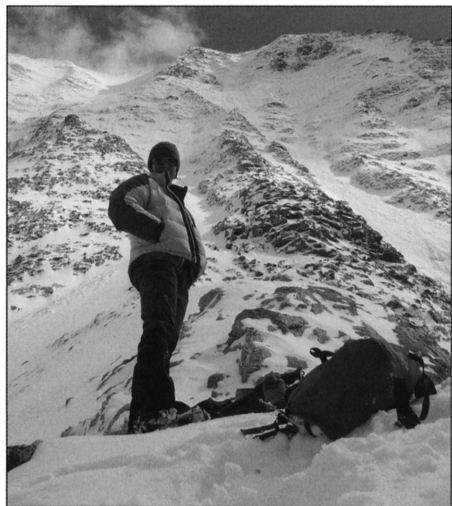




Late in the day, Pat Deavoll rappels the upper couloir on the north face of Haizi Shan after making the first ascent with Malcolm Bass. The two regained their tent (C) that evening. *Malcolm Bass*



Pat Deavoll below the north face of Haizi Shan (5,833m). Deavoll and Malcolm Bass made the coveted first ascent via the big snow gully to the right, which leads directly to the summit ridge right of the highest point. *Malcolm Bass*

*Haizi Shan, first ascent.* When Pat Deavoll from New Zealand suggested a trip to Sichuan or Tibet, I jumped at the opportunity, especially as Pat had experience of the country from her successful 2005 expedition to Xiashe with the late Karen McNeill. We only had time for a short trip, so Haizi Shan's accessibility from Chengdu commended the mountain to us.

By our reckoning this 5,833m mountain has three commonly used names. Haizi is its Mandarin Chinese name, but local Tibetans call it either Yala or Zhara. It stands in proud isolation on the edge of the Tagong grasslands, and has a reputation as a bad-weather magnet. It had seen about 10 previous attempts, mostly by the long northeast ridge. Photographs of the north side suggested a direct line might be possible up the 1,150m north face to the main summit. Such a line would not only be aesthetically pleasing but hopefully quicker, giving us more chance of snatching an ascent during a typically short weather window.

Getting to the mountain was relatively straightforward, except for an anxious delay while Pat's bags were extricated from the chaos of the new Bangkok airport. A day on good roads took us to Kanding, where we picked up our permit from the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Region Mountaineering Association. The next day's driving was superb, taking us over high grasslands to an inspiring view of the south side of Haizi. The road circled to the west and then around to birch and larch woods north of the mountain. At this point we turned on to a small rough track that took us bumpily past a zinc mine to a grassy camp site. Haizi's north face hung ethereally above.

Over the next eight days we found a way up from the Tai Zhan Valley to the basin beneath the north face, and then spent a few days at 4,500m acclimatizing and face-watching. The route into the basin followed a 400m snow gully through steep lower cliffs and was rather fraught, as it drained the whole basin and north face above. We narrowly escaped obliteration when a serac fell on the north face, 10 minutes after we'd descended the gully.

On October 11 there was snowfall down to the level of base camp. This forced us to delay our first attempt for two days, while we let the face clear. On the 13th we went back up

the gully, into the basin, and camped 200m below the face. The most prominent feature on the north face is an arête dropping from just west of the main summit. Gully systems fall to the foot of the face from either side of this nose. We decided we'd climb a rib between these two gullies, then drop into the right-hand gully and follow it to the west ridge near the summit. On the 14th we climbed 800m onto and then up the rib as planned. Snow conditions varied from firm to knee-deep. The climbing was straightforward; we took turns breaking trail and didn't rope up. There was a shallow couloir, on the rib, that we mostly stayed in, finding snow conditions better. At 5,200m we moved back onto the rib proper and hacked out a tent platform. This was a fine, safe bivouac site, with a good view over the serac-threatened face to the east. The early part of the evening was a bit worrying, as thunderstorms played over the surrounding lower hills, and the odd shower of hail blew in on gusty winds. Eventually the weather passed around and below us and the night grew quiet.

Next morning, with just over 600m to gain, we left the tent pitched and set off into the darkness with light sacks. We made a rising traverse into the right hand couloir, which we reached at dawn. Snow conditions were good, and again we were able to climb unroped, until we encountered loose snow over granite slabs at 5,500m. At this point we roped, as it got a bit scratchy, and belayed two pitches. The best of these was a groove in the gully wall, skirting some particularly blank slabs in the gully bed at about Scottish IV. We stopped belaying and trailed the ropes, leaving the gully and moving left. The cornice at the top of the face took a while to break through, and I asked Pat for a body belay when I became convinced that, having surmounted it, I'd fall down the south face. But this didn't happen, and we were soon able to relax, albeit briefly, on the broad west ridge. As the excitement of having climbed the face faded, tiredness began to tell on our pace. We stayed roped, as the ridge was corniced to the north. Eventually a promising top ahead began to look like a summit. Pat led out, vanishing into the cloud as she surmounted a last step. So far from maritime Scotland and New Zealand, and still not a ropelength of visibility.

And that was it, the summit: a sharp little point above a big northerly cornice. Obliging the clouds parted, and we were enraptured by expansive views west to grasslands, south to the hot springs valley, north to our base camp, visible only as a clearing in the woods, and east to a vividly colored glacial lake. The final section of the oft-attempted northeast ridge looked particularly corniced and resembled a roller coaster.

And then down, rappelling the top of the face in pink evening light and downclimbing into the encroaching gloom, till the GPS guided us onto the traverse back to our tent. We descended to base camp next day, the 16th.

We encountered no problems with bureaucracy throughout the trip. The Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Region Mountaineering Association and our agent Lenny (Chen Zheng Lin) worked well together. There is considerable potential for new routes on Haizi Shan, both on rock ridges and ribs to the west and south, and on steep mixed routes in the couloirs and chimneys between. However, the latter would need to be done early or late in the year.

MALCOLM BASS, *Alpine Club*

*Haizi Shan, second ascent.* Piecing together the evidence, it appears that the late Christine Boskoff and Charlie Fowler made the second ascent of Haizi Shan on October 22. They appear to have walked into the peak, presumably from the north, and climbed it straight off. However, they were later buried by an avalanche below Genyen, and sadly we will never know the details.