Chengdu to and from Rilong can either be by public bus or by private vehicle. For public transportation, expect to pay around 100 Yuan (about 13 USD) per person, plus an extra per-bag fee. The bag fee is usually negotiable but can be upwards of 50 Yuan (6.50 USD) per bag. For a private van that can easily hold four climbers plus gear, expect to pay 1,800–2,000 Yuan (240–266 USD). Horses can also be hired in Rilong and run from 200–300 Yuan (about 26–40 USD) per horse. It is feasible to take a single load or ferry loads up to base camp as well. Contrary to what foreign climbers might think, the first “pure alpine” ascents (those climbs that left from the trailhead without the use of horses) were made long ago by the likes of Charlie Fowler, and before him by local climbing guides. Also, yaks pose no threat in the valley and are quite afraid of humans.

Climbing in the Qionglai Mountains of Sichuan Province is going to change dramatically over the next couple of years. The Chinese government is actively promoting the area for tourism, and Rilong is undergoing major changes. The small mountain road from Chengdu to Rilong is being overhauled and widened into a superhighway of sorts in order to handle the expected onslaught of visitors. Many of the residents of Rilong are being evicted from their homes in the main area of town, where the government wants to build hotels and other large tourist facilities. Some of the residents’ families have lived in these homes for over 300 years. (Tibetans have resided in the valley for over a thousand years.) Compensation for their homes is minimal. In addition the government plans to build a gondola to a sacred hilltop where there are several stupas that look out toward Mt. Siguniang. Other changes already implemented include the reconstruction and expansion of a 3km boardwalk system that leads into the main Changping Valley. It would not be surprising if this boardwalk one day extended all the way (17km) to the meadow at the main base camp area. The Shuangqiao-gou Valley, just west of the Changping, a few years ago received a paved road that leads several kilometers to its head. It remains to be seen how the Chinese will manage the environmental and social impacts of a large influx of visitors to such a small and delicate alpine area. [For further notes on logistics, see the last paragraph of Jon Lane Sullivan’s notes above—Ed.]

JOSEPH PURYEAR, AAC

YUNNAN PROVINCE

HENGDUAN MOUNTAINS

*Deep Gorge Country* ("Three Parallel Rivers": Salween, Mekong, Yangtze), *exploration.* My many voyages of discovery to what I call “East of the Himalaya–Alps of Tibet” were triggered by reading the enchanting narratives of Frank Kingdon-Ward, in which he chronicles his travels to the remote Tibetan regions of

*The caravan crossing the Yu Qu at Gebu. Tamotsu Nakamura*
northwest Yunnan and southeast Tibet in the early 1900s. A paradise for plant-hunters, this land is also attractive to mountaineers because numerous stunning peaks are still unclimbed. Throughout the entire East of the Himalaya region, I count 255 unclimbed 6,000m peaks on the map: 200 in Nyanchen Tanglha East, 30 in the Kangri Garpo Range, 20 in the Deep Gorge Country of the Hengduan Mountains, and five in the Sichuan West Highland of the Hengduan Mountains.

The Deep Gorge Country has especially fascinating scenery. The Tibetan Plateau has been eroded by some of Asia's longest rivers, which sculpted the high plateau not merely into a land of steep mountains, but of deep valleys with gloomy shadows and forbidding gorges. This Deep Gorge Country was intensively explored by Kingdon-Ward, and I have been tracing his footsteps since 1990.

In this time I have seen a wave
of change rushing through China, even reaching the isolated frontiers in Yunnan. The Deep Gorge County, which the Chinese call Three Parallel Rivers (Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze), was registered as a world UNESCO natural heritage site in 2002. Taking advantage of the famed Shangri-La in James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*, the Chinese government is highlighting the Meili Snow Mountains on the Yunnan-Tibet border and the Mekong River Valley for tourism development. Still, there remain many unfrequented and little-known mountains and valleys to attract an old explorer. I have that good fortune.

In autumn I led an expedition of six members—Eiichirou Kasai (67), Tsuyoshi Nagai (75), Ms. Sonoe Sato (48), Tadao Shintani (64), Lu Weidong (58), and me (72)—to the Gorge Country to revisit an isolated borderland of my particular interest and sentiment.

The expedition was rather hard and uncomfortable. Our original plan was to go up the Salween River (Nu Jiang) northwestward from Tsawarong, but the muleteers refused, as the trail was too narrow and dangerous for pack animals carrying loads. We were forced to choose an alternative route along Yu Qu (Wi Chu), a tributary of the Salween that I had already followed twice. Extraordinarily heavy snowfall in mid-November closed high passes, including two (4,900m and 5,300m) that we’d wanted to cross. In addition, all six members caught serious colds from the heavy smoke in the Tibetan houses where we slept.

Nevertheless, we were satisfied to unveil two 6,000m massifs and a 5,700–5,800m massif. These peaks are in the following mountain ranges:

*Baxoila Ling:* The northern part of this large range is on the Lohit Parlung Tsangpo–Salween Divide. The southern part is on the Irrawaddy-Salween Divide in Tibetan Autonomous Region. Its name is Gaoligong Shan in Yunnan Province. There are three outstanding mountain massifs: Yangbayisum (6,005m), Chagelazi (6,146m), and Mukong Xueshan (6,005m). Xueshan means “snowy mountains.”

*Salween-Yu Qu Divide:* There are three massifs: Geuzong, a massif of 5,700–5,800m peaks, a central massif of 5,700m peaks, and a northern massif of 5,400–5,600m peaks.

*Nu Shan/Taniantawen Shan:* This is a large range on the Salween-Mekong Divide. Nu Shan, in the southern part, includes the famous holy peak of Meili Snow Mountain (6,740m) with well-developed glaciers, while Taniantawen Shan, stretching north of Nu Shan, has the rocky massifs of Damyon (6,324m) and Dungri Garpo (6,090m), with no eminent glaciers.

A couple of years ago, as part of the ambitious West Development Plan, a vehicle track was opened 56km as the crow flies from Bingzhonglou to Tsawarong on the left bank of the
Salween River. On November 8, thanks to this new road, we reached the administration center of Tsawarong in six hours from Bingzhonglou, whereas the old path required three or four days on foot. Tsawarong is a warm, fertile land to Tibetans, who normally live on the arid and cold high plateau. King-don-Ward loved the people and culture of Tsawarong, and visited there three times, in 1911, 1913, and 1922. Here we arranged for a 16-horse caravan to take us along the Yu Qu Valley.

On November 10 we started walking.

It is said that Yu Qu is the most beautiful pine-forested valley in Eastern Tibet, and we were overwhelmed by the grandeur of the first bend of the Yu Qu gorge. All along our route we were welcomed in Tibetan houses. On November 13 I left Razun village in the predawn dark, because at last I could take a picture of Mukong Xueshan. Twice before I had tried to view this mountain: first from the pilgrimage trail around the Meili Snow Mountains in 1996 and again in 2003, when I traversed the gorge country from Zayu to Mekong. However, the mountain had remained veiled in clouds, and I never saw it. In 2007 the gods finally blessed me, and I could photograph the magnificent and precipitous northeast face. The north peak is the main summit (6,005m), while the south peak is 6,000m high.

On November 13 our caravan departed from Do village (3,350m) to reconnoiter the Damyon massif from the west. We ascended through primeval conifer forest along the Do Chu, a tributary of the Yu Qu, and camped at 3,560m. On the following day we reached a summer yak pasture at 4,140m, which was surrounded by outstanding lofty rock peaks of ca 5,800m, south of Damyon’s main peak. If we had come in summer, we would have found a fairy meadow. But it had snowed heavily lately, and we returned from the pasture to escape the snow.

Damyon (6,324m) has long been worshiped by local Tibetans and the Nashi minority. The Damyon and Dungri Garpo massifs are in the southern end of the Tiantantawen Range, which is 50km long from south to north, with five unclimbed 6,000m peaks. According to an old villager, to reach the west face of the main peak, one must cross a 4,850m-high pass called Zeh La near the headwaters of the Do Qu, which is beneath the south face. There is a pasture just north of a lake called Uke Tso, where camping is possible. A trail passes northward from the Uke Tso to a 4,000m pass near Chaka, where the Sichuan-Tibet Highway crosses the Mekong River.

The old man also explained that each rock peak south of Damyon has a name. From north to south the names of the 5,800m–5,900m peaks are Lamyon, Gonmyon, Nachamyon,
Suzemyon, and Kashonmyon. Myon means “goddess.” The other Goddess Mountains, sisters of Damyon, have their own legend and continue peak after peak to the north of Damyon.

In 1998, also in mid-November, I crossed Di La (4,581m), adjacent to Beda La to the northwest, and saw the panorama of the mountains on the Yu Qu-Salween Divide. One of our objectives in 2007 was to gather as much information as possible on the mountains between Salween and Yu Qu. This range is little known and receives little attention, because there are no peaks exceeding 6,000m, and only a few tiny glaciers. The Russian topo map (1:200,000) tells us there are many 5,300m–5,800m peaks ranging from northwest to southeast. They break down as follows:

- Geuzong massif (5,700m–5,800m): West of Jino to Do villages. Many outstanding rock peaks in northern part.
- Central massif (5,300m–5,700m): West of Bake to Jomei villages. Many lofty peaks.
- Northern massif (5,400m–5,600m): West of Zayi to north. Few attractive peaks.

The path along the Yu Qu Valley was too close to the mountains to have good views. I could only manage to take pictures of the Geuzong massif from near Do Village, on the way back, after reconnoitering Damyon and the central massif from the Ge La (3,960m), between Bake and Meila villages. I took pictures of the northern massif in 1998, on the way to a 4,000m pass west of Zayi.

This deeply eroded country of southeast Tibet is most beautiful in the Yu Qu Valley. The river flows in a narrow gorge between two snow-clad ranges of the Salween–Yu Qu and Yu Qu–Mekong divides.

Our quest to see unknown mountains ended in Jomei, where muleteers from Jino and Do villages held a farewell party for us. This was the first such festivity in my 17 years of traveling in “East of the Himalaya.” We were deeply moved by the event and felt the warmth of the people of Tsawarong. In a Tibetan house at Jino, the family remembered my stay in 1998 and rendered the best services. At Meia Village, I met an old man whom I interviewed nine years ago about the former slavery system in Tibet.

Even here we could see the rapid changes sweeping through western China. In Pitu, which was an old center of Tsawarong, two new guesthouses had been constructed and the main streets were rebuilt. Cars and motorbikes were gradually replacing pack animals for local transport. In Jomei we were invited to a primary school and welcomed by seven teachers and 150 pupils.

On November 26, we left Jomei by three Land Cruisers for the return journey. I thank two old friends for their support on our expedition: Weidong Lu, who joined us as an interpreter from Kunming, and Shaohong Cheng (Tibetan name: Gerong), a guide from Deqen who traveled with me several times to the Gorge Country since 1996. Cheng arranged everything for our journey. I proudly recommend him as the best and most reliable guide for trekking in the Hengduan Mountains.

Tamotsu Nakamura, adapted from Japanese Alpine News