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Russia & Central Asia 2006-2007

As well as the teams themselves, the following sources have formed the basis of this report: Alpinist news, Alpclub Ural, Extreme portal vvv.ru, Lindsay Griffin, Mountain.ru, Russian Alpine Federation, Russianclimb.com, Sergei Kurgin (sibalp.com), and Stolby.ru.

The above websites contain photo-topos for many of the developed rock walls, for example major Pamir Alai walls, Erydag (Caucasus) and Morcheka (Crimea). Dates in this report refer to 2006 unless stated otherwise.

Caucasus

As has been the case for several years, all the news from this range is from Russian climbers. Some venues such as Erydag have yet to receive reported ascents by non-Russians.

Several new routes were climbed in the Western Caucasus. On **Fisht North (2160m)**, V Afanasev and team climbed the NW rib of the W face at 5A, while on **Dombai Western (4036m)**, from 26-29 June, S A Pugachev's Khabarovsk team climbed the central 'triangle' on the S face at 6A. Earlier, in February 2006, four climbers lost their lives in a major avalanche during an attempted first ascent of a 6B route on **Bolshoi Nakhar (3784m)**. These included the prolific Makhachkala-based climber Konstantin Dorro. A search in May found only some of the bodies.

In the Central Caucasus two significant winter ascents were made in January 2007. A Moscow team including George Kozlov attempted the *Balyberdin route* on **Shkhelda 3rd Western (4280m)**. This 5B winter route has not been repeated since its first ascent in 1984. The team climbed 13 pitches over 4-5 January before retreating due to heavy snowfall. Later, Moscow climbers Sergey Nilov, Sergey Doronin and Yevgeniy Korol made a successful winter ascent of the 6A Myshlyaev route *Rhombus* on **Chatyn-Tau (4368m)**. This route, which has repelled several prior winter attempts, takes a steep couloir and ridge on the N face. The climb took from 18-25 January and was probably the mountain's second winter ascent, the first being in 1984 via Peak Trud. On **Misses-Tau (4427m)**, a team led by A Nikitin climbed a new route on the central E face at 5B.

At the eastern end of the range, in February 2007 a St Petersburg team made an ascent of the *Mirror* (6A) on the left part of the NW face of **Erydag**

(3995m). They found the next-to-last pitch of this route now requires A3 climbing instead of grade 5, after an enormous block fell off in August.

Crimea

From 23-26 June a new route *Rainy Season* (6A F6b A3 340m) was climbed on **Morcheka** by Odessa residents Alexander Lavrinenko and Taras Tsushko. The route name reflects the heavy showers encountered each day during the ascent. The route lies between the *Grishchenko* and *Geniush routes*, coinciding with them for a short middle section. In early June another new route, *DLS (Twenty Years Later)* (6B 280m) was climbed immediately right of the *Geniush route* by local climbers Anatoliy Geniush and Alexey Zhilin. They felt the route to be harder than *Machombo* on the same wall. The route is named in celebration of its ascent 20 years after the 1986 *Geniush route*.

Two weeks later Yevgeny Novoseltsev and Shonin made an onsight ascent of the **Shaan-Kaya** route *Samurai*, taking 13 hours. This was probably the second ascent of the route, which the climbers felt to be two grades harder than *Machombo*. Also on **Shaan-Kaya**, in March 2007 Cyril Gostev, Alexander Ruzhkovskiy and Michel Voloshanovskiy climbed a new 200m route in the centre of the face.

Pamir Alai

There has been a healthy level of activity in the Turkestan range, as climbers have gained confidence in the security status of the region. In summer 2006 several parties climbed in the Karavshin area. Mike and Andy Libeckii climbed a 21-pitch line on the NW face of **Asan (4230m)** at VI 5.11 A2. They probably climbed a variation finish of *Alperien*, moving to its left above half height. They completed the route in a 50-hour push including a 17-rappel descent down a new section of wall. Also on the NW face of Asan in August, Australian climbers Kent Jensen, David Gliddon, Steve Anderton and Julian Bell freed 20 of the 23 pitches of an existing A3 route up the centre of the wall to make a free route at French 7B. Gliddon and Bell also climbed a new A4 route over eight days. The team retrieved the portaledge left on **Yellow Wall** in 2000 by Tommy Caldwell, John Dickey, Beth Rodden and Jason Smith when they were kidnapped.

A large Polish expedition climbed from the Kara-Su valley in August-September. An early success was the free ascent by Adam and Pawel Pustelnik of a new route on **Ortotyubek (3850m)**, *Amba* (F7c/7c+, 1100m). While most of this route is new, in some places (including in the key 7c/7c+ section on pitches 8-9) the climbers found that it intersects another route (possibly the *Ivanov route*) that is absent from the Yuri Koshelenko topo published in *Desnivel*. The Pustelnik brothers, with Slawek Cyndecki, also made an on-sight ascent of *Perestroika Crack* (F7b, 1000m) on **Pik Slesov**.

Jerzy Stefanski, Artur Magiera and Jan Kuczera made a free ascent of an epic new route on the NW face of **Kotin (4521m)**, *Czarna Wolga (Black Volga)*, on sight with no bolts at F7a, 1700m. Meanwhile Slawek Cyndecki, Pawel Grenda and Marcin Szymelfenig attempted a new route on the SE face of **Pik 4300m** (SE of **Pik 4810m**). They retreated after 22 pitches due to incessant rockfall. Lukasz Depta and Wojciech Kozub made a free ascent of a new route on the W face of a c.4000m tower in the Karasu massif, *Opposite to Asan* (F6a, 800m, on-sight). In addition, the group climbed several existing routes: **Yellow Wall (3800m)** via *Diagonal* (F6a+, 500m) by Stefanski, Kuczera, Kozub and Magiera (partly simul-climbed), **Asan (4230m)** via the *Timofeev route* (6A F7a A3) in alpine style by Stefanski and Kuczera and via the *Alperien route* (American variant) (5B F6c+) by Depta and Kozub.

The Anglo-German party of Daniel Danzer, Jens and Michael Richter, Markus Stofer, Sarah and Tony Whitehouse climbed from the Ak-Su valley in July. They climbed a new route *Russendisko* on **Pik 3700m**, a pyramid immediately west of the **Russian Tower (Pik Slesov, 4240m)**. The route is left centre, and left of existing routes, on the W face and has 10 pitches at 7a, 6c obl. The team also made a free ascent of *Perestroika Crack* (Faivre-Gentet-Givet-Roche 1991) above on the W face of **Pik Slesov**. They made some use of fixed ropes, which facilitated ascents by most members of the party. The first free ascent of this route was by Greg Child and Lynn Hill in 1995.

In the Lyailyak area in July-August 2006, the Ukraine team of V Mogila, A Lavrinenko, T Tshushko and Cheban climbed a new 6A A4 route variant on **Aksu North (5217m)**. This 1700m route takes the centre of the right part of the N face between the 1982 *Troshchinenko route* and the 1988 *Pershin route*. The first 20 pitches of the route are new, after which the remaining 22 pitches coincide with the *Pershin route*. The ascent was awarded second place in the 2006 CIS alpinism championships. The same area attracted the attention of two teams in the winter season. From 27 January to 4 February 2007 a team from Krasnoyarsk region led by Oleg Hvostenko made the second ascent, and first winter ascent, of the 6B 1996 *Pershin-Odintsov route* on the central N face of **Aksu North (5217m)**. The other climbers were E Beljaev, V Gunjkov, I Loginov, D Prokofjev and B Rodikov. Vladimir Arkhipov and Eugeny Dmitrienko from the same group had earlier retreated from an attempt on the 6B *Chaplinsky route*. In the same area in March 2007 a Sverdlovsk region team including Sergey Timofeev and Alexander Korobkov made the ascent of a probable new route right of the *Efimov route* on the central 'bastion' of the N face of **Pik Blok (5239m)**.

There has been one ascent reported in the Fann mountains. S Soldatov's team climbed a new route on **Chimtarga (5489m)**, the highest peak in the range, taking the central W face.

Pamir

The Tajik authorities recently re-named several major Pamir summits. The former **Pik Lenin (7134m)** is now named **Pik Nezavisimosti (Independence Peak)**, while **Pik Revolutsiy (6940m)** is now officially named **Pik Avitsenny**. This follows the earlier re-naming in 1999 of the former **Pik Kommunisma (7495m)** as **Pik Ismail Somoni**

Parties have been returning to the southern Pamir ranges, taking advantage of greater political stability in Tadjikistan. In August, the **Shakdara range** in the SW Pamir was the venue for an Alpine Club expedition organised by Phil Wickens. They approached the area via the Amu Darya (Oxus) river along the Afghan border. The 7-person team climbed from a base in the Nishgar valley, making ascents of **Pik Karl Marx (6736m)**, the highest in the range, and of **Sosedniy (5928m)**, **Litovskiy North (5905m)**, **Ovalnaya (5780m)** and **'Great Game Peak' (5635m)**. (See *'Top Marx in Pamirs for AC climbers'*, pp26-39.) Also in the Shakdara range, a Russian team led by Mikhail Volkov climbed the E ridge (Kustovskiy 1964) of **Pik Engels (6510m)** at 6A. The ascent took from 18-25 August, with a further two days for the descent to base camp.

Further north, climbers from Perm and Orenburg led by Veniamin Reutov and Ugor Zemlyanskiy made an ascent of **Pik Revolutsiy (Avitsenny, 6940m)**, reaching the summit on 11 August. They climbed via an ice rib at the left end of the NE 'Myshlyaev' face. On the summit they found the note from the previous ascent seven years earlier by Lebedev's team. During the expedition the group found two pairs of trainers that they thought must belong to the British climbers who disappeared in this area in 2005 (see *AJ* 111).

On 19 August Nikolai Pimkin made what appears to have been the first ski descent of **Pik Lenin (Independence, 7134m)**, taking the *Arkin route* in the centre of the N face. The less-explored eastern end of the Zaalay range around **Kurumdy (6613m)** received a visit from a 12-person Spanish team including David Taurà. In unsettled and often warm July weather, they made a number of first ascents including that of a 5155m summit they named **Ekishak** (two horns) on the ridge between Golova Orla and Shining Peak. They climbed via the SE face and upper NE ridge at PD+. On **Pik Molly (4748m)**, they climbed a new route via the NW ridge at AD. They also attempted **Zarya Vostoka, Kurumdy West (6545m)** and **Golova Orla (5441m)** but in each case retreated in poor snow conditions. Contrary to the claimed 2001 first ascent described in *AJ* 107, the main summit of **Kurumdy** (though not Kurumdy West) was climbed in 1932 from the south by Krylenko's 1932 expedition. The 2001 party climbed in October for lower temperatures.

Tien Shan

The major news from this range is the successful ascent of two major objectives above the **Inylchek glacier** that have repelled earlier attempts.

Climbers from Krasnoyarsk region including Alexander Mikhailitsin, Vladimir Arkhipov, Vladimir Gunko, Andrey Litvinov, Sergey Cherezov and Alexander Yanushevich made an ascent of the unclimbed NW face of **Pogrebetsky (6487m/6527m)**. The face, claimed to be the last unclimbed high-altitude wall in the former Soviet Union, had repelled three previous attempts in 1984, 1989 and 1991. The mountain had been climbed only by its W ridge/face (Streltsov 1980, 5B). The team reached the summit on 16 August after seven days' climbing at 6A. The descent took almost a further two days, ending with an escape from heavy snowfall that was creating avalanche danger. The lower 1000m of the route is snow and ice, and the upper part a steep 800m rock wall. A new route on **Pik Voennykh (Military) Topografov (6873m)**, also in the upper Inylchek but now lying wholly in China, is described in the report for China/Tibet.

Strangely neglected by European climbers is the Karakol region of the **Terskey Ala-Too**. Here in August on the impressive N face of **Dzhigit (5170m)**, Slovenian climbers Andrej Magajne, Simon Slejko, Andrej Erceg and Dejan Miskovic climbed a 1200m new route *Tretje oko (Third eye)*, ED2 VI/AI6, taking ice strips on the right part of the central wall. The group also climbed new routes *Espresso* (TD+ V/AI5 900m) and *Frappuccino* (TD+ V/AI5+ 900m) on the N face of **Pik Karakolski (5280m)**. On an earlier visit in August 2005, Magajena and Slejko had made the first ascent of *Amor Therapeutica* (TD+ V/AI5 700m) on the N face of **Slonienok (4728m)**. Also active on **Dzhigit** in August 2006 was a team from the Tomsk Alpinism Federation which, from 12-15 August, made an ascent of the 6A mixed route *Central North Face* (Slesov 1975). The ascent won them fourth place in the CIS mountaineering championships.

In May Dave Wynne Jones and six others from the UK made a ski traverse of the **Ak-Shirak range** from the Kara-Say glacier to the Petrov glacier. This followed an earlier attempt in 2003 (see *AJ* 109). During the traverse the team reached the summit of **Pik Kyrgyzia (4954m)**, the highest in this part of the range, and made seven first ascents of peaks over 4600m. They accessed the range by vehicle over the Suek pass and on foot up the Kara-Say river, ending the traverse at the Kumtor mine. (See article 'Celestial Touring', page 54.)

The SW corner of the **Borkoldoy range** just east of the At-Bashi was visited by UK climbers Dave Molesworth and Mark Weeding. They made ascents of summits 4608m, 4778m, 4661m, 4690m and 4705m, finding large wooden posts and a summit cairn on the latter. The posts were probably placed during earlier border tensions, as there was a Chinese claim to part of this range. The team also climbed from the valley above Akalla village.

Exploratory climbing continued in the **Western Kokshaal-Too**. In September the venue for the 2006 ISM visit to the area was the Navlikin glacier. Characteristically for this range, heavy snowfall made for avalanche-prone slopes. A group led by Pat Littlejohn retreated from **Pik 5611m** but summited on **Argon (4880m)** and made the first traverse of **Macciato**



132. The north-west face of Pik Vektor, in the Mushtuairi valley west of Bielukha, first climbed in 2005 by Vitaly Ivanov and friends via the centre of the face.
(*Mark Brits*)

(4656m). Meanwhile, teams led by Vladimir Komissarov and Adrian Nelhams found better conditions on the Malitskovo glacier to make ascents of Piks **Ascha (4717m)**, **Novey (4760m)** and **Berum (4812m)**. They retreated from a forepeak of **Kanashay (4996m)**, the dominant peak of the glacier, due to cornicing. Earlier, in July 2005, French climbers Manu Pellisier, Guillaume Baillarge and François Savary attempted the 700m W face of **Pik 4850m (Sabor)** near Kizil Asker, climbing 11 pitches up to A2 5c, reaching halfway up the face. They retreated in the face of a deluge of snow melt from earlier heavy falls. Following this, Thomas Faucheur, Lionel Albrieux and the above team made an ascent of the N ridge.

Finally, in the popular Kyrgyz range near Bishkek, Russian climbers made three ascents in August of routes on **Korona (5th tower, 4860m)** for the CIS championships. The SW face was climbed by a Tomsk team and a Tatarstan team at 5B. The W rib, also 5B, was climbed by a Moscow team.

Siberia

Previously unreported from July 2005 was an ascent by Colorado-based climbers Roxanna Brock and Heidi Wirtz in the vicinity of **Kupol (2921m)** in the **Eastern Sayan** Mountains. Targeting the only formation in the vicinity not to have been bolted by local climbers (see ascents reported in *AJ* 108), they climbed a new route *Pofigo* (5.11 335m), placing no bolts or pins. The climbing in this range was described in the 2006 *AAJ*.

Visiting parties in the **Altai** have increasingly looked to winter mountaineering activities. Various groups have descended Belukha on skis. There have also been ascents of 300-500m frozen waterfalls in the Ak-Tru area; there are reportedly also falls of 700-800m south-west of Teletskoe Lake. The best climbing season apparently is late February-March. On 16 April 2007 a party of mostly Croatian climbers accompanied by Vitaliy Ivanov made the first ascent of the N face of **Tapduair (3505m)** via 900m of up to 45° ice. Russians Vadim Kabanov and Evgeniy Danilchenko made ski and snowboard descents of this peak from 3200m. Summer activity in 2006 included the May ascent of a modest but accessible new route at 4B, V, 380m on the SE face of **Begemot (c1700m)**. This peak is in the Chuy valley, above the 755km road post on a spur of the Aygulak ridge.