
JOSÉ LUIS BERMÚDEZ & PAUL KNOTT

Russia and Central Asia 1995

We would like to thank all those correspondents who have sent information, in particular Józef Nyka; Tolia Gvosdev, Minsk; Vladimir Komissarov of ITMC Tien Shan, Bishkek; Sergei Kurgin of SibAlp, Novosibirsk; Ian McNeill of Adventure, Protection and Survival Ltd; Alexander Shcherbakov, Sevastopol. Reports and information should be sent via the Alpine Club. Contact with any of the correspondents, many of whom offer logistical support to climbers, can also be made through the Club.

The Pamir

Summer 1994 A British commercial expedition made the second recorded British ascent of **Pik Kommunizma (7495m)**. The ascent route was from the Moskvina Base Camp on the Valtera glacier via the Borodkin Spur (5A) which is the standard way up the mountain. This route was first climbed in 1968. Changing conditions have meant that the spur must now be accessed from the left via an objectively dangerous sérac ramp rather than up the middle of the triangle. The summit was reached by Mike Smith and two others on 14 August. (The first British ascent of Pik Kommunizma was made in 1962 by Joe Brown, Ian McNaught-Davis, Graeme Nicol and Malcolm Slesser.)

Reports from Russian climbers strongly suggest that helicopter prices are rising in Tajikistan. A figure of \$1000 has been quoted for the flight from Dushanbe to the Moskvina Base Camp. Those planning a visit to the area should negotiate their transport in advance. Anecdotal reports suggest that the costs of climbing in the 'traditional' areas of the Pamir and Tien Shan have driven Russian climbers to the development of areas like the Kola Peninsula which have the advantage of being within Russia.

The Pamir Alai

Summer 1994 The Muzkol range lies in the Eastern Pamirs in Tajikistan, 100 km SE of **Pik Kommunizma**. It has 11 summits over 6000m, of which the highest is **Pik Sovetskikh Ofizerov (6233m)**, and 30 between 5500m and 6000m. The first mountaineering visit to the area was made by a Soviet Army team from Leningrad in 1986, whose first ascent of **Pik Bitkaya**

Vostochnaya (6074m) won first prize in the Soviet Mountaineering Championships. Two first ascents were made. Francis Distefano, Sergei Arsentiev, Billy Mason and others climbed **P 5800m**, which they named **Goodwill Peak**, while Arsentiev and Distefano climbed **Chottukay (5823m)**. Also on the Muzkol Ridge a team of four climbers from St Petersburg made the first ascent of **P 5660m** by a 6A route on its NW face.

A three-person Italian team from Friuli visited the Laylak gorge and put up the first route on the 850m high NE face of **Parus (5037m)**. Andrea Carolli, Mauro Florit and Silvia Stefanelli climbed *Sulli Ali delle Aquile (On the Wings of the Eagle)* at VIII-, A3. Florit and Stefanelli also climbed two new routes on **Pik Atabekov (4300m)** a 280m line at grade VII on the SW pillar and a 400m route at VI+ which they entitled *Rasputin*.

Summer 1995 An extremely high-profile American team visited the Karavshin valley in the Pamir Alai for a productive three-week visit. Lynn Hill and Greg Child made the first free ascent of *Perestroika Crack* (5.12) on **Pik Slesov** (also known as the **Russian Tower** and **P 4240m**) in 28 hours of continuous climbing. On the same peak Kitty Calhoun-Grissom and Jay Smith spent five days on *Fat City*, a new route at 5.12, while Alex Lowe and Conrad Anker climbed *The Russian Shield*, a variation on existing routes at VI, 5.10, A4. Hill teamed up with Lowe to free the 1100m W face of **Pik 4810** (also known as **Pik Boston**), connecting two existing aid lines at Russian 6B with climbing up to 5.12c. Two routes were climbed on the N face of **The Bird (4490m)**, including a new route by Anker and Lowe at 5.11d and A0. Hill and Child also climbed *Clodhopper Direct* at 5.10+ on the **Central Pyramid (3850m)**. Like many teams visiting the Pamir Alai the Americans found that far more routes had already been climbed in the area than they had anticipated.

A six-member Italian team climbed in the Ak-su valley in August. Their routes, all climbed in pure Alpine style, included a first traverse of **Little Makalu (5011m)**, ascending by the N ridge and descending the E ridge; a possible new route on the S face of **Domashnaya (3929m)**; and a variation on the SW pillar of **Pik Dostoyevsky (4979m)**.

Although the Pamir-Alai is best known for its big granite walls there are plenty of relatively unexplored Alpine peaks in the area. A commercial expedition led by Pat Littlejohn of the International School of Mountaineering made several first ascents in September from a base camp at the junction of the Kara-Su and Ak-Su valleys, including the N ridge (graded Alpine D) of **P 5011 (Scott's Peak)** at the very south of the Kara-Su valley, and the N face (at D) of **P 4786** just north of **P 5011**. The N face of the main summit of **Domashnaya (3929m)** went at D. Several peaks were climbed on the ridge running E from **Pik Dostoyevsky (4929m)**, including **King** (4760m AD), **Queen** (4720m PD+), **South Prince (4650m)** by its N face at TD and **North Prince (4650m)** by the S face. The expedition made the round trip from Tashkent by helicopter.

The Caucasus

Summer 1995 The Russian Snow and Ice Climbing Championships were held in the Bezingi region during August. The format of the championships will come as a shock to Western climbers. Fifteen of the hardest routes in the Bezingi and Mishirgi valleys were each given points on a scale of one to six according to their length, technical difficulty and degree of commitment. The ten or so pairs entered were then given 10 days to amass as many points as possible. Each pair had a coach, and a support team whose job it was to keep the climbers supplied with food and equipment. Climbing competitions still seem to be taken quite seriously in Russia, with teams sponsored by their municipal mountaineering clubs and coming from as far away as Kemerovo in Siberia.

The Championships were plagued by bad weather, with no climbing possible on days seven and eight. When the weather cleared the leading pair from St Petersburg, Sasha Kashevkin and Sergei Malinin, were slightly behind a Siberian pair. They decided to attempt the highest-scoring route, the *Blankovsky route* (6A) on **Shkhara West (5057m)**. They climbed the route extremely fast but sadly slipped and fell to their deaths while descending the NE spur of Jangi Tau East. The Championships were called off.

These were not the only lives claimed by Shkhara that season. A week previously three Moscow climbers fell to their deaths through a cornice while descending the classic NE ridge route (5A) after climbing the *Tomashek-Muller route* (5B).

The Tien Shan 1995

Access This year parties for the N Inylchek approached via Kazakhstan and those for the S Inylchek approached via Karakol, Kyrgyzstan. Logistics providers in each country are able to overcome potential difficulties with visas and permits, and helicopter access remains normal with prices similar to those in 1994.

Central Tien Shan The established base camps, one of which now has permanent buildings, continue to operate on the **South Inylchek Glacier**. The area still has unclimbed peaks, many over 5000m and a handful over 6000m, but large cornices and poor snow conditions hamper many ascents.

Pik Pobeda (7439m) had an estimated nine ascents during 1995. In April-May a team from Novosibirsk made the first spring ascent. Using four fixed camps, Gleb Sokolov, Vitaly Ivanov and Yevgeniy Belousov reached the summit on 8 May, five days after leaving Base Camp. Conditions are said to be particularly dangerous at this time of year.

Khan Tengri (6995m) remains popular with at least 45 ascents during the year; the West Ridge is reported to be littered with detritus. A speed competition took place on this route via the Semenovskiy glacier. Of the 18

participants 10 completed within the 36-hour control time, the fastest being Alex Lowe (USA) who summited and returned to camp in 10 hours 8 minutes.

In the same area a Slovenian team climbed a hard new route on the N Face of the NE summit of **Pik Troglav (5100m)**. On 14 August Peter Mežnar, Blaž Stres and Thomas Jakofčič took 15½ hours to complete the 1000m route at ED VI 90°. The British team of Tim Sparrow and Geoff Thomas reached 5400m on **Otkritii (5664m)**, taking a spur left of the SW ridge. Earlier they had attempted to reach **Shipilov (6201m)** but found the approach via the Zvezdochka glacier impassable (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 95/42).

Several British teams were active in the region of the **Kayndy Glacier**, which is parallel to and S of the Inylchek. Some approached partly or wholly on foot from the Maida-Adyr road head. A team visiting early in July was unsuccessful owing to metre-deep snow. Later, on 17 July, Mick Davie and Joanna Newton attempted the E ridge of the unclimbed **Pik 5445**. Close to the summit a cornice collapsed and Davie fell to his death; during the subsequent search two Russian guides also fell to their deaths owing to cornice collapse (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 95/34). Rob Collister and John Cousins were also in the vicinity. On 14 July they climbed **P 5315** from the 30 Years of Victory Pass (5000m), after which they descended towards the Terekty valley to climb the S spur/E ridge of the unclimbed **Pik 5784**, the highest in the Kayndy basin, on 18 July at AD. They later named this **Pik Moelwyn**. They then approached the unclimbed **Pik Kirov (6073m)** at the head of the Kuyon-Kap glacier to attempt the SW ridge. On 24 July they retreated from a point 600m below the summit in deteriorating weather and after experiencing a huge cornice collapse. (See article 'Success and Failure In the Tien Shan', pages 140-146.)

A group led by Ken Findlay and Paul Hudson was based near the **Moshni Glacier**. On 6-7 August Findlay, Ashley Hardwell, Hudson, and Philip Kendon made the first ascent of **Angel Peak (5200m)**, on the SW side of the Moshni glacier, via hard ice slopes at TD. First ascents were also made of **White Horse Peak (4850m)** E of **Pik 4921** from the Przhevalski glacier, **Point of Damocles (5200m)** SW of **Pik 5162** from the Bishkek glacier on the N side of the Kayndy, **Hunter Point (5250m)** E of the 30 Years of Victory Pass, via the W face, and **Pik 5050** at the head of the Moshni glacier (see *MEF Reports*, ref. 95/25).

Also in August a team led by Andrew Wielochowski and Sergei Semiletkin was active on the **Shokalskiy Glacier**, between the Kayndy and the Inylchek. First ascents were made of **Glade Peak (4868m)**, immediately south of the Merzbacher Glade, via the S ridge, **Marmot Peak (5448m)** via the SW ridge at D and, on 15 August, **Scimitar Peak (5330m)**, SW of the Fidel Castro Pass, via the N ridge at TD.

From the nearby **Komsomolets Glacier**, in August a team led by Guy Willett also made first ascents including **Peaks 4905m, c5000m** (NW of **Peak 5631m**), **5045m**, and **5235m** (N ridge AD+). **Peak 5330m**, (50m S of

Scimitar Peak) was climbed by the SE ridge (AD+) on 9 August (first ascent). On 12-15 August an attempt was made on the E ridge of **Red Army Peak (5736m)** by Willett and Richard Vecqueray, which was halted 300m from the summit after a 30m fall through the cornice.

Guided ascents of Khan Tengri, including some by British teams, have increasingly taken place from camps on the **N Inylchek Glacier**. The standard route, via the Chapaev spur right of the N face and dropping down to the col on the W ridge, is objectively safe but is longer and harder than the avalanche-prone Semenovsky glacier route. A team led by Simon Yates acclimatised by climbing **Pik Marble Wall (6400m)** at the head of the glacier via the N ridge. Also from the North Inylchek, Andy and Chris Hall climbed **Karly-Too (5450m)** via the W ridge and a Dutch guide climbed **Bayankol (5841m)**, also via the W ridge.

A little explored area of the **Terskei Ala-Too** range, 20km S of Issyk-Kul Lake, was visited by a team including Knut Solberg and Alan Geer. First ascents were made of the two highest peaks in the vicinity at **4765m** and **4687m** and three smaller peaks, all on snow at F/PD, after which the team walked out via the Konguroleng valley (see *MEF Reports, ref. 95/46A*).

Northern Tien Shan The **Kyrgyz Range** was visited in July by a group of British climbers led by Guy Willett. First British ascents were made of peaks above the Ak-Sai glacier, **Teke-Tor (4441m)** via the N ridge, **Izyskatel (4400m)** via the N face, and **Semyonov Tien Shanskiy (4875m)** via the N ridge. **Korona (4860m)** was climbed by the route of the 1990 British team. New routes were climbed up the E face of **Ak-Too Col**, at TD-, and a 250m rock pillar on the S arm of **Korona** at HVS.

In the **Zailiskiy Alatau**, immediately south of Almaty, rock climbing and potential winter icefall climbing have been reported close to the ski area of Chimbulak, and a ski traverse has been suggested.

The **Dzhungarskiy Alatau**, further north, is not strictly part of the Tien Shan but is approached from Almaty via the town of Taldy-Kurgan. Close to the Chinese border and formerly of restricted access, the range has peaks over 4000m characterised by rocky cirques surrounding glaciers. A British team including Ian McNeill visited the Kara valley via Teleky, reporting potential for big wall climbs.

Siberia and the Russian Far East

Altai In May a large number of climbers from nearby Siberian cities made ascents in the Ak-Tru area of the **North Chuiskiy** of the 1st-4th category of difficulty. In the same area, an interesting new rock route on the N face of **Kara-Tash (3600m)** was climbed by a group from Talyati at 5A/B. This range has also been visited in recent years by mountaineers from Germany and the USA.

In August 1995 the nearby **South Chuiskiy** range received its first British or Western visit by a team including Michael and Catherine Pettipher, Helen Geddes and Peter Nelson. The group travelled by road from Novosibirsk in 3-4 days. From a base in the Taldur valley in the area of **Iiktu (3942m)**, ascents were made of **Sophiya (3745m)** via the NW ridge at AD (first ascent), and **Peaks 3170m, 3205m, 3534m, 3620m, 3678m** and **c3840m**. Attempts were made on the twin snow peak of **Olga (4000m)**. Earlier the same group visited the remote hills of the **Tapduair**, climbing all six major summits including **Tapduair (3505m)**.

In the **Katun Range**, previously unreported is the ascent of **Bielukha (4506m)** from the south on 10 August 1993 by Ian Heywood, Angus Tree and Jim Walker, taking the line of the 1914 first ascent from the Katun glacier via the Blue Balcony at 2B.

Cherskiy Previously unreported was the ski traverse of the Buordakh massif made by a group from Estonia led by Alvar Soesoo, in March-April 1991. Lowest temperatures in March were -56°C . An attempt on **Mt Pobeda (3147m)** was aborted owing to avalanche risk. Ski tours have previously been carried out in the area by Russians, the first being in 1968 by R V Sedov.

Russia and Ukraine

Crimea A little-known coastal cliff near Arfen-Chair-Burun, just east of Balaklava, has seen some new route activity. In 1992 local climbers A Lyapun and S Streltsov climbed the first route on the main crag, making a two-day ascent up the centre of the 235m cliff (5.12, A3). In summer 1995 another route, further right, was attempted by climbers from Kiev. Approach was by boat, and the routes were started from the boat.

Polar Urals A team from Minsk led by V Ganopolski undertook a 430km journey on skis through the northern and southern parts of the range in March-April. Finishing in Khalmer-ju, the trip took 26 days but the weather precluded travel on 11 of these. Seven passes were crossed and ascents were made of **Khaurdykej (1246m)** and the pre-summit of **Paj-Er (1472m)**, the true summit being technically difficult.

Western China

In July a Russian-led expedition organised by Sergei Kurgin visited the **Mushe Shan** massif in the Kunlun, travelling overland from Novosibirsk via the Takla-Makan desert to the town of Qira. The first ascent was made of **Pik Byezymyannaya (5200m Without Name)**, and the second ascent of **Pik Central (5800m)**.