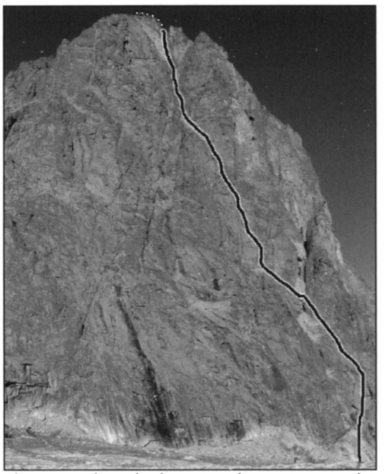
AK SAI – ALA ARCHA

Pik Box (4,242m), central buttress of east face, new route. Pik Box is popular for climbing. There are two classic routes: 4A on the northern wall (Aytbaeva, 1956), and 5B "The Balloon" (Mikhaylov, 1997) on the left side of the northern wall. In 15 hours of non-stop climbing, Vitalius Chepelenko and I ascended a new route on the eastern wall on September 16, proposed a difficulty rating of 4B. The vertical gain is 700m, and the length of the climb is 1,300m.

IVAN PUGACHEV, *Kyrgyzstan, adapted from www.mountain.ru*



The new Chepelenko-Pugachev Route on the east face of Pik Box. *Ivan Pugachev*

WESTERN KOKSHAAL-TOO

Kizil Asker, southeast face, new route. Mikhail Mikhailov, Alexander Ruchkin, and I began climbing on September 5 and finished our two-day descent from the summit on September 14. We climbed in alpine style and mostly free, though we used aid on the overhanging sections. The wall itself consists of three bulwarks. The lowest is the simplest, with a grade of about 5A/5B. We climbed an ice couloir with no places to put a tent and had to chop into the ice to make a bivouac ledge. The second bulwark overhangs, with an average steepness of about 93 degrees. Between the second and the third bulwarks, instead of the expected nice ledge, we came across an ice "knife." The top of the wall—vertical monolithic granite—cannot be climbed directly. The average steepness of the route was 70–75°. We rated the 1,500m, 30-pitch route Russian 6B. The descent slope was dangerous from avalanches. To belay or rappel, we dug pits and fixed our ropes from buried sacks.

Overall, we were lucky with the weather. We had two or three days of comparatively bad weather and one whole day of sitting in camp, but otherwise it was fine. It was very cold at night. When it thawed in the mornings and in the afternoons, ice balls flew down. The rock on this wall is monolithic, with no loose stones.

The peaks here are wonderfully compact. In one tight area there are 8–10 mountains higher than 5,000m, and only one has a name—Kizil Asker. There are routes for all tastes: Himalayan, alpine, snow, ice, rock. However, the summer season is short--from the middle of August to the end of September, only 1.5 months. Before this the weather is unstable; two days of good weather in a row are nearly unheard of. Another feature of the region is its difficulty of access when the roads become impassable. The upper part of the valley is covered with grass growing on loam; when it gets wet, you cannot move except by helicopter.

ALEXANDER ODINTSOV, *Russia; adapted from www.mountain.ru*