

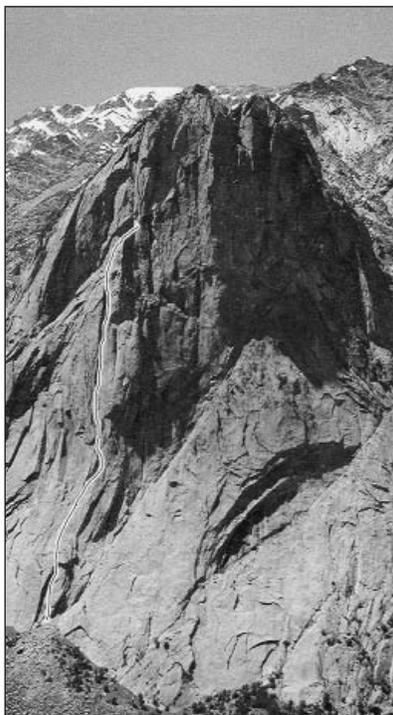
Kyrgyzstan

PAMIR ALAI

KARAVSHIN

Yellow Wall, possible new route. Our 21-day expedition to the Karavshin Valley last July was during one of the rainiest summers the Kyrgyz shepherds said they had seen in a long time. Despite this and numerous difficulties with border patrols, having the right permit, meeting our mule transport, climbing with partners that I had just met through the internet, and the worst of all a broken right hand, we still managed to escape with some stories to tell. Unfortunately, most of them were not climbing related. Dining with the Kyrgyz shepherd families over meals of bread, rice, chai, and sour milk balls was an interesting experience. But nothing beats doing machine gun practice with the Kyrgyz military, or watching them fire their AK-47s at the surrounding big walls, supposedly patrolling for IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) insurgents.

Nonetheless, we had this rain-soaked valley of gargantuan granite walls to ourselves for the first two weeks. We spent the first day exploring a line up Little Asan, a small formation in front of Mt. Asan (a beautiful 3,000' cliff), on the left side of the Kara Su valley. However, after four pitches, we discovered that the beautiful crack we had spotted from the ground was chock full of grass, so we descended to the ground. Day two was spent climbing the "Diagonal Route", the presumed "classic" line up the Yellow Wall. Unsure of what Russian "5B" was supposed to mean, we over prepared for this route by fixing the first 1000', and bringing way too much gear. The crux is probably only 5.10, but the route climbs up a chossy, wet, approach ramp for about eight pitches just to gain halfway-decent climbing. It was on this climb that I discovered my right hand was not just sore; it was broken. This forced me to do everything left-handed. We found Tommy and Beth's portaledge (I'm assuming it's their A5 ledge) about one third of the way up the Diagonal Route just barely hanging on, apparently having fallen from its perch higher up after being shot at so much. Not surprising, the Kyrgyz military seemed to have been using it for target practice and we saw them fire quite a few rounds at



The Yellow Wall, showing its possible new, and in any case newly equipped route (not to summit).
Chris Harkness

the surrounding walls when we were there too. Haulbags and fixed lines are still hanging up there. Ken and Stewart finished up the climb the next day while I explored the beautiful Ak Su valley alone.

Afterward, the rain fell consistently every day, leaving only afternoon windows of climbable weather. Due to the rain and having one injured climber, we decided to abandon our hopes of climbing Mt. Asan and settle for a smaller, more escapable objective on the Yellow Wall. We decided to try out a line that Ken had spotted on the first day of recon that followed the left side of the wall up a trail of disconnected crack systems and beautiful dihedrals. With about four to five hours a day to climb (if that) we poured all efforts into this route, climbing siege style. We were further encouraged when the Ukrainian National Climbing Team, the apparent climbing authorities of the area, arrived at base camp and told us we were doing a new route. However, we later discovered some ancient pitons on the last pitch. We cleaned it up a lot, and installed two-bolt anchors at every belay. In my opinion, this route should provide a much more enjoyable and aesthetic one-day warm-up route than the Diagonal Route, and will be easy to descend. In addition, any climber who summits the Yellow Wall will have a safe and clear way to get off the wall by following the shoulder from the summit down and west for about four low-angled pitches (easy fifth class; rappels possible) until seeing our last anchor—a bolt and piton (instead of having to downclimb sections like Ken and Stewart did after topping out on the Diagonal Wall). The route: Everything is Normal (1200', 5.10b, A2, Chris Harkness, Stewart Matthiesen, and Ken Zemach).

CHRIS HARKNESS

PAMIR

Zaalayskiy Ridge, exploration, first ascents and new routes. On July 22 a team from the UK, including a US citizen now working in Scotland, set off for Kyrgyzstan. The team consisted of Ian Arnold, Ken Findlay, Paul Hudson, Paul Lyons, Will Parsons (all UK), Susan Jensen (USA) and Shaun the Sheep. Shaun was a toy “Wallace and Grommit” sheep and was on the trip to



Various ascent routes as seen from above ABC1: (1) Peak of the Long White Cloud. (2) Whaleback. (3) Professor Peak. Paul Hudson

raise money for the Alpine Fund, a charity started some years ago by Garth Willis, an American working in Kyrgyzstan. The Alpine Fund helps disadvantaged and orphaned children make the most of themselves and uses the hills and mountain environment as a tool to make this happen.

The team chose a less frequented area of the Pamir south of Sary Tash and east of the main road leading from south Sary Tash into Tajikistan. A little further east along the range is the triple-border point of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and China. The venue was chosen to fit a one month's vacation, all that half the team could manage. A direct flight from Heathrow, London, to Almaty (Kazakhstan) via Astana Airlines, a drive to Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), and another flight of a couple of hours landed us in Osh. From Osh it was a day's drive to our area of the Zaalayskiy Ridge.

There were some initial difficulties when we found out that the in-country company had placed our base camp in the wrong place and we had to negotiate its relocation. Subsequently, base camp was not quite in the right place and few of us used it much during our stay, spending most of our time at two advanced base camps, designated in this report ABC1 and 2, from where we explored two different valleys. The best venture from ABC1 was a two-day excursion to Charity Peak. After a night spent on a ridge south of Krazha and descent to the adjoining valley the following morning, Susan Jensen and Ian Arnold took a serac-threatened lower route while Will Parsons, Ken Findlay, Shaun, and I chose a lovely hard *névé* ramp. We joined forces higher on the ridge. Named Andy's Route, after Andy Bennett, a friend of Ian's killed in an Alpine accident in 1990, the climb varied between a snow plod and some exciting bits and pieces, where ice or rock jutted out. A grade of Alpine PD/AD seemed appropriate.

From ABC2 the two main excursions were to a pair of hills opposite the camp and a five-day excursion to a side valley that Ian had spotted when he and I took a stroll out on the first day. The two hills across the river from ABC2 were climbed on August 10 and 11. Cold Foot Peak was climbed of the day the team crossed the river and Professor Peak the day after.

The best outings from "Ian's Valley" were a first ascent by Ken Findlay and Will Parsons of Karena Peak, where the soft snow and sections of loose rock gave them one or two moments to think about, and a new route on Cold Sunrise Peak.

On the evening of the 16th we climbed to a high bivouac site in order to access one of the higher peaks in this little cirque. Up at midnight, we edged our way upward among the ice and rock outcrops with only Will seeming to know where he was going. Out in the lead he made good progress between icefalls and rock. At 4 a.m. Will, Paul Lyons, and Ken took a rest, as Paul needed a toilet break. Sue, Ian, and I carried on up towards the ridge and by doing so missed the pantomime of the trip. Paul tried to access his bottom through a climbing harness, waterproof salopettes, fleece salopettes, and underpants. All on a 70° ice slope. It seems that all the various pieces of clothing had to be removed in different directions and Paul's struggles brought Ken and Will to their knees with laughter. After that event Paul L., Will, and Ken started up the slope following our lights and began to close the gap, until Paul began to ask for more and more rests and in the end started to fall asleep resting on his axe.

Will and Ken realized that Paul was suffering from an altitude problem and decided they needed to get him down. A shouted conversation later and it was agreed that the three below could adequately deal with the situation, leaving those up above free to continue. The descending trio started down immediately, but after a few rope lengths Paul recovered enough for them to stop their dangerous descent and wait until first light. Hacking a ledge on which to sit, Will then got them all to start the digit wiggling procedure that so many mountaineers know. Ian

and Susan continued pulling me along and as the sun rose we gained the final section and much to my relief soon stood on the summit of Cold Sunrise Peak. This was our last peak. Fortunately, Paul Lyons recovered as soon as he lost height, and apart from being tired was fit and well. The following day, the 18th, we started our journey back to base camp and finally flew back to the UK on the 23rd.

The team, well Shaun really, was sponsored for each hill he ascended and raised around £1,500 for the Kyrgyz charity. The following ascents were achieved: from ABC1 Whaleback (1st Ascent 4,456m—F); Peak of the Long White Cloud (1st Ascent 4,452m—PD); Charity Peak (1st Ascent 4,982m—PD/AD); Krazha Peak (1st UK/US ascent 4,592m—PD); White Top Rock (1st UK/US ascent 4,347m—PD-). From ABC2 Cold Feet Peak (1st ascent 4,550m—PD-); Marmot Peak (1st ascent 4,005m—walk); Karena Peak (1st Ascent 5,052m—PD+); Professor Peak* (1st British Ascent 4,840m—PD); Fossil Peak** (1st British/US Ascent 5,116m—PD); Cold Sunrise Peak** (New Route; 1st British/US Ascent 5,505m—PD+/AD). While I have found, as yet, no written evidence for previous ascents of any of the peaks excepting Krazha and White Top Rock, the asterisks show which tops had evidence of previous ascents. ** signifies clear evidence, while * stands for less clear evidence. We took the evidence as small cairns left on the summits. On Professor Peak it was unclear if the stone pile was man-made or a natural effect of weathering.

PAUL HUDSON, *United Kingdom*

TIEN SHAN

WESTERN KOKSHAAL TOO

Kyzyl Asker, second ascent; new routes on Great Walls of China, Ochre Wall, Panfilovski Division. Guy Robertson and I returned to Kyrgyzstan's Western Kokshaal-Too in late August, intent on finishing what we had started in 2002 on the unclimbed southeast face of Kyzyl Asker (5,842m). With us we brought extra firepower in the form of Pete Benson, and base camp conviviality in the form of Robin Thomas and Matt Halls. Matt and Robin planned to climb anything that took their fancy, while Guy, Pete, and I planned to tackle the southeast face as a three. In 2002 the problem had been the line thawing at the slightest hint of sunshine. Although it was colder this time around, thawing still proved a significant problem, and we left without having attempted our intended route. It is difficult to know the best time to attempt this route. You could go in September and get lucky, or you could simply try it in bad



Kyzyl Asker (left) and Panfilovski Division. (1) Robertson-Tresidder attempt (ended at the x, 2002). (2) Pete and Matt's Couloir (Benson-Halls, 2004). (3) Haggis Supper (500m, WI5+, Benson-Robertson-Tresidder, 2004). *Es Tresidder*



The first route on the Great Walls of China: Border Control (Robertson-Tresidder). *Garth Willis*



The Ochre Wall. (1) Ak Saitan (600m, 5.10+ A3+ 85°, Buil-Cabo-Castro-Latorre, 2002). (2) Fire and Ice (Scottish VII, Benson-Tresidder, 2004). (3) Beef Cake (600m, M5 W14, Isaac-DeCapio, 2001). *Es Tresidder*

weather when it is not thawing but the likelihood of heavy spindrift is very high. February March is a good time for climbing in the Ala Archa and might be an option on Kyzyl Asker, but it will be very cold and getting to the mountain would be very difficult. Instead we added four new routes to the surrounding walls, and a new route on Kyzyl Asker to make the second ascent of the mountain. We stayed in the area till September 21.

Guy, Pete and I climbed a technical icy line on the south face of Panfilovski Division (ca 5,400m), the neighboring peak to Kyzyl Asker, early in the trip. In bad weather and continuous spindrift we climbed four fine technical pitches of pure ice and mixed. Higher up on the route we moved together up moderate but insecure ground before reaching easy ground approximately 200m below the summit. From here we descended a broad gully on Abalakov threads. We named the route Haggis Supper (500m, WI5+). After this the weather cleared for five days. Matt and Robin added a new gully line to the south face of Pik Jerry Garcia (ca 5,200m), climbing the crux ice before the sun hit them.

Guy and I made the first ascent of the Great Walls of China, finding a superbly sustained icy mixed line, which provided 13 long pitches, only three of which were easier than Scottish V (WI4)! The crux pitches involved thin ice, with some rock climbing on the more discontinuous sections. Border Control (WI 5, Scottish VII/VIII, A1) was born [thought not to the summit—Ed.].

On this wall there is massive potential for high standard icy mixed lines. The rock climbing also looks superb, but on closer inspection anything that gets the sun is very dangerous due to rockfall. This may be why routes have not been climbed before (people who have expressed an interest have thought of doing them as big wall aid/free rock routes. The Great Walls face east, but because there are pillars you can climb on northerly aspects. Each pillar has several stellar north-facing lines; ours was perhaps the easiest. The climbing might not be any harder on the others, but it would certainly be more sustained! Parties wishing to repeat our route would be advised to take bivouac gear, as there is the world's best bivi cave at the top of the hard climbing. This would make bagging the summit feasible and complete the route (we climbed for 20 hours with no water after bursting our water container on a crampon at the base of the route, so by the time we reached the ridge we just wanted to get down).

While we were recovering, Pete and Matt climbed a devious route to make the second known ascent of Kyzyl Asker. They avoided the problematic seracs on the north face by traversing onto the face above them from the east col, gained via a gully on the south flank (one pitch of Scottish VI). From the top of the gully there was a steep icy traverse above a big drop to reach the north face proper, after which it was quite easy-angled and was more or less skied in both directions apart from the summit slopes, which were too steep.

Last up, Pete and I added a route to the Ochre Walls, climbing an obvious ice smear to the left of the DeCaprio-Isaac route Beefcake (600m, IV, M5 WI4, 2001). This offered superb icy mixed climbing up to Scottish VII on a bitterly cold day. We reached the unnamed summit at dusk. After a night out at a notorious Bishkek nightclub, Fire and Ice seemed an appropriate name.

It would seem that late August/early September offers the best chance for stable weather in this region. In July/August 2002, as two teams, we made four attempts on routes. This year, as two teams, the weather allowed us to make eight new route attempts!

ES TRESIDDER, *United Kingdom*

Pik Sabor, new route attempt and repeat of north ridge. In 2003 the Groupe Militaire de Haute Montagne suffered a tragic loss when two well-known members, Antoine de Choudens and Philippe Renard, were killed while acclimatizing for an alpine style ascent of the South West Face of Xixabangma. The group re-gathered in 2004 and planned an attempt on the coveted south east face of Kyzyl Asker. However, the heavy costs imposed by the Chinese and an eventual denial to allow the team to cross the border, meant a change of plan and the climbers opted for a new route on Pik Sabor (4,850m), an impressive rock bastion on the ridge south of the Ochre Walls and opposite the end of Kyzyl Asker's unclimbed north ridge. The first ascent of this peak took place in 1985 when Kasbek Valiev's team climbed a big wall route up the West Southwest Rib (the same expedition on which he also made the first ascent of Kyzyl Asker via the 1,500m west face). Unable to drive to their proposed base camp at the start of July due to boggy ground, the team was forced to ferry loads 15km to an advanced base three kilometers short of Sabor's 700m-high west face. Bad weather proved a constant hassle (early in the trip it deposited one-and-a-half metres of snow in base camp over a two-day period) and it wasn't until the 22nd

that the climbers could embark on a new line up the west face, fixing the first 150m (approximately seven pitches) before Guillaume Baillargé, Manu Pellissier and Francois Savary set off with a portaledge. The granite was magnificent but the cracks proved either wet or clogged with ice. Above the end of the ropes the three only managed four pitches over the next two days, nice F5c cracks having to be climbed laboriously at A2. Then, at a point roughly half-way up the wall, a storm moved in and three very wet and bedraggled climbers were forced to retreat to base.

In the meantime the other two on the expedition, Lionnel Albrieux and Thomas Faucheur, repeated the 2002 British Route on the North Ridge (Neal Crampton/Blair Fyffe, 10th-11th August 2002: c800m: TD+: Scottish 6). The French pair climbed the route in a long day on the 31st. A day or two later Baillargé, Pellissier and Savary also climbed the line (which they report as 500m) in less than 12 hours, finding it mostly mixed up to M5. The weather continued poor until the French left the area, having experienced only two fine days in the 20 at or above base.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *Mountain INFO* editor, *CLIMB* magazine

Pik Yurnos, second ascent. With help from the Anatoli Boukreev Memorial Fund, Melis Coady and I spent several weeks during August and September climbing in Kyrgyzstan. After climbing several snow, rock, and ice routes in Ala Archa National Park, outside the country's capital of Bishkek, we headed south to the West Kokshaal-Too and Komorova Glacier, situated on the Kyrgyz-Chinese border.

On August 26 we made the second ascent of the peak located next to Pik Ecstasy, via a series of ice couloirs on the east-southeast aspect. We topped out in deteriorating conditions and descended the peak's north ridge in a whiteout. We dubbed the route *Dreaming of Wild Elephants* (estimated grade: III AI4).



Snow peaks from left to right: Pik Gronky (FA: Edwards-Isaac, 1998), Pik Yurnos (FA: Beckwith-Edwards-Isaac, 1998), Pik Ecstasy (FA: Beckwith-Edwards-Isaac, 1998). Pik Begger (FA: Edwards, 1998) is just right of Pik Ecstasy, out of the photo. *Molly Loomis*



Molly Loomis celebrating sunrise on the Komarova. *Melis Coady*

On August 3rd we had also attempted a prominent unclimbed peak two mountains north of 52 Years of American Duct Tape. Two-thirds of the way up the north ridge, we retreated due to unstable snow conditions. We then returned to the Ala Archa in late September.

MOLLY LOOMIS, AAC

BORKOLDOY

Central Borkoldoy, exploration and various first ascents. The central area of the Borkoldoy range in southeast Kyrgyzstan is a group of superb “alpine” peaks that are well-defended on every side by chains of slightly lower mountains. They are north of the Dankova group in the West Kok-shaal-Too. It has been traveled by a few trekking groups in recent years, but other than one (unsuccessful) attempt by a Russian team on the highest peak (5,170m) there are no known records of previous mountaineering expeditions. Our ISM expedition in September (Adrian Nelhams, Vladimir Komissarov, and I (guides); Ben Box, Steve Brown, James Bruton, Dr. Tom Fox, Phil Naybour, George Ormerod, John Porter, and Nick Wheatley) expected to approach on foot using horses for carrying camp equipment. However, with all our manpower we were able to open up an old geologists’ road made in Soviet times. This led to a broad river delta, which was drivable for 20km to a base camp at 3,570m, where all the main glaciers terminate, making it a fantastic base for exploration.

After reconnaissance, ABC was set up at 4,240m on the right-hand branch of the double-headed glacier running southward (we later named this Ilbirs Glacier, after snow-leopard tracks were discovered). Ascents were made of Pk Ilbirs (5,017m, PD+), the big dominant peak on the right side; the obvious rock pyramid on the east side (Zoob Barsa, 4,685m, PD+), and a traverse of Trident Peak (AD) just north of Pk Ilbirs. One team explored the glacier to the west and climbed Pk 4,857m by its west ridge.

Overlooking base camp were rock walls between 100-500m high. These proved to be made of excellent solid limestone and gave two fine routes (E2 and HVS). For the second “foray,” ABCs were set up on the east branch of Ilbirs glacier and the base of Pk 5,170m. Several summits above

Ilbirs E were climbed, including the excellent Dvoynay Vershina ("Twin Peak," 5,041m). The forepeak of Pk 5,170m gave a pleasant excursion to 4,915m (named Sakchi—Sentry), then a serious attempt was made on Pk 5,170m via a couloir on the west flank to the north ridge. At ca 5,000m the ridge became seriously knife-edged and corniced, and the attempt was abandoned. Three smaller summits on the opposite side of the glacier gave easier days before the expedition decamped. All in all it was a very enjoyable trip to the most remote mountains any of the team had visited (ca 200km to nearest proper village). Sightings of the rare Marco Polo sheep and seeing prints of the exceptionally rare snow leopard were a great privilege.

PAT LITTLEJOHN, *United Kingdom*



Pk Ilbirs (5,017m), climbed via the right-hand ridge. *James Brunton*



The still-virgin Pk 5,170m and its "Servant." *James Brunton*

Kuilu Range, first ascents. Gaizka Bilbao and Belen Menedez from Spain, with Amando Niño de Rivera (Mexico) and Gerard van der Berg (Holland), climbed two new routes in the Karator Valley of the Kuilu Range, first visited by an ISM expedition in 2000. The ascents took place between August 8 and September 5 and were named Controlador Aereo and Zoolander. No further information.

Servei General d'Infomacio de Muntanya, Spain

Djungart Range, first recorded visit and exploration. After an acclimatization ascent in the Ala Archa, Graham Sutton and I traveled from Bishkek via Karakol to At Jailoo (2,655m). From there we were able to make a 25-minute flight by helicopter to a base camp at 3,060m in the previously unvisited Djungart Range of the Tien Shan (Kyrghyz Map K-44-XIX: N 41 44' 32.6", E 78 56' 52.5"). We arrived on August 1.

Our aim was to explore the region and make the first ascent of its highest peak, Pt. 5,318m. Running south from base camp, two parallel valleys flank the east and west sides of this peak; we reconnoitered both. We first established an Advanced Base at 3,545m in the eastern valley, and on the 7th we climbed a gully on the flank of Pt 5,318m that connected with the

western valley. We reached a height of 4,150m over scree and boulders. Sutton and I then walked further up valley to ca 4,000m, but found no obvious way forward through complex moraine and steep hanging glaciers. We dismantled advanced base and a few days later sited another camp at 3,500m in the western valley, later inspecting this valley to 4,000m before returning to base. On the 17th we made a 35-minute flight to Karkara, after which we returned to Bishkek via a night in Karakol. Throughout our stay the weather was exceptionally warm, with rain up to 4,000m. Any snow encountered was old and rotten, and there were regular late afternoon storms. Exploration revealed steep rocky terrain (for which we had no gear) interrupted by hanging glaciers, which due to large crevasses and avalanche danger we considered unsafe. Only border zone permits were needed to visit this area; these were easily arranged for \$10 per person by ITMC in Bishkek (one month's notice needed). Gifts of cigarettes, watermelons, and fresh fruit were greatly appreciated by the border guards.

INGRID CROSSLAND, *United Kingdom*

Khan Tengri, multiple deaths. Sometimes referred to as one of the most beautiful mountains in the world, 6,995m Khan Tengri in the Tien Shan claimed the lives of no less than 12 climbers last summer. Its most formidable aspect is an almost 2,000m-high north face with many formidable mixed routes of the highest grade; apparently none have been climbed by non-CIS parties. On July 18 top Polish mountaineers Janusz Golab and Grzegorz Skorek were retreating in a storm from a probable new route up the center of this face. Skorek appears to have rappelled to a ledge and called to Golab that the rope was free. When Golab arrived there was no sign of either Skorek or the ledge. His body was later found at the foot of the face. Golab made a further nine rappels with minimal gear to escape the mountain, three times being hit by avalanches that seriously injured his leg. The talented Skorek was the son of the equally renowned Janusz Skorek (first ascent Thalay Sagar's northeast ridge), who had been a regular climbing partner of the famous Jerzy Kukuczka.

Traditionally, the classic route to Khan Tengri ascends the trough of the Semenovski Glacier from the South Inylchek to gain the west ridge at a 5,800m col east of Pik Chapiev (6,371m). Unfortunately, between ca 4,500 and 5,200m it is threatened by serac fall from both sides. In August 1993 an enormous avalanche, emanating from a huge serac band on Chapiev, obliterated this section of the glacier, killing the celebrated Soviet Valeri Khrischaty and two British climbers. Since that time it has become more usual to reach the west ridge from the north; this is longer but objectively much safer. However, ascents from the south have still been made on a regular basis.

Almost exactly 11 years to the day from the time of this accident a large group of climbers (reportedly 40-50) from many different nationalities set off up the Semenovski Glacier. At 6:00 a.m. a huge ice avalanche swept down the flanks and into this group. Five Czechs, three Russians, and three Ukrainians were killed and many others were injured, some seriously. Casualties were evacuated by Kyrgyz helicopter pilots who were forced to carry out rescue operations at night to minimize further risk from avalanche.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *Mountain INFO Editor, CLIMB Magazine*