



British Yangmolong
2009 Expedition
Western Sechuan
10/9/09-10/10/09
Mount Everest Foundation
Report

Dave Wynne-Jones

Aims of the Expedition.

To make an ascent of the unclimbed Yangmolong main peak and/or others in the massif.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction.

While China remained essentially closed during the period following the victory of the Peoples Liberation Army over the Kuomintang, largely as a result of American international pressure to isolate the Communist government, there was little chance of exploring China's mountains.

With Nixon's overtures to the Chinese and the subsequent thawing of international relations, the recognition of China's huge presence both physically and economically on the world's stage has led to an openness that has included mountain tourism. A key figure in this opening up of access to Chinese mountains has been Tamotsu Nakamura. The special edition of the JAC East of the Himalayas, the Alps of Tibet was a landmark publication. His research, exploratory travels and careful collation of maps and pictures has provided climbers with the information to mount expeditions to mountain ranges hitherto unknown to us in Sechuan and eastern Tibet.

After attempts on Gongkala and Haizi Shan in 2005 during an expedition led by Dick Isherwood, the team's interest turned in the direction of Yangmolong, one of only 3 unclimbed 6000m peaks in the Sechuan region. In 2007 Dave Wynne-Jones led a team including Dick Isherwood and Peter Rowat, this time with Steve Hunt, to attempt the peak from the north. Despite failing on Yangmolong main peak they were successful in making first ascents of a satellite peak "Snow-snake" 5600m and a new route on Dangchezhengla 5847m from the north. Subsequently the trek out to the south of the massif revealed possibilities of an ascent from the east. In 2009 Dave led another expedition, this time including Derek Buckle instead of Steve Hunt to explore these possibilities. The sketch-map on the next page is a copy of a Japanese map of the mountain area indicating their approach from the south but also indicates the features referred to in our approach from the north and east.

The Area

Western Sichuan has 2 independent adventure tourist agencies that can provide trekking and climbing holidays with a set itinerary or "tailor-made" packages of transport and accommodation to support exploratory expeditions, including the provision of permits via the Sechuan Mountaineering Association. Costs are reasonable, given that the infrastructure of the province is still under rapid development, and a welcome contrast to the high prices of Tibet.

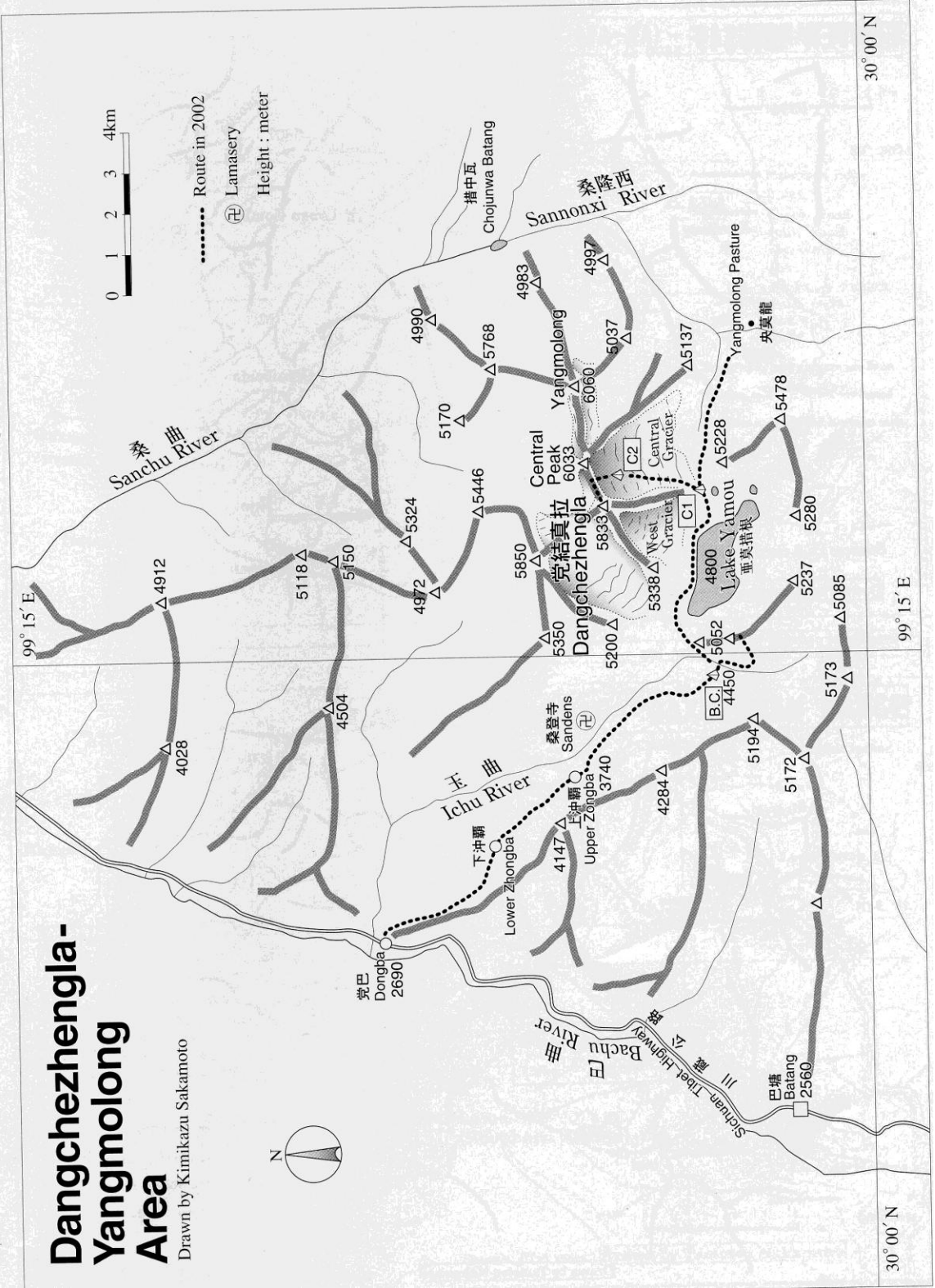
The northern & western areas of the province have a culture very like that of Tibet and the local Kham people speak a Tibetan dialect. There is plenty of evidence of the encouragement of that culture, in the rebuilding of roadside stupas for example, and the countryside is dominated by prosperous farms. The towns are being rapidly developed with shops, services, and community areas often run by Han Chinese settlers.

An indication of the developing prosperity was the almost complete replacement of the horse by the motorcycle in inter-village and inter-valley communication!

The disturbances in the area following riots in Lhasa during the run-up to the Beijing Olympics and some serious casualties amongst foreign expeditions to the area have resulted in a tightening up of regulations and an increase in peak fees since we first visited Sechuan.

Dangchezhengla- Yangmolang Area

Drawn by Kimikazu Sakamoto



The Team

Dave Wynne Jones, leader, 57, British, semi-retired

30 year Alpine experience including ascents of all of the 4000m peaks & routes such as the Frenedo Spur; expeditions to Alaska, Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan, Peru, Pakistan, Nepal, China; 1st ascents of Nevado Padrecaca, S. Face of Pokharkan; 1st British ascent of Punta Bareita, 2nd British ascents of Quepala & Ticlla in Cordillera Central of Peru (all over 5000m); ascents of Denali, Illiniza, Cotopaxi, Cayambe, Pik Lenin, Pisco, Huascaran Norte; Attempts on Gongkala (5992m) and Haizi Shan (5833m) in Western Sechuan in 2005, Yangmolong massif, first ascents of “Snow-snake” 5600m and a new route on Dangchezhengla 5847m NE ridge. Ski expeditions to Mt. Logan, Caucasus, Damavand, Mustagh Ata (7546m. solo ascent), Ak-Shirak 2003, 2006 (7 first ascents of peaks inc. Kyrgysia 4964m), 2007 (4 first ascents), 2008 (5 first ascents, 2 first British).

Dick Isherwood, 65, British, retired

Many Himalayan trips, starting in 1964. 14 summits over 20,000 ft, including first ascents of Lamjung Himal (6983m), Dorje Lakpa (6989m) and South Parbati (6127m) and second ascents of Kanjiroba (6882m) and Drifika (6447m). New routes on Piz Badile ENE Face (Via delle Inglese, in 1968) and Carstenz Pyramid (3rd ascent in 1972). Attempt on Haizi Shan in 2004 reached 200m below the summit. Attempts on Gongkala and Haizi Shan with DWJ in 2005, climbed in support in 2007.

Peter Rowat, 65, British, neurobiologist.

Extensive Alpine climbing in winter and summer, including the North faces of the Monch and Jungfrau, Route Major on Mont Blanc, and a ski traverse of the Bernese Oberland (possibly first British) in 1968. Several first ascents in the Stauning Alps of East Greenland in 1963. Extensive climbing in the Coast Range of British Columbia, including a first ascent on Mt Waddington, and in the Canadian Rockies, including an early ascent of the North Face of Mount Robson. Attempts on Gongkala Shan and Haizi Shan with RJI and DWJ in 2005 & Yangmolong 2007, Snowsnake & Dangchezhengla first ascents.

Derek Buckle, 64, British, Consultant Research Chemist– Alpine Club Member. Expeditions to *Peru*: (Ascent of Rurec Sur, Pisco & Chopicalqui, 2007); *Tibet*., {1st ascents of Dobzebo (6429m, 2005); Nganglong Kangri I, 6,720m and Nganglong Kangri II 6,591m, (2004); Beu-tse (6,270m, 2003), and Machag (6,020m, 1999)}, Exploration of Wortse Chu area, Upper Kongpo (2001); *Greenland*: (Six 1st ascents in the Lemon and Lindbergh mountains 2002); 1st British ascent of Chatyn Tau, Caucasus (1998). Extensive mountaineering experience in the Alps, Caucasus, Ecuador, Kenya, Nepal, Pamirs, Southern Alps, Tetons, and the Canadian Rockies. Ice climbing experience in the Canadian Rockies, Norway and Alps and numerous ski tours in the Alps, Greenland, Tien Shan (Ak-Shirak 2006 & 2008) and the Tatra Mountains.



Logistics

Travel

1. Flights

KLM flies direct to Chengdu from Amsterdam with cityhopper links to most major cities of the UK. Other airlines fly to Beijing and internal flights have to be arranged.

2. Road travel.

It saves hassle to arrange transport in advance with an agency.

Permits.

A visa obtainable from the Chinese embassy is necessary to enter the country. This service is now sub-contracted to an agency that has doubled the cost of a visa although still with fast turnaround times and no extra charge for another 30 days if required.

Communications.

Western mobile phones were not reliable: some worked, others didn't. We took 2 way radios that did not work on the mountain.

Food.

It is difficult to obtain lightweight dehydrated food in China unless you are addicted to noodles so we brought our own supplied by www.expeditionfoods.com

Most other food needs were met by the big supermarkets in Chengdu, although instant soup was not available.

Medical arrangements.

Peter Rowat brought a pack of medical supplies donated by his doctor wife. The rest of us brought mini-kits of what we'd found useful on previous expeditions. It was essentially a sophisticated first aid package. Little was used other than basic antibiotics, and low dosage painkillers to deal with stomach upsets and aches and pains en route.

Insurance

Medical and rescue insurance was provided by the Austrian Alpine Club Weltweit scheme.

Maps

Digital maps of the area are available from East View Cartographic – www.cartographic.com

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Expedition Log.

10/09/09

The team was united in Chengdu after various flights & overland travel. We spent the day shopping for expedition food & any gaps that had emerged in the equipment we had brought.

11/09

We drove to Yajang, 13 hours from Chengdu.

12/09

The drive continued to Batang via Litang, crossing some high passes up to 4700m on very bumpy roads. We spent the night at a hotel in Batang.

13/09

Transport had been arranged up the valley from a drop-off point just off the main road using a tractor with trailer. A party of child-nuns were also walking up-valley having hired a couple of motor cycles for their gear, although several then hung their shoulder bags on our vehicle. Their presence was a surprise as there had been no sign of organised religion in the valley in 2007. Gao Je our liaison person & Chung the cook climbed aboard but the team walked up to the lower village of Sanglong Xi at about 3700m. We were offered space to sleep in a storeroom in the new headman's house. The local



people were interested in us but there was an edginess to some of their behaviour that bordered on rudeness. Gao-je informed us that they were demanding a much higher price for motor-cycle transport up the valley.

14/09

There was some tension about the number and cost of motorbikes hired but eventually we left with me & Gau-je riding pillion to ensure we reached the right site for base camp. This was at a bridge crossing the river to access a forestry track up towards the eastern approaches of the mountain. After setting up camp, suddenly the local people started suggesting reasons to move ranging from the possibility of theft to much better campsites being up-river (a lie). We resisted this & Derek & I set off up the forest track to scout an approach to ABC. We returned to find Dick's binoculars had been stolen when a motorcyclist roared off with them and that Peter's spare batteries etc had been stolen from his pack en route. All items were eventually returned after payment of a ransom. Gau-je & Chung decided to sleep in the main tent that night to prevent theft of stores.

15/09

Their efforts were in vain as the sound of the nearby river masked the noise of the thieves who stole a tent, hill food, a trekking pole, BC stove and pans. Gau-je was disheartened & disinclined to do anything about it but I sent him & Dick (who does

angry much better than me) down to the village to protest. The police took statements but advised us to go elsewhere or hire local camp guards to avoid further thefts. Gau-je took the latter option since we had no research to back an attempt on another mountain. The cook did a tremendous job cooking on a single burner for the rest of the time at BC.

During the day the team had managed to explore some of the surrounding territory, confirming the worth of the BC site and being shocked by the devastation caused by illegal logging of virgin forest by the locals. The impression was that they had gone mad with greed & abandoned the more sustainable practices we had witnessed on our earlier visit to the valley. Inevitably the government had stepped in and shut them down in line with its obligations under international treaties. This explained the new 4x4 road & power cables to the village that must have been put in as compensation. Not only had vast swathes of forest been wastefully cleared with early signs of soil erosion, but one huge abandoned logging camp was a wasteland of trash. The only positive signs were that the cut timber that they could no longer get out was going into building more substantial dwellings to support transhumance in the valley.

16/09

Peter and I headed back up into the forest to the west, taking a dry stream bed



that became a steep gulley higher up. There were some huge boulders and rock steps that provoked some thought but would be just about manageable with loads. The gully led up above the tree line onto a shelf of moraine debris with the terminal moraine above. A stiff climb took us through the moraine to the snout of the glacier and the possibility of 2 or more campsites. We had found a way to ABC. We went on to scout to the north and south of the glacier snout with sufficient encouragement to head back hopeful.

Meanwhile Dick & Derek had

climbed up the opposite side of the valley to see the “big picture” regarding approaches to the mountain. They were able to take a number of digital pictures that later informed our discussion of routes.

17/09

Having decided to put an ABC above the terminal moraine, we carried a load of gear up the 1000m to the moraine & cleared tent placements before getting the tents up.



18/09

Rest day before the final carry and occupation of ABC. Thunderstorms in the night then again at the end of the evening. I had a stomach upset.

19/09

We packed up loads for our move up to ABC and despite a threatening morning set off at 11.30 to walk at an easy pace up the gully. Reaching ABC, we quickly settled in but could not make radio contact with BC.



20/09

We woke to 3 inches of wet snow after a night of mixed precipitation. Nothing to do but wait it out. We waited. All day. With no respite.

21/09

We packed up basics for BC & walked back down in the rain. Beer, tea, food, then more rain.

22-27/9

Continuous bad weather was broken only by wet forays into tributary

valleys to maintain some kind of fitness and the arrival of the yak herds from up valley on 25th.

27/09

A clear morning meant that we packed up & climbed back up to ABC. The tents and stores were fine but the little lake had dried up, its contents draining into the limestone beneath with no replenishment from the snowed up glacier streams. I walked up to the glacier snout to find water and found snow a foot deep on the glacier. I sighted a wallcreeper at 5000m amongst the marble slabs.

28/09

We set out at 6.30 for “Peter’s Col” that he’d reached in 2007, hoping to get some acclimatisation and survey route options from there. Half way up the upper glacier bay, Derek & I swung off right thinking to climb the 5700m satellite peak & get even better views of Yangmolong while Dick & Peter gained the Col. Dick did fine despite Peter turning back, but Derek & I struggled up to over 5500m before finding ourselves in an impasse. A foot of snow on loose rock was an uncertain medium to climb through. We had good views of the summit ridge of Yangmolong though & it looked hard.



29/09

We all decided to explore on the left to see if access to the ridge could be gained lower down & an intermediate camp placed higher up. Derek & I went for a ramp up a snowy couloir before finding a tricky traverse with on loose snowed up rock barred the

way. The consequences of a fall were unthinkable so we backed off and followed Dick and Peter up a steep snow slope to a slight saddle before a snow bay. The bay looked to access a gully leading to the hanging glacier beyond but again loose rock and snow meant we backed off & load-carrying would have been impossible without fixed ropes that we lacked. There had been some interesting climbing but ultimately it was not getting us anywhere in that direction. It looked as though we would be forced to make an attempt from "Peter's Col" as the remaining option in the time available.



30/09

After much discussion, Dick & Peter offered to help carry kit up to Peter's Col for Derek & me to make an attempt on the main summit. When we reached the Col that had been free of snow in mid-October 2007 there was a couple of meters of snow for us to dig into for a tent placement. Derek & I settled in to camp 1 at 5400m while Dick & Peter set off back to ABC.

We ate supper and got our heads down, having set the alarm for midnight.

1/10

The alarm went off & I had a look at the weather: heavy cloud swagged across the moon and banked up on the mountain; 1 star. I reset the alarm for 4: thick clag. At 6 it was no better so we resigned ourselves to a day waiting it out and another attempt next morning. There was very mixed, changeable weather all day.

2/10

Midnight arrived with strong winds and snow showers: we had no confidence in setting out. At 6 the weather was no better so we packed up and went back down to ABC.

Dick & Peter concurred with our decision & felt that for them the climbing was over. They packed up a load and set off back to BC for the night. Derek & I stayed up in hopes of climbing the satellite 5700m peak to the NW as a consolation prize.

3/10

Up at first light there was a little light snow but not enough to deter us from climbing up snowy screes then through a rock band via a thin mixed couloir to gain the upper narrows leading to a Col on the skyline. The weather had been steadily deteriorating and we reached the Col to find wind-blown snow curling over it. The continuation ridge to the summit looked like very serious rock and ice climbing and a fierce squall was buffeting us. There was no question of going on. We reversed the route from our high point of 5550m.

4/10

More bad weather overnight eased during the morning so that we could pack up and return to BC.

5/10

We all went about packing up our personal kit while Gau-je negotiated transport out.

6/10

More tension as the lawless motorcyclists demanded even more money with the threat of stealing everything from us if it was not forthcoming. The people at the village were definitely rude to us in passing so we continued with big packs down to the roadhead. There was a tense wait for the truck with various threatening behaviours from the locals including slitting my goretex jacket in an attempt to persuade me to part with it to one or other of them. Ironically most of them had photos or video clips of the Dalai Lama on their mobile phones.



When the driver of the bus arrived he had money stolen from his cab but our watchfulness and refusal to be intimidated managed at least an orderly if rather expensive retreat.

7-8/10

Reversed the route back to Chengdu.

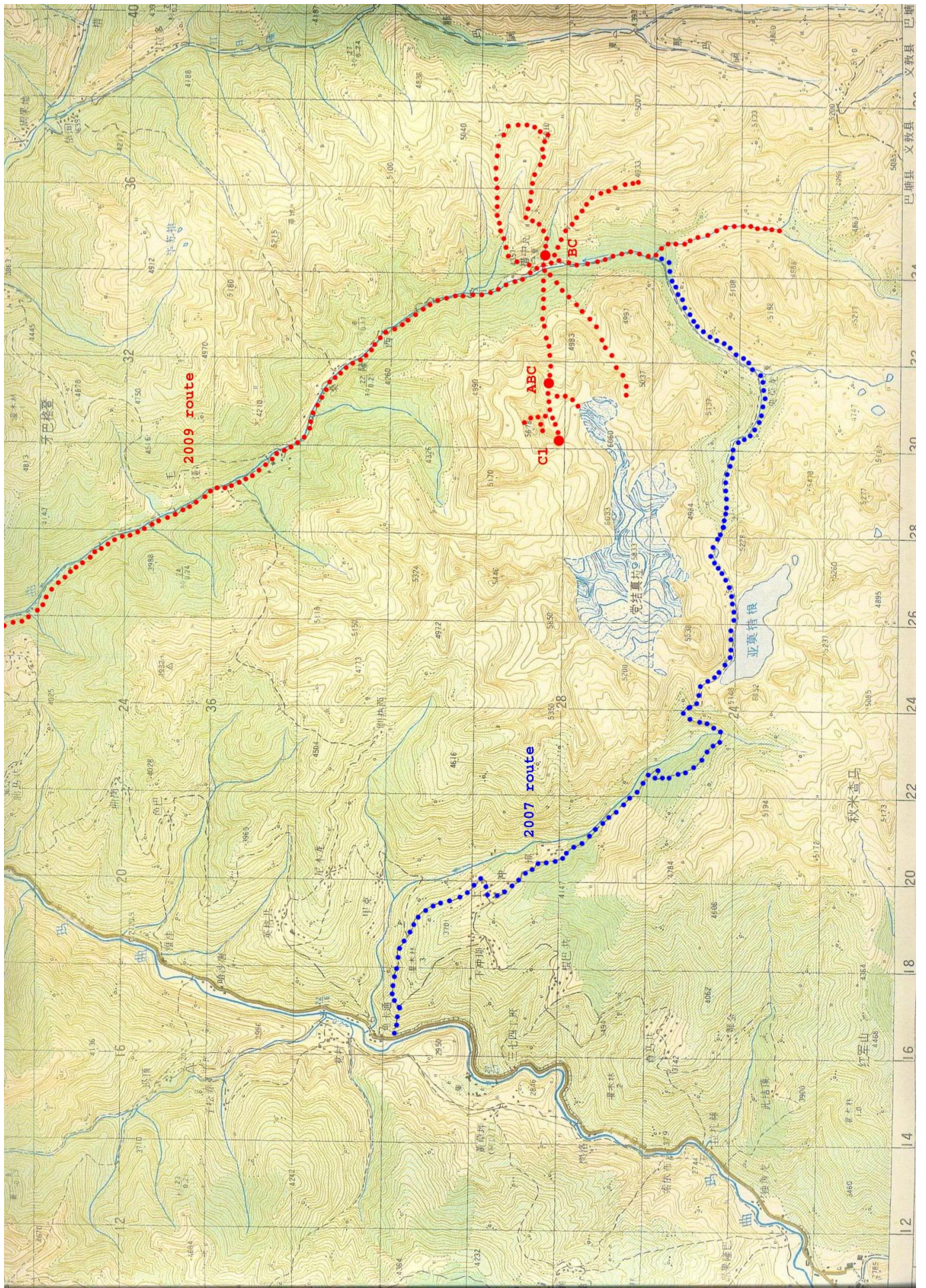
9/10

At Chengdu, Jiyue reckoned he'd made a loss on the trip & having seen his accounts it seemed all too likely. We flew home.

Conclusion

Something had changed in the valley where the people had been so friendly & welcoming in 2007. Clearly there was a lawless element that worried the older local people but there was little they could do about it. They had to live there after we'd gone. Objectively there were 2 differences: the logging had been closed down; there were now Buddhist monks and nuns in the valley. Possibly the monks & nuns moved in to take advantage of the inevitable resentment generated by the logging being closed down. If so they may have effectively legitimised a lawless element in an attempt to make political capital out of local disaffection with the government. We coped by hiring one of the local headmen and his daughter as camp guards/helpers after the night of major theft but this was yet more expense on top of the extortionate rates charged for transport including unnecessary motorbikes. Base camp was an area of tension rather than relaxation and the Chinese staff slept inside the main tent with one in a small tent inside that where the most important kit was stored to try to foil further attempts at theft. None of us would be in any hurry to return to that valley.

That said, I am still convinced that the approach from the north is the most promising for an ascent of Yangmolong and but for the appalling weather we may have been able to achieve more from the east.



Appendix 1
Finance summary

Costs

Flights to Chengdu, via Beijing or otherwise: £2400

Sichuan transport & accommodation package: £1800 x 4 = £7200

Lightweight Food: £200

Additional expenses: £200

Total: £10,000

Less: MEF Grant: £1300

Balance made up by members of the team: £8700