



Kashkaratash Valley, Various Ascents

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, At Bashi Range

In 2013 and 2014, the International School of Mountaineering (ISM) made its fifth and sixth visits to the delightful At Bashi Range, this time exploring the area around Peak 4,788.9m in the center of the range, reached via the long Kashkaratash Valley. [Editor's note: This system of valleys and glaciers lies immediately to the west of the Mustabbes area, where an ISM team made numerous first ascents in 2010 (AAJ 2011). A British team returned to this area in 2013 and did many other ascents (AAJ 2014).]

We approached by driving around the east and south sides of the range, but ran into difficulty at the main Aksai River, where a temporary crossing had been built after a bridge partially collapsed in floods. Unfortunately, the temporary structure collapsed under the weight of the Kamaz (six-wheel-drive truck) and the vehicle overturned, injuring three people, one of whom had to be airlifted to hospital. The team was able to continue in a second vehicle, and finally base camp was established south of Peak 4,788.9m, where the valley divides. The following week was spent climbing 10 peaks, from 4,365m to 4,600m, in generally good weather, with grades ranging from F to AD+, all to the west of Peak 4,788.9m and the Kashkaratash Central Glacier.

The team then moved to the Son Kul canyonlands and established five new routes in the superb Kokgrim Canyon, south of the main Son Kul canyon. These ranged from HVD to E3 and up to 250m in length.

In late August 2014, an ISM team returned to the Kashkaratash area to explore the mountains farther to the east. Advanced base was established at 4,000m beside a large glacial lake on Kashkaratash East Glacier. Conditions were exceptionally dry, Kyrgyzstan having had a long, hot summer with no significant precipitation since early June. This meant that virtually every snow and ice slope was bare water ice, making it arduous and time consuming to climb even relatively low-angle slopes, as everything had to be pitched (and usually abseiled in descent).

Two attempts were made on the jagged chain of peaks running up the west side of the glacier (a succession of rocky spires approached by various couloirs). These resulted in AD routes to Point Tanoguch (4,750m) and Point Penitent (4,700m). The most northerly peak of the chain was climbed by its northeast ridge at PD+ (Peak Tunduk Gildys, 4,730m). The summits on the east side of this glacier are generally lower and easier (although some would give fine technical routes). The obvious snow dome at the north end was climbed via its west ridge at F+ (Peak Arie Gabai, 4,530m), while the next rocky summit southward, Peak James Bruton (4,727m), was climbed by its south flank, also at F+. Beside this the rocky ridge of Point 4,690m gave a nice AD climb.

A foray up Kashkaratash Central glacier led to Peak Dianne (4,439m) and Peak Dostuk (4,590m), which had been climbed the previous year from the west. Finally, starting from base camp, two scree peaks with craggy tops were climbed and traversed: Peak Kara (4,534m, F) and Peak Taaji (4,200m, PD). With better snow conditions, possibly in early summer, a future team could have a very productive trip to this area.

The team then climbed in a previously unvisited limestone canyon in the Son Kul region called Katchik-Kindyk, which gave three routes in the V/V+ grades, each over 200m long. Huge scope for adventurous rock climbing remains throughout this area.

Pat Littlejohn, U.K.

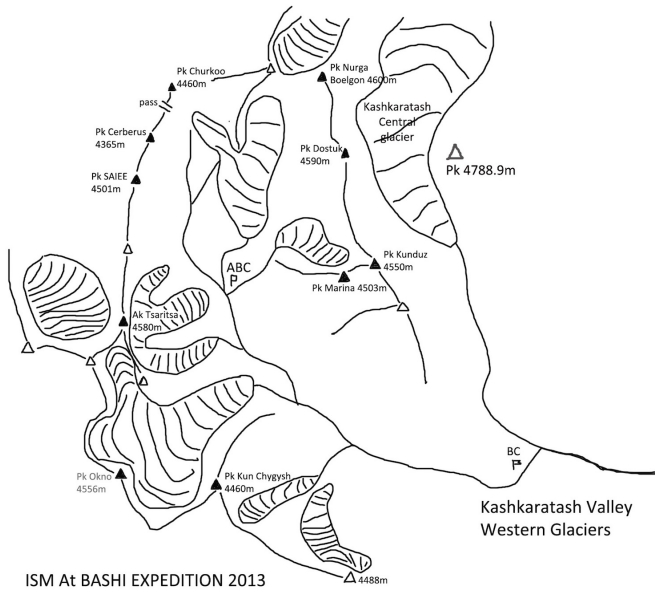
Images



Climbing Point Penitent (4,700m) on the west side of Kashkaratash East Glacier.

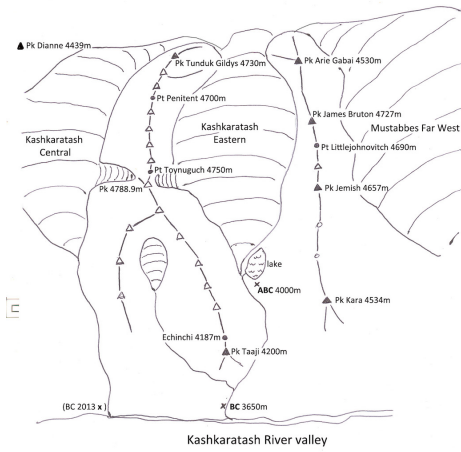


Peaks above the Kashkaratash East Glacier.



Kashkaratash Valley western glaciers (2013 ISM expedition) sketch map.

ISM AT BASHI EXPEDITION 2014



Kashkaratash East Glacier sketch map (2014 ISM expedition)

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