

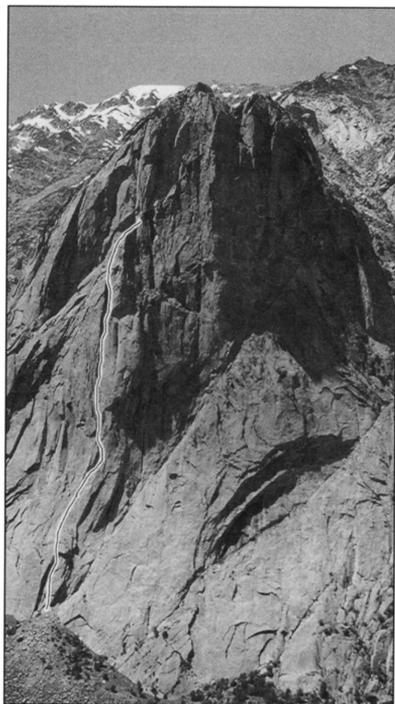
Kyrgyzstan

PAMIR ALAI

KARAVSHIN

Yellow Wall, possible new route. Our 21-day expedition to the Karavshin Valley last July was during one of the rainiest summers the Kyrgyz shepherds said they had seen in a long time. Despite this and numerous difficulties with border patrols, having the right permit, meeting our mule transport, climbing with partners that I had just met through the internet, and the worst of all a broken right hand, we still managed to escape with some stories to tell. Unfortunately, most of them were not climbing related. Dining with the Kyrgyz shepherd families over meals of bread, rice, chai, and sour milk balls was an interesting experience. But nothing beats doing machine gun practice with the Kyrgyz military, or watching them fire their AK-47s at the surrounding big walls, supposedly patrolling for IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) insurgents.

Nonetheless, we had this rain-soaked valley of gargantuan granite walls to ourselves for the first two weeks. We spent the first day exploring a line up Little Asan, a small formation in front of Mt. Asan (a beautiful 3,000' cliff), on the left side of the Kara Su valley. However, after four pitches, we discovered that the beautiful crack we had spotted from the ground was chock full of grass, so we descended to the ground. Day two was spent climbing the "Diagonal Route", the presumed "classic" line up the Yellow Wall. Unsure of what Russian "5B" was supposed to mean, we over prepared for this route by fixing the first 1000', and bringing way too much gear. The crux is probably only 5.10, but the route climbs up a chossy, wet, approach ramp for about eight pitches just to gain halfway-decent climbing. It was on this climb that I discovered my right hand was not just sore; it was broken. This forced me to do everything left-handed. We found Tommy and Beth's portaledge (I'm assuming it's their A5 ledge) about one third of the way up the Diagonal Route just barely hanging on, apparently having fallen from its perch higher up after being shot at so much. Not surprising, the Kyrgyz military seemed to have been using it for target practice and we saw them fire quite a few rounds at



The Yellow Wall, showing its possible new, and in any case newly equipped route (not to summit).
Chris Harkness

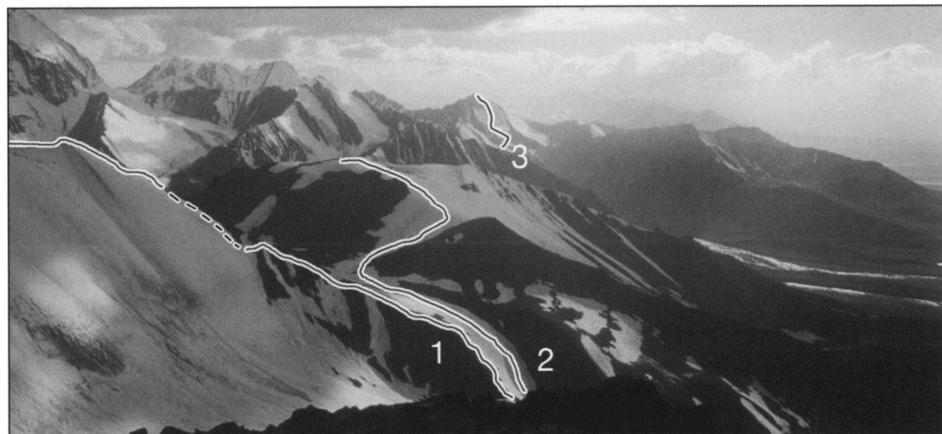
the surrounding walls when we were there too. Haulbags and fixed lines are still hanging up there. Ken and Stewart finished up the climb the next day while I explored the beautiful Ak Su valley alone.

Afterward, the rain fell consistently every day, leaving only afternoon windows of climbable weather. Due to the rain and having one injured climber, we decided to abandon our hopes of climbing Mt. Asan and settle for a smaller, more escapable objective on the Yellow Wall. We decided to try out a line that Ken had spotted on the first day of recon that followed the left side of the wall up a trail of disconnected crack systems and beautiful dihedrals. With about four to five hours a day to climb (if that) we poured all efforts into this route, climbing siege style. We were further encouraged when the Ukrainian National Climbing Team, the apparent climbing authorities of the area, arrived at base camp and told us we were doing a new route. However, we later discovered some ancient pitons on the last pitch. We cleaned it up a lot, and installed two-bolt anchors at every belay. In my opinion, this route should provide a much more enjoyable and aesthetic one-day warm-up route than the Diagonal Route, and will be easy to descend. In addition, any climber who summits the Yellow Wall will have a safe and clear way to get off the wall by following the shoulder from the summit down and west for about four low-angled pitches (easy fifth class; rappels possible) until seeing our last anchor—a bolt and piton (instead of having to downclimb sections like Ken and Stewart did after topping out on the Diagonal Wall). The route: Everything is Normal (1200', 5.10b, A2, Chris Harkness, Stewart Matthiesen, and Ken Zemach).

CHRIS HARKNESS

PAMIR

Zaalayskiy Ridge, exploration, first ascents and new routes. On July 22 a team from the UK, including a US citizen now working in Scotland, set off for Kyrgyzstan. The team consisted of Ian Arnold, Ken Findlay, Paul Hudson, Paul Lyons, Will Parsons (all UK), Susan Jensen (USA) and Shaun the Sheep. Shaun was a toy “Wallace and Grommit” sheep and was on the trip to



Various ascent routes as seen from above ABC1: (1) Peak of the Long White Cloud. (2) Whaleback. (3) Professor Peak.
Paul Hudson