

border crossings, military bribes, food poisoning and heated dealings with the Tadjik donkey men, we finally arrived at Base Camp beneath the towering walls of the Ak-Su Valley. Already our three week trip to these stunning spires had been cut back to two due to the red tape “approach;” I then spent another week sprawled in my tent, delirious with a high fever and painful cough. This left just one week in alpine rock paradise!

While I was sick, Brian and Kevin climbed one of the smaller towers, Pyramid du Pamir, by its 300-meter west face (5.10-). Guy soloed a similar route to the right at the same time. Once I had recovered, Guy and I made a 27-hour round trip of the highest spire, Peak 4810, by its 750-meter south face (V 5.10+). We climbed 15 pitches of cracks and face on good granite to top out just below the summit at dusk, then spent all night descending back to camp for sunrise. During the same time, Brian and Kevin climbed the 1300-meter French route on the northeast buttress (V 5.10-) of Pik 1,000 Years of Russian Christianity in a little over two days up and down.

With only three days left, Guy and I started up our primary objective, the *Perestroika Crack* (VI 5.12, 900m) on the beautiful Russian Tower (Pik Slesova, 4250m). We climbed 12 pitches of 5.10 cracks on rock as good as Yosemite’s finest while snow squalls blew through, soaking the stone, until the weather worsened and forced us into an early bivouac perched on top of a chockstone in a chimney. With the 5.11 and 5.12 pitches still to come and the rock plastered from the night’s snow storm, we began rappelling with only half the route completed.

On the last day, Hermien and I climbed the Pyramid du Pamir by the line that Guy had soloed, eight pitches of 5.10-, just behind Brian and Kevin. Meanwhile, Guy hooked up with a German climber for a sub-24-hour round-trip of the French route on 1,000 Years of Russian Christianity. They climbed the 35-pitch route in ten simul-climbed pitches, then made 25 rappels through the night, arriving at Base Camp just in time to leave.

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Akshirak and Pamir Alai Ranges, Various Ascents. In July, Chris Seashore, Carol Petrelli, Blase Reardon and I went to the Akshirak Range in eastern Kyrgyzstan for ski mountaineering. The range is a day’s drive (by old slow Russian army truck) due south of Lake Issykul. Base Camp was reached by driving about 20 kilometers up river from the small town of Kara Se to the end of the dirt track, then pushing another ten kilometers overland by truck, and finally walking about ten kilometers to the confluence of two large glaciated valleys that join to form the Kara Se River. The region is remote and untouched; we climbed and skied five unnamed and previously unskied peaks immediately surrounding the confluence. Peak heights ranged from 4500 to 4800 meters. The skiable terrain ranged from 350 to 500 meters of 35-45°. We judged anything steeper than 45° to be too dangerous because the thin layer of new snow was hanging on old blue ice. I would recommend skiing in the area earlier in the summer or late in the spring when there is more snow and colder temperatures.

After two weeks in the Akshirak Range, Chris Seashore and I traveled to the Pamir Alai where the peaks are higher. We skied three peaks near Peak Lenin. One, Ukana (5100m), is routinely climbed from the Peak Lenin Base Camp. The other two were approached by hiking straight up the valley as you trek from lower Base Camp toward Peak Lenin. (The path to Lenin turns left over a small pass). All the ski runs had pitches of consistent 45°, and all were, I believe, unskied. I ski-cut one oozing slide because we were too greedy and made a

second run on one of the peaks late in the day. We also made two runs on the lower half of the standard route on Peak Lenin. Other possibilities abound, but we had some bad weather and ran out of time.

JON TURK

Korzhnievskovo Valley, Various Ascents. From July 2 to August 22, Rowland Barker, Steven Carter, Hamish Downer, Mark Stevenson and I visited the Korzhnievskovo Valley in southern Kyrgyzstan. We attempted ten peaks and reached the summit of seven. We climbed in lightweight alpine style, generally in pairs. The region is heavily glaciated and the peaks heavily eroded. The rock on the mountains was very broken and all major rock lines on relatively reasonable rock were threatened by serac fall. Snow conditions were generally firm, although deep soft snow was a problem at times.

There were rarely periods of good weather for more than half a week, and the bad weather usually lasted up to three days. There was often a weather pattern of the weather closing in during the late afternoon and rain, hail or snow in the evening. This would often clear by midnight and the morning would present good climbing conditions. However, this pattern could not be relied upon. We used very little protection, partly due to the climbs being less technical than expected and partly due to the lack of protection available. We never saw any rock we would trust to hold nuts or cams. The ice was generally not deep enough and too brittle to hold ice screws.

Most of the mountains have already been climbed and named by Russian climbers. However, we were not able to discover all of the names in our research, so we have simply referred to them by the height of the summit according to our maps. Ascents were as follows. The north face of 4810m, PD, July 20, Barker and Lassetter. The west face of 4931m, AD, July 25, Downer and Lassetter. The north ridge of 5015m, PD, Lassetter and Stevenson, August 19. The south ridge of 5525m, AD, Lassetter, solo, July 25, repeated by Barker and Stevenson the same day. The south summit (5845m) of 19th Party Conference Peak (5945m) via the south ridge, F, Downer and Stevenson, August 10. Pic Korzhnievskovo (6008m), PD/AD, Lassetter and Stevenson, July 28; repeated by Barker and Downer on July 30. Lassetter and Stevenson bivied just above the col (ca. 4600m) and took 17 hours to reach the summit from there and return. Barker and Downer bivied beyond most of the steep steps. The north ridge of Pic 6624, PD/AD, Lassetter and Stevenson, July 31. The east ridge of Pic Lenina (7134m), PD, Barker and Lassetter, August 9-11.

The group recommends the valleys in this area to those wanting solitude and the opportunity to experience exploratory mountaineering on high peaks of easy to moderate difficulty.

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WEST KOKSHAAL-TAU

Kizil Asker Area, Various Ascents. In 1997, I traveled with an international team of five to the West Kokshaal-Tau range, the southwestern-most part of the Tien Shan mountains on the border with China (see 1998 AAJ, pp. 342-3). In 1998, supported by funding from a Mugs Stump grant, I returned with Carlos Buhler and Mark Price from the U.S. and Sean Isaac and Guy Edwards from Canada, traveling one valley to the west to the Kizil Asker