



Eastern Borkoldoy, First Ascents from Kainar Lake

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Borkoldoy Range

The Borkoldoy Range lies due south of Lake Issyk Kul and north of the Western Kokshaal-too mountains, and consists of two main valleys systems, one facing west and the other east. The western end of the Borkoldoy has seen many prior expeditions, but previous trips to the eastern side are clouded in tales of disappointment, as teams were turned back by armed hunters. We were able to contact the local hunters in advance and agree a permit fee for access.

This was the first major mountaineering expedition any of the team had made. Overall, it proved highly successful, with the likely first ascents of 14 peaks. We also documented the local distributions of observed wildlife (there is no published field guide that comprehensively documents the wildlife of Kyrgyzstan), as well as photographed 11 glaciers for Project Pressure, a charity that is documenting the world's glaciers.

Unfortunately, when the vehicles dropped us off in our chosen valley, the pack horses we had prebooked were not there. After waiting a couple of hours, we decided to begin ferrying our 500kg of food and equipment to base camp ourselves. Consequently, our camp on the south shores of Kainar Lake (41°24'32.31"N, 77°52'53.09"E), although idyllic, was far lower than planned, and we ended up spending the first week in reconnaissance and attempting scary, loose rock routes, rather than progressing to the head of the valley where more enjoyable and objectively safer climbing awaited.

Nonetheless, between August 11 and 27, Stuart Gillan, Tom Harding, Matt Lewis, David Lyons-Ewing, Scott Martin, Hannah Meinertzhagen, and I (in various combinations) climbed the 14 peaks detailed below and made attempts on two others. Four temporary high camps were established.

August 11: Pik 4,557.5m (Russian map, measured by GPS as 4,576m, 41.431513°N, 77.898366°E), south face and southwest-facing gully-depression (850m, PD-), and a second route via the south face direct and southwest-facing gully-depression (850m, D-, British Severe 4a on dubious rock with often sparse protection).

August 12: Pik 4,375.2m (GPS 4,418m, 41.379693°N, 77.910640°E) via the east ridge (980m, PD-).

August 13: Unmarked Peak (GPS 4,701m, 41.368503°N, 77.861738°E), north face and southwest ridge (450m, D-, ice to 60°).

August 17: Unmarked Peak (GPS 4,666m, 41.370145°N, 77.822965°E), north face and northwest ridge (470m, AD+); Pik 4,724.9m (GPS 4,723m, 41.370145°N, 77.822965°E) via the west ridge from the previous summit (PD); Pik 4,632.8m (GPS 4,625m, 41.357120°N, 77.796635°E) via the north ridge (850m, PD-); and Pik 4,785.4m (GPS 4,785m, 41.349781°N, 77.812428°E) via the east ridge (1,010m, PD-).

August 18: Pik 4,444.6m (GPS 4,465m, 41.396001°N, 77.790070°E) via the south face (690m, F, a lot of steep scree).

August 19: Pik 4,722.3m (GPS 4,727m, 41.353000°N, 77.795000°E) via southeast ridge (950m, PD-, a pinnacled ridge to a scenic summit).

August 22: Pik 4,966.2m (GPS 4,963m, 41.376700°N, 77.821011°E) via the western cwm and glacier (1,190m, PD-).

August 23: Pik 4,668.9m (GPS 4,678m, 41.341445°N, 77.805133°E) via the north ridge (900m, PD-), and Pik 5,044.1m (GPS 5,042m, 41°21'38.76"N, 77°50'42.01"E) via the western glacier and southwest ridge (390m, PD, Scottish I/II to a heavily corniced summit). Piks 5,044.1m and 5,020.6m were the expedition's main objectives before arriving in the area. An attempt on Pik 5,020.6 via the north face and southwest ridge was unsuccessful. In fact, a circumnavigation of this mountain revealed no easy route.

August 26: Pik 4,513.8m (GPS 4,520m, 41.428735°N, 77.875643°E) via the south couloir (1,040m, F, largely scree).

August 27: Pik 4,636.1m (GPS 4,640m, 41.433263°N, 77.914266°E) via south face (1,160m, F, mainly scree slopes and scrambling).

The eastern end of the Borkoldoy range still offers potential for first ascents and new routes, though the rock quality is poor. We didn't make it to the head of the valley, so any peaks there will be unclimbed from the east; most if not all have already been climbed from the west. Clear mornings with afternoon wind and rain were characteristic of our stay. Temperatures noticeably dropped over the month.

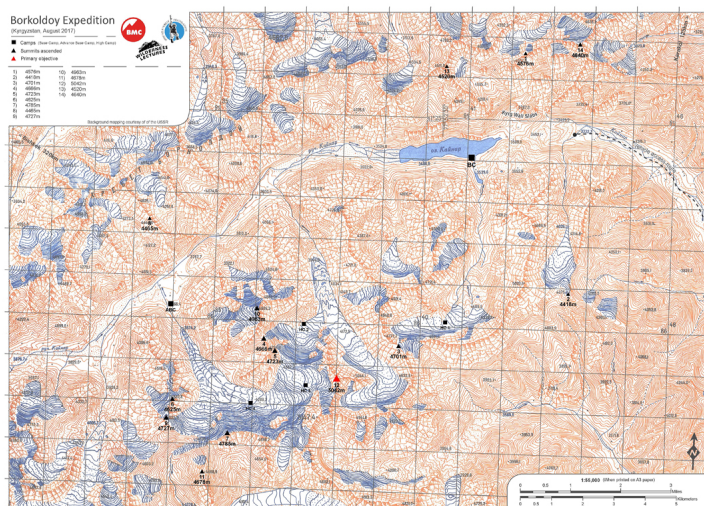
[Click here to download a PDF of the expedition report.](#)

Neil Cox and the Borkoldoy 2017 Expedition, U.K.

Images



Looking east at Pik 5,042m (GPS) and the route of ascent up the southwest ridge.



Peaks climbed in 2017 are marked by triangles, high camps by squares.



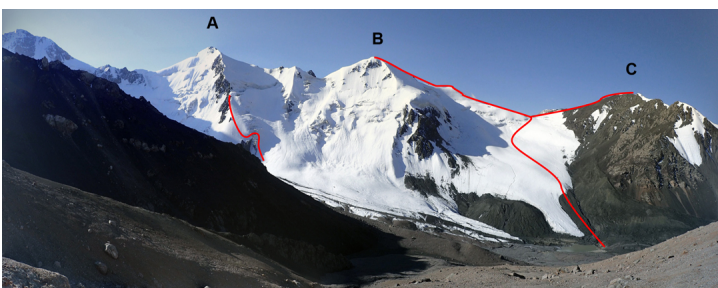
Neil Cox on the summit of Pik 4,722.3m (4,727m GPS) with Pik 4,785.5m behind and to the right, and unclimbed (but attempted in 2017) Pik 4,898.7m to the left.



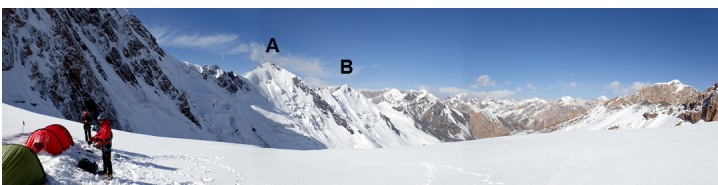
Looking southwest at Pik 4,632.8m (4,625m GPS) and route of ascent via the north ridge. A number of the peaks beyond, at the head and further west of the Kainar Valley, have been climbed by previous expeditions.



The idyllic base camp on the southern shores of Kainar Lake. Several summits on the ridge above were climbed by the 2017 expedition.



Looking from the north at (A) Pik 4,898.7m and route of attempt, (B) Pik 4,785.5m and route of ascent via the west ridge, and (C) Pik 4,722.3m (4,727m GPS) and route of ascent via the southeast ridge.



Descending the west glacier of Pik 5,044.1m (5,042m GPS) after the successful ascent. (A) Pik 4,898.7m, attempted by the obvious north spur. (B) Pik 4,785.5m.



The southwest ridge of Pik 5,044m (5,042m GPS), the route of the first ascent, plus a compelling ice line on the west face.

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