high winds.

Haizi Shan's north summit had been previously reached, but it is unclear if another team had climbed the route we called the Beckey Direct. In the lower icefall above Camp 1 we found fixed rope, white nylon static like that used in water skiing. We presume this to have been placed for descent by a Korean team.

Fred remained in base camp for most of the trip due to illness, but his mountain-awareness and route-finding proved invaluable to every aspect of the climbing. More importantly, it was a great experience to spend a month in the mountains with the legendary Beckey.

TODD OFFENBACHER, AAC



Climbing through the lower icefall on the north flank of Haizi Shan, during the probable third ascent of the ca 5,700m north summit. The climbers dubbed their line the Beckey Direct, but failed to cross the connecting ridge to the main top. *Todd Offenbacher*



Late in the day, Pat Deavoll rappels the upper couloir on the north face of Haizi Shan after making the first ascent with Malcolm Bass. The two regained their tent (C) that evening. *Malcolm Bass*



Pat Deavoll below the north face of Haizi Shan (5,833m). Deavoll and Malcolm Bass made the coveted first ascent via the big snow gully to the right, which leads directly to the summit ridge right of the highest point. *Malcolm Bass*

Haizi Shan, first ascent. When Pat Deavoll from New Zealand suggested a trip to Sichuan or Tibet, I jumped at the opportunity, especially as Pat had experience of the country from her successful 2005 expedition to Xiashe with the late Karen McNeill. We only had time for a short trip, so Haizi Shan's accessibility from Chengdu commended the mountain to us.

By our reckoning this 5,833m mountain has three commonly used names. Haizi is its Mandarin Chinese name, but local Tibetans call it either Yala or Zhara. It stands in proud isolation on the edge of the Tagong grasslands, and has a reputation as a bad-weather magnet. It had seen about 10 previous attempts, mostly by the long northeast ridge. Photographs of the north side suggested a direct line might be possible up the 1,150m north face to the main summit. Such a line would not only be aesthetically pleasing but hopefully quicker, giving us more chance of snatching an ascent during a typically short weather window.

Getting to the mountain was relatively straightforward, except for an anxious delay while Pat's bags were extricated from the chaos of the new Bangkok airport. A day on good roads took us to Kanding, where we picked up our permit from the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Region Mountaineering Association. The next day's driving was superb, taking us over high grasslands to an inspiring view of the south side of Haizi. The road circled to the west and then around to birch and larch woods north of the mountain. At this point we turned on to a small rough track that took us bumpily past a zinc mine to a grassy camp site. Haizi's north face hung ethereally above.

Over the next eight days we found a way up from the Tai Zhan Valley to the basin beneath the north face, and then spent a few days at 4,500m acclimatizing and face-watching. The route into the basin followed a 400m snow gully through steep lower cliffs and was rather fraught, as it drained the whole basin and north face above. We narrowly escaped obliteration when a serac fell on the north face, 10 minutes after we'd descended the gully.

On October 11 there was snowfall down to the level of base camp. This forced us to delay our first attempt for two days, while we let the face clear. On the 13th we went back up

the gully, into the basin, and camped 200m below the face. The most prominent feature on the north face is an arête dropping from just west of the main summit. Gully systems fall to the foot of the face from either side of this nose. We decided we'd climb a rib between these two gullies, then drop into the right-hand gully and follow it to the west ridge near the summit. On the 14th we climbed 800m onto and then up the rib as planned. Snow conditions varied from firm to knee-deep. The climbing was straightforward; we took turns breaking trail and didn't rope up. There was a shallow couloir, on the rib, that we mostly stayed in, finding snow conditions better. At 5,200m we moved back onto the rib proper and hacked out a tent platform. This was a fine, safe bivouac site, with a good view over the serac-threatened face to the east. The early part of the evening was a bit worrying, as thunderstorms played over the surrounding lower hills, and the odd shower of hail blew in on gusty winds. Eventually the weather passed around and below us and the night grew quiet.

Next morning, with just over 600m to gain, we left the tent pitched and set off into the darkness with light sacks. We made a rising traverse into the right hand couloir, which we reached at dawn. Snow conditions were good, and again we were able to climb unroped, until we encountered loose snow over granite slabs at 5,500m. At this point we roped, as it got a bit scratchy, and belayed two pitches. The best of these was a groove in the gully wall, skirting some particularly blank slabs in the gully bed at about Scottish IV. We stopped belaying and trailed the ropes, leaving the gully and moving left. The cornice at the top of the face took a while to break through, and I asked Pat for a body belay when I became convinced that, having surmounted it, I'd fall down the south face. But this didn't happen, and we were soon able to relax, albeit briefly, on the broad west ridge. As the excitement of having climbed the face faded, tiredness began to tell on our pace. We stayed roped, as the ridge was corniced to the north. Eventually a promising top ahead began to look like a summit. Pat led out, vanishing into the cloud as she surmounted a last step. So far from maritime Scotland and New Zealand, and still not a ropelength of visibility.

And that was it, the summit: a sharp little point above a big northerly cornice. Obliging the clouds parted, and we were enraptured by expansive views west to grasslands, south to the hot springs valley, north to our base camp, visible only as a clearing in the woods, and east to a vividly colored glacial lake. The final section of the oft-attempted northeast ridge looked particularly corniced and resembled a roller coaster.

And then down, rappelling the top of the face in pink evening light and downclimbing into the encroaching gloom, till the GPS guided us onto the traverse back to our tent. We descended to base camp next day, the 16th.

We encountered no problems with bureaucracy throughout the trip. The Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Region Mountaineering Association and our agent Lenny (Chen Zheng Lin) worked well together. There is considerable potential for new routes on Haizi Shan, both on rock ridges and ribs to the west and south, and on steep mixed routes in the couloirs and chimneys between. However, the latter would need to be done early or late in the year.

MALCOLM BASS, *Alpine Club*

Haizi Shan, second ascent. Piecing together the evidence, it appears that the late Christine Boskoff and Charlie Fowler made the second ascent of Haizi Shan on October 22. They appear to have walked into the peak, presumably from the north, and climbed it straight off. However, they were later buried by an avalanche below Genyen, and sadly we will never know the details.

QONGLAI SHAN

SIGUNIANG NATIONAL PARK



The north face of Banji North (5,400m) above the Bipeng Valley. The face was attempted during the winter of 2006 via a line toward the right edge. A marks the high point. Bob Keaty

has become a *voie normale* and sees three or four repeats every year. Jon Otto's company (Otto made the first ascent) guides it at least twice a year (May and October); that's a lot of traffic by Chinese standards.

Driving up to the Bipeng Reception Center, you cannot help but be impressed by Banji North's huge north wall, dominating the southern skyline up and left from the main valley. The face is 600-800m high, and the summit of Banji North is marked as 5,400m on the Chinese topographic map. Banji North is connected by a knife-edge ridge to the main summit, and when I first I photographed these peaks, I began to dream about a traverse along the jagged skyline between the two summits.

On January 21 Cosmin Andron, a Rumanian living in Guangzhou, and I, an American living in Shanghai, arrived at the accommodation in Shanghaizi (3,600m; GPS N 31° 14.776', E 102° 52.778') after driving that day from Chengdu. Cosmin had food poisoning, so the following day we did a couple of new icefalls in the valley. On the 25th we went down to Lixain for a night's sleep in a warm room and the next day, with two porters, walked up to camp in the basin below the wall. A direct line up the center of this wall proved too difficult to access due to deep powder snow, so we chose a line toward the right side. Cosmin led off on granite that was mossy, particularly in the cracks, requiring a lot of cleaning for gear placements. We climbed three pitches before settling down for a cramped bivouac.

The next morning, as the sky lightened, we could clearly see the distant Outaiji, a magnificent lone peak near Heishui. Also visible were spectacular peaks with high icefalls splitting blank rock walls. These lay to the east, probably in the Tazi Valley. There is no shortage of stunning peaks in this area. Most of them have never been explored or named, and none has been climbed. The only difference between these peaks and their counterparts in Europe and the Americas is a climbing history. Once climbers start putting up routes in these mountains, they should be recognized as classic, beautiful climbs. And these mountains are becoming more

Bipeng Valley, Banji North, north face, attempt. Banji (Banji Feng; Half Ridge Peak, 5,430m) was the first main peak to be climbed in the Bipeng Valley. It was first ascended in May 2004 from the west via the drainage that flows down to the valley below (north of) Shanghaizi (see *AAJ 2005*, pp. 418-419). I climbed Banji the following October via the same route. Beyond the approach, the route ascends the north flank of the mountain and is mostly glacier travel of the order Alpine F/PD. It

accessible. A plane ride to Chengdu, followed by a five-hour drive into the canyons, and you are near the base of giants waiting for new lines. The rock quality is great, the avalanche danger relatively low, and the various forms of accommodation are getting more comfortable.

On day two the line was obvious: straight up a dihedral with great cracks. The temperature was only -6°C, though it felt colder because of a chilly wind. The first pitch took three hours, and it was dark by the time we were on the third. The bivouac was as uncomfortable as the previous. The next day we climbed a pitch, before we realized we had bitten off more than we could chew. The route would require more aid gear, food, and fuel, and at least three more days. By evening we had reached the foot of the face and our high camp in the basin.

BOB KEATY, *Shanghai*

Bipeng Valley, Longgesali. On September 3-4 Saburo Mizobuchi, Keiichi Nagatomo, Naoki Ohuchi, and Tomohiro Sugai climbed a new route (400m, 13 pitches, IV A0) on Longgesali (a.k.a. Panyanjuhui, 5,420m). They also made unsuccessful attempts on the pointed rock summit of Pt. 5,513m and Jiang Jun Feng (5,260m).

TAMOTSU NAKAMURA, *Editor, Japanese Alpine News*

Shuangqiao Valley, Daogou West, first ascent. In late September Vaughn Thomas (Australia) and I made the first ascent of the granite peak of Daogou West (5,422m), via the south face. The weather was unstable during most of our stay, with the best weather windows occurring at the end of September and beginning of October.

During one of these good spells we made two attempts on the face, on the second of which we reached the summit. The south face is 600m high, and we climbed it in nine pitches, plus some scrambling, to a foresummit. We then followed the ridge rightward for three more pitches to the base of the main summit, which we climbed in two pitches. The route has 700m of vertical gain and is mostly free rock climbing, with snow ledges and ramps. We made one small pendulum and a 10m rappel to avoid a gendarme in the upper section. The grade was 5.10 A0 and the rock of the highest quality for the entire route.

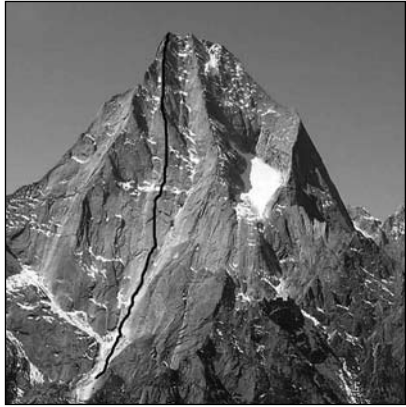
We climbed and descended the route in a day from a bivouac at the foot. We descended mostly by rappel, with a deviation to avoid reversing the ridge. We left a single nut or knotted sling at each anchor. There remain many unclimbed granite ridges and faces in and around the Shuangqiao and Changping valleys, and even a few impressive summits yet to bear a flag.

KESTER BROWN, *Aotearoa/New Zealand*



The south face of Daogou West (5,422m), with the line of the Australian-New Zealand first ascent (700m, 5.10 A0). This side of the mountain is approached from the Shuangqiao Valley. Kester Brown

Editor's note: Daogou West lies in a side valley that drains west into the upper Shuangqiao Gou. It was possibly first visited by climbers in 2000, when Italians Gianluca Belin and Diego Stefani climbed Shuangqiao Peak (a.k.a. Wong Shan). It was visited in 2003 by Andrej and Tanja Grmovsek (see AAJ 2004, pp. 420-422), who climbed the south face of Tan Shan, and in 2005 by Boris Cujic and Ivica Matkovic (see AAJ 2006, pp. 451-453), who climbed three peaks. That same year Americans Chad Kellogg, Joe Puryear, and Stoney Richards climbed Daogou (5,466m) by the south face. They reached the head of the valley from the east, walking up the Chiwen Gorge and crossing a pass (see AAJ 2006, pp. 446-448).



The east face of Celestial Peak (5,413m) above the Changping Valley, showing the line of the new Russian winter route. The left skyline was climbed in 1985 by Keith Brown, solo, while the American first ascent in 1983 was made from the far side via the southwest face. Anna Piunova collection



Ben Clark seconding a pitch of M6 during an unsuccessful attempt on the southwest face of Camel Peak West (5,484m) in the Changping Valley. Josh Butson

Changping Valley, Celestial Peak, east face. From February 7-19 the Russian team of Kolesov, Shelkovnikov, and Sherstnev climbed a major new line up the east face of Celestial Peak (5,413m). The accompanying photograph shows the line but no further details have been forthcoming.

ANNA PIUNOVA, www.mountain.ru, Russia

Changping Valley, Thorn, first ascent; Falcon, first ascent; Camel Peak, southwest face, attempt. In October Josh Butson and I ventured to the Quonglai mountains, inspired by conversations with Charlie Fowler, Keith Brown, and information lifted from recent volumes of the *Japanese Alpine News*. The two of us were hungry for a remote adventure and first ascents on virgin granite. I purchased a plane ticket to Chengdu, armed with a tip from Salt Lake climber Tommy Chandler that our first discovery would be a man named Tong Wei in a bar called the Iced Rock. By the time we found him, we had flown for two days, been held up on the road to Rilong, and pushed a Yugo over a 4,000m pass in a blizzard. On our first overcast morning in the heart of Sichuan, we woke worried and uncertain we were in the right place. We could see no mountains.

We ambled about town, rendezvoused with Tong Wei, and met a government man named Gao Wei. A heated negotiation, tense with cigarette smoke and bulletted by broken but deliberate English, forged an agreement over a stream of Heinikens and \$85US. We hadn't expected contact with the Sichuan Mountaineering Association but its representative, Gao Wei, was fair. We could climb in any style, but not on any mountain. We were granted a permit to explore unclimbed 5,000m peaks in the Changping Goa. It was scrawled on cheap waxy paper.

We hiked from the mouth of the valley with just rucksacks, post-holing through miles of mud deep enough to inhale our plastic boots and exhale belches like a fifth grader. We established a base camp in the hanging valley north of Celestial Peak. The valley, which rises west out of the Changping, was steep and offered little room but ample water. Our first alpine foray was adventurous climbing on two unclimbed 5,000m peaks: a twin-peak formation we called The Thorn and a second peak that looked like a Falcon. We established a run-out 5.9+ on The Thorn and climbed a long steep couloir to a previously unclimbed summit on The Falcon. The couloir was the only weakness in the granite cirque north of Celestial Peak; we found it to be interesting but not altogether difficult: 50°, with third- and fourth-class mixed moves to surmount a small saddle, after which we scooted up to the tiny, exposed summit. We felt The Falcon to be no more than 150m lower than Celestial (5,413m), and as tree line is ca 3,700m, our route, which we named No Cupcake Couloir, must have been ca 1,500m long.

Our final reconnaissance was an endurance march as far up valley as we could see. For four days we approached the unclimbed southwest face of the highest of the previously climbed Camel Peaks [Camel Peak West, 5,484m, first climbed in 1994 by Charlie Fowler]. This face looked demanding, with powder-covered, polished, exfoliating granite slabs, which rose over 600m to a long, steep shoulder.

We burned every bit of the next day's sunlight establishing an absorbing but incomplete route we named Up the Gullet. The climbing was run-out and mixed, with difficulties of AI 5+ 5.7 M8. The pitch of M8 was an unprotected runout up a 35m corner of s'nice. When I returned to the belay after having pounded in the only piece of pro, a stubby LA, and then tenuously rapped down the scrappy corner, Josh commented on what a mentally challenging lead it must have been. I handed the next lead to Josh, and we continued onward, finding more steep, fun climbing through the heart of the throaty route. However, at 6 p.m., when we were over 400m up the face, we became enveloped in winter's icy blast. We were only one overhanging pitch from the long snowfield that led to the summit but decided to bail. Both the rock and the climbing had been great, and we were content, but we were well aware that the weather of the Changping does not forgive.

Darkness stripped away the light as ominously as the featureless granite devoured our 11-pin rack in the maelstrom. Seven rappels led to the wind-scoured ramp below our gully. I dropped to my knees once while blindly traversing the rarely recognizable lower moraine, ready for a night out. Hours passed before the relentless gale ceased, and a momentary break in the cloud revealed the tent. The guy lines were reflecting eerily back at us like a ghost ship. We hugged like brothers and sat outside the tiny structure, finishing our water and flushing our senses.



The Falcon (ca 5,250m), which lies in a cirque on the north side of the hanging valley north of Celestial Peak. Marked is the line of the first ascent, No Cupcake Couloir (ca 1,500m). Ben Clark

The walk out took three more days; our trip total was 27. Wild is the Changping Goa. How lucky we were to have traveled there. How irrevocable our will to return.

BEN CLARK

Changping Valley, Dorsal Peak, first ascent; Jiang Jun Feng, southwest ridge. On April 3 two friends and I found ourselves on top of a previously unclimbed peak for the first time in our lives. This was not the culmination of a lengthy expedition to one of the most remote places in the world, nor the completion of one of the sport's most challenging new routes. Rather, we were in the first half of a three-week trip, climbing at a grade achievable by many enthusiastic mountaineers.

One of the beauties of the Siguniang National Park, an area that has become a popular Chinese tourist destination and hit the climbing headlines in 2002 with Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden's award-winning ascent on Siguniang itself, is its accessibility and lack of bureaucracy. Ian Gibb, Felix Hoddinott, and I left London on a Saturday and were in base camp by Wednesday, largely thanks to our Mr. Fix-It, a man known as Lion, whom we had contacted on the Internet. Lion is a young Chinese climber who has acted as an interpreter/guide for several Western expeditions. He proved to be an invaluable asset, whether arranging park fees, introducing us to boiled rabbit heads, scaring off yaks, or getting the local party official drunk. In Chengdu we were able to buy our food at a large Western-style supermarket and purchase a few items of Black Diamond equipment, after one of us found he had forgotten his harness.

In Rilong we stayed at Mr. Ma's hostel. Although Ma proved to be a skillful negotiator when it came to renting horses to carry our equipment, he was a man of his word and treated us as a family guest. His mother even offered to disinfect Felix's cut finger by having her grandson urinate on it: a rare level of hospitality. With Mr. Ma and his horses, we established base camp at 3,800m, two-thirds of the way up the Changping. On the third day after our arrival, we set off for the northwest ridge of what we named Dorsal Peak, after its distinctive curved arête. Dorsal Peak lies on the east rim of the Changping, south of Peak 5,666m, climbed by Charlie Fowler in 1997, on the ridge running south towards the Siguniang peaks. After a bivouac at 4,200m,



The line taken by the British expedition on the south flank of Peak 5,260m at the head of the Changping Valley. The high point on this unclimbed mountain in Siguniang National Park was ca. 5,000m. *Jeremy Thornley collection*



Looking southwest toward Daogou (5,465m, left) and Daogou West (5,422m) from the north side of the upper Changping Valley. Both peaks have been climbed from the far side; the former by an American team in 2005, and the latter by an Australian-New Zealand pair in 2006. *Jeremy Thornley collection*



Kitting up before an unsuccessful attempt on the unclimbed Peak 5,260m at the head of the Changping Valley. Behind are Putala Shan (5,428m, left) and, closer to the camera, the unclimbed Peak 5,592m (a.k.a. Barbarian Peak). *Ian Gibb*

we were slowed by regularly falling into chest-deep hidden, snow-covered fissures between boulders. The ridge posed a more technical challenge, with delicate traverses across excellent rock covered in powder snow. The summit was a pleasingly small, pointed, 5,050m peak and our route around PD+ in standard. There were no signs of a previous ascent, and we felt confident that our 6mm tat left on top was the first sign of human presence on the mountain.

On the sixth day of relatively stable weather we ascended the path towards Bipeng Pass (4,644m) at the head of the valley. We made a comfortable bivouac in the snow just under the pass, before starting up our second objective: the southwest ridge of the peak immediately east of the pass, known locally as Ding Ding (5,202m). We circumnavigated the initial gendarmes by traversing the south flank of the ridge, then passed through a notch in a subsidiary ridge running north-south. From there we followed a couloir through a rock band to reach an awkward step, which led onto the main ridge and amazing

views. Without an accurate map or knowledge of the summit height, we found the ridge to present a frustrating series of false summits. However, the climbing was enjoyable and became steadily more technical. A delicate step down to an exposed traverse led to steep, exposed snow-smothered rock and finally the fairytale summit. We were disappointed to discover a small but unmistakable cairn, and we subsequently discovered that the peak is also known as Jiang Jun Feng and had been climbed from the Bipeng Valley the previous year by Tommy Chandler and Pat Goodman (see *AAJ 2006*, pp. 445-446). The grade of our ascent, which took place on April 6, was AD.

The second half of the trip was dominated by afternoon snowstorms. Toward the end we made an attempt on the south flank and west ridge of Peak 5,260m, at the head of the Changping, the second peak west of Bipeng Pass. The route seemed feasible and worthwhile (about AD), but we had only reached 5,000m when heavy snowfall forced retreat.

Despite mixed weather, the team had enjoyed their first taste of new ascents in the greater ranges and is grateful to the Mount Everest Foundation and The British Mountaineering Council (U.K. Sport) for supporting the expedition.

JEREMY THORNLEY, *U.K.*



The southwest face of Siguniang IV (the Fourth Sister of Siguniang Shan, a ca 4,950m summit on the long southwest ridge of 6,250m Siguniang) rises out of the jungle above the east side of the Changping Valley. Marked is Suffering First Class (ca 450m, V A3 5.10). *Cosmin Andron*



Cosmin Andron following the initial cracks of Suffering First Class (V A3 5.10), the first route climbed on the southwest face of the ca 4,950m Fourth Sister of Siguniang, Qonglai Shan. *Wai Wah Yip/Cosmin Andron collection*

bad they were off-width, and for most of their length we only had two pieces of gear that would fit. Geordie leapfrogged a Camalot 5, cute and cozy, and a wobbly, screeching 4.5. Above this section we had a roof, then a system of overhangs and chimneys, all seasoned by a several-days downpour, a sprinkle of high winds, and a fist-full of mist.

Ours was the first ascent of the southwest face of Siguniang IV (the Fourth Sister of

Siguniang IV, southwest face. Our initial team of four, which intended a leisurely trip to Siguniang National Park, saw itself reduced to two: Steve Wai Wah Yip (Geordie) and I. We decided to play on granite faces in the Changping Gou, walls that I remembered from a trip the year before. However, our visit turned out jinxed, and it appeared that disasters ready to happen were lurking around every corner. First we missed our flight. Then our luggage was rejected. We were sent to board the plane with ice axes, were turned back again, and missed the next two flights fighting with the challenging-to-deal-with staff of Sichuan Airlines. Then our local fixer didn't show up as agreed, and we ended up overcharged and dumped halfway to base camp by charming porters and their lovely horses. We had to randomly choose a wall, pay more money to have our gear ferried there, and then the weather crapped out. I then got sick. It seemed as though we'd got the perfect recipe for disaster, but we managed to improve on it.

We got onto our wall, a splendid blank face with two parallel cracks running for 200m. Too

Siguniang Shan, a ca 4,950m summit on the long southwest ridge of 6,250m Siguniang). The wall topped out on the ridge, where at 2:45 a.m. on June 8 we intersected a previously climbed route. However, we were unable to follow it to the summit due to time constraints. We climbed the 400-450m wall bolt-free (and in places brain-free) and left behind only a few pegs, nuts, and slings for rappel anchors.

We named our route Suffering First Class and graded it V A3 5.10. However, getting to and back from the route got A6 in my book. I'm entirely to blame, because when our teacher was instructing my classmates to the meaning of "monsoon," I was playing truant and bouldering on the school's wall. As she said, "You can learn things the easy way or the hard way." I made my choice.

As we descended the wall after a 24-hour day, a belay in an expando crack blew, nearly sending me to the valley floor air express. Somehow we got off the wall with all limbs attached, to find out that we were again hijacked by our porters, who refused, halfway through the descent, to take us to the nearest village. This would have meant we were doomed, once again, to miss our flights. For me this included the one back to my home country, Romania. Finally, after a shouting championship, we concluded our 36-hour day in the van taking us to Chengdu's airport. To top it all we received a \$300 fine for not having a climbing permit (which our fixer was supposed to have arranged) and later realized that the porters had lost some of our precious gear. The last mix-up that befell us was that by mistake we ended up flying...first class. Somehow this made for a happy ending.

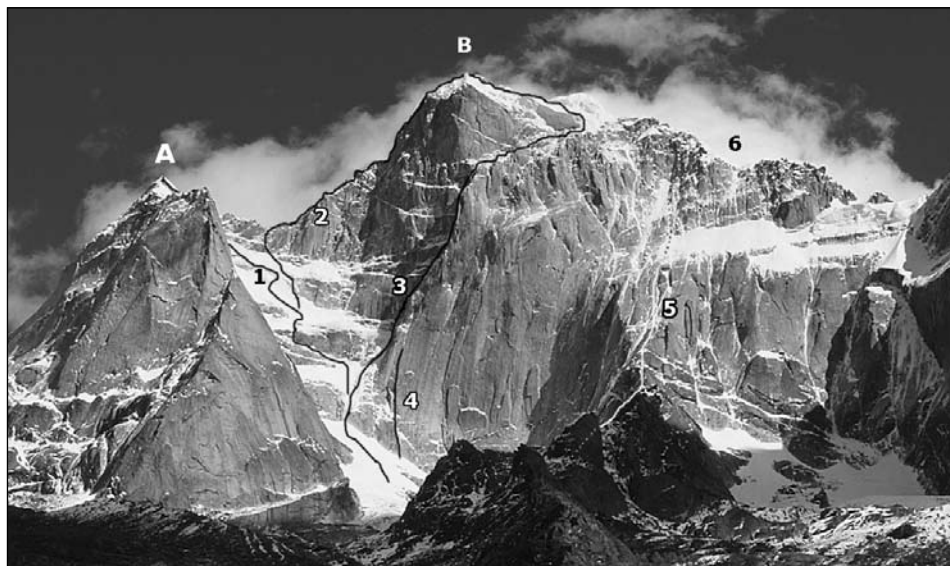
So, I'm writing this report sitting on my Zion haul bag, which I'll be sending this afternoon to Chengdu. And guess where are we headed next Saturday? Yep! But I've heard that in winter it doesn't rain.

COSMIN ANDRON, *Guangzhou, China*

Siguniang, south face to southwest ridge, not to summit; Siguniang North, first ascent, southwest face. I'm at 5,500m. The ice is hard. My crampons rebound, blunted after three weeks. For the last eight years in Haute Savoie the Committee of the French Alpine Club has selected people 16-26 years old for a "young alpinists" group. For two years the young men and women are trained in various aspects of mountaineering by a professional guide, and at the end of this period they organize an expedition. In 2006 the project was a new route on Siguniang (6,250m) in Sichuan, an area still ignored by many Europeans but having exceptional potential.

Our flight landed in Chengdu on October 9. Chengdu is a model of the modern Chinese city, soaked in Western culture. With McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, posters for Oréal, Cartier, Vuitton, Sony, it doesn't correspond to my image of a communist country; the Cultural Revolution seems far away. The city appears to be under construction, with 40-floor apartment blocks. There are many cars: Is Audi the symbol of the new Communism? Is China becoming modernized too quickly? Economists calculate that if the 1.2 billion Chinese had the same amount of stuff as Westerners, there would be no more oil on the planet in 20 years.

The road to Rilong has been greatly upgraded since the Siguniang National Park became a World Heritage Site. In Rilong, Audis are replaced by horses and yaks. The walk to our base camp at 3,500m in the Changping Valley takes four hours. Our site is next to a wooden hut, where two Tibetans live. They have no running water or electricity, just a wood stove. They have a few pigs and yaks, and sell kebabs to Chinese tourists.

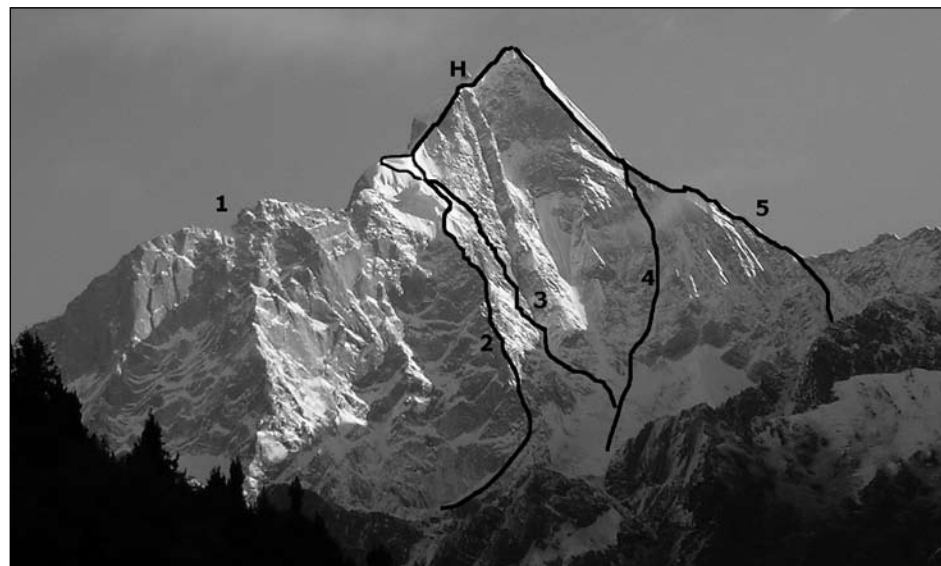


(A) Siguniang North (5,700m) and (B) Siguniang (6,250m) from the west-northwest. (1) Southwest face (V 4+ M4, Batoux-Blair-Bodin-Jacquemond-Rolinet-Valla, 2006). (2) North ridge, used in descent by Fowler and Ramsden after their ascent of the north couloir. (3) North couloir - The Inside Line (WI 6, Fowler-Ramsden, 2002). (4) Northwest buttress attempted in 2005 by an American team. (5) Northwest face, with the proposed line attempted by Americans in 1981 and British in 2004. The solid line ends at the approximate high point of 5,400m. (6) The unclimbed southwest ridge. *Philippe Batoux*

Maile, our translator, has always lived in Beijing and Chengdu, and it is his first time outside a large city. He is so happy to discover the Milky Way and a billion other stars. The pollution in Chinese cities only allows people to see the most brilliant planets. Chengdu and Rilong: two cities in the same China but separated by 100 years.

The mountains of Siguniang are splendid. The peaks are of the most beautiful granite, smooth and compact, a Yosemite Valley with virgin tops between 5,000 and 6,000m. Jérôme Berton, Guillaume Blair, Guillaume Bodin, Clément Jacquemond, Aurélie Lévêque, David Rolinet, Théo Valla, and I hoped to climb the prominent central couloir on the south face of Siguniang. However, last autumn this gully, more than 1,000m high, was quite dry and the top section completely rocky. Instead, we chose a steep ice line leading out left, up the right side of the rock pillar taken by the eight-member Japanese team, which in 1992 sieged the south buttress and upper southwest ridge to make the second ascent of the mountain. [The French line may be similar to that tried by a Russian team, which attempted a route west of the central couloir but was forced down by stonefall and avalanches—Ed.]

We established a high camp at 5,000m and fixed 500m of rope on the initial difficulties. On October 24 we tried to make a one-day lightweight push to the summit. Leaving camp at 1 a.m., we jumared the ropes and continued on the upper snow slopes, crossing the Japanese Route to reach the crest of the southwest ridge. Here we were slowed by poor conditions. At 5,950m a horizontal rocky ridge, covered in soft snow and impossible to protect, barred the way. An accident at this point would have been serious. Some of the team were already quite tired. It was now 3 p.m. If we continued to the summit, we would certainly have had to bivouac



The south face of Siguniang (6,250m) above the Changqing Valley. (1) The long unclimbed southwest ridge. (2) South buttress and upper southwest ridge (Japanese, July 1992, eight climbers led by Chiharu Yoshimura, 600m of fixed rope). (3) The 2006 French attempt, which joined the upper section of (2) and reached a high point H, using 500m of fixed rope. Russians have also attempted a line in this vicinity. (4) South face and southeast ridge (Charlie Fowler, solo, September 1994 in alpine style). (5) Original route via the southeast ridge (Japanese, July 1981, Suita and Sumiya were the first to summit, 2,000m of fixed rope). *Philippe Batoux*

above 6,000m without equipment. I made the decision to go down. The difficulties of our incomplete line, which joined the existing Japanese route on the ridge, were V (WI) 4 M5+.

Four days later we made an attempt on the original 1981 Japanese Route on the southeast ridge, but more bad snow and cold forced us down from 5,600m.

We returned to base camp for a new objective, Siguniang North (5,700m). At 2 a.m. on November 1 all except Berton and Lévêque left the camp at 4,500m and started up the southwest face. This is the open snow and ice slope left of (and opposite) the northwest face Siguniang and was partially followed in descent by Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden after their successful ascent of the stunning north-facing couloir, The Inside Line.

The face was granite flagstone, covered by a 5cm layer of snow and ice. The ice was good. The climbing wasn't difficult, but we couldn't protect ourselves. Higher, a mixed section, followed by a short vertical ice wall formed by a bergschrund, led to the summit slopes. A ridge led to the highest point. Our joy at being the first to reach this summit was immense. The difficulties of our route were V WI4+ M4.

On our way back to Rilong, we detoured to look at the Shuangqiao, the parallel valley west of the Changqing. This valley is famous for its icefalls: more than 50 higher than 400m. Most end up at 5,000m. These lines were not in condition, but there was another surprise. Less than a day's walk from the road we saw several granite walls at least 1,000m high, major objectives to justify many trips to this land of pandas. This is the new Eldorado, and I believe part of alpinism's future development will take place on these walls.

PHILIPPE BATOUX, *France*