

Kayindy Valley

Ascent of Peak 5784 and Kirov Peak Attempt. Five days after leaving Wales, we establish basecamp on a medial moraine at 3600 meters in the Kayindi valley. On July 9 John Cousins and I recon Col 4900, a long day mostly in deep snow. On July 12 John and I, having left Alan Hughes and Lisa Holliday at the Kayindi camp, recon up to the col at 5000 meters, encountering soft snow all the way. We spot a good line on Peak 5784, the highest peak in the Kayindi basin. (Al and Lisa subsequently attempt a satellite of Peak 5315, turning back at the top, and Lisa solos a satellite of Peak 5171. They walk out a few days later.) On July 18, we climb Peak 5784 by way of the spur and along the east ridge, finding it about alpine AD, with some mixed ground halfway up and a short but exciting ice pitch through some seracs. Otherwise, a lot of deep, loose snow lying on ice and some weaving in and out of double cornices on the final ridge. The next day we move our camp to the Terekti Valley for our attempt on Kirov. On July 21, we set off with five days' food. We get to the junction with the main southwest ridge via a couple of ice pitches and a lot of exhausting, unconsolidated snow before the weather closes in. We move along the ridge in wind, snow and poor visibility, at first on hard ice for several ropelengths on the Chinese side, moving together with icescrew runners, then on the west, or Kyrghiz side, to stay on top of the cornices. We pitch the fly on a flat section at about 5300 meters, where bad weather pins us for a day. On July 24 we set out with one light sack between us, conscious that this will be our only chance of reaching the summit. Long traverses on steep slopes over huge drops down the northwest face, and pockets of soft slab alternating with the usual bottomless melt-freeze crystals characterize the climbing. We give the cornice edges a wide berth — or so we think, until on one flat section, a place where we would confidently have pitched a tent, a huge segment 10 meters deep and 50 meters long suddenly breaks away. John has just taken over breaking trail; I plod along behind. The fracture line is between my feet, though John is on terra firma and the rope is tight. I dangle for a moment from my ice axe, thrust instinctively into the snow; then, amazingly, a small section of the cornice which has failed to break off swings back like a rat trap to imprison me from the waist down. But for the pressure on my legs, it would be almost comic. I am carrying the shovel in the sack on my back so, while John anchors the rope downslope, I start digging. It takes 10 minutes to release myself. After six more hours of climbing we turn back because of the weather and retreat the next day in a storm of snow, wind and swirling spindrift.

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