
PAUL KNOTT

Russia and Central Asia 2002

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As in 2001, the exploratory activities of international climbers were again concentrated almost entirely in the Tien Shan. Meanwhile, there was significant development by climbers from Russia and Central Asia, partly due to the introduction of a 'first ascent' class in competitions. There were also many purely independent endeavours and a plurality of styles from group ascents of hard routes over many days (a style that is awarded its own grade), to a lightweight 'alpine' approach.

The Caucasus

Exploration in this range included winter climbs on the major peaks, continued attempts at hard routes on serious faces, and lower altitude rock routes in outlying areas.

In the Western Caucasus in August Yuri Koshelenko, with Mikhail Astakhov, continued his Open Caucasus project with a trip exploring the potential of the area around **Great Tkhach (2368m)**. They found cliffs with a vertical drop of 250-350m and suggested that although the area has promise, the **Fisht/Pshekhasu** area seems to have greater potential. At around the same time a group of Krasnodar climbers including Nikolai Rudenko and Natalya Grishenko visited the area. They made first ascents of several 3-6 pitch routes of an easy grade, reporting a total length of cliff over 10km.

In the Elbrus Region, several teams sought to climb new routes on the W/NW Face of **Kiukiurtliu (4610m)**. This has been argued to be the hardest rock wall in Russia, and presently has only three routes: the 1974 *Giutashvili Route* on the W Face at 6A, the 1981 *Lukashvili Route* in the centre of the NW Face at 6B and the 2000 *Andreev Route* on the R part of the W Face, also at 6B. Typical difficulties include sustained steepness of 100° combined with unreliable rock, problematic access and poor weather. In 2000, an attempt at repeating the *Andreev Route* ended when Igor Nefedov was killed by rockfall low on the route.

In June Alexander Abramov returned to the mountain for a second attempt on the new 6B route on the NW Face that he first attempted with Sergey Shchepachkov in December 1999. On that occasion, they climbed a quarter of the route before Shchepachkov suffered pulmonary oedema, forcing a retreat. The 2002 attempt, with four other climbers, ended when ominous rockfall was encountered in the same place as in the 2000 Nefedov accident. A Dagestan team climbing early in 2003 was more successful, climbing a new route on the Central W Face between the *Lukashvili* and *Andreev Routes*. The team including

A Grigorev and Konstantin Dorro climbed from 7-26 February, reporting practically all pitches as having difficulties of 5B-6A.

On **Elbrus (5642m)** in late July an international clean-up expedition took place, with over 130 people taking part from cities in Russia and elsewhere. On one day alone an estimated four tonnes of metal cans and broken glass were carried down, in addition to which a large amount of rubbish was burned. From the nearby Adyl-Su Valley, early in 2003, the team of V. Volodin, Andrey Kazakov and G Kochetkov climbed a new route at 6A on the N Face of **Bashkara (4241m)**. They climbed in alpine style, in poor weather conditions, reaching the summit on 26 February.

In the Bezingi area, A. Rakhmanin's team from St Petersburg climbed a new route on the E Face of **Misses-Tau (4427m)** from 14-18 August. On **Koshtan (5151m)**, in December, the team of Ruslan Kochetkov, Ivan Artemov and Sergey Shchepachkov climbed a new 5B route which they named *Samara*. Taking an ice couloir on the N Face slightly to the right of the 1989 *Kolchin Route*, they summited on 15 December after spending three nights on the mountain. This was the second climb of a project to make ascents of Caucasus 5000m peaks in winter.

In February 2003 two teams made ascents of the rock face of **Ak-Kaya**. Kiril Korabelnikov's team climbed a new route left of the *Vasiliev Route*, finding climbing up to 6A. The *Vasiliev Route* itself received an alpine-style ascent by the St. Petersburg team of Valery Shamalo and Alexey Gorbatenkov.

The 1000m NW Face of **Erydag (3925m)/Erydag NNW (3887m)** in Dagestan was the venue for the rock class of the 2002 Russian open championships. The face has straightforward access and a dry climate with minimal build-up of snow and ice in winter. Routes climbed during the championship included the *Goloshchapov*, *Efimov*, *Shchedrin*, *Rodoshkevich*, *Babitskiy*, *Mikhailov* and *Nekrasov*. The 2001 *Voronin Route* received its second ascent by a Ekaterinburg team including Anatoliy Yarusov.

Konstantin Dorro with a team from Makhachkala climbed a new route on the face. The 1100m route took the 'nose' on the R part of the NW Face and was 6th class climbing with VI and A3. It was climbed from 17 July to 3 August using two camps on the wall. During that time there was at least one storm sending waterfalls and rockfall down much of the face. The ascensionists compared the route to the *Voronin Route*, considering it possibly to be harder overall.

Russia and Ukraine

In this mostly non-mountainous area, exploration highlighted surprising climbing potential in lower altitude arctic ranges. In the **Prepolar Urals** two separate teams made first ascents on the E Face of **Sablya (1497m)**. The St Petersburg team, led by Kiril Korabelnikov, climbed the Central NE Face in 20 pitches at 6A from 10-19 April. The team from Perm led by Vyacheslav Puchnin climbed the right side of the NE Face, finding the same grade and length of climb, which they completed in two pushes from 8-11 and 14-19 April. In the **Khibins Mountains** on the arctic Kola Peninsula there are reportedly potential routes up to 5B, and 400m unclimbed N faces on **Petrelliusa**, **Fersmana** and

Takhtarvumchorr amongst other peaks. On the NE Face of **Great Vudyavrchorr (1068m)** near Kirovsk, a St Petersburg team including A Andreev, S Sidorenko and M Pankov climbed a new 11-pitch 5B mixed route, completing it on 23 August after two days of preparation. Previous routes on the E Faces of this peak and its neighbour **Vudyavrchorr Lesser (1068m)** took various ribs at 3A-B. On 1 February 2003 a Moscow team including Ivan Ermakov climbed a new route taking the E Couloir of **Vudyavrchorr Lesser (1068m)** at 2A. In March a ski mountaineering competition was held in the range.

A number of new routes was reported on the cliffs and mountains of the **Crimea**. At the end of January 2003 Alexander Lavrinenko, Vladimir Mogila and Aleksey Zhilin completed the 310m new route *Centre*, 6A VI A3, on the well-known cliff **Foros Kant**. The route takes a central line, between *Semerkiy 5A* and *Left Rhombus 5B*. This followed the tradition in the last few years for Odessa climbers to climb significant new routes over the New Year period. In early 2001 A. Zhilin and team climbed the 400m *Renaissance*, 6A VI A3, on **Treugolnik**, and V.Yarechevskiy and V. Maruchin climbed the 300m *Giperboreya*, 6A 5.11d (F7a) A3+, on **Shaan-Kaya (871m)**.

In early 2002 Odessa climbers put up *Machombo*, on **Morcheka (980m)** (see AJ107). This route received a solo ascent over three days in February by Minsk climber Alexander Maksimen, who also completed a solo ascent of *Centre* (over two days, by Ershov's *Zamanikh* variant). In mid-May **Machombo** was again climbed by Latvians Kristaps Liepins and Janis Kigurs, who completed the route in 24 hours of active climbing time, grading it 6A VI A3, 335m.

On **Chelebi (657m)** in late February Kharkov climbers L. Volkov and A. Larionov climbed a new route on the right side of the S Face, estimating its grade at 5B and giving it the name *Extreme*.

The Pamir (including Chinese Pamir)

There remained little climbing activity in the Pamir other than on its three highest peaks, probably because of security concerns, which remain in some areas of Tadzhikistan. In contrast, there was much activity on **Pik Lenin (7134m)**. In February-March 2002 a team including Dmitry Shparo from Russia and Alexander Gubaev and Alexander Agafonov from Kyrgyzstan made a winter ascent. In the summer season 74 participants from 13 countries took part in a mountain festival. Of these, 41 from 9 countries reached the summit. A further festival is being held in 2003, which is an important anniversary of the first ascents of the Pamir 7000m peaks: the 75th, 70th and 50th for peaks **Lenin, Communism (Ismaila Samanievo)** and **Korzhenevsakaya** respectively.

In an area sometimes referred to as the Chinese Pamir (and otherwise as part of the Kun-Lun), in August-September a team of five led by Andrey Ledebev made a 195km traverse over the **Ulug-Arttag, Kongur-Tag and Muztag-Ata Ranges**. The Ulug-Arttag has seen little attention since Eric Shipton's attempt on its highest peak Chakragil (Karabentertag, 6760m). In the Kongur-Tag the team made the first ascent of the westernmost summit **Pik Aklangm (6995m)**, approaching from Bulunkol to join the upper SE Ridge. The 30-day trip was concluded with a N-S traverse of the 'crater' of **Muztag-Ata (7546m)**, over the **Kuksay Glacier**.

The Pamir Alai

As in 2001, climbers were deterred from visiting much of this area by the unstable security situation. Concerns remain despite the reduced capability of the IMU following the military action in Afghanistan. Conflicting views about the situation have been expressed by local sources.

One of the few reported climbs from 2002 was that of the Central N Face of **Ak-Su (5217m)**, by the Kirov team of Ilyas Tukhvatulin and Pavel Shabalin. A new variant on the left of the 'nose' in the centre of wall was climbed over 16 days, starting at the unusually late date of 20 September. The pair descended via the *Cold Corner*. This was Pavel Shabalin's tenth ascent of the face, with all ten ascents having been by different routes.

In the nearby **Fann Mountains** an alpine rock-climbing championship was held in July-August. Ascents included the 1987 *Arkhilov Route* taking a pillar on the N Face of **Parandas (4250m)** at 5B, the 1966 *Usenov Route* on the N Rib of **Chapdara (5049m)** at 5A, and the W Face of **Zamok (5070m)** at 5A. Also in the Fann Mountains an international expedition took place, during which the first ascent was made of a 5800m summit in the Darvazskiy Range. The team led by Alexander Kirikov from Tomsk summited on 15 August by a route graded at 5A. The peak was named **Druzhby Narodov** ('friendship of peoples').

The Tien Shan

The interest of non-Russian climbers continues to be concentrated in this range, and this is being paralleled by continued development of access and facilities. In May the Irkeshtam Pass was opened between Kyrgyzstan and China, making combined trips easier between Pik Lenin and Muztag Ata. Climbers will also be interested to note that Globalstar satellite phones are now available for rent in Bishkek. On a less encouraging note, the impression of more unsettled weather is reinforced by recent measurements showing rising levels in the Issyk-Kul Lake, reversing the earlier trend towards shrinkage.

During the summer season there were ten ascents of **Pik Pobeda (7439m)** by climbers from Russia and beyond. There was one fatality from cerebral oedema. The mountain received its first ski descent in August by Nikolai Pimkin from St Petersburg, who had climbed the mountain in the company of two friends from Novgorod. Both ascent and descent were by the standard route via **Pik Vazha Pshaveli (6918m)**. In 1997, Americans Tyson Bradley and Dave Braun skied from 6700m on Pobeda's *Abalakov Route*. The team of Nikolay Chervonenko, Dmitry Muravjov, Sergey Samoilov, Alexander Krynin and Ali Nasuh Mahruki (Turkey) attempted the second winter ascent of this route in February 2003, the first having been in 1990 by a very strong team. After an initial push was made to 5650m heavy snowfall prevented further climbing.

In the **Kyrgyz Range**, in February 2003 Kyrgyz climbers Vitaliy Akimov and Nikolai Gutnik climbed a new 5B route on Svobodnaya Korea (4740m).

A number of teams visited the area around **Kyzyl Asker (5842m)** in the **W Kokshaal-Too**, attracted by its potential for fine technical lines on mostly good granite. The Scottish team of Esmond Tressider and Guy Robertson made two attempts on the SE face of **Kyzyl Asker** by its central ice couloir. Both attempts were thwarted by rapidly thawing ice as the sun hit the face. The highest point reached was a little under halfway up the 1300m face, just past the first section

of very steep ice. The climbing was up to 95°, with more of the same above, plus difficult mixed climbing high on the face.

Blair Fyffe and Neal Crampton from the same group repeated the N Face of **Pik Babuchka (5225m)** ('butterfly peak') at the head of the Central Komorova glacier, reporting quality climbing with a crux of Scottish V. The route was first climbed in 1998 by a N American team (see *AJ104*). Following this they made the first ascent of the N Ridge of **Pik 4850m** from the Kyzyl Glacier. This was the second ascent of the peak, which they provisionally named **Pik Sabor** (Cathedral peak). The 1200m route took two days at TD with Scottish V,6, tricky route finding, and a novel bivvy behind a huge flake.

In September a team including Cecilia Buil and Iñaki Cabo climbed a multi-day big wall route *Ak-Shaitan* ('white devil') on the Ochre Walls. The route involves a 500m rock tower at around A3+ 6A 80° followed by an alpine arête. Fixed ropes and some bolts were used on the wall, but nights were spent at its base because of the unsettled weather. The attempt was interrupted for four days during which a metre of snow fell at base camp. After this, a cold clear spell allowed an ascent to the summit.

In October a group from Bishkek and other cities coordinated by Vladimir Biryukov visited the same area, with new route objectives including the SW Face of **Pik 4716m** (often called Petit Dru). An attempt on the face was started on 15 October, but this was curtailed by heavy snowfall that soon confined the team to base camp. Their retreat to Bishkek was something of an epic, in which even Ural trucks became stuck on a number of occasions.

There were also several teams exploring smaller ranges in the same general area. In September a trip guided by Pat Littlejohn, Adrian Nelhams and Vladimir Komissarov first visited the **At-Bashy Range** of limestone peaks immediately north of the Kyzyl Asker group. There are no records of previous climbs in this range. From a base camp at 3800m in the Aksu-lu-tor Valley ascents were made of **Ak-Kalpak (4673m)** at PD and the W Ridge of **Pik Troika** at AD, and a traverse was made of **Berkut (4717m)** at AD+ and **Kenesh (4630m)**. After this they moved to the previously unvisited Ak-bai-tal Glacier, the third to the W of Kyzyl Asker, via a 25km drive up a river bed. From a camp at 4200m they climbed routes including both summits of **Ak-bai-tal Peak (4981m)**, the technical W Ridge of the same peak, and a traverse of the distinctive 'White Fan' (**Belyi Veer, 4757m**). Finally, at the end of the trip, a number of 3-pitch HS-E2 limestone rock routes were climbed in an area christened Nomad Domes.

Approaching from the same direction, a UK team including Mike Rosser, Wayne Gladwin and Sharon Abbott made the first visit to the SW end of the **Khrebet Borkoldoy**, where they climbed **Peaks 4655m** at PD (which they named **Peak Alexander**), **4850m** (named **Ata Peak**) and **4655m** (named **Peak Ibex**).

The similarly unexplored **Khrebet Kyokkiar**, situated by the Chinese border and reached by skirting the At-Bashy Range, was visited by David Gerrard's UK team in August. As acclimatisation, David with Karl Baker climbed several new peaks in the Gory Sarybeles including **4300m**. In the Kyokkiar they made the first ascent of the highest **Peak 4760m** at AD, and of two nearby peaks, both at c. **4600m**. Meanwhile John Cuthbert and Graham Sutton had explored a separate cwm and attempted an ice line on one of the faces. The greatest

potential of the area would appear to be the 500m-1000m limestone walls, which are highly featured and have snow-free descents.

Siberia and the Russian Far East

Here the exciting development highlighted in AJ107 continued both in the previously reported areas such as the Ergaki Massif, and in even less known regions.

The more established **Altai Range** also saw some activity. In the **Katun Range**, early in 2002 **Altai Crown (20th October Peak, 4160m)** received a winter ascent of its NE Face by a team including A. Afanasev. The route was climbed over 15 days at 6A. In the same area on 21 August a speed competition was held on **Belukha East (4506m)** from the 1900m base camp to its S. The winner was Sergey Brodsky with a time of 6 hours 45 minutes. In July members of the Sakharov alpinist movement of Russia including E Maltsev and E Onishchenko made the first ascent of a peak from the Shavlo area of the **Northern Chuisky**, which they named **PL Kapitsy (3500m)**. The ascent was from the NW at 2B.

Several new routes were climbed in the **Western Sayan**. A Krasnoyarsk team including V. Balezin, D. Tsyganov and E. Dmitrienko climbed a new route on the N Face of **Sphinx North (1915m)**, climbing from 23-26 August at 5B/6A. In the Ergaki Massif from 3-6 August, D Morozov and team from Chababinsk climbed a new route taking the left part of the N Face of **Parus (2137m)**.

In the **Eastern Sayan**, Andrey Afanasev and Bair Khandzhapov from Irkutsk gained first place in the climbing championship in the new class of first ascents, with their route on the N Face of the E shoulder of **Kupol (2921m)**. They climbed the route from 18-24 September at 6A. In the same range from 5-8 August a Krasnoyarsk team including S Cherezov made the first ascent of the E Face of **Golova (1970m)** at 5B.

In the **Barguzin Range**, immediately E of Lake Baikal, a new route was climbed on **Argada (2340m)** by P Kolesov, P Tugarin and I Sherstnev from the Buryat Mountaineering Federation. The route took the Central E Face at 5B.

In February 2003 there were two major winter ascents in the **Kodar Range**, one day's train journey NE of Lake Baikal. The Angarsk team of Sergey Kosoturov, Andrey Kustov, Oleg Pedenko, and Denis Veretenin climbed the 600m S Face of **Obrez (2980m)** (aka. **Pioneer**) at 6A-6B. This peak immediately N of **Pik BAM (3075m)** was previously unclimbed in spite of several prior attempts. The team started climbing on the 9th in calm sunny weather at -25C, and after losing many days' climbing to bad weather, finally summited on the 21st. They used one portaledge camp on the face, which is mainly rock. They approached the mountain via 50km of off-road driving by Ural truck followed by five days of load-hauling over the remaining 17km.

In spite of the low temperatures encountered on their winter 2001 expedition, Krasnoyarsk climbers including Valeriy Balezin, Vladimir Arkhipov and Zhenya Dmitrienko returned to **Pik Tsarskiy Tron (2820m)**, also in February, 2003. They climbed a 1000m new route on the SW Face of the main summit, making two camps on the face and mostly using aid to overcome the 6B climbing because of poor rock. They avoided a lengthy approach by using helicopter access.