



Bazar-Dara Valley, Ski Mountaineering First Ascents

Tajikistan, Pamir

In September 2013, Jamie Bunchuk and Matt Traver traveled to the Alichursky Mountains to make a documentary about a Kyrgyzstani-Tajik hunter and herder called Orozbek, and while there ventured into both the north and south Alichursky ranges (AAJ 2015). After listening to a lecture by Traver and then having private discussions with him, we came to the conclusion that the northern Alichursky Range would provide an ideal ski-mountaineering venue, with opportunities to climb in a largely unexplored area.

In April 2016, Anna Bushe, Stefan Jachmich, and I flew to Osh in Kyrgyzstan before driving south along the M41 via Sary-Tash to the Tajikistan border. After crossing the 4,280m Kyzylart Pass, we continued past Karakul Lake to the town of Murghab. The following day, a short drive along an increasingly snowy road, south and then west, led to a point some 14km short of the town of Alichur, where a track branches north up the Bazar-Dara Valley. We planned to ski 20km north to Bazar-Dara Pass and the lake of the same name, from which we would explore some of the major side valleys and attempt several of the unclimbed peaks in the area.

Access to this region is relatively easy during the summer months, as a well-defined track follows the valley to a disused silver mine north of Bazar-Dara Pass. According to the 1:100,000 Russian military map, this 4,464m pass is only navigable from May to November. In April we found poorly consolidated snow, with travel impossible on foot. Donning skis and towing climbing and camping gear, using a previously validated haul-bag system, we spent several days reaching Bazar-Dara Pass, a journey that was made more arduous by our suboptimal acclimatization schedule.

On April 11 we positioned our first camp at 4,047m in the wide valley, about 7km from the road head. Next day high winds kept us tentbound but at least provided a valuable opportunity to acclimatize further before we progressed to higher camps. On the 13th we established our second camp 7km further up-valley at 4,349m on a gently inclined plateau. On the 14th we carried a stash to the Bazar-Dara Pass before Stefan, with energy to spare, climbed the south ridge of the obvious peak to the north-northeast of Camp 2. He used skis until he was able to scramble up the last few meters on foot to the 4,952m summit (37°55.678'N, 73°24.822'E) to make what we believe was the first ascent. We called this Pik Perestroika, in recognition of the Russian reformative movement that helped open Tajikistan to the West.

After relocating our camp to 4,525m, north of Bazar-Dara Pass but still south of Bazar-Dara Lake, we subsequently explored the major valleys to the east and west. Under the prevailing conditions (high avalanche risk and unconsolidated snow, where a climber would sink to his hips if not on skis), few peaks were safely accessible. Nevertheless, Stefan and I climbed two other peaks we believe to be first ascents, both on skis until the last few meters. Pik 4,918m (37°56.284'N, 73°22.138'E), which we called Pik Glasnost (Openness Peak), was climbed on April 16 via the south face, and Pik 5,021m (37°54.506'N, 73°26.458'E), which we called Pik Druzhiba (Friendship Peak), was climbed on the 20th via its broad southwest gully and west ridge.

It was more or less impossible to get any information on the peaks bordering the Bazar-Dara, and while certainly a few have been climbed, all the peaks we summited had rocky outcrops on top and none had any evidence of cairns.

Following a return to Camp 2, we explored two of the easterly side valleys, and on the 21st made an attempt on the 4,879m peak at the head of the most southerly of these. However, on reaching a well-defined col featuring a prominent pinnacle at 4,629m ($37^{\circ}53.288'N$, $73^{\circ}27.162'N$), it was clear there was no safe ski access to the summit.

With obvious climbing opportunities now in short supply, we decided to make a slow return to the road head, rejoining our driver on the 24th for the journey back to Murghab. The team would like to thank the Austrian Alpine Club, BMC, Julie Tullis Memorial Fund, Mount Everest Foundation, and Mountaineering Council of Scotland for their financial support.

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Images



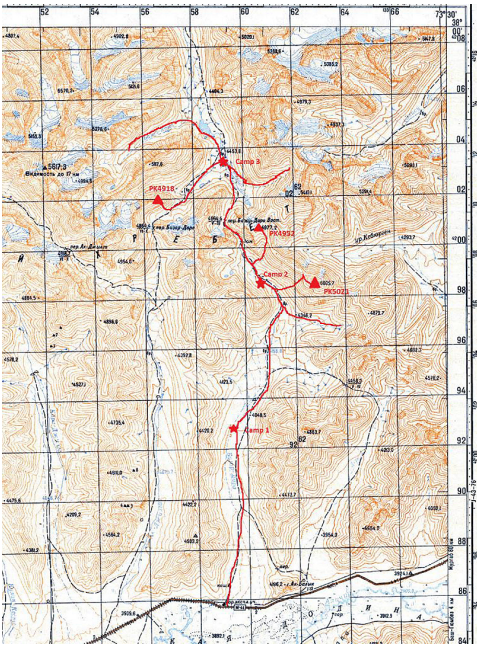
Camp 2 and the view south. The mountain in view is likely Peak 4,863.7m on the Russian map and is possibly unclimbed. The route back to the main road passes right of this summit.



Looking west into an impressive cirque of peaks. Pik Glasnost is the foreground summit left of center. Other peaks are above 5,000m, with the highest being Peak 5,617m, as designated on the Russian map.



Stefan Jachmich with the snowy pyramid of Pik Glasnost behind.



Part of the north Alichursky Range, showing the route north from the Alichur Road, the three camps used in April 2016, and various peaks climbed and attempted.

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