

KAZAKHSTAN

TIEN SHAN

Peak Pobeda, Zhuravleva Route. First place in the High Altitude Class of the Russian Climbing Competitions was taken by the team “Sever” from Severod (S. Penzov, leader, M. Ishtyn, M. Strelkov) who climbed on Peak Pobeda (7439m) by the 1990 Zhuravleva route on the northeastern buttress. It was the second ascent of the route. The snow was very deep and unconsolidated. They worked one section of the route for 14 hours. The remains of a short letter from the V. Bezzubkin group (1981) were found on the summit. The climbers ascended the route from August 19-21 in 34 hours.

VLADIMIR SHATAEV, *Russian Mountaineering Federation*

Peak Pobeda, Ski Descent, Attempt. “Mt. Victory” (pronounced po-byeh-da in Russian) was the last major peak in the Soviet Union to be scaled, and despite the popularity of skiing in the adjacent Pamirs, it still remains unskied in its entirety. Dave Braun, Julie Faure, Pete Keane and I attempted to ski it in August, but were repulsed by a common but frustrating cause in Asian mountaineering: Our stoves became terminally clogged by the “benzene” we were burning. We were forced to turn back despite reasonable weather and a healthy cache of food and “fuel,” leaving the upper 700 meters of the mountain still to be carved.

We acclimatized on the incomparably majestic marble and ice pyramid of Khan Tengri (6995m), “the Lord of the Spirits.” After a pleasant recovery at Inylchek Base Camp, where sauna and fresh food are provided by ITMC-Tien Shan Mountain Service, we flew to the base of the 10,500-foot Abalakov Ridge. The line of first ascent in 1956, this series of prows and snow faces leads directly to the broad summit, which is also the Chinese frontier. Due to avalanche danger below 18,000 feet, however, the route is now rarely ascended. Most parties today climb Pobeda via its west ridge (the Dikey Pass Route).

We found melt-freeze and powder snow surfaces on the lower ridge, which made for smooth climbing and skiing. However, at the sight of the 1960 avalanche disaster that caught 29 climbers and killed ten, we found that a series of huge avalanches had recently fallen. Fracture lines up to four feet high and 500 feet wide loomed above shimmering bed surfaces. Wide crevasses were choked with debris. Despite the intimidating presence of the fractures, we took it as a good sign that the stress had been released from the slope. Until the next storm we’d be relatively safe scaling the bed surfaces. These provided challenging skiing, especially where they fall away at 45-50°. Dave and I hop-turned, leaving no trace, and brought up additional supplies while Julie and Pete negotiated a nasty crevasse field on the snow plateau.

The next day we all carried to 19,000 feet and cached below a 60° crest, the gateway to a 1,000-foot section of low-angle, protruding ridgeline. Pete declined to posthole any farther in the rotten snowpack, and Julie descended with him to try the Dikey Pass Route. After skiing from 19,000, Braun and I climbed past our cache, enjoying honeycombed ice, and established high camp at 20,000 feet. Dropping back for our cache the next day we skied the 60° step on a snowy ramp.

Dave and I cramponed up to 22,000 feet on August 20, and I linked turns on wildly variable saastrugi/alpine ice while Dave downclimbed with mild AMS. We intended to hydrate and rest for a summit push the following day, but the stove rendered only a pitiful candle-power flame. Survival without a way to melt snow is, we realized, impossible, so we descended on skis, proud at least to have gotten away with free-heel carving on 8,000 feet of the northernmost 7000er in the world. Meanwhile, Julie and Pete reached a similar height on the west ridge before their stove *simultaneously* failed.

TYSON BRADLEY