



Pik 5,190m: East Face

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Western Kokshaal-Too

In September, Mike Abrahamsson, Harry McGhie, Heather Swift, and I set out from Naryn to climb the north face of Pik Kosmos (5,940m) at the head of the western branch of the Grigoriev Glacier. In fact we set out three times, as we had significant, repeated vehicle problems. Our first driver had a heart condition that prevented him from continuing, then the gear box on the first vehicle broke, shortly followed by the breakage of the gear box on the second vehicle. Vehicle three had a water leak but eventually made it to the mountains, via a detour to pick up two starving Alaskan climbers.

After these delays, Harry and Mike became very unwell with suspected giardia, so Heather and I did a significant amount of the initial load carrying. This sadly, and predictably, put us over a week behind our schedule. Our first reconnaissance of Kosmos was not encouraging: Serac walls threatened much more of the north face than we'd hoped. In 2014 a Polish team had been up the right side of the face (AAJ 2015), without summiting, and we thought we could at least attempt their route. However, in 2015 even this approach was significantly threatened by a large band of seracs, and none of our team thought the route viable. Next day all team members climbed partway up several 5,000m peaks to acclimatize, and we all witnessed significant serac falls triggering sizeable avalanches; some powder clouds made it 2km out from the face and engulfed our reconnaissance point from the day before. Every day at least 10 significant seracs would carve from all areas of the north face. We decided to look at alternatives!

Harry, Mike, and I opted to try a mixed route on the east face of Pik 5,190m. I was not fast enough soloing the initial 700m couloir, and the sun reached the ice before I did. Harry and Mike continued and found four pitches of good climbing up a series of icefalls and mixed steps (AI 3/3+ M3), before snow-covered ice slopes led northward to the summit. In descent they downclimbed the snow/ice slopes and descended the steeper cliff band in two, 60m rappels from blocks. At the time we believed the mountain was unclimbed, but in July it had been climbed from the Palgov Glacier, to the west, by Paul Knott and Vaughan Snowden.

With Harry still sporadically unwell, we decided to make the long trip back to the drop-off point and spend our last few days on the Kotur Glacier. Unfortunately, after four weeks of exceptionally good weather, we had to wait out the only storm of the trip by the Kotur. Still, Heather had a quick explore of the basin, and I soloed a variation up the east side and north ridge of Pik Oleg (4,657m). We'd like to thank the British Mountaineering Council, Mount Everest Foundation, and Goretex Shipton-Tilman Grant, without whom the trip would not have been possible. [Download the complete expedition report.]

Emily Ward, France

Kosmos – There and Back Again

Images



Harry McGhie rappelling toward the Grigoriev Glacier after making the first ascent of the east face of Peak 5,190m.



The far left side of the north face of Kosmos was, like the rest of the wall, very active during 2015, with powder clouds from avalanches at times reaching 2km out from the face.



The east face of Peak 5,190m. The wide 700m couloir was climbed unroped to the top left, where the obvious ice runnel was followed for four pitches (AI3/3+ M3) to the summit slopes.



Mike Abrahamsson and Harry McGhie climbing the ice runnel high on the east face of Peak 5,190m.



A limestone wall on a probably unclimbed peak above the west side of the lower Grigoriev Glacier.

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