



AAC Publications

Gangga Range, Lilliana Peak

China, Sichuan, Shaluli Shan

In September, Mark Smiley and I decided to make a foray into the “West Sichuan Highlands,” as Tom Nakamura describes the ranges on the eastern Tibetan frontier. Our plan was to travel overland to Ganzi, survey the area, and act opportunistically when we got a weather window. We were planning to be deep enough into the mountains that little would have been climbed aside from the highest peaks.

We flew into Chengdu and continued with a two-day overland journey to Ganzi via the Sichuan-Tibet Highway. Much construction was under way, largely to support mining operations in the west. Highway detours were prevalent.

From Ganzi we traveled about 19km south along the well-constructed Ganbai road in the Zhuoda Qu (valley). Just before crossing Zhuodana Pass, we walked up a low ridge to ca 4,250m to see the mountains to the immediate west. These peaks are all referred to as the Gangga Range, despite there being a river valley, the Niyada Qu, between the range immediately west of the Zhouda Qu and another range farther west containing the well-known Gangga I (5,688m). It wasn't clear if there would be better approaches to our peaks from the Niyada Qu, although Google Earth later showed this wasn't promising. After looking at our photos, we decided on a valley we could enter from the Zhuoda Qu, surrounded by three or four peaks in the 5,000–5,500m range. [These lie in the same cluster of mountains as Asura Peak, climbed by an Australian, Japanese, and Scottish team in 2015 (AAJ 2016)].

We found a place to ford the river at what appeared to be a former gravel-mining site. With light packs, we followed a trail used by Tibetan farmers to a scree and boulder field. A small complex of rough stone buildings housing a Tibetan family appeared to be the only settlement in this valley. There were a couple of Buddhist shrines and prayer flags higher up on the scree slopes against the valley walls. Rain was frequent and heavy, as it was much of the trip.

As we walked up the valley, we saw at least three potential climbs. Finding water and a campsite, we made our way back to the road, on the way stopping for tea with the Tibetans, after they hailed us from a distance.

Next day we carried gear up to our campsite, where rain and sleet continued off and on for two more days before we got a window to climb. It looked most promising to head west, up-valley, to see what peaks might be approachable. We decided on Peak 5,320m to the north of camp. After booting up 35–40° snow slopes into a gully on the southwest face, we switched to crampons and ice tools and continued quickly and unroped on a 45° slope, eventually reaching a saddle between two rock peaks.

Initially we worked left, mostly on rock that was decidedly rotten in places. After 40–50m we reached an exposed ridge. Once there it was obvious this was not the high point, so we rappelled to the saddle and started up the other side. There appeared to be a steeper snow and ice gully winding up to the summit, and Mark set off, getting in a couple of cams early. A piton was placed and after 60m of M2 we arrived on the summit (31°30'0.1"N, 99°57'16.9"E), from where we could just glimpse a section of the road to the east and the Gangga peaks to the west.

Our peak had no known Tibetan name. We suggested Lilliana Peak, which the Sichuan

Mountaineering Association has accepted, naming it Lilliana Peak of Mt. Sha Lu Li, this being a rough translation of their designation for the Shaluli Shan mountain range.

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Images



A foreshortened view of Lilliana Peak. The 2016 ascent followed the couloir splitting the two main tops. From the col at the top of the couloir, the climbers reached both peaks, of which the right-hand top (hidden) was the highest.



Mark Smiley in the broad snow gully on the southwest face of Lilliana Peak.



Mark Smiley climbing the last mixed pitch on the first ascent of Lilliana Peak.

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