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
became restless and walked up to Camp 1. The route followed small, skinny couloirs. I placed camp in a large boulder field on the north side of the west-southwest ridge. The following day the entire team made the trip to Camp 1.

On the 26th Chen Cheng, Su Rongqin, Ma Yihua, and I, all guides working with the Arête Alpine Instruction Center in Chengdu, climbed to Camp 2 at 5,010m. The route followed the north face of the west ridge. When we reached the crest, the wind was howling, blowing directly from the south. We made camp on the leeward side, and Su Rongqin descended to base camp that evening.

A two-day storm had deposited a thick layer of unconsolidated snow on the primarily rocky ridge above, where initially the solid-granite crest was stepped, a horizontal section generally being followed by a steep rock face. Wind and blowing snow plagued our entire ascent, and the route proved very time-consuming. Two sections involved sack-hauling, while a few others required the leader to climb without a pack, then rappel and jumar back up with his sack.

We spent the night of the 27th in a half-erected tent on a small ledge at 5,250m. The next day we only managed to climb 147 vertical meters. The following morning we avoided the crest by a snow slope on the right, but when forced back to the ridge, were surprised to find it changed in character: narrower, steeper, and composed of large unstable blocks. Progress on less-steep sections often involved gingerly crawling along the crest, while the vertical parts involved climbing difficult rock in boots and crampons. One small section required easy aid.

We sited the last camp at a little over 5,500m, but by the afternoon of the following day, with obviously looser rock above, we realized we were not going to make the summit by the ridge. At 6 p.m., a little more than 200 vertical meters below the summit, we decided to rappel into the gully on the left. The gully would not only provide a campsite for the night, but hopefully we could downclimb it to a point where it met other couloirs, one of which we might be able to follow directly to the summit ridge.

We did not make a conscious decision to abandon our route that evening, but once we'd started rappelling, we kept going down. We descended for 15 hours through the night, enduring a storm with erratic, bitter cold winds and whipping spindrift, and finally reaching base camp at 9 a.m. on the 31st. Concentration during the descent was so great that at 10:47 p.m. an earthquake measuring 4.2 on the Richter Scale, with an epicenter just 20km away, occurred unnoticed. We rated the climb to our high point Alpine TD 5.10 A0. Despite a number of attempts to date, Yala remains unclimbed.

JON OTTO, AAC and Arête Alpine Instruction Center, Chengdu, China

QONGLAI SHAN

SIGUNIANG NATIONAL PARK

Jiang Jun Feng, Bipeng Valley, first ascent. Chris Chitty, Pat Goodman, Ari Menitove and I were to travel to the Qionglai Range to explore and make first ascents in the Shuangqiao Valley. However, during planning before we left for China, we heard about an adjacent valley called the Bipeng, which had only become easily accessible two years ago, because of a new road. This valley lies north of the Shuangqiao and just across a ridge from our primary objectives, but is