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Climbing on the North-west face of Mount Tsoboje – Slovenian party

Contents

- (1) Slovenian First Ascent of North-west face
of Mount Tsoboje (6680m)
by Luka Strazar and Nejc Marcic Page 2 ~ 10

- (2) Mountains of the Yangtze – Mekong diamond
by Nathan Dahlberg of New Zealand Page 11 ~ 20

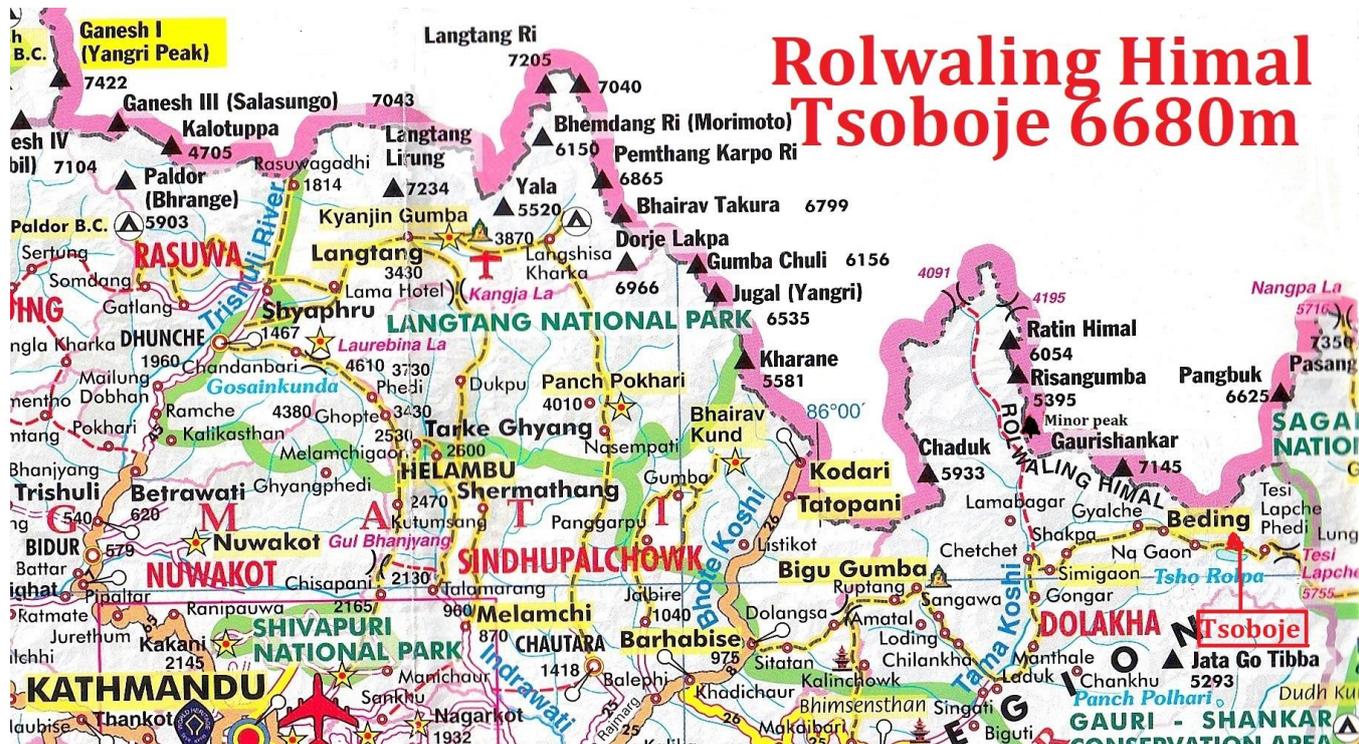
Slovenian First Ascent

North-west face of Mount Tsoboje (6680m)

Between 28 and 30 October 2021 Slovenian alpinists Luka Stražar and Nejc Marčič have succeeded in making the first ascent on a new 1700m route on the north-west face of Mount Tsoboje 6680m above the Rolwaling Valley in Nepal, which they named Slovenian Direct.

The little known and little visited Rolwaling valley region lies between the Langtang Range and the Everest Range.

Trekkers are rewarded with enchanting views of majestic mountain scenery from Mt. Gaurishanker 7134m, Rolwaling Himal, Chobabhamre, Dorje Lakpa, Yalung Ri, and Pachharmo Peak. Explore the many hidden valleys, which act as an excellent habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals including many kinds of monkeys, Himalayan thar, gaur, musk deer, Himalayan black bear, wild dog, and more than 250 species of birds.





Nejc Marcic & Luka Strazar on summit of Tsoboje 6,680m Nepal (Photo: Luka Strazar)

Top Slovenian alpinists **Luka Stražar** and **Nejc Marčič** made an alpine-style ascent of the north-west face of Tsoboje, the stunning 6,680m peak in the remote Himalayan region of Rolwaling in Nepal. Also referred to as Tsoboje, the mountain in Himalaya was first climbed in 1972 via the north-east ridge by the Germans Wolfgang Weinzierl, Peter Vogler, Gustav and Klaus Harder. In 2015 Mingma Gyalje Sherpa made an impressive solo ascent of the west face, while Slovenian mountaineers now made the first ascent via the north-west face. Below are **Matija Volontar** and **Marko Prezelj** in base camp.





Climbing in the easier lower part of the Slovenian direct route (Photo: Luka Strazar)



Exposed climbing in the middle part of the north-west face (Photo: Nejc Marcic)

Stražar and Marčič left Slovenia at the beginning of October along with **Marko Prezelj** and **Matija Volontar** and after acclimatising properly despite poor weather, **Stražar** and **Marčič** climbed the mountain's north-west face from 28 to 30 October. They named the 1700m route *Slovenian Direct* and graded it ED, M5, AI5.



Climbing sketchy thin ice in the lower part of the north-west face of Tsoboje (Nejc Marcic)



Prezelj and Volontar were forced to quit the attemptin Tsoboje south face



Tsooböje 6680m

west face

Slovenian direct

ED, M5, AI5, 1700m

28.10-30.10.2021

Nejc Marčič

Luka Stražar



Matija Volontar in the mixed terrain



Beginning of the steep middle part of the north-west face of Tsoboje (LuKa Strazar)



The first pitch of the second day with bivy spot under the rock overhang (Luka Strazar)

We found steep, exposed climbing in the central part. Ascent was accompanied by low temperatures and strong winds, creating frequent spindrift. Despite unfavorable terrain, we found two really good bivy spots. To avoid the confusion due to small height difference, we climbed both the Central and the East summit of the mountain. We descended the southern side and reached the base camp the evening before our return to Kathmandu," **Stražar** and **Marčič** explained.



Ascent was accompanied by low temperature and strong winds (Neji Marcic)



Bivouacking in Tsoboje southwest ridge

Prezelj and **Volontar** for their part attempted a line up the mountain's south face but were forced to turn back due to the high winds.



Climbing the Tsoboje southwest ridge, Tso R olpa

Piolets d'Or

Stražar, **Marčič** and **Prezelj** are among the most renowned high-altitude alpine-style experts nowadays. They hold a total of seven Piolets d'Or among them.

Stražar and Marčič received one in 2012 for climbing the north-east face of K7 West (6615 m) in Pakistan in 2011, while Stražar received another in 2019 together with Aleš Česen and Tom Livingstone for a first ascent.

Mountains of the Yangtze – Mekong diamond.

Introduction

Some 40 million plus years ago the Indian continental plate plowed into the Eurasian plate forming in the process the “roof of the world” - the Tibetan plateau and the concentric rings of mountains that bound it and run through it which comprise most of the earth's major mountain ranges, Hindu Kush, Pamirs, Karakoram's, Himalayas, Tien Shan and Kun Lun not to mention a host of lesser ranges. The plateau is sometimes referred to as the third pole due to the amount of ice it contains.

Although largely inhabited (apart from the central areas called the Chang Tang) for millennia the process of exploring, mapping and in the case of mountaineering, climbing mountains has largely taken place in the last 150 years.

Due to political reasons and the general geographical and meteorological difficulties in these high mountain areas – not to mention a general lack of interest once the major mountains were climbed, they remained largely unexplored by outsiders.

Whilst looking for an area to explore I came upon an area in Qinghai province several years ago not far from the source of the Mekong for which no information was available. With the Hoetjes brothers, I set out in July 2018 and spent 3 weeks in central Qinghai province on the Tibetan plateau exploring this area. Successful as the exploration was it has led as many such explorations do, to raising even more questions and research further into the areas bounded by the Yangtze and Mekong rivers in Qinghai province. As they lie within the boundaries of a diamond shape when placed on a map. I have named them - the Mountains of the Yangtze – Mekong diamond.

The PLA (Peoples Liberation Army) has apparently mapped all of China (1970's) but to what degree of accuracy is difficult to ascertain as these maps remain state secrets. To compile this report outside of my own observation I have relied on the following other sources - Russian maps, Map Carta, the Czech maps, ArcGis maps, large scale Chinese maps, satellite photography and Tom Nakamura's maps and photos.

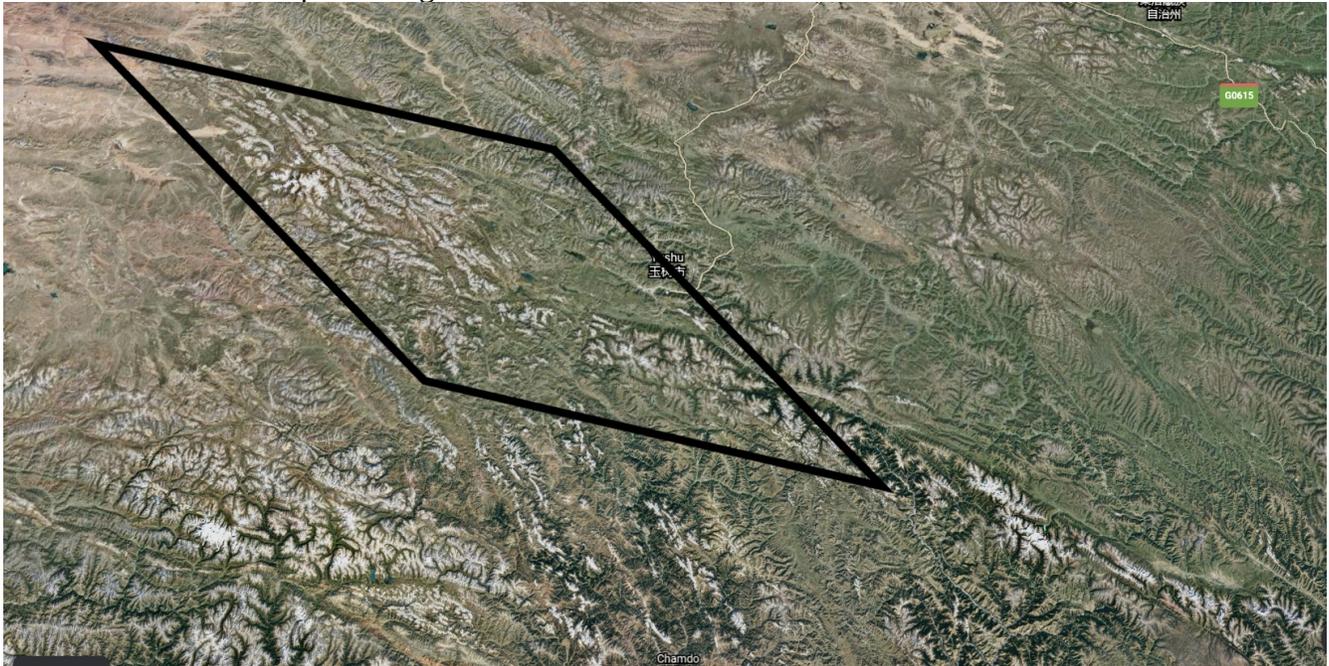
Mountains of the Yangtze – Mekong diamond.

The Mountains run roughly NW to SE and are placed south of the Kun Lun but north of the Tanggula Shan. The mountains could be considered as an arm Tanggula Shan - connecting with the main range in the ancient kingdom of Nangqen. Generally, they run in a series of NW to SE arcs but in closer detail they are often a very convoluted mass with some small systems even running north – south.

On the northern edge and also in the far south deep river valleys running into and of the Yangtze and Mekong have completely desiccated the terrain and deep forested valleys rise sharply upwards to glacier peaks.

The NW start point is Fenhong pass 4900m on the G109 on the high plateau – the first mountain being point 5535 almost directly east of G109 (for this section I will use Russian map heights for references) 60kms east of G109 is point 5728 before the Yangtze gorges pierce the range at roughly 92kms east of G109. From here the northern line of the diamond runs to Qumalab town whilst the southern heads to Jiaguokongsangongma mountain. This is roughly the widest point of the diamond at approx 200kms and between these 2 points are the highest mountains of up to 5900m. From here the diamond closes in again intercepting on the gorge created by the Yangtze which then divides these mountains from Chola

The Diamond – close up on Google Earth



Brief History of exploration and mountaineering in the Diamond

With the fabled “Sources of the Mekong” being within the diamond many explorations right to the present day have focused on this area and also in descending the Mekong - often by raft. A history of these can be found at

https://asian-alpine-e-news.com/asian_alpine_e-new_issue_no48.pdf.

Little exploration or mountaineering has been done by known sources (ie non - Chinese sources) and even those missions to the Sources of the Mekong seemed to show little interest in anything but finding the source.

Information I have found about explorations and mountaineering within the Diamond apart from the Source of the Mekong explorations which are well documented elsewhere are as below in order of date.

2004 A Spark Hillary NZ Expedition descended the length of the Mekong. I contacted an expedition member Kaaren Mahtias who wrote “ I know we started from Mugxung towards source and it was a very flat route. We climbed the peak above the Adobe... 5500 m and not very technical...On the exit we climbed Zanarigen 5900m also not technical.” note Zanarigen is a named and known peak and all maps put it at about 5500m. This and some neighbouring peaks are about 55kms due south of the peaks and glaciers that form the Sources of the Mekong and are the last major peaks before the plateau which then averages some 4700m or more until the peaks of the Tangula Shan range. The Abode ?? I think maybe means a campsite near the source.

2004 First ascent Qiajajima. Two Japanese expeditions went to the Qiajajima range – details can be found on the site below. I have seen no pictures from those expeditions.

<http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/12200541100/Asia-China-Qinghai-Tibet-Plateau-Qiajajima-I-5930m-First-Ascent>

2012 Spanish mountaineers and explorers Sergi Ricart, Dani Martín and Josito Fernández made a trip to the sources to climb a mountain “Gujon Ri” at the head of the source – very detailed and useful information can be found on the sites below.

<http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/13201212900/Qiajajima-Range-Gujon-Ri-5490m-and-the-Mekong-headwaters>

[file:///C:/Users/broad/Downloads/028c34875e1915ea31b33cf693be246c%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/broad/Downloads/028c34875e1915ea31b33cf693be246c%20(1).pdf)

https://travelsdocbox.com/117194206-Adventure_Travel/Exploration-project-of-the-sources-of-the-mekong-river-and-unclimbed-mountains-of-kham-tibet.html

2015 A French expedition visited the region an information was found on a commercial website. I could find no further details or information about where they actually went. They write that they scaled two peaks there but give no coordinates. Note – photo’s suggest they were in the Yushu alps.

Excerpt from site - “Carole and I scaled two - most likely – never-before climbed peaks. Dza Tsumbo, 5500 m, and Tadzeu Maia, 5900 m”.

More information and pictures can be found at

<https://lyofood.com/blogs/lyofood-blog/175062407-seven-weeks-in-the-kingdom-of-nangchen>

2018 With the Ben and Jos Hoetje and myself an expedition by bike exploring the region with a focus on what we called the Zhidoi glaciers – the most heavily glaciated area in the diamond. Three of the highest peaks were climbed and some of the countryside on our routes documented.

https://asian-alpine-e-news.com/asian_alpine_e-new_issue_no35.pdf

<http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/13201215079/Mountains-of-the-Mekong-Headwaters>

you tube video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1aUxR5KYzs>

2019 Tom Nakamura made visits to the area – his trip report below

https://asian-alpine-e-news.com/asian_alpine_e-new_issue_no54.pdf

2020 Chinese based American Kyle Obermann completed a Kora of Jiangjiaduode massif - a detailed account can be found at

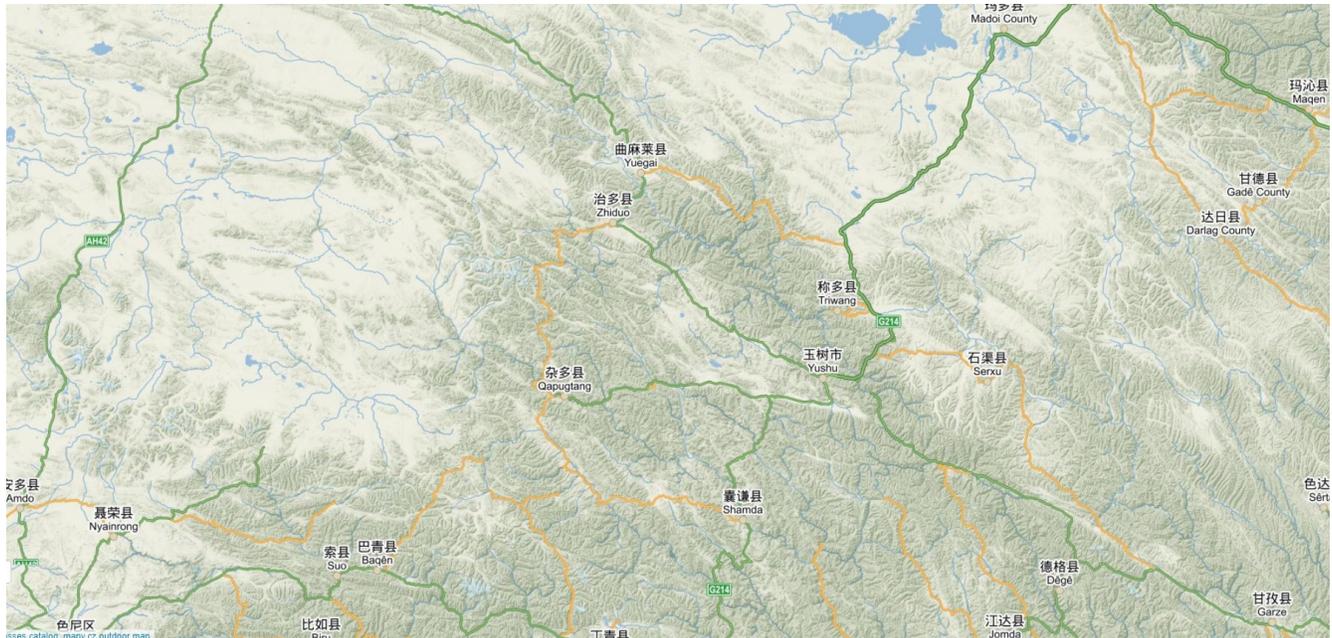
https://asian-alpine-e-news.com/asian_alpine_e-new_issue_no70.pdf

Access and Road system and the Sanjiangyuan (Three river source) national park.

Main access is via Yushu where there are regular bus and aircraft options to Chengdu and Xining. From there a good road system connects with Zadoi and Zhidoi thence on wards west and south across the

Tibetan plateau. There are many smaller roads as well some paved others just dirt paths. It has been announced that there will be a Sanjiangyuan (Three river source) national park covering an enormous area of the plateau but at the time we visited no evidence of that was seen.

Major roads are as on map below - Qapugtang is Tibetan for Zadoi, Shamda is for Nangchen.



The Mountains

Mountains , mountains and more mountains – there are literally a hundred or more peaks between 5500m and 5700m in the Diamond and several dozen more over 5700m. Generally speaking most have easy access up streams and glacial moraine. Because of there diversity and the sheer size of the Diamond I have divided the main mountain areas into 9 groups as below which is a brief guide to the main mountain areas which constitute the diamond. Please note that altitudes given vary considerably on different mapping systems – up to 250m or almost 1000 feet in some cases so I use approx below regards mountain height.

The central area:

1 The Zhidoi Glacial group. Encompassing many of the highest peaks and heavily covered in glaciers these are at the heart of the Diamond. Several peaks are around and above 5800m and several ridge lines exceed 5700m. To the West the group tends to be much lower and the mountains assume a more docile appearance.

2 Qiajajima group. The rock mountains and mountain spires are just west of the Zhidoi glaciers – The altitude and area these peaks encompass is roughly comparable to the glacial system but there are only small hanging glaciers mainly on northern slopes and no valley glaciers. The mountains are distinctly

individual with several peaks approaching 5800m and perhaps above but there are no high ridge lines. The Rilong pass at 5002m and road S224 are basically the division between the Zhidoi glaciers and Qiajajima group. Possibly many of the peaks in the Zhidoi glaciers would resemble the Individual rock towers of the Qiajajima massif if the large valley glaciers were not present.

There is a broad area around these 2 main groups which contain many notable peaks over 5600m –

3 To the north east until Zhidoi – divided from the Zhidoi glaciers and Qiajajima massifs by the river system An yang qong chu/Ningqu. Several peaks approach 5700m.

4 The Sources of the Mekong to the north of the Zhidoi glaciers divided by the An yang qong chu and a tributary of the Mekong (name?) – lower more individual peaks with small valley glaciers one peak may approach 5700m but generally the higher peaks are around 5500m. North of this group the mountains fade into the plateau.

5 A broader area of mountains south of the Zhidoi glaciers extending to Zadoi. This is a very large area with small ranges running in various directions with at least 2 containing peaks over 5700m. Generally the relief of the mountains grows towards the lower grasslands and river valleys to the south and many even lower altitude peaks are of significant character.

Outside of the central area

6 The system across the plateau – a long range stretching from G109 to Qumarleb and Zhidoi. Several peaks may exceed 5600m or even 5700m but relief over the high plateau is generally small.

7 The Jiangjiaduode Massif including Ganggeqiaji (approx 5700m) just south of Yushu stretching all the way to the Yangtze gorge which separates Qinghai from Sichuan provinces - a very large area with many peaks and small glaciated systems including peak 5462m near the Yangtze in the eastern most corner which has the most relief of anywhere in the Diamond of approx 2100m.

8 The mountains south of Zadoi and the road S309 – generally of lesser altitude a confused mass of rock peaks – it's unlikely any mountains exceed 5500m.

9 The mountains north of G215 and south of S308 – generally of lesser altitude a confused mass of rock peaks. These peaks include Holy Mountain Gado Jawa but it's unlikely any mountains exceed 5500m.

Photo gallery



Above heading towards the Rilong pass – 5002m **Below** Snow dome rises in the distance above intervening ridge lines.





Above peaks NW of Qiajajima

Below the Jiangjiaduode Massif seen from above Yushu





Above One of the many peaks of Ganggeqiaji sticks up behind lower lying ridges as seen not far from the Yushu airport. **Below** Rock ridges in the distance south of the road between Yushu and Zadoi.



Below the Qiajajima massif viewed from peak 5806m in the Zhidoi glaciers

