



Balagezong Massif: Photos of Unclimbed Peaks and Observations on the Influx of Tourism

China, Yunnan Province

In January 2004 a letter arrived from William Bueler in Colorado (author of the Roof of the Rockies climbing history) with a brief description, maps, and pictures of his reconnaissance of Balagezong (5,545m) the previous year. I knew of this soaring peak, since I had seen it from afar in 1993, but to the best of my knowledge Bueler was the first to reconnoiter the massif with the intention of climbing there. Sadly, a communication from his wife in April the same year informed me that William had just died of a brain tumor. Balagezong stayed in my mind thereafter, but it wasn't until May 2016 that I got the opportunity to visit.

The development of tourism in Yunnan and Sichuan is progressing at extraordinary speed, replacing traditional industry. New roads, bridges, and tunnels are being built through the mountains, visitors are appearing from every corner of China, and the Dagu Glacier Scenic Park now has a cable car to a 4,800m viewpoint. Thirteen years ago, it took Bueler eight days to trek on foot to Balagezong; now it is less than two hours' drive from Shangri La Airport to the village of Shuishuang (2,320m) at the mountain's base, where there are new four- and five-star hotels.

As tourism progresses, controls over Tibetans have become tighter. Newly built dwellings line the roadsides of East Tibet, Sichuan, Qinghai, and Yunnan, as Tibetans and other minorities in remote areas are being forced to move to locations where the government can keep them under closer supervision. Restrictions on foreigners entering East Tibet also have become much tighter. Two years ago, it was possible to drive across the border from Yunnan or Sichuan—not any more. Procedures for foreigners entering unopened areas have become very complex and time consuming.

The Balagezong massif lies close to the meeting point of Tibet, Yunnan, and Sichuan and provides a fascinating area for tourists, due to the spectacular Shangri La Grand Canyon. A shuttle bus leads from Shuishuang to the hamlet of Bala (17km) and then a further 23km to a pass at 4,250m, which provides a fine viewpoint of the mountains. We waited a week before the weather cleared, allowing us to rush up to the pass and photograph the peaks. Most of the mountains in this area are from 4,700m to 5,000m and form striking rock summits with large walls. All are unclimbed. [Download the full report of this trip with more info and photos.]

Tamotsu Nakamura, AAC Honorary Member

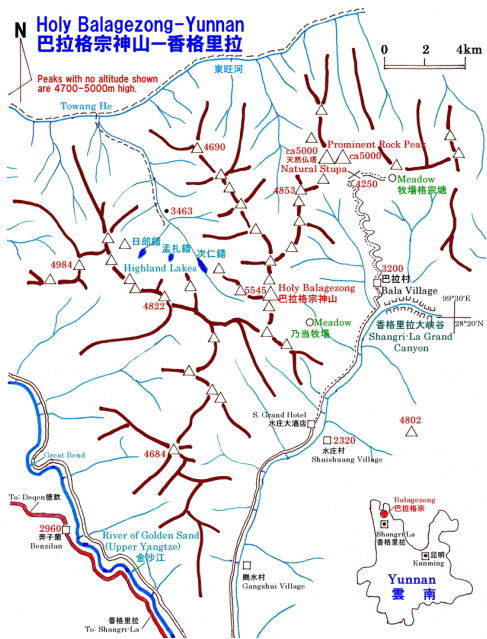
Images



Another unclimbed rock peak (between 4,700m and 5,000m) seen from the high pass east of Shangbala Stupa.



The holy mountain of Balagezong (main summit on the left) viewed from Bala hamlet to the east.



The Balagezong Massif.



Naidang alpine meadow and 5,000m rock peaks in the Balagezong Massif to the west.



An unnamed and unclimbed summit above 4,700m in the Balagezong Massif.



Shangbala Stupa (Natural Stupa, ca 5,000m, left) and to its right (east) an unnamed rock peak of ca

5,000m.

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