Changping Valley, Dorsal Peak, first ascent; Jiang Jun Feng, southwest ridge. On April 3 two friends and I found ourselves on top 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,
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.

**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 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...