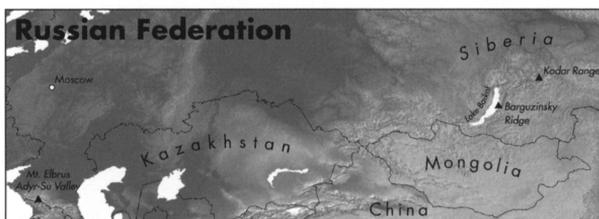


Russia

SIBERIA

SAYAN MOUNTAINS



Kupol-Stol region, Peak ca.

3,000m, Pofigo. In June, Heidi Wirtz and I made a first ascent at a climbing area known as Kupol-Stol, in the remote Barun Valley of the Sayan Mountains, just west of the southern end of Lake Baikal. We were the first Americans to grace the Siberian taiga, as well as the first women and first to put up a traditionally protected route in the region. In 1999 local Irkutsk climbers made a helicopter reconnaissance of this area, then attacked it, rappelling from the tops of the peaks with a stack of bolts, to create 10 sport routes up to 20 pitches long. The climbers who frequent this area do not even own traditional gear, and splitter cracks are accessorized by a line of closely spaced bolts (excluding off-width sections, where they are farther spaced).

We arrived in Irkutsk, the capital of Siberia, with five loaded haulbags and a fat extra-baggage dent in our pocketbooks. After only one day we were itching to get to the mountains, and when our guide asked why we had brought so many bags, then asked us to wait in “the city” for two weeks while he finished another job, we hired an 18-year-old we met in the hotel lobby.

Our proposed helicopter ride fell through, so we trekked ca. 30km into the Sayan Mountains, carrying a minimal amount of gear and food. At base camp, with a double rack and a hand drill, we were told by local climber and area aficionado Pavel Trofimov that it



The Kupol-Stol region of the Sayan Mountains, close to Lake Baikal in Russian Siberia. Existing routes are marked, though details are unknown except for the route on the far left up the obvious prow to an unnamed ca. 3,000m summit, climbed in June 2005 by Roxanna Brock and Heidi Wirtz (350m, 5.11). *Roxanna Brock*

would take “a million years” to drill a bolt in this area. “Cool, we didn’t want to drill any bolts!” exclaimed Wirtz.

While in the States, we had seen photos of the area’s one large peak without an ascent. After tossing the drill and weathering three days of intense thundershowers, we grabbed the rack and tromped to the base. Benighted on our first attempt, we ended up huddled in a wet cave big enough for two large packs.

Two days later we returned for a first ascent on one of only three days without rain. After completing pitch seven, Wirtz climbed a jigsaw puzzle of balanced rock to our right. I then traversed back left using one point of aid to reach the crack that rose directly from the top of pitch seven. I continued up the crack to a belay below a roof. When Wirtz reached this point she lowered me 60m to the top of pitch seven, and I top-roped a finger crack at 12a. I found it would require a lot of gear we weren’t carrying. Wirtz then also top-roped the crack and confirmed the grade. The ninth and final pitch of this 350m route, above the roof, was also loose, and we arrived on the summit late in the day, estimating its elevation to be between 2,900 and 3,050m.

We named the route Pofigo, which means *whatever or it does not matter* in Russian. The grade was about 5.11. We chose this name to reflect the numerous changes in plan that took place before and during the trip, and because it is unlikely to be climbed again (unless someone bolts it), since climbers in the region lack traditional gear.

Supporting the expedition, The North Face, in conjunction with Global Giving, provided financial support to the City Bridge Foundation, which gives treatment to children who suffer from a rare auto-immune disease called Plastic Anemia. Many of these children are from the nearby shores of Lake Baikal.

Trofimov, who was initially cold, subsequently declared, “We don’t have any women like you here.”

ROXANNA BROCK