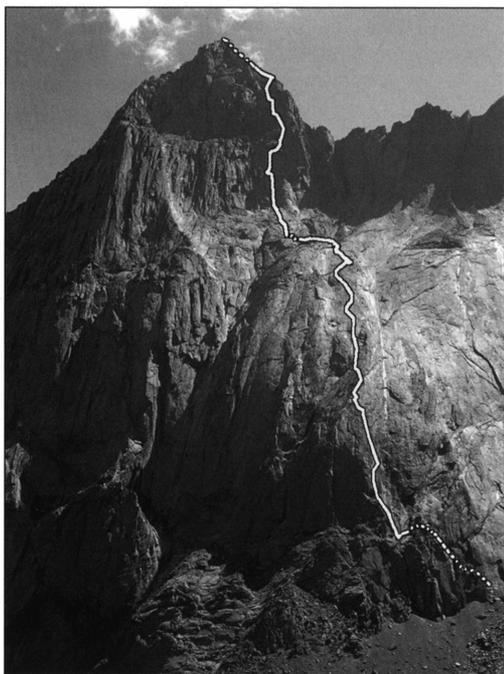


The resulting climb is a superb 25-pitch (many 60m in length) line at 5.11d. The quality is excellent, the rock good and the bolted belays provide a continuous rappel line. With fantastic bivouac ledges and a sustained level of difficulty, this is surely one of the best, moderate, big wall free routes 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



On the first ascent of Czarna Wolga (ca 1,700m of climbing, 7a) on the northwest face of Kotina (4,521m). *Jan Kuczera*

face of Asan (4,230m). This route was established in 1988 at Russian 6B, but it subsequently became popular and was downgraded to 6A. Because our ropes were only 50m long, we had problems on some pitches, which were up to 60m long. The difficulties were 7a and A3, on solid rock except in the upper section, which was friable and wet. We made two uncomfortable bivouacs and arrived on the summit of Asan during our third day, having made the ascent in alpine style.

Our next objective was the beautiful, huge northwest face of Kotina (4,521m). We first rested for six days in order to heal finger wounds, then Artur, Jerzy, and I set off alpine style. We estimated that it would take us three days to climb the face, but in fact we completed it in half that time. The entire route gave nice climbing on solid rock. Up to two-thirds height the face offered mainly slab climbing, up to 6a, but the line through the steeper headwall above followed cracks and corners, which we found harder and graded 7a. We used mostly nuts, Friends, and occasional pitons and placed no bolts. After one-and-a-half days we were on the summit. However, an unpleasant descent was still to come. After eight hours of rappelling, downclimbing, and walking to the east, we arrived in the Ak-su valley, from where it was another three hours walk back to our base camp. We finally arrived at our tents at midnight. We named our route Czarna Wolga (1,500m of climbing plus 200m up the summit ridge, 29 pitches all climbed on sight, 7a). The name roughly translates as “Black Volga,” in reference to the infamous Soviet car associated with the KGB.

Artur, Jerzy, and I now wanted to try the awesome west face of Pik 4,810m. Our plan was to repeat the Rusayew route, graded Russian 6A, but we weren’t prepared for the 10-15m ice wall that guarded access to the foot of the face; without ice gear we were unable to set foot on the wall. Meanwhile, the other two members of our team, Łukasz and Wojciech, completed a new route on a nameless peak opposite Asan [see report below].

It was now September, and temperatures were getting lower and the wind stronger. We made two other attempts, one on Asan and the second on Yellow Wall, but due to poor weather, tactical mistakes, and a certain lack of motivation, we decided to go home.

*JAN KUCZERA, Poland*

*Kara-su valley, nameless tower, Opposite to Asan.* Our plan was to repeat existing routes but also climb new ones in the Kara-su valley. For our new route we chose the east face of the nameless tower directly opposite Asan; its altitude is ca 4,000m. We met a Kyrgyzstan climber named Alexiej who told us this yellow granite wall was unclimbed. Stable sunny weather helped us achieve our goal.

We scoped the face from the ground and saw a possible line up a system of corners and chimneys in the central section of the face. We sketched topographic details, to make route-