

The First Ascent of Lopchin Feng (KG-2) 6,805m
Autumn 2009 Expedition to the Kangri Garpo East Mountains, Tibet
Unknown Peaks in the Range

By Tim (Tatsuo) Inoue



Photo-1 Lopchin Feng (6,805m), the White Hawk Peak, from the road to Dema La

“The White Hawk” Lopchin Feng (KG-2) was climbed by two Tibetan students, Deqing Ouzhu and Ciren Danda, on 5th November 2009, and two Japanese, Masanori Yazaki and Koichiro Kondo (student), on 7th November 2009. The Joint Scientific and Mountaineering Expedition organized by ACKU (the Alpine Club of Kobe University) and CUG (the Mountaineering Association of Chinese University of Geosciences, Wuhan) was led by co-leaders Tim Inoue and Dong Fan. 17 members, including 9 students, established BC (the Base Camp 4,320m) on the Ata Glacier on 18th October, and returned to BC on 10th November.

Even though there are more than 30 unclimbed 6,000m-peaks in the Kangri Garpo Mountains, it is remarkable that no 6,000m-peak had been climbed until the above mentioned made the first ascent. The 280km long mountain range is located in the southeastern part of Tibet, adjoining the east end of the Himalayas. And though Mr. Yukio Matsumoto and Mr. Tom Nakamura, who are best known as researchers of this range, have been studying the peaks and valleys, many of them

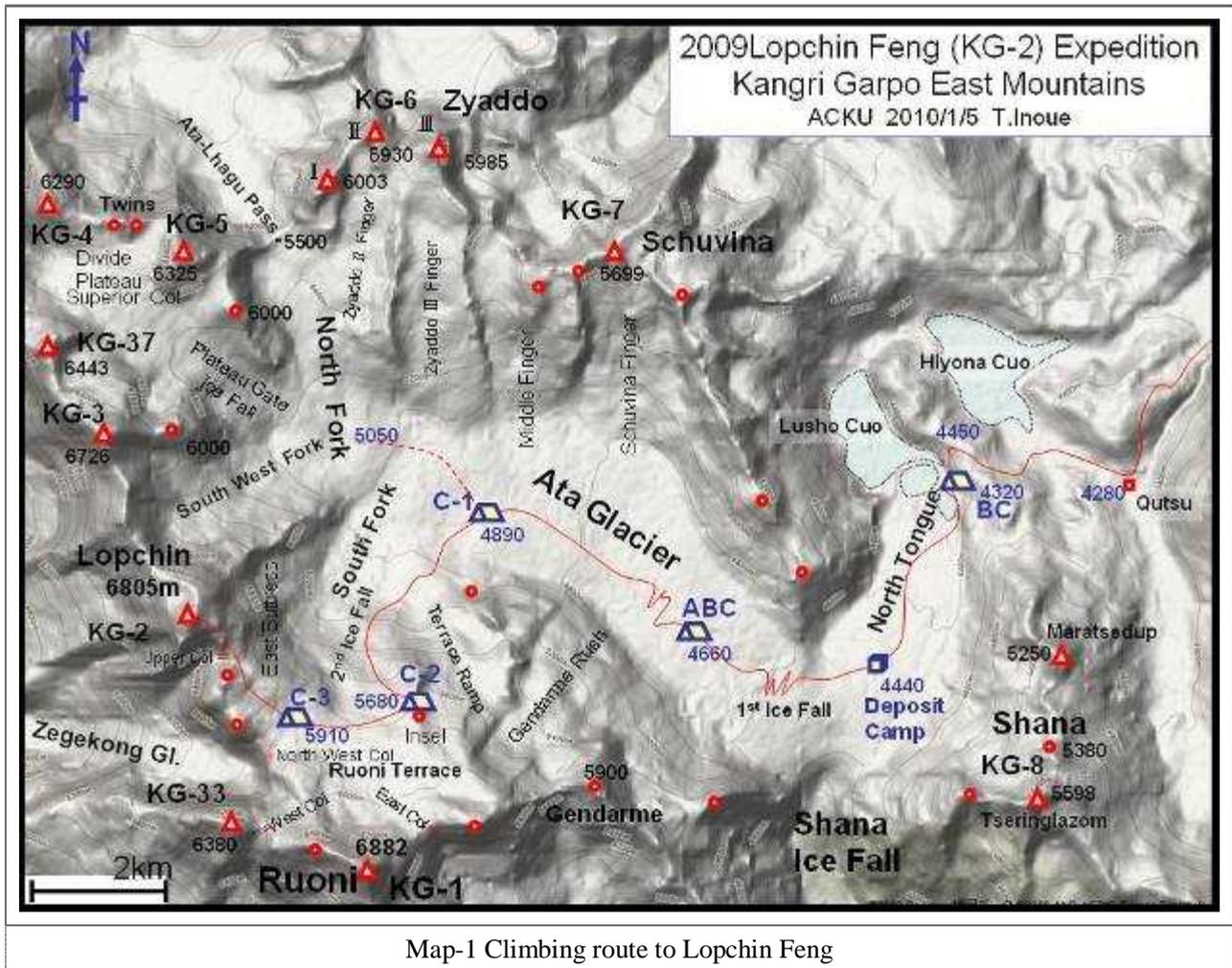
are still unknown. Since this area is very close to the disputed border between China and India, entry is severely restricted for foreigners. Only Kobe University received an official permit to send a climbing party. In 2003, the Kobe University party had tried to climb Ruoni Feng 6,882m, the highest peak in this mountain range, but failed because of bad weather with difficult and dangerous conditions of hanging ice collapse. In autumn 2007, after signing the agreement of the joint expedition, ACKU and CUG sent a reconnaissance party to the Ata Glacier led by Takeru Yamada. They recognized 3 major peaks, KG-1 (Ruoni), KG-2(Lopchin) and KG-3 on the main ridge of the Kangri Garpo Mountains. They could not find a safe and passable route to the summit of Ruoni, but were impressed by KG-2, which has a beautiful skyline and a possible route to the summit. The joint party discussed which should be the climbing target, and chose KG-2. The altitude of KG-2 was printed on the old Soviet Union map as 6,703m when we had decided on the target peak. But in reality, the GPS indicated 6,805m at the top. This was a big surprise and badly affected the Japanese members. 100m excessive climbing drove them into a difficult plight.

The so-called Lehman Brothers shock prevented us from obtaining sufficient funding, but many personal contributors supported our finances to execute the expedition. On 11th October, the joint expedition party briefing was held at Wuhan, and then launched to the challenge.

Progress on the Ata Glacier

On 18th October, 23 yaks and 15 porters with a 1,500 kg load arrived at BC (4,320m) on the meadow on the right side of a moraine valley, on the north tongue of the Ata Glacier. Along the way, they passed Hiyona La (4,530m) from Lhagu village via Kogin and Qutsu pasture. The weather in Lhagu was clear, but it was snowy at BC. In the evening, 10 porters were selected for carrying food and gear to the DPC (Deposit Camp 4,440m) on the foot of the first ice fall. They got boots, gloves and glasses to protect them from the sharp edges of the stones on the moraine and snow blind.

We completed the DPC on 21st October, after 5 shuttle transports over 3 days by the porters in snowy weather, while the members had opened a route to ABC t (he Advanced Base Camp 5,660m) through the labyrinth of crevasses in the first ice fall with fixed rope at a few points.



We observed relatively low snowfall and less piled snow on ice throughout the days in the mountains in 2009. During the first 10 days, the wind blow from the south tongue of the Ata Glacier, bringing wet air and snowfall in the mornings. In the afternoons, the sunshine provided us with warm and dry conditions. That weather looked unusual compared to 2002, 2003 and 2007 in which years our party had experienced heavy snowfall and deep snow on the glacier.

Passing through the zigzag trace in the first ice fall, a flat snow field on the Ata Glacier provided us with a good location for ABC. On 24th October, almost all members moved to ABC.

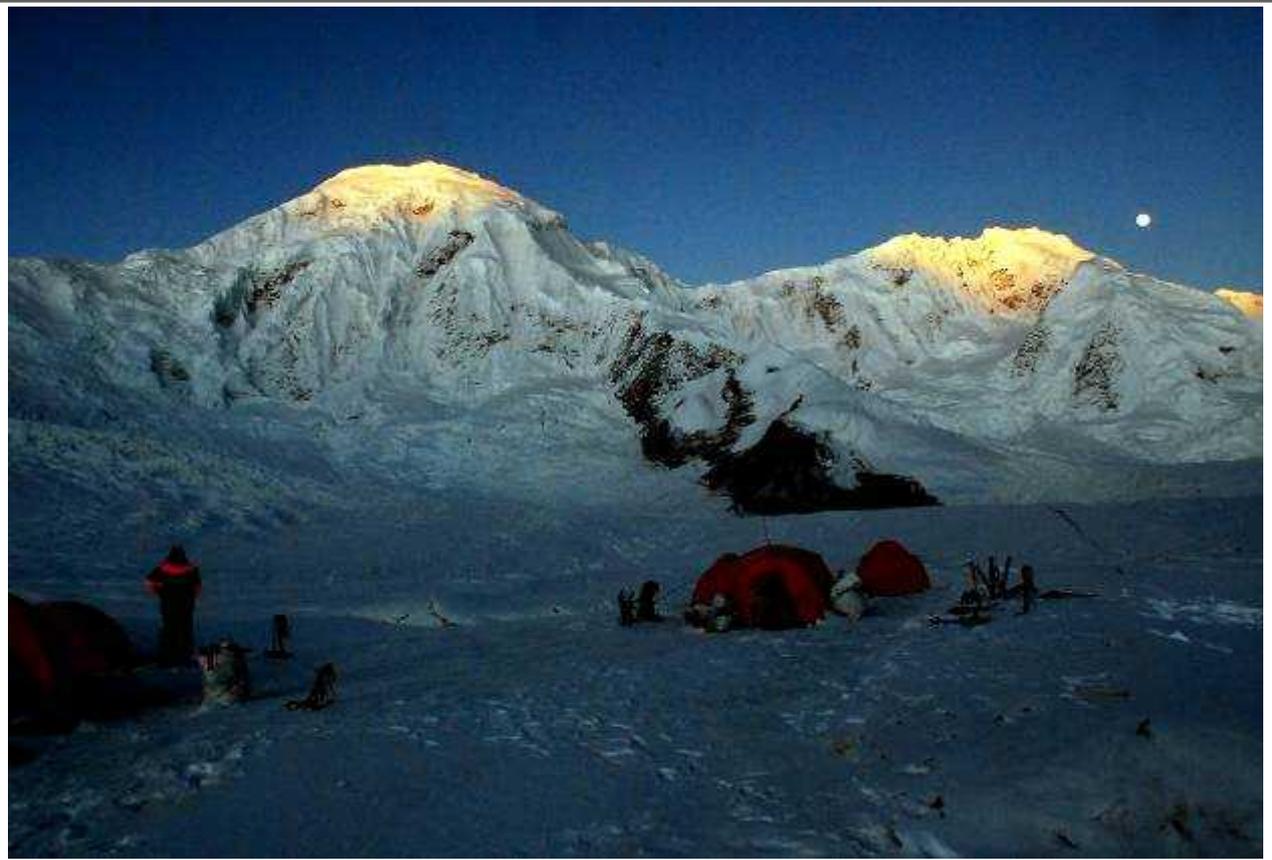


Photo-2 Moon set and Sun rising at C1 ; Morgen rot on Lopchin (KG-2 ,left) and KG-3

We enjoyed the view of Ata 3-Sisters (KG-1, 2 and 3) in the deep glacier origin. They showed their flanks to the sunrise that presented to us a dramatic festival of light in the mornings. On one day, we witnessed a full moon setting beyond 3-Sisters, synchronizing with the pink and golden sunrise to brighten up their faces. Irregular sounds of the ice collapsing from hanging seracs on the buttress of 3-Sisters during the days and nights was a symphony of nature.

Camp-1 (C1 5,890m) was placed in the middle basin of the glacier on 29th October, where we could provide good coaching to the summit attackers. There were 2 possible routes from C1 to Ruoni Terrace where the main ridge from the summit of KG-2 joins. One was through the Terrace Ramp ice fall flowing down from the east end of Ruoni Terrace, and the other was through the second ice fall in the south fork of the Ata Glacier. We chose the south fork route closer to the summit as a result of prudent reconnaissance. 600m of fixed rope work and cutting ice /snow in the seracs led us to the Camp-2 (C2 5,680m) on the scree of Insel Ridge.



Photo-3

The route to C2 through seracs in the 2nd ice fall



Photo-4 Kondo carried heavy stuff .

After opening the route to the C3 (Camp-3 5,910m), all members assembled at C1 on 3rd November to form an attack operation. The CUG team had chosen one attack from C2 because of a food supply conflict and because some members were worn out. Since we had 2 perfect fine weather days, they also worried about missing the good weather. The ACKU team wanted to be well acclimatized by spending one more day at C3 on the main ridge. The discussion concluded that 2 separate operations might give us 2 chances with less risk. The five selected climbers from the CUG team were well experienced in Tibet's high peaks. For instance, Deqing Ouzhu and Ciren Danda had reached the summit of Chomolangma 3 times within the past 3 years. Therefore, they were well acclimatized for the high altitude. On the other hand, ACKU's 3 young climbers were not so-highly skilled and they needed to be acclimatized much more at that time.

In any event, we were ready to ascend Lopchin Feng.

The First Ascent of Lopchin Feng

On the morning of 4th November, 5 CUG members and 4 ACKU members started from C1 with climbing gear and 5 days of food. They moved to C2 in the evening. The weather was perfect, but cold wind blew over the main ridge.

On 5th November, 5 CUG attack members started from C2 at 4:00 AM in the dark with the moon light and were opening a route to the southeast ridge of Lopchin Feng. On Ruoni Terrace, partly soft snow and deep crevasses prevented them from achieving their anticipated progress. They fixed a 200m of rope on the way to the middle of the summit ridge. Three of them abandoned their attempt to the summit at 6,450m on the steep slope of the snow ridged face. Deqing and Ciren had continued to climb the ridge in deep soft snow and reached the summit of Lopchin

Feng (6,805m) at 1:18PM in hazy and windy weather. They made the most significant event in the history of climbing in the Kangri Garpo Mountains; the first ascent of Tibetan virgin peak by Tibetans.

While this drama was going on, the ACKU Team established C3 (5,910m) on the edge of Ruoni Terrace near the northwest Col of Ruoni Feng. Yazaki and Kondo stayed at C3. Shigeaki Yamamoto, who was the climbing leader and Shoji Ishimaru returned to C2 in the evening.

Deqing and Ciren had descended the ridge carefully to C3 where they took a rest and returned to C2 after 14 hours of work.

On 6th November, it was windy and the route was veiled with clouds. All of us stayed at camps the whole day.



Photo -5 Watching attempt , C1



Photo-6 Deqing on the summit 1:18PM

On 7th November, the weather turned favorable. Three members of CUG had been changed and they formed a new 5-climber attack team, including Deqing and Ciren. They started C2 at 4:30AM to join the ACKU team at C3, but one climber had twisted a knee and could not reach C3 on time. They abandoned their attempt. The ACKU team decided to start from C3 by themselves at 8:00AM. Yazaki had led Kondo and had made smooth progress to the middle of the summit ridge about 6,600m around 1:00PM. They were visible from C1 and we had confidence they could win the attack at that time. At 3:00PM, two hours later, they were seen in the foggy screen near the crest ice cornice. Despite 2 hours of powerful plowing through waist deep snow, they could not get enough elevation. They would be confronted by this huge ridge. It was time to return. We misunderstood the altitude of KG-2. We thought there was a remaining 100m of climbing at 6,600m, but in reality, they had to climb 200m. They were so tired but they wanted to reach the top. They were given only 30 more minutes by Tim Inoue. Yazaki became unconsciousness from the thin air. Kondo tried to overcome the crest cornice in the soft and chest level deep snow. A walkie-talkie at C1 received a message from

Kondo, “We made the summit.” It was 3:36PM. Kondo was surprised with his GPS receiver that indicated 6,805m.

Their descending was critical. Dizziness had overcome Yazaki and slow descending consumed time. They met darkness on the foot of the ridge where the large Ruoni Terrace expands ahead and they lost their way back to C3 in the dark. Yamamoto and Ishimaru had started C2 and waited for Yazaki and Kondo at C3 while the two attackers were seeking their way. Yamamoto and Ishimaru decided to approach the attackers with head lights. They had communicated with each other by walkie-talkies and finally, they met on the way and come back to C3 at 8:00PM. Four of them stayed in a 2-man tent that night.

On 8th November, All attack members had come back to C1 and our first ascent drama come to an end.

Climate Change

Through our 4 visits to the Ata Glacier area in 2002, 2003, 2007 and 2009, we experienced climate change. One change is the Shrinkage of the Ata Glacier. We compared two pictures, the map of the Soviet Union and Google Earth. Two additional lakes were created in the past half century.

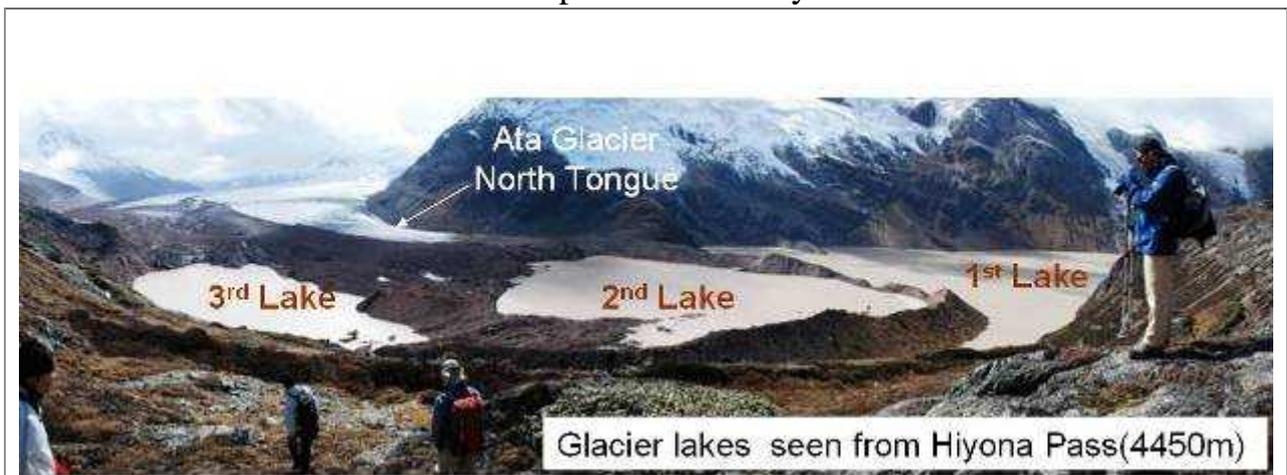
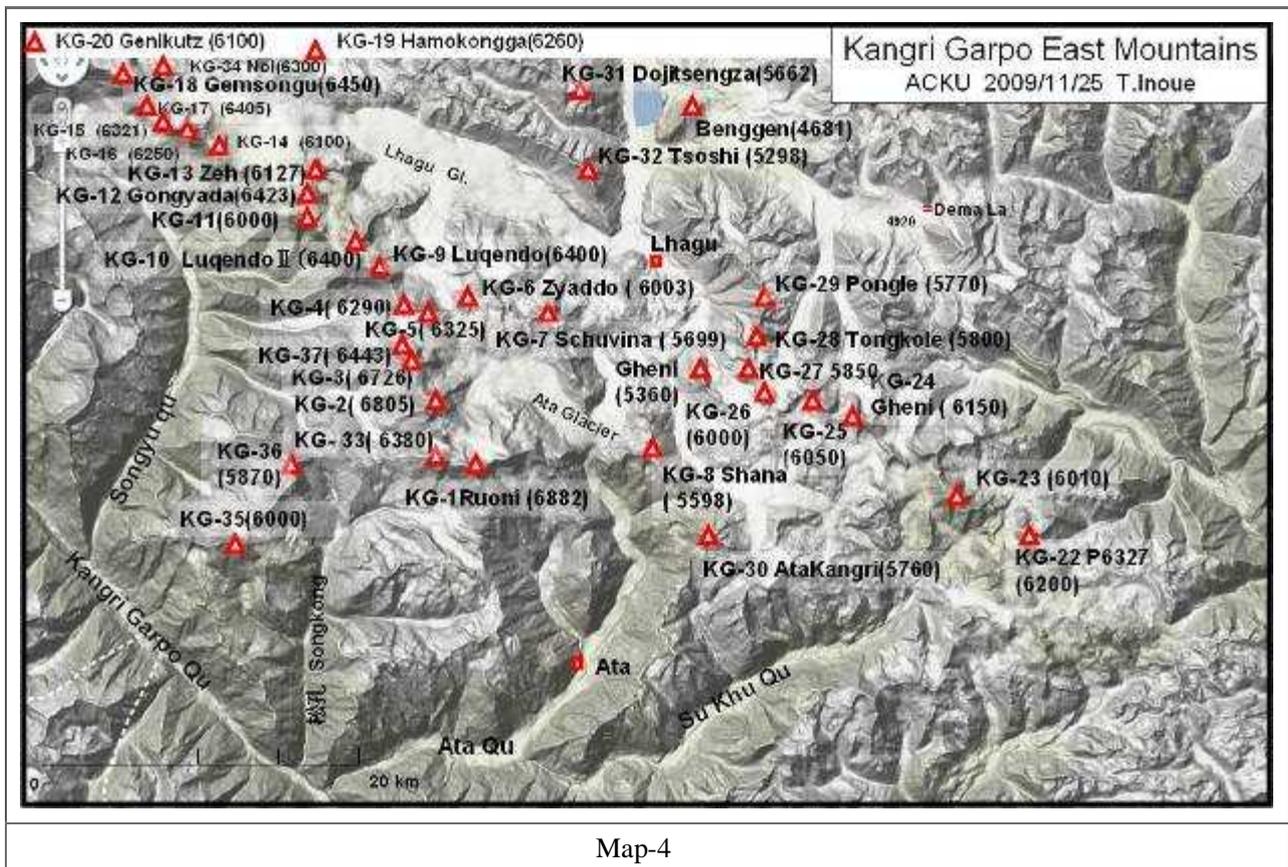


Photo-7 Newly born glacier lakes photo taken from Hiyona Pass

Another change was snowfall. We had predicted heavy snowfall in 2002, 2003 and 2007. The results were as expected. In the case of 2009, we did not experience such heavy snowfall. At DPC (4,440m), we had daily snowfall, but no cumulative snow on the glacier. We put tents on the bare ice. At ABC (4,660m), we measured 130 cm snow pile up on the glacier ice. But, At C1 (4,890m), we met the same conditions as at DPC. We felt hanging ice cornices on the flanks of the 3-Sisters had shrunk compared with the past years when we compared pictures of each year. We suppose a drier climate is increasing in southeast Tibet recently.

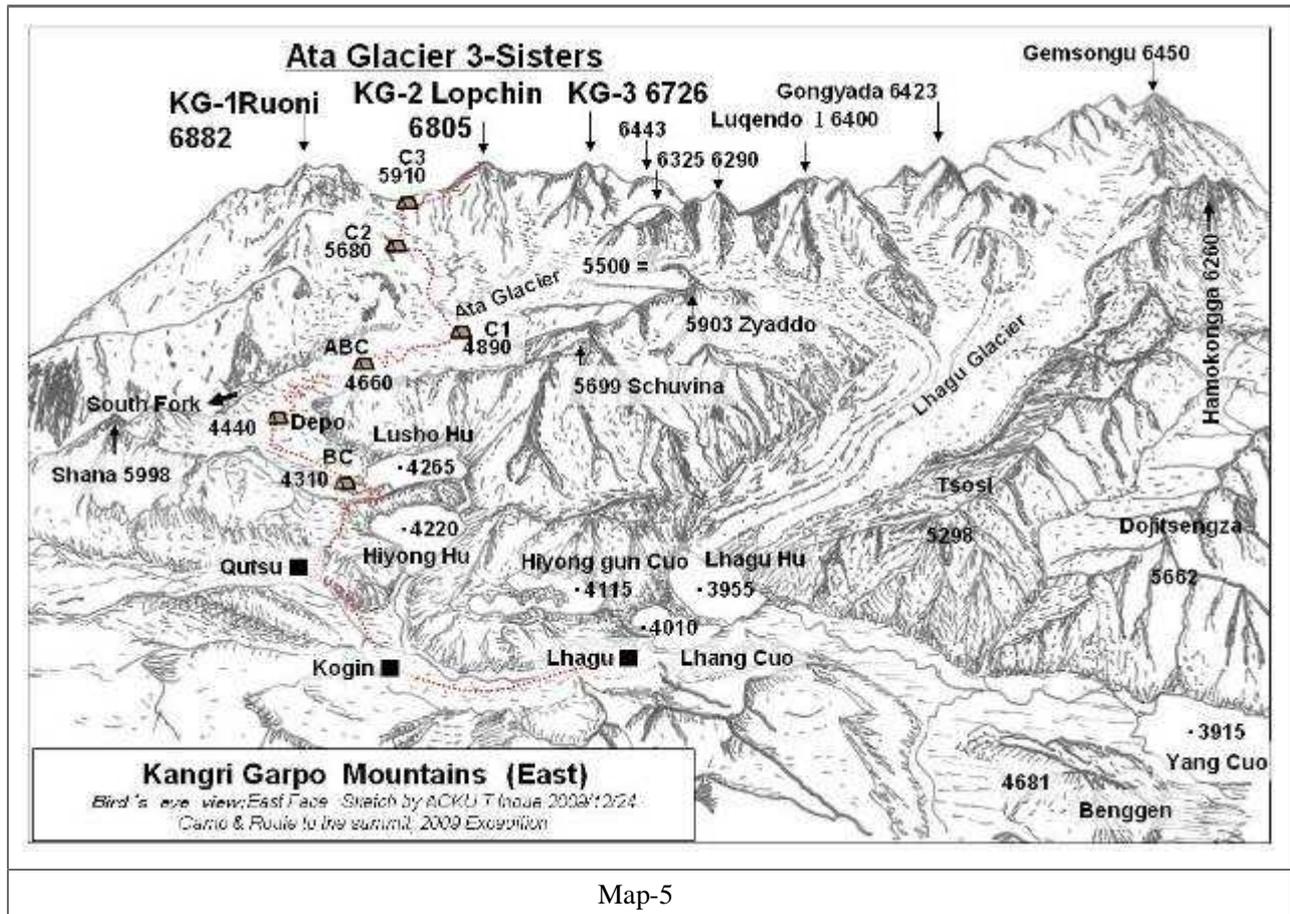
Mountains. We focused on the Lhagu Glacier watershed, Ata Glacier watershed and the remaining southeast end of the range. Since we could not observe the Lhagu Glacier area during our climbing in the Ata Glacier, peaks in our report should be excluded from some mountains in the Lhagu Glacier except visible peaks from Lhagu village.

It is quite difficult to share knowledge about peaks in this mountain range without any marks because heights and names of peaks are not confirmed or are inaccurate. We put numbers on the peaks we recognized through our observation to discuss and identify peaks. The numbers on each peak, like KG-##, means Kangri Garpo-##. The temporary numbers are on our sketch map. Heights of peaks are put by our presumption. Some of the numbers have references as remarks in this article. I believe the pictures shown in this article are mostly the world's first shots!



Map-4

I have picked up almost all pictures of numbered peaks in this article. I will be happy if the readers of this book become interested in those new shots of the mountains.



Map-5

1. KG-1 6,882m Ruoni / Chombo / Bairiga

It has 3 names and different heights, 6,805m (Soviet Union map), 6,882m (Chinese map), 6,900m (estimated) and others. The local people call her “Ruoni”, but we suspect the 2003 ACKU expedition members called her “Ruoni”, and influenced the locals. A recent Chinese map has the name “Bairiga”.

The ACKU 2003 expedition had reached 5,900m on Ruoni Terrace just in front of the steep wall. We heard news from a student of Tibet Mountaineering School that a Swiss party accessed 3 different routes to Ruoni in 2005, but we did not get any information about this attempt from the Chinese Tibet Mountaineering Association. They said they gave a permit only to ACKU.

We could not find a safe and passable route to the summit of Ruoni despite 3 reconnaissance trips that were done over the past several years. There are 3 considered routes to the top. But we were too overwhelmed by hanging seracs and steep saw-tooth rocks and snow ridges.

	
<p style="text-align: center;">Photo-8</p> <p style="text-align: center;">KG-1 Ruoni 6,882m from the road to Dema La</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Photo-9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">KG-1 Ridges and flanks are guarded by huge seracs. From 5,050m point in the upper Ata Glacier</p>

2. KG-2 6,805m Lopchin Feng

Since the peak had no name, we expected to get a local name. We asked Lhagu village people and got several answers. One person said, “White bird’s peak” but it was not confirmed and we asked the village leader to research the name. Finally we got a proposition from them. “Lopchin” is the Tibetan pronunciation written in English (Chinese “Lou bu qin”). It means; male hawk, brave, intelligence and university. Another alternative was “University Peak”, but CUG and ACKU preferred to choose the local pronunciation of “Lopchin”.

	
<p style="text-align: center;">Photo-10 KG-2 Lopchin Feng 6,805m Gold shine in the morning at C1(4,890m)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Photo-11 KG-2 At C3: Left skyline was the route.</p>

The Soviet Union map shows the height of KG-2 as 6,703m. The GPS indicated 6,805m when Kondo measured the height on the top. The difference of about 100m was a big surprise.

3. KG-3 6,726m



Photo-12 KG-3 6,726m



Photo-13 KG-4 6,290m

KG-3 was a missing peak in the Ata Glacier before ACKU identified it in 2003. Since KG-3, KG-37 and KG-5 overlap each other when viewing them from the road to Dema La, it was difficult to distinguish them individually. Only P 6,443m is printed on the Soviet Union map.



Photo-14 KG-1, KG-2, KG-3 and KG-5 on the main ridge of the Kangri Garpo

Photo taken from the road to Dema La

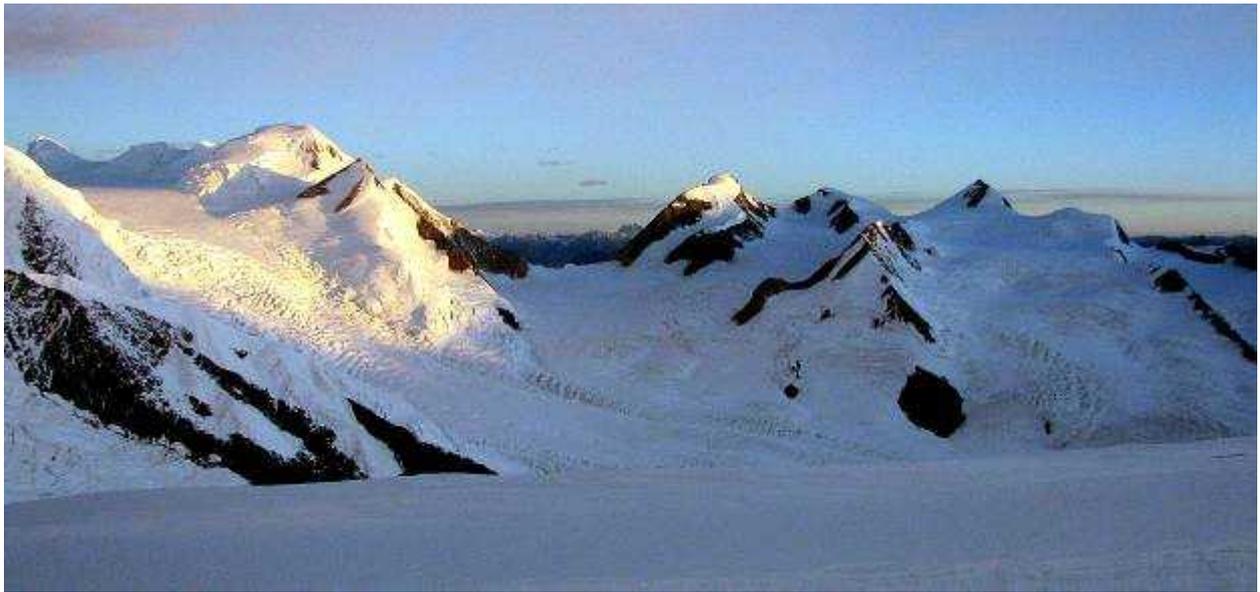


Photo-15 Peaks on the divide of the Ata and Lhagu Glacier
 KG-4, Twins, KG-5, Ata-Lhagu Pass (5,500m) and KG-6- , ,

4. KG-4 6,290m (Matsumoto map height)

The main ridge of the Kangri Garpo Mountains runs from KG-4 to KG-5 via Twins (This is not an official naming, but just a nickname for identification.). The upper plateau cut the main ridge off near KG-5. The main ridge starts again from KG-37(P 6,443m) and continues to KG-2 and KG-1. KG-4 stands on the edge of the upper plateau and is visible from Ruoni Terrace.

5. KG-5 6,325m (Estimated by ACKU)

KG-5 is visible from the point on the road to Dema La, but many observers could not recognize it because KG-5, KG-37 (P6443m), KG-6- and have overlapped on a line. ACKU 2007 reconnaissance party identified this peak.



Photo-16 KG-4 (6290m left end) ,KG-5 (6325m)
 Photo taken from C2



Photo-17 KG-5 Morgen rot
 Photo taken from C1

6. KG-6

- 1) 6,003m (Estimated by ACKU)
- 2) 5,930m (Estimated by ACKU) (5,903m on the Soviet Union map)
- 3) 5,985m (Estimated by ACKU) Zyaddo (5,903m, Matsumoto map)

On the Matsumoto map, Zyaddo has just one peak. But in reality, she has 3 peaks. The Lhagu Glacier side has a steep rock wall and the Ata Glacier side is covered with gentle slopes of glacier fingers. The Ata-Lhagu Glacier Pass (5,500m) is located between KG-5 and KG-6-

7. KG-7 5,699m (Matsumoto map) Schuvina

	
<p>Photo-18 KG-7 Schuvina from ABC(Ata Glacier)</p>	<p>Photo-19 KG-7 Minor Peak (5,699m) Photo taken from the Lhagu Glacier Lake</p>

While the bumpy 4-wheel drive vehicle was approaching the Lhagu Glacier Lake in the U-shaped valley leaving from the main road to Zayul, the jagged peaks in front of the main ridge of the Kangri Garpo Mountains, KG-7 and KG-6 pressed ahead. It is supposedly said that a monk at Shugden Gompa, the old Buddhist monastery near Yang Lake, named KG-6 Zyaddo, KG-7 Schuvina, KG-8 Shana, KG-31 Dojitsengza and KG-32 Tsoshi as sacred mountains. The 5,699m height on the Soviet Union map may correspond to KG-7 Minor Peak seen from Lhagu village. The highest point of KG-7 is not visible from the village.



Photo-20 KG-7(left) and KG-6-

Photo taken from the gate of Lhagu Village near the end moraine of the Lhagu Glacier

8. KG-8 5,598m (Matsumoto map) Shana



Photo-21 KG-8 Shana (5,598m)

Photo taken from ABC



Photo-22 KG-8 Shana (5,598m)

Photo taken from ABC

KG-8 Shana is visible from the road near Yang Lake. She stands on the divide of the Kangri Garpo main ridge, but looks isolated by the Ata Glacier and the glacier of Ata Kang La. Those two glaciers have a unique topography, that both of them flow into two legs surrounding Shana.



Photo-23 KG-8 (5,598m) Shana

The Ata Glacier flows down to the southeast and is split into north and south tongues by the wall of Shana.
The south fork gathers wet air and rushes to the joint point making clouds and snow fall.

- 9. KG-12 6,423m (Matsumoto map) Gongyada
- 10. KG-13 6,127m (Matsumoto map) Zeh
- 11. KG-19 6,260m (Matsumoto map) Hamokongga

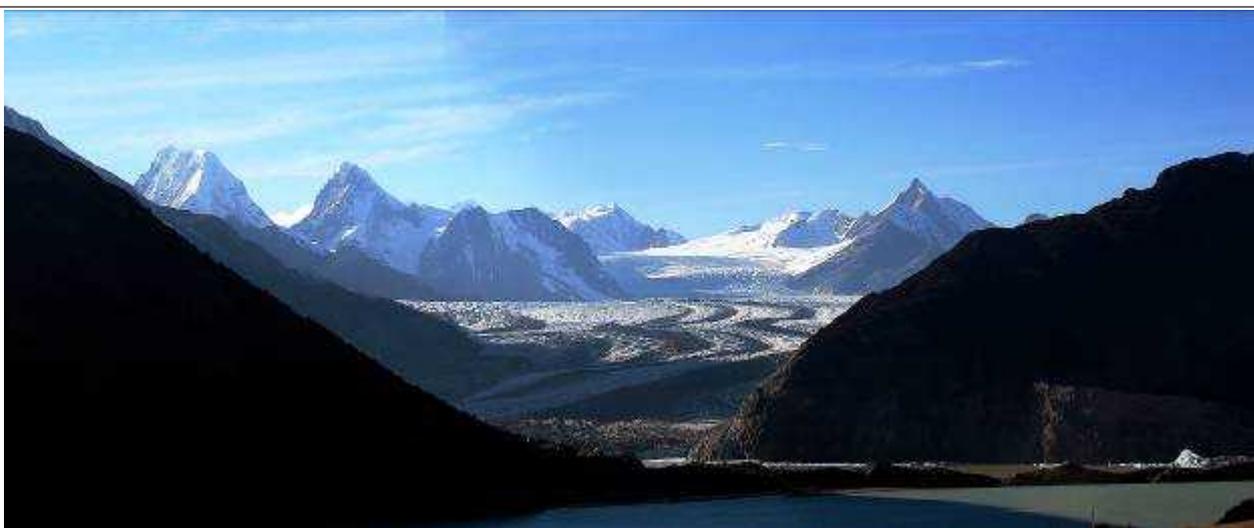


Photo-24 the Lhagu Glacier view from Lhagu village
KG-12, 13 on the left and KG-19 on the right

The glacier view from Lhagu village is one of the best places to see the glacier and needle peaks. Even though it is far and remote from cities and has a high altitude (about 4,200m above sea level), many tourists visit there nowadays.



Photo-25 KG-12 Gongyada (6,423m)



Photo-26 KG-13 Zeh (6,127m)

Kg-12, KG-13 and KG-19 (Hamokongga) are well known to climbers in Europe and the USA.

12. KG-22 6,327m (Matsumoto map) P 6,327m

13. KG-23 6,010m (Estimated by ACKU)

KG-23 (P 6,327m) is seen on the Soviet Union map, but KG-23 (6,010m) is not seen on it. KG-23 was discovered by ACKU in 2009. A picture taken from Camp 3 (5,910m) clearly shows the peak.

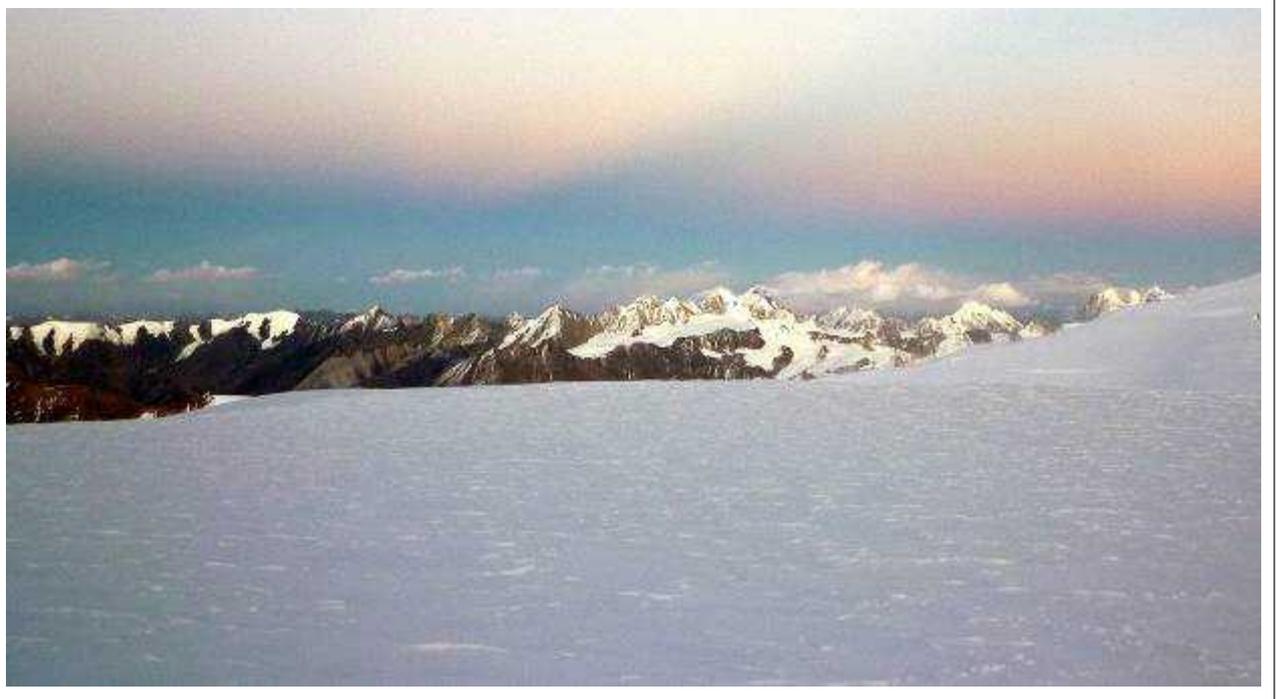


Photo-27 East end peaks of the Kangri Garpo Mountains



Photo-28 KG-23 (6,010m)



Photo-29 KG-22 (P6,327m)

KG-22 and KG-23 were seen from the Ata Glacier. Two zoom shots were not identified when it was taken. We could identify these peaks through our check on the map and direction analysis. Mr. Tom Nakamura took a picture of KG-22 near Zayul. The new shot is on the opposite side of his picture. The picture of KG-23 is the first shot of her.

14. KG-24 6,150m Gheni-1

15. KG-25 6,050m Gheni-2

KG-24 Gheni and KG-25 Gheni-2 are visible from the road to Dema La. We could see them from C3 and the 5,050m point on the Ata Glacier.

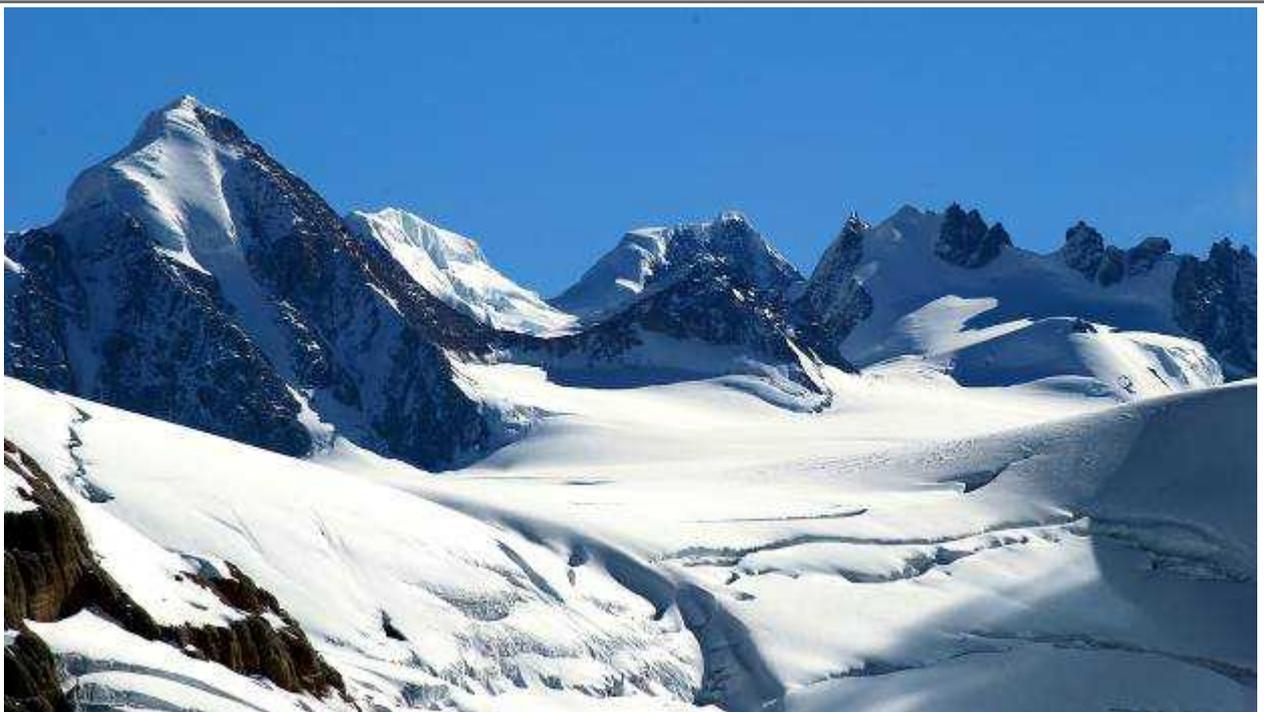


Photo-30 KG-26 (6,000m; left sharp peak) and linking rocky ridge. KG-25(white trapezoid peak) and KG-24 (Gheni, a half black trapezoid peak behind the rocky ridge) are seen.

Photo taken from the 5,050m point of Ata Glacier

16. KG-26 6,000m (Estimated by ACKU)

17. KG-27 5,850m (Estimated by ACKU)



Photo-31 KG-27 (5,850m; left end rocky pyramid)
and KG-26 (6,000m; center triangular peak of the picture)

Photo taken from the 5,100m point on the route to C2

KG-26 and KG-27 were not recognized in past years. These peaks are newly identified. The skyline ridge of KG-26 and KG-27 connects to KG-28 (Tongkole).

18. KG-28 5,800m (Estimated by ACKU) Tongkole

19. KG-29 5,770m (Estimated by ACKU) Pongle

From the playground of Lhagu Elementary School, pupils can see sharp and rocky triangular Tongkole and the white dome of Pongle every day. Water from the white dome grows wheat in the village. More than 500 yaks graze on the foothills pasture.

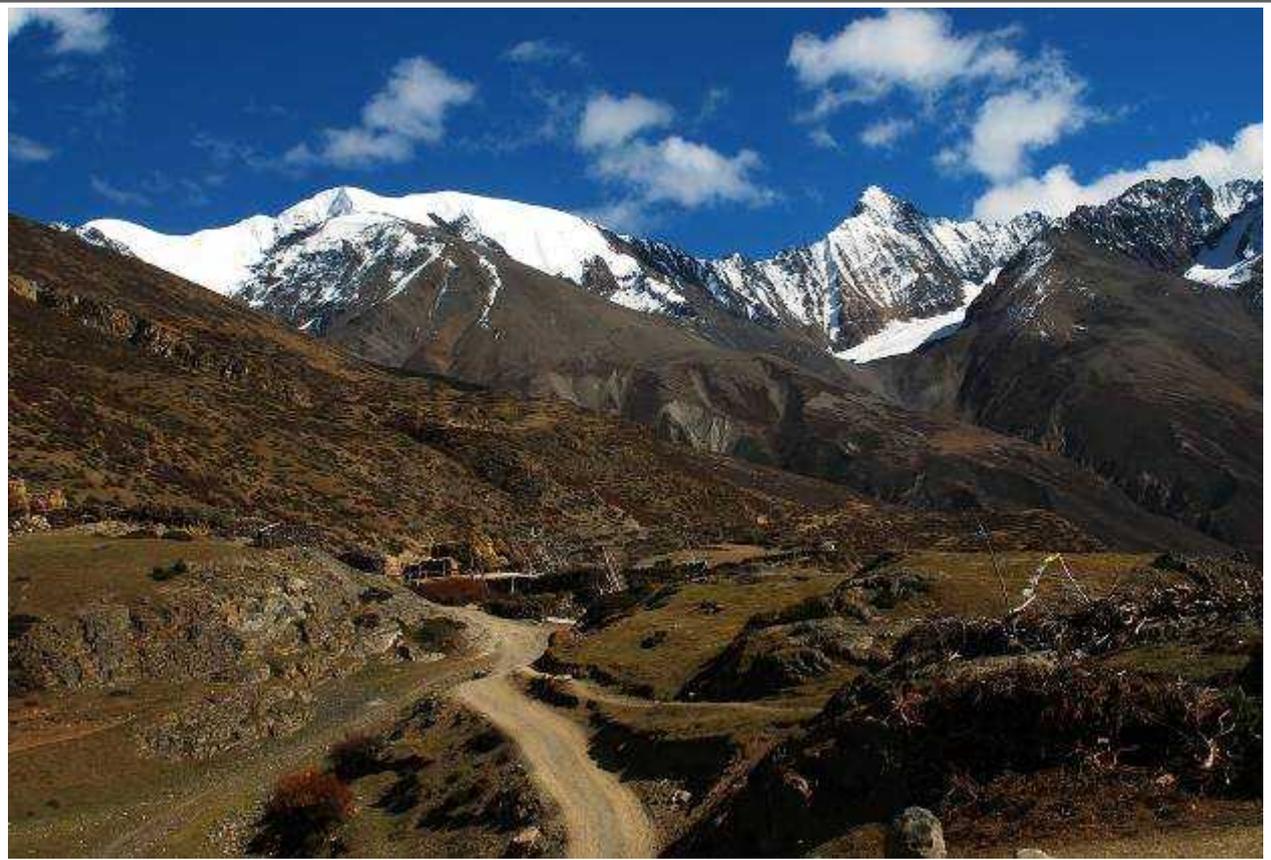


Photo-32 KG-29 (5,770m Pongle , left) and KG-28 (5,800m Tongkole)

Photo taken from Lhagu Village

20. KG-30 5,760m Ata Kangri



Photo-33 KG-30 (5,760m) Ata Kangri
Photo taken from ABC in the Ata Glacier



Photo-34 KG-30 (5,760m Ata Kangri; left)
and KG-8 (5,598m Shana)

Photo taken from Yang Lake

21. KG-31 5,662m Dojitsengza

22. KG-32 5,298m Tsoshi



Photo-35 KG-32 (5,298m) Tsoshi
Photo taken from Yang Lake



Photo-36 KG-31 (5,662m) Dojitsengza
Photo taken from Yang Lake

Sacred mountains, Dojitsengza and Tsoshi, stand on the left bank of Parlung Zangbo's U-shaped valley. These rock pinnacles are visible from Shugden Gumpa. These names are also supposedly the names of ancient gods.

23. KG-33 6,380m (Estimated by ACKU)

The Soviet Union map shows a peak without height near Ruoni (6,805m). We expected an outstanding peak set off from the main ridge of the range. We found KG-33 and took the first picture of her from the 6,450m point on the southeast ridge of Lopchin (KG-2). The height (6,380m) looks underestimated, according to the picture taken from 6,450m. We need to survey it to obtain its accuracy.



Photo-37 KG-1 Ruoni (6,882m) and KG-33 (6,380m, right)
Photo taken from 6,450m on the southeast ridge of Lopchin (KG-2)
The flat snow field on the lower left is Ruoni Terrace (a 5,900m).

24. KG-37 6,443m (P 6,443m on the Soviet Union map)

A small top part of KG-37 is visible from the road to Dema La, but it looks like a part of KG-5. Many observers misunderstand that KG-5 is KG-37 (known as Peak 6,443m on the Soviet Union map.)

An interesting discussion was had about the main dividing line connection and the branch ridge connection to Zyaddo and Schuvina around the Upper Plateau of the Ata Glacier origin, shown on the map as “Divide Plateau”. The Matsumoto map and his book describe the branch ridge connection starting from KG-4 and running directly to KG-6 (Zyaddo) via the 5,500m Pass between the Ata Glacier and the Lhagu Glacier and the main ridge starting from KG-4 connecting to KG-37 (P 6,443m).

In reality, the map in this article shows a presence of the big upper plateau of the Ata Glacier. Some of the pictures in this article show evidence of accuracy of this map (Map-6).

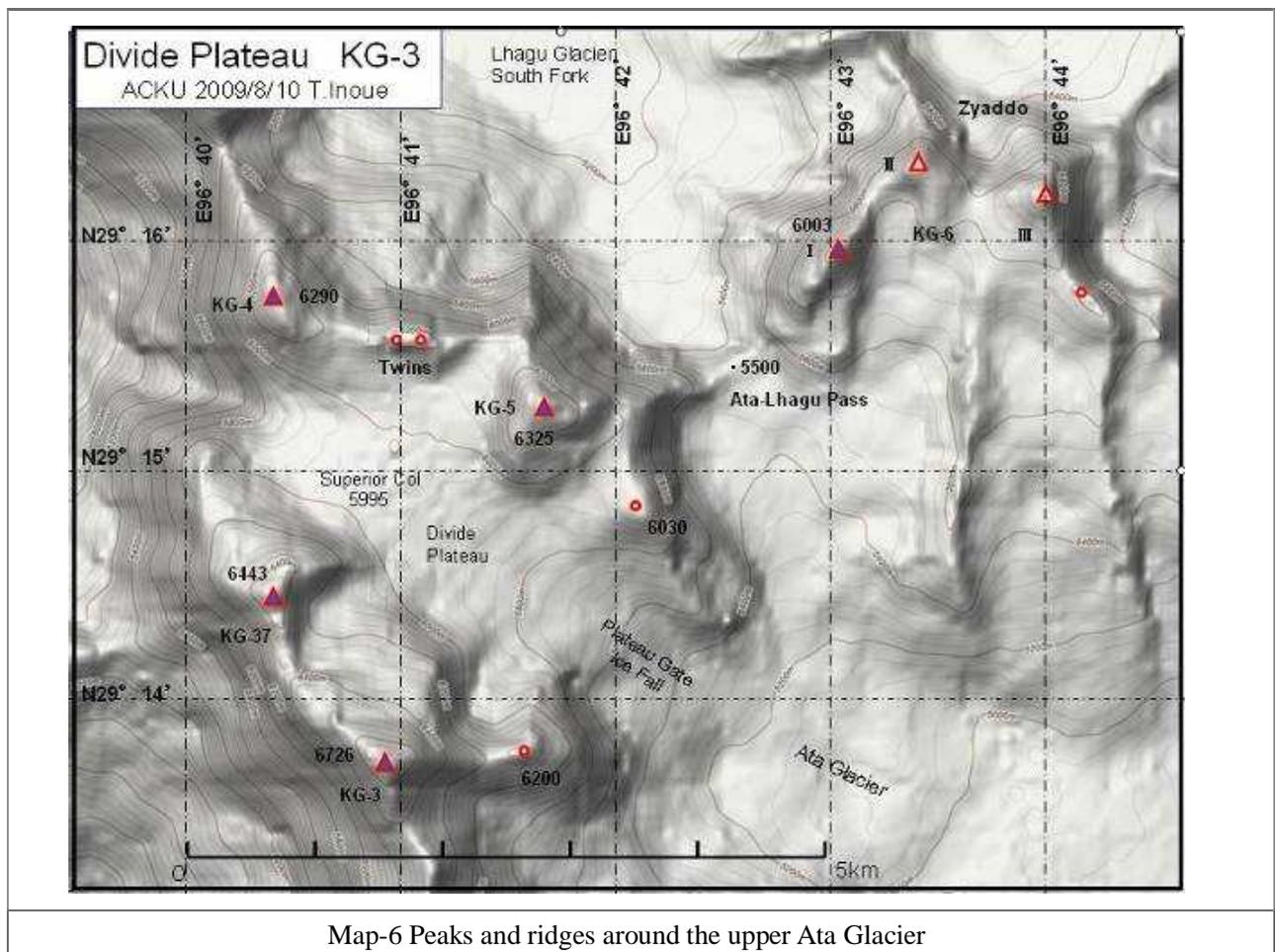




Photo-38 KG-37 (P 6,443m) photo taken at 4,600m in the Ata Glacier (2007 Reconnaissance party)



Photo-39 KG-1, KG-2, KG-3, KG-37 and KG-5 (from left to right)

We Call KG-1, 2, 3 as Ata 3-Sisters. KG-1 (Ruoni) is visible (only the top part of the mountain)

Photo taken at 4,700m in the Ata Glacier

One of our exciting studies was to identify peaks, ridges and valleys in these unknown remote mountains. Our 2009 expedition discovered some unknown peaks and ridge connections. The Kangri Garpo Mountains have many unexplored areas and we eagerly want to send another expedition in the near future.