



On the first ascent of Czarna Wolga (ca 1,700m of climbing, 7a) on the northwest face of Kotina (4,521m). Jan Kuczera

face of Asan (4,230m). This route was established in 1988 at Russian 6B, but it subsequently became popular and was downgraded to 6A. Because our ropes were only 50m long, we had problems on some pitches, which were up to 60m long. The difficulties were 7a and A3, on solid rock except in the upper section, which was friable and wet. We made two uncomfortable bivouacs and arrived on the summit of Asan during our third day, having made the ascent in alpine style.

Our next objective was the beautiful, huge northwest face of Kotina (4,521m). We first rested for six days in order to heal finger wounds, then Artur, Jerzy, and I set off alpine style. We estimated that it would take us three days to climb the face, but in fact we completed it in half that time. The entire route gave nice climbing on solid rock. Up to two-thirds height the face offered mainly slab climbing, up to 6a, but the line through the steeper headwall above followed cracks and corners, which we found harder and graded 7a. We used mostly nuts, Friends, and occasional pitons and placed no bolts. After one-and-a-half days we were on the summit. However, an unpleasant descent was still to come. After eight hours of rappelling, downclimbing, and walking to the east, we arrived in the Ak-su valley, from where it was another three hours walk back to our base camp. We finally arrived at our tents at midnight. We named our route Czarna Wolga (1,500m of climbing plus 200m up the summit ridge, 29 pitches all climbed onsight, 7a). The name roughly translates as "Black Volga," in reference to the infamous Soviet car associated with the KGB.

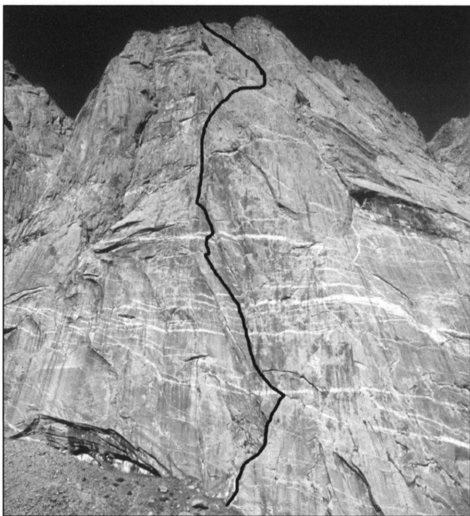
Artur, Jerzy, and I now wanted to try the awesome west face of Pik 4,810m. Our plan was to repeat the Rusayew route, graded Russian 6A, but we weren't prepared for the 10-15m ice wall that guarded access to the foot of the face; without ice gear we were unable to set foot on the wall. Meanwhile, the other two members of our team, Łukasz and Wojciech, completed a new route on a nameless peak opposite Asan [see report below].

It was now September, and temperatures were getting lower and the wind stronger. We made two other attempts, one on Asan and the second on Yellow Wall, but due to poor weather, tactical mistakes, and a certain lack of motivation, we decided to go home.

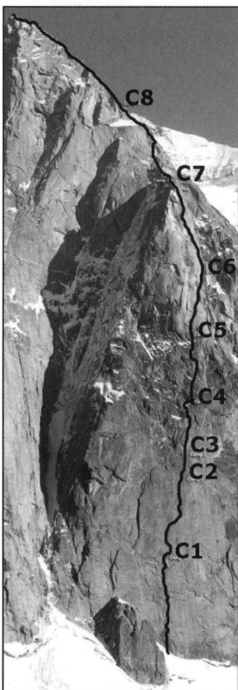
JAN KUCZERA, Poland

*Kara-su valley, nameless tower, Opposite to Asan.* Our plan was to repeat existing routes but also climb new ones in the Kara-su valley. For our new route we chose the east face of the nameless tower directly opposite Asan; its altitude is ca 4,000m. We met a Kyrgyzstan climber named Alexiej who told us this yellow granite wall was unclimbed. Stable sunny weather helped us achieve our goal.

We scoped the face from the ground and saw a possible line up a system of corners and chimneys in the central section of the face. We sketched topographic details, to make route-



The new Polish line, Opposite to Asan (6a, 700m), on the east face of a ca 4,000m rock formation on the opposite side of the Kara-su valley to Asan. *Lukasz Depta*



The new Ukrainian route up the right side of the north face of Rocky Ak-su (a.k.a. Aksu North, 5,217m). *Anna Piunova collection*

finding easier once we were on the wall, and with this topo of a nonexistent route and some aid gear we set off at daybreak.

From the start we were pleasantly surprised by the quality of the granite and hoped it would continue. We climbed the great corner by a system of elegant cracks. A little roof appeared above, and it seemed likely we would need to use aid, but we found that it went free. The pitch above, however, turned out to be the hardest of the route, though perfect Friend placements assured good protection for this 40m dihedral.

By now the sun was leaving the wall. We exited the great corner and followed a system of shallow chimneys, while watching shadows creep slowly up the west face of Asan. Chasing darkness but still on excellent rock, we came to the end of the difficulties and avoided an unpleasant bivouac on the

harsh vertical wall, reaching the summit at twilight.

Although it was a frosty night, it seemed better to stay than lose our way in the dark. The sparkling lights of the other climbers on Asan disappeared, to be replaced by familiar constellations appearing from behind the ridge. Cuddled inside a rescue blanket, we fell into a restless slumber. Next day we returned to the valley and paid our respects to shepherds in a wooden shelter, before making our way back to base camp. We named our route, logically, Opposite to Asan (700m, 17 pitches, French 6a, sustained at V and V+, 150m of easier II-IV). We also repeated the classic Alperien Route (Russian 5B) on the west face of Asan, taking one-and-a-half days to make a redpoint ascent at 6c+.

LUKASZ DEPTA, *Poland*

*Liayliak Valley, Rocky Ak-su, north face, Odessa Route.* In July and August Ukrainians V. Cheban, A. Lavrinenko, T. Tsushko, and V. Mogila (leader) climbed a new 6A route up the right side of the north face of Rocky Ak-su (a.k.a. Aksu North, 5,217m). The route starts on the steep wall between the original line on Aksu, the 1982 Troshchenko route (6A), and, to the right, the 1988 Pershin route (6B) and its more direct variant, the Klenov route (6B, 1996). After broken ground above the first buttress, the new route cuts through the Pershin route to take a line more toward the right edge of the second pillar. Above, it follows the Pershin and then the Troshchenko up the long but easier