



AAC Publications

Pik 5,023m, Northwest Ridge

Kyrgyzstan, Tengri Tag

Will Kernick, who had previously been to the region in 2014 to attempt Pik Pobeda, and Tim Miller arrived on the North Inylchek Glacier in July, having transferred from Almaty in Kazakhstan. Cameron Holloway and I arrived one week later. Both teams set about acclimatizing—Will and Tim on Khan Tengri (6,995m), and Cameron and I on Karly Tau (5,450m, between Pik Kazakhstan and Marble Wall on the north side of the North Inylchek). We were all successful with our objectives, Will and Tim climbing Khan Tengri over the summit of Chapaev North (6,120m) to make the season's first ascent from the north, and Cameron and I summiting Karly Tau on our second attempt, the first stopped by bad weather. We then joined forces to attempt unclimbed peaks near the junction between the North and South Inylchek Glaciers.

The original plan had been to trek 25km down the North Inylchek to attempt unclimbed Razor Peak (5,576m), one of the targets of a 2009 Singaporean Expedition led by David Lim (AAJ 2011). This team was hoping to approach the peak from the north, but was stopped by serious crevassing and avalanche risk. We planned to make an attempt from the south.

Unfortunately, the North Inylchek proved too broken and challenging to negotiate for such a long distance, so after making camp 10km down the glacier at 3,750m, we resorted to our reserve plan, an attempt on Pik 5,023m, one of the highest remaining, officially unclimbed peaks in the North Inylchek region. This summit lies to the south of the North Inylchek, between the Ryzhova and Mikailova glaciers.

After a miserable four-hour glacier traverse to the base of the peak, we all headed up a loose scree slope into worsening weather, reaching the snow line at ca 4,100m. Choosing to climb light, we had equipped ourselves with one two-man tent, four ice screws, and a 50m half rope between the four of us. Above the snow line we simul-climbed 45–65° icy slopes for the next three hours, then traversed right to the northwest ridge, where we placed camp at 4,350m.

The following day we headed up the remaining 700 vertical meters to the summit in perfect weather, negotiating networks of crevasses and climbing sections of 55–60° ice, a chossy rock ridge, and a small serac to gain a small shoulder 100m shy of the summit.

Here we were faced with a 50m serac guarding the summit pyramid. Unfortunately, this could not be skirted, so we were forced to climb a 25m pitch of Scottish 5, followed by 25m of unprotectable 60° terrain to reach gentle slopes immediately beneath the summit.

Having reached the top, we rappelled the main difficulties from a series of snow bollards, and then downclimbed to camp. The following day we chose a more direct line of descent, which proved to be quite involved due to heavy rockfall and bad ice conditions. We returned safely to the glacier, but then were stopped 700m from our original glacier camp by a deep (it was afternoon) glacial river, which forced us to spend the night on the bank before crossing next morning.

We had planned to climb other peaks in the area, but Tim became racked with vomiting and diarrhea. When this failed to improve, we headed back up the glacier to the helicopter evacuation point and returned home.

We suggest the mountain might be named Nutcracker Peak, given that Tim had whistled the theme to "The "Nutcracker" on the mountain (and the peak proved to be a bit of a ball breaker!). It also seemed appropriate, given its Russian connotations. Our expedition was supported by grants from the Austrian Alpine Club, Mount Everest Foundation and British Mountaineering Council.

Seth Ford, U.K.

Images



Pik 5,023m and the route of ascent seen from the northeast. The abrupt serac wall is visible just below the summit. Camp was made at the point where the route reaches the skyline ridge.



A pitched section of bad ice during the first ascent of Pik 5,023m.



Descending steep loose rock onto the ice on the way down from the first ascent of Pik 5,023m.



Will Kernick starting up the serac wall just below the summit.



Nearing the summit of Pik 5,023m, with the North Inylchek Glacier below and, from left to right, Pik Piramida (5,332m), Pik Ignateva (5,488m), and Pik Panoramnyi (5,300m).

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