



AAC Publications

Karakol Valley: High Traverses Over Unclimbed Peaks

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Fergana Range

The relatively unknown Fergana Range is over 320km long with an average altitude of 3,800m. The biggest peaks are at the southeastern end, where there is heavy glaciation below the main watershed and snow peaks between 4,200m and 4,819m (the highest). The approach is via Naryn and then on the main road toward the Torugart Pass, eventually reaching the mountains by 4WD from the Arpa, a wide valley that runs along the northern side of the range. The original plan for Pete Duguid, Pete Nugent, Gabe Oliver, John Venier, and me was to explore peaks at the head of the Kokbel Valley. However, an organized team of armed hunters denied us access, forcing us to change objective to the next main valley to the northwest, the Karakol.

Mark Weeding had visited this valley twice (AAJ 2011 and 2012), making numerous first ascents. With the last-minute change in plan, we didn't have information on what had previously been climbed, and our expedition repeated some of Weeding's ascents, but also added several first ascents on the main ridgelines.

We established base camp next to the river at 3,000m (40°41'2.88"N, 74°36'21.38"E), 18km below the glaciers. After establishing two higher camps, we made two very enjoyable multi-peak traverses.

The Vershina Ridge (PD) crossed four summits on the ridge between Piks 4,203m and 4,701m, as shown on the Russian military map. I soloed this traverse, which offered interesting mixed climbing along a broken crest, on August 30, and got within 100m of the top of Pik 4,701m before being forced to retreat in a thunderstorm. Two of the peaks had no previously recorded ascents.

The second traverse, Podkova Ridge (F+), completed on September 4 by Gabe and me, crossed five summits between Piks 3,870m and 4,330m, in winter-like conditions. Four of these had no previously recorded ascents.

Nugent and Venier made an attempt on impressive Pik 4,485m at the head of the valley, climbing the north ridge to within 50m of the summit, where they were forced to turn back due to bad weather and the seriousness of the climbing.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to be certain when claiming first ascents in Kyrgyzstan. Many teams have made ascents over the last few years and have not recorded them. For that reason, we chose not to name any of our peaks, but did take the liberty of giving names to the two very enjoyable traverses. [[Download](#) the complete expedition report.]

Paul Josse, U.K.

Images



Gabe Oliver approaching the summit of Peak 4,361m during the traverse of the Podkova Ridge. The view is to the south and peaks at the head of the Karakol Glacier. The high summit to the left is Peak 4,750m, while the prominent Castle Ridge, with its three or four rocky tops, is in the far center.



Paul Josse on the Podkova Traverse, with the Vershina Ridge to the southeast behind.

Article Details

Author	Paul Josse
Publication	AAJ
Volume	58
Issue	90
Page	282
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions