
JOHN TOWN

China and Tibet 2008

The past year was not a good one for the people of Tibet or Sichuan, nor for climbers with ambitions to climb there. In March riots broke out in Lhasa and a range of other centres within the Tibetan areas of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu. The Chinese closed the borders of TAR and other affected areas and most expeditions abandoned their plans. Initial assurances to groups heading for the north side of Everest proved worthless, as the area was sealed off to avoid the chance of any further protests concerning the Olympic torch. Most diverted to the south side, where the paranoid behaviour of the Nepalese authorities in response to Chinese pressure to eliminate protest did them little credit. The torch's 8 May 'Journey of Harmony' apart, no other expeditions reached the summit from the north in either the pre- or post-monsoon seasons.

On 12 May a massive earthquake hit the mountain regions of Sichuan, killing over 69,000 people and making nearly 5 million people homeless. Disruption of the infrastructure made travel difficult or impossible. Taken together these events ensured that most mountaineering activity was limited to the latter part of the year:

Qonglai Shan

In September Americans Chad Kellogg and Dylan Johnson completed the first ascent of the impressive south-west ridge of **Siguniang (6250m)**, taking an epic nine days to complete the 72-pitch route.

Daxue Shan

French guides Sébastien Bohin, Pascal Trividic, and Sébastien Moatti visited the Minya Konka group in late September and October. Bohin and Trividic made the third ascent of the beautiful **Riuchi Gongga (5928m)**, via the south-east ridge. The team also attempted the 1600m West Face of **Jiazi (6540m)** but were turned back at 5400m by poor weather.

In late November, Tom Nakamura and three companions explored one of the last unclimbed 6000m peaks in western Sichuan – a 6079m peak south of Minya Konka, provisionally named **Ren Zhong Feng**, before moving on to investigate **Xiaqiangla (5470m)**, a spectacular unclimbed pyramid north-west of Danba town in the Dadu River basin.

Hengduan Mountains

The Hengduan mountains stretch down from Tibet into the northern part of Yunnan, but the Yunnan section is rarely visited. In January Booth

Haley (USA) and Juan-Antonio Puyol explored the **Tza-Leh (Cali)** group that lies north of the Baima Shan Pass, south-east of Deqen, on the Yunnan-Tibet border. They climbed **Peak 5600m**, south of the highest peak, which is shown as 5621m on some maps.

The Nu Shan, situated in the Deep Gorge Country of south-east Tibet, forms the watershed between the Mekong and Salween rivers and consists of three massifs – from north to south these are Dungri Garpo, Damyon and the Meili Xue Shan. In October and early November Tom Nakamura and two Japanese companions explored the first of these massifs from its western side, braving both landslides and deep snow. They were eventually rewarded with stunning views of **Dungri Garpo (6090m)** and a range of other peaks (article *Travels Beneath Blue Skies* p91).

Nyenchen Tanglha East

A party from the Tohoku University Alpine Club, consisting of Junichi Imai, Kenji Tajiri and Hiroshi Okada visited the Yigrong Tsangpo gorge in March. A road built in 2007 reaches as far as the village of Ba, from where they explored the Jianpu valley. They were unable to reach the Jianpu glacier in the two days available but did obtain photos of the unclimbed **Peak 6694m** at its head. The party then trekked for three days from Ba, via Bake, to Rika (Rigonka, Ragoonka) village. From Rika they crossed the main river and followed an unexplored subsidiary valley south-west for two days to reach the village of Long Pu. This lies at the junction of the Nenqeng, Shindoboma, Tamboo and Yumo valleys and they were able to see a variety of fine peaks, including **Tsepurong (6648m)**, as well as to visit the Shindoboma glacier. Returning to Rika, they then attempted to repeat Kingdon Ward's 1935 traverse of the main gorge but had to retreat three days short of their objective when Imai suffered a broken leg.

An elderly party from the Osaka Eiho Club, lead by Takatsugo Shiro, continued their 2007 exploration of five new glacial lakes in the Botoi Tsangpo valley, this time equipped with a kayak as well as climbing gear. After a variety of aquatic trials they succeeded in reaching the icebergs of the fifth lake, which lies directly below the glacier.

Tien Shan

Paul Knott, Guy McKinnon and Bruce Normand visited the Chinese Tien Shan in August 2008 (article p19). All three made the first ascent of **Hanjaylak I (5424m)**, and McKinnon and Normand also made the first ascents of **Hanjaylak II (5424m)** and **Yanamax (6332m)**.

Himalaya

Three members of a seven-man Japanese expedition were avalanched and killed on 1 October during an attempt on the unclimbed North Ridge of **Kula Kangri (7538m)**. Yoshinobu Kato, Satoshi Arimura and Susumu Nakamura had been fixing ropes above camp 1 on a snow spur leading to the ridge.