



## AAC Publications

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### **First Ascents of Peak After You (Peak 5,318m), Peak Buddyness, and Other Summits**

Kyrgyzstan, Central Kokshaal-Too

I was being pummeled from every direction. After two days of nonstop travel to Bishkek, my fatigued mind was slow to comprehend what was happening. Then realized it was just my teammates, enthusiastically ambushing me at the airport. The six of us had finally reunited in the capital of Kyrgyzstan, heading for unclimbed peaks in the Djangart region of the central Tien-Shan.

For three of their four years at Tufts University outside Boston, Rob Gleich, Nick Levin, Austin Lines, Zach Matthay, and Ryan Stolp had lived together, partied together, and learned to climb together. In 2008, this ragged band of self-proclaimed dumpster divers helped me form Vertical Ice Climbing Enthusiasts (VICE), a club that solidified our commitment to a lifetime of adventure. Despite living in different parts of the world, we successfully coordinated gear acquisition, travel agency arrangements, and insurance enrollment (required for helicopter travel).

Our expedition was made possible through the assistance of an AAC Live Your Dream Grant and the vision of team member Rob Gleich, an adventurous young man known for his alleged ascent of a 200-foot smokestack on the Tufts campus and his penchant for ice climbing in a Speedo. Being a world traveler, Rob had learned some Russian phrases that helped us find essential supplies such as food, fuel, and alcohol.

None of us had ever completed a first ascent. We began acclimatizing in nearby Ala-Archa National Park, which was awe-inspiring, spectacular, and at times utterly miserable. The team endured bouts of food poisoning and altitude sickness, hailstorms pelting us with icy dippin' dots, and more than a few snowball fights. After spending the night of July 9 in Hotel Korona, a dilapidated shack perched along the moraine at 4,100m, we returned to Bishkek to finalize arrangements with Tien-Shan Travel. On July 13 we crammed into taxis, mashrukas (mini-buses), and a 4WD van for an 11-hour cross-country bumpfest that took us through Karakol to Maida-Adyr airbase.

Plenty of teams travel through Maida-Adyr, most of them bound for 7,000m peaks in the eastern Tien-Shan, but we were one of the first expeditions to arrive for the 2013 season. Three days passed while we waited for our 30-minute helicopter ride to the Djangart. Just as cabin fever was setting in and the team was debating the purchase and slaughter of livestock to replenish supplies, the chopper picked us up and magically transported us to the northern terminus of the N1 valley, where it meets the Djangart River. Using a Delorme InReach—smart phone combination allowed us to track our flight in real time and gave us the confidence we needed to burst into the cockpit and indicate our desired landing spot, narrowly avoiding an accidental drop-off at Djangart Pass.

Shuttling supplies toward the N1 Glacier, we reveled in the beauty of the surrounding unclimbed peaks and the beckoning silence of stunning rock and ice routes. On July 18 we established the Sandy Spit Camp at 4,000m on the east side of the N1 Glacier. Just southeast of camp towered our primary objective: Peak 5,318m. As the highest peak in the region and one of the most aesthetic, this summit had been the primary goal of multiple prior expeditions, of which the most successful to date was most likely Alex Brighton and Richard Tremellen (AAJ 2012). They reached a highpoint near the forepeak before being turned back by a dangerously loaded snowfield.

Around 3 a.m. on July 19 we started stumbling up the talus slope to the toe of a massive glacier. Climbing up icy slopes, we forged our way through an easy rock band onto a 2,000-foot snow and ice field on the northwest face. We overcame another short rock step to reach the corniced north ridge, where we turned toward the snow-capped summit. In the afternoon sun, the snow became less consolidated and progress proved difficult. We gathered ourselves in a sheltered alcove we came to call "the cave." Four of us huddled on the only flat ground we'd seen in awhile. Nick and Zach were somewhere to the north, exploring the ridgeline for descent options. From the cave, Ryan led an exposed mixed traverse across an ice gully and into a steep snow funnel. He stopped at the last solid anchor in sight, slinging a partially frozen rock outcropping at approximately 5,250m. Despite our best efforts and a good deal of digging on Rob's part, we had no way of making upward progress through the unconsolidated snow.

At 2:30 p.m. we began our descent. Four rappels brought us to open slopes where all six of us were reunited. After building the first V-threads of our lives, we completed another 10 rappels to reach the glacier, where Rob successfully extricated himself from a hidden crevasse. Some dubious decision-making led us down a loose gully on the northern edge of the glacier. On our last rappel, the ropes became stuck and we left them behind. We continued hiking down a treacherous talus slope to our high camp. Ryan had gone ahead, and a steaming-hot horsemeat dinner was ready for us when we arrived at 2 a.m.

Two days later we had retrieved the ropes, rested up, and felt ready to try again. Nick's cracked plastic boots kept him from joining us. He still played a key role in our ascent by transmitting music over the radio and cooking meals for our return. We departed at 8:30 p.m. on July 22, hoping to take advantage of stable snow conditions. Hiking up a 300m talus slope scouted by Nick and Austin to the south of the glacier, we reached the ice field and climbed through the night under a full moon. The sun rose as we crested the ridge and gathered in the cave. Ryan led his mixed pitch again, this time taking us through the snow barrier to the summit ridge. Rob and Zach pushed the lead through varied snow features until we could go no higher. We arrived on the summit around 9 a.m. and began our descent less than 30 minutes later. The snow conditions were already deteriorating in the early morning light. By 6 p.m. we were back in camp, eating dinner with Nick and debating the name of our mountain, which we decided to call After You so we could tell both our moms and our girlfriends that we named it after them. The route was deemed the Turd Burglar Indirect in a nod to Nick and his habit of snagging WAG bags (ca 1,200m, M3 AI3).

After two well-earned rest days, our group split to try multiple objectives. On July 25, Ryan and I traveled south to attempt the west side of Peak 5,172m. We felt drawn to a three-pitch ice line that took us through perfect rock to a hanging glacier. I completed a scramble across the rock ridge and into the mouth of the glacier, eventually surmounting an ice wall that deposited me on the surface. I turned the lead over to Ryan who descended into a monster crevasse. As he reached the snow-covered floor, it collapsed under him. An eternity seemed to pass as he struggled out of the dark hole and crawled across a snow bridge to the opposite side. We finally reached a crevasse-free area and set up camp at 4,700m. The next day, we hiked and climbed steep snow and ice to reach the summit at 9:15 a.m. in perfect weather. Nine or ten rappels brought us back across the bergschrund to high camp. We watched the sunset while eating a delightful dinner of cough drops from the first-aid kit. In the morning, we downclimbed an ice ramp where the glacier pinches against compact rock and then rappelled over seracs to make our way back to the Sandy Spit Camp. We named the peak Buddyness, and we called our route Last Crusade (5.3 WI3).

Meanwhile, Nick, Zach, Rob, and Austin had marched south to the border mountains. They roped up and frontpointed to a notch in the ridge, where, taking off his gloves in the midday sun, Zach led easy fourth- and fifth-class rock to the summit of Peak 4,580m, and was surprised to find an old bamboo pole on top. While this peak had been climbed before, perhaps the route had not. The guys decided to name it Cigarette Direct (5.2 AI2). Four rappels on rock horns and V-threads returned them to the moraine field that connected to camp.

On July 27, our pre-determined last day of climbing, this same four-person team climbed into a gully north of Peak 5,318m. As they paused to don crampons, rockfall came down and struck Nick in the kidney. Despite feeling somewhat nauseous, Nick continued climbing as the group ascended 50°–60° ice and some easy mixed ground to reach a heavily corniced ridge. The sunbathed, hanging snow features to the north prevented them from traversing toward Peak 4,885m, their original plan. Instead, the group reached a nearby highpoint to the south (ca 4,860m), which they named Mt. Skimmins in honor of a particularly obese feline friend in the U.S. They decided to call the route Kidney Stone Gully (AI2 M2) to commemorate injuries old and new. The group rappelled and downclimbed, returning to camp around 4 p.m.

On July 28 we broke camp and hiked back to our helicopter drop point. Once there, we celebrated our successes by delving into cached reserves. Just as we were running low on spaghetti sauce, Nutella, and vodka, the helicopter arrived to whisk us away. By July 30 we were relaxing on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul and eating everything in sight.

Jeff Longcor, AAC

## Images



The first-ascent route up the northwest face and north ridge of Peak After You (5,318m), highest summit of the Djangart region.



Summit of Peak After You.





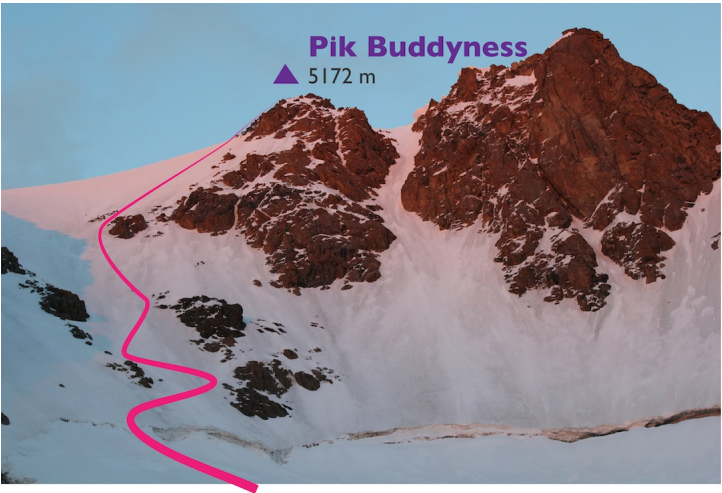
Summit ridge on Peak After You.



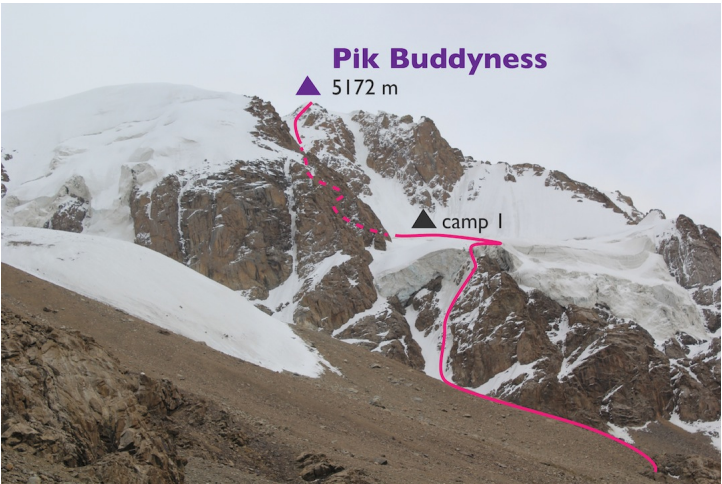
Peak After You seen from Peak Buddyness.



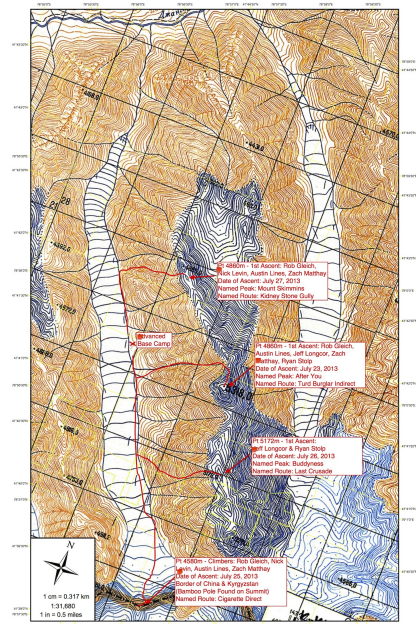
Ice climbing on Peak Buddyness.



First ascent line on Peak Buddyness.



First ascent line on Peak Buddyness.



Map showing routes climbed by VICE Expedition.

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