

rising number of people coming into the sport.

I see the Chinese climbing scene advancing in several areas: quadruple the number of people going into the mountains during the next two to three years, pursuit of alpine style climbing, and subsequent opening up of new areas and many new routes and peaks. The number of rock climbers will also continue to grow, with sport climbing being prominent. While official standards for guides are now nearly non-existent, the next five years should see a basic development of qualifications. It is safe to say that China's climbing scene is still in a pioneering stage. However, 10 years ago it was no more than a seed. During the next decade I am confident the development of climbing in China will surpass all of our expectations.

JON OTTO, AAC

## TIEN SHAN

*Kashkar, first ascent and traverse.* In July a team from Moscow made the first ascent of 6,435m Kashkar (aka Koshkar or Kochkar Bashi), an isolated massif lying in the rarely visited Chinese Tien Shan ca 20km due south of Pobeda. The peak is thought to have been attempted by French in the early 1990s and members of the Moscow party made a reconnaissance in 2002. From a 3,400m base camp on the Chonteren Glacier Alexey Kirienko, David Lehtman, Vladimir Leonenko, Ilya Mikhalev, and Yury Strubtsov spent three days climbing through an ice fall and along a previously unnamed glacier (christened Morenny) to reach the foot of the north ridge of the mountain. The next day, July 11, they climbed up to the first summit on the ridge, Pt 5,550m and camped at 5,400m. The following day they crossed Pt 5,550m, the day after that Pt 5,620m and on the 14th 5,650m. Several days of bad weather pinned them down at 6,000m and at one stage a tent with three occupants was completely buried by avalanche but the summit snow dome was eventually reached on the 21st (from where they were able to contact Moscow by satellite phone). The team continued the traverse by descending the east ridge, a route they had climbed to ca 5,750m in 2002. In one and a half days they reached the Ladybird Glacier and were back at base camp on the 23rd. Climbing in classic style, the team used fixed rope on ca 2,000m of the ascent and 700m of descent, the total length of the route being nearly 14km and Russian 4B/5A. The team admits to being stretched, having taken food and fuel for a maximum of 10 days, rather than the 16 that it took in a round trip from base. They also note at least 20 unclimbed 6,000m peaks on this side of the range.

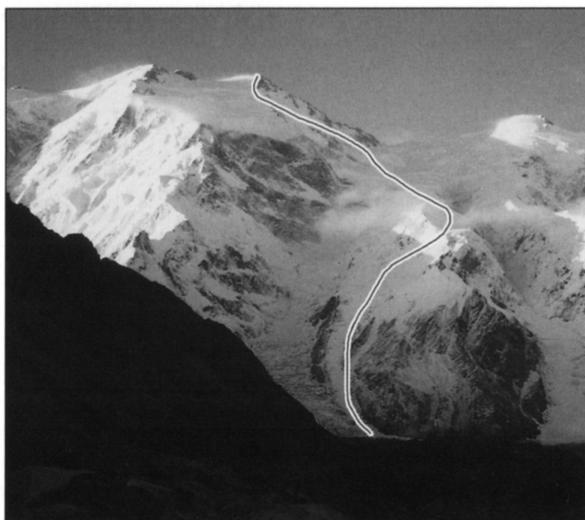
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## KUN LUN SHAN

*Kongur Tagh (7,719m), northeast ridge, new route.* Kongur Tagh's summit is on China territory close to the border of two big mountain systems, the Pamir and Kun Lun. It is supposed to be the highest mountain of Pamir. In spite of its altitude, Kongur Tagh was unknown till 1900, probably because of its location inside a group of other high peaks. After the first investigation, 56 years passed before the first climb was attempted and 25 more years till four Britons (Peter Boardman, Chris Bonington, Alan Rouse and Joe Tasker) reached the summit in 1981. The summit is on a long ridge, stretching several tens of kilometers from east to west with an average

altitude of about 7,000m. There are a few 7,000m peaks situated in the Ridge: Kongur East Summits 7,246, 7,126, 7,200, and Kongur Tube.

In 2004 there were five attempts to reach the summit. Three expeditions from the north side—from Saint-Petersburg/Riga, Moscow, and Krasnoyarsk (Russia) reached the summit. French and Italian expeditions attempted to make new routes from different directions. From the Saint-Petersburg-Riga expedition, the following people summited: Valery Shamalo, Kirill Korabelnikov and Latvians, Oleg Silin and



Kongur Tagh (7,719m), showing the new Russian route on the northeast ridge. *Alexey Gorbatenkov*

Valdis Purins. Alexey Gorbatenkov turned back at 7,350m because of frostbite.

The north slopes of the mountain are not that steep, but extremely avalanche prone. The summit is surrounded with a few belts of hanging glaciers. They turned back many expeditions. Our route is not that difficult, the only technical places are a long ice slope at the altitude 4,900m-5,300m and an icefall around 6,000m. The entire route totally escapes rock climbing. Avalanche danger is more or less permanent on the route, but it is possible to find good places to bivouac. In the very beginning of the expedition our bivouac was blown down from the mountain by a fresh snow avalanche. Fortunately we were out of the tent at the moment and were just a bit covered with snow. This made us more serious about choosing good places for the higher camps. All in all, the climb required a lot of power. Probably because it is a long route with a big rise from base camp to the summit: more than 4,000m. Snowshoes are highly recommended between 4,600m and 6,900m. This saves you a lot of energy while breaking trail.

We suggest our route as the easiest way to reach the summit, but one has to keep avalanche danger in a mind. Our base camp was on green meadow at 3,500m. Kyrgyz nomads inhabit this valley. They were very friendly, and we felt comfortable leaving our stuff in the meadow. By negotiating with local people we had fresh meat, chicken and vegetables. They also provided us with donkeys for travel to BC. A few words about logistics: The best way to reach the northern side of Kongur is to start from Kashgar. This ancient city was a key point on the Silk Road. These days it is a big mix of civilizations. Local tour operators provide necessary permits, visa support, transport, and so on. You can buy most of the food you need here, but we did not find cheese or good sausages. You also can buy gas for the gas stoves here, but it's not that easy to find. Local beer bottles have a non-standard volume 0.63 L, which makes it difficult to calculate the total volume you need.