



The lower section of the north face of Koskulak (7,028m) seen from the lower Kalaxong Glacier. The first section of the new route climbed by the St. Petersburg team is marked. *Alexey Gorbatenkov*



The upper north face of Koskulak (7,028m), seen from the south ridge of Muztagh Ata: (1) The upper section of the northeast ridge (Moscow Aviation Institute expedition, August 2005), (2) north face (St. Petersburg team, August 2005), (3) west ridge (Moscow expedition, August 2005). *Alexey Gorbatenkov*

*Koskulak (7,028m), first and second ascents by the west ridge and third ascent by the north face.* Koskulak is situated in the Muztagh Ata Range and can be reached by the same route and logistics as Muztagh Ata itself. Until 2005 it remained unclimbed, neglected as other lower-altitude neighbors of Muztagh Ata and Kongur have been. The easiest route to the summit is quite obvious and does not require technical skills.

During the summer several expeditions attempted the mountain. The first to summit were Russians Leonid Fishkis, Dmitry Komarov and Alexandr Novik, who reached the top on August 10 via the west ridge. Two days later their route was repeated by seven members of another Russian expedition, from the Moscow Aviation Institute (they climb mountains as well as make airplanes).

At the same time two Russian climbers, Valery Shamalo and I from St. Petersburg, were attempting a more difficult route on the north face, from the Kalaxong glacier. This route had three distinct sections: an initial glacier and snow slopes; a rock barrier; steep snow slopes, followed by a large cornice and summit plateau. It was obvious that the main technical difficulties would be found on the rock barrier, but it was not clear from below how or even if the capping cornice could be climbed.

Above base camp and the Kalaxong Glacier was a long, steep slope of deep snow. Progress was strenuous and slow, requiring physical exertion rather than tech-

nical skills. We spent two nights out on this section, sheltering in crevasses. Above this slope lay the rock barrier, with an angle varying from 60-90°.

The main difficulties on the barrier were caused by thin ice or snow over rock, which made the climbing insecure and finding good belays difficult. We did not find any good bivouac sites in this section and had to make three consecutive sitting bivouacs. This section could be climbed faster, but we were not properly acclimatized and also had to haul the leader's rucksack. The barrier finished with steep snow slopes and scattered rock outcrops; here we established our last camp before the summit push. It was also our first comfortable night.

On our summit day, August 17, we had more strenuous deep snow before reaching the cornice, ascending only 100m per hour. The cornice was the last challenge. It was not possible to climb it with normal ice equipment, as the snow couldn't hold the weight of a climber, so we resorted to aid-climbing it using two snow anchors with ice gear. The cornice took two hours to complete, but from its top the summit was just 300m across a large snow plateau, which we crossed in an hour.

Although there may be other possible routes on the north face, we felt ours was the most logical and direct. We were also lucky with the weather. The nights were not very cold, which allowed us to be relatively comfortable during our sitting bivouacs.

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*Yume Muztagh, first ascent.* At 11:05 a.m. on August 1 all four members of our expedition succeeded in making the first ascent of an unnamed 6,345m peak in the Kun Lun Mountains. Although our average age was 61, all participated in every aspect of the climb, including load carrying, reconnaissance, and route selection. We did not employ local porters, horses, donkeys, or camels. Moreover, we received no outside financial and material support; the expedition, including a reconnaissance trip in 2004, was financed solely by its members. The party comprised a group of friends who have climbed together for decades and are well aware of each other's abilities and limitations.

The Xinjiang-Tibet Highway runs southeast from Kashgar along the southwestern edge of the Taklimakan Desert. At Yecheng the road splits, with the Highway running south, then southeast into the Lingzi Thang Plains, while a left branch continues east along the edge of the desert. We drove along the Highway for ca. 530m and made our base camp at one of the truck stops at Dahongliutan. Our proposed virgin peak was located 16km northeast of this point at N 35° 41'; E 79° 41' [These mountains are often referred to as the Aksai Chin—Ed.]. Our peak, the highest among a group of 6,000m mountains, lay at the end of a broad valley that curves towards the southeast. It is not visible from the road.

Because of the rich history and romance associated with the Silk Road, we were interested in the Kun Lun Mountains, rather than the better known Himalaya or Karakoram. A reconnaissance team in 2004 chose the mountain for its easy approach and, out of consideration for our ages, lack of great technical difficulty. So it was that on July 21, 2005, I (66) as leader, Hiromitsu Izutani (61), Toshikazu Kurimoto (56), and Eizo Maeda (61) arrived at Dahongliutan (4,265m). Although basic and without toilet facilities, the truck stop provided us with spacious and luxurious living quarters (compared to a tent), hot water, and a warm environment for recovery.

Conditions were such that we were able to drive eight kilometers across the desert and