

# LOOKING FOR INSECTS IN KACHIN STATE

An Exotic Region of the North Myanmar in 1998-2001

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**Kachin State, the northern part of Myanmar (Burma), had been scarcely known to foreigners before the time a famous plant hunter Frank Kingdon-Ward explored the region in late 1920s to 1930s. He published books “Plant Hunter’s Paradise” in 1937 and “Burma’s Icy Mountains” in 1949. These works contain very interesting descriptions of the minority people of Kachin State. After World War II, however, only few researchers were able to enter to this area because of the continued internal war between Kachin tribe and the armed forces of the Burmese government. On September 15, 1996 Takashi Ozaki, a Japanese climber, succeeded in the first ascent of Hkakabo-razi (5881m), the highest peak of Myanmar. After that, some foreigners visited this area.**

As a door was being gradually opened to the foreigners, we planned to make researches on the insect fauna of Kachin State. First we tried to fly to Tahundum – the northernmost village of Kachin- by a helicopter in the autumn of 1998. But our request was turned down by an army commander. We had to stay at the military base of Putao for a few days in vain. The second time, we visited Tahundum and Marain village by trekking in 1999. The third time, in 2000, I climbed Ponkan-razi (3500m) that is located on the border of Myanmar and India. In the fourth expedition in 2001, we visited the border of Myanmar and China from Myitkyina. We collected more than 400 species of butterflies in including a new species and a subspecies.

## **The First Trekking to Tahundum and Marain Village**

Three members of Hideo Shizuya (59), Yasuyuki Watanabe (47) and Motoki Saitoh (23), all amateur entomologists conducted 38 days trekking. We departed from Putao (450m) with two guides, 11 soldiers and a commander for Naungmon (500m) by a jeep and a tractor on April 7, 1999. It took us four days to drive from Putao to Naungmon, as the road condition was extremely bad. On April 10, we arrived at Ratbot village (480m), the junction to Naungmon. As there was no road for vehicle traffics toward the north, we had to walk from here.

Our party consisted of a MTT (Myanmar Travels and Tours) guide Htay Aung, a hunter, three soldiers for guard, 27 porters including women and children, pack animals of 14 pack animals, horses and donkeys in all. The party carried 600kg of rice! Hereabouts the weather is changeable and sometimes it rains or squalls. In the dense evergreen broad-leaved forests many mosquitoes and leeches were lying in wait for us. We were stung and sucked blood every day. We took one tablet of antimalaria medicine Mefloquine in a week. Nevertheless Saitoh suffered from malaria.

On April 13, we crossed the pass of Wellpin (1650m) and went down to Pannandin village (1000m) along the north side of the Mayhka River (Nam Tamai), upper stream of the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River. This village is small and has only 60 inhabitants of eight families belonging to the Rawan (Lanwan) tribe. They are Baptists and have a church in their village and speak Rawan. Only the path from the village leads to the border of Myanmar and China. A Chief of the village told us that it would take four days to the border on foot. We saw some goods made in China. On the way we met Nammer Jansen who is a Tibetan hunter living in Tahundum village. He climbed Hkakabo-razi together with Ozaki.

Everyday we marched about 6 to 13 miles and stayed at a villagers’ houses. Otherwise, we stayed at a bamboo hut for travelers. The roof is hatched with banana leaves. Bridges are also made of bamboo and rattan without using wires. We arrived at Ngawar village on April 16. Here are 20 houses with 155 inhabitants, all Rawan tribe. Throughout the rainy season heavy rains prevail. A large landslide, which took place in July1995, killed four villagers. Only a few

wooded tracks remain around the village, since the forest in the vicinity has been burnt off for making fields called “Taung-ya”(taung: mountain, ya: field) in Burmese.

On April 19, we reached Dhazondum village (Tazungdam: 1250m), 15 houses with 100 inhabitants, all Rawan tribe. Some houses are made of woods like log cabins. The climate is not suitable for the growth of rice, but good for barley. The Mayhka River diverges from here, one is the main stream, Adung Wang to the north and the other is a large tributary, Seinghku Wang to the northwest. We were able to obtain dried meats of Takin (*Budorcas taxicolor*). On the next day we passed Tazuhtu village (1300m), 18 houses of Rawan and two houses of Tibetan with 178 inhabitants and arrived at Talahtu village (1390m), 10 houses with 61 inhabitants of Rawan tribe and three houses with 20 inhabitants of Daru (Htalu, Derung) tribe. The latter minority migrated about 200 years before from the Dulong-jiang basin, Yunnan Province, China. They are called pygmies because of their considerably short stature. Five days walk along Thala Wang takes us to the border of Myanmar and China. The next village is Thalong (Adung-long: 1530m), 20 houses with inhabitants of Daru tribe, all Christians. From here we could see snow covered mountains far ahead for the first time.

On April 21, we arrived at Tahundum village (1800m), 10 houses with 68 Tibetan inhabitants. Although they are Lamaist, there is a Myanmar style pagoda in their village. It was built in 1994 and Rev. Pattanner Htiroka, a priest of Hinayana Buddhism, has lived there since 1992. We stayed for seven days with John Tshu. He lived together with his wife, his six children and elder brother of Nammer Jansen. There are barley, corn and potato fields around the village. The villagers breed cattle, pigs and goats. I saw a venomous snake with yellow and black spots at about 2400m above sea level. The upper forested valley has no village exists but there is an unclear footpath. In the summer season some of the villagers go to an alpine zone in order to hunt wild animals such as Takin by crossbows and to collect medical herbs i.e. Beimu. It takes seven days to trek from here to the base camp of Hkakabo-razi and four days to the pass, Namni-la (4660m) on the border of Myanmar and China. Everyday it was raining heavily and the temperature went down to 10 degree centigrade even in the daytime.

We started returning to Putao on April 28. Saitoh and I entered to Seinghku Wang valley. Passing through Dhazondum next day, we arrived at Htaondum village (1540m) of only three houses with two Tibetans and one Rawan. Walking five miles from here, we reached Gubar village (1780m), which has wide barley fields and seven houses with 40 Tibetan inhabitants. In the village there is a Tibetan style monastery and a monk who has fled from Tibet, China. Two more miles walk took us to Marain (Madun) village (1850m) of 13 houses with 75 Tibetans. A reconnaissance party of the Hitotsubashi University Mountaineering Club from Japan came here in 1995. It takes three days to trek to Chakake and Surisu (4100-4300m) where a large glacier lake exists in an alpine zone. Two kinds of alpine apollo butterflies, *Parnassius imperator* and *P. orleans* were found. Diphu-la (Diphuk-la: 4325m) is the pass on the border of Myanmar and India. We returned to Putao on May 17.

### **Ponkan-razi Trekking**

Two members of Shizuya and Watanabe visited Ponkan-razi from April 26 to May 16 in 2000. It took for us one hour by a jeep from Putao to Upper Shankhaung village (500m). On April 29, we started trekking with a guide and 13 porters. The path was muddy and slippery because of heavy rain. Walking for five hours, we reached a pass (1400m). Then in two hours we came down to Wasandum village (900m) of 11 houses with about 60 inhabitants of Rawan tribe except for one family of Kachin tribe. “Dum” means flat plain in Rawan language.

On the next day we walked two hours and a half and arrived at Lonnet village (910m) of 20

houses with 135 inhabitants, all Rawan Christians. This village is located beside the Nantlan River, i.e. the upper stream of the Malihka River. On May 1, in three hours and a half on foot, we came to Ziyardum village (1100m) of 20 houses with 120 inhabitants, all Rawan Christians. This village is located on a terrace along the Ziyar River. I started ascending Ponkan-razi on May 2 with the guide and six porters. The first day we went up a tributary of the Fungung River for eight hours and camped at the riverside. This was the first camp (1130m).

On the following day, after walking one hour and a half hours, we came upon a bridge brought down by flood. We rebuilt it and crossed the river. From there we climbed up the mountain ridge. After three hours marching, we set up the second camp (1820m). After further four hours trekking, we reached a site for the third camp (2450m). Hereabouts *Rhododendron* trees were abundant. It was very fine on May 5 and we attacked Ponkan-razi. For three hours walking, we got to a site for the final camp (3000m) covered with snow. Walking up and down two more hours, finally we stood atop Ponkan-razi (3500m) at 0:58pm. The peak is located on the border of Myanmar and India. A local guide said that sometimes an Indian helicopter was flying on patrol. The summit was covered with much snow and *Abies* trees and bamboo were abundantly growing, but there was no alpine zone. We returned to Putao on May 13.

### **The border of Myanmar and China and Imau Bum Trekking from Myitkyina**

I traveled near the border of Myanmar and China in July and August 2001. It was two days driving for 80 miles by a Toyota truck from Myitkyina to Chipwi (320m) along the Mayhka River. Myitkyina is the seat of the local government of Kachin State. The driving was very hard because of the muddy road after heavy rain.

On July 20, I reached Panwa (2280m) after five hours ride for 40 miles in a hired car. On the way I saw numerous Chinese workers for road maintenance and cutting down trees. Panwa Pass (2336m) is located on the border of Myanmar and China and there are immigration offices of both the countries. Panwa looks like a town in China. The signboards are written both in Chinese and Burmese characters. The houses have tiled roofs similar to those of China. The inhabitants are mostly Lisus and Chinese. Most of them are bilingual. As for money, only Chinese currency is in circulation. I stayed at the Panwa Hotel that was of two-star class and funded by Chinese sources. The chairman of Panwa, Za Khom Thain Yin welcomed us and promised that NDAK (Northern Democratic Association of Kachin) would cooperate with us. He said that we were the first foreign visitors except for Chinese. Until ten years ago gunfights had continued there between KIO (Kachin Independence Organization) and the national army.

On the next day we drove on army Ford trucks for five hours. We passed through a higher place (2400m) and reached Lakyin village (1430m) of all Lachake tribe. We trekked from this village with a guide, an immigration officer, two policemen, three soldiers and eight porters. After walking for five hours, we reached Bwelee village (1280m) where our cars were waiting for us. After three hours drive we arrived at Lower Hpimaw (1680m) on the border of Myanmar and China. The relevant demarcation of the border was discussed and agreed to in the negotiation between the two governments in 1960. As a result, the new border moved about ten miles westwards from the previous location. Nowadays the Upper Hpimaw and Hpimaw pass (3350m) is in the Chinese territory. We had a distant view of Gaoligong Mountains of China. I found deciduous *Quercus* trees growing here and there. The view of rice-fields terrace was impressive. The distance from Lower Hpimaw to Kangfang is about 21 miles that includes a roadway of some six miles. We walked for six hours and reached Kangfang village (1630m), also on the border of Myanmar and China. On July 26, after three hours' drive on a large truck to transport timbers, we arrived at a lumber-mill (2700m) funded by Chinese sources. On our way from Kanfang to the mountain, people everywhere were cutting trees to export to China. An

extensive area must, in no doubt, have been covered with mossy, huge trees since time immemorial. We climbed up one of the peaks of Imaw Bum (3400m) on July 28. As it was raining heavily, we stayed for only a couple of days and descended to Kangfang on foot. The main peak of Imaw Bum must be more than 4000m high. Alpine zone did not exist around the top of the mountain, but *Abies*, *Pinus*, *Rhododendron* and *Betula* trees were seen. I was unable to find coffin trees "*Taiwania cryptomerioides*". We returned to Myitkyina on August 6.

