

Vorobyov on August 6 in sunny weather, Peak of Four on August 9 in fair weather, Korzhenevskaya on August 16 in medium to high winds and poor visibility after two nights at 6300 meters, and Communism on August 25 in clear weather after the storm. It was Serguei's fifth successful ascent of Peak Communism.

One Belgian died on the descent of Peak of Four a day prior to our ascent. Two Iranians died on Peak Communism, one near the top during the descent, the second, of over-exposure, lack of food and drink. A rescue team of six was sent by Vladimir Moshkow, Director of Navruz, the international alpinist camp on the Moskvin Glacier. Serguei used to be a member of the Soviet rescue team and thinks the qualifications for team members these days is suspect and that they are not properly compensated. The rescuers were supposed to have a helicopter drop of supplies, which never happened. Their tents were broken by high winds. Fortunately, they were able to survive the storm and return with the one surviving Iranian climber.

Based on six different altimeter readings, we believe that the Moskvin Base Camp is actually 4400 meters, not 4200 meters. Helicopters are not allowed to land higher than the latter.

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## KYRGYZSTAN

### PAMIR-ALAI MOUNTAINS

*Schurovkovo Glacier, Various Ascents.* It was reported that Hugh Nicholson, Peter Crampton, Alison Douglass, Peter Garlick and Paul Hersey (NZ) traveled to the Schurovkovo Glacier\* in Kyrgyzstan in July and August. During their stay they made ascents of Harturtay (5127 m), Muz-Tash (5040 m), Pic 4900 m, and Pic 4720 m. (*New Zealand Alpine Journal* 1996)

\*It is unclear where this glacier or these peaks lie. The team made their approach from Vahrook, traditional jumping-off point for the Laylak and Karavshin valleys. The report could mean the climbs took place in one of these valleys.

### Laylak Valley

*Pik Alexander Blok, Stairway to Hell.* In August, we made an ascent of a Russian 6B route on Pik Alexander Blok (5239 m). We camped under the formation and examined the blank, southwest face. Disappearing in a granite ocean, a thin scar marked the route. As we bent our heads back we spotted a smudge against the right skyline: rescuers, carrying a climber with a broken leg. They were one pitch from the top; it took them half a day to get down to where we were standing. The injured man silently smoked; with the other hand he explained the start of the route to us. He looked OK. Twelve men took him on their shoulders and disappeared among the snow bulges of the glacier. Later we would learn he almost died.

Positively tuned, in an exultant mood, we set out. Ten pounds heavier I was crawling around in my slippers on wet, greasy edges looking for a belay. Russian belays are marked by a scrap of white, rotten webbing. They call it "strachovka," which means something like "take care, man!" I did.

The day ranneth over. Too fast. We only managed five pitches, though we weren't climbing slow. Second day, same scenario. The only difference was that we had to hook. The dream of an all-free ascent dissolved as we looked up the perfectly compact wall with only invisible, shal-

low, drilled holes in it. I couldn't believe how slow we were going as I belayed my partner for long, long stretches.

All around the world the calendars showed the start to a new day, but to us it was just one long continuation. Sore fingers were on fire from the sharp granite. It looked like it had to be over at every moment. Each pitch seemed to be the last. But it took eight more pitches on the final day before we could go no higher. After four days linked up into one, we had completed a great climb. We called it *Stairway to Hell* (it wasn't really evil, but it was strenuous, grueling and awkward) and rated it 5.12 A3, since the Russian "blind" rating tells you nothing. The remaining two-day journey to base camp was only a sweet dream, a dream that eventually became reality.

FILIP SILHAN, *Czech Republic*

*Rocky Ak-Su, Various Ascents.* It was reported that this peak in the Laylak Valley was climbed from July 12 to August 6, 1995. The north summit is rocky (Rocky Ak-Su, 5217 m), and the principal summit in back is extremely snowy (Snowy Ak-Su, 5355 m). The north face is the highest, and without doubt the most difficult of the Turkestan chain. A. Plyanin and A. Ruchkin repeated the Mashnikov route (third ascent) and also the Chaplinsky route (second ascent). (*GHM* 1995-1996).

*Alexander Blok Peak, West Face.* It was reported that a big team from Central Siberia that included A. Bekasov, V. Kokhanov, P. Kuznetsov, K. Obednin, S. Pushkarev and S. Sagan made a new route up the very impressive face of Alexander Blok Peak (5229 m), a 1000-meter rock wall that is home to several demanding mixed free and aid routes. Further details are lacking. (*High Mountain Sports* 165)

## Karavshin Region

*Ak-Su and Kara-Su Valleys, Various Attempts and Ascents.* As part of our Kyrgyzstan itinerary, Brady Van Matre and I traveled to the Karavshin region of the Pamir Alai mountains in early September and made camp in the Ak-Su valley. (There are many Ak-Su, or "Pure Water," valleys in Kyrgyzstan; our base camp in the Ak-Su valley of the Karavshin region is not to be confused with the Ak-Su valley in the Laylak valley two valleys to the west.) We had hooked up with a German climber, Matthais Engelen, who joined us on our first foray, a climb up a 1,000-foot granite pillar at the base of the magnificent Slessova Peak. At the top of the first pitch Brady called down that he had clipped in to two shiny Simond bolts. The climb continued up fun cracks for six or seven pitches of moderate (5.8-5.9) climbing that varied from incipient to sphincter-tighteningly wide (we had only two number four Camalots). I got my head wedged in one womb-like feature as I tried to chimney when I should have thrutched. We made the top by late afternoon, and hid our dislike of lycra on the way down with our gratitude for the convenience (if not the unnecessary placements) of the anchors.

After a rest day we began our approach into the neighboring Kara-Su valley for an attempt at Piramidalni, at 5509 meters the highest peak in the area. We had hoped to climb the mountain via the east ridge, but as the serac fall thundered its way to the valley floor during the night we switched our objective to the more benign west ridge. The next day we began early, only to top out on what we had thought would take us to the top by noon. To our dismay we were on a sucker ridge, and further vertical progress would have necessitated far more work than we had