

Mount Everest Foundation

Expedition report of:

**The 2005 New Zealand Unclimbed Tibet
Expedition**

Nyenchentanghla East Range

**September-November 2005.
(Expedition Reference 05/44)**

Sean Waters, June 2006.

Mount Everest Foundation

The 2005 New Zealand Unclimbed Tibet Expedition September-November 2005.

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1. Summary

Between late September and mid November 2005, two New Zealand climbers visited the Lawa valley in the Nyenchantanghla East Range in eastern Tibet (Map 1). Despite having hundreds of very attractive peaks between 5000-7000m, this region is relatively unexplored and is barely known to the mountaineering world. It has however, gained more attention recently due largely to the explorations of Mr Tomatsu Nakamura since 1990, as well as a very few mountaineering expeditions more recently.

This expedition began life in 2004. However, at the last minute, while the expedition was in Chengdu preparing to fly to Lhasa, the necessary permits were cancelled. This resulted in the first ascents of two peaks, Longemain (6294m) and Daddomain (6380m), in the Daxue Shan Range, and a new resolve to make another attempt to get to the Lawa Valley in 2005.

The Lawa Valley was accessed from Lhasa over three days via the Lake Basong area. Basecamp was established in the Lawa Valley Gumpa, half a days walk from the village of Punkar and the road end. After 10 days of searching for the best access route, an ABC was established below the west face of Ura Drajhmo (6060m). Twelve days were then spent double and triple carrying loads via Camps 1, 2, 3, and 4 to the high cirque below the south face of Birutaso (6550m). The route passed over a high col (Choirboy Col) on the NE shoulder of Ura Drajhmo before dropping down to the edge of the Birutaso glacier which drains Birutaso and falls into the cirque above Kangpo Tso (the lake immediately south of the Lawa Gumpa). This glacier was followed into the Birutaso Cirque.

From Camp 4, Birutaso was climbed via a long, steepening gulley on the south face which ran into the east ridge. We reached the summit on the 5th November at 10pm and bivvied just below the summit. Three days were then spent descending back to Basecamp.

Due to a much drier road the drive from Punkar to Lhasa was done in one, very long day.

The Chinese Tibetan Mountaineering Association organised permits, staff, transport and accommodation while in Lhasa and on the road. We supplied all basecamp equipment and food. Permits for this area remain tenuous and very expensive.

Another climbing expedition was in the Lawa Valley at the same time. The Swiss team of Adrien Greiner and Gian Liesch shared transport into the valley and had the forethought to bring decent coffee. They made an unsuccessful attempt on Chiewchukpo 6552m.

2. Introduction

The 2005 New Zealand Unclimbed Tibet Expedition began life as the 2004 New Zealand Unclimbed Tibet Expedition which had obtained permits to climb in the Nyenchentanghla East Range of eastern Tibet. Apparent illegal activities by other expeditions and agencies in the area caused the cancellation of our permits by the Chinese Tibetan Mountaineering Association (CTMA), while the expedition was preparing to fly to Lhasa from Chengdu, China. A gob smacking view of what we thought was Birutaso during a subsequent flight to Lhasa stiffened our resolve to return to the fray in 2005. We originally applied for permits to climb Chiewchukpo 6552m (Mr Nakamuras' Chuchepo) and Birutaso, however a huge increase in fees since 2004, meant we refocused on one peak only, Birutaso.

The spelling of Chinese or Tibetan place names in this report is our own, probably misguided, phonetic spellings, where we have not been able to confirm correct spelling. We have tried to identify placenames for various features around the valley. These place names are shown on Fig 1, 2 and 4 and Map 3 and those that we have not seen previously mentioned in other literature are marked in red. Appendix B has some pronunciation notes for frequently used Tibetan terms. We refer to the Col on the north-east shoulder of Ura Drajhmo as Choirboy Col and the glacier which drains it towards the north-west as Choirboy Glacier. Also, the glacier which drains the Birutaso Cirque is referred to here as the Birutaso Glacier upper and, below the cirque wall south of Kongpo Tso, lower. These names replace a seeming absence of local names.

More information on the expedition may be gained from www.summitfootprints.com

2.1. Purpose

The expedition aimed to explore the surrounds of the Lawa valley, in particular the southern side of the valley with a view to accessing Birutaso for an attempted ascent. No other climbing party had previously been to the Lawa Valley although Mr Nakamura had trekked into the valley in 2002. Birutaso was unattempted.

2.2. Location (Map 1, 2, 3 and Fig 1)

The Lawa Valley lies in the southern part of the Nyenchentanghla East Range (=Nyainqentaghlha East) between the Yigong Tsangpo and the Upper Kongpo Valley (Nyang-Chu). Lake Basong (Draksum Tso) lies just to the south and an ancient trade path links this to Lhari in the north. This trade path turns from a drivable (only just in Sept) 4WD road to a horse track at the village of Punkar (actually a strung out collection of small hamlets) at N 30° 16.867', E 93° 26.942'. The Lawa is a small valley which runs east from Punkar for approximately six kilometres before branching. The main valley swings south and ends at a lake, Kongpo Tso surrounded by huge mountain walls. The other branch continues east through a small steep gorge towards Chiewchukpo. Our basecamp was established approx one kilometre to the north of Kongpo Tso at the Lawa Valley Gompa (monastery) at N 30° 16.868', E 93° 26.942'.

2.3. Character and Area Access (see Map 1 and 2)

The Lawa Valley can be accessed relatively quickly by road from Lhasa. A very good tar-sealed road heads NE from Lhasa up and over the Mi La (Beh La, Mamzhong La 5000m) and down the upper Kongpo (Nyang Chu) before turning off to the well known tourist spot of Lake Basong (Draksum Tso). We spent our first night here. This is the end of good roads! A reasonable dirt road heads north up the Drukla-Chu to the local administration town of Drukla. The drainage continues north from here to the south face of the highest peak in the region, Nenang (6870m). The road to Punkar heads west then north up the Duuma Phu, and rapidly deteriorates. In September it was still raining every day and the truck frequently became bogged. The drive took two days from Lk Basong to Punkar (this took approx 4 hrs on the way out). We spent the night at the village of Baa.

The overall range runs east-west here, however the topography is very convoluted and the terrain is very steep. The valley floors are for the most part open and grazed, however the valley sides are heavily forested. The northern side of the Duuma Phu rises in very steep granite walls. Access from the valleys up to the peaks looks to be difficult and expeditions should allow plenty of time to recce routes. The whole area is very beautiful but the lushness of the vegetation acts as a warning as the prevailing quantities of precipitation.

3. Personnel

The expedition consisted of two New Zealand climbers, a CTMA 'guide' and a local villager Nordrup who minded basecamp.

New Zealand Climbers

Sean Waters

Sean is a 36 year old climber from Christchurch, New Zealand. He currently works as a civilian Adventurous Training Instructor for the New Zealand Army

Jorian (Jo) Kippax

Jo is 35 years old and currently resides in Hobart, Tasmania. He is a Doctor of Emergency Medicine.

CTMA Staff

'Guide'

Tashi Pemba is a Tibetan guide employed by the CTMA. While adequate, he proved more quietly obstructive than helpful. Despite a very clear agreement that basecamp was one days walk above Punkar, Tashi tried his level best to keep our basecamp down in the village. This is apparently 'normal' on the 'big' expeditions. When we finally convinced that we weren't paying him to sit in the village he agreed to come up, but spent his entire time in the Swiss basecamp further down valley. This meant that we had to insist that he hire a local to look after our basecamp equipment when we weren't there. This had

been part of the original agreement anyway but Tashi tried to wriggle out of it. Our advise- before you leave Lhasa be very explicit about whether basecamp is up the valley or in the last village. Tashi also spent a good deal of his energy trying to convince us to leave the valley early.

Nordrup

Nordrup was a local villager from Punkar, employed by the CTMA at our insistence, once it became obvious that Tashi was not going to be at our basecamp most of the time. Nordrup was excellent, looking after our camp whenever we needed him to and providing excellent company.

NB: CTMA do not supply basecamp equipment or cook unless specifically arranged and paid for.

The CTMA had undertaken to supply two staff. This agreement, which had been part of the price negotiations, was largely ignored once we were away from Lhasa. Nordrup was employed only at our vehement insistence.

4. Preparation and Logistics

4.1. Introduction

This section deals with the organisation and logistics as organised prior to beginning the walk into basecamp.

4.2. Research

This region of Tibet has had limited prior exploration by mountaineering parties. The area around Lake Basong and the peak of Jieqinnalagabu (Namla Karpo) in particular, just to the south of the Lawa Valley, has seen several expeditions including a New Zealand party in 1999 and an American party in 2002 as well as the eventual first ascensionists, a Swiss party in 2004. Several British parties have explored the Niwu valley to the north of the Lawa and their 2003 MEF report proved valuable. The initial motivation for the expedition and the best source of information in both 2004 and 2005 proved to be Mr Tomatsu Nakamura and in particular his seminal 2003 publication *East of the Himalaya – To the Alps of Tibet*. This provides excellent photos, maps, history and descriptions of the area. As is to be expected in a publication of initial explorations, the occasional geographic details proved to be incorrect but these became apparent only after having spent a considerable period of time in the Lawa Valley.

Maps were sourced from Eastview Cartographics at www.cartographic.com. We purchased the Russian 1:200000 map, sheet H46XVI. These proved to be mostly accurate in topographical detail although many of the stated spot heights were a little dubious.

The flight path of the Chengdu-Lhasa flight turned out to fly almost directly over Birutaso and in a 2004 flight to Lhasa we took an excellent photo of the range out the plane window. This proved invaluable in planning our attempts.

Google Earth seems set to become the new must-have tool in planning trips such as this. Although the vertical scale can be a little twisted and the finer detail is obviously

hazy, the images provided by this amazing software are excellent at giving a relatively accurate picture of large scale terrain features (see Fig 1 and 3).

4.3. Formalities

The Nyenchentanghla East Range falls under the jurisdiction of the Chinese Tibetan Mountaineering Association and as such they issue all permits for the area. We dealt directly with them rather than through an agent. In 2004 we dealt with Mr Dou, while in 2005 we dealt with Ms Yang Zhen. Despite the fact that these two work in the same office for the same organisation we received two very different outcomes. In 2004 we were granted an 'Exploratory Mountaineering Permit' which allowed us to climb anything in the valley, at the cost of US\$3000.00, but in 2005 we were told that this type of permit did not exist (and never had) and a single peak permit was US\$8000.00 (and always had been!). We still haven't gotten to the bottom of this.

It appears that this area is still very tenuous to get permission for. The week before our departure from New Zealand, we were told our permits had not come through and to look for another objective. Then, four days before departure, we finally received confirmation of the permits. This appears to be par for the course- probably not an area to visit if you require certainty for your holidays!!

The CTMA organised accommodation and meals in Lhasa and on the road to Punkar, all permits, transport to and from Punkar and staff. There appears to be little negotiation around the degree of service- its all part of the package. We supplied all food and equipment at and above basecamp.

The other expedition (Swiss) in the valley arranged their permits and logistics through an agent and were fully serviced with basecamp equipment and a cook supplied. They obviously paid more for these services but also seemed to have paid significantly more for their peak permit.

Different costs seemed to be quoted to the three expeditions to the Range that we have been in contact with. We were charged US\$8000.00 for the peak permit and US\$3000.00 per person for logistics.

We had trouble with the CTMA staff as to the siting of basecamp. We obviously wanted a camp as close as possible to Biruatso while Tashi was adamant that basecamp should be at the roadend. This, evidently, is normal practise on the 'big peaks' where the 'guide' stays at the road end. In more remote locations however where the security of equipment and food left at an unattended higher basecamp is an issue, this is obviously unsatisfactory. These issues should be clarified before leaving Lhasa.

4.4. Area Information, Previous Activity and Local Placenames

Information on the area is very scarce. Tomatsu Nakamuras' book- East of the Himalayas- To the Alps of Tibet, proved to be the main source of information as did personal communications with Mr Nakamura. It appears that the last visitor to the Lawa valley/Punkar before Mr Nakamura may have been Frank Kingdon Ward in 1924, although several expeditions have explored other valleys in the region.

Certainly the larger Range has had various expeditions visit it, and the best known area to date has been the Sepu Kangri massif which British teams attempted in 1996, 97, and 1998. This peak, the highest in the range was finally climbed in 2002 by an American team. South of the Yigong Tsangpo has had much less exposure and exploration, as detailed below.

Explorations in the area south of the Yigong Tsangpo

- 1924 Frank Kingdon-Ward reached Lake Basong from the east and travelled through to Lhari via Punkar.
- 1999 New Zealand party attempted Jieqinnalagabu, (Namla Karpo) 6316m and another 6000m peak- east of Lk Basong.
- 2000 Japanese party enter a valley north of Lake Basong and a valley north of Kajaqiao (Jajacho) (6447m)
- 2001 T Nakamura attempted to head SE from Lhari down the Yigong Tsangpo.
- 2001 John Town (British) visited a valley north of Lk Basong.
- 2002 John Town and Nicola Mart explore up the Nyewo Chu (Niwu Chu) from the Yigong Tsangpo to the north side of Nenang
- 2002 American attempt on Jieqinnalagabu (Namla Karpo) east of Lk Basong.
- 2002 T Nakamura visits southern side of Nenang and travels through Punkar to the high pass Laqin La (pass across to Niwu Chu). Side trip into Lawa Valley- photographs Chiewchukpo and Birutaso (from Laqin La)
- 2003 Swiss ascent of Jieqinnalagabu (Namla Karpo), east of Lk Basong
- 2004 New Zealand ascent of Birutaso 6550m (this report)
- 2004 Swiss attempt on Chiewchukpo
- 2004 British ascent of Kajaqiao (Jajacho)(6447m)

Originally we had intended to attempt Chiewchukpo (Nakamuras' Chuchepo) as well as Birutaso but a huge increase in fees from our 2004 quote caused us to focus on one peak only, Birutaso. Although labelled on his sketch maps, Mr Nakamuras' publication did not include a photograph of Birutaso and the peak was labelled as the 6691m peak on his sketch maps. This, in conjunction with the Russian map which indicates that the highest peak in that cirque is on the south side (6542m) had us thinking that Birutaso was the highest peak in the cirque and was indeed on the southern side of the cirque. An aerial photo that we took during the Chengdu-Lhasa flight also showed the biggest peak on the southern side of the cirque which we assumed was Birutaso. It also showed a gob-smacking looking rock peak on the north side of the cirque. Mr Nakamura was able to send us a hazy photo of what he thought was the snow/ice north face of Birutaso taken from a long way up the Punkar-Lhari trade path. After a significant investment of time investigating a route into the cirque with a view to climbing the southern-most peak we finally got a clear weather day when we could ascend the pass above Punkar village and see Birutaso for the first time (See Fig 5). After confirming with the locals that the peak we were looking at was indeed Birutaso, it became obvious we'd been chasing the wrong peak. Birutaso was the beautiful rock peak on the north side of the cirque that we had seen from the plane. By this time we were committed to our explored access route (due to time pressure) into the cirque and we climbed from that cirque on Birutasos' southern side. The 6691m peak on the southern side of the cirque is a beautiful peak called Qang Dhen.

We used Mr Nakamuras' sketch maps of the area and the Russian military map at a scale of 1:200000, from East View Cartographics at www.cartographic.com. Sheet H-46-XVI covers the area. The topography of these maps seems to be very accurate. After discussions with the local people, various placenames that have appeared in previous reports/maps appear to have been changed in this report. Chief amongst these is the gob smacking looking peak of Chiewchukpo (see fig 2). This is the same peak as that called Chuchepo in Mr Nakamuras publication. The other notable change is to the peak that the British attempted from the Niwu valley. They called this peak Chukporisum- however the people from the Lawa valley call this peak Peygyer and reserve the name Chukporisum for some form of holy trinity comprising Peygyer, Sendho and Chiewchukpo. (see fig 1 and 2 and Map 3)

4.5. Climbing Seasons

There seem to be two main seasons for climbing in this region, the pre-monsoon April- May and post monsoon September-November. As far as we know all the successful ascents (Sepu Kangri, Namla Karpo, Kajaqiao and Birutaso) have been made in the Sept-Nov season.

We drove into Punkar on the 4th October. The road was still very marginal due to high rainfall. This precipitation eased during the next month or so but continued to be a problem. There were about five precipitation free days in the entire five weeks of the expedition.

4.6. Weather (see Appendix D)

We encountered unsettled and seemingly unpredictable weather. During our approach from Lhasa and the initial few weeks in the valley were very wet, indeed we wondered if we were going to get out of Basecamp at all during the first week. Days in which there was no precipitation at all were very rare and we were very fortunate to summit during a multiday fine spell. The first week of November was definitely the most stable period of the trip.

Initially precipitation at basecamp was in the form of rain, however from mid-October snow began to predominate. The result of the precipitation rate, obviously, was a huge amount of snow up high and very heavy going. Avalanche hazard was regularly high.

Discussions with the locals and the obvious density of forestation on the valley sides indicate that these levels of precipitation are normal.

4.7. Provisions and Fuel

We obtained climbing food in New Zealand in the form of Backcountry Foods Dehydrated meals, Mother Earth and Powerbar snack bars, and Easy Yo milk drinks. All other food was purchased by us in Lhasa, A comprehensive supply of groceries is available at the supermarket on the main street of Lhasa not far from the old Tibetan quarter. Many other items such as tarpaulines and pressure cookers were obtained in the various markets and shops around Lhasa. It is fair to say that you will be able to buy most items other than specialist high altitude food, in Lhasa. It was an enormous help to have a local CTMA person with us while we shopped, as little English is spoken.

Fuel is always the bugbear of these expeditions and on this one we decided to dispense with liquid fuel as much as possible. We had no problem purchasing butane/propane gas canisters in Lhasa. These seemed to be plentiful. For basecamp we hired a gas ring and large gas bottles from the CTMA.

We did purchase a limited stock of petrol in case we needed to run a liquid fuel stove. Thankfully this never became an issue.

Cigarette lighters always seem to be a real problem on these trips and inevitably we end up wishing that we had risked the ire of airport security staff and packed reliable lighters from home. This trip was no exception and the only answer seems to be to purchase an inordinate number of lighters and carry at least ten at all times. This policy got us through the trip although at times it still looked questionable as to whether or not we would get a cup of tea.

4.8. Equipment

Our route required glacier travel gear plus a rack for general alpine snow/ice climbing. The south side of Birutaso had some fantastic looking rock buttresses on it and there appears to be good rock on other peaks. Hence we carried a minimal rock rack as well. The rock appears to be some sort of granite.

Avalanche gear was essential- a transceiver, shovel and probe made us feel a little better about the conditions. Snowshoes were also essential. Without them we would not have gotten anywhere near Birutaso let alone climbed it. Skis would have been handy but awkward with very heavy packs and a pain to travel with.

4.9. Logistics

CTMA organised most of the logistics including accommodation and meals while in Lhasa, transport, accommodation and meals between Lhasa and Punkar and on the way back. This all went relatively smoothly although a new truck was required to be sent in to replace an inadequate vehicle during the drive between Lk Basong and Lhari. This was the first expedition the CTMA had conducted into the area so they knew as much as us about what to expect. CTMA also organised horses into and out of basecamp.

We did have problems with our CTMA staff member and his expectations of where he would be spending his time (see Personnel section). The best description (if I was a psychologist) of Tashi Pemba would be 'passive obstructive'. We did have a few minor financial issues with him as well that we would have let pass if it hadn't been for his previous largely unhelpful manner. Fortunately the Swiss expedition who were in the valley at the same time seemed to have a more capable CTMA guide, Tashi Tshering, who organised much of the 'on the road' logistics for us as well as them (we shared transport from Lhasa to Punkar).

CTMA provided no basecamp equipment.

The local Lama Tashi Wangdra asked us if we would like to establish our basecamp in the grounds of the local Gompa. This proved to be a wonderful basecamp which included a cook hut.

Table 1

Overall Expedition Itinerary (all dates are 2005)

Dates	Activity
29 Sept-1 Oct	Lhasa- formalities/food purchase
2 Oct- 4 Oct	Drive Lhasa- Punkar
5 Oct- 6 Oct	Organisation and walk to basecamp
7 Oct- 17 Oct	Recce approaches to Birutaso
18 Oct-8 Nov	Climbed Birutaso
9 Nov	Walked to Punkar
10 Nov	Drive to Lhasa

4.10. Finance

The expedition cost approximately NZ\$36160.00

We received various grants including NZ\$2550.00 from the MEF, NZ\$2800.00 from the NZDF Singapore Fund and NZ\$3000.00 from the NZAC. We are extremely grateful for this support.

4.11. Air Travel, Luggage and Freight

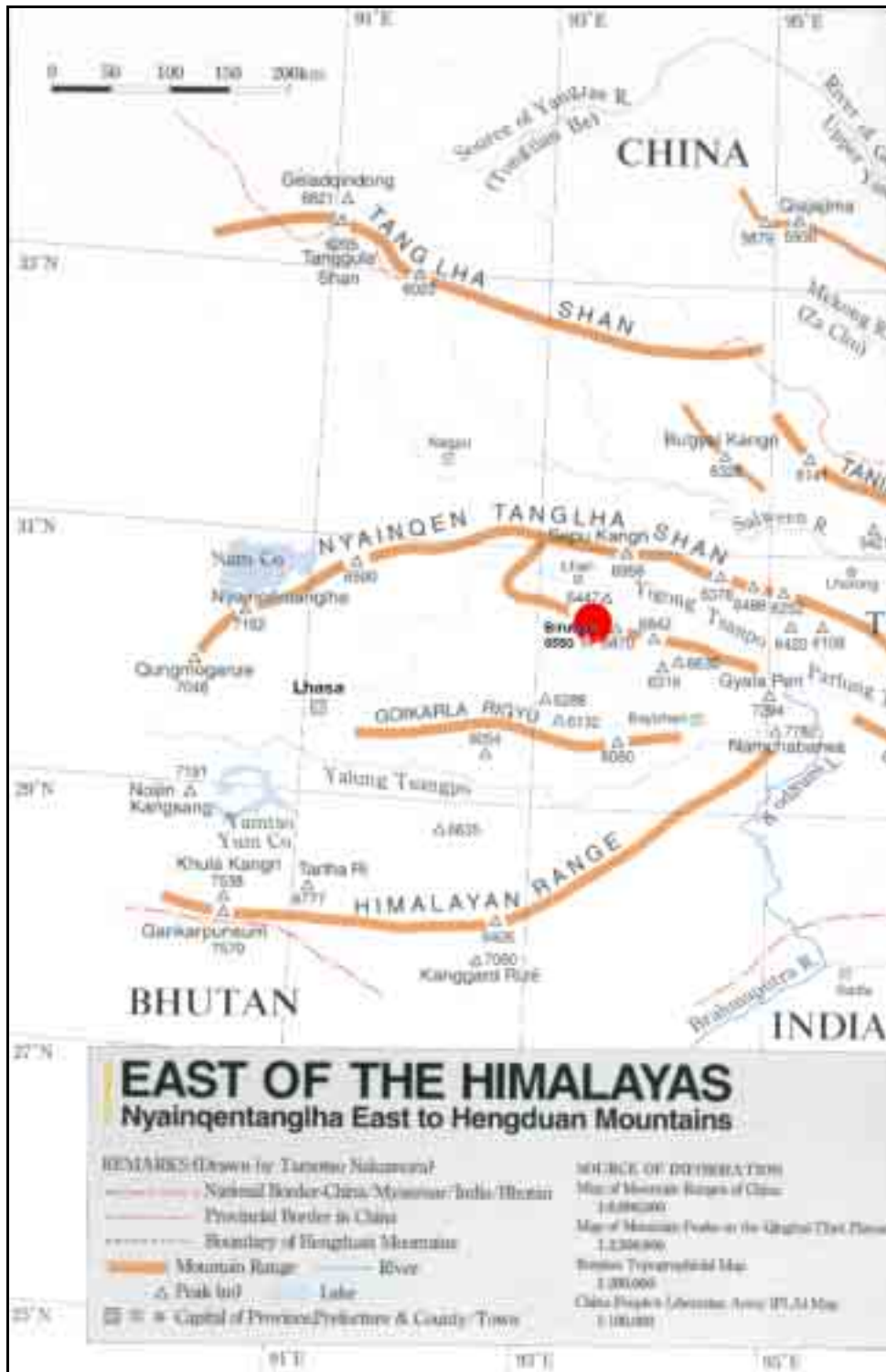
We flew Singapore Air to Chengdu via Singapore and returned the same way. We had 10 kgs of excess baggage arranged and managed to sweet talk the check in people to allow the remainder on free of charge. We were unable to book a Chengdu-Lhasa ticket from New Zealand and hence used Shaohong Zhang from the Sichuan Adventure Travel Company that we used in 2004, to book us tickets. The CTMA sent copies of our permits through to him to enable him to do this. Air China seem to be a lot less amenable to such sweet talk and we freighted several large boxes from Chengdu to Lhasa. This took two days to arrive.

On the way home we freighted boxes of equipment from Lhasa to New Zealand and Australia. This arrived home without incident in about nine weeks, however we still got stung for excess luggage at the Air China counter in Lhasa. We tried cajoling, threatening, looking meek, then mad, but all to no avail.

4.12. Medical Arrangements

Jo organised and transported all medical equipment.

No significant medical problems transpired during the expedition. Jo was able to advise and treat local people on occasion.



Map 1. The ranges of eastern Tibet with the expedition area shown in red.
Adapted from a map in 'East of the Himalaya' drawn by Tomatsu Nakamura

5. Expedition Activities

5.1. Introduction

This section describes our activities once the expedition was underway.

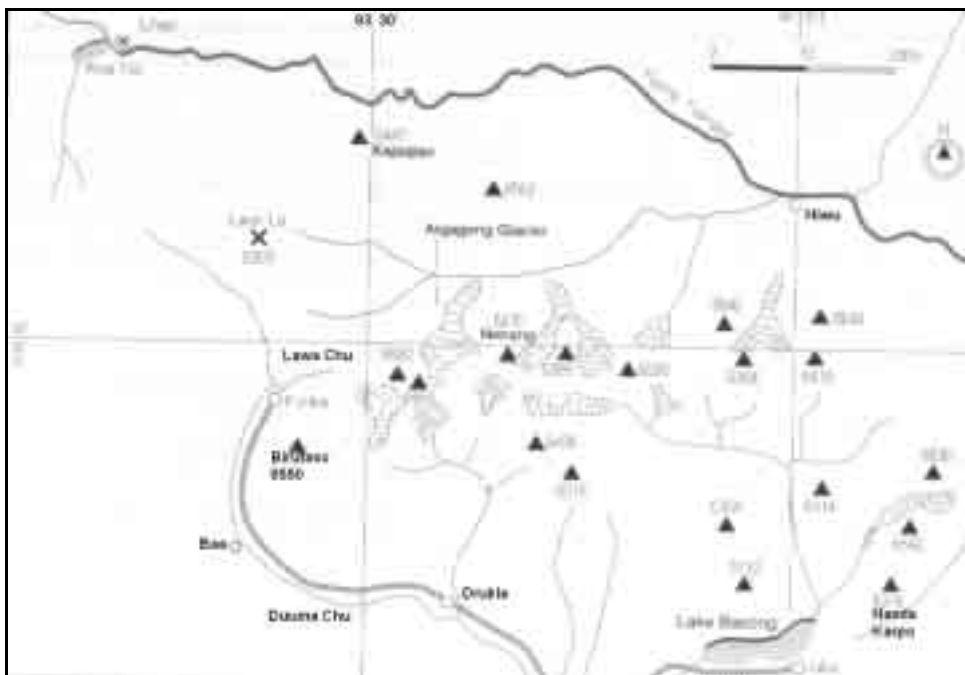
5.2. Access in and Out (Map 1 and 2)

The expedition drove, in tandem with the Swiss expedition, east from Lhasa on the main road over the Beh La (Mi La) to Gyamda. This road is of very good quality, although the same cannot be said of the drivers on it! Shortly after Gyamda we turned off the main road onto side road to Lake Basong (Draksum Tso). This road was also very good. The drive from Lhasa to Lake Basong took nine hours. Lake Basong is a highly promoted tourist center and although the facilities there were basic one gets the feeling that this will become a very busy spot over the next few years.

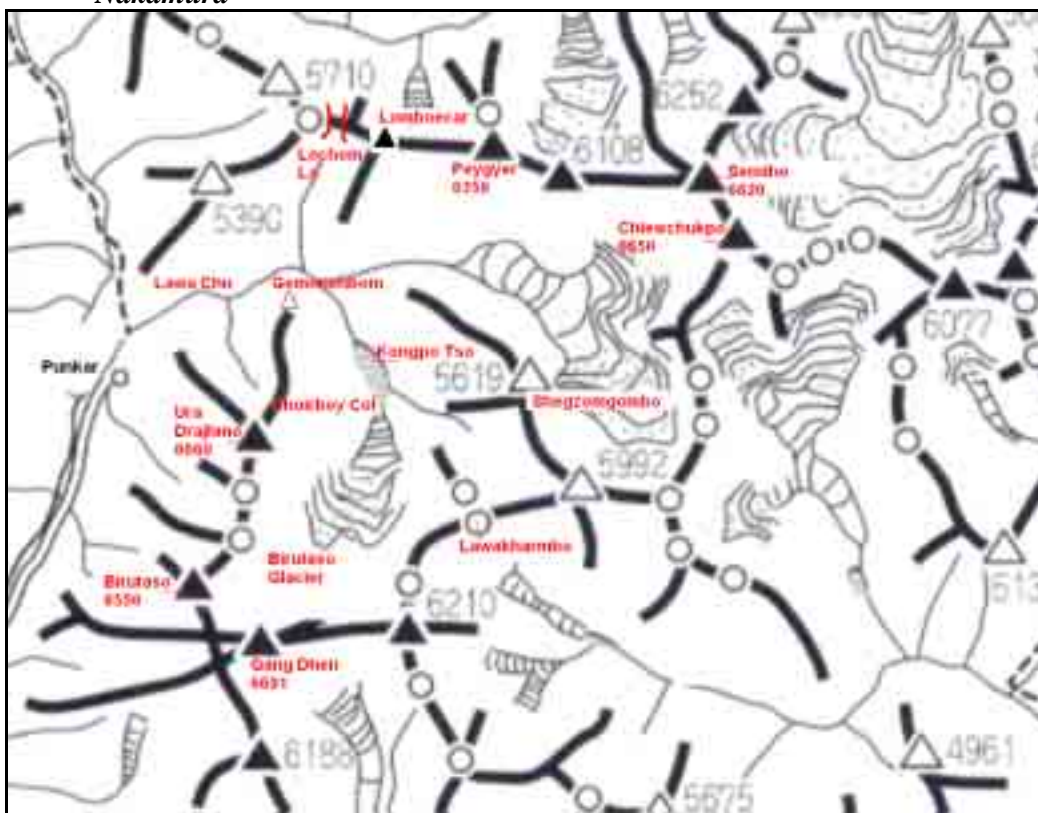
From Draksum Tso we headed back down the road for a few kilometres before turning north up the Drukla Valley where a good gravel road lead to the village of Drukla. This is the administrative center of the area and our permits etc were checked here while our CTMA guides tried to work out how to get to Punkar. The main valley continued north towards the south face of Nenang (Nakamura travelled up this valley in 2002). Our route headed west from Drukla through a narrow gorge which opened up into the large valley of the Duuma Phu. The road slowly deteriorated into a mud track and, with vehicle problems, we ended up spending the night in the village of Baa before proceeding the next day up valley to Punkar which we reached late in the day. Progress was touch and go, due to the continuing monsoonal rains, with many mud holes and washed out bridges.

From the road end at Punkar, a short 2 hour walk up the Lawa Valley to the Lawa Gompa saw us at the most beautiful basecamp either of us have had the pleasure of spending time in. We had no problem engaging local horses for our equipment. The local Lama, Tashi WangDra, was more than happy with us using the grounds of the Gompa as our basecamp and provided a stone accommodation hut for our use as a cook hut. The Swiss expedition established their basecamp two kilometres down valley, in an area known as Beemorthung (Hidden place grassland).

On the way out we left the Lawa Gompa on the 9th November and stayed with Tashi WangDra in Punkar before driving all the way to Lhasa in a long day. This was possible due to the road in the Duuma Valley being in much better condition than on the drive in.



Map 2 The approach to the Punkar and the Lawa valley from Lake Basong (Draksum Tso)
Adapted from a map in 'East of the Himalaya' drawn by Tomatsu Nakamura



Map 3: The Lawa valley area with additional local names and corrections to the original map (as understood by our expedition) added in red (phonetic spellings).
Adapted from a map in 'East of the Himalaya' drawn by Tomatsu Nakamura

5.3. Initial Recces (Fig 3)

Tomatsu Nakamuras map on page 88 of *East of the Himalayas-To the Alps of Tibet*, in which Birutaso appears to be attributed to the 6691m peak (6542m on Russian 1:200000) and the Russian 1:200000 map which has only Pk 6542 assigned a spot height (6691 on Nakamuras map) had us assuming that Birutaso was Pk 6691 (or 6542) and this is what we based our initial plans on. During the first part of our expedition we gained no view of the mountains above Punkar due to continual cloud cover. It wasn't until mid-way through the trip that we discovered that the locals called the peak, labelled in Nakamuras' map 6455m, Birutaso. This peak towered almost directly above the Duuma valley and Punkar and was not the peak we had been heading for during the proceeding few weeks! It was however the very good looking rock peak that we had photographed from the Lhasa-Chengdu flight the previous year, and that we had hoped we might get a look at on the ground. By the time that we had realised our error we were running out of time to recce new approaches to Birutaso (eg; directly from the Duuma Valley) and continued on our attempts to gain the cirque between Pk 6455(Birutaso) and Pk 6691. (Pk 6691 is a beautiful looking ice fluted peak called Qang Dhen (pronounced phonetically Khungden) and Birutaso turned out to be 6550m).

So our initial recces were an attempt to get to the cirque between what turned out to be Birutaso and Qang Dhen- a cirque referred to subsequently as Birutaso Cirque.

1st Recce - 7 October.

The lake immediately south of the Lawa Gumpa is Kongpo Tso and we had initially hoped that there may be easy access from the southern end of the lake around the corner and up the Birutaso Glacier into the Birutaso Cirque. A day trip up onto the lower Birutaso glacier quickly dispelled this dream- a huge cirque wall surrounded the valley. A vegetated ledge was noticed on the western side of the valley, that may have provided access around the cirque wall and was deemed worthy of further investigation. Heavy snowfall in the evening convinced us to explore another option before we did battle with this thick- snow covered scrub ledge.

2nd Recce 9-14 October

On the walk into the Lawa Gumpa we had noticed a small hanging glacier on the south side of the Lawa Valley. This looked like it might provide quick access to a col (we named it Choirboy Col) on the north-east shoulder of a peak known as Ura Drajhmo (6060m Nakamura or 5872m Russian 1:200000) and we hoped that this would lead us over to the upper Birutaso Glacier, or at least give us a good view point from which to gain an understanding of the best approach. We carried loads up to 4720m in this valley and returned to basecamp before heading back up hoping to get right through to Choirboy Col from basecamp. This illusion was cruelly shattered as soon as we stepped onto the Choirboy Glacier. The snow was very deep and it quickly became obvious that progress was going to be very slow and that a reasonably major icefall stood between us and the Col. We retreated to basecamp with our tail between our legs. The following day we moved a camp up to 4720m. Above this, in a pattern that came to characterise the expedition we had to re-plug our steps which had been covered by overnight snow. We did however manage to reach Choirboy Col at 5427m (N30° 15.440' E93° 26.060'). This gave us great views into the upper Birutaso Glacier neves, although Birutaso cirque was obscured around the corner. Along the western edge of the upper Birutaso Glacier,

polished rock slabs looked as though they would give fast access towards the cirque and looked to link very closely with the top of the vegetated ledges that we had seen from the lower Birutaso Glacier. It also seemed to us that the Choirboy Col route would be very slow due to the snow cover/icefall and would also quickly become subject to dangerous avalanche conditions with further snowfall. The decision was thus made to abandon the Choirboy route in favour of the vegetated ledges. The loads and camp we had carried up over three days were carried back down to basecamp. We were super excited to find snow leopard prints in the snow around our camp on the morning of the 12th.

3rd Recce 16 October

We headed back around Kongpo Tso, this time on the eastern side, noticing bear prints in the mud (the locals had warned us to make lots of noise while bashing through the forest between basecamp and Kongpo Tso) and made quick progress up rock buttresses at the south-west corner of the lake. These led up onto the vegetated ramp and initially the going was pretty good. Progress soon deteriorated into thick interlocked Rhododendron bushes as we tried to force a way through the roughly 800m we needed to cover to reach short gullies that appeared to lead up to near the beginning of the rock slabs we had observed from Choirboy Col. After a couple of hours we dumped our packs and after 6 further hours we had covered only 600m and were forced to admit that we were never going to be able to carry loads through this nightmare of a forest. Back to square one!!

Back in basecamp we re-evaluated our progress and it became obvious that we probably didn't have time to recce another route which may take days and leave us thwarted again. So we decided to commit to going back up the Choirboy Col route. With the time left we probably didn't have the luxury of two attempts and so we committed to a single push probably, due to snow conditions, with double/triple carrying of loads. That decision made, we carried loads to our first camp site, now ABC, over the next two days before the weather packed in and rained/snowed heavily for three days. On the afternoon of the fourth day the weather cleared and we scurried down to Punkar village and up the hill behind the village. From there we saw, for the first time on the expedition Pk 6455 and Pk 6691 (*Nakamuras map*). Consultation with Tashi WangDra over the resulting digital photos made us realise that Pk 6455 was in fact Birutaso. It was too late to attempt a recce from the north or east side and the already planned route into the Birutaso cirque should give us access to the south face of Birutaso which we had a good aerial photo of. It was decided to stick with the Choirboy Col route.



Fig 2. View NE from near the summit of Birutaso showing some of the local features. (photo Jo Kippax)

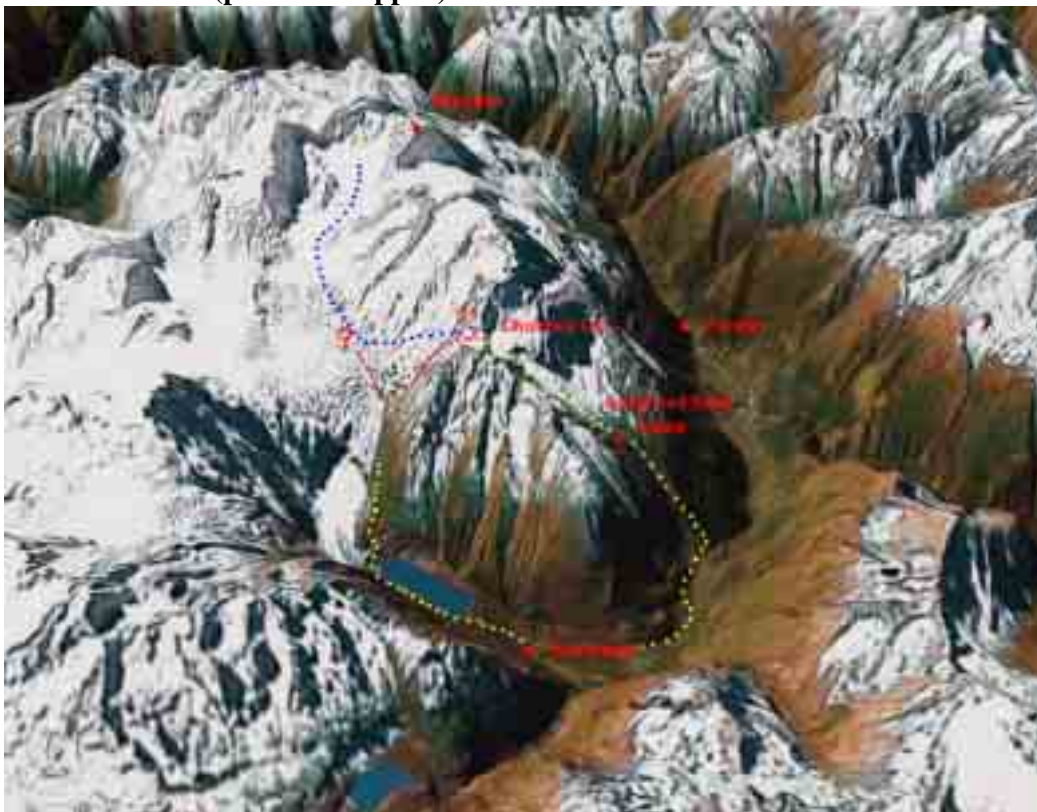


Fig 3. Google Earth image from the NE showing the recce routes (yellow) and final line of access (yellow then red then blue)

5.4. Access to Birutaso Cirque (Fig 3 and 4)

On the 24th Oct we carried a final load and moved into ABC at 4720m. The recent storm had obviously deposited a lot of new snow and our previous footprints were completely obliterated. We spent the next two days forging a way up Choirboy Glacier initially on the true right and then centrally through the icefall. At times we resorted to ditching our packs and shovelling a way forward. These two days got a stash of gear at the foot of the final slope up to the Col and we were hopefully of moving a camp up to the Col the following day. 25cm new snow overnight put paid to that, as most of the slopes on and around the glacier proceeded to avalanche. After a days settlement we moved camp up and over Choirboy Col. This involved double carrying loads to the bottom of the Col and then carrying a light load over the Col to a camp site. We established a cave at this site (5399m N30° 15.397' E93° 26.071' and began the traverse around to the south hoping that it would lead us toward the rock slabs we had noticed on the earlier recce. Just around the corner however, a large icefall completely blocked the route and we were forced to drop 500m down and around the toe of this feature. It soon became obvious that the nice clear, fast-access rock slabs we had been anticipating were now covered in 0.5-1m of new snow and forward progress was a complete body experience. We were somewhat despondent by this stage and had all but given up hope of getting a crack at Birutaso. Over the next five days we slowly ground our way through approx 4 kms of glacier via three more camps and, somewhat surprised, found ourselves at Camp 4 (5630m N30° 13.258', E93° 25.359') in the heart of the Birutaso Cirque right under the south face of Birutaso.

5.5. Ascent of Birutaso from Camp 4 (Fig 6)

On the 4th November we moved into Camp 4 and spent the evening plugging steps up a steepening coulior that headed up towards the East ridge. The following morning we headed up the steps, leaving the tent at 5.00am in very cold conditions. The top of the coulior led to the ridge which had very steep ground on the north side. A section of sharp unconsolidated ridge, forced us to traverse around on the southern side just below the crest. Conditions were not ideal, consisting of 10 cm of large grained snow overlying hard ice, however after 12 days of deep snow it was heaven. The ice in the couliors was dinner plating green ice but on the steep ground just under the ridge it turned to brittle, chandelier ice, very difficult to get good protection into. The traverse led us into the top of our eventual descent coulior which we pitched up for three- four pitches. These led us onto a broad shoulder leading up to the crest of the east ridge. Anywhere that the ground eased off, the snow deepened and pockets of terrain lee to the northwest were obviously avalanche prone. Jo kicked off a Class 2 slab not far along the ridge which disappeared over the south face leaving us both somewhat nervous. It became reasonably obvious early on that we were facing a night of climbing or bivying if we continued. The ridge continued over several large steps before merging into the bottom of the summit block. We headed up this in a broad coulior on the south east face and initially good conditions rapidly deteriorated into very steep, bottomless snow. This occurred as darkness fell, leaving us feeling very vulnerable. The only available belay was to dig a large hole and hope that body mass was enough to avoid getting dragged out, something we were not at all confident of. The only way to make upward progress was with a shovel and we very tentatively dug

our way to the summit up steep, nerve wracking ground. We arrived there about 10.00pm in bitter cold.

Given the lack of available anchors and the uncertainty of a descent down unknown ground in the dark, we opted for a bivy and spent several hours enlarging the last belay hole. A very cold and anxious night was spent about 20m below the summit however the morning eventually arrived and with it, another clear day. We were incredibly fortunate to have struck a very, very rare two day clear weather window for our summit attempt. We struggled back to the summit for photos and then began a descent which saw us back at Camp 4 at 4.30 pm 35 hrs after leaving and completely shattered.

5.6. The Descent

The next two days were spent in getting back to basecamp. The relatively clear weather meant that initially our steps were still in place, something of a novelty on this expedition! On the 7th November we dragged our tired bums back to the Camp 1 snowcave which, fortunately didn't take too long to dig out. The following day we nervously descended a very loaded Choirboy Glacier, packed up ABC and lugged huge packs down the slabs and back to the valley, to be met by a very relieved Tashi Wangdra and Tashi Pemba.

The following day we packed up Basecamp and sadly turned our back on the Lawa Valley



Fig 4. The Approach to Birutaso from Choirboy Col. This photo was taken from the plane on the Chengdu-Lhasa flight. View is looking toward the NW



Fig 5. The north face of Birutaso taken from just above Punkar Village. Our route joins the left skyline ridge near the obvious break in slope.



Fig 6. South Face of Birutaso showing Camp 4 on the Birutaso Glacier and the main couloir used to access the east ridge.

6. Conclusions and Future Prospects

- The Nyenchantanghla East Range is an amazing place to visit and offers wonderful cultural, exploratory and climbing opportunities.
- It seems to remain bureaucratically fraught, with gaining permits being an expensive and nerve wracking experience.
- Permit and logistic costs seem to be ‘flexible’ and are worth negotiating over.
- Access is relatively straightforward, although the roads may be dodgy in the immediate post-monsoon period.
- Ensure that the CTMA supplies good vehicles, capable of dealing with very rough, wet roads.
- Reach a very clear agreement with the CTMA staff regarding basecamp positions and the employment of additional local staff as required. This should be done before leaving Lhasa.
- Sourcing horses for walks into basecamp appeared to be no problem.
- Butane/propane gas is easily available in Lhasa and is preferable to the local liquid fuel for high altitude cooking.
- Buy what seems like a ridiculous number of lighters (or smuggle them in from home).
- The area is a high precipitation zone and conditions seem likely to be unfavourable for rapid travel during most years.
- The climbing opportunities are almost limitless for those prepared to deal with the uncertainty of permits and the prevailing conditions.

7. Acknowledgments

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- The New Zealand Alpine Club
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- Powerbar
- Mother Earth Ltd
- Easy Yo Ltd

Plus, Lees Solar, Portables Plus and BackCountry Foods Ltd.

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- CTMA and staff

8. Copyright

The compiler of this report and all members of the expedition agree that all or part of it may be used or copied for the purpose of private research

Appendix A. Articles and Books that may be of use

1. Nakamura, T, East of the Himalaya- To the Alps of Tibet. Japanese Alpine News Vol.4 May 2003
2. Bonnington, C & Clarke, C, Tibets Secret Mountain- The Triumph of Sepu Kangri 1999
3. Kingdon-Ward, F, The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges. London 1924.
4. Cammell, P, Feeding the Rat in Tibet, The New Zealand Alpine Journal 2000.
5. MEF Report on British Nyewo Chu Expedition 2002.

Appendix B. Chinese Tibetan Place-Names

The names and placenames used in this report, are phonetically spelt according to our understanding of the local pronunciation (which is shady at best).

There are a few variations from the spellings and pronunciations used in T.

Nakamuras publication. Perhaps the most notable of these is Chiewchukpo (white bird/rich bird). This is what seemed to be the common name given to Mr Nakamuras' Chuchepo. Use of Chuchepo resulted in looks of confusion which eventually gave way to a correction to Chiewchukpo.

The other change from previously published names is the peak of Chukporisum, named and attempted in the reports from the British 2003 Niwu Chu expedition. On the Lawa Valley side the term Chukporisum seems to encompass three peaks- from east to west, Chiewchukpo, Sendho and Peygyar.

Birutaso is the protector diety of the Lawa Valley. Biru = protector Taso= horses tooth.

Other common Tibetan terms used in this report:

La = mountain pass

Chu/Gu = valley or river

Tso = Lake

Appendix C. Expedition Itinerary- Daily

Date (2005)	Activity
25 Sept	Fly to Singapore
26 Sept	Fly Singapore- Chengdu
27-28 Sept	Chengdu- sorting flights and freight
29 Sept	Fly Chengdu-Lhasa
30 Sept-1 Oct	Lhasa- sorting permits, food, logistics etc.
2 Oct	Drive Lhasa- Draksum Tso (9hrs)
3 Oct	Drive Draksum Tso –Baa (8hrs)
4 Oct	Drive Baa- Punkar (5 hrs)
5 Oct	Recce walk up Lawa Valley to Kongpo Tso- select basecamp site
6 Oct	Load horses x 6 and walk to Gompa- establish basecamp
7 Oct	Recce around Kongpo Tao and up onto lower Birutaso Glacier
8 Oct	Basecamp
9 Oct	Recce route to Choirboy Col (CC)- left stash at glacier snout (4700m)
10 Oct	Basecamp
11 Oct	Attempt to reach Choirboy Col- abandoned attempt mid-icefall –back to BC
12 Oct	Carry to 4700 (CC route) and camp.
13 Oct	Up Choirboy Gl to Choirboy Col 9.5 hrs return to camp
14 Oct	Recce to ridge above camp- return to BC with all equipment
15 Oct	BC
16 Oct	Up to recce ramps on W side of lower Birutaso Gl- diabolical Rhododendrons- abandoned attempt
17 Oct	BC- decided to re-commit to Choirboy Col route
18 Oct	Carry to ABC site (CC route) at previous campsite 4700m
19 Oct	Carry load to ABC
20-22 Oct	BC
23 Oct	BC plus sorte to get view of Birutaso for the first time- discovered we're trying to get to the wrong Mtn.
24 Oct	Move to ABC -ready to go with 16 days food and fuel
25 Oct	Plugged steps to mid icefall- back to ABC
26 Oct	Plugged steps and shovelled our way to headwall below Col back to ABC
27 Oct	ABC waiting out Avo conditions after 25cms o/n
28 Oct	Move to Camp 1 on east side of Col 5300m. Double carries.
29 Oct	Dug snowcave and ferried last of gear over Col.
30 Oct	Investigated route south toward Birutaso Cirque- dumped stash return to C1- knackered.
31 Oct	C1- rest day
1 Nov	Cave avalanched o/n. Dug out and sorted gear- Plugged just past stash to Camp 2 5150m
2 Nov	Plugged to and set up Camp 3 (5300m), past Disappointment Buttress
3 Nov	Recce up into Birutaso cirque- fantastic. Back to Camp 2 site to bring up gear to Camp 3
4 Nov	Up to and establish Camp 4 (5650m)in heart of Birutaso cirque
5 Nov	Climbed Birutaso (6550m) summit 10pm. Bivy just below summit.
6 Nov	Return to summit. Descent to Camp 4 at 1630.
7 Nov	Carry down to Camp 1
8 Nov	Descent to Basecamp
9 Nov	Packed up BC- walked with horses to Punkar. Evening with Tashi Wangdra.
10 Nov	Drive Punkar –Lhasa
16 Nov	Depart Lhasa

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Appendix D. Daily Weather Observations

Date (2005)	Time	Loc	Alt	Baro (sea level)	Temp °C	Sky	PPT Rn=Rain Sn=Snow L=light M=moderate	Wind	Wind at ridge top L=light M=Mod S=Strong
3 Oct							Rn		
4							Rn		
5							Rn clear in pm Rn o/n		
6							Clear in am- rain o/n		
7	0930	BC	4000	1028	+6	o/c at 4600	Mod Rn		
7	2140	BC	4000	1026	+4	6/8 Cu	Nil	nil	L NW
8	1230	BC	4000	1028	+9	obs	L Sn- 5cm o/n	Nil	M SW
8	1710	BC	4000	1025	+5	2/8Cu	Nil- sn till 1400	L S	L NW
9	0900	BC	4000	1028	+3	Fog 6/8Cu	Nil -showers all day	VL N	L SE
10	1300	BC	4000	1026	+11	5/8Cu	Nil -Rn o/n till 1000	L S	M SW
10	1930	BC	4000	1024	+5	3/8Cu	Nil	L SE	M SW
11	0800	BC	4000	1026	+2	6/8Cu 1/8 fog	Nil- Rn o/n	nil	M SW
12	0930	BC	4000	1027	-2	2/8Cu	Nil -Rn o/n	nil	L S
12	1915	ABC	4700	1023	+3	2/8Cu	Nil	L SE	L SW
13	0830	ABC	4700	1025	-4	2/8Cu	Nil-1cm Sn o/n	nil	L SW
14	1200	ABC	4700	1026	+6	3/8Cu	Nil -1cm Sn o/n	nil	L SW
14	1800	BC	4000	1021	+9	2/8 Cu	Nil	VL S	M SW
15	1030	BC	4000	1027	+7	2/8Cu, 7/8CiSt	Nil -sn o/n	L NE	S W
16	0850	BC	4000	1026	+3	7/8Cu	L Sn	L N	M SW
18	0840	BC	4000	1026	0	3/8Cu	Nil -L Sn o/n	L S	L SW
19	1000	BC	4000	1026	+5	4/8Cu	Nil L Sn o/n	nil	L SW
19	2000	BC	4000	1023	+9	8/8StCu	Nil -L Sn in pm	L S	M SW
20	1500	BC	4000	1025	+13	8/8StCu	Nil- Rn o/n	L S	L SW
21	1120	BC	4000	1027	+6	8/8StCu	L Rn -rn all night -Sn to 4500	L W	Obs
22	1800	BC	4000	1024	+4	obs	M Rn- Rn +Sn all day	M N	Obs
23	1100	BC	4000	1026	+5	6/8StCu 1/8 Ci	Nil -2cm Sn o/n	nil	Nil
24	1000	BC	4000	1028	-5	clear	Nil-frost	VL S	Nil
25	0800	ABC	4700	1024	-10	clear	nil	nil	Nil
25	2030	ABC	4700	1022	-1	clear	nil	nil	L SW
26	0800	ABC	4700	1022	-8	3/8Cu	L Sn	nil	L SW
26	2000	ABC	4700	1020	0	8/8AlSt	L Sn -sn o/n	nil	L SW
27	0900	ABC	4700	1023	-3	7/8CiSt	Nil -25cm Sn o/n	nil	L SW
27	1830	ABC	4700	1023	-3	1/8 AlSt	Nil -L Sn during day	L E	L SW
28	0900	ABC	4700	1026	-8	clear	Nil	nil	Nil
28	1830	C1	5400	1027	-10	1/8Cu	nil	nil	Nil
29	1900	C1	5400	1022	-5	2/8 AlSt	L Sn in am	nil	Nil
30	0800	C1	5400	1026	-1	obs	L Sn o/n	nil	Nil
30	1930	C1	5400	1027	-5	obs	H Sn	nil	Nil
31	1000	C1	5400	1025	-10	obs	L Sn -5cm o/n	L S	M SW
31	2130	C1	5400	1024		obs	L Sn -3cm during day	Nil	Obs
1 Nov	2030	C2	5150	1025		obs	M Sn -5cm o/n	L S	Obs
2	1000	C2	5150	1027	-5	3/8Cu	L Sn -10cm o/n	nil	L SW
2	1930	C3	5300	1026	-10	5/8StCu	Nil -L Sn in am	nil	L SW
3	1930	C3	5300	1027	-8	3/8Cu	Nil -5cm o/n =Sn all day	nil	L S
4	0730	C3	5300	1028	-20	1/8Cu	Nil -3cm Sn o/n	nil	L S
4	2030	C4	5650	1027	-12	3/8Cu	L Sn -2cm o/n	L SE	L S
6	1930	C4	5650		-15	clear	nil	nil	L S
7	2200	C1	5400	1027	-12	clear	nil	nil	Nil
8	2100	BC	4000	1022		1/8Cu	Nil -L Sn in pm	nil	M SW

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