

KYRGYZSKY ALATAU

ALA ARCHA NATIONAL PARK

Peak Free Korea, Variation. Two summits caught Bernard's and my attention: Mt. Korona (4860m) and Mt. Svobodnaya Korea (4740m). The first one is a granite tower surrounded by a vast glacier. Many difficult lines remain untouched, while various rock routes of 20 to 30 pitches in length have already been climbed. Mt. Svobodnaya Korea (a.k.a. Free Korea Peak) has a very impressive north face with an overhanging wall. As we had no information on the area, we decided to explore the northeast spur of Mt. Svobodnaya Korea. The north face has a magnificent spur that rises to the west summit of the mountain. An 1100-meter couloir, the Lowe Route, which has never been skied before, runs parallel to this spur. The lower part of the spur has many steep ice or mixed possibilities that finish high on the spur. After one night spent in a bivouac that reminded us of the golden age of Soviet alpinism, we started to move early in the morning of July 7, 1996. That night we approached via the Ak-Sai glacier to the bottom of the face on foot. After crossing a bergschrund, we went up the first slopes without any troubles. To be as light as possible, we brought a nine-millimeter rope, four screws and three pitons. The climb rapidly became engaging in the vertical ice pitch. I joined the spur after ten hours of intense climbing. We stopped for a while in the sun, then continued on easier terrain on the spur. Unfortunately, our enthusiasm was damped by huge quantities of new snow that reached my belly, making progress impossible and dangerous. We decided to descend by the Lowe route. Hours later we finally arrived on the glacier. The northeast slopes were avalanching all day long, and Andrei, who had watched our progress from the hut, took us in his arms and gave us tchai, the local sausage, upon our arrival.

The north face of Mt. Svobodnaya Korea can be easily compared to Les Droites in the Argentiére basin in the Alps. I can now better imagine what went on in the heads of the first climbers in the Alps.

ALAN DELIZEE, *France*

Box Peak, New Route. In July, Misha Michailava, Andrei Molatov, Dmitry Jumakov, Valerie Fedem and Alexandar Chernov ascended a new route (5B) on the west face of Box Peak in the Ak Sai region. At 11 rope lengths, it is not the longest route in the area, but one of many possible new routes. Most climbers have chosen to climb only the traditional routes in the area, or if determined to put up a new route, choose the longer lines. This climb is an example of the many shorter unclimbed routes still to be done.

The entire climb took a total of four days. The first day was spent ascending two pitches to a cornice, which was overcome by drilling a small hole in the face, then standing on a sky hook (the crux of the climb). On the second day four more pitches were climbed, including another aid pitch to overcome a small cornice; a 30-meter slightly overhanging section was also aided cleanly. Four more pitches were climbed on the third day. The final day involved two more difficult pitches, followed by a few rope lengths of low angle dirt and ice. The descent was completed on the same day. There were comfortable belay and bivy ledges for the entire route. Many other routes remain unclimbed in the Ak Sai Valley. For 1998 the same climbers hope to ascend Peak Free Korea, which still has unclimbed routes of up to 20 rope lengths left.

GARTH WILLIS, *The Bishkek Bohemians*