

WESTERN KOKSHAAL-TOO

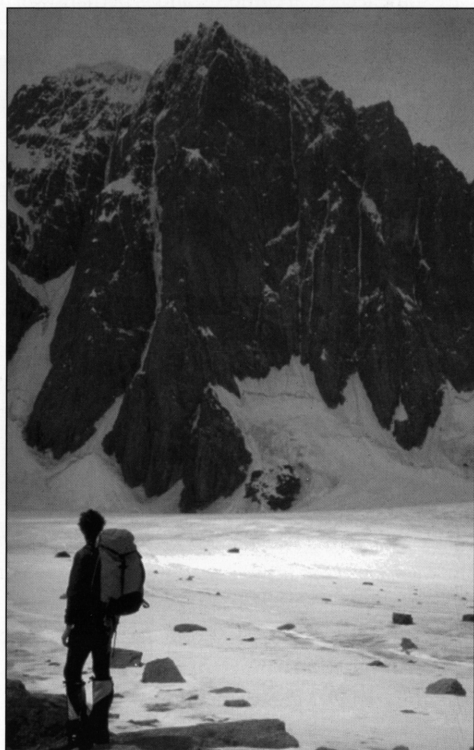
Kizil Asker, new route attempt. In July and August, Guy Robertson and I made two attempts on the most compelling alpine ice route either of us has ever seen: the 1300m virgin southeast face of Kizil Asker, the highest peak in the Western Kokshaal-Too area of the Tien Shan. The wall was steep and split by the dream line: a snaking couloir of ice, overhanging in several places, vertical elsewhere, ran nearly the entire length of the face. It petered out directly below the summit, leaving the crux where it should be: at the top! But both attempts were thwarted by rapid thawing when the sun hit the face. The first attempt ended at around 300m, before any of the real climbing had begun. We hid for most of the day under a small overhang from ice falling off the most wild ice smear imaginable. Then we abseiled off through the icy torrent that had formed down the middle of the couloir.

On the second attempt, we climbed the initial easy section in the dark, arriving at the foot of the first really steep section at dawn. Three superb pitches of mostly perfect ice, up to 95°, led to ominous hanging icicles. Here we skirted left, climbing overhanging, fluted, and thawing ice just as the sun hit. This led to a “non-belay” in a small bay and a very bold pitch of thin ice to reach a small hanging ice field. After rehydrating from the stream that was beginning to flow from the ice, we tried to carry on. But we were rebuffed at every option by sodden, thawing névé that wouldn’t hold a pick. Four hours earlier, what would have been a pleasant pitch of 80° Scottish V (WI4, I guess?), the easiest pitch encountered since breakfast—but now it was impossible. We abseiled off from just below the obvious snow ledge on the left, about 500m – 600m up.

This last attempt was at the very end of the trip, and we had to be back at base camp in three days. Too much time had been wasted sitting in advanced base, getting snowed on, and unable to see the face, but we usually were aware of its presence from the sound of avalanches sloughing off all around. We intend to go back in 2004 to finish the job.

ESMOND TRESIDDER, *Edinburgh University
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Komarova Glacier, Pic Babushka and Pt 4,850m (“Pic Sabor”), new routes. As half of the Scottish Kizil Asker expedition, Blair Fyffe and I climbed two alpine style routes. The expedition visited the Kokshaal-Too region with the aim of climbing the northwest face of Kizil Asker. However due to poor weather



Scoping the incredible ice line on the main buttress leading to the summit of Kizil Asker. Esmond Tresidder

and the distance from base camp this turned out to be unfeasible. Instead the base camp was established beneath the Komarova glaciers and a number of routes were climbed from there.

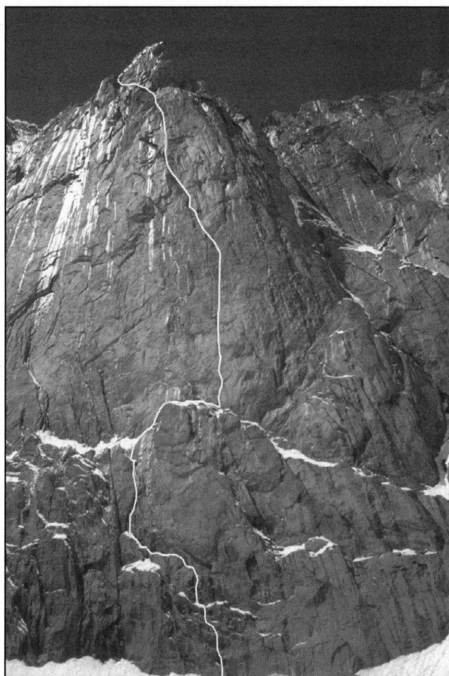
First as a warm up was the north face of Pik Babushka (5,282m), a beautiful alpine snow/ice face with about 700m of climbing up to Scottish V, climbed in a long day from the Central Komarova Glacier. The route took the prominent central groove and upper snow arête of the snowy north face, clearly visible from the base camp at the glacier snout. Descent was made down the west ridge and then the south face, followed by a walk back to the central glacier via the window col separating Pik Jerry Garcia and Pik Unmarked Soldier. This route was first climbed in 1998 by Christian Beckwith and Mark Price.

We then moved to the glacier below Kizil Asker and climbed the north ridge of the mountain marked as Pt 4,850m on the map, making the first ascent of what we christened Peak Sabor (Cathedral Peak), cathedral being one of the few words in our phrase book that could describe a mountain. The route ascended the left hand side of the icefall before gaining the ridge proper. We climbed the long low-angled section easily until the brèche (notch). A few tricky pitches and an abseil overcame the brèche and the steeper, blunt ridge above was gained. The ridge gave good climbing in icy runnels and rock steps, although relatively warm temperatures, being a general feature of the trip, led to some poor snow and ice conditions. After a bivi at one-third height we reached the summit by mid afternoon of the second day. The descent was made by abseiling the route until the breche and then abseiling the broad gully on the east side of the breche. The route gave some technical climbing and is perhaps worthy of an alpine grade of TD+. We think Pic Sabor has been climbed by a Russian expedition from the south side, although we think our route is a first ascent. (Editor's note: this peak was first climbed via the west-southwest rib in 1985 by Kasbek Valiev's team during the competition era.)

During the descent the weather deteriorated and the descent to the Kizil Glacier was hazardous due to avalanches from either side. The snow persisted for another three days, leaving waist-deep snow for the walk back to base camp at the snout of the neighboring Komarova glaciers.

NEAL CRAMPTON, U.K.

Ak Saitan. After a difficult journey through Kyrgyzstan in August, Iñaki Cabo, Elena de Castro, Ferran Latorre, and I finally arrive at base camp on the Komarova Glacier. The potential of the area is immense. One formation in particular draws our attention: a rock pillar reaching between Carnovski and Zukerman peak. But we have come to climb and make a movie of Kizil Asker, located in nearby China north of the "Great Walls of China." We file away the image as one of many first ascent possibilities in the area.



The line of Ak Saitan, on the Ochre Walls. Cecilia Buil