JOHN TOWN

# China and Tibet 2009-10

The past two years have continued to be difficult ones in Tibet, though one or two teams have managed to find a way through police and permit problems. The main activity has been in Sichuan and Xinjiang where climbers continue to break new ground on routes that are often at the cutting edge. Other ventures seem less in tune with current trends, with a 6500m peak in the Kangri Karpo succumbing to a party of 17 supported by 10 porters, and a team on Siguniang making extensive use of skyhooks and a drill when free climbing became impossible. A more welcome development is the appearance of Chinese climbers climbing independently for the fun of it. Many gained their skills on state controlled and initiated mega-expeditions, but this no longer seems to be a constraint on individual initiative. One only has to stroll through the endless array of outdoor shops in Chinese cities to see what is coming.

## QONGLAI SHAN

Attention centred on the formidable S face of **Siguniang (6250m).** In December 2008 Li Hongxue, Yan Dongdong, Liu Yunfeng, Wang Ting and Zhou Peng and a second team consisting of Gu Jie, Luo Biao and Sun Bin both made attempts on different lines in the area of the central couloir. Cai Yu, Ji Xing, Peng Xiaolong, Zhang Yusheng, Zhao Jianshan and Zheng Chaohui made an unsuccessful attempt on the SE ridge. Yan Dongdong and Zhou Peng returned for a further go at the central couloir line in February before finally succeeding on this impressive route in November 2009. Alexey Gorbatenkov and Svetlana Gutsalo had tried a month earlier but retreated in the face of a storm.

In October 2009 the Russians Vladimir Molodozhen, Andrey Muryshev, Valery Shamalo and Denis Sushko climbed a new route on the NW buttress of **Siguniang.** The 1150m line took 18 days and when the weather made free climbing impossible they continued, making extensive use of skyhooks and the drill on a section of 100m at around half-height. Evgeny Bashkirtsev and Denis Veretenin retreated from a different line in the face of the storms.

Another Russian group, consisting of Anfisa Krasheninina, Sergey Lyagin, Andrey Mikhailienko and Igor Sherstnov were avalanched at about 5100m on **Luotuo (aka Camel) Peak (5484m)** at the end of October. Krasheninina and Sherstnov did not survive. A Chinese guide was killed on **Celestial Peak (5413m)** when an abseil piton failed, but his client managed to make his own way to safety.

Yan Dongdong was in action again in February 2010, this time with the female climber Li Lan in the Changping valley, where they made the







183. 5800m peak in the headwaters of the Dongchu Tsangpo, Kangri Karpo range. *(Tamotsu Nakamura)*

first ascent of the multicoloured **Wuse Shan (5430m)** via the south face and an unsuccessful attempt the previous month on the west side of **Chibu (5430m).** In September, two US teams climbed new routes in the area. Chad Kellogg and Dylan Johnson made the first ascent of **Seerdengpu (5592m)** at the third attempt via the NE ridge and made an attempt on a 5086m spire. **Toby Grohne** and **Jesse Huey** climbed the impressive NE (Forlorn Ridge) of **Celestial Peak.**

## DAXUE SHAN

There were two fatal accidents in this region in 2009. In May, Johnny Copp, Micah Dash and filmmaker Wade Johnson were avalanched in a deep gorge below the SE face of **Mount Edgar (E Gongga, 6618m)**. Hungarians Peter Csizmadia, Veronika Mikolovits, Balazs Pechtol and Katalin Tolnay left their base camp in the Gangou valley, to the east of **Ren Zhong Feng (6079m)** on 17 October 2009. No trace of them was found but rescuers found evidence of recent avalanches in an area extremely exposed to sérac fall.

The Danish team of Carsten Cooper-Jensen, Martin Ploug and Kristoffer Szilas followed the unfortunate Hungarian team on the eastern approach to **Ren Zhong Feng.** Ploug and Szilas reached the summit on 25 November 2009 via the E face and N ridge; Ploug took a 30m fall down one side of the ridge but was stopped by Szilas, who jumped over the other side. The height of the peak as measured by GPS and altimeter was c5800m, rather less than the official 6079m.

Russian climbers Mikhail Mikhailov and Alexander Ruchkin made the first ascent over 12 days in May 2009 of **Pt 6134m,** which lies north-west of Mt Edgar, close to Mt Grosvenor, via the 1100m SW buttress**.**

In October 2010, Kyle Dempster (US) and Bruce Normand (UK) made the first ascent of the west face of **Mt Grosvenor** (aka **Riwuqie Feng, 6376m**) in a single day. They followed this up by a successful attempt on the east face and south ridge of **Mount Edgar (E Gongga, 6618m)** in an eight-day round trip. Their companions Jean Annequin and Christian Trommsdorff reached 5700m on a line further right before retreating in high winds.

Penny Goddard, Lydia Bradey (NZ), Kenny Gasch and Mark Jenkins (US), made an attempt in April 2009 on the unclimbed **Nyambo Konka (6114m).** A liaison officer, Chen Zheng Lin, forced upon them by the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Mountaineering Association, did his best to foil their efforts and they were finally halted by poor weather and conditions. They did however manage the first ascent of a 5020m peak in the neighbouring Qionglai, navigating by BlackBerry.

A further sign of the growth in independent climbing was the first ascent by Chinese mountain guides Xiaolong Peng, Jie Gu and Yang Liu of **Peak 5662m,** 17km south-west of Kangding, on 24 July 2010.

## SHALULI SHAN

**Yangmolong (6066m)** still remains unclimbed, despite two further attempts in the autumn of 2009. Dave Wynne-Jones with Derek Buckle, Dick Isherwood and Peter Rowat suffered hostility and multiple thefts from local people before having their ambitions thwarted by bad weather and technical difficulties. John Otto, Tim Boelter (US) and Su Rongqin (China) had similar problems with the locals in the Sanglongxi valley and moved to the Zhongba valley. The south face of the mountain proved too dangerous but they were successful in making the third ascent of **Dangchezhengla (5830m)** via the south glacier, south-east face and north-east ridge.

A Joint Expedition from the Kobe University Alpine Club and the China Geosciences University Mountaineering Association, comprising 17 members and 10 porters, made the first ascent of **Lopchin (Kangri Karpo II 6703m)** on 5 November 2009. Tibetan students Deqing Ouzho and Ciren Danda were the first to reach the summit, followed two days later by Koichiro Kondo and Masanori Yazaki.

## NYENCHEN TANGLA EAST

In November 2009 Tamotsu Nakamura, with Tsuyoshi Nagai and Tadao Shintani, explored three new areas of the Nyenchen Tangla East: the Aigagong glacier above the Nye Chu, Lake Jambo Tso and the Maraipo glacier in Jingling District, and the North Yuri glacier in the Botoi Tsangpo. They also visited the Dongchu Tsangpo, south-west of Songzong in the Kangi Karpo. The expedition returned with a stunning array of photographs of new and unclimbed peaks, as well as documenting a rare tree burial site. John Town and Jerry Lovatt succeeded in entering the Yigrong Tsangpo gorge from the east by the new road but were turned back by police at the village of Talu. Bruce Normand and a companion attempted to cross the Shargung La to the Jingling area but were turned back at Bemba (Pelbar).



## TANGULA SHAN

The Tangula Shan lie to the north-east of Central Tibet, forming the barrier over which the main road and railway must pass to reach the rest of China. In September 2007 a five-man Japanese expedition made the first ascent of **Peak 6543m**, 5.4km south-west of the main peak of the Geladaindong massif. Three of the team set off from the top camp, but due to strong winds only Osamu Kato reached the summit.

## QILIAN SHAN

This glaciated range lies to the north of Qinghai on its border with Gansu Province. A three-man Chinese expedition consisting of Li Yong, Yuan Wei, Huang Zonghua attempted the first ascent of the **West Face** and **South Ridge** of highest peak **Kangze'gyai (c5800m)** in 2009. Li and Huang reached the summit on 7 October.

## TIBETAN PLATEAU

Reports have been received from Sweden of a variety of remote ascents in 2007 and 2008, approaches being made on foot and by mountain bike in the company of a variety of other climbers.

In 2007, on the Chang Tang, a Canadian-Swedish party made the ascent of **Kangzhagri (6,305m)** (N 35°33'25", E 89°34'40") on 26 June via the WSW face, after a 27-day unsupported approach. In September two ascents were made in American company from the Aksia Chin road connecting Xinjiang with the far west of Tibet.

**Sirenshou** (N 35°49'33", E 79°13'42") was climbed on the 2 September by the north ridge, after a three-day approach on foot, and **Jiao Feng** (aka **Qierlizuoke South**, N 35°58'09", E 79°26'33") on the 9 September by the north-west ridge after a two-day approach on foot.

Between 4 and 8 October a number of ascents were made in German company in the Toze Kangri range, after a one-week approach. These included **Toze Kangri South-West (6356m)** (N 34°44'20", E 82°19'51"), **Toze Kangri North-East (6356m)** (N 34°46'32", E 82°21'52") and **Toze Pyramid (6329m)** (N 34°41'44", E 82°12'56") – the latter two being solo Swedish ascents.

In 2008 two further ascents in the Chang Tang were made after an epic approach by foot and bike.

**Kukushili (6360m)** (aka **Songzhi Ling** N 35°39'48", E 85°37'03"), was climbed on 28 June via the south face by a Canadian-Danish-Swedish party, after a 36-day unsupported approach. **Purog Kangri (6436m)** (aka **Purog/Zangser** massif: N 34°25'00", E 85°38'03") followed on the 9 July from the south after a further nine days of travel.

In October 2009 Grzegorz Chowla from Poland made the first ascent of **Mayer Kangri I East (6035m)** by the east ridge, accompanied as far as 5865m by Janusz Majer. The pair had first tried to reach the village of Nyima via Shigatse and the Kiku La (5120m) but were stopped on this pass by Chinese police. They then tried a different route, first via the Lhasa-

Golmud highway to Nakchu and then driving west past Baingoin and Serling Tso (lake) and over a 4900m pass to the village of Rongma. They then crossed a second pass to place their base camp at 5057m on the south-east flanks of the range.

KUN LUN

Russians Diana Borisova, Pavel Demeshchik, Vasiliy Ivanov, Ivan Muyzhnek, Anna Pereverzeva, Sergey Zayko and Otto Chkhetiani made the first ascent of **Qong Muztagh East (c6970m)** on 6 October 2009. During previous explorations in 2006 they had discovered this second major peak of this massif, which is about the same altitude as Qong Muztagh itself. Although the group started from the northern Taklaman side of the range, it had to cross over to the south, before circling round to approach the massif from the south-east, making a round trip of over 500km. While they were on the mountain, Chinese authorities confiscated nearly all of their cameras, photos, GPS and maps.

CENTRAL TIBET

The unnamed Swede (see Tibetan Plateau above) began his 2008 efforts with solo ascents in March and April of **Jietanzhouma (6008m)**, (N28 51' 40" E 90 08' 10") which lies just south of the Gyantse Road and Noijin Kangsang massif, and of the south-east ridge of **Pulha Ri (Maphu Kangri 6404m)**, which is situated just east of the road between Tingri and Lhaze, not far from Lhagoi Kangri.

HIMALAYA

The well-known American climber Joe Puryear was killed when a cornice collapsed on **Labuche Kang (7367m)** in October 2010. Together with climbing partner David Gottlieb he was attempting to make the second ascent of the peak.

Kazuya Hirade and Kei Taniguchi deserve special credit for reaching **Gaurishankar (7135m)** from the north in October 2009, talking their way past several police and army groups. After four days on the north-east face of the south summit, they were defeated at 6850m by the rock band just below the summit ridge.

TIEN SHAN

The Xuelian massif of the Central Tien Shan has continued to draw attention. Following his successful visit in 2008, in 2009 Bruce Normand (UK), with Jed Brown (US), made the first ascent of **Xuelian North (6472m)** by the west ridge, and **Xuelian East (c6400m)** by the east ridge. At the same time, Kyle Dempster and Jared Vilhauer (US) climbed **Xuelian East** by the north flank, having previously made the first ascent of **Yanamax II (6180m)**. Normand then teamed up with Brown and Dempster to climb the impressive 2650m north face of **Xuelian West (6422m)**. (*see account p 62*)

In September 2010, Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden made the first ascent of the N face of **Sulamar (5380m)** in the Xuelian massif. The 1000m route took six days and they followed this by exploring the nearby Chulebos range. (*see account p 53*)



184. Western summit of Mount Hua Shan (2160m), Shaanxi Province. *(Ondřej Žváček)*

SHAANXI PROVINCE

Leo Houlding**,** Carlos Suarez and Wang Zhi Ming received special permission for their 600m tree and rock route on the revered **Mount Hua Shan (2160m).** They were able to bathe their wounds in the temple/hotel complex that adjoins the summit.

**Sources:** *American Alpine Journal, American Alpine Club, Climbing, Mountain Info, BMC, Tamotsu Nakamura.*