



Looking north into the Tza-Leh Xueshan. The most distant peaks lie on the Yunnan-Tibet border. The highest distant peak, which presents a snowy face split by a rock rib, is Peak 5,600m, climbed by the right skyline ridge. *Booth Haley*

YUNNAN PROVINCE

Tza-leh Xueshan, Peak 5,600+m. Juan-Antonio Puyol and I visited Yunnan because it is largely unexplored. The only information we found for our chosen area on the Mekong-Yangtze divide in the Hengduan Range came from a report by Tom Nakamura in AAJ 2003, which noted that north of the 4,292m road pass (Baima Shan Pass) southeast of Deqen lie the Jiazi Xueshan and Tza-leh Xueshan, groups having a number of 5,000m peaks. The only recorded ascent is of a ca 5,300m summit east of the pass, climbed in April 1998 by Damien Gildea, who also reconnoitered an approach to Zhalachoni (5,429m), the highest summit in the Baimang Xueshan, south of the pass. We settled on Tza-leh, or Cali as Chinese maps call it. The peaks there are very close to Tibet, and crossing the frontier requires special permits. Nakamura's map of the region showed Tza-leh to be 5,534m. I also procured from the U.W. Library a copy of Russian maps from 1942, the only topographic maps available of the area (in China such maps either don't exist or are not sold to civilians). This shows the highest peak of the Cali as 5,621m. According to the map, a second summit also exceeds 5,600m. From discussion with locals we learned that no individual peak bears the name Cali; only the group bears that name. We arrived at Zhongdian (Xianggelila or Shangri La) in January 2008 and made a 10-hour bus ride north to the Yangla Copper Mine (Yangla Tongshan, N 28°55', E99°5'). From there we hiked west for two days before setting up a high camp at 4,700m. Navigating towns and trails in China is possible for me because I speak Chinese. At this time of year the range is bone-dry and freezing. In the shade we found old foot-deep powder snow. We spent the next two days scrambling and acclimatizing, then on day five made a big push for the more southerly 5,600m summit. It was third-class rock, quite crumbly, but with an exposed snow finish on the southeast ridge. The summit is on the Tibet-Yunnan border at N 28°52', E 98°58'.

We don't recommend the Cali group to prospective climbers. The rock is bad, and the summits are gentle. However, to the west, in Tibet proper, northeast of Meili Xueshan but still east of the Mekong, we saw many impressive peaks that would be worthy of exploration. The approach would follow the A-dong River, a north-south Mekong tributary north of Deqin, until the path reaches a high pass leading into Tibet.

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