

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 Kawarani 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 Kawarani I and II. From there it appeared possible to reach the ca. 5,500m col between Kawarani 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