

Da Xue Shan, Sichuan, China

Henry Day

A team from the British Army was offered Jiazi peak in Sichuan Province of China by the Chinese Mountaineering Association for an attempt in the spring of 1981. All the mountains in the Da Xue Shan were unclimbed except for the highest, Gongga Shan (Minya Konka) which had already been allocated to a Japanese team from Kyoto. Jiazi appeared to be the same mountain as Djaze or Rudshe Konka, recorded by A. Heim and E. Imhof as being 7200/7100m high, which would make it the second highest peak in the Da Xue Shan. (However, see subsequent comments on heights of mountains in this region.)

The CMA ensured a smooth approach to the W side of the range to a base camp at 3900m at a distance of 18km SW from Kangding. This was reached on 6 April just 6 days after leaving Hong Kong. From there the team carried out a thorough exploration of the NW part of the Da Xue Shan, confirming Professor Imhof's map (*Die Grossen Kalten Berge von Szetschuan* by Eduard Imhof. Orell Füssli Verlag, Zürich 1974) by traversing the Riuchi Glacier and the Tshiburongi Glacier, climbing the passes at the head of each, and ascending Riuchi Gongga (Tshiburongi) 5928m. This last was climbed by Arthy and Baxter via a steep couloir on the SE side on 16 April.

Half the team then switched to the E side to explore Nan Men Guan Gou (South Gate of Heaven), a valley unknown to Imhof. A difficult approach through a ravine filled with thick forest revealed a lost world, never before entered by man. The base of Jiazi was everywhere denied by chaotically fractured glaciers so plans to traverse the col on its NE ridge back to Tshiburongi Glacier and thence to base were dashed. E Gongga, never before approached, looked formidable.

In the last 3 weeks of May the team made 4 attempts to get up Jiazi, first by the NE ridge (2 variations) then by the NW ridge. The first 3 attempts were in alpine style and failed when difficult snow conditions and a steep rotten rock band were met at a height of about 6000m. The final attempt resorted to the use of fixed ropes to enable support climbers to carry a camp further up the ridge and the lead climbers to secure a traverse across steep mixed ground on the W face. Thus they gained an ice field that led to the central and highest summit of Jiazi. On 18 May the ice was found to have been polished to a yellow-grey coloured glass so hard and brittle that Neame, Baxter and Arthy were turned back, but not before Baxter had taken a 20m fall.

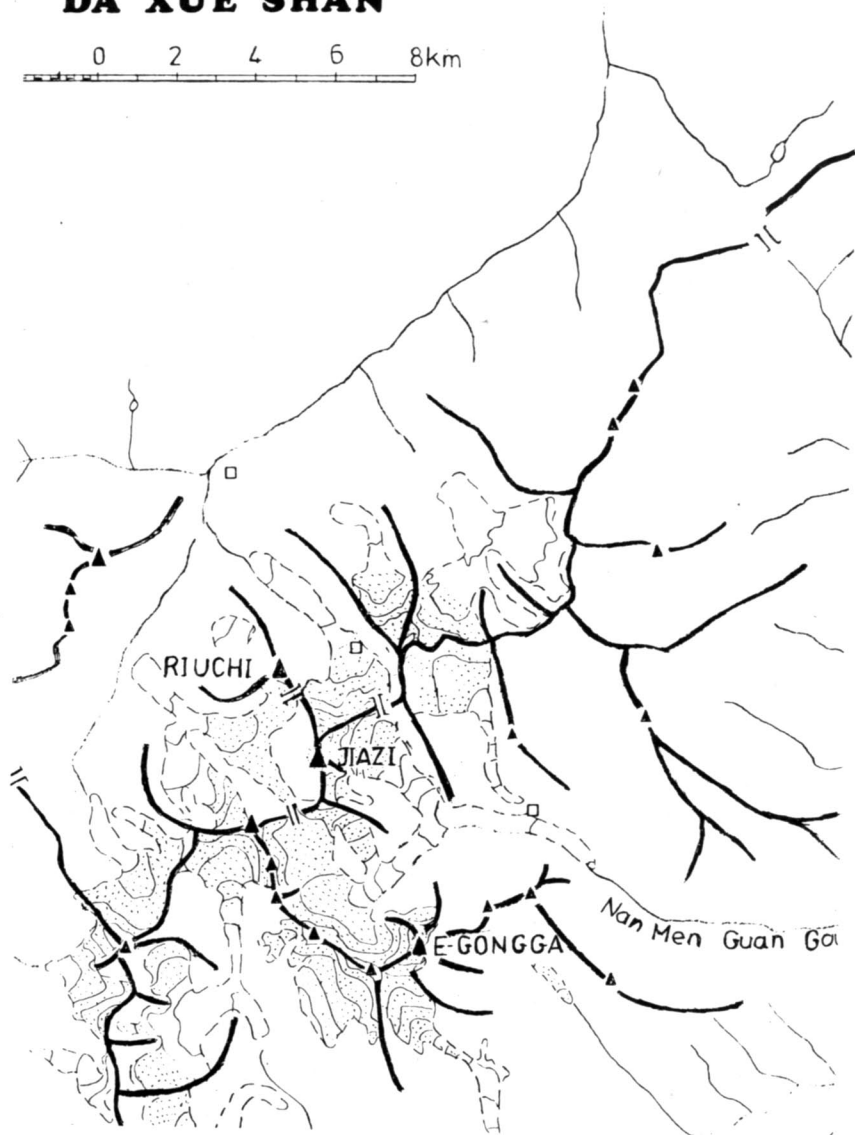
Comments on climbing in China. The Chinese survey maps, by comparison with a Landsat satellite photograph, have been compiled using modern aerial techniques. The traditional survey methods of the pioneers Heim and Imhof have been enhanced and we are bound to prefer the Chinese heights given to peaks in the Da Xue Shan which are (Imhof's in brackets): 1. Gongga Shan (Minya Konka) 7556 (7600). 2. Zhong Shan (Sun Yat Sen

Peak) 6886 (7010). 3. E Gongga (Mt Edgar) 6618 (6900). 4. Jiazi (Rudshe Konka) 6540 (7200).

We had been advised that the best spring climbing season would be in April and May. We experienced the most settled weather in April but even then freezing level fluctuated between 4000 & 5000m causing sometimes atrocious conditions on the glaciers. The weather was almost continuously bad from mid-May onwards, presumably the forerunner of the heavy monsoon that has devastated Sichuan.

DA XUE SHAN

0 2 4 6 8km

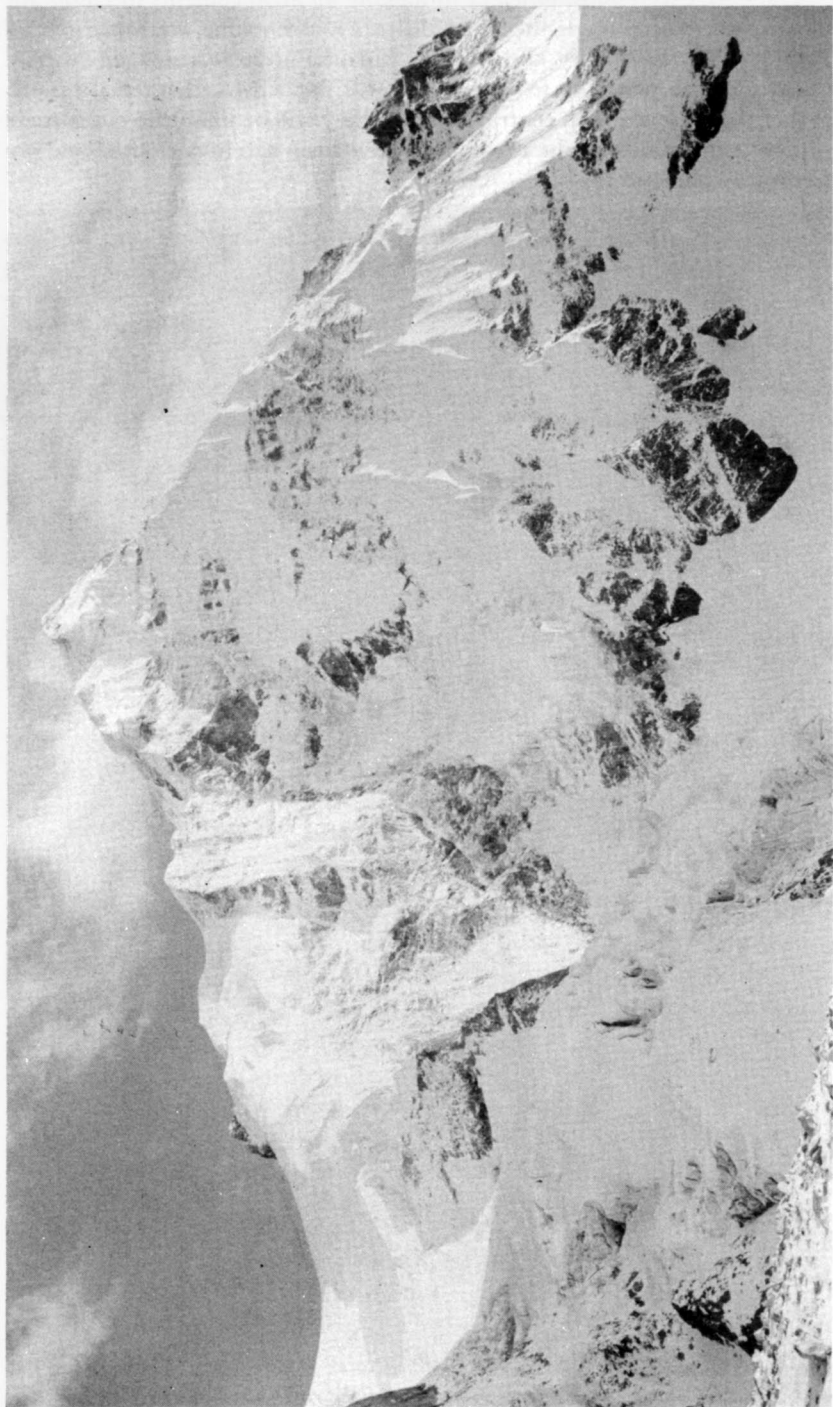


Map 5

The CMA were most efficient in making all arrangements in China for the expedition although they had difficulty in booking transport out of Peking. They were very keen to help but had no experience above Base Camp. Teams planning to visit China will find CMA charges are much higher than elsewhere in central Asia and they will be unable to cut corners in their expenditure as the regulations have been carefully drafted and are rigorously adhered to.



43 *Riuchi Gongga, first ascent was made by the right hand gully (This and next photo: H. Day)*



44 *Jiazi, N face*