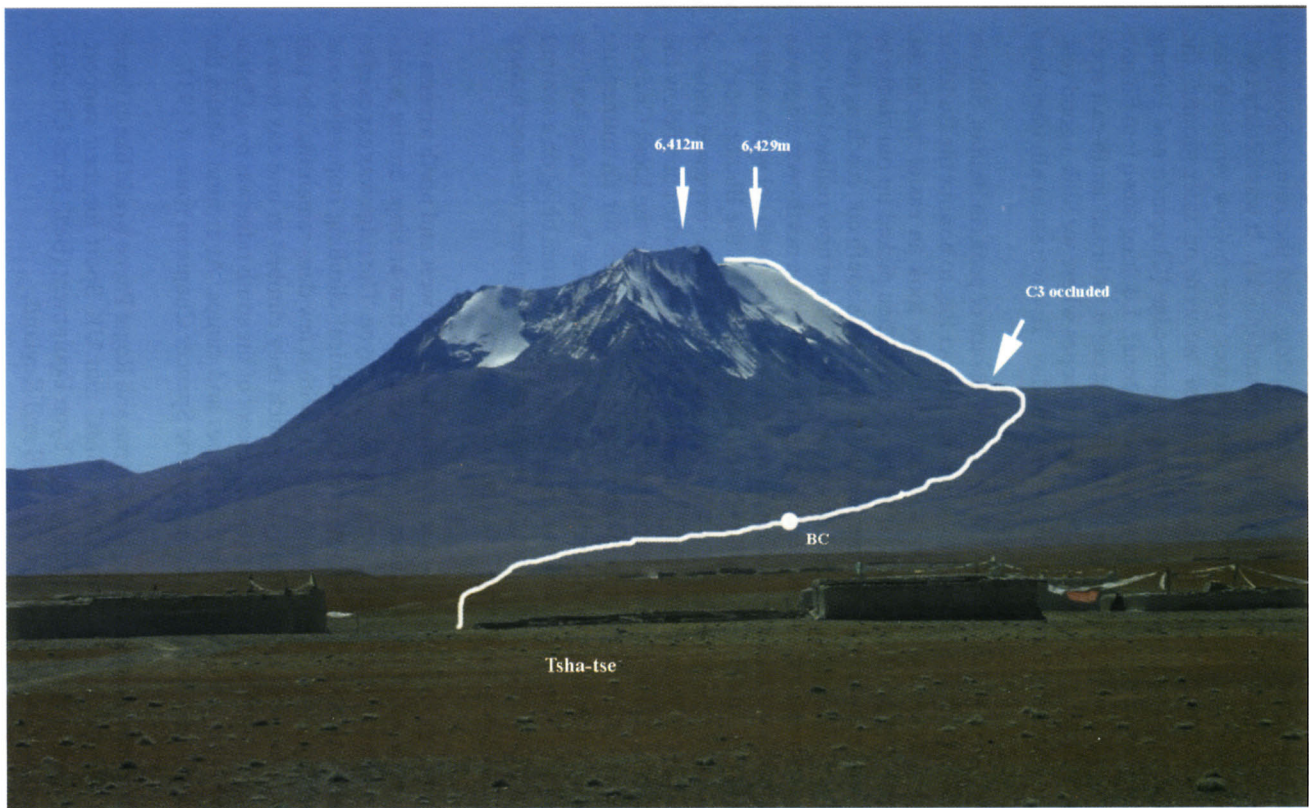




38. Dobzebo, north summit (*left*) and south summit (*right*) from Tsha-Tse, showing camps. (*Al Scott*)

Dobzebo and the Battle of the Mountains

Near the centre of the Transhimalaya are two mountains that once fought a battle. According to legend, Dobzebo fired an arrow striking Targo's knee, leaving a scar on the lower slopes still clearly visible today. In retaliation, Targo returned an arrow that struck Dobzebo in the stomach; though where the scar is on the mountain today is not obvious, unless perhaps it is the cirque that makes up the north face.

The central Transhimalaya of Tibet has many unclimbed peaks and after studying maps, satellite photos and books our team of four focused on an area south of lake Dangra Yutso that seemed to have been rarely visited. Further study and conversations with Julian Freeman-Attwood, who knows the area well (*AJ 108*, 103, 2003), led us to choose Dobzebo as our primary target with some peaks to the north, collectively called Lungmari, as a secondary objective. There was the additional attraction of visiting a Bon monastery shown on our map on the shores of Dangra Yutso.

Having entered Tibet via Kathmandu and the Friendship Highway on our last trip, we chose this time to fly to Lhasa via Beijing, mainly to save time and to avoid complications caused by the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. In Lhasa, as well as acclimatising, we again experienced the mysterious world of the Tibetan Mountaineering Association and the process of acquiring the necessary permits. We took this seriously as last year more than one party had been refused access at the last moment. We also stocked up on food, gas canisters and sundry items. Thanks to Mig Ma, our excellent support organiser, we left after two days with the required seven permits to get us past all bureaucratic and army check points.

The main road west being under reconstruction, we took the alternative dirt road to Shigatse, in fact a more attractive and interesting route. At Shigatse we met up with our Dong Feng truck, transferred our supplies and were at full complement with Lotta our truck driver, Dawa our interpreter, Kusang our cook, and our Land Cruiser driver, Quangming, a Tibetan despite his Chinese name (meaning 'the light'). Having arrived earlier than expected we were able to visit Tashilhunpo monastery, one of the very few to weather the storm of the Cultural Revolution, albeit with far fewer monks. The night was spent in unaccustomed comfort in a Chinese-style tourist hotel.

We next headed further west along a dirt road to the small town of Sangsang where, by contrast, we slept in a very un-Chinese traditional Tibetan guesthouse. Despite its attractiveness, the yak dung stove was unlit and our room was very cold. Characteristically, the yard functioned as the toilet, but the view was memorable.



39. Dobzebo north from Dobzebo south-west with lake Zuru Tso and the Targo range in the distance. (*Al Scott*)

Next morning we turned north off the main east-west road along tracks leading to Dobzebo. It was here that our earlier research, particularly with satellite photos available from the internet, and Julian's advice, paid off. We were now in typical Tibetan countryside with nomads in yak skin tents tending large herds of sheep. As we went higher and the land became more arid, sheep gave way to yaks and increasingly we saw kyang (wild asses), gazelles and other wild animals.

The weather continued fine with generally cloudless skies. We jostled in the Land Cruiser for the best photo opportunities, particularly of wild animals and the mountains. From the first major col at 5300m we could see south as far as the Nepalese frontier and were even able to identify Everest in the distance. Travelling further north, then west over a higher col at 5540m, we caught our first glimpse of Dobzebo in the distance before continuing down to Tsha-tse, the village just under its north face.

From Tsha-tse we headed back south past the old village and some hot springs, which we noted for a possible bath later. Beyond a small monastery we entered a valley immediately south-east of Dobzebo. Here the track petered out, forcing us to drive either up the riverbed or over a boulder field. Lotta seemed oblivious to the problems while Quangming was more cautious with the Land Cruiser. Unfortunately even his caution could not prevent the inevitable and eventually, at 5120m, we ground to an

ignominious halt with ominous noises emanating from the rear axle. With the diagnosis a broken rear half-shaft, things were not looking too good. While the non-mechanically minded camped, the ever inventive Quangming and Lotta devised a number of plans, one of which was to hoist the stricken Land Cruiser onto the lorry. However by disconnecting the rear axle it proved possible to limp along on front wheel drive alone. Nonetheless this was base camp, as far as normal vehicles were likely to get, and further than most were likely to venture. We were close to the river, at a reasonable height, but unfortunately a long way from where we wanted to be.

The first thing that we noticed about Dobzebo, apart from how impressive it looked, was how much higher the snowline was than we had expected from earlier trips to Tibet. Indeed it was much higher than when we passed some 80km to the west at a similar time last year. Moreover, at first sight there seemed to be no water between BC and the snowline around 6000m.

A reconnaissance next day to the west of BC showed a possible route up the south glacier, but no easy route round to the south-west ridge, our preferred line of ascent. Further reconnaissance to the south the following day reinforced this initial impression and confirmed that the two major tops identified from maps and satellite pictures were of comparable height.

On 4 October we advanced to a sandy campsite nestling at 5690m in the complex moraine beneath the south face. Without animals, we were very fortunate that our support team volunteered to help with the loads since this allowed us to establish camp 1 in a single carry. Although this assistance was far more than we could reasonably expect, Kusang had similarly helped us in 2004 on Nganglong Kangri. This camp was ideal except for one small problem – water. We knew that there were several glacial pools nearby, but finding them among the undulations of the moraine was a challenge in itself. Moreover, it needed an ice-axe to get at and all our containers to bring sufficient volume back to camp.

The following day was spent identifying a viable route onto the glacier. Having found one more easily than anticipated, we made a partial carry before establishing Camp 2 high on the glacier at 6100m. Worryingly, Bill was suffering from incomplete acclimatisation and for a while it looked as though we might have to take him back down. Remarkably resilient, he rallied overnight but was not able to come with us as we set off for the north summit. Taking an impressive but relatively easy line above Camp 2 we climbed the south face on gradually steepening ground to a rock outcrop standing proud of the summit ridge. Moving westwards along a heavily corniced ridge we arrived at a steep wall immediately beneath the north summit. A short climb and we were there, at 6412m, just 2.5 hours after leaving camp.

The views were superb. To the north we could see across the plain, past Tsha-tse to the beautiful blue lake of Zuru Tso bordered by high mountains on the west. Further north was Dobzebo's enemy, Targo Ri, and the main Lungmari range. West and south, the crenellated ridge continued upwards



Left

40. Dobzebo, south ridge of south-west summit, with Cho Oyu, Everest and Makalu in the distance. (Derek Buckle)



Right

41. Al Scott on the headwall below the north summit of Dobzebo. (Martin Scott)

towards the dominant snow-covered south-west summit. A double cornice on this ridge leading to the main summit denied access from the north but, more importantly, meant that even climbing the snow couloir left of our ascent route would not provide easy access from camp 2. It was clear that we needed to relocate base camp nearer to the south-west ridge in order to have a realistic hope of reaching the main summit. Having dutifully photographed the Alpine Club banner that Peter Mallalieu requested we take with us, we rejoined a markedly enlivened Bill at camp 2 and the following day returned to BC.

Since the direct route from BC to the south-west ridge looked long, arduous and unpleasant we drove to Tsha-tse to seek advice. Here it was confirmed that no motorised access to the south of Dobzebo was possible, although a good footpath used by local yak herders led round from the north. On inquiring about horses we were taken to the headman's house where, perched on carpet-covered boxes around a standard issue yak dung stove, we sampled yak butter tea while discussions took place. The elderly headman was a memorable character, sitting cross-legged beneath a backdrop of former Dalai Lamas. His face, etched by the harsh Tibetan sun, resembled a gnarled ebony carving and he was simply clothed in traditional dress. Unhurriedly the negotiations proceeded as more tea was drunk. Eventually the hire of three horses was agreed, although we undoubtedly paid a generous price by local standards.

Having relocated BC to the valley north of Dobzebo, we set out next day following the horses and their minders, past the north summit and beneath spectacular steep granite cliffs that would make a fine objective for those more accomplished than ourselves. Further on we crossed a windy, cairned col before dropping to a lake at 5503m at the foot of the prominent south-west ridge where we located camp 3.

It was very clear and sunny, but the sun had little warmth. Camp 3 was a cold, dusty and windy place. Beyond here there appeared to be no water until the snowline, so we decided to make an early start and go for the top in one go; a height gain of more than 900m. Waking some four hours before dawn it was still very cold, but fortunately the wind had died down. We plodded up steep, boulder-strewn slopes in the dark, but apart from the effort at this altitude there was no technical difficulty. Shortly after daybreak we reached the crest of the broad ridge to be greeted by fantastic views south towards the Himalaya. It was minus 15°C, but felt a lot colder. Thankfully there was not much wind. As we walked and scrambled higher the broken ridge narrowed considerably before reaching the final icefield some 200m below the summit.

From here a heavily corniced arête led easily to the airy summit at 6429m. To the south Cho Oyu, Shisha Pangma and Everest were silhouetted on the horizon, while to the west was the prominent peak of Loimbo Kangri, and to the north the extensive Lungmari range. Closer to hand the complex ridge leading to the rocky middle top and then to the more distant north



42. Hired horses moving our camp. In the background are Dobzebo north (*left*) and Dobzebo south-west summits. (*Martin Scott*)

summit that we had climbed earlier could be seen in detail. Prior analysis suggested that we were indeed at Dobzebo's highest point, but the middle top was certainly a close contender.

Since we had allowed ourselves more time than we had actually needed to reach the summit, we faced the prospect of another two days at the inhospitable camp 3 before our horses returned. Someone would have to return to BC to organise an earlier departure. Al and Derek, who were feeling fit, raced down ahead, exchanged their climbing gear for sleeping bags at the campsite and headed off in the late afternoon for BC. Bill and Martin (who was still recovering from a minor knee operation 10 weeks earlier) descended at a more leisurely pace. When the horses returned the next day they packed the camp and rejoined the others at BC.

With sufficient time still left to follow our plan to explore northwards, we drove past the village of Tsha-tse to Zuru Tso and took a good track on the east shore of the lake, passing under the impressive south face of Targo Ri with its famous scar. Continuing round to the east of the massif, it became possible to see the full extent of the Lungmari range running northwards. The map and satellite photos had led us to believe that these were relatively uninteresting, rounded peaks separated by a number of east-facing glaciers running down from intervening cols. In reality, the range was noticeably

more impressive with varied climbing opportunities at a range of standards; all in all well worth another visit.

Our next objective was the Tershi Bon monastery, which was supposedly on the shores of Dangra Yutso. In fact it lies some 15km south of the lake on the west side of the valley nestling on the lower slopes of the principal peak of Lungmari.

Bon has its roots in the earliest religious beliefs of the Tibetan people. These centred on an animist and shamanistic faith shared by all central Asian people with an emphasis on the spirit world, exorcism and the cult of dead kings. This was supplanted by Buddhism in the 8th and 9th centuries, though Tibetan Buddhism is influenced by it rather as Christianity shows signs of Mithraism. A notable feature of Bon adherents is that they circumambulate lakes, monuments and mountains in an anticlockwise direction even today, in contrast to the clockwise circumambulation of Buddhists.

We camped at a pleasant, though cold, grassy campsite by a river on the broad valley floor and the next day made our way up to the Tershi monastery. As with most monasteries it is in a beautiful setting and we arrived to the chanting of praying monks. Rather surprisingly we were allowed to visit the monks during their devotions and, even more surprisingly, were permitted to take photos. The remoteness, poverty and location of Tershi conveyed a stronger spiritual air than that found at larger, more prosperous monasteries, and left us with fond memories of the area and its people.

In conversation with the abbot it transpired that despite its isolation even this monastery had been sacked during the Cultural Revolution. Encouragingly, it has now been fully renovated by the inhabitants and local nomads, although it has far fewer monks than previously. We were told that Tershi receives some visitors from other parts of Tibet but none from elsewhere.

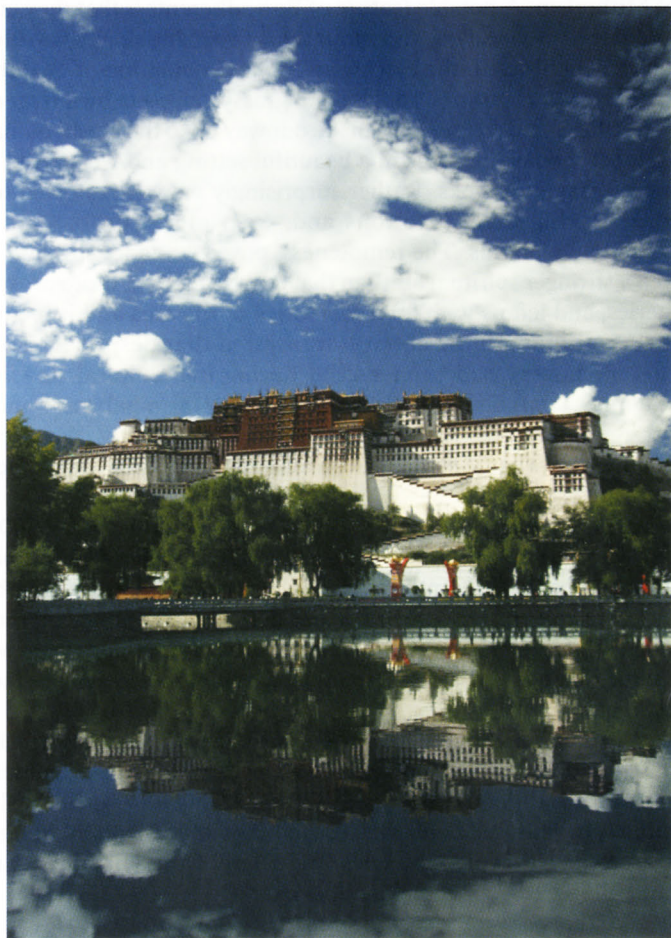
Heading north again next day we arrived at the large lake of Dangra Yutso. It was more barren than we expected, with no visible monastery and almost no habitation until much further north. No track suitable for vehicles existed on either shore, but it was possible to continue on foot and with animals; a fact confirmed by two nomads that we met who were waiting to take some sheep given as payment for their summer labouring in Tsochen back to Shigatse.

On our return journey we had intended camping in the valley before Sangsang, but threatening clouds gathered overhead and the temperature dropped markedly. We therefore pushed on to Sangsang with its cold, but welcoming, guesthouse. Later we learned that this weather change was part of a prolonged depression covering much of the Himalaya, causing havoc and killing 18 people on Annapurna.

We kept to the main track east for our return, deviating only for a tourist trip to Everest base camp to photograph the north face, before travelling on to Lhasa, Beijing and home.

Summary: An account of the first ascent of Dobzebo North (6412m) by the south face on 8 October 2005 and of Dobzebo South-West (6429m) by the south-west ridge on 14 October. This was followed by a short exploration of the Lungmari range to the north that revealed a number of promising unclimbed 6000m peaks. Team: Alasdair Scott, Bill Thurston, Martin Scott and Derek Buckle.

Acknowledgements: The team wish to thank the British Mountaineering Council and the Mount Everest Foundation for their support.



43. Potala Palace, Lhasa (*Al Scott*)