



## AAC Publications

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### **Laylak Valley, Peak 4,800m, Northwest Pillar, Alexandra Supernova**

Kyrgyzstan, Pamir Alai

**FOR MANY YEARS I had dreamed of going to Kyrgyzstan to climb perfect granite walls above green meadows filled with wild horses. The first question was exactly which destination to choose.** After much research we decided on the Ak-su branch of the Laylak valley, despite this area, unlike the neighboring Karavshin valley, not having a reputation as a free climbing Eldorado. [Editor's note: Like the Karavshin, the Laylak area is divided into Kara-su and Ak-su branches; the main peak at the head of the Ak-su arm has two well-known tops named Snowy Ak-su and Rocky Ak-su.]

Since the 1980s, Rocky Ak-su has been the mecca of former Soviet alpinists, who preferred technically difficult, mixed rock and ice walls to free climbs. In both summer and winter, hard-hitting alpinists with large haul bags, portaledge, pitons, and aid gear make their pilgrimage to the north-facing walls of Ak-su, Iskander, and Pik Alexander Blok. Spending five to ten days on an ascent and battling infernal storms at 5,000m are the rule rather than the exception. Free ascents of classic routes throughout this valley can probably be counted on one hand.

Nevertheless, a variety of smaller, 600–900m walls offer fantastic free-climbing potential. Our plan was to make a free ascent of an existing aid route and/or open a new free route. Benno Wagner and I from Munich were joined by Paul Sass, a crack climbing specialist from the Elbsandsteingebirge, and by Henry Francis from Sheffield, England. In August, after a flight via Moscow to Osh, a big shopping crusade at the local markets, and a minibus trip, we began trekking from the mountain village of Ozgurush with the help of horses and donkeys. These transported our hundreds of kilograms of gear and food for 25km to the start of the glacier moraine below the north face of Ak-su.

The first week was very warm; it was well above 0°C at 4,000m, even at night. The surrounding walls rumbled often and violently with falling rock and ice. Many objectives we had thought promising from photos were now out of the question. We looked for the safest and best rock climbing line and eventually decided on the compact northwest pillar of Pik 4,800m, a summit at the end of the west ridge of Pik Alexander Blok. [Not to be confused with the well-known Peak 4,810m in the Karavshin Valley farther east.]

Working in teams of two, we took turns to establish the first pitches. The lower half of the wall was either very slabby or presented hard face climbing on compact granite, and we had to drill bolts regularly. In a week, we climbed, equipped, and cleaned the first 10 pitches. Two-thirds of the way up the 800m route, we reached considerably steeper ground, with numerous crack systems that required far fewer bolts. The orange granite, illuminated in the afternoon sun, gave a Joshua Tree–like climbing experience, with perfect hueco formations made for climbing. The end of the route seemed near. Unfortunately, the initial warm weather did not last, and when it changed the first half of the pillar caught a severe frost in the morning. In the afternoon, a cold wind and shade made the use of a down jacket necessary, even while climbing. Snow fell at base camp. We completed all of the pitches through these harsh conditions, but the route still awaited a completely free ascent.

Sometimes you get lucky: In our final four days the sun came out, dried the wall amazingly fast, and we were able to free all the pitches. We called the route Alexandra Supernova, to give the nearby peak named after Russian poet Alexander Blok pleasant new company. We climbed 18 pitches, largely from 6a to 7b.

After three weeks, our forces and food supplies had dwindled, and we returned to the valley through beautiful alpine meadows, green woods, and steep ravines. In addition to the climbing experience and the beautiful scenery, the overwhelming friendliness of the Kyrgyzstan people remains a warm memory.

Toni Lamprecht, Germany

## Images



On pitch 15 (6c) of Alexandra Supernova, with wild rock formations above.



Looking southwest and west from Peak 4,800m to (A) Ak-su South (Snowy Ak-su, 5,355m). (B) Ak-su North (Rocky Ak-su, 5,217m). (C) Pik Admiralteets (5,090m). (D) Pik Petrogradets (5,163m). (E) Iskander (5,120m). (F) Iskander North (5,000m).



Toni Lamprecht following pitch 15 (6c) of Alexandra Supernova.



Toni Lamprecht on pitch nine (7b) of Alexandra Supernova.



Looking down the seventh pitch (6c+) of Alexandra Supernova after a storm.



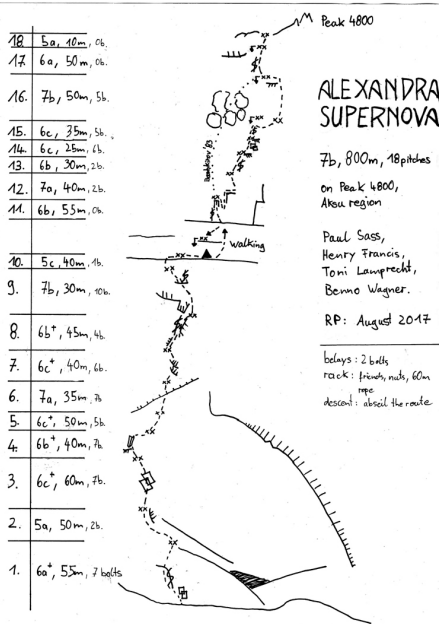
Base camp below the moraines of the Ak-su Glacier. (A) North face of Rocky Ak-su (Ak-su North, 5,217m). (B) Pik Admiralteets (5,090m), with its prominent northeast-facing pillar on the left side of the face. Pik Petrogradets (5,163m) is hidden behind (C) Iskander (5,120m). Toni Lamprecht



View east from the Ak-su moraines toward Pik Alexander Blok (5,239m) and (immediately in front and to the right) Pik 4,800m. Summits on the main divide to the right lead to Ak-su (just off picture).



Panorama from Pik 4,800m from southeast to southwest. (A) Piramidalny (5,509m). (B) Pik 5,170m and the Zarafshan Range. (C) Ak-su South (Snowy Ak-su, 5,355m). (D) Ak-su North (Rocky Ak-su, 5,217m). (E) Pik Admiralteets (5,090m).



Lamprock\_Peak4800\_2018\_AlexandraTopo



(1) Alexandra Supernova on Pik 4,800m. Some of the routes on the west side of Pik Alexander Blok are also marked: (2) Maximenja Route (2008, 6A, 6a A4); (3) Valiev Route (1986, 6A, since damaged by rockfall); (4) Gunko Route (2010, 6A, attempts to climb the damaged Valiev route with many variants); (5) Summer Bouquet (Slovaks, 2017, IX+ 70°); and (6) Southwest Ridge, Petrichenko Route (1984, 5B).

## Article Details

Author	Toni Lamprecht
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions