



AAC Publications

Sangay Ri, Longyala West

China, Qinghai, Tanggula Shan

For nine years I had toyed with the idea of climbing in Qinghai, which has many virgin summits. The relatively few peaks climbed to date have mostly been ascended by Chinese Army units. With only two weeks to spare, I focused on a small glaciated system in the Tanggula Shan, 100km north of the border with Tibet. The Tanggula Shan is crossed by the Golmud-Lhasa road at the Tanggula Shankhu, which at 5,300m is one of the highest motorable passes in the world. Today it is also traversed by the pressurized train that runs from Xining to Lhasa. The venue of choice lay a little to the northeast, at 33°06'N, 92°03'E.

Researching the area was a four- to six-month detective story, poring over many glaciology studies, linking with a U.S. and Japanese scientist, and stumbling onto an old Russian military map. A picture emerged of a small, glacial hub-and-spoke formation: the hub a flat glacier plateau, and the spokes unnamed glaciers ringed by almost a dozen unclimbed peaks from 5,700m to 6,000m. These lay relatively close to the road, but ca 80km southeast of the main peak of the Tanggula Shan, Gelaindatong (6,612m, AAJ 1998). The Qinghai Mountaineering Association have Longyala as a permitted peak (brought onto the official list in 2002). Once in the area, we found that locals had no name for Longyala, but there was a pass, some distance from the peak, named Longya La.

Mohd Rozani bin Maarof and I traveled 600km south from Golmud by 4X4, and after inspecting northern approaches, we drove to the western end of the Dongkemadi Glacier. Old reports suggested it was possible to drive to a base camp at 5,100m, but tire-crunching grass tussocks stubbornly refused passage, and we eventually established camp at ca 5,000m near the glacier outflow. We moved up next day to an advanced base at 5,400m.

On September 23 we left at 8:30 a.m. and headed east to an unnamed peak, which we climbed by its west-northwest ridge. The climb was PD- but the rapid altitude gain and strong wind (gusting 60-80km/hour at the summit) made it feel harder. On top our GPS recorded 6,000m, and we named the peak Sangay Ri (Lion Peak). We had summited just eight days after leaving the tropical shoreline of Singapore.

On the 25th we left at 5:30 a.m. and took an unexpectedly long time to cross a small but crevassed glacier. In light winds we headed southwest up broad slopes of good névé to reach the col between Longyala and Shar Ri, the latter a ca 5,800m summit directly above base camp. From here we climbed east over the west shoulder of Longyala to a false summit (Longyala West) at ca 6,000m. However, what had appeared from below to be an easy traverse to the main top (6,100m) was in reality a 50m drop and then a rising traverse along a double-corniced ridge. I have a disabled right leg, the weather was worsening, and Rozani was not well-acclimatized. A stronger team would have pushed on, but it is interesting to realize how one's approach to risk changes when in a remote situation with no possibility of rescue. We descended, and two days later began our drive back to Golmud.

Images



Longyala from Sangay Ri to the northeast, with part of Shar Ri to the right. The Singapore party climbed to the obvious col between these two peaks, then back left up the dome-shaped ridge to the west top.



Sunset on the Dongkemadi Glacier. Left is Sangay Ri, climbed by the curving ridge, between rock and snow, that leads back left to the top. The skyline ridge distant right is the snowy northeast ridge of Longyala. Shar Ri is the rocky summit nearer the camera.



Unnamed, unclimbed peak of ca 5,800m on the northern fringes of the Longyala Group.

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