

hooks to climb between cracks. Above the hook moves we gained an inclined rocky ledge where we began to fix almost vertical ropes. We accessed a corner with poor relief, but we were able to bolt it without any problems. After another corner we reached a system of cracks and grass. The hooks came out to help again. We found a nice ledge for a camp.

Further up, we freed a wide crack in wet and chilly weather. A very complicated couloir ended by a cornice and a complicated overhanging corner. A long internal corner revealed big lively edges as we made a belay station on an anchor bolt and settled into another camp. We fixed the main rope near two slanting cracks, using hooks to overcome them. We were climbing on a half rope on unpleasant lively slabs. Yet another steep grassy ledge opened up a long corner leading to the ridge straight under the top. From here, an easy ridge brought us to the summit. We spent a total of five days on the route, and placed 10 bolts. Members: O.P. Kolesov (leader), Sherstnev Igor, Lyalin Sergey, and Sherstnev Igor.

Recommendation to climbers: The specialty of this region is wet weather, especially in August, because of its proximity to Baikal. There is a lot of grass on the route, even on vertical rock. Hooks are necessary, and the rock is very tough, so I recommend bringing several drill bits, even for a Hilti.

O.P. KOLESOV, *Chairman of Federation of Mountaineering and Rock Climbing Republic of Buryatiya, [www.mountain.RU](http://www.mountain.RU)*

## *Afghanistan*

*Noshaq (7,492m), first ascent in 25 years.* The Oxus Mission, organized by Mountain Wilderness International, had two main goals: to show that it was again possible and not risky to visit the mountains of the High Hindu Kush in northeast Afghanistan, and to help organize a training scheme for young Wakhan Valley inhabitants who wish to become professional mountain guides, trekking guides, high altitude porters, or who want to arrange modern outdoor activities. This second goal, a project submitted to the Afghan Government one year ago by Mountain Wilderness, could get adequate funding from Italy and Europe and would help improve the socio-economic status of young people in this remote mountain area. Mountain Wilderness is convinced that training courses and accompanying structural improvements (such as new guest-houses, storage facilities for mountain gear, courses for management and basic English) could also pave the way toward the local population accepting a project for a Wakhan National Park, which seems to be on the agenda of Dr. Nouristani, the Afghan Minister for the Environment and Territory.

The three main organizing staff of the Mission were: Carlo Alberto Pinelli (Italy, Head of Mission); Giorgio Mallucci (Italy, technical and logistic chief);



*Noshaq, showing the line of ascent.  
Carlo Alberto Pinelli*

Maria Chiara Starace (Italy, base camp manager); Haj Safat Mir (Afghanistan, representing the Ministry for Tourism). The international climbing team: Fausto De Stefani (Italy), Lambert Colàs Toràn (Spain), Irena Mrak (Slovenia), Olivier Paulin (France), Marco Schenone (Italy-Switzerland), Jocelyne Audra (France), Christophe Faisy (physician–France), Sahid Akmal (Afghanistan). In addition we had an Italian film crew of Alessandro Ogetti, Giorgio Gregorio (Italy), and Gabriella Tiberti.

The team was due to leave Europe on June 25 but just two weeks prior we learned that the valley leading to the foot of Noshaq (7,492m—the highest mountain in Afghanistan) was probably blocked by two mine fields, placed some time ago by Commander Massoud's Muja-heddin to prevent Pakistani troops disguised as Talibani from crossing the border. In order to check this alarming news, the Mission had to postpone its departure by 15 days. De Stefani and Ogetti were sent ahead to reconnoiter the terrain.

On July 17 the whole team grouped at the village of Qaz-i-Deh on the banks of the Amu Darya (formerly the Oxus River in the times of Alexander the Great). With the help of the local Ismaelite religious chief and a very efficient officer from the new Afghan Army, assigned to the Mission by General Zulmai (Chief of Security in the Karzai Government), 136 porters were hired for the rather attractive salary of 10 US dollars a day. As the Army officer had personally directed the placement of the landmines about three years ago, he was able to find an alternative route, zigzagging up the steep left hand side of the valley (looking upstream), completely avoiding the mined area.

On July 19 the expedition reached the traditional site of Noshaq Base Camp (4,550m) to find not only traces of low stone walls, but—alas—also many piles of non-biodegradable garbage, abandoned by expeditions in the 1970s. During our stay at base camp, members cleared the whole area and nearby moraine, carrying back to Kabul over 200kg of old (and new) tins, jars, and gas bottles. Unfortunately, it was not possible to clean entirely the high altitude camps from debris left by over 30 expeditions.

We started our climb, without local high altitude porters, on July 21. Right from the beginning it was obvious that during the last quarter of a century the condition of the ice slopes had become more demanding and the lower section of the West Ridge, the normal route, had become a huge heap of rubble, which was impractical except for descent. Instead the team moved up the glacier on the north flank and then climbed a 1,000-meter snow ramp to gain the crest. The first high altitude camp was set up at 5,400m on a small, flat section formed by a big



The 6,000m camp on Noshaq. The ridge in the middle distance above the tent belongs to the Aspe Safed Group, while the two snowy tops visible in the left distance are Ghul-Lasht Zom (6,665m on the right) and Ghul-Lasht Zom East (6,611m on the left). Both Ghul-Lasht summits lie on the border with Pakistan and have been climbed many times since their first ascents in 1965. Afghanistan's Central Hindu Kush can be seen in the distant haze on the right.  
*Giorgio Gregorio*

crevasse, which luckily was filled with snow. This is where the first group of De Stefani, Colàs, and Gregorio spent the night, planning to proceed the next day to choose a site for Camp 2. However, De Stefani's partners were not suitably acclimatized and it was not until the 25th that Camp 2 was established by De Stefani, Carrel, and Gregorio. During the night Gregorio became ill with AMS and Carrel volunteered to descend with him. Stefani carried on alone, overcoming the ca 400-meter rock barrier leading to the plateau below the West Summit. This was relatively rotten with steps of UIAA IV. Old fixed ropes were still visible. Stefani bivouacked on the plateau (he carried no tent) and experienced "one of the coldest nights of my long mountaineering career." Leaving at 3:30 a.m. he continued over the West and Central tops to reach the Main summit by noon. Amazingly, by 5 p.m. he had returned to Base Camp.

In the next days Carrel, Schenone, and Mrak also reached the summit. By the 10th everyone was back at Qaz-I-Deh.

CARLO ALBERTO PINELLI, *Mountain Wilderness International*

*Historical note: Although records are not totally exact, this was approximately the 33rd ascent of Noshaq, a mountain that was first climbed in 1960 by a Japanese expedition via the South Ridge from the Qaz-i-Deh Glacier. The first ascent of the West Ridge, the line subsequently used as the Standard Route of ascent, took place in August 1963, when an Austrian expedition traversed all four main summits, in the process making first ascents of the West and East Tops. This was the route used by Andrzej Zawada's Polish expedition, which during February 1973 made the first winter ascent of any mountain above 7,000m. The last ascent before the Soviet invasion of the country took place in 1978.*

## Kyrgyzstan

### TIEN SHAN

### INYLCHIK REGION

*Peak Gorky (6,050m), south face, Slovenia Direct.* In July-August 2003 the region of famous peaks Pobeda and Khan-Tengri was visited by expedition from Slovenia. Its members were mostly young alpinists, climbing at such heights for the first time: Ales Cesen, Anze and Tine Marenc, Darko Podgornik, and Peter Poljanec. The main goal of the expedition was the south face of Peak Gorky (6,050m), which had not been climbed before. The team arrived to Almaty, the former capitol of Kazakhstan by direct flight from Frankfurt, on July 21. On July 25, after transfer to Karkara camp near Kyrgyzstan border (to the east from Issyk-Kul Lake) and 40-minute helicopter flight, the expedition arrived to the base camp located on moraine at 4,100m between peaks Khan-Tengri and Pobeda. About 10 days were spent on acclimatization on nearby peaks (twice up to about 5,300m) and preparation of ABC in a snow cave at 4,750m in the lower part of south face of Peak Gorky. Meanwhile Peter Poljanec had to return home because of a twisted ankle.

Upon arrival to the base camp they noticed that the wall could be climbed following two logical lines: the direct line over the waterfall, which rises over rock level in the upper part of

