

Daxuetang-feng of Qonglai Mountains in Sichuan

The second ascent via a new route in the fall of 2003

RENTARO NISHIJIMA

Daxuetang-feng, 5,364 meters high, is a well-known mountain which can be seen directly south from the road, which is a part of the highway that runs from Chengdu towards the Balang Pass. It is a mountain belonging to Wenchuan County, Aba Prefecture. More than ten Chinese teams have tried to reach this peak.

On the 8th of October, five Japanese and one Chinese members of our joint party reached the summit of Daxuetang-feng. However, a pennant on the summit showed that a Beijing mountaineering team had already been there. Thus, we were the second party to reach it. However, our route ascended a glacier at a slope of more than 70 degrees, and it will possibly become the standard route for this mountain. Therefore, we consider our climb very meaningful.

Team Members of the China-Japan Joint Party

Japanese members (Hakusan [Matto] Fuuro Mountaineering Club)

Joint team leader : Rentaro Nishijima
 Assistant team leader : Akira Hoshihara
 Climbing chief : Masanori Kawamura
 Members : Yasunori Tanaka, Toshiaki Tamai, Sachiyo Manizaki,
 Shigeru Yasuda, Takashi Suzuki

Chinese members

Team leader: Li Qing
 Members: He Qin, Feng Yilong

Support staff

Gao Yi, Qin Zhenglin, Tang Ping

Ascent of Daxuetang-feng (October 1 – 11)

September 30: All eight members of the Japanese team gathered at Dengsheng, which is midway between Wolong and the Balang pass, and where the highway bends southward. At Dengsheng, we met the six Chinese members and staff who would climb Daxuetang-feng with us. We spent the night at the lone forestry administration office in Dengsheng.

October 1: We hired 35 porters. 49 members, including eight Japanese and six Chinese, left Dengsheng in a fog. We made our way to Yeniugou, a valley right beneath Dengsheng, crossed a bridge and went along the left bank of a river flowing from Daxuetang-feng. A mossy path continued through a forest of conifers, rhododendrons and bamboos where Giant Pandas might live. Soon, we reached Niupengzi, a grazing area for yaks where a shepherd hut stood. From there we moved to the right bank and followed a barely trodden trail. After walking more than six hours from Dengsheng, we reached the Baishuitaizi Plateau, 3,600 meters above sea level. The steepness of the place does not justify its designation as a "Plateau."

October 2: A 100m waterfall was seen above Baishuitaizi. After climbing a steep slope on its right

bank, seven of our members reached Ganhaizi, altitude 4,200 meters. That was a big flatland which seemed to be the sunken remains of a dried pond. Yaks had come up from another valley as the droppings showed. Just above the flatland was the north face of Daxuetang-feng. This face was unclimbable due to loose rocks. We then climbed along a valley from Ganhaizi, veered to the right where the east face of Daxuetang-feng became visible, and established Base Camp (BC) at Heihaizi, altitude 4,700 meters.

October 3: The team decided on an ice wall route right in front of BC. One member arrived at BC from Baishuitaizi. Nine porters carried loads up to BC. Four team members who had descended to Wolong returned to Baishuitaizi. According to them, they rejected the unreasonable demands of excited porters in the presence of the police.

October 4: At BC, four Japanese and Chinese members worked together in creating a route. The lower part of the ice wall was shaped like the bottom of a funnel. It was very dangerous as falling rocks from the right wall converged into the area. The route was taken as leftward as possible where a fixed rope of two pitches, 100 meters was put in. Five other members, including the joint team leader, reached BC from Baishuitaizi. Now all the joint team members got together. Snow began to fall heavily late afternoon, so we decided to cancel the next day's route operation.

October 5: It snowed all day. The climbing equipment of the Chinese team was still left below as the Japanese loads were given priority. In the snowstorm, four members (two Japanese and two Chinese) made a day-trip down to Baishuitaizi to pick them up.

October 6: Fine at BC. Temperature -2°C . Route operation resumed. There seemed to be no danger of avalanche despite a new snow depth of about 30 centimeters. New snow appeared to hold up falling rocks and settled things down. Four members extended the route another two pitches and 100 meters from the previous spot. They were clearly seen from BC, climbing on the ice wall and fixing rope. The porters who had carried up the last of our loads shouted with joy to see the top member of the operation team appearing from behind a rock past a difficult crux.

The members returned from the route operation of the ice wall 200 meters short of the top.

October 7: Clear at BC. Temperature -5°C . No wind. Best conditions thus far. At 05:40, the operation team departed with headlamps. At 07:40, the support team departed. About the time when sun began to shine brightly against the glacier on the east wall of Daxuetang-feng, the operation team was seen approaching the upper section of the steepest slope of the glacier. Through binoculars, Suzuki was seen standing only with the toe points of his crampons stuck into the ice wall, with almost the entire soles of his boots visible to us at BC. He was also seen inserting ice screws and fixing his rope with one hand. That was quite a risky climb at a high altitude. We held our breath as we feared fatigue in his calves, or loss of the toe points. We felt a sense of relief as his wheezing voice reached BC by radio: "Belay removed. Climb on." He Qin followed. As he approached Suzuki, the same anxious moments were repeated. Tanaka led the last two pitches.

At about 13:00, the three members of the operation team were seen from BC standing a flat place after climbing the 400 meters high ice wall with a slope of 70 degrees.

They reported by radio: "There are two peaks. We can't tell which is higher. We have time so we'll climb the right peak today, and the left one tomorrow. The left peak may need a lot of rope fixing." "OK. Let's climb both of them," was our answer.

(The right peak is probably the pyramid-shaped peak seen from the Balang Pass, and the left peak is the trapezoidal, snow-capped one. In appearance and on the map, both peaks seem to be 5364 meters high. The team named the right peak Peak I, the left Peak II, and another peak, which is described as 5,354 meters high on the map, is hidden behind Peak II, Peak III. Peak III is presumed to be the glaciated peak on the right side of Peak I, as seen from the Balang Pass.)



Climbing 80 degree ice wall of the east face of Daxuetang-feng I (Rentaro Nishijima)

October 8: Clear at BC. Temperature -4°C . Four members of the advance team camped on the upper part of the flat place. The team spent a sleepless night in thin tents with no mats, and started the attempt for the peak at dawn.

At BC, Gao Yi and Qin Zhenglin stayed awake preparing for the departure of the second group. After breakfast, Team A of the second group departed at 05:30 and Team B at 07:40.

The advance team aimed at Peak I, and bypassing many crevasses, proceeded beside the walls of the crevasses and glacier. As the ground was relatively even, no fixed rope was used. At the head of the glacier, there was a narrow, steep gully, 20 meters long, 1.5 meters wide, and with an angle of 70 degrees. After passing it, the team reached a col which continued to the summit. There was a sheer drop on the west side.

From the col to the summit, a narrow ridge with a slope of 60 degrees continued for about 100 meters. There was no snow on the ridge. Loose rocks easily crumbled with each step, making it impossible to hammer pitons for ropes. The members took off their crampons and climbed very

cautiously. A Chinese member, He Qin, retired saying “It’s crazy.”

At 09:36, Tanaka and Kawamura succeeded in reaching the summit, followed by Suzuki and the Chinese team leader, Li. The summit was only one square meter in size, so they could not stand together. However, it commanded a spectacular panoramic view. Mt. Siguniang and Ganzi mountains were seen in far distance. They found a relatively new pennant of a Chinese team with “Beijing” printed on it. Nishijima and Hoshiba came up after a while.

While descending to the col from the summit, I had a mixed feeling as the joint team leader. Looking up, I could see the snow-capped, massively towering, trapezoidal Peak II on the left. It might be unclimbed, but there was no knowing. Satisfied with the second ascent on Peak I by a new route, we descended.

The team left behind a fixed rope in the gully, after cutting about 15 meters to be used for descent. Also left behind were two pitons on top of the ice wall. By using the 100 meter rope on those pitons, all the other pitons and ropes were recovered. Although not perfect, the team endeavored to leave the mountain as clean as possible. At 17:30 everyone returns to BC safe and sound.

October 11: Farewell party is held in Dengsheng with the porters. A car came to pick us up and headed for Chengdu.

Daxuetang-feng and Vicinity in Qonglai Mountains, Sichuan

