

We will be returning to some unfinished business. The following day we scrambled up the ridge east of our camp, only to find deep snow over large blocks, which limited us to a prominent top at 4,100m. One kilometer farther more distinctive peaks appeared to rise to ca 4,400m.

Attempting to improve our chances, we bivouacked the following night at 3,350m on the far side of the valley, hoping the extra height and an early start would allow us to reach a more satisfying summit. Deceptively large distances and hidden drops took us to an attractive sharp ridge that provided enjoyable scrambling reminiscent of the North Ridge of Tryfan in North Wales. However, fatigue limited progress to a height of ca 4,200m at a prominent top, the ridge continuing to a distinctive summit at ca 4,600m.

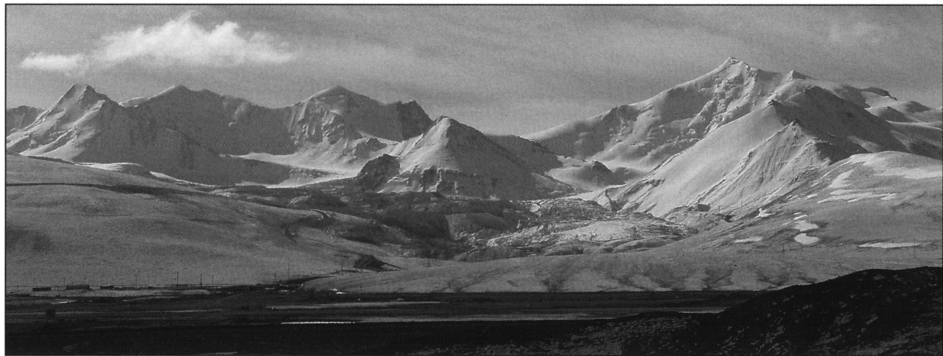
We thank Igor Prasolov, Dmitry Sosodov, and Micha Suhorukov from ITMC for their devoted, unstinting support: Dima for ascending his first 4,500m peak, Micha for letting himself be towed along an apparently unending and bear-infested ridge by two crazy English guys, and Igor for his inimitable approach to driving and keeping us safe for the month.

DAVE MOLESWORTH and MARK WEEDING, U.K.

*Editor's note: the At Bashi (Horse's Head) is a range of limestone peaks immediately north of the Kyzyl Asker group at the west end of the Western Kokshaal-Too. There are no peaks above 5,000m and no record of any climbing until 2002, when it was visited by an ISM expedition. An adjacent area was visited the same year by another British expedition (see AAJ 2003, pp. 352-353, which includes a sketch map of the At Bashi).*

## TIEN SHAN

*Ak-Shirak, seven first ascents, first south-to-north crossing.* By daylight the river flood plain of moraine debris stretched away to where distant peaks shone whitely. The skis and sledges lay forlorn at the roadside, where we had been unceremoniously dumped in pitch darkness the night before. The drivers had caused a five-hour delay in reaching our destination by getting the truck stuck in thawing river ice. Those same drivers had assured us that no vehicle track led up the Kara Suy valley. We were looking at one now. There was no option but to break camp and follow this track.



Looking from the northwest over a ruined meteorological station toward the peaks of the Ak-Shirak, Tien Shan. From left to right: Piks Eagles, Koyon, Kargo, Chasovoi, and Kyrgysia. Dave Wynne-Jones



The upper reaches of the Petrov Glacier, an unexplored part of the Ak-Shirak Range. *Dave Wynne-Jones*

Our seven-member team, comprising Derek Buckle, Alistair Cairns, John Goodwin, Lizzy Hawker, Anna Seale, Mike Sharp, and I as leader, traveled by 4WD from Bishkek via the Barskoon Gorge and Suek Pass (4,000m) to Kara Suy village, where a border-zone permit was required. We then moved on to the Kara Suy valley, up which we expected to continue by vehicle on a dirt track, seen during our 2003 reconnaissance.

After four days of sledging on gravel and river ice, with a few double carries, we camped at the snout of the Kara Suy Glacier. The Mer de Glace in the Mont Blanc Massif of France carries a wealth of associations, but this sea of ice had more and bigger waves than any of us had seen from Ecuador to Antarctica. Navigating to a high camp, from which we could access several peaks, we found ourselves above the waves at 4,200m.

We sited our camp (N 41° 48.560', E 78° 13.815', 4,193m GPS) on the flank of an icefall, beneath a ridge coming down from Kyrgysia (4,954m), the highest peak in the northern half of the Ak-Shirak. After making a first ascent of Pik Chasovoi ("Sentinel," 4,765m) in a near white-out, then scouting the route to Kyrgysia Pass in a bitter wind that froze fingers and cameras, we climbed the south spur of Kyrgysia. From the summit we enjoyed panoramic views of the Ak-Shirak Range and the extensive peaks of the Tien Shan beyond. The ski descent to camp was superb.

Over the next few days we climbed the exposed Pik Karga ("Raven," 4,831m) and the superb viewpoint of Pik Anna (4,658m), skinning to within 100m of the summits before donning crampons. Then, on a less auspicious day, we moved camp to the glacial watershed and made three further first ascents.

A glacier bay to the northwest gave access to two of them. Skirting the steep north face of Pt. 4,865.9m, with its tottering seracs, we gained the north col and found a good line up its steep north ridge. On the way up we were surprised by tracks that could only have been those of a hare, so the summit had to be Pik Koyon ("Hare" in Kyrgyz). Returning to the col, I led off up the south ridge of the second peak, rising through a series of ice bowls to a fine, narrow summit ridge. Hunched brooding above the gold mine far below, we Eagle Ski Club members named our summit Eagle's Peak (4,822m).

We climbed our final summit, east of camp, in flurries of snow, first ascending an easy snow dome, then, when it looked as though a nearby rocky pinnacle could be higher, along a mixed ridge to that summit. Scrambling along granite blocks reminiscent of Chamonix, we reached a turret with “twin cannons” pointing to the sky. We took turns bridging up between these rocks to a precarious summit, which I christened Snow Cannon (4,720m at both summits).

We had been on the traverse for 15 days, and it was time to ski out. An unknown glacier system on the far side of a pass provided an easy descent for the laden pulks. We glided through stunning scenery to the foot of the Petrov Glacier, where we finally camped on the fine gravel shores of Lake Petrov. But there was a sting in the tail. The lake ice would not bear our weight, so we were forced to carry heavy rucksacks and drag our pulks along the increasingly chaotic moraine banks on the southern shore of the lake to reach the road.

We had completed the first south–north traverse of the Ak-Shirak Range, a distance of ca 50km on foot and ski, during a trip lasting from April 29 to May 21. En route we made seven first ascents of summits from 4,600m to 4,954m, all at a standard of around PD. We thank the Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council (UK Sport), and the Eagles Ski Club for their support.

DAVE WYNNE-JONES, *Alpine Club*



This 900m face is only a small part of the huge north face of Pik Karakolski (5,280m) in the Terskey Ala-Too. Most of the north face is seriously threatened by serac fall. The two new Slovenian routes are marked: (1) Frappuccino Kirgizzo (TD+ V/5+) and (2) Espresso (TD+ V/5). The rock rib between these routes is The Snake, a Russian route (Belousov) from 1978. *Andre Magajne*

*Karakol region, Pik Slonenok, north face; Pik Karakolski, north face; Dzhigit, north face.* The Terskey Ala-Too runs for 300km along the southern edge of Lake Issyk Kul. Its highest summits are located by the Karakol Valley. The range used to be a venue for mountaineering championships in the former Soviet Union, but the Soviets weren't so keen on climbing ice and escaped onto rock faces wherever possible. Today there are many incredible virgin ice lines.

The range is also well known for rapid changes in weather. Although the majority of the annual precipitation falls at the end of spring, and the weather in July and August is considered relatively stable, frequent thun-

derstorms with snowfall are common during summer. September is the most stable month but is cold, with short days. The town of Karakol is the starting point for climbs in the Karakol Valley, with relatively good 4WD roads leading into the massif.

I first visited the area in 2004, trekking around Karakol and admiring the 1,500m north face of Pik Karakolski (5,280m), which became the main objective for Simon Slejko and me in 2005. However, bad weather forced us to change plans; large quantities of fresh snow on the north faces of Pik Karakolski and Dzhigit (5,170m) forced us to acknowledge that climbing would be too dangerous. When the skies finally cleared, we decided to go for a consolation prize, the north face of Pik Slonenok (4,728m). This gave a potentially classic ice route, with 700m of good névé, vertical steps, and an exposed, corniced summit ridge. The climb took