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PAUL KNOTT

## Russia and Central Asia 1999

*Thanks are due to all those who have contributed information, in particular Liana Darenskaya, Zoya Kondratieva, Sergei Kurgin, Sergei Semiletkin and Kasbek Valiev. Information on many of these areas can be sporadic, so reports are always gratefully received. These should be sent via the Alpine Club.*

*Climbers seeking route or access information will be interested to note that an extensive and increasing database of information is available through the Moscow-based web site Risk Online (<http://www.risk.ru>). Established in 1995, the site is linked to the Russian Mountaineering Federation and the magazine Vertical World.*

### The Caucasus

There is controversy about the safety of visiting the Caucasus, as local sources dispute the blanket warning put out by the Foreign Office. It has been suggested that the Central Caucasus is safe enough, except for armed thieves in the Shkhelda Valley and street crime in Tyrnyauz. Climbers from Eastern Europe and Russia were sufficiently confident in the situation that they returned to the Baksan Valley in greater numbers than in recent years.

In the Balkaria region a new route was climbed on **Doppakh W (4398m)** by a Moscow team including V. Zakhodin. The route, taking the R part of the NE Face and the NE Ridge at 5B, took from 21-27 July. Elsewhere in the Caucasus several hard repeats were made as part of the Russian Mountaineering Championships. In the Elbrus Massif a Moscow team led by A. Abramov made what was probably the sixth ascent of the 6B 1981 *Lukashvili Route* on **Kiukiurtliu (4639m)**, taking from 21 to 27 August. In the Western Caucasus, from 18-19 August, a team from the Alibek climbing camp headed by A. Shvyrev climbed the 6A 1973 *Korotkov Route* on the S Face of **Dombai Main (4046m)**.

The fashion for snowboard and extreme-ski descents continues, with reported descents from Elbrus and the Ushba Plateau.

### The Pamir

Tajikistan remains on Foreign Office warning lists for visitors, but parties report much of the country as safe. Activity in the High Pamir included a government-organised camp on the Moskvina Glade, connected with the re-naming of the highest peak **Ismaila Samanievo (7495m)**. The nearby **Pik Korzhenevskaya (7105m)** also received an ascent, by the Dagestan team of S. Smotrov, K. Dorro and S. Shanavazov who climbed via the 5A 1966 *Tsetlin Route* from 8-9 August.

Explorations in the Muzkol region organised by Andrew Wielochowski and Sergei Semiletkin continued for the fourth successive year. From 23-25 July Sasha Bolotov and Giles Cornah made the first ascent of **Soviet Officers Peak West (c 6100m)**, from the Bozbaital Valley via ice couloirs and a rock wall at 5B. On 26 July Malcolm Churches and Andrew Wielochowski made the first

ascent of **Pik Frunze**, which turned out to be an easy ascent at 3B. On 30 July Ulf Carlsson soloed **Fay's Peak (6115m)** via a 3A couloir from the Zartosh Glacier, finding a plaque from a previously unreported 1984 Tajik expedition. The first ascent of the mountain was previously thought to have been by the 1997 British/Russian team (see *AJ103*, 259, 1998). Finally on 2 August Giles Cornah and Ulf Carlsson attempted the N Face of unclimbed **Zartosh (6106m)**. Poor conditions slowed the ascent and they retreated late in the day 100m from the summit. On the descent an abseil anchor failed and Carlsson fell to his death.

Also in July a UK team led by Paul Deegan was active in the area of **Pik Khurumdy (6613m)**, in the **Zaalayskiy Khrebet** close to the borders of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and China. The area is relatively accessible from the Osh-Khorog highway near the Kyzyl-Art Pass and requires no unusual permits other than Border Zone Registration. The team were able to obtain 1:50 000 contour maps from Missing Maps, Minneapolis. They approached along the Alai Valley to a base camp at c3500m, from which they made first ascents of five peaks 4985m, 4892m, 4925m, 4789m and c4800m at AD-D. They report that access to **Pik Khurumdy** and neighbouring unclimbed 6000m peaks could be made via the N Khurumdy Glacier. The only previously known trips to this range, during the Soviet era, approached from the south and made ascents of **Pik Khurumdy** and **Pik Pogranichnik**.

## The Pamir Alai

Access to this impressive area seems more fraught than hitherto, with numerous border checks on the road from Osh and reports of tourist kidnapping by guerrilla factions in Batken.

Several British teams were active in the **Ak-Su Valley**, which can be reached by pack animals in one day from the road head above Vorukh. Mark Baker and Chris Forrest put up *Times of Unrest*, a 1000m 5.9/E1 on the SE Spur of the tower opposite **Pik Boston (4810m)**, taking two days and descending the E side of the tower. The same pair also put up *Mr Chippendale*, a 550m 5.10b/E2 to the R of *The Missing Mountain*, on the Pamir Pyramid below the W side of **Pik Slesov (4240m)**. The route takes a series of corners up the R side of the buttress. Jonathan Garside and New Zealander Peter Scott put up *The DC Route*, a 700m E3 on the previously unclimbed S Face of the c4200m summit immediately R of Pik Slesov (the W Face of this summit was named Wall of Dykes. See *AJ103*, 109-116, 1998). The route took three days and, at its best, the climbing was excellent up steep reddish rock with numerous crack systems. The pair used the standard descent from Pik Slesov. Before leaving the valley they also repeated *Mr Chippendale*, described above.

Also active in the area was a group from the Club Alpino Italiano, whose most significant achievement was the 33-pitch new route *Fiamma d'Oriente* on **Pik Slesov**. Andrea Zanetti, Cristoforo Groaz and Giorgio Pancheri faced bad weather on the route but completed it in 11 days at up to grade 7 and A3+, reaching the summit on 17 July.

Several ascents were recognised in the Russian Mountaineering Championships. The Moscow team of V. Lavrinenko, I. Pehterev, D. Vlaznev and J. Kazartsev climbed a new 6A variant on the Central SW Face of **Pik Slesov**.

Their ascent was the second of the route as a whole and took from 1-7 August. Teams from Perm and Magnitgorsk made ascents of the 6A *Cold Corner* on the N Face of **Aksu (5217m)**. During 23-27 July a Riazan team led by E. Shagaeva climbed the 6A 1986 *Gorbenko Route* on the central NW Face of **Asan (4230m)**. Further ascents were made from the Karavshin Valley by teams from Russia and the USA.

### The Tien Shan

In the Central Tien Shan there were two notable ascents in the area at the E end of the S Inylchek Glacier. A team of young Kazakh mountaineers led by S. Lavrov climbed **Pik Voennykh Topographov (6873m)**. This was only the third ascent of this impressive mountain, which is well seen from the higher summits in the area but is not visible from the main base camps on the S Inylchek. The first ascent was in 1965 by a Kazakh group led by A. Vodokhova, and the second in 1988 by K. Valiev's team. The 1999 group left the standard S Inylchek base camp on 17 August and climbed in two days to the relatively straightforward Chon-Teren Pass (5488m). From here they climbed the long corniced W Ridge of Voennykh Topographov, reaching the summit in heavy snowfall on 21 August after a further camp on the crest.

Also in August the nearby **Pik Shipilova (6201m)**, one of the few remaining virgin 6000m peaks in the area, received its first ascent by the New Zealand team of Sean Waters and Jo Kippax. From the standard base camp area they spent two days walking up the Inylchek beyond its turn to the south, and a further day making a higher camp. From this camp they summited and returned on 10 August, via the N Rib which was technically straightforward at New Zealand Grade 3.

On **Khan Tengri (6995m)** most ascents were made by the classical routes, with two notable exceptions. A new route was climbed on the S Face by the St Petersburg team of Valeri Shamalo and Kiril Korabelnikov. They spent five days in August climbing a new line on the steep marble buttress adjoining the Semenovskiy Glacier, between the 1982 *Sviridenko Route* and the 1982 *Isachenko Route*. A further four days up the Marble Rib took them to the summit. They experienced good weather throughout the climb but despite this described the buttress as 'a place of bad dreams'. On the N side of the mountain the Tagil team of V. Popovich and A. Korobkov climbed the 5B 1974 *Solomatov Route* via the NE *Chapaev Ridge*, reaching the summit on 18 July.

The development of hard technical climbing continued on the granite of the **Ala-Archa** area of the Kyrgyz Alatau with a new route on the N Face of **Korona (4860m)**. From 6-9 May Alexander Ruchkin solo climbed the 600m *Solo Dream* at 6A with a VI+/A4 crux. This is the hardest graded route to date on the face, which is well seen from the popular Ratzek Hut. Of the remaining six routes, several are unrepeatable including the 1982 *Kalugin Route* which has been unsuccessfully attempted on several occasions. Descent from these routes is straightforward via the *Normal Route* on the Korona Glacier. Later in the season Chris Forrest and Mark Baker put up the 170m E3/5.10c *Chasm Fissure* on one of the lower shoulders on the NE side of **Pik Baichechekei (4515m)**, overlooking a large gully leading to **Pik Uchitel (4527m)**.

In September a team guided by Pat Littlejohn, Alan Delizee and Vladimir Kommissarov visited the **Kotur Glacier** area of the **Western Kokshaal-Too**. They were able to approach by Ural truck to 3950m near the glacier snout. Ascents were made of six peaks around the head of the glacier, of which the highlight was previously virgin **Volshebznitsa (5285m)** ('White Witch'), climbed via its N Ridge at D+. **Pik Judith Brian (5050m)** was also climbed by a new route via its E Ridge at AD+.

Two further areas of a similar exploratory nature have been suggested by local operators. Southwards from the E end of Lake Issyk-Kul are the Akshirak and Kuilu Ranges. Each is accessible by road and has unexplored summits over 5000m. The Kuilu Range is said to have potential for rock routes, some difficult, whilst the Akshirak is described as having ski touring potential for a substantial part of the year.

In the Northern Tien Shan ski touring activity took place in early spring with a visit by James Houghton and Martin Laternser. In the **Zailiysky Alatau** near Almaty, they ascended from the Almatinka Valley to cross the Tuyuksu Pass (4100m) and the Turistov Pass. They climbed **Pik Tuyuksu (4218m)**, but their plan to climb the highest peak in the area, **Pik Talgar (4973m)**, was thwarted by excessive deep soft snow. On its W and SW Faces **Pik Talgar** has hard rock and mixed routes up to 6A.

## Siberia and the Russian Far East

In the Altai several important climbs from 1998 were previously unreported. A number of new ascents were made by Russian climbers in the area of **Pik Chuiskiy (3777m)** in the relatively unexplored **S Chuiskiy Massif**. The most notable of these were the first ascent of the W slope of **Pik Chuiskiy** and the first ascent of **Pik Memorial to Ascents of Everest**, both at a modest grade. In the N Chuiskiy Massif the Biysk team of A. Afanasyev, N. Zyatkov and A. Salin climbed a new route on the N Face of **Maashey (4177m)** taking the central part of the face at 5B. The only previous face route here was the 1960 *Budanov Route* on the NW Face, also at 5B. The same team also climbed a new route on the N Face of **Karatash (3534m)** in the **Ak-Tru** area, on the E side of the face at 5A. The three also returned to the face in 1999, climbing with I. Slobodchikov from 6-10 May. They succeeded on another new route, this time in the centre of the face at 6A.

In June 1999 Russian ski mountaineers Alexey Kim, Vladimir Martynov and Vitaly Biryukov skied down the SE Face and Delone Pass on **Bielukha (4506m)**. They had intended to ski the *Bottle Route* on the N Face but there was insufficient snow on the upper part of the route. Following their descent of the standard route, Kim and Martynov were joined by Igor Slobodchikov on a re-ascent and ski descent of the bottom part of the *Bottle Route* from the Tomsk Camp. European ski mountaineering trips have also taken place in this range, mainly in March and April.

In the Western Sayan there has been an increase in climbing activity in the granite peaks of the **Ergaki Massif**, as Krasnoyarsk climbers have rediscovered the mountains within easy reach of their city. The massif is situated between Khakassia and Abakan, and is within a reasonable distance from the road.

Although its highest point reaches only 2281m, many of the peaks have difficult faces up to 550m in height. In February 1997 a new route was climbed on the N Face of **Zvezdny Pik (2265m)**, a mixed route graded 6A and taking nine days. The route was repeated in July 1998 in a time of five days. Also in 1998 the first route was climbed on the W Face of **Zvezdny Pik**, in winter at 6A over five days then in summer at 5B over two days.

These routes demonstrated the potential of the area, and in 1999 mountaineering camps were held here in the winter and summer seasons. Shortly before the winter camp, during the 7 days 18-25 February, a Krasnoyarsk team climbed a new route on the Central NNW Face of **Pik Dinozavr (2221m)**. The 600m route had an average angle of 82° and was graded 6A. The team, led by V. Balezin and N. Zakharov, experienced strong winds and temperatures of -25°C.

In Kamchatka, the 500m rock walls of the **Ganalskiy Range** have seen only a little further attention since the report in AJ 100. The range, 80km NNW of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, is said to be the only place in Kamchatka with worthwhile rock for climbing, the rest being friable volcanic material. Nevertheless, since 1994 only three of the six routes, up to 5B or 5.9-5.10 A2, have been repeated by members of the Kamchatkan Mountaineering Club. In 1996 Kamchatkan mountaineers F. Farberov and S. Panyukin added a further new route at 4B-5A, which is said to be the last new route in the area although potential still remains.

Limited icefall climbing has also been reported in Kamchatka, on the one easily accessible fall which is found near the Vilyuchinsky Volcano. Other falls are situated well into the wilderness and require helicopter access.