

the highest peak of the Kyrgyzskiy Alatau. From July 24-25, Elena Nagovitsina, Tamara Zueva, Alexander Afanasiev and Dmitry Aliadvin put up a new route (5B) via the left spur of the west face.

VLADIMIR SHATAEV, *Russian Mountaineering Federation*

## PAMIR-ALAI

### Lailak Region

*Ak-Su North Peak, North Face, New Route, Previously Unreported.* From August 4-12, 1996, Alexander Ruchkin and Alexander Odintsov established The Direct North Face (Russian Grade 6B, 5.11 A3+) on the north face of Ak-Su North (5217m). Practically nobody believed an ascent up the center of the wall was possible. That's why our win was so pleasant. It seemed that the wall was absolutely smooth, without any relief. Micro-relief was observed only after multiple and detailed examinations. The idea was born a long time ago and we thought it over many times. After we had climbed five different routes on the wall, we collected real experience and a kind of data base.

Big wall strategy was used during the ascent. Eight nights were spent on the wall and one on the top. There were no ledges on the route. The climbing was very precise, almost jewellerying, because there were many "live" stones on the route, and at any moment we needed to think about our friend below. We climbed what cracks we could find, which were hardly any. We ascended the center of wall by sky hooks, sometimes drilling holes for them. If we were lucky and found a crack, it was flaring and shallow. Bolts could hold only body weight but not a fall. All protection points were made with Petzl 12-mm screws. We wanted to live badly. Thank you, Petzl. The route is logical and beautiful.

ALEXANDER RUCHKIN, *Russia*

### Karavshin Region

*Karavashin Region, Various Ascents.* After a frustrating visit to the neighboring Lailak region where poor weather stopped us from attempting any big objectives, Mark Pretty and I travelled to the superb granite towers of the Karavashin region. Here we set up camp on August 1 in the Ak-Su Valley with John and Anne Arran, the other half of our British team. Among the four of us we made nine new routes in the valley up to 1300 meters long (all figures are the total sum of the climbing) and 5.12 in difficulty. Of particular note was John and Anne's route *The Philosopher's Stone* (5.12b, 1200m), which takes the quartz veins and overlap right of *The Great Game* (Pritchard-Green, 1997) on the "Wall of Dykes." The first 250 meters of this was fixed over three days and included the two crux pitches, which involved long runouts above sky hooks. The remainder of the route took one and a half days of sustained climbing, including a junction with *The Great Game* for its crux pitch.

While participants in the Russian championships taking place in the area suffered on 12-day repeats of existing routes, Mark and I climbed numerous new routes in conventional, fast, one-day style. We also made two more ascents spread out over one and a half days with *The Big Joke* (5.12a, 1000m), which climbs the Central Pyramid (Pik 3850) 400 meters left of the