

Peak Nazarbaev, Mass Ascent. On July 6, our party of about 300 made the first ascent of Peak Nazarbaev (4376m) in the Zailiysky Alatau range above the city of Almaty. Peak Nazarbaev had not been climbed because it had not existed prior to July 6, when it was renamed after Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbaev on the occasion of his birthday. The previous name had been Peak Komsomola (Peak of the Communist Youth League).

The Kazakhstani Army Sports Club provided excellent support for the climb. The chairlift began before dawn to carry everyone up to 3100 meters. It was just as well that only about 300 of the expected 1,500 climbers appeared, because it took the single-chair chairlift a while to get everyone up. Five minutes up the trail from the top of the chairlift, doctors had set up a M.A.S.H.-like medical tent and several tables to check each participant's pulse and blood pressure. After getting medical clearance, everyone set off up the glacier.

For the first few miles, a hundred helmeted soldiers from the Kazakhstani Army led the way. The route was hard to miss because men in bright orange coveralls were posted every 200 feet to offer assistance. For the last 150 meters below the summit, members of the recently returned Kazakhstani Everest expedition had fixed two sets of ropes to allow for travel in each direction. Except for a bottleneck at the bottom of the ropes, the system worked well and nearly everyone reached the top. Given the right conditions, both meteorological and political, many other first ascent possibilities (perhaps Peaks Lenin and Communism) in the former Soviet Union await.

STEVE BAIN

SIBERIA

ALTAI MOUNTAINS

NORTHERN CHUISKY RANGE

Maashey, Northwest Wall, Bydonov Route. The Rubtsov Mountain Club (D. Sergeev, leader, E. Vinnikov, A. Drakie) made an ascent of Maashey (4173m) via the P. Bydonov route on the northwest wall from July 31-August 1 in 24 hours of climbing. The ascent earned them sixth place in the Russian Mountaineering Championships.

VLADIMIR SHATAEV, *Russian Mountaineering Federation*

Maashey Valley, Various Ascents. The Altai mountains straddle the border area of Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China. Much of the mountaineering interest in the range lies within Russia—broadly speaking, in southwest Siberia, or more precisely in the Altai Republic. The Siberian Altai is probably best known for the Katun Range, and in particular the Ak-Kem wall of Bielukha (4506m). This area has been visited by a number of British parties (including the author's in 1990); it was also, for a number of years, the site of one of the established base camps characteristic of the Russian mountaineering scene.

Some 80 kilometers east-northeast of Bielukha lies the Northern Chuisky Range. This range, like the Katun Range, had a Russian camp for many years in the Ak-Tru valley. The Ak-Tru camp has easier access than the Ak-Kem, and perhaps for this reason remains very popular with local climbers. Despite this, it has still received little attention from foreign parties. Curiously, it lies somewhat east of the highest part of the range and, characteristically, other areas have received much less attention from mountaineers despite being well frequented by trekking parties.

The only significant foreign climbing team was a British school party organized by Leslie Fox, then of Trent College, in 1990. From a base in the Shavla valley, at the western end of the range, ascents were made of a number of peaks, of which Krasavitsa (3700m) was probably the most impressive.

The Maashey Valley is central to the Northern Chuisky Range, and at its head lie the highest and most glaciated peaks of the range. The main peaks were climbed in the 1960s-70s, but generally only by their easiest routes. Prior to our trip there had been virtually no new route activity since. Visits by non-Russians had been few, and of these the only climbing teams were one from Poland in 1994 and one from Hungary in 1996. The highest peak both in this valley and in either of the Chuisky massifs is Maashey (4177m). This has an extensive north face; the only existing recorded route on it is the Northwest Face (Russian 5B, ~TD+). Reports of considerable new route potential on this extensive face were instrumental in the choice of location for this expedition.

Immediately east of peak Maashey lies the smaller, but arguably more photogenic, Karagem (3972m). Its north face is broken by a series of five rock ribs (although later in the trip these became almost completely snowed over). Identifying the existing routes on this face proved problematic. The rock on Karagem, as elsewhere, is a dark brown sedimentary rock. This and other problems such as the discontinuities in the ribs and the threat of seracs in the gullies may make the routes both harder and more objectively dangerous than they appear. In addition, the easiest descent (given the impassable state in which we found the Tamma Pass) appears to be the north face of Peak Bars, which calls for reasonable snow/ice conditions.

During our stay we met a number of Russian trekkers who came to see the glacier, to visit the two mountain lakes above it to the west, and sometimes to cross to the Shavla valley. There was also a German party, guided by Sergei Kurgin and his team, that spent several days in our base camp area. The only climbers were Andrei Kolesnikov and Kostya Vinnikov from Barnaul, who completed a traverse from Kurkurek round to Maashey. This traverse had been achieved before, by Valery Karpenko in May 1997, and is a logical expedition given that the main ridge is generally easy and safe in comparison to the ascents on the north wall.

When Justin Canny (U.S.), Michael Doyle (U.K.), Bili Fischelis (U.S.), and I visited the Maashey Valley from July 16-August 1, we were the first British or American climbing teams to do so. Despite boasting the most impressive north wall in the Altai outside of the Bielukha region, the valley remains known to relatively few climbers even inside Russia. Success came early with two new routes on the north side of Maashey (4177m), the highest peak in the Chuisky massifs, though both produced 23-hour epics due to their length and difficulty of access. The next trip out was curtailed by a prolonged storm that blew avalanche-prone snow onto many slopes, but achieved ascents of peaks Tamma (3800m) and Burevestnik (3700m). Finally, ascents of Ak-Tru (4044m) and Kurkurek (3982m) confirmed that the snow conditions still precluded routes on the north face of Karagem (3972m), a major remaining objective.

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TIBET

Self-Sufficient Crossing of the Tibetan Plateau, and Ascents of Zangser-Kangri and Peak ca.6400m. From June 12-August 1, Frank Kauper and Stefan Simmerer made a south-north crossing of the Tschang-Tang (1000 kilometers, on foot and unsupported), making two first ascents en route: Zangser-Kangri (6640 meters, N 34° 23' 29"7", E 85° 51' 18"4") via the south-east ridge, July 4-5, and Peak ca. 6400 meters (N 34° 27"7", E 85° 56"7") on July 6. A full