

peaks, many of them still unclimbed. We descended the Normal Route. We named our route Tretje oko (The Third Eye; 1,200m, ED2 VI/6).

ANDREJ MAGAJNE, *Slovenia*

TENGRI TAG

Pik Pogrebetskogo, northwest face. From August 10-16 the Krasnoyarsk team of Vladimir Arhipov, Sergey Cherezov, Vladimir Gunko, Andrey Litvinov, Alexander Mikhailitsin (leader), and Alexander Yanushevich made the long-awaited first ascent of the northwest face of Pik Pogrebetskogo (6,487m) at the head of the South Inylchek glacier. This mountain appears to have been climbed only once before, in 1980 via the west ridge. Its name commemorates the first ascensionist of nearby Khan Tengri, M Pogrebetskiy. The face consists of an initial 1,000m-high snow-and-ice slope, topped by an 800m rock wall. It was first attempted in 1984 by a team from Moscow, again in 1989 by Krasnoyarsk climbers, and subsequently in 1991 by a team from Irkutsk. All were defeated, as was an attempt by four strong British climbers in 1994, and the face gained the reputation of being the last virgin high-altitude wall in the former Soviet Union.

On the recent ascent the team found serious difficulties on the upper rock wall, reached the summit in the early afternoon on the 16th, and then began rappelling the route. However, part way down the weather deteriorated, and heavy snowfall made the lower section dangerous from avalanches. They continued through the night of the 17th and by midday on the 18th were safely back at base camp. The overall grade was 6A.

PAUL KNOTT, *New Zealand*, and ANNA PIUNOVA, *www.mountain.ru, Russia*

Tajikistan

FANSKIE MOUNTAINS

Chimtarga, west face. From August 4-7 the four-man team of Gladysheve, Igolkin, Kondrashov, and Soldatov (leader) climbed a new route up the center of the west face of Chimtarga (5,489m), the highest peak in the Fanskies mountains, a beautiful alpine range northwest of Dushanbe at the western end of the Pamir Alai.

ANNA PIUNOVA, *www.mountain.ru, Russia*

SHAKHDARA RANGE

Piks 5,635m, Litovskiy North, Karl Marx, Nikoladsye, Ovalnaya, Nikoladsye South, possible first ascents and new routes. The Shakh-dara Mountains are the southernmost range of the Pamir. They lie in Tajikistan's semi-autonomous *oblast* of Gorno Badakhshan, immediately north of the Afghanistan border. The range has three distinct areas, separated from one another by passes. The highest peak is Karl Marx (6,736m), which lies in the Eastern Shakh-dara. The highest peaks in the Western and Central ranges are Pik Mayakovskiy (6,096m) and Pik Vorujenik Sil (6,138m), respectively.



Pik Karl Marx (6,736m) showing the line on the west face to southwest ridge to west ridge climbed by a British party as part of a west-east traverse of the mountain. The peak was first climbed in 1946 by Abalakov via the west ridge (4B). The black spot marks the British camp at 6,384m. *Phil Wickens*

During the Soviet era many of the peaks were ascended from large organized camps, notably in the Zugvand and Shaboy valleys. These ascents were well documented in the Russian Mountaineering Classification tables, and many were via extremely hard routes. Ascents outside these camps were poorly recorded and often not included in the tables, the only record being cairns, or a note in a tin left on the summit of an apparently unclimbed mountain. The area has rarely been visited since Soviet times, due to the Tajik civil war, which lasted from 1992 to 1997. However, since 1999 Tajikistan has become both safer and political more stable, making expeditions to this fascinating little-known area again feasible.

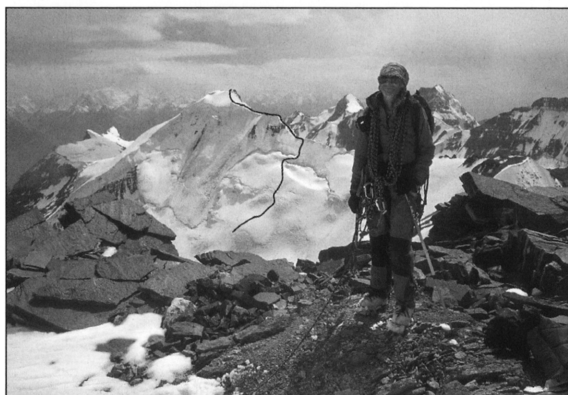
I was asked by the committee of the Alpine Club to organize an expedition to coincide with the formation of its Climbing Fund, which had been established to assist members, particularly younger members, with expeditions to lesser-known areas. I had kept the Shakh dara Mountains in the back of my mind, and this was the perfect opportunity to visit.

The journey from the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, along rough roads that cross high hills, before following the river Oxus, must be one of the greatest road journeys in the world. Cutting through breathtaking scenery it follows the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border to the regional capital of Ishkashim. From here a rough road took us along the barren Wakhan Corridor to the village of Iniv, perched above the Oxus and close to the start of a faint mule track that leads northward into the Nishgar Valley. We followed this track steeply up the hillside, before dropping to a pleasant flat, grassy pasture, on which we sited our base camp.

Soon after arrival the whole team headed into the Western Nishgar Valley, which proved ideal for initial exploration and acclimatization. Despite unsettled weather Steve Hunt, Tim Sparrow, and Alex Rickards ascended the northwest flank of Pik 5,635m (initially nicknamed



Rick Allan nearing the summit of the north ridge of Pik Ovalnaya (5,935m). *Phil Wickens*



Rick Allan on the summit of Pik Sosedniy (5,928m). Behind him, across the upper Central Nishgar Glacier, is Pik Ovalnaya (5,935m), showing the British line of ascent up the east flank and north ridge. The peak was probably first climbed via this line in 1961 by a pair from Leningrad University and may not have been repeated before last year. In the distance are peaks of the Afghan Hindu Kush. *Phil Wickens*

“Peak of the Glorious Committee of the 150th Anniversary of the Alpine Club” but later shortened to “Great Game Peak”), which gave straightforward snow climbing followed by a narrow ridge (PD, 500m, possible first ascent). Two days later Derek Buckle and Kai Green climbed the southeast face of Pik Litovskiy North (5,905m) via a very direct and increasingly steep snow and ice line (750m, D, possible new route).

Access to Pik Karl Marx (6,736m) from the Nishgar Valley is guarded by steep, loose slopes, which we nicknamed “the beast.” These led to the Central and East Nishgar Glaciers. The team split here, with Hunt, Sparrow, and Rickards working a route through the seracs of the East Nishgar Glacier to place a camp directly below the end of the south ridge of Karl Marx. They passed this to the east, ascending a small tributary glacier in a deeply cut valley, then its steep headwall, to reach the Marx–Nikoladsye col (6,200m). Above, steepening slopes led to the snowy upper south ridge and finally the summit (900m, PD+, possible new route). After a rest day at their high camp they climbed diagonally up

the west face of Pik Nikoladsye to reach a col at 6,150m, from where they continued up the rocky north ridge, past three exposed steps, to the summit at 6,340m (500m, AD+, possible new route).

Meanwhile, Rick Allen and I had placed a camp next to a small glacial lake at 5,345m on the relatively benign Central Nishgar Glacier. After climbing Pik Sosedniy (5,928m) by its easy northeast ridge (600m, PD) we started up the west face of Pik Karl Marx. An 800m snow slope led to a broad shoulder and campsite at 6,348m, from where we could see Hunt, Sparrow, and Rickards reaching the summit. The following day was cloudy with light snowfall, but we were able to make use of brief clearings to follow the southwest ridge to the summit blocks. A delicate traverse on steep, loose and poorly iced rocks led rightward to the top of the south ridge, which we followed easily to the small rocky summit (1,200m, AD).

We made a straightforward descent in poor visibility down the south ridge and south-east flank, following the line, and occasionally the footprints, of Hunt, Sparrow, and Rickards, whom we met at their upper camp. This exact traverse may not have been completed before.

The following morning we descended the East Nishgar Glacier and icefall, re-ascended the Central Nishgar to retrieve a food depot, and the next day climbed the east face and north ridge of Pik Ovalnaya (5,935m). This gave a very enjoyable climb along a wonderfully exposed ridge, with numerous short steps of perfect water-ice, which we reversed from the summit and then continued over the north top (5,808m) to reach the Ovalnaya-Sosedniy col. From there we returned to our camp at 5,345m. Our route was D- and may not have been climbed before.

At camp we met Buckle and Green, who were back from their ascents of Pik Sosedniy via the northeast ridge and Pik Karl Marx via the west face and southwest ridge (1,200m, AD-). They had climbed the latter after aborting an attempt on the west ridge at 5,840m due to poor rock and deteriorating weather. The next day this pair repeated our route up Pik Ovalnaya.

With time running short but energy in abundance, Hunt, Sparrow, and Rickards set off from base camp to investigate the Far East Nishgar Glacier, which lies below the impressive unclimbed west face of Pik Tajikistan (6,585m). From a large plateau at 5,360m they followed the glacier to its head and then traversed, from north to south (AD and a possible new route), Pik Nikoladsye South (6,265m), returning to base a few hours before the mule drivers arrived. They were just in time for a final celebration of chocolate-garlic gateau and a selection of fine whiskies.

The Shakh dara Mountains have potential for many new routes, though most would be on poor rock. All our ascents were carried out from August 13-27, when the weather was generally unstable, with thick cloud but very little precipitation or wind. More snow and ice lines may be in condition slightly earlier, but remaining winter snow could make access difficult. We thank the Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council (U.K. Sport), and the Alpine Club for their support.

PHIL WICKENS, *Alpine Club*