

Bogdo Ola Group Survey

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During 1980 a number of mountains in the Peoples' Republic of China were opened to foreign mountaineers. The Japanese Alpine Club obtained permission to climb Mt Qomolungma (or Everest) and were successful in ascents of both the NE ridge and the N wall. On the return journey, expedition members talked to Chinese officials who indicated that young members of the JAC would be welcome in the Bogdo Ola massif. The following year 15 members of the JAC visited the area in August and stayed for about 6 weeks.

Bogdo Ola, 5445m, is the highest peak in the eastern Tien Shan range. It is located about 60km to the NE of Urumqi (Urumchi), capital of Xingjiang (Sinkiang) Uygur Autonomous Region. The mountain is so conspicuous that its name has been known since ancient times. It is even mentioned in the chronicle of the Sui Dynasty (581-619); but the first man to have surveyed the area was a Russian geographer, Grum Grjimallo. He visited Tien-chi, a beautiful lake at the foot of Bogdo Ola, in 1890. He reported that a Taoist shrine stood by the lake and many monks lived there. This is confirmed by reports written in the first decade of this century, and an old pagoda was photographed in 1948. When we reached there on 10 August 1981, we could not find this pagoda. Now the lake is developed as a mountain resort for the people in Urumqi. Some cottages for the tourists are built by the lake and there are 2 sight-seeing boats working on the lake.

Our caravan started from this heavenly place. We crossed the lake on the boats to the south side where Kazaks awaited us to carry our goods to Base Camp. Before starting, we bought 2 sheep from a Kazak who had a summer flat close by the Forestry Research Institute near the lake.

We went up along the Da-dong-gou valley, which Gottfried Merzbacher, the German geographer, mapped in 1908. He visited Bogdo Ola after his exploration in the western Tien Shan range. His reports and maps clarified the geographical concept of the area. Only 2 days' journey brought us to the San-ge-cha-shan-kuo pass (3690m) which Merzbacher had named the Gurban-Bogdo pass. After climbing down for half an hour we reached the bank of the Grachimailo glacier. We pitched our Base Camp there at the altitude of 3850m. Generally speaking, Chinese names are given to the valleys which flow down to the north, but beyond the passes at the end of these valleys no Chinese names are known. Anyway those Chinese names attest the long relationship between Kazaks and Chinese.

In an open valley on the north side of the Bogdo Ola massif lies the Grachimailo glacier, which extends over troughs that lie side by side

with each other from the east to the west. These troughs are of synform or downfold valley. As Eric Shipton stated precisely, this glacier flows down both to the north and to the south. In the north, the river is called the Li-xing-da-po-gou in Chinese, and in the south the valley in which the river goes is named the Gurban-Bogdo valley by Merzbacher. Our Base Camp was on the moraine by the S tip of the glacier, where Shipton and H. W. Tilman set their camp in 1948 to climb the highest peak of the massif. They reconnoitred the N and the S sides of the mountain for about a month. Though they could not reach the summit, they found the NE arête to be the most approachable. In 1981, 5 Japanese parties visited the region. The summit was reached by the first party via the NE arête in June. Another party reached the W peak, 5213m, at the beginning of August. Then on 28 and 29 August 5 members of our party succeeded in the second ascent of the highest peak via the same NE arête. Up to this point, apart from these climbs, we had learnt nothing new about the region.

After the ascent our party began to survey the area. Shipton and Tilman aimed to climb the mountain in such a short time that they did not go round the massif. The same is the case with Merzbacher. His map is blank beyond $88^{\circ}45'$ in the east. When British explorer D. Carruthers visited the region in 1911, he came to Tien-chi; but he did not go further, as his main objective was to search the Kalik Tagh in the east. So the activity of our party was to cover the area as yet untrodden by foreigners.

The first reconnoitring party went down to the south. The lake at the end of the Gurban-Bogdo valley flowed out over great slabs, and a rough track marked by Kazak cairns followed the left bank. Climbing down the track, we were led to an open valley covered with grass. About 1km from the drop we met a rather big valley that came down from the left (E) bank. We went up this valley as Shipton and Tilman did years ago. They had climbed to the col at the head of the valley and gone down the opposite side to the Chigo glacier. The valley began with the end moraine of the Sud glacier and then an easy slope of small stones continued to the col. As the place was first visited by Merzbacher, we called it Merzbacher's col. I climbed a little peak of 4420m to the south of the col. The S ridge we were on starts from the main ridge linking the E and W peaks and divides the valley of the Chigo glacier from the Gurban-Bogdo valley.

We spent the first night on this col, and the next morning at dawn could see the eastern half of the Bogdo Ola massif silhouetted against the sky. Though the highest peak was hidden by a peak between us and the main ridge, the E ridge that comes down from the highest peak could be seen stretching several kilometres to the east. At the eastern end, two higher peaks, one triangular and the other dome-like, rose and concluded the massif. Later reconnoitring confirmed that the dome-like peak is the second highest peak of the massif. Shipton and Tilman



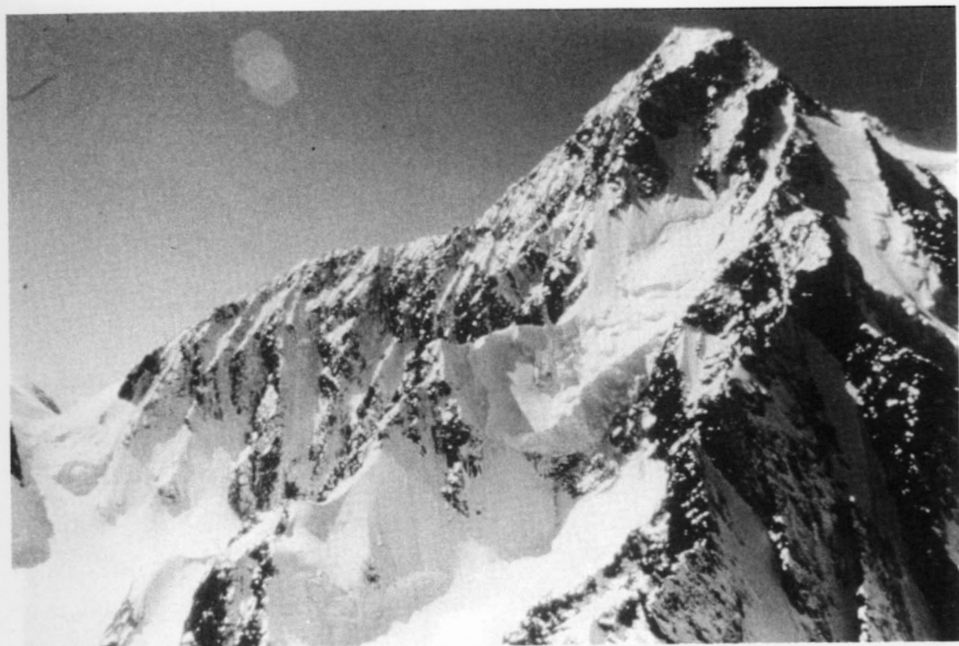
16 Bogdo Feng (5362m), the Second Highest Peak, viewed from the north

Photo: John Cleare

had walked along the Chigo glacier and climbed up to this E ridge. After climbing a peak (which we named Tilman's peak) at the head of the Chigo glacier, Shipton observed 'From the top, the view of Bogdo was really magnificent, while in the other direction the ice-ridge continued over another peak about the same height as our own to another wide col, beyond which stood the massive "Six Thousander".' This second highest peak seemed no less attractive than the main peak.

So the following two days we entered the valley of the fifth glacier (see the map) to examine the mountain. We went down along the right bank of the Chigo glacier, the end of which we reached sooner than expected. There an ice tongue of some 20-30m dropped to a sheet of pale green water. This tarn was about 100m long and 50m wide and was on the end moraine recently formed by the retreat of the Chigo glacier. At the southern end a stream tumbled down among boulders to the bottom of the valley 20m below which was of moraine of an older generation. We went round the tarn and up the left bank of the Chigo glacier. It seemed that Kazaks drove their sheep thus far, for the grass growing there was neatly cropped and animal wastes were dispersed here and there. We went up the wide valley of the fifth glacier along the side moraine until it met another little glacier which originates in the S wall of the second highest peak. I think that the summit can be reached from this side by climbing this valley to the col of the fifth glacier and then following the SW ridge to the peak in front. This peak is united with the summit by an easy snow ridge. The problem is that one cannot site Base Camp in this valley. Anyway, as we had seen enough of the S wall, we went down the valley of the Chigo glacier. Only a few km away from the glacier, the valley becomes open and the mountains smooth. At 3000m or so many passable cols appeared on both sides. We went down further and camped at the riverside where the flow of the valley meets another stream. A group of poplars grew along these streams and a number of little birds chirped noisily amongst them, which is unusual for the generally barren S side. On this side, yurts of the Kazaks were found to an altitude of 3000m, but when we visited there at the end of August most of them had already moved away. On the next day we walked westward over the low mountains and entered the Gurban-Bogdo valley. There is a village further down this valley through which both our predecessors, Shipton and Merzbacher, had left the mountain. We went up the valley and returned to Base Camp. Five days had passed since we departed.

Our next move was to approach the second highest peak from the N side of the Bogdo Ola massif. We crossed the Grachimailo glacier to the eastern end and climbed to the lower col of the NE arête. Shipton and Tilman had stood on this snow-covered col, 4150m, on their first reconnaissance, so we called the place Shipton's Col. From there on, nobody ever seemed to have set foot. The NE face of the Bogdo holds a hanging glacier which supplies ice to the first glacier beyond the col. The



17 Bogdo Feng east ridge viewed from the north

Photo: Shigeru Kodama



18 Bogdo Feng seen from Valley IV in the south

Photo: Shigeru Kodama

first glacier, as we called it, was about 5km long, and the valley itself was open and about 1km wide. Bogdo Ola seen from this side was quite challenging with its peak towering above the rest. The end of this glacier was a day's walk from Base Camp. By the end was a pond where we pitched Advanced Camp. Just by the camp was the end of another glacier which flowed down from the N wall of the second highest peak. This is the second glacier. The first and the second glaciers seemed to have shared a common termination until recently. Now one end is 50m away from the other. We advanced along the right bank of the second glacier and climbed to a gully-like col on the NE ridge of the second highest peak. The N side of the mountain was a great wall, almost covered with snow. At first we tried to follow the rocky NE ridge but as the rock was too loose for us to continue, we abandoned it at 4100m. The main ridge of the Eastern Tien Shan range turns to the north-east along this ridge, though the range does not seem to recover 5000m again.

We went down over the col to the valley between this main ridge and the E ridge. It was filled with flat smooth ice. We crossed the head of this third glacier to the foot of the E ridge. This ridge loses height abruptly beyond the second highest peak. Its N side is precipitous, and avalanches are likely to happen at any time. When we climbed to the col on the E ridge and pitched Camp 1 at 4100m, we heard some hanging ice drop with a roar. We worked for 2 days on the thin ridge to an altitude of 4750m and pitched Camp 2. Two men attacked the summit on 22 September. The upper wall was a mixed climb with unstable ice. Climbing roped for 9 pitches, they reached a terrace at about 5000m from where they could see the summit which might have been reached by another 20 pitches, but they had used up all their pitons already. Considering their equipment and the days remaining to them, they abandoned the ascent. The summit seems to be easy to reach by the SW ridge. Anyway we would return to the region in the following year.

After this attempted ascent of the second highest peak, the attack party descended the col to the south. The fourth glacier lies between the E ridge and the SW ridge. They stayed a night at a comfortable grassy patch on the right bank of the glacier and walked down to the meeting point with the Chigo valley where I had spent a night on the first reconnaissance. They crossed the fringe mountains through a different route from ours and followed the Gurban-Bogdo valley to Base Camp.

We were eager to make a round tour of the massif from the beginning. After reconnaissances from the north and the south, we reckoned that the tour would need at least 5 days. If we left Base with provisions for 7 days we might be able to complete the circuit or, failing that, to return the same way. Four members went through the first and second glaciers and parted company with the climbing party at the col on the N ridge of the second highest peak. They went down the flat third glacier to the end. This glacier, at about 6km long and 1km wide, may be the largest

in the region. With no conspicuous peaks around, the valley is quite open. At one end, many layers of moraine make complicated terraces and each terrace has its own pond. A damp grass patch at the end was almost 100m lower than the glacier's flat surface. They spent 2 nights in a tent pitched there as it snowed off and on the next day, during which the pyramidal figure of the second highest peak showed itself impressively through the rifts in the cloud. A small stream flowed down from the right bank of the valley near the tent. Following the stream about 100m they found another flat and wide valley which is surrounded by low mountains and thus seemed to have no perpetual ice. Judging from Kazak cairns and the animal wastes found there, these valleys, too, are summer pastures.

About 300mm of snow fell that day, but as they descended the valley, which turns towards the south, the snow disappeared rapidly. At the turning of the valley they saw a deep cut valley descending to the right bank. Our sketch map suggested the existence of a valley of some size in that direction, but the stream they now saw seemed too small and the valley of it too narrow. The confluence of the 2 valleys went down making a gorge. Through this gorge they came to an open valley at last and found short willow trees and tall poplars growing along the river bed. They clambered up the right bank to head west. Reaching the terrace on the bank, they found the place to be ideal not only for nomads but also for geographers. In the north, mountain walls exposed the black rock remains of an ancient volcano. Along this rock mass, rolling valleys continued from the far east, across the valley they had come down, to lower mountains in the far west. Geologically it is a 'folding cuesta' (Spanish = slope. Ed) which suffered differential erosion. One good kick by an expert could expose much ammonite. The party climbed these passes in successive ups and downs, following a path trodden by horses and other animals. Over the fifth pass, 3070m, they were surprised to find a valley with a striking contrast: a flat open space without any undulation stretched to the west several km. The valley had the same characteristics as the one beyond the pushed-out moraines of the Chigo valley, which we had crossed during the first reconnaissance around the south. These pastures with little erosion were surrounded by low mountains which showed instead some signs of abrasion. This may indicate the existence of a large ice-field on these valleys before the development of the Chigo valley.

At any rate the round tour party got to the already known junction of the Chigo and the fourth valleys. They went up the Chigo valley and examined the fifth glacier. Via another pass they reached the Gurban-Bogdo valley, and on the seventh day they returned to Base Camp.

On 27 September we struck the tents and set off on the return journey. We crossed the Yi-ken-qi-shan-kuo pass, 3760m, and went down along the Jiang-jun-gou river. Though the valley was narrower than that of the Da-dong-gou river, the moraines, piling one upon

another, were covered with beautiful grass. In the case of the Da-dong-gou and Jiang-jun-gou the timber line was about 2800m. Passing through an orderly spruce forest, we came down to Tien-chi.

Thus we finished the survey of the Bogdo Ola massif. The second highest peak of the range is worthy of attention for climbers, and the peaks around them have their own charms; but I feel that the true attraction lies in the wanderings and the exploration of these unknown valleys, searching for trails and finding new routes. I hear that the N side of the mountain will be developed as a place for training climbers in the near future by the Chinese Climbing Association.

The members of the party were as follows:

Katsuhiko Kano, leader; Masahiko Kaji, deputy leader; Akio Nagoshi, Yuji Maruo, Shigeru Kodama, Tatsuo Masujima, Kojun Mori, Gota Isono, Shigeru Irizuki, Kenji Chikata, Yuichi Kamiguri, Makoto Uchida, Tsutomu Soma, Michiko Odazawa, Takako Akimoto.

[Editor's note: The Second Highest Peak is also known as Bogdo Feng.]