

ining the wall. This proved a godsend, as we could see what falls from where, and then modify our original line. There was much ice in the upper section, and from noon onwards it began to fly, as on Cerro Torre. The saving grace was the steepness; the ice would pass well out from the face.

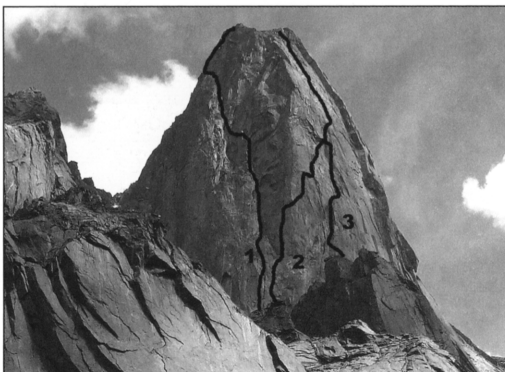
The next two days were sunny but cold. Our route led to the base of a chimney, which shocked us by its size and structure. It was formed by a giant detached flake leaning precariously against the wall. After two pitches it widened to 6-7m, so we had to traverse out right and climb 70m alongside.

Higher, the situation changed; there was a series of roofs with no cracks. Fortunately, 20m to the right we spotted flakes. Reaching them required a 30m pendulum across a water runnel. The runnel is often bombarded by falling ice, but we were lucky as at that time there was no sun. In fact every day was poor, with rain and snow. Above the flakes, the route became fun. It was technically difficult, but the cracks were good and the rock solid. At the top of the 17th pitch we joined the Moroz Route and followed it to the summit. We named our new line Odessa Route and graded it Russian 6B.

After five days' rest we started up the Kritsuk on Pik 4,810. The most unpleasant part of this route is at the bottom, an overhanging broken corner. Above, it is better, and because there was snow everywhere we didn't have to haul water. We had three different route descriptions and, picking a line that averaged the three, never got seriously lost. However, one thing I couldn't understand: everyone talks about free-climbing, yet where did all the drilled holes for bathooks come from?

We reached the summit and descended in bad weather. We felt this route was easier but longer than our line on Slesov. With these two routes we won the 2009 Ukrainian Championships. Incidentally, it was a great season on 4,810: two teams did Kritsuk, two did Sakharov, one climbed Voronov, and two completed the 5B Nazarov.

ALEXANDER LAVRINENKO, *Ukraine* (translated by Marina Modlin)



Upper two-thirds of 900m northwest face of Pik Slesov, seen over lower walls of Central Pyramid. (1) Spanish Dihedral (6c A4, Gallego-Gomez-Seiquer, 1992). (2) Odessa Route. (3) Moroz Route (6A/6B). Huge corner close to right skyline is Klenov Route (6A/6B), and between this and Moroz are Semiletkin (6A/6B) and its variant Russian Shield (5.10 A4, Anker-Lowe, 1995). Tony Whitehouse collection.

TIEN SHAN

WESTERN KOKSHAAL-TOO

Pik Vernyi (5,250m GPS), northwest face; *Kyzyl Asker* (5,842m), southeast face, attempt. I first visited the Kyzyl Asker region in August 2007. We set up base camp at 3,750m, in the valley leading to the Kyzyl Asker Glacier, but as we knew nothing about the area, we spent much



Vernyi from north-northwest. Belorussian-Russian ascent and portaledge camps marked. Left skyline is 2002 British route on north ridge. *Nikolai Banderet*



Southeast face of Kyzyl Asker after storm, showing Belorussian-Russian attempt. 1,500m pillar forming left edge of face was climbed in 2007 (AAJ 2008). Steep, narrow couloir left again has also seen several attempts. *Nikolai Banderet*.

time exploring. Nearly all the ascents we made from the West and East glaciers were straightforward.

In August 2009 I organized a second Belorussian-Russian expedition. Our aims were to climb the northwest face of Vernyi and to establish a new route on the southeast face of Kyzyl Asker, which had only the line climbed in 2007 by Mikhailov, Odintsov, and Ruchkin. We established base camp at the same spot as in 2007. After a short period of acclimatization, we attempted Vernyi as a team of five, as we thought this would be faster. Although the 700m wall is not huge, it is difficult, with an average angle of 82° and large smooth sections of granite. The lower and upper sections presented problems finding protection and belays. In the lower part cracks were full of ice, which restricted the use of cams, but was too thin and unstable to climb with ice tools. In the upper part a 100m vertical, wide chimney posed a problem, the side walls being very friable; this was probably the crux. These factors, with cold temperatures, meant that the amount of free-climbing was less than expected. Nonetheless, Dmitriy Golovchenko, Aleksander Malakhovskiy, Sergey Mikhailov, Sergey Nilov, and I reached the summit after three nights on the wall. We spent a fourth night on top because thick cloud prevented us seeing the descent. We graded the route 6B.

There is still much potential in this region for big rock routes, the main venues being Kyzyl Asker, Vernyi, and the Great Walls of China.

NIKOLAI BANDALET, *Republic of Belarus*
(translated by Ekaterina Vorotnikova)

Editor's Note. In recent years Vernyi has been referred to by a variety of names. It was first climbed in 1988 by Vladimir Turgaleva's four-man team, which climbed a rock rib to the right of the northwest face, finishing on the south ridge (5A). They named the summit Pik Vernyi (Faithful). The height