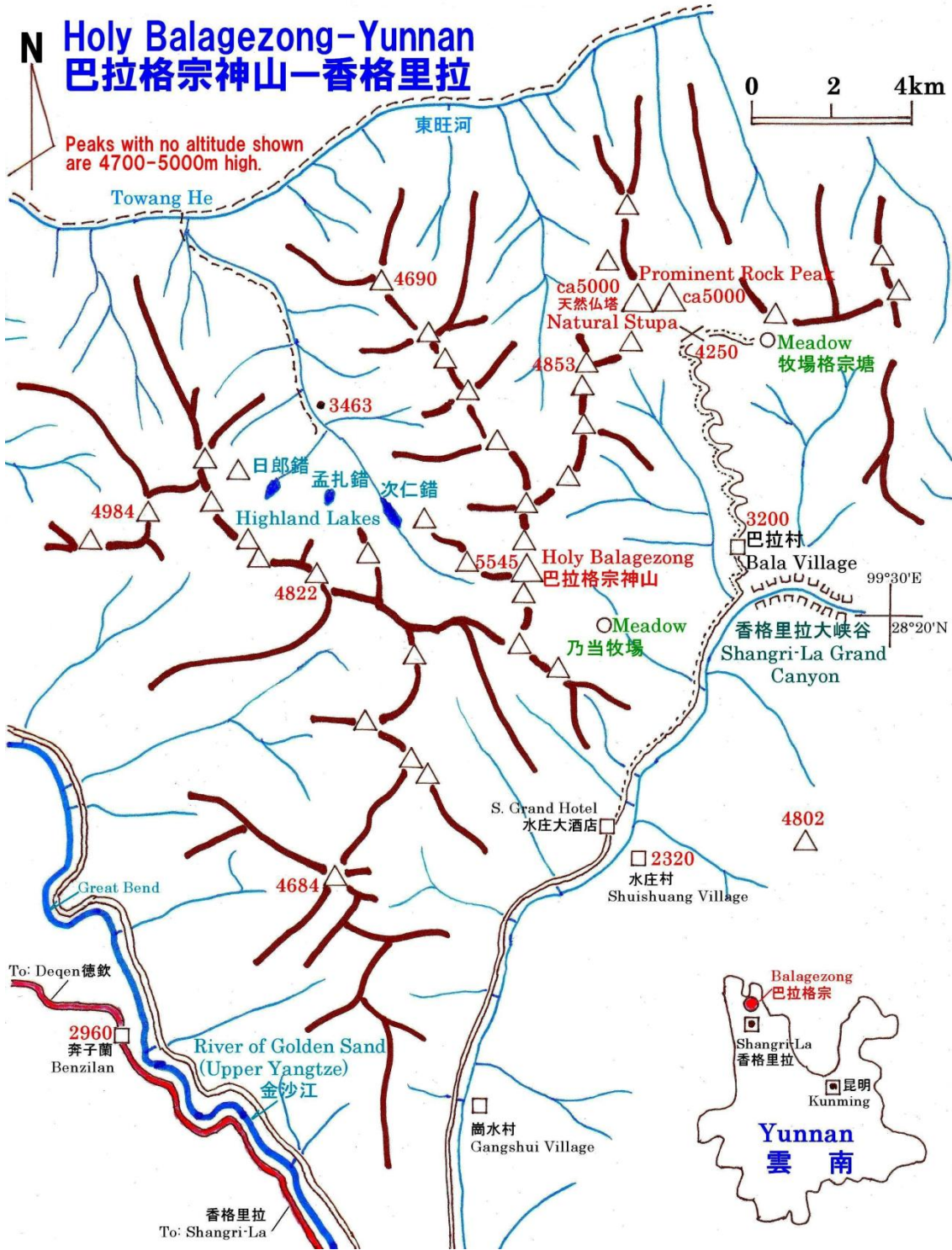


Tamotsu (Tom) Nakamura

Holy Mountain Balagezong

Future Climbing Paradise in Shangri-La, Yunnan





Holy Balagezong 5545m (center: highest peak) east face viewed from near Bala Village

Remembrance of William M. Bueler

In January of 2004 a letter came from William M. Bueler living in Colorado. It contained a brief note of his reconnaissance of Balagesong with maps and pictures in October 2003 and his book "**Roof of the Rockies—A History of Colorado Mountaineering**". Our contact had begun through the American Alpine Journal and the Japanese Alpine News. I knew of this soaring peak since I had seen it far in distance in 1993.

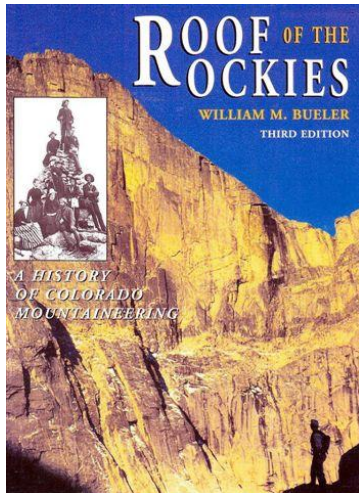
To my best knowledge he was the first to have reconnoitered Balagezong for attempting to climb. In the next month, however, he told me that tumor had suddenly been found and it was difficult to write because of being paralyzed on one side. Subsequently in April the following sorrowful letter arrived from her wife.

Dear Mr. Nakamura, 10 April 2004

I am sad to inform you that my husband Bill (William M. Bueler) died on 6 April of the brain tumor of which he had informed you. But we received your card with its information and beautiful mountain picture in fine for me to read it to him and for him to be pleasure that you had received and would be able to use his information. Thank you for your correspondence with Bill. His travels to the Sino Tibetan borderlands were the great adventures of his last ten years and he enjoyed those adventures to the full. He felt that you were a kindred spirit.

Gratefully,

Lois Bueler (Mrs. William M. Bueler)



Bueler's book

West face of Balagezong—both Bueler and Nakamura had a look.

Since then, Balagezong has long been being stayed in my mind for exploring someday in future. But time has lapsed for more than a decade. After William Bueler, Damien Gildea, an expert of the Antarctic mountaineering paid attention and later Dr. Liu Yong, the Sichuan University entered twice the mountain, but he did no climbing. In May, 2016, a chance came to Nakamura.

Accelerative Tourism Development

Mountain scenic places are in a hive of industry in Yunnan and Sichuan. Tourism development is progressing in a tremendous speed. New roads with bridges and tunnels are under construction through mountains and valleys wherever we go in the frontier. Driving distance is becoming shorter. Traditional industry such as agricultures is being replaced with tourism industry. In fact many tourists are rushing from an every corner of China. The Dagu Glacier Scenic Park has a rope way to 4800m lookout point. It is only one day drive north from Chengdu is busy in autumn leaves season.

You may get to Degen (Atuntze, a field of early explorations, famous for Meili Snow Mountains) in 3.5 hours pleasant drive from Shangri-L (Zhongdian). It previously took a full day. However I have been inattentive for my studies on Balagezong and not known of such rapid change of Shangri-La. 4 stars and 5 stars hotels entertain visitors at Shuishuang 2320m, a base for sightseeing. 13 years ago it took 8 days on foot for Bueler to trek to Balagezong for reconnaissance. Now less than two hours drive carries us from Shangri-La airport to hotels in Shuishuang (Balagezong is an important project which

is a policy of the Shanggri-L County with overriding priority. The County has already invested 800 million RMB.

Main attractions are as follows

1. Holy Mountain Balagezong 5545m is called “Gezongsongben” in Tibetan turned from three beautiful princesses in legend. These peaks, Natural Stupa (Shangbala Stupa) ca 5000m and other prominently soaring strange rock peaks (4700-5000m), alluring alpine meadows, and mysterious high mountain lakes are impressive and attractive. All peaks are untrodden and remain unclimbed. Contrast with fascinating peaks enchants visitors.
2. At a meeting point of Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet, Balagezong is fascinating for brilliant Shangri-la Grand Canyon. The magnificent canyon captivates tourists as 2.5km artificially-made hanging path ensures safe walking and they enjoy river rafting in return. In the typical “U Shape canyon, the cliff with 200-1000m drop is exciting.
3. Bala at 3200m is a typical Tibetan hamlet. “Bala” means “A Tibetan village which came from Batang, Sichuan”. Some 300 years ago a Khamba family sought for a paradise, an ideal homeland with no warfare and misery, and finally settled down here after overcoming hardship to migrate to unknown place. Tibetan style wooden houses are layer-built along the mountain side.

Controls and Regulations being tightened – Paradox of Development

As tourism development progresses, controls over the Tibetans have been becoming tighter and tighter. When you travel through eastern Tibet, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan, you would often come across a board “New Village” in roadside. Tibetans and other minorities living in remote areas are being forced to move to the houses newly built near by a main road, so that the local government may easily control villagers.

Old villages and trails are abandoned and thus less populated in the remote areas. This must be said a paradox of development.

Stronger control over Tibetan

My Tibetan guide, Gerong, who lives in Deqen, has complained that he could not go out to foreign countries. Even though he became a member of the Communist Party, the County government does not allow him to renew his passport since he visited Dharamshala last year. Awang, a Tibetan guide of Lhasa, is also not allowed to have a new passport after he returned from Nepal and India two years ago.

[Note] The Tibetan settlement of Dharamshala began in 1959, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama had to flee Tibet and the Prime Minister of India allowed him and his followers to settle in McLeodGanj (in Upper Dharmshala), a former colonial British summer picnic spot. There they established the "**government-in-exile**" in 1960. Now Tibetans over 6000 live in Dharamshala.

The Xi Jinping administration is strengthening control and watching of Tibetans. In Sichuan, for example, Tibetans in Danba County, one day drive to northwest from Chengdu, are required to have a permit of the local government for going to Lhasa, whilst Han Chinese may freely travel to Lhasa.

Controls over foreigners

Restrictions over foreigners to enter eastern Tibet are getting tighter and further strengthened. Before two – three years ago, foreigners were able to enter eastern Tibet by roads both from Yunnan and Sichuan. Now it is impossible. Foreigners cannot travel from Deqen (Yunnan) to Yanjing/Markam (Tibetan Autonomous Region=TAR) crossing provincial border by road. They are unable to cross the Jinsha Jiang (Upper Yangtze), provincial border of Tibet-Sichuan Highway, from Batang (Sichuan) to Markam (TAR). Foreigners are off-limit to Qamdo Prefecture, formerly a forbidden city. Tsawarong along upper Salween (Nujiang) northwest of Meili Snow Mountains is the same. Damyon, a mountain of Goddess is inaccessible.

My friend, Secretary of Sports Administration Center of TAR mentions that a procedure for foreigners to obtain a permit to enter un-open areas is becoming more complicated and time-wasting.

Journey in May – Rainy season starting

Members are elderly Tom Nakamura (81) and Tsuyoshi Nagai (83) as usually. Period was from May14 to 29. Journey started from Chengdu. Direct (non-stop) flight Tokyo-Chengdu of All Nippon Airways is convenient. We flew from Chengdu to Shangri-La of Yunnan. We planned [Stage I] Yunnan-Balagezong and [Stage II] Sichuan-Dagu Glacier Scenic Park and reconnaissance of least-known 5500m massif in the vicinity. However, bad weather continued and there was no harvest to note in Sichuan. Therefore only [Stage I] Balagezong is reported here.

May 16: Rainy season has already started. Hoping a luck of [Man of Blue Sky] Tom Nakamura, we took off Chengdu at 07:30 and stood in Shangri-La airport 3230m at 08:30. Cloudy, 9°C. Old friends, Lu Weidong (Nakamura's agent in Kunming) and Gerong, Tibetan guide of Deqen welcomed us at the airport and soon began to drive to Balagezong.

New highway led us to the junction of Jinsha Jiang (upper Yangtze) and a tributary, Gang Qu, to Balagezong through tunnels and bridges along mountain sides to short-cut the old road. We arrived at Suishuang Grand Hotel 2320m, a base for sightseeing at 11:00. Distance from the junction to Shuishuang is 17km. From here private cars are not allowed to go farther for environmental protection. Shuttle buses are operated. In the afternoon we ran up to Bala village by zigzag road through canyon and then to a pass 4250m of Natural Stupa (Shangbala Stupa).

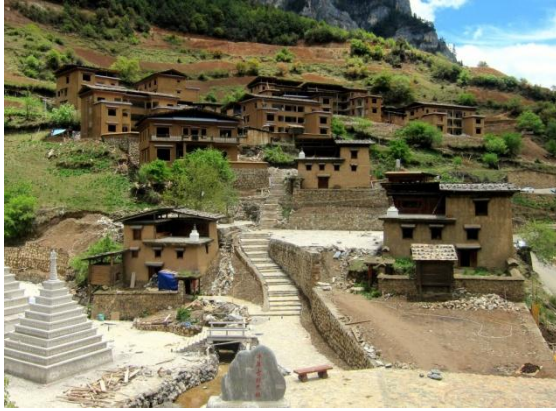
To our disappointment, however, there was no visibility because of cloud, rain and fog. Distance from Shuishuang to Bala village is 17km and from Bala village to the pass of 4250m is 23km. We stayed at new Tibetan style in Bala village.



New bridge of Yunnan-Tibet Highway



Suishuang Grand Hotel (4 stars)



Bala village 3200m, 14 new houses



Shangri-La Grand Canyon

May 17: Rain, Bala village, 09:00, 8°C. No sign of improvement of weather. To make use of time efficiently we went to Deqen 3200m of Meili Snow Mountains. We crossed Baimang Shan Pass 4280m (snowing).

May 18: Rain, Deqen, 06:30, 6°C. Meili Snow Mountains were in the cloud. We returned from Deqen to Shuishuang and in the afternoon we went to Shangri-La Grand Canyon for sightseeing.

Future Climbing Paradise

May 19: Cloudy-fine, Shuishuang, 07:00, 13°C. After one week, the long waited good weather returned. This was the only chance to have a look of the mountains. We chartered a shuttle bus and were in a hurry to the pass of Natural Stupa via Bala village where east face of Balagezong overwhelmingly towered beyond valley. As ascending zigzag path from Bala village to the pass of Natural Stupa east face of unique rock peaks of 4700-5000m appeared in succession. Though these peaks were only a part of Balagezong massif, they were magnificent and fascinating. We were deeply touched.

We were happy to have taken advantages of only three hours fine weather. We returned to Chengdu on May 22 via Lijiang of Yulong Snow Mountains. Though it was a short journey we were lucky to unveil a part of the Climbing Paradise in Shangri-La.

Photo gallery of Holy Mountains Balagezong and other outstanding rock peaks in the massif would help to know the mountains in Shangri-La.

Photo Gallery of Balagezong and 4700-5000m Rock Peaks





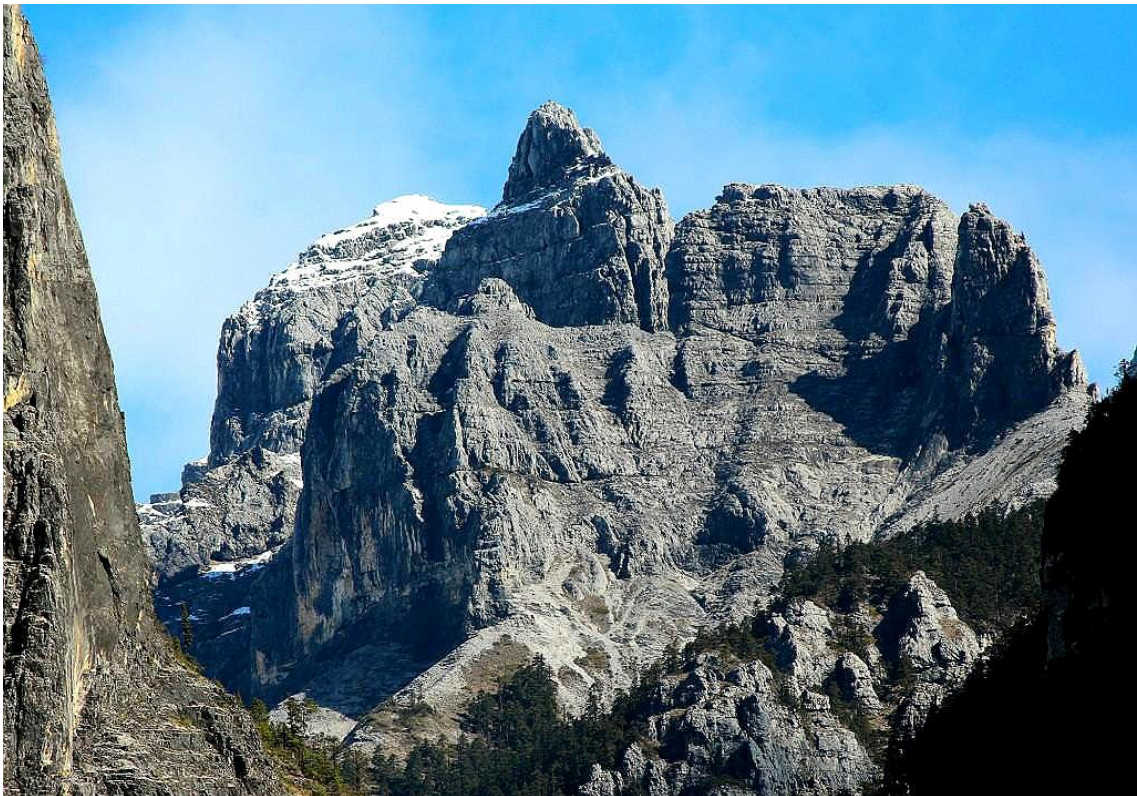
Natural Stupa (Shangbala Stupa) ca 5000m south face



Immediate east of Natural Stupa, prominent rock peak ca 5000m south face



Balagezong 5545m (main peak, left) viewed from Bala village



View from Bala village to north: left behind -Natural Stup, front –rock peak ca 4800m

