

China 1982

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China undoubtedly has the greatest wealth of unclimbed peaks and unexplored mountain areas of anywhere in the world. The huge range of the Kun Lun demarking the borders of Tibet and Xinjiang is barely touched. The ranges of E Tibet are unexplored and even on the main range of the Himalaya are countless unclimbed gems, Men Lungtse, Namcha Barwa and Chomo Lonzo, to mention just three.

The Chinese authorities seem to be pursuing a policy of gradually opening up their mountain regions, both allowing more peaks within the 8 mountain areas originally defined in 1980 to be attempted and, in 1982, adding K2 to the list. In 1983 the Karakoram 8000m peaks adjacent to China have also been added.

Climbing in China is more strictly controlled than in any of the other Himalayan countries, with everything being organised centrally through the Chinese Mountaineering Association. The services are undoubtedly expensive, but they are also efficient, with all the costs being clearly defined in the Chinese regulations and price lists.

The 1982 season saw an increase in both expeditions and trekking groups visiting all mountain areas. The most notable ascent, in terms of objective, was undoubtedly the successful first ascent of the N ridge of K2 by a 14-strong Japanese expedition backed up by a 29-member support team whose role was to ferry loads from the Shaksgam River to Base Camp. Using siege tactics, 7 climbers reached the summit without using oxygen, but one of the leading pair, Yukihiro Yanigisawa, died on the descent. There were 2 ascents on 14 and 15 May. A Polish expedition, attempting the NW (frontier) ridge, drifted onto the N side and even dropped down to the Japanese base camp, but were asked to leave Chinese territory. The N ridge certainly appears to be one of the most elegant lines on K2.

Perhaps the most outstanding climb of the season, however, was the first ascent of the S face of Xixabangma by Roger Baxter-Jones, Alex MacIntyre and Doug Scott. The face looked both complex and difficult, though in the event proved easier than they had anticipated. They climbed it in superb style in 3 days, reaching the summit on 28 May and descending the SW ridge. They had previously acclimatised on the S face of Nyanang Ri (7070m) and the first ascent of Pungpa Ri (7446m), 1.6km SW of Xixabangma.

A 14-strong Japanese expedition made the first ascent of Polong Ri (7230m) a peak to the W of Xixabangma on 17 May.

There were 3 attempts on Everest, none of which were successful. In the Spring, Boardman, Bonington, Renshaw and Tasker attempted the first complete ascent of the NE ridge, using siege tactics to reach a height of approximately 8230m, and then hoping to make a push for the summit from this point. They used the minimum of fixed rope in a series



66 *Xixiapangma seen from Nepal*

Photo: Doug Scott

of 3 sorties from their advanced base camp, to establish 3 snow caves at heights of 6860m, 7250m, and 7830m. Boardman and Tasker were attempting to cross the final pinnacles barring their way to the upper part of the ridge when they were last seen at a height of 8260m. It is unlikely that they got very much further than this point.

An American expedition led by Lou Whittaker attempted the N face of Everest by the Great Central Couloir. Most of the team were Mount Rainier guides and had worked together over the years. They showed considerable determination and unity in their attempt, fixed-roping the route up to a height of approximately 7900m. They made 3 attempts on the summit and in the second attempt, Marty Hoey, the only woman in the team, died after falling out of her harness on the fixed ropes at a height of 7950m. Their first summit bid reached a height of around 8200m, breaking out to the left or NE from the central couloir.

A Dutch expedition tried the original N ridge route in the autumn but experienced heavy snow and high winds, abandoning the attempt just above the N Col.

In Xinjiang, a Mountain Travel expedition led by John Cleare climbed Muztagata, putting 8 members of the team on the summit. One of them was Norman Croucher, who has 2 artificial legs. An American expedition attempted Kongur in July by the original British route but encountered deep snow and experienced appalling weather, turning back short of the summit of Junction Peak. It looks as if May and June are the best months for climbing in this area. Another British party, from Oundle School, climbed in the Kongur region ascending a 6270m peak to the S of Kongur. A 13-strong Japanese expedition climbed Bogda II in August.

On Mount Gongga (Minya Konka—7550m) a Japanese expedition lost 2 members, Makoto Sugawara and Hironari Matsuda in their bid for the summit. They were last heard from on the radio while descending on 1 May. The remaining members of the team made a search for them reaching just above their second camp and, as they could find no trace of them, assumed they had been killed in an avalanche and abandoned base camp on 9 May. Matsuda was found by some local Chinese on the moraine of the glacier on 21 May. He was severely frostbitten and in a state of collapse, but was evacuated to Chengdu and has survived, although he had to have extensive amputations.

A Swiss expedition climbed Gongga on 25 May but on the descent one of the members of the 3-man summit team, Andreas Eschman, became separated from the group and was never found.

Fred Beckey's American expedition climbed in the Gongga region in the Autumn, making the first ascent of Rudshe Konka (6540m).

The accident rate in China has undoubtedly been high and their mountains demand respect.