

## *Russia*

### URAL RANGE

*Northern Urals, Peak Sablya, two new routes in winter.* These ascents took 10 days for the climbs (820m, Russian grade VI) and were done simultaneously by two teams. The joint Peterburg-Ekaterinburg team earned second place in the “first-ascent class” of the Russia-2002 mountain climbing championship. See “The Sabre” earlier in this Journal.

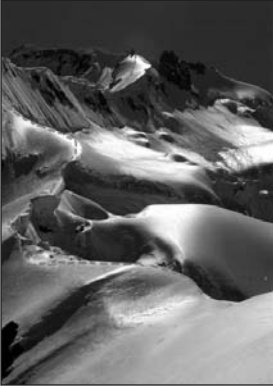


Sat Peak and its ridgeline traverse. Alexander Novik

### PAMIR RANGE

*Zaalaisky Range, Sat Peak traverse.* In July 2002, I led a team of Moscow climbers on several climbs in the western Zaalaisky Range (the Pamir), and the first full traverse of the Sat Peak massif. Because the western Zaalaisky Range is separated from Lenin Peak (7,135m) by Ters-Agar pass, it is actually a separate range, with steep ice-falls and many rock faces and ice walls. The highest point, Sat Peak (5,900m), is located in the long southern branch of the Zaalaisky Range. The second highest summit, Surkhangoy Peak (5,627m), is also situated in the southern branch. The Sat Peak massif consists of Sat Main (5,900m) and, from east to west, 5,781m, 5,820m, 5,840m (Sat Middle), and 5,740m high summits. Sat Peak plateau is within the triangle formed between Sat Middle, Sat Main, and the 5,740m summit.

Though exploration began in the 1930s, the western Zaalaisky is rarely visited today because nearby Lenin Peak attracts most of the attention. Several teams made ascents of Sat



The Sat Peak ridgeline.  
Alexander Novik

Peak in 1985, 1996, and 1998 by a variety of routes, all from South Kyzilsy Glacier, and all leading across Sat Peak plateau (5,700m). We began our traverse from the southwest tributary of South Kyzilsy Glacier, on a 30° to 45° crevassed snow and ice slope. An easy rock and ice ridge led to the traverse of the 5,781m and 5,820m summits, then Sat Peak was climbed from Sat Peak plateau. Afterward, we continued west on an eroded rock ridge via summit 5,740m. Then it took two days to descend to Surkhangoy Glacier because bad weather made it necessary to fix ropes all the way down.

We also made a first ascent of two beautiful summits (about 5,200m) several kilometers east of Sat Peak. These summits were named Kyzilkul East and Kyzilkul West. The Western Zaalay still holds great potential for first ascents on 4,800m to 5,500m peaks, with routes of varying levels of difficulty.

ALEXANDER NOVIK, *Russia*

## KAMCHATKA PENINSULA

*Kamchatka exploration.* Our self-sufficient, four-person team—Melis Coady, Aubrey Knapp, Keri Meagher, and myself—made the first ski-mountaineering expedition to the Pinechevo Pass area on Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. With support from the American Alpine Club's Mountaineering Fellowship, we departed from Yelsova in April, 2002. From Pinechevo Valley, we set up base camp on the southwest side of Pinechevo Pass, and made many forays into the surrounding valleys to climb and ski.

We made a number of first ascents on small unnamed peaks near Pinechevo Pass (up to 8,000'), including a route up the south ridge of Volcano Aag's southwestern sub-summit. We



Kamchatka view. Molly Loomis



Melis Coady heading up the Pinechevo Valley, Kamchatka. Molly Loomis

also made many ski descents on slopes up to 40° and as long as 4,000 vertical feet. The snow varied from exceptional to “survival.” Our initial objective had been to climb and ski some of the larger volcanoes in this area, but horrible weather, wet snow, and problems with stove fuel (Russian diesel) thwarted us.

This area offers tremendous potential for alpine mountaineering routes. Steep narrow couloirs, jagged rock, and clean ridgelines abound with potential routes ranging from moderate to long and challenging. It is a ski-mountaineering paradise with the added bonus of smoking volcanoes and natural hot springs. Planning an expedition to Kamchatka requires time and patience. Only recently opened by the Soviet government, the logistical challenges include tourist invitations, travel to the peninsula, the Russian bureaucracy, and a scarcity of accurate maps. The payoff is an unexplored area with unlimited possibilities.

MOLLY LOOMIS, *Wyoming*

## Kyrgyzstan

### TIEN SHAN

#### INYLCHEK REGION

*Tien Shan Mountains, mapping expedition.* In August and September, 13 of us, mostly students from Dresden University of Technology, conducted a mapping expedition to the central Tien Shan Mountains. The objective of this university project (the Institute of Cartography) was to create a new 1:100,000 scale map of central Tien Shan in the style and quality of European mountaineering maps. This new map will probably be available in two or three years. We received support from, and worked with, Tien Shan Travel—the biggest Travel Agency in Kyrgyzstan—and from The Geodetic and Cartographic Service of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Useful maps at a large scale are not currently available—a universal problem in Russia and its former member states. The best available maps are of 1:200,000 scale, which are not very useful for mountaineering. There is also a map of central Tien Shan at 1:150,000, but this map only shows the major mountains and ridges, and is not a topographic map.

We worked in three teams: two in non-glacier areas and one on the glaciers or at higher altitudes. During this mapping, the “glacier team” probably did two first ascents, one on a previously unclimbed mountain. But it is difficult to know for sure if they were in fact first ascents—the best information about this still comes from local guides.



Khan Tengri (6,995m) from base camp on the southern Inylchek Glacier. Sebastian Wolf

Two of us reached the top of Khan Tengri at the end of August. Along with two Russian climbers, we removed about 20kg of garbage from the upper camps (except Camp 4) on the south side. We were shocked to see how much trash had been left behind, mostly by Americans.

Surveyors from Kyrgyzstan made a new survey of Khan Tengri this summer, showing that the summit is 6,995m—definitely below the magical 7,000m mark. Consequently, Pik Pobeda (7,439m), several kilometers to the south, is still the northernmost 7,000m peak in the world.

The weather was good in August, and we collected more data than we had planned. The expedition was very successful, and revealed a lot of potential for mountaineers in Tien Shan. However, most people seem to want to climb Khan Tengri or Pik Pobeda, and are not interested in the surrounding, less famous, peaks.

Further details about the expedition, including the first ascents and photos are available in the expedition report, which is online in a PDF-file at [www.inf.tu-dresden.de/~sw760654/Tienschan](http://www.inf.tu-dresden.de/~sw760654/Tienschan) (in English and German).

SEBASTIAN WOLF, *Deutsche Alpenverein*

## KUILU RANGE

Peak Milo (pik 4,800) and Peak Misha (pik 4,750), ski descents. Martin Strasser and I went to the Kuilu range, travelling to the site of Pat Littlejohn's base camp (ca 3,300m) in a surplus Soviet military vehicle (2001 AAJ, Pat Littlejohn, p. 341–2). But shortly after our arrival, I came down with strep throat. While I recovered, Martin made a solo ascent and descent of Pik 4,375, just southwest of our camp. Then we followed the Karator River east to the next drainage, which we followed south to the base of a large glacier, and set up Advanced Base Camp I (AB-I) at ca 3,800m.

From AB-I we climbed and skied two peaks—both first ascents, we believe. We climbed the first of these, located on the west side of the glacier and due south of AB-I, on June 16. Starting at 4:30 a.m., we skied up the glacier to the base of a 40° slope leading to the south ridge, then cramponed up firm snow that, unfortunately, gave way to post-holing. But conditions improved when we gained the top of the ridge, where a series of steps (up to 50°) with alternating ice and deep snow lead us to the summit (ca 4,800m) by noon.

We skied down the ridge that we had climbed up. Initially we enjoyed cold, dry snow, but half-way down the ridge we dropped onto the east face and threaded through seracs, where the snow became atrocious. Although each turn on the east face triggered a wet avalanche, we made it to the base without mishap.

On June 17, we climbed the peak on the east side of the glacier.



Peak Milo, showing the line of the complete descent, and Martin Strasser's second shorter descent. Kyle Amstader





Martin Strasser carving on Peak Milo. Kyle Amstadter

Martin left an hour early, while the snow was still firm, to climb and ski a new line on the 50° face of Peak Milo (pik 4,800). Then we met on the glacier, and skied up Peak Misha (pik 4,750) from the south col, on its western slopes. Our ski descent took us down the northwest face, including a 50° chute, on snow that stayed dry and firm until late in the day.

We believe these were first ascents, and are suggesting the names Peak Milo and Peak Misha to the Russian Mountaineering Federation, and to our outfitter in Bishkek.

We reached Advanced Base Camp II (AB-II) by following the Kuilu River west (on an animal trail) to the first river valley west of the Karator Valley. Then we hiked south along the river for about 10 km until we came to the glacier. We established AB-II at 3,750m, close to the spot where we could begin skiing.

After one rest day, we skied to the base of pik 4,750, at 3:30 a.m. We skied up a ramp that led from the low angled glacier to the base of the northwest face. There were crevasses on the ramp, so we roped up and climbed 40° slopes to the steeper part of the face, where crusty snow offered poor protection (the rock was worse). So we soloed together up 50 to 55° chutes, reaching the rocky summit of Pik 4,750 after three pitches. Because of the crusty snow and rock cliffs, we set up an anchor on the summit and skied down the steep part of the northwest face on belay. When we got back down to the 40° slopes, we unroped and skied down our route of ascent. All of our descents were made on telemark skis.

This area has a lot of potential for technical routes during the cold part of the year. With lower temperatures, much of the unstable snow we encountered could be avoided. The rock we encountered was generally poor.

KYLE AMSTADTER, AAC

## WESTERN KOKSHAAL-TOO

*Kizil Asker, new route attempt.* In July and August, Guy Robertson and I made two attempts on the most compelling alpine ice route either of us has ever seen: the 1300m virgin southeast face of Kizil Asker, the highest peak in the Western Kokshaal-Too area of the Tien Shan. The wall was steep and split by the dream line: a snaking couloir of ice, overhanging in several places, vertical elsewhere, ran nearly the entire length of the face. It petered out directly below the summit, leaving the crux where it should be: at the top! But both attempts were thwarted by rapid thawing when the sun hit the face. The first attempt ended at around 300m, before any of the real climbing had begun. We hid for most of the day under a small overhang from ice falling off the most wild ice smear imaginable. Then we abseiled off through the icy torrent that had formed down the middle of the couloir.

On the second attempt, we climbed the initial easy section in the dark, arriving at the foot of the first really steep section at dawn. Three superb pitches of mostly perfect ice, up to 95°, led to ominous hanging icicles. Here we skirted left, climbing overhanging, fluted, and thawing ice just as the sun hit. This led to a “non-belay” in a small bay and a very bold pitch of thin ice to reach a small hanging ice field. After rehydrating from the stream that was beginning to flow from the ice, we tried to carry on. But we were rebuffed at every option by sodden, thawing névé that wouldn’t hold a pick. Four hours earlier, what would have been a pleasant pitch of 80° Scottish V (WI4, I guess?), the easiest pitch encountered since breakfast—but now it was impossible. We abseiled off from just below the obvious snow ledge on the left, about 500m – 600m up.

This last attempt was at the very end of the trip, and we had to be back at base camp in three days. Too much time had been wasted sitting in advanced base, getting snowed on, and unable to see the face, but we usually were aware of its presence from the sound of avalanches sloughing off all around. We intend to go back in 2004 to finish the job.

ESMOND TRESIDDER, *Edinburgh University  
Mountaineering Club*

*Komarova Glacier, Pic Babushka and Pt 4,850m (“Pic Sabor”), new routes.* As half of the Scottish Kizil Asker expedition, Blair Fyffe and I climbed two alpine style routes. The expedition visited the Kokshaal-Too region with the aim of climbing the northwest face of Kizil Asker. However due to poor weather



Scoping the incredible ice line on the main buttress leading to the summit of Kizil Asker. Esmond Tresidder

and the distance from base camp this turned out to be unfeasible. Instead the base camp was established beneath the Komarova glaciers and a number of routes were climbed from there.

First as a warm up was the north face of Pik Babushka (5,282m), a beautiful alpine snow/ice face with about 700m of climbing up to Scottish V, climbed in a long day from the Central Komarova Glacier. The route took the prominent central groove and upper snow arête of the snowy north face, clearly visible from the base camp at the glacier snout. Descent was made down the west ridge and then the south face, followed by a walk back to the central glacier via the window col separating Pik Jerry Garcia and Pik Unmarked Soldier. This route was first climbed in 1998 by Christian Beckwith and Mark Price.

We then moved to the glacier below Kizil Asker and climbed the north ridge of the mountain marked as Pt 4,850m on the map, making the first ascent of what we christened Peak Sabor (Cathedral Peak), cathedral being one of the few words in our phrase book that could describe a mountain. The route ascended the left hand side of the icefall before gaining the ridge proper. We climbed the long low-angled section easily until the brèche (notch). A few tricky pitches and an abseil overcame the brèche and the steeper, blunt ridge above was gained. The ridge gave good climbing in icy runnels and rock steps, although relatively warm temperatures, being a general feature of the trip, led to some poor snow and ice conditions. After a bivi at one-third height we reached the summit by mid afternoon of the second day. The descent was made by abseiling the route until the breche and then abseiling the broad gully on the east side of the breche. The route gave some technical climbing and is perhaps worthy of an alpine grade of TD+. We think Pic Sabor has been climbed by a Russian expedition from the south side, although we think our route is a first ascent. (Editor's note: this peak was first climbed via the west-southwest rib in 1985 by Kasbek Valiev's team during the competition era.)

During the descent the weather deteriorated and the descent to the Kizil Glacier was hazardous due to avalanches from either side. The snow persisted for another three days, leaving waist-deep snow for the walk back to base camp at the snout of the neighboring Komarova glaciers.

NEAL CRAMPTON, U.K.

*Ak Saitan.* After a difficult journey through Kyrgyzstan in August, Iñaki Cabo, Elena de Castro, Ferran Latorre, and I finally arrive at base camp on the Komarova Glacier. The potential of the area is immense. One formation in particular draws our attention: a rock pillar reaching between Carnovski and Zukerman peak. But we have come to climb and make a movie of Kizil Asker, located in nearby China north of the "Great Walls of China." We file away the image as one of many first ascent possibilities in the area.



The line of Ak Saitan, on the Ochre Walls. Cecilia Buil



After five days on the Komarova, we head to China to see Kizil Asker. It is immense. We dream of the route possibilities: lines of ice, rock, and mixed sections on a wall almost two km. wide. While we examine our objective, a storm moves in and soon snow is blowing horizontally around us. We begin the return trek to Komarova.

Upon arriving at base camp we debate if we have the time needed for a successful ascent. With many doubts concerning relinquishing our dream, we decide instead to attempt a first ascent on the rock pillar above base camp, and afterward to attempt the Chinese Wall, a four-hour hike from base camp. We make the first carry to the base of the pillar and begin climbing the obvious line.

On the fourth pitch there is an eight-meter blank section and we place six of the route's eight bolts. For four days we are busy on the lower pitches—up and down the ropes, back and forth the hour between basecamp and the pillar, jumaring, rappelling, frustration,

and cursing the continuous blasts of snow. It does not stop. A meter of snow covers camp. Each flake that falls convinces us it is best to focus on where we are and forget the Chinese Wall.

"As a distinguished one said, Hell is white, no?" jokes Ferran, "and the Devil too, at least in China. That's what we could name the route. Ruslan, how would you say that in Kyrgyz?"

"Ak Saitan," our liaison officer Ruslan responds.

As a courtesy to us for dedicating the route to him, the Devil gives us three days in a row of good weather. We can't believe it.

On the fifth pitch my fingertips split and after four hours when I arrive at the belay I am shaking. The flaring crack is dirty and I move slow and blind. The same happens in the dihedral pitch that Elena begins and Iñaki finishes, and also in the beginning of the ninth pitch that Ferran opens. The granite is similar to Corsica: very eroded, large granules, and flaky in places.

Then the tenth pitch and three more pitches that Elena and Iñaki free climb. After 15 days we have fixed lines all the way to the top of the tower. This is the moment to launch for the summit. We worry that the stable weather won't last long. Early the next morning we jumar up



Topping out on the spectacular Ak Saitan, Punta Aragon. Cecilia Buil

the fixed lines and Inaki begins the final four pitches that separate us from the summit, which we reach late in the day.

The granite on the wall is a bright orange color and is very solid and abrasive. Most cracks are rounded and flaring, requiring much work in engineering placements. The Ak-Saitan route is 600m in height, VI, 5.10+ A3+ 85°. It begins with a 450m rock tower and continues via an airy ridge where we encountered steps of UIAA grade IV rock, snow, and 65° ice with occasional short sections of 80°.

CECILIA BUIL, *Spain* (translated by M. Loomis and Oriol Solé-Costa)

*Editor's note: The summit of the point that Ak Saitan reaches was first crossed by Guy Edwards during his solo traverse of the Ochre Walls in 1998, and then reached again in 2001 by Scott de Capio and Sean Isaac via their ascent of Beef Cake (see AAJ 2002).*

*Pik Unmarked Soldier, China View.* In the summer of 2001, we put up a previously unreported route on Pik Unmarked Soldier (5,322m). "China View" ascends the east face on snow and ice to the right of the main gully (560m, 50° to 70°).

IRENA MRAK, *Slovenia*, AND GARTH WILLIS



The final steps of the west ridge of Ak-bai-tal, above the Ak-bai-tal Glacier in the West Kokshaal-too. Pat Littlejohn

*At-Bashy Range and West Kokshaal-too, first ascents.* In early September an International School of Mountaineering expedition comprising Pat Littlejohn, Adrian Nelhams, Vladimir Komissarov (guides), Julian Duxfield, Peter Kemble, Nigel Kettle, Ursula Mulcahy, Mark Pontin, John Porter, and Dr Jane Whitmore reached the West Kokshaal-too range on the Kyrgyzstan-China border.

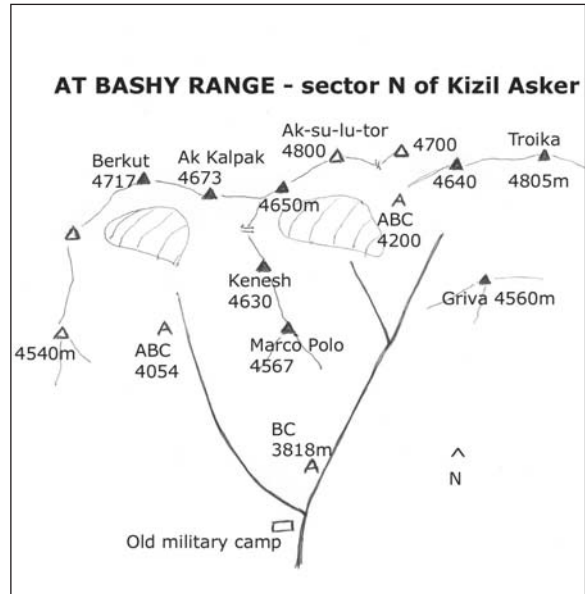
This was the fifth visit to this area by an ISM team. Recent snowfall and waterlogged ground stopped the expedition approaching its intended base camp beside the Aytaly Glacier, so they decided to acclimatize by exploring the At-Bashy (Horse's Head) Range—limestone peaks immediately north of the Kizil Asker group in the West Kokshaal-too. Having no peaks above 5,000m, there are no records of anyone having climbed in the At-Bashy range before.

Base camp was established at 3,800m in the valley of Aksu-lu-tor above a wrecked ex-Soviet military base. After acclimatizing on a couple of easy peaks, advanced bases were established at 4,054m and 4,200m. Peaks ascended included

the snow dome of Ak-Kalpapak (4,673m; PD), the long west ridge of Pik Troika (AD), a traverse of the impressive Berkut (beak) (4,717m; AD+) and the icy dome of Kenesh (4,630m; PD+).

More settled weather prompted a move across the valley to the Kokshaal range and after an exciting 25km off-road drive up a river bed, the Ak-bai-tal valley was reached. This is the third valley to the West of Kizil Asker and had probably never been visited by mountaineers. Advanced base was established on the edge of the Ak-bai-tal glacier at 4,200m, from where attention focused on the twin-summitted snow peak (4,981m), which dominates the glacier. The easiest routes to each summit involved arduous trail breaking (PD+), then the steep and rocky West Ridge was ascended to give a mixed climb at AD+.

A big team traversed the elegant snow fan (Pik Belyi Veer, 4,757m), which bounds the left side of the glacier and is a prominent landmark for the area. After this, with the weather again ominous, the expedition struck camp and drove for a day to a series of limestone rock domes which Littlejohn had spotted on earlier trips. These were christened Nomad Domes (being surrounded by people living in yurts) and a number of routes were climbed, mostly three pitches and up to British E2. Very little rock climbing has so far been developed in Kyrgyzstan and this area will be of interest to anyone climbing in the West Kokshaal-too, either for acclimatization purposes on the approach or a fun stop-off on the way out.



Map of the At Bashy Range courtesy of Pat Littlejohn

*Borkoldoy Khrebet, Pik Alexander, Father's Peak, and Pik Ibex ascents.* A British team comprising Sharon Abbott, Wayne Gladwin, Mike Rosser and Stephen Saddler were the first climbers to visit the southwestern sector of the Borkoldoy range. This is an extensive group of low altitude peaks to the north of the Kokshaal-too. The more substantial peaks of the northeast had previously been explored in 1994 by a British expedition. In 2002 the mountains more or less north of Kizil Asker were approached from the same six-wheel-drive track used to reach the western end of the Kokshaal-too, a relatively short walk required to reach a suitable base camp in a north-facing cwm. The peaks of this cwm gave pleasant rocky scrambles with a bit of snow on the north flanks. The south faces were completely bare. Illness dogged the expedition but Pik Alexander (4,655m), Father's Peak (4,850m), and Pik Ibex (4,655m) were climbed.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *High Mountain INFO*



Part of the Khrebet Kyokkiar. These walls are ones Gerrard's group didn't get around to doing anything on. About 1,200m vertical from the valley floor to the summit opposite, and the rock was top quality with lots of naturally protectable lines. David Gerrard

*Khrebet Kyokkiar and Gory Sarybeles, seven first ascents.* After visiting this interesting and unexplored range in 2001, I organized another expedition in August, 2002. Karl Baker, John Cuthbert, Graham Sutton, and I (David Gerrard, as leader) made eight ascents, including seven first ascents. These mountains—only visited twice by mountaineers—offer classic mixed alpine ascents on peaks below 5,000m, plus many hard mixed lines on faces up to 1,000m high. Also, good quality limestone walls, from 500 to 1,000m high, offer an immense amount of rock climbing on cracks, corners, and towers, where snow can usually be avoided on the descent.

As before, we camped near the foothills of the Khrebet Kyokkiar—a small but perfect group of snowy peaks and limestone walls. The approach to the Khrebet Kyokkiar, which is on the Kyrgyz-Chinese border at the end of the Kokshaal Too Range, was easy. We hired a truck

and driver from ITMC, a Bishkek based travel company (who also helped with the permits and paperwork). First we went to Naryn, then over the hills through Ak-Muz, skirting the At-Bashy range before a long downhill track took us to the border region. In the lush open valleys, we saw farmers living in yurts for the summer, and an occasional military border post. Everyone we met was friendly and welcoming.

Wet weather had caused dangerously high river levels, so while we waited for them to subside we crossed another pass to the Gory Sarybeles: a smaller range of snowcapped 4,500m mountains with fine alpine ridges and rock walls. After surviving a night of local hospitality, Karl and I climbed a 4,300m peak (PD) for acclimatization, then moved to a higher camp, where we traversed two other unclimbed peaks (AD), getting chased off by an electrical storm that had been brewing all day. Meanwhile, John and Graham attempted a prominent unclimbed peak (to the right of another peak that had been climbed the previous year), but retreated after reaching the main ridge.

Returning to the Kyokkiar, we rode horses for one day, then carried loads for two more days to reach a base camp surrounded by 1,000m unclimbed limestone walls. The next day, Karl and I continued up the valley to a glacial basin, near most of the alpine-type summits, while John and Graham went into a different cwm to attempt a stunning face on another unclimbed peak.

With two days of good weather, Karl and I made three more first ascents. First, we climbed a 4,600m peak by a couloir and rock ridge (AD). The following day, we traversed from the highest peak in the range (4,760m) to its neighbor (AD) on a fine mixed ridge, down-climbing a steep face of snow and ice to the glacier. The next day, we went to another high cwm, then climbed through seracs to a steep snow slope which led to the main ridge of the range. From there we made an easy traverse to a 4,600m (PD) summit, with fine views of some impressive mixed faces.

Then, although the weather turned bad, we still managed to climb a 400m rock route, and fit in a day of load carrying before John and Graham joined us again. They had made a spirited attempt on a stunning ice line on one of the large faces before being turned back by difficulties. Then they had done some exploring and reached the upper glacier before the weather turned bad, forcing them down again.

Since the Khrebet Kyokkiar and Gory Sarybeles Ranges are lower in altitude than the surrounding higher ranges, we probably had better weather than other expeditions in the area. The next day, temperatures fell as we carried loads to meet the horses. We had a beautiful ride out of the range in six inches of new snow.

Our expedition was generously supported by the Mount Everest Foundation and British Mountaineering Council.

DAVID GERRARD, U.K.

## *Pamir Alai*

### KARAVSHIN

*Kara-Su Valley, north face of a ridge east of Piramidalny summit.* The Karavshin Valley in southern Kyrgyzstan was eerily deserted in the fall. There were no large groups of climbers on the towering granite faces (as in the Soviet era), and no fighting between Islamic rebels and Kyrgyz troops. Even



the local farmers and families that used to live in stone huts were gone. In the whole area, there were only two climbers, a cook at base camp, and one hunter who sometimes stopped by.

We (Irena Mrak and Garth Willis) arrived in Karavshin on October 1 after a three-day drive from Bishkek and a two-day stay in Batken (where we gathered the necessary documents and signatures). At the end of the last dirt road along the Karavshin River, we met soldiers at a small group of dirt buildings they'd made into a fort. We paid eight soldiers \$5 each to help us carry a month of food and gear to our camp at the base of the Yellow Wall.

Our first climb was a diagonal route on the Yellow Wall (mostly 5.8, with an overhang that went, for me, at A0—although it has been reported as 5.10c). This 500m route had everything you really don't want in a climb: a wet start, long sloping pitches, an awkward overhang, and a grassy finish. But the panorama from the top gave us a great feeling for the region, with views of Asan-Usen, Piramidalny, and Pik 4,810.

After sitting out some bad weather, we headed for the dramatic Peak Piramidalny (5,506m). This peak's north face has been climbed by soviet teams and by a solo Italian climber in 1991 (Ed note: also by French and partially by British). We did not climb the peak itself—our goal was a route on the north face of a ridge east of the summit. We started from our advanced base camp, at 4,100m. The route went up an ice gully (50°–60°) for 250 meters. It was a bowling alley of falling snow and ice, so we climbed out over a rock wall to the right. In a time consuming battle, we climbed over 150m of 5.8 loose rock covered with snow, then continued up a snowfield to a bivy at 4,600m. The second morning was clear, cold, and windy. The first pitch was a snow-filled rock couloir, followed by a 120m ice gully of 70° to 85° black ice that broke into plates with each swing. The wind blew stinging pellets of snow into our faces all day. Wind-blown snow built up on the route above, pouring down on us constantly. More snow and ice pitches followed, until we finally reached the ridge (5,200m) at 7:00 p.m. We began our descent as the sun set.

Returning to our bivy, we decided to continue the rappel in the dark. With a clear sky and cold temperatures, we hoped the avalanche danger would be minimal. We kept our eye on the



The north face of Peak Piramidalny, showing Russian Roulette. Garth Willis

ridge as the wind-blown snow flowed down over our feet like a river. Twice avalanches hit us as we rappelled, but they roared on by in the steep gully, leaving us behind. At 9:00 a.m., 50 hours after we had started the climb, we reached the base. We named the route Russian Roulette, because we doubted we'd survive it a second time. We rated it 1100m, V+, M3-M5 WI4 50–85°. The dramatic Italian line (AAJ 1992, p. 35) seemed to have much less ice than before. The ice visible in the picture only extends halfway down the face now. Either the climate has changed, or we were much later in the season than when the picture was taken.

IRENA MRAK, *Slovenia*,  
and GARTH WILLIS



Pik 4810m showing, left to right: Zlaté Pisky, Otikovy Mokré Sny, Krizok. Jan Kreisinger

*Kara-Su Valley, Pik 4810 m, various new routes.* In July 2002, our group of 11 Czechs who drink and climb everything, went to the Karavshin, where we split into four climbing teams. Three teams decided to climb the 1,200m northwest face of Pik 4,810m by three different routes. The fourth team climbed the Yellow Wall.

The first team—Jan Kreisinger, Jirka Srutek, Petr Balcar, and Mirek Turek—climbed a new route to the left of Sacharov 94. After 24 pitches, they joined with the Sacharov Route (Russian) on the north summit ridge. We called our new route “Zlate písky” (Golden Sands); it was 1,000m, 8 (OS)/A2—the first 350m were fixed, followed by 10 days capsule style.

The second team—Vazek Satava, Pavel Jonak and Marek Holecek—climbed a new line to the right of Sacharov 94. After 15 pitches they joined the Sacharov Route, then continued free to the top. We named this new route “Otikovy mokre sny” (Otik’s Wet Dream); it was 1,100m, 23 pitches, 9-/9 AF—the first 350m were fixed, followed by 9 days capsule style. The third team—couple Jan Doudlebsky and Dusan Janak—climbed the Russian route Krizok (6b, Russian scale), with a 200m variation on the central part of the NW face. We named the variation “Fifteen to the Chimney,” because Jan fell off on 20th pitch. Its difficulty was 1100m to the summit ridge, 26 pitches total, 8+(PP)/A4- (with an A4 pitch on the variation)—the first two pitches were fixed, then nine days on the wall.

Tomas Zákora and Pavel Kopázek started a new route on the 500m east face of Yellow Wall (American climbers were kidnapped from this face in 2000). After about 200m, they retreated and returned to basecamp in the Karasu Valley. After a period of bad weather, Tomas went back to the line and soloed it in 6 days. He called it Meresjev. It was 14 pitches, 9-/9 A3—the first 200m were fixed, then Tomas made his 6 day solo.

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