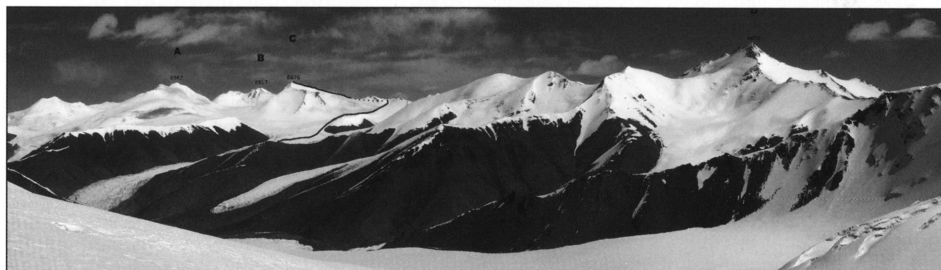


## KUN LUN

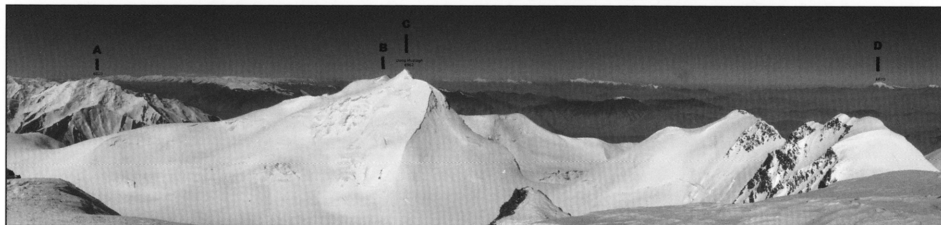
*Qong Muztagh East* (ca 6,976m). In September and October, Diana Borisova, Pavel Demeshchik, Vasiliy Ivanov, Ivan Muyzhnek, Anna Pereverzeva, Sergey Zayko, and I visited the Western Kun Lun, near the northern border of Tibet. It was my fourth expedition to this remote region. The 2003 and 2005 expeditions (AAJ 2006) explored the western borders. The 2006 expedition focused on a detailed reconnaissance of the Ustjuntagh Range, which includes Qong Muztagh (AAJ 2007). During the 2006 expedition we found another peak with a height comparable to double-summitted Qong Muztagh (6,962m). In 2000 the western summit of Qong Muztagh (6,937m SRTM) was climbed by Japanese (AAJ 2001). The eastern or main summit (6,962m) is still unclimbed.

Qong Muztagh lies a little east of the main range, which turns south at Peak 6,817m (SRTM). As a result, Qong Muztagh East, a separate mountain from Qong Muztagh and 700m south of Peak 6,817m, cannot be seen from the north. During our crossing of the Tibetan Plateau southeast of the range in 2006, the summits were hidden, and we failed to see this peak. SRTM data suggests that it is at least 6,946m. Since the difference between this and the heights of the two Qong Muztagh summits is slight, and in view of measurement error, the question as to which of the peaks is highest remained open. Possibly, the highest peak of the region was hidden from sight. This riddle was the focus of our expedition.

We wanted to go in 2007, but access to the region was restricted because of the massive rescue of a Russian rafting expedition. In 2008 the Beijing Olympics meant that Russian citizens encountered great difficulties getting Chinese visas. In 2009 there were riots in Xinjiang, and the atmosphere was tense when we arrived in Urumqi on September 12. However, we were able



View north-northeast from Pass of Chinese Friends. (A) Qong Muztagh (6,962m). (B) Peak 6,817m. (C) Qong Muztagh East, with route of ascent up southeast ridge. (D) Peak 6,878m. *Otto Chkhetiani*



Looking west from summit of Qong Muztagh East. (A) Peak 6,820m. (B) West top of Qong Muztagh (6,927m). (C) Qong Muztagh (6,962m). (D) Peak 6,670m. *Otto Chkhetiani*



Qong Muztagh and surrounding peaks, prepared in 2010 by Vadim Liapin. Part of Russian traverse, with campsites marked.

to drive across the Taklamakan Desert to Niya (Minfeng), and set off from there in two jeeps.

In 2006 we found that approaches to Qong Muztagh East from the north ran into deep, impassable canyons. The mountain can only be accessed from Tibet or through a ca 6,500m pass in the main range. It seemed that the simplest route of ascent would be either the southwest or southeast ridge.

We followed a mountain road that we discovered in 2006, via Yapal (4,632m) and over the Atyshdavan Pass (5,073m) to the Shor Koul Plain, spectacular but an extremely rough journey. Apparently used primarily by geologists and gold diggers, it follows an old trail from Tibet to Taklamakan oases. Roborovsky, Bogdanovich, and Deasy took this trail in 1890 and '98.

After scouting two valleys of the main range, we realized

we'd have to cross the range much farther west than expected. To acclimatize we made a circular trek over six high passes between the Aksou, Koutaz-Dzhilga, and Keriya rivers, the highest pass being at 5,995m. We returned to the site of Baba Khatoun (4,784m) in the upper Keriya valley on September 24.

Our guess proved correct. Going west of Peak 6,150m (map height; 6,283m SRTM), we crossed the Nevidimka (Invisible) Pass, which we measured by GPS as 6,178m, and on the 29th, after traversing 20km-long ice fields, arrived at a barren, gently-sloping Tibetan plain south-east of the range. Next, we crossed the Pass of Chinese Friends (Kitayskikh Drouzey, 6,327m) and descended north to a region unapproachable from the north. From the pass we enjoyed an impressive view of Qong Muztagh and Qong Muztagh East, from which flowed a large crevassed glacier filling the valley. To the right stood Peak 6,878m, another high summit invisible from the north. It dominates the entire range on the Tibetan side and can be seen in a photo published in *AAJ* 2007, where it was incorrectly identified as Peak 6,470m. We dropped to moraines at 5,500m and then headed generally northeast toward our goal.

After passing through an icefall at 5,820m, we continued navigating numerous crevasses, leaving behind the spectacular and steep Peak 6,820m, which towers more than 1,000m above the glacier. At 6,000m we put on our lightweight, homemade snowshoes. Crossing a watershed ridge, we returned to Tibet and, below Qong Muztagh East, gained a 6,610m pass, where we

found hard ice and some rocks, which we used to secure our tents. On the next day, October 5, we waited out a strong wind.

The 6th was our big day. There was no wind and the sky was clear. Crossing a 25-30° ice slope, we climbed onto the southeast ridge at 6,776m. It varied from three to seven meters wide, 30° maximum, so we moved together. However, just before the summit the crest narrowed and became corniced to the north. We belayed, the entire team finally climbing a short 40° pitch to the top. GPS readings ranged from 6,960 to 6,982m (an average of 6,976m, N 35.648990°, E 82.337070°). A barometric altimeter showed an elevation of 7,005m. The panorama was magnificent. Ahead was the double-summitted Qong Muztagh. It was difficult to say whether it was higher, so an ascent of that peak is required to answer this question.

Next day we continued northeast and crossed Podnebesnyi (Celestial) Pass (6,541m). Then, after a long descent in snowshoes and crampons through a crevassed glacier with ice-falls, we reached grass on October 8. From here we walked long days across the Koumboyan and Khokhlyk passes and the eastern tributary of the Keriya, to the Shor Koul Plain. While waiting for vehicles, we scouted several valleys in the Russian Range to the north. We met our jeeps on the 17th, by the north shore of Lake Shor Koul (4,503m, N 36.140170°, E 82.693630°). This was the end of our expedition, which traveled over 500 km through the Kun Lun, and we were back in Moscow on the 20th.

Unfortunately, there was a misunderstanding with Chinese authorities, who suspected us of being involved in illegal exploration. In our absence they searched our belongings and confiscated nearly all our photos, cameras, maps, and other items. We were told they would be returned in a week, but five months later we have received nothing. The GPS data and photos in this report are from one Garmin Vista HCx and a micro SD card, which by chance were missed.

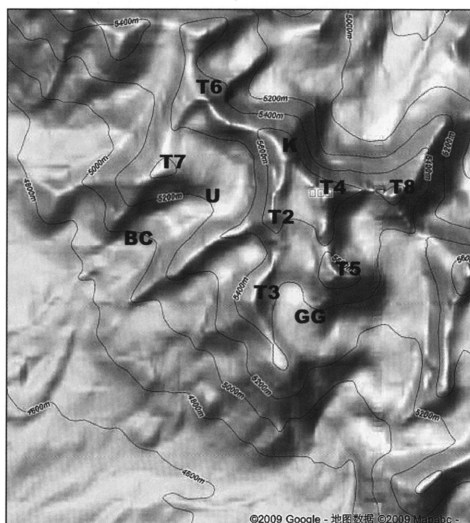
OTTO CHKHETIANI, *Russia*

## QINGHAI

### QILIAN MOUNTAINS

*Kangze'gyai (ca 5,800m), west face.* Kangze'gyai (a.k.a. Tuanjiefeng), the highest peak in the Qilian Mountains, is located in Tianjun County within the Haixi Autonomous Prefecture of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. From the town of Xining it took Li Yong, Yuan Wei, and I three days to reach base camp northeast of Hala Lake. We arrived on October 4. While Yuan remained to take care of camp, Li and I made the first ascent of Kangze'gyai's west face and south ridge in a three-day round trip.

We took neither tent nor fuel, carried only two sleeping bags, one liter of water,



The highest peaks of the Kangze'gyai Group. Hala Lake is just off the map to the left. (BC) 2009 Chinese base camp. (U) Unnamed glacier. (GG) Ganalou Glacier.