

KYRGYZSTAN

PAMIR ALAI / SURMERTESH VALLEY

ARCHAKANYSH GORGE, RYZHII AND SAUK DZHAYLYAU WEST I

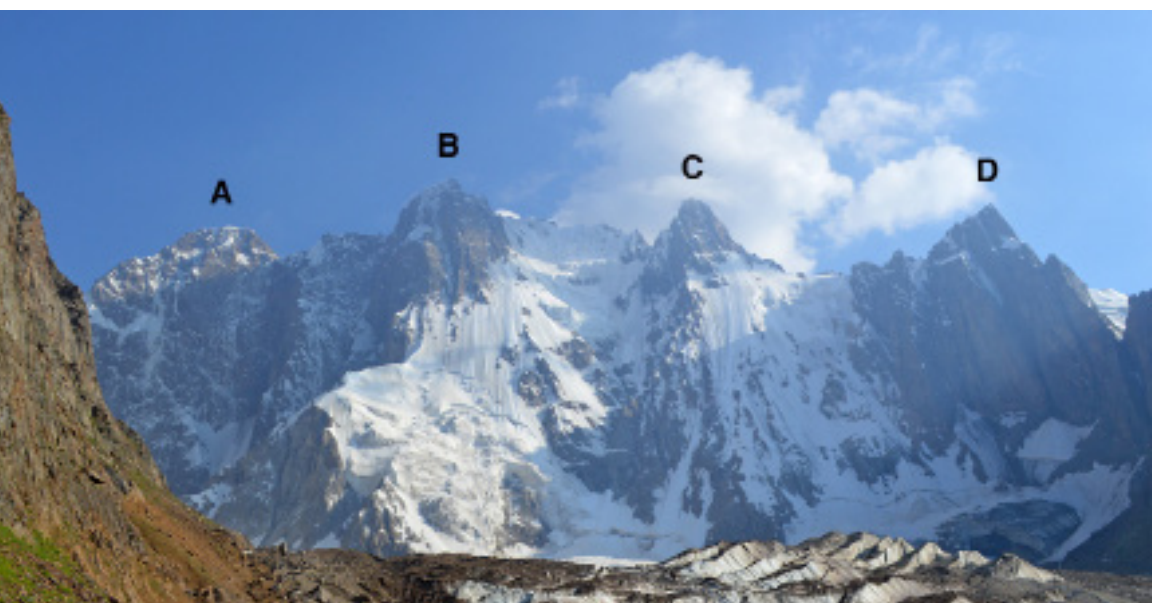
DURING JULY, Eugene and Sergey Glazunov and Alexey Tyulyupo explored peaks in the long-forgotten Surmertesh Valley. The expedition was only two weeks, but this was enough time for the team to make two first ascents of primarily rock routes, one on a previously unnamed 4,300m peak and the second on Sauk Dzhaylyau West I (4,866m).

Exploration of this region culminated in the 1970s and early '80s, when the area was used for the USSR Mountaineering Championships. Since the start of the '90s, no mountaineer had visited the Sauk Dzhaylyau cirque.

The trio drove south from Uch-Korgon, through Shigay, and then penetrated the Archakanysh Gorge to a base camp at ca 2,300m. They then climbed a new route on a peak they named Ryzhii at the head of a cirque to the north of the main valley. The ascent of the southeast ridge was completed in 6.5 hours on July 14 with an overall difficulty of 4A (600m, V). According to a note found in the summit cairn, the last ascent was made in 1978, when the peak was given 4,160m; the climbers' GPS measured 4,300m. As the peak was unnamed they called it Ryzhii ("Ginger") after the reddish color of the rock and also a late friend of that name.


Their second new route was on Sauk Dzhaylyau West I (39°46'0.47"N, 71°56'4.48"E), one of the higher glaciated peaks to the south of the main valley. The three climbed the 900m north ridge at an approximate grade of TD (6A, mainly free climbing at 5b/5c, with maximum 6a, some A2, and sections of WI4). They started at 6 a.m. on July 18, summited at 3:30 p.m. on the 19th, and were back in base camp at 1 p.m. on the 20th. Four bolts were left as rappel anchors. This was only the second recorded ascent of the peak—the first was 38 years earlier, during a complete traverse of the Sauk Dzhaylyau massif.

[Below] Looking southwest into the Sauk Dzhaylyau cirque. (A) Sauk Dzhaylyau Main (5,120m). (B) Central. (C) West II. (D) West I, climbed in 2015 by the north ridge (right skyline). *Sergey Glazunov*





[Above] Steep ice runnel on the north ridge of Sauk Dzhaylyau West I. *Sergey Glazunov*

Editor's note: Nearly all routes climbed under the official system in the former Soviet Union have been well-documented. However, at present this information is difficult for non-Russian speakers to access. Climbers wishing to visit lesser-known areas such as the Sauk Dzhaylyau massif are encouraged to contact Russian climbers or outdoor journalists for information. Otherwise, go to the area, have an adventure, but be prepared to be making second or third ascents. 

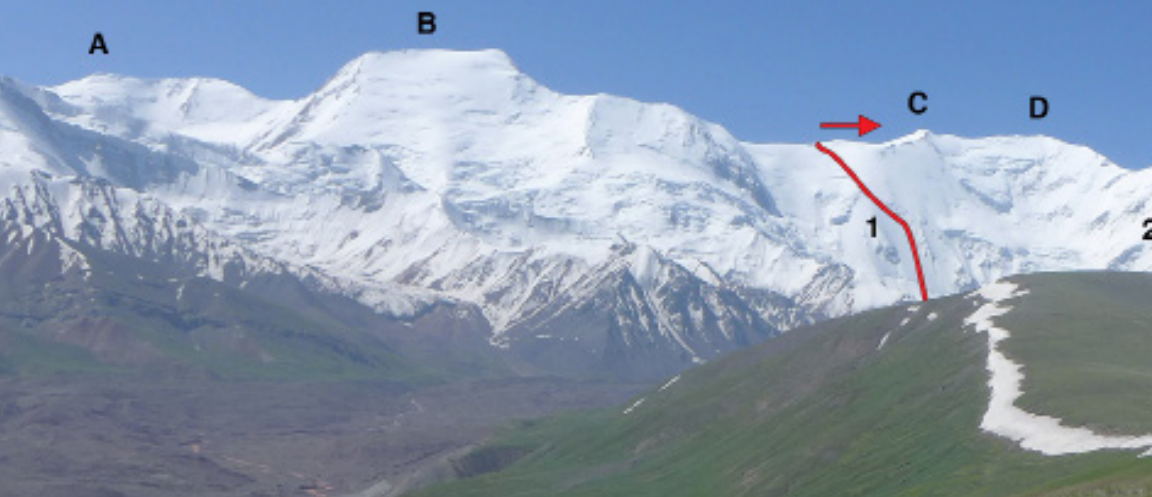
— ELENA DMITRENKO, *RISK.RU, RUSSIA*



PAMIR

BOR DOBO GLACIER, PEAK 5,143M, NORTHWEST FACE

HAVING A SPARE WEEK at the end of August between expeditions, James Monypenny, Heather Swift, and I made a quick exploratory hit in the mountains close to the Kyrgyz-Tajik border at Kyzyl-Art Pass. We caught a taxi from Osh to just south of the Kyrgyz checkpoint, and then hiked up the valley to the southeast and onto the Bor Dobo Glacier. Vladimir Kommissarov (ITMC owner and mountain guide) said there had been very few expeditions to this area east of Pik Lenin, and that most peaks remained unclimbed.

From a base camp at ca 4,300m, we climbed the prominent, icy northwest face of Pik 5,143m (Russian map; 39°28'15"N, 73°19'19"E, Google Earth). The angle was relatively sustained at 55–60°, with slightly steeper sections at the bottom and top of the face. We topped out on the west ridge 50m shy of the final chossy rock pillar. Heather belayed James onto the summit, but with no possibility of a belay or rappel anchor, she didn't follow and James downclimbed, declaring this to be "one of the most terrifying things I've ever done." We descended the face in 18 full-length rappels from Abalakov anchors as a blizzard built from the west. The face that we had guessed would be about 300m was more like 1,100m.



The blizzard kept us tent-bound for the next three days, after which Heather and I climbed the much shorter north face of Pik 4,875m (ca 50° with bomber névé), situated on the main ridge to the west. Sadly, the weather closed again so we were unable to reach the summit. We walked down to Bor Dobo that afternoon, and border guards plied us with vodka and tomato chasers before we started our cramped hitch back to Sari-Tash.  

— EMILY WARD, FRANCE

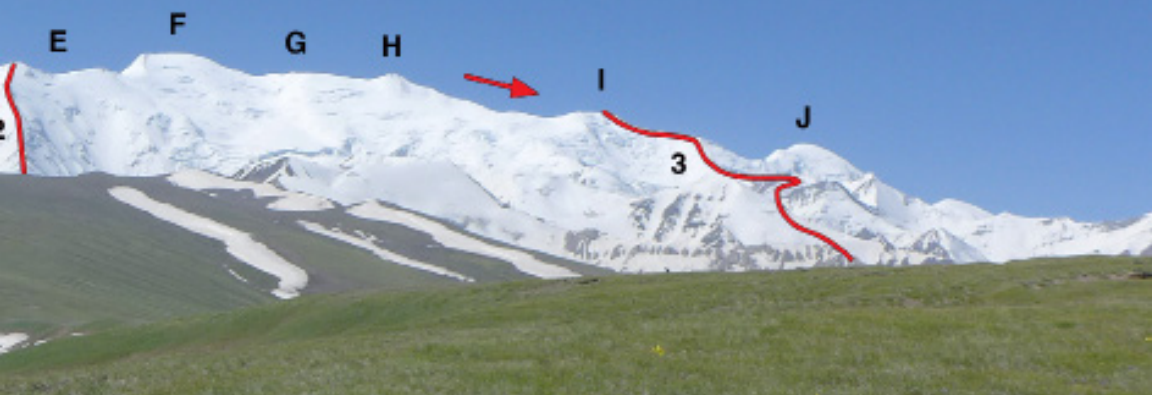
PAMIR / ZAALAYSKIY RANGE

TRAVERSE OF KURUMDY AND UNCLIMBED SATELLITE PEAKS

MELANIE GRÜNWARD (21), James Lam (21), Katharina Pfnaisl (23), and I (46) wanted to be the first to cross the central section of the Zaalayskiy Range, taking in the main summit of Kurumdy I (6,613m), a mountain climbed only once before. [*Kurumdy I was climbed October 12, 2001, by Vitaliy Akimov, Alexander Gubayev, Mikhail Mikhailov, and Oleg Turayev by the north spur and east ridge. Despite previous reports that the mountain was first climbed in 1932 from the south by Nikolay Krylenko's expedition, it now seems most likely they reached the summit of 6,154m Kurumdy Southwest II.*]

We located base camp at 3,770m beyond the western moraine of the East Kyzylsu (Kyzylsy) Glacier, and on July 14 put advanced base at 4,100m to the southwest. Over the next week we acclimatized and put our next high camp at 4,800m, positioned for an ascent of Gorlova Orla (5,440m). Melanie had been fighting an illness since Osh, so remained in camp on the 20th, while James, Kathi, and I climbed Golova Orla by the north flank and east spur, a new route. This was mainly 50° but ended with a huge, vertical, rotten summit cornice. This was only the second ascent, the first taking place in 2000, when a British-Russian team climbed the northwest ridge.

On July 26 we headed for the main ridge between Zarya Vostoka (6,349m) and Kurumdy East II (6,259m). Two days later we were at a 4,500m high camp, where the forecast for the coming nine days, and Melanie's continuing illness, caused her and James to abandon the ascent. Kathi and I opted to continue. After another night at 4,500m, we set out with provisions for eight days, with rucksacks weighing ca 30kg each. At times we needed to wade through





[Above] The central Zaalayskiy Range from the north. (1) Start of the 2015 traverse. (2) 2001 original route to Kurumdy I. (3) Descent from the 2015 traverse. (A) Pik 5,995m. (B) Zarya Vostoka (6,349m). (C) Kurumdy East II. (D) Kurumdy East I. (E) Kurumdy Sharqi III, II and I. (F) Kurumdy I (6,613m). (G) Peak 6,585m. (H) Kurumdy West I. (I) Kurumdy West II. (J) Turkvo. *Markus Gschwendt*

hip-deep snow, sometimes making no more than 10 vertical meters an hour. We made a camp on the north flank before reaching the crest on August 1 at ca 6,000m. The view was poor as we progressed westward to a camp at 6,120m. Next day we reached the previous unclimbed Kurumdy East II, naming it Pik Kathi. It was the first 6,000m peak she had climbed.

In knee-deep snow we continued along the ridge toward Kurumdy East I (6,384m), making another two camps en route, the latter because of complete lack of visibility. We had now spent our proposed eight days on the traverse. However, next morning the visibility was a little better and this spurred us on. We reached East I quickly, descended the far side, and joined the route of the first ascensionists of Kurumdy I.

In increasing wind we crossed the three Kurumdy Sharqi peaks to a camp below the ridge leading to the main summit. Next morning, August 5, it was very cold and windy, but by 3 p.m. we reached the highest point of the range, and as a reward the sky began to clear and we soon had a perfect view in all directions. What a gift!

We continued to the west, crossing another small top of 6,585m, which might be considered a previously unclimbed summit, and a few hours later were preparing camp below the striking double summit of Kurumdy West I. In barely two meters of visibility we reached its northern top (6,554m), but due to the bad weather we decided to forego the higher south top (6,558m, possibly unclimbed). Instead we headed down the west flank of the ridge and over Kurumdy West II (Chorku, 6,283m, first climbed in 2000). We stopped at 6,150m, at the junction of the main ridge and a spur that descends north over Peaks 5,532m and Golova Orla. That night was extremely windy, and by next morning the tent had been ripped in several places.

Next day we descended the spur, and yet again, it took far longer than anticipated. We ended up having to camp close to the top of Golova Orla, and it took us until after dark the following day, reversing our previous route on the east spur, to reach advanced base, where we were very happy we'd left a little food, clothing, and gas. Ultimately, our traverse took 15 days: ten to the main summit and five on the descent. It was exciting, exhausting, and beautiful.  

– MARKUS GSCHWENDT, AUSTRIA



[Above] Gabe Oliver approaching the summit of Peak 4,361m during the traverse of Podkova Ridge. The view south shows peaks at the head of the Karakol Glacier. The high summit to the left is Peak 4,750m, while the prominent Castle Ridge, with its three or four rocky tops, is in the far center. *Paul Josse*

TIEN SHAN / FERGANA RANGE

KARAKOL VALLEY, HIGH TRAVERSES OVER UNCLIMBED PEAKS

AFTER BEING DENIED access to the Kokbel Valley, our original objective, by a team of armed hunters, Pete Duguid, Pete Nugent, Gabe Oliver, John Venier, and I made two long traverses above the Karakol Valley, where British teams previously had done numerous first ascents (*AAJ 2011 and 2012*). On August 30, I soloed the Vershina Ridge (PD), crossing four summits on the ridge between Piks 4,203m and 4,701m (Russian military map). Two peaks had no previously recorded ascents. On September 4, Gabe and I traversed the Podkova Ridge (F+), crossing five summits between Piks 3,870m and 4,330m, in winter-like conditions. Four of these had no recorded ascents. Pete Nugent and John Venier made an attempt on impressive Pik 4,485m at the head of the valley, climbing the north ridge to within 50m of the summit. [☰](#) [📷](#) [🔍](#)


— PAUL JOSSE, U.K.

TIEN SHAN / TORUGART-TOO

MUR SAMIR, NORTHWEST FACE

AFTER AN ATTEMPT on Pik Karakol in July foiled by warm weather (freezing level above 5,000m), Sebastian Conrad, Stephan Rath, and I drove east via Naryn to the Torugart-Too, on the border with China. In the Mustyr Valley we headed up the John Charles Glacier (as a 2010 expedition named it) to establish base camp below Mur Samir (5,035m GPS, 5,008m


Russian military map). We first attempted to repeat the northeast ridge, climbed in 2010 by John Proctor and Robert Taylor for the first ascent of the mountain (*AAJ 2011*). We followed a couloir to the right of theirs (400m, PD) to reach the crest at 4,800m. However, the very rotten rock on the ridge was unfrozen, making it almost impossible to climb or find anchors. We turned around without reaching the top.

Next day, July 27, we headed for the unclimbed northwest face. Above the bergschrund we climbed steepening ice in good condition, leading toward two narrow couloirs, each 50–60°. We took the left, which gave short passages of mixed climbing. After 700m we reached the north ridge and followed this on snow to the summit. The overall grade was AD. We continued down the northeast ridge and used Proctor's descent along the eastern part of the north face. This proved more difficult than described, due to dangerous rockfall and large crevasses that on several occasions we had to rappel. 

– SEBASTIAN WOLF, GERMANY

TIEN-SHAN / CENTRAL REGION

ALA ARCHA RANGE, FREE KOREA PEAK, NEW ROUTE

In late January 2016, Russian climbers Max Krivosheev, Igor Loginov, and Alexander Zhigalov spent four days climbing a hard new route up the left side of the north face of Free Korea (4,778m). The route ascends the steep 690m wall between the 1991 Balezin Route (5B) and the 1982 Svab Route (5B), on what is referred to as the Lion Triangle (*AAJ 2011*). The climbers traversed the long east ridge over the summit and descended the ice couloir soloed by George Lowe (USA) in 1976. Their route was graded ED, mostly free with ca 150m of A3/A4. 

– LINDSAY GRIFFIN, WITH INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY DMITRIY SHALYGIN, KYRGYZSTAN,
AND ELENA DMITRENKO, RUSSIA

TIEN SHAN / TERSKEY ALA-TOO

KONGURLONG VALLEY CLIMBS

IN SEPTEMBER, Dominik Bednar, Miroslav Dusek, Tibor Majer, Pavel Mezera, Pavel Simandl, Tomas Vemola, Borek Zelenka, and I, all from the Czech Republic, visited an easily accessible but rarely visited valley in the western part of the Terskey Ala-Too. From the main road alongside Lake Issyk Kul, we drove 25km south to Kalkagar village and then walked four hours to establish base camp at the confluence of the Kongurlong and West Kongurlong rivers at 2,950m. This point can be reached by a 4WD truck and/or mules.



Our first climb was Karakoo (4,289m), reached by a long approach up the East Kalkagar Valley, followed by a 45°, heavily crevassed, north-facing glacier to gain the east ridge. Bednar, Majer, Simandl, and I followed an easy snow crest to the top.

Merzera and Vemola climbed Lama (4,096m) and Verblud (4,040m), two rocky pinnacles above the Kongurlong Glacier, via a steep gully on the east flank to the col and then short rocky ridges to each top (UIAA III and IV).



Bednar, Majer, and I then made a long and winding approach up the Kongurlong Glacier, heading west at the top to reach the northeast ridge of Ak Bashi (4,610m), which we followed to the summit.

Dusek, Mezera, and Vermola climbed the highest peak in this part of the range: Kongurlong (4,747m). From the head of the Kongurlong Glacier they crossed a difficult and heavily crevassed col, and then climbed the southwest face of the mountain (55° ice). They found signs of a previous visit, but we have not been able to find a description in Russian journals. [Editor's note: A Swiss expedition visited this glacier in July 2014 and appears to have climbed Kongurlong, which they called Kundebe Peak, and also Ak Bashi, which they named White Melon and measured at 4,630m.]

We also attempted Peak 4,399m on the upper western rim of the West Kongurlong Glacier but ran out of time at 4,250m on the north-northeast ridge. All ascents apart from Karakoo required one bivouac above base camp.  

— MICHAL KLESLO, CZECH REPUBLIC

TIEN SHAN / WESTERN KOKSHAAL-TOO

KYZYL ASKER GLACIER, VARIOUS ASCENTS

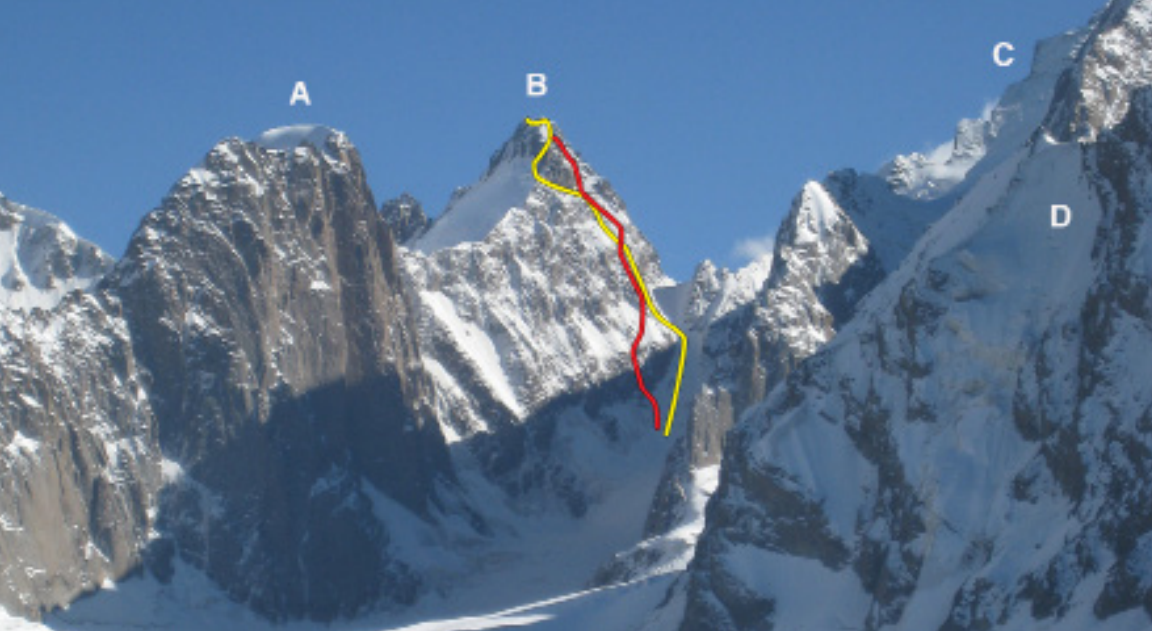
MATJAZ COTAR, Anze Jerse, Uros Stanonik, and I landed in Bishkek to find one of our rucksacks had not boarded the plane. After three days of waiting, we were left with no other option than to buy the missing gear and move on. Two days' driving and five days' load carrying saw us established in base camp at the foot of the Kyzyl Asker Glacier.

After an initial reconnaissance, Anze, Uros, and I bivouacked below Gronky (5,080m) and the next day, August 29, climbed a new ice line on the west face of Carnovsky (4,860m). It was not exactly the warm-up we wanted: Because of bad conditions, the line required nine hours of difficult and often dangerous climbing: Mr. Mojo Risin' (500m, V/5+ M5 R/X). We determined to shift our activity to ridges, as the snow and ice was so bad.

After an acclimatization climb along the ridge forming the eastern rim of the glacier, all four of us packed four days of food and headed for the west ridge of Kyzyl Asker (5,842m). A heavily crevassed area, and then deep fresh snow higher up, forced us to camp at ca 5,000m. Next day, September 7, we continued through more fresh snow toward the saddle at the foot of the west ridge. Here, we realized conditions were too bad to reach the main summit, so we left our sacks below the saddle and climbed the ridge southeast for ca 100m vertically (M4) as far as Kyzyl Asker West Shoulder (Pik 5,632m). [This summit was first climbed ca 1985 by Soviets via the ridge over Rock Horse and Raven Peak to the north-northwest; see AAJ 2011.]

We had just enough time left for one more climb, and we split into two teams, planning day climbs, more or less. Uros and I left at 11 p.m. on the 11th and spent the whole night approaching the northwest face of Panfilovski Division (5,290m). At daybreak we were horrified to see the seracs on the east face of Kyzyl Asker directly above us, so we started climbing away from them—fast. Above a lower rock barrier we found steep ice, which brought us to a snowfield. We moved right below a broken pillar, and then—a surprise!—an entire wall of concrete-hard névé. The sound of the tools squeaking could be heard half a pitch away.

[Left] Uros Stanonik, belayed by Anze Jerse, leads thin ice on Mr. Mojo Risin'. *Miha Hauptman*



[Above] Looking south up the east fork of the Kyzyl Asker Glacier. (A) Vernyi. The very steep northwest face has three routes (AAJ 2010–2012). (B) Panfilovski Division. (1) White Walker. (2) 1980 Popenko Route. (C) Northeast ridge of Kyzyl Asker. (D) Part of the north flank of Ljoshka (4,713m). *Miha Hauptman*

We reached the top half an hour before dark. We got lost twice during the descent and finally returned to base camp after nearly two full days without sleep. We named our 900m route White Walker (V/5 M6). [Editor's note: *The northwest face of Panfilovski Division was climbed in the summer of 1980 by Popenko and team to make the first ascent of the mountain. The new Slovenian route would appear to lie close by, but largely separate from, this line, which was likely climbed as a rock route.*] Meanwhile, Anze and Matjez had climbed a new route on the southwest face of Gronky. Their line, which followed obvious couloirs interspersed with icefalls and a few detours onto rock, was completed in a round-trip of 14 hours from base camp: Take a Walk on the Wild Side (700m, V/4+ M6 6a).

— MIHA HAUPTMAN, SLOVENIA

PANFILOVSKI DIVISION SOUTHEAST, FLIGHT OF THE ZEPHYR

MY MOTHER WOULD PROBABLY SAY that going on a blind date to a foreign country like Kyrgyzstan is a bad idea. Ben Erdmann and I corresponded for months prior to the expedition, but we only met in person on the plane from Seattle to Dubai. However, the signs all pointed toward the potential for a productive partnership with a shared desire for adventure.

We reached base camp at the toe of the Komorova Glacier (3,800m) in the second week of August. I had been here once before, in May 2012, when Ryan Johnson and I attempted the southeast couloir of Kyzyl Asker (AAJ 2013). This time Ben and I hoped for less snow and better weather. After nine days of heavy load hauling, we finally arrived at our advanced base camp (4,400m) below the unique and cathedral-like 1,300m southeast face of Kyzyl Asker (5,842m).

We constantly monitored weather reports sent by friends back home, but each time we received a good forecast and packed for an attempt, a sudden storm would shut us down. At one point we decided to use a marginal window (read: snowstorm) to attempt a line on

Panfilovski Division's southeast summit, a peak on the southeast ridge of Panfilovski Division that is ca 100m lower than the main top. This stunning, 600m golden granite spire rose directly from the glacier near our advanced base camp.

Our blind-date partnership unfolded over initial pitches of moderate Styrofoam ice, as we carefully raced warming temperatures and falling ice to establish ourselves at the base of the thin mixed system defining the route's upper half. We then embarked on iconic mixed terrain that required all the tricks in the book, until finally a layback with my body horizontal got me through the last of the technical ground. Our line, Flight of the Zephyr, went in 12 pitches at AI4 R M7, without the use of bolts. Ben and I concurred that this line could be a classic in another range. We arrived back in camp at 6:30 p.m., 14 hours after walking out that morning.

Early on August 29 we decided to make an attempt on the Kyzyl Asker couloir, in what appeared to be an acceptable if not ideal period of moderate diurnal precipitation cycles. Eclipsing my previous high point of 5,300m in only seven hours, we found technical difficulties up to WI5 M6, as well as dangerous melting, hazardous precipitation, and punishing spindrift. We spent around 50 hours on the face, with the final 36 hours mostly pinned down by the frightening conditions. We believe our ca 5,500m high point is the second highest attained so far on the route; Ines Papert reached 5,600m on one of her several attempts.

Our trip ended with losing much of our remaining food in a crevasse and multiple delays in our pickup due to vehicle and driver health breakdowns. For six days we watched our bodies deteriorate, remembering the deeper meaning of hunger. Finally, our transport arrived with four U.K. climbers inside. They'd heard about our plight and brought us an enormous cake. 🍷 🍷

— SAMUEL JOHNSON, USA

SEDOY STRAZH AND OTHER FIRST ASCENTS

OUR EXPEDITION CONSISTED of nine people, divided into three teams, including several very inexperienced climbers. The original goal was Byeliy, but after we discovered it had been climbed in 2011 by Slovenians, we focused on virgin Peak 5,481m (sometimes referred to as Byeliy East). Although it had been the aim of several parties, there had not been a serious attempt.

From August 8 to 13, we climbed above the Sarychat Glacier, where various teams made



[Above] Panfilovski Division Southeast. Flight of the Zephyr takes the obvious couloir and then ice runnels up to the right top. *Ben Erdmann*




[Above] Ninth Wave on Sedoy Strazh (a.k.a. Byeliy East, 5,481m) with the higher summit of Byeliy (5,697m) behind. The first-ascent party descended to the north and northwest, between Sedoy Strazh and Byeliy. *Dmitry Golovchenko*

first ascents of three mountains (Piks 4,585m, 5,020m, and 4,990m), from Russian 1B to 3A. We also completed a new route on Pik Novey (4,978m), the east face and north ridge, 2A.

On August 14, four climbers headed home and the rest of us moved to the Fersmana Glacier. On the 16th, while Dmitry Grigoriev, Sergey Nilov, and I started an ascent of the northeast face of Peak 5,481m (the steepest aspect, but also the safest), Vladimir Nikitin and Ruslan Sharifullin reached the col north of Korsun (5,320m). On the 17th they climbed Chudo (“Miracle,” 5,100m, 2A), and on the 18th they summited Prozrachnaya (“Transparent,” 5,070m, 2A). On the 19th they descended the Malitskogo Glacier and returned to base camp.

Meanwhile, Dmitry, Sergey, and I climbed Peak 5,481m over five days, reaching the top at 2 p.m. on the 20th. We had to wait there for two hours as a storm moved in and eliminated visibility, but once it was possible to see the way down, we set off to the northwest and descended to a bivouac in the bergschrund that night. The following day we were back on the Fersmana, having traversed the mountain. We have named the peak Sedoy Strazh (“Gray-haired Guardian”), and our ascent route Devyaty Val (“Ninth Wave”), from the famous 1850 painting of the same name: 1,230m (1,885m of climbing), Russian 6B (ED 6c WI5 M6 A2, minimal aid).

After a day’s rest at base camp we returned to the Fersmana, and on the 25th Ruslan, Sergey, and I made the second ascent of the Polish Route (2009) on Granitsa (5,370m), while Dmitry and Vladimir made the first ascent of Pogranichnik (“Border Guard,” 5,270m, 4A). 

— **DMITRY GOLOVCHENKO, RUSSIA**

PIK PALGOV, WEST FACE AND NORTH RIDGE

IN JULY AND AUGUST, Vaughan Snowdon and I climbed from the Palgov Valley, where we were fortunate to make the first ascent of Pik 5,602m, one of the highest unclimbed summits of the range. We were probably the third party to climb from the Palgov, after Moscow teams in 1998 and 2003. [*The former made the first ascents of seven summits, including neighboring Krylya Sovetov (5,480m).*]



[Above] The untouched southwest (Chinese) face of Pik Kosmos (5,940m), seen from the summit of Pik Palgov. The shoulder on the left is Point 5,495m. *Paul Knott* [Below] Looking west-southwest from the summit of Pik Palgov to unclimbed 5,000m peaks on the Xinjiang (Chinese) side of the range, south of Pik Byeliy. *Paul Knott*





In two days from Bishkek, our agents ITMC took us by Gaz-66 truck to the nearest established vehicle access, by the Kotur River at 3,900m. From here we spent several days ferrying loads via the Aytali and Sarychat valleys to a base camp by the confluence of the Palgov and Grigoriev rivers, a distance of 20km and rather hard work.


On July 31, for acclimatization, we made the first ascent of Pik 5,190m on the east side of the valley. Scree and dry glacier led us to snow runnels on the west side of the north ridge. From the summit we descended over Pik 4,973m to the north.

After several days of intermittent rain, on August 8, we ascended the Palgov Glacier to its upper névé, at 4,600m, to tackle our main objective, Pik 5,602m. The most aesthetic route, the west ridge, looked exposed with sustained technicalities. Instead, on the west face, we found a twisting snow/ice couloir right of disintegrating rock buttresses and left of the most

[Above] Pik Palgov (5,602m) from the upper icefall of the Palgov Glacier. The first-ascent route reached the north ridge (left skyline) via a hidden couloir between the buttresses in the left foreground and the large seracs behind them. *Paul Knott* [Below] Vaughan Snowdon on the Palgov Glacier. Behind him to the south lie Pik Palgov (left) and Krylya Sovetov (5,480m, in the sun). The latter has had two known ascents (AAJ 1999 and 2003). *Paul Knott*



threatening seracs. Unfortunately, an overnight electrical storm and persistent heavy snowfall forced us to descend to base camp, wary of avalanche risk in the upper cwm.




Cooler and seemingly settled weather persuaded us to use our last available days on a second attempt. On August 14 we climbed up the couloir and onto easier, west-facing slopes, which led to a rounded foresummit and the exposed but straightforward upper north ridge. The summit was a spectacularly sharp point overlooking the impressive southern buttresses of Pik Kosmos and some striking unclimbed peaks on the Xinjiang (China) side of the border. [See the AAJ website for excellent photos of the surrounding mountains.] Thanks are due to the Mount Everest Foundation, which provided funding support for this expedition. 

– PAUL KNOTT, NEW ZEALAND

PIK 5,190M, EAST FACE

IN SEPTEMBER, Mike Abrahamsson, Harry McGhie, Heather Swift, and I set out from Naryn to climb the north face of Pik Kosmos (5,940m) at the head of the western branch of the Grigoriev Glacier. Our first reconnaissance of Kosmos was not encouraging: Every day at least 10 significant seracs would carve from all areas of the north face. We decided to look at alternatives!

Harry, Mike, and I opted to try a mixed route on the east face of Pik 5,190m. I was not fast enough soloing the initial 700m couloir, and the sun reached the ice before I did. Harry and Mike continued and found four pitches of good climbing up a series of icefalls and mixed steps (AI 3/3+ M3), before snow-covered ice slopes led northward to the summit. In descent they downclimbed the snow/ice slopes and descended the steeper cliff band in two, 60m rappels from blocks. At the time we believed the mountain was unclimbed, but in July it had been climbed from the Palgov Glacier, to the west, by Paul Knott and Vaughan Snowdon (see report above).

We spent our last few days on the Kotur Glacier, where I soloed a variation up the east side and north ridge of Pik Oleg (4,657m). We'd like to thank the British Mountaineering Council, Mount Everest Foundation, and Goretex Shipton-Tilman Grant.   

– EMILY WARD, FRANCE

BORDER CROSSING RUMORS

TEAMS ARRIVING in the Western Kokshaal-Too from August onward were treated to a widespread rumor that, one month earlier, two Russians who had approached the mountains from the north had been caught on the Chinese side of the border, spent a month in jail, and then required the assistance of the Russian government to get home. As a result, a Slovenian party planning to attempt Kyzyl Asker's coveted southeast face decided against crossing the border at Window Col (the usual approach) and instead climbed on the Kyrgyz side of the range.

The two Russians, from Novosibirsk, approached the Kokshaal-Too via the hunting lodge at Bulat-M. Exactly what they planned to climb is unknown, but for whatever reason (lost, out of food) they opted to descend into China. Despite the rumors, they were helped by the Chinese and taken back to the border at the Torugart Pass, well to the west, where a main road crosses into Kyrgyzstan. It appears there were no problems with Chinese authorities.

– LINDSAY GRIFFIN



[Above] Nearing the summit of Pik 5,023m, with the North Inylchek Glacier below and, from left to right, Pik Piramida (5,332m), Pik Ignateva (5,488m), and Pik Panoramnyi (5,300m). *Will Kernick*

TENGRI TAG

PIK 5,023M, NORTHWEST RIDGE

CAMERON HOLLOWAY, Will Kernick, Tim Miller, and I arrived on the North Inylchek Glacier in July. After Will and Tim climbed Khan Tengri and Cameron and I succeeded on Karly Tau (5,450m) on our second attempt, we joined forces to attempt an unclimbed peak.

The original plan had been to trek 25km down the North Inylchek to attempt unclimbed Razor Peak (5,576m), one of the targets of a 2009 Singaporean expedition led by David Lim (AAJ 2011). Unfortunately, the glacier proved too broken to negotiate for such a long distance, so after making camp 10km down the glacier at 3,750m, we resorted to our reserve plan, an attempt on Pik 5,023m. This summit lies to the south of the North Inylchek, between the Ryzhova and Mikailova glaciers.

After a miserable four-hour glacier traverse to the base of the peak, we all headed up a loose scree slope into worsening weather, reaching the snow line at ca 4,100m. Above, we simul-climbed 45–65° icy slopes for the next three hours, then traversed right to the northwest ridge, where we placed camp at 4,350m.

The following day we headed up the remaining 700m to the summit in perfect weather, negotiating networks of crevasses and climbing sections of 55–60° ice, a chossy rock ridge, and a small serac to gain a small shoulder 100m shy of the summit. Here we were faced with a 50m serac that could not be skirted, so we were forced to climb a 25m pitch of Scottish 5, followed by 25m of unprotectable 60° terrain to reach gentle slopes beneath the top.

We suggest the mountain might be named Nutcracker Peak, given that Tim had whistled the theme to “The “Nutcracker” on the mountain—and the peak proved to be a bit of a ball breaker! *A complete expedition report is available at the AAJ website.* [E](#) [P](#) [Q](#)

— SETH FORD, U.K.