



AAC Publications

Pik Palgov, West Face and North Ridge

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Western Kokshaal-Too

In July and August, Vaughan Snowdon and I climbed above the Palgov Valley, where we were fortunate to make the first ascent of Pik 5,602m, one of the highest unclimbed summits of the range. We named it Pik Palgov, since it is the highest of the border peaks at the head of the Palgov Glacier. We were probably the third party to climb from the Palgov, after Moscow teams in 1998 and 2003. [The former made the first ascents of seven summits, including neighboring Krylya Sovetov (5,480m).]

In two days from Bishkek, our agents ITMC took us by Gaz-66 truck to the nearest established vehicle access, by the Kotur River at 3,900m. From here we spent several days ferrying loads via the Aytali and Sarychat valleys to a base camp by the confluence of the Palgov and Grigoriev rivers, a distance of 20km and rather hard work.

On July 31, for acclimatization, we made the first ascent of Pik 5,190m on the east side of the valley. Scree and dry glacier led us to snow runnels on the west side of the north ridge. From the summit we descended over Pik 4,973m to the north. The overcast weather turned to a persistent overnight rain that chased us down to base camp, where rain continued intermittently for some days.

When conditions allowed, on August 8, we ascended the Palgov Glacier to its upper névé, at 4,600m, to tackle our main objective, Pik 5,602m. The most aesthetic route, the west ridge, looked exposed with sustained technicalities. Instead, on the west face, we found a twisting snow/ice couloir right of disintegrating rock buttresses and left of the most threatening seracs. Unfortunately, an overnight electrical storm and persistent heavy snowfall forced us to descend to base camp, wary of avalanche risk in the upper cwm.

Cooler and seemingly settled weather persuaded us to use our last available days on a second attempt. On August 14 we climbed up the couloir and onto easier, west-facing slopes, which led to a rounded foresummit and the exposed but straightforward upper north ridge. As we gained height, wind gusts increased in ferocity, keeping us focused as we traversed undulations and climbed around rock features on surprisingly good névé. The summit was a spectacularly sharp point overlooking the impressive southern buttresses of Pik Kosmos and some striking unclimbed peaks on the Xinjiang (China) side of the border. Partly due to the high winds, we moved fast and summited in less than three and a half hours from our high camp, returning in under three. Thanks are due to the Mount Everest Foundation, which provided funding support for this expedition.

Paul Knott, Alpine Club (U.K.), New Zealand

Images



Looking west-southwest from the summit of Pik Palgov to unclimbed 5,000m peaks on the Xinjiang (Chinese) side of the range, south of Pik Byeliy.



The lower west face of Pik Palgov (5,602m) from the upper Palgov Glacier. The ascent toward the north ridge took the prominent left-slanting couloir that starts between the large rock buttress and the line of seracs to its right.

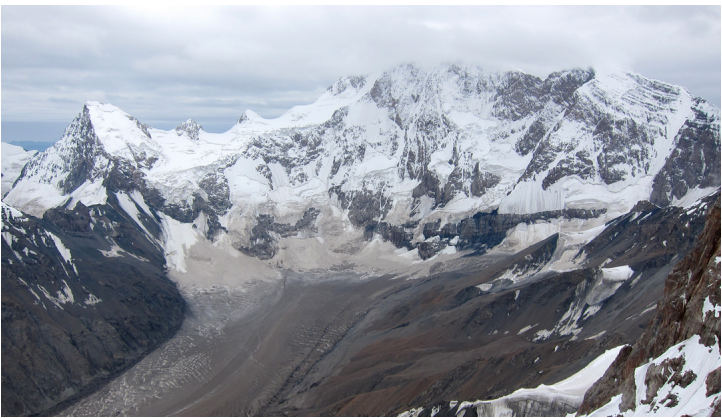


Looking across the northeast face of Krylya Sovetov from the west face of Pik Palgov to Pik Byeliy

(5,697m, left) and its northern outliers.



The big peaks of the eastern sector of the Western Kokshaal-Too, seen from the summit of Pik 5,190m. Pik Chonturasu (5,729m) just left of center, Pik Dankova (5,982m, the highest summit in the range) on the right, and in the distance, between the two, Pik Koroleva (5,816m).



Looking across the western branch of the Grigoriev Glacier from the summit of Pik 5,190m. Pik Vityaz (5,355m, left) and the huge north-northeast face of Pik Kosmos (5,940m). This face was climbed during the Soviet competition era during the 1980s.



The upper north ridge of Pik Palgov.



Pik Palgov (5,602m) from the upper icefall of the Palgov Glacier. The first-ascent route (2015) reached the north ridge (left skyline) via a hidden couloir between the buttresses in the left foreground and the large seracs behind them.



Vaughan Snowdon crosses the fast-flowing river draining the plateau south of the Sarychat during load carrying to base camp.



Vaughan Snowdon on the Palgov Glacier, Western Kokshaal-Too. Behind him lie Pik Palgov (5,602m, left) and Krylya Sovetov (5,480m, in the sun).



The untouched southwest (Chinese) face of Pik Kosmos (5,940m), seen from the summit of Pik Palgov. The shoulder in the left foreground is Point 5,495m.

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