



Andy Libecki high on the Alperien Route on the northwest face of Asan (4,230m). Mike Libecki

my old skills, learned when I was living in Yosemite. Nothing better than being 25m above the belay, walking a fully spread cam that is probably only good enough to hold itself. Although my brother had jumared before, he'd never had to deal alone with logistics. I led all the pitches; he belayed, cleaned, and dealt with hauling issues for the first time.

On two pitches we found ancient rivets and remnants that could have been hemp rope. Once we got higher, we traversed left to splitters. From this point the climb appeared to be on untouched stone. There was some basic A2 coral digging, but two of the pitches were among the best 5.11s I have experienced. We fixed six pitches, then took a few rest days through rainy weather. We still had around 450m to go to the top.

We started just before dawn, taking only one liter of water each. After 20 hours we found a nice ledge, where we each ate two inches of summer sausage, curled up in fetal positions, and shivered like cartoon characters until dawn. We had no bivouac gear, and the temperature was below 0°C. Next day we made the summit a few hours after the sun reached us. When we reached the top, where we took pictures in our Year of the Dog masks, we had been gone 35 hours from our high point.

It was clear that trying to rappel the route would be too risky. Ropes would inevitably get stuck and pull loose flakes onto us. Late that night, 15 hours after we had reached the top, we found ourselves in a gully that led to the valley floor. From the summit we'd made 17 new rappel stations down an untouched section of the wall on the side of the mountain opposite to that we'd climbed. I was in a paranoid state for the entire time. I knew if we got our ropes stuck, we were basically fucked. It was Russian Roulette every time we pulled the ropes. From our high point it had taken us 50 hours to summit and get down. Our climb had 21 pitches and rated 5.11 A2.

MIKE LIBECKI, AAC

Editor's note: the line climbed by the Libecki brothers appears to follow the classic 1986 Alperien Route (Russian 5B) on the right pillar of the northwest face. Above half-height, where the original route continues directly up to the crest of the southwest ridge, the pair moved left onto the wall and climbed a variant between the Alperien and the 1988 Timofeev Route, gaining the southwest ridge nearer the summit.

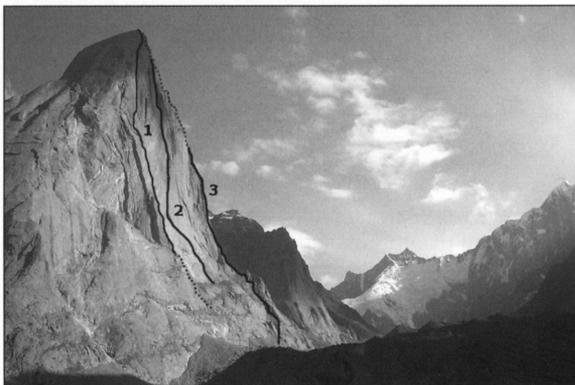
Kara-su valley, Asan, northwest face, The Hammer and Sickle and a free ascent of an existing aid line. During July and August, a team of four Australian climbers, Steve Anderton, Julian Bell, David Gliddon and Kent Jensen, spent 40 days living and climbing on the huge northwest face of Asan (4,230m). While climbing lines on the wall, we raised money for the charity Project Dare. Members of the public pledged cash, based on the number of hours the team spent

on the wall. For the duration of our climbing period we were supported by three Australian climbers and two locals, who tirelessly brought food and water to a camp a few pitches up the face.

The approach, in an ex-Soviet truck via the dusty town of Osh, was incredibly taxing. The team faced endless roadblocks by gun-toting soldiers demanding bribes. These ranged from money to vodka and cigarettes. A washed out road extended the approach and caused the team to spend three days on horseback before arriving at base camp. However, a clever maneuver by an interpreter avoided the \$10 per day protection fee administered by a wandering contingent from the Kyrgyz army.

The four of us initially summited the wall in a relaxed style, taking 16 days and using plenty of fixed rope. Our climb was rated A3+ 5.10+ and we established a rappel route with the aim of free climbing and filming the line. To our surprise, it was not an original route, as we discovered an array of decrepit Soviet hardware [apart from a more direct start and a couple of variation pitches along the way, the line was the same as the 1986 Pogorelov Route, with the 1986 Moros finish, 6A—Ed.]. The climb featured excellent bivouac ledges every 200m, with each able to accommodate at least five people. Portaledges were only used for comfort and convenience.

After a few days' rest at our advanced base camp on a vast, comfortable ledge at 150m, we began free climbing and filming the route. To our surprise we managed to free most pitches first try. The climbing was of excellent quality, with soaring cracks and plentiful features. The solid pinkish granite sucked up natural gear and only nine protection bolts were used during the entire climb. After nine or so pitches the angle increased, giving six steep, wildly exposed pitches of 5.11+ crack and face climbing. After a rest at the luxurious Camp 4, we traversed right and climbed another 10 or so pitches of mainly 5.10-5.11 to the summit.



The ca 900m northwest face of Asan (4,230m) seen from Yellow Wall. On the right is the highest peak in the region, Pik Piramidalniy (5,509m). Marked are the three routes climbed by visiting parties in 2006. (1) A combination of the 1986 Pogorelov Route and 1986 Moros finish climbed free at 5.11d by an Australian team. (2) The Hammer and Sickle (VII A4 5.11, Bell-Gliddon). (3) The 1986 Alperien Route (5B) with a variation finish climbed by the Libeck brothers. *Dave Gliddon*



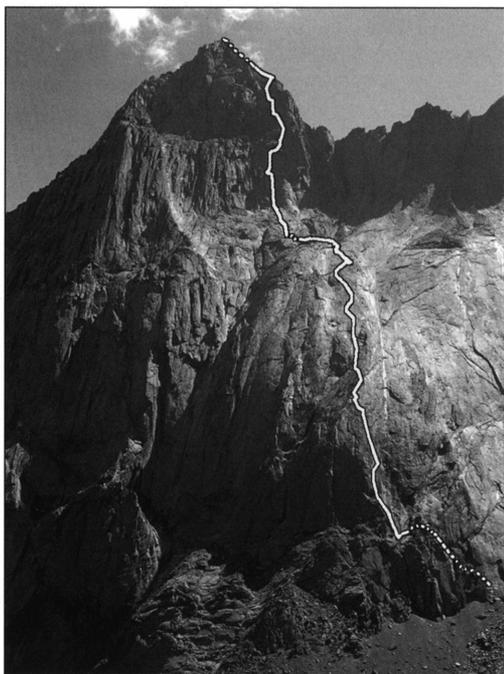
Steve Anderton free climbing pitch 10 (5.11b) of the 1986 Pogorelov Route on the northwest face of Asan. This is the second pitch above Camp 3 on top of the pillar. *Dave Gliddon*

The resulting climb is a superb 25-pitch (many 60m in length) line at 5.11d. The quality is excellent, the rock good and the bolted belays provide a continuous rappel line. With fantastic bivouac ledges and a sustained level of difficulty, this is surely one of the best, moderate, big wall free routes in the world. Oh, and did I mention that it hardly rained and the temperature hovered around 25°C?

Later, over eight long days, Julian Bell and David Gliddon climbed a steeper line on the face to the right. The Hammer and Sickie (VII A4 5.11) was completed in capsule style, featured a 30m pendulum, and had two huge roofs, including a 70m A3+ arch that I felt was the greatest pitch of my life. The route featured substantial sections of hooking and copperheading up a very steep section of the wall [the route uses a few of the lower pitches of the 1988 6B Russiaev Route, before a pendulum left leads to the left slanting arch. Higher, it rejoins the Russiaev for two more pitches. Where the original route swings left, a direct line is followed to the summit ridge]. The route gave around 1,300m of climbing and a small video of the ascent can be found on YouTube at: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=SUWSx2x9FgE>

Our base camp manager, Glen Foley, and Kyrgyz climber “crazy” Alex climbed a line up Yellow Wall on the opposite side of the valley. Over three days they retrieved bullet-riddled gear and a portaledge abandoned by the Caldwell-Dickey-Rodden-Smith party in 2000, when they were kidnapped. In the last week of the expedition Steve Anderton went back to the summit of Asan with “crazy” Alex, and on our 40th day jumped from the top in a wingsuit.

JULIAN BELL, *Australia*



The line of the new Polish route, Czarna Wolga (29 roped pitches and ca 1,700m of climbing, 7a), on the northwest face of Kotina (4,521m), Kara-su valley. *Jan Kuczera*

Kara-su valley, Kotina, northwest face, Czarna Wolga. There are many problems to overcome if you go to the Karavshin. It's possible to hire an agent to prepare everything, but we couldn't, as we didn't have the money. Nevertheless, at the beginning of August we reached the Kara-su, the western of the region's two main valleys. The five climbers in our group split into two teams: Łukasz Depta and Wojciech Kozub as one and Artur Magiera, Jerzy Stefa ski, and I as the other. Artur, though, was ill at the start of the trip and didn't take part in the initial climbing.

To get the feel of the rock, we first chose the Diagonal Route, the most logical line up the Yellow Wall (3,800m). We climbed this 500m line at 6a+, but moved simultaneously up half of it because of the low level of difficulty. Artur and Wojciech later also climbed this line.

Next Jerzy and I climbed the Timofeev route on the 900m northwest