
PAUL KNOTT

Russia and Central Asia 2000

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Although climbing is being inhibited by conflicts and instability in some parts of this vast region, in others infrastructure and service improvements are making access easier for visiting climbers. Maps and route details for several climbing areas can be found at <http://mountains.tos.ru/kopylov>.

The Caucasus

Despite popular concern over security in this area, 2000 saw noteworthy climbs in many parts of the range. Unfortunately February saw a tragic incident on **Ushba (4710m)**. Mark Richard, Vincent Diamond, Marc Payne and four Russian climbers were camping at about 4000m on the Shkhelda Glacier when their camp was buried by an avalanche.

In the summer season several routes were climbed as part of the Russian Mountaineering Championship for high altitude technical ascents. The St Petersburg team of A Andreev, D Kirsanov, D Krivitski and I Potankin climbed a new route taking the centre right of the W Face of **Kiukiurtliu (4639m)**. The route, climbed from 26 June to 6 July, was awarded second place in the Championships and given the grade of 6B. Also awarded were two hard repeats, both at 6A, on **Mt. Dalar (3979m)** above the Uzuncol Valley. From 27-29 July a team from Shelkovo near Moscow led by Y. Dzhaparidze climbed the N Face of the tower on the L of the N Face (first climbed in 1976 by Michael Warburton and Valentin Grakovich). From 29 July to 1 August a Perm team led by A Shavrovich climbed the 1962 *Snesarev Route*, also on the L side of the face. In the same area from 8-9 August **Kirpich (3800m)** was climbed by the *Rhombus* on its W Face by Moscow climbers led by V Volodin.

Local climbers keen to stimulate climbing interest in the range have launched the project 'Open Caucasus', which has inspired two new winter routes in early 2001. From January 4-8 Yuri Koshelenko and Viktor Bobok from Rostov on Don made the first ascent of the N Face of **2nd-W Shkhelda Peak (4310m)**. Access to the face was gained via first ascents of two ice falls. In March 2001 Koshelenko was joined by Andrey Andreev,

Alexei Krivitsky and Sergey Voronin on the first ascent of *Northern Edge* (1200m, VI, 5.10, A2+) on **Erydag (3925m)**, a mountain in the Eastern Caucasus well known for technical rock climbing. The route took six days to the summit, with strong winds battering the climbers throughout.

The Pamir

Exploratory activity in 2000 was concentrated in the **Zaalaiskiy Range** east of the Kyzyl Art Pass. In July the area was visited by an Anglo-Russian expedition led by Tom Avery and Anatoli Moshnikov. After making ascents of **Golova Orla (5440m)** and **Kenelda (5439m)** they attempted **Khurumdy (6613m)**, retreating at 5900m due to poor conditions. Shortly afterwards a team from Kyrgyz Republic led by Alexander Novik made two first ascents in the area. From 4-9 August they made a traverse of **Zarya Vostoka (Eastern Sunrise, 6349m)**, then on 14 August they climbed **Pik Chorku (6283m)** from the Alexander Zotova Col to its NW. A trip organised by Andrew Wielochowski and Sergei Semiletkin was active in the same area, also in August, using a base camp at 3500m on the Kyzyl-Su River accessed from the Taunmurun Pass. An attempt on the NW Ridge of **Zarya Vostoka** was curtailed by poor weather, but first ascents were made of various peaks just under 5000m closer to base camp. The group experienced no major access problems, but did find tighter security than usual. In December a group from Tashkent including Victor Vasyanin made a winter attempt on **Khurumdy**. The climbers retreated from 5600m due to prolonged high winds and heavy snowfall.

Prior to their visit to the Eastern Zaalaiskiy the Wielochovski/Semiletkin-led team made an attempt on **Zartosh (6106m)** in the **Muzkol Range**. They climbed above the col between Zartosh and its W summit **White Pyramid**, but retreated short of the summit due to fresh snow.

The Pamir Alai

Concern continues about the threat of armed extremists operating in this area. There are widespread expectations that the underlying conflict will intensify. During the summer season American climbers Tommy Caldwell, Beth Rodden, Jason Smith and John Dickey had an alarming brush with terrorists, who forced them to descend from their portaledge camp and held them hostage. Eventually, feeling their lives were threatened, they managed to escape and after an 18-hour run were fortunate to meet the Kyrgyz Army. There were also other similar incidents during 2000 involving visiting climbers.

Previously unreported from summer 1999 was a British expedition visiting the Lialiak and Karavshin areas. In late July in the Lialiak area Mark Pretty and Ian Parnell climbed the new route *The Kyrgyz Way* at E4 5c 1150m (700m technical) taking the central spur of the W Face of **House Peak (3800m)**. Moving to the Karavshin area in August the pair first investigated **Central Pyramid (3809m)**, climbing new routes including

Smetana Moon at E5 6a 820m, 520m technical (200m L of *Black Magic*), and *The Big Joke* at E5 6a 1000m, 700m technical (100m L of *Smetana Moon*), both on the Upper Tier. On the Wall of Dykes on the **Russian Tower (Pik Slesov, 4240m)** they made the first ascent of *The Last Laugh* at E5 6A 680m, 100m R of a prominent waterfall. Parnell then teamed with Pete Scott from New Zealand to climb the new route *Albino Boys*, 100m L of the start of *Black Magic*, on the lower tier of **Central Pyramid** at E4 6a. Finally he made the solo first ascent of *The Isolationist* on the central spur of the E Face of **Kotin (4509m)** at E2 5c and 1300m.

Meanwhile Anne Arran and John Arran climbed new routes *The Hostage*, E5 6a 550m, joining *Missing Mountain* on the **Pamir Pyramid (3700m)**, and *The Philosopher's Stone*, E6 6b 1300m on Wall of Dykes (pitch 9 shared with *The Great Game* climbed by Dave Green and Paul Pritchard in 1997 (see *AJ103 p.260*).

The routes described above were all climbed in lightweight style using little in the way of fixed rope, bolts or pegs, in contrast to the approach taken by other climbers in the area. The team noted the potential of the alpine rock faces lying beyond the immediate rock towers, many of which are unclimbed or have had only one ascent. (See also *AJ105 pp. 68-70, 275*.)

The Tien Shan

The Tien Shan continues to attract considerable interest from British teams. Pat Littlejohn's activities here over the past few years have been recognised by his election as Honorary President of the Kyrgyz Alpine Club. Recent exploratory activity has encompassed both hard new routes in popular areas and ascents in lesser known parts of this extensive range.

A major event in the **Central Tien Shan** was the 'Festival Khan Tengri 2000', which appears to have enjoyed high level support in Kazakhstan with visits from government officials and various international diplomats. Of over 500 participants from almost 30 countries, many were helicoptered to the N Inylchek Glacier and 280 attempted **Khan Tengri** (approximately 79 were successful). As part of the festival a speed ascent was organised on **Khan Tengri**, the first from the N side. The winner was Denis Urubco of the Kazakh Military Sport Club, with times of 7 hours 40 minutes to the summit and 12 hours 21 minutes return trip from base camp.

Due to unusually deep snow, high winds and cold temperatures there were no successful ascents of **Pobeda (7439m)** during the 2000 summer season. The furthest point reached was by a Kazakh team, which turned back 400m from the summit.

Climbers from Central Asia and Russia have been active during recent winters in the Ala-Archa area of the **Kyrgyz Range**. In January 2000 the Kyrgyz team of Alexander Ruchkin, Dmitriy Grekov and Andrey Puchinin climbed a new route on the N Face of the **1st Tower of Korona (4810m)** which they named *The Mobiles Route*. Climbing lightweight, they completed the 900m mixed route in 9 hours at 5B, 5.10/A1, descending by moonlight.

In late November Kyrgyz climbers Mikhail Mikhailov, Andrey Puchinin, Alexander Gubayev and Vitaly Akimov climbed a new route on the central N Face of **Free Korea (4740m)**. Claimed to be harder than all previous routes on the face, *Grey Rocks Girdle* often exceeded 90° and was climbed using a portledge over 11 days. Later in the season a team from Krasnoyarsk climbed a further new route on the face, taking an ice couloir on the L of the face at the 5th category of difficulty. In addition the 1997 Ruchkin-Puchinin route *North Wall Direct (6A/A3+)* was climbed both by a team from the Kazakhstan Army and by climbers Gutnik and Novoseltsev.

The range also attracted popular interest amongst local alpinists during 2000, which included a mass ascent of **Komsomolets (4140m)** involving more than 100 people. There was also a ski and snowboard descent from **Pik Adygene (4404m)**, and a ski trip to the confluence of the Manas, Toktogul and Ala-Archinsky Glaciers. Europeans David Gerrard and Hilda Grooters visited the area in August, making the traverse of Towers 3-5 on **Korona (4860m)**.

In September a team guided by Pat Littlejohn, Victor Saunders and Vladimir Komissarov made the first recorded climbing visit to the W part of the **Kuulu Range S** of Lake Issyk Kul, approaching by 4wd vehicle along the Kuulu Valley. From a base camp in the Karator Valley at c.3300m teams led by Komissarov and Littlejohn made ascents of seven moderate summits of which the highest was **Tsarevich (4920m)**, while Saunders' team climbed **Pik Humani (4800m)** at AD- and **Pik Karator (5203m)** via a snow route at PD. Littlejohn, Ingrid Crossland and Diarmid Hearn then made an attempt on **Pik 5088m**, gaining its N Ridge but unable to complete it due to poor conditions. Later they summited via the S Ridge and named the peak **Matarshinita**. Following this three peaks were climbed above the nearby Ashutor Valley including **Krenintor (4732m)**.

In July-August a group led by Rob Johnson with members from Queen Elizabeth and Milton Abbey Schools made first ascents in the nearby **Ak-Shiirak Range**. Of the five peaks climbed the highest was **Tsunami (4750m)**, which was ascended via the SW Arete at PD-.

Exploration continued in the **Western Kokshaal-Too** range on the border between Kyrgyz Republic and China. In late July the UK/Netherlands team of David Gerrard, Hilda Grooters, Danny Boothman and Louise McParland visited the Itali Glacier area, attempting **Pik c.5000m** from a base camp accessed by 4wd vehicle at c.3800m.

Previous teams visiting the Western Kokshaal-Too have observed the potential on the Chinese side of the border, and this previously unvisited area was explored during July-September by the US team of Mike Libecki, Jerry Dodril, Jed and brother Doug Workman. Having obtained permission with considerable difficulty, the team travelled by road via Ak-su and Karabulak, then with animal support beyond the road end. They attempted **Pik 5697m** on the border with Kyrgyz Republic, but were turned back by a storm close to the summit. The climbing was on steep granite, snow and

ice. Following this attempt they climbed on crags in the area which were steep, clean and solid with strong natural lines. Overall, they report almost limitless climbing potential on impressive towers, walls, spires, and ridges.

Previously unreported from 1999 was the visit of a large Moscow team to the Grigoriev and Palgov Valleys near the E end of the Western Kokshaal-Too. The team, led by Boris Starostin, Fedor Akhmatov, Valerii Boiko, Victor Efimov and Eugeny Monaenkov, used a base camp at the confluence of the two rivers at c.3500m reached by some adventurous driving. A group led by Akhmatov made the first ascent of **Chon-Turasu (Dzholdash, 5780m)**, from the S at 5B. A group led by Boiko climbed a new route on **Dankova (5982m)**, taking the NNE Ridge at 5B. A team led by Manaenkov made the first traverse of **Krylya Sovetov (5450m)** at 5B. Also climbed were **Piks 5200m** at 4B, **4825m** at 5A, and other smaller summits. On 12 August on the ascent of the N Face of **Pik Cosmos (5940m)** falling ice caused the death of Igor Korsun, after which the expedition was called off.

In the **Ugamskiy Range** of the Western Tien Shan an ascent was made of the 6A *Rafikov Route* taking the L side of the NE Face of **Kyzylbash (4200m)**. The Norilsk team, headed by A Paveljev, climbed the route over three days to 22 August.

In July a Royal Engineers expedition led by Stuart Batey visited the **Dzungarskiy Alatau** on the Kazakh-China border. The team made the second ascent (first British ascent) of the highest peak **Semyonov Tien Shansky (4622m)**, and made ascents of seven further peaks in this little-explored range.

Siberia and the Russian Far East

Reports from the Altai suggest an increasing level of interest in the range by Russian alpine skiers and snowboarders. There have also been reports that Siberian alpine climbers have put up a number of hard new routes in a spectacular gorge in the Kara-Kabak area of the Northern Chuiskiy.

The tradition of extended wilderness traverses in Russia was continued during 2000 by a team of six from Mezhdurechensk led by Sergey Kosin, which completed an extended ski and raft tour of the **Putorana Plateau** in Central Siberia. At a total of 2548km this tour was more than twice the length of that made by the same group in 1997 (see *AJI03 p.263*). Leaving Norilsk on 23 March they went by ski via the Melkoye, Lama, and Ayan lakes and the Amnundakata, Dulismar, Yaktali and Kureyka rivers to make ascents of mountains **1312m**, **1701m** and **Kamen**. They also made an ascent of plateau **Talabaiski Greben (1040m)** by a new route. After covering 1018km on ski they completed the trip by rafting down the Vivi and Niznaya Tunguska Rivers to finish on 12 July.

Ice-climbing potential has been reported in the same region, around Norilsk. An outdoor tower provides training from October to June, and within skiing distance there are 30m waterfalls at the edge of the Putorana Plateau as well as further climbing interest accessible by helicopter. The city

also provides unique 'mixed climbing' on the icicles that form on its high-rise buildings.

In Kamchatka, local climbers celebrated the Millennium (2000-2001) at the top of the volcano **Avachinskaya (2741m)**. In the -25°C temperatures the champagne froze in the bottle, but fortunately could be warmed in a convenient fumarole. Interest in ice-climbing also continues in the area, with reports of January ascents of the 70m frozen waterfall at the base of **Vilyuchinskiy (2173m)** by local club 'Kutkh'.