



AAC Publications

Ak-tau Traverse

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan

Between the well-known summits of Khan Tengri and Pik Pobeda sleeps a seldom-visited yet interesting group of mountains known as the Ak-tau Group, after its central peak, Ak-tau. (Ak-tau is 6,181m; the highest summit of the group, an unnamed 6,201m peak, lies on the long southeast arm of Ak-tau.) In order to acclimatize before an attempt on the Abalakov Route on Pik Pobeda, Simon Taffner and I made a self-supported circular traverse through the range from our base camp. With little available information, we had to choose our route simply by going and having a look. We most likely climbed no new ground, but the exact track of our journey may never have been completed previously.

In late July, from the standard base camp on the South Inylchek Glacier at just over 4,000m, reached by helicopter, we first traveled east and then headed south along the ridge leading to Majlina (5,285m). Crossing this summit and continuing in the same direction, we reached the upper glacier plateau north of Ak-tau. After a night on the col between Ak-tau and Pik Pyramida (5,876m), we then climbed Ak-tau by its west-northwest ridge.

From there we continued south-southwest down a steep, narrow glacier, near the bottom of which we made our last camp. The following day we reached the Zvezdochka Glacier, below the north face of Pobeda, and returned northward to base camp.

Snow conditions at lower altitudes in this area are generally poor, and often during this journey we had to dig through deep snow—sometimes up to our chests—despite the fact that 2017 and 2018 were known for having relatively little snowfall. Steep faces, narrow ridges with cornices, and heavily crevassed glaciers made the traverse a real adventure. The narrow glacier we descended from Ak-tau could be a real problem in different conditions.

Subsequently, I made an ascent of the Abalakov Route (6A, 1956) on the north face of Pik Pobeda (7,439m). Snow conditions were good, making this is a far safer line than Pobeda's normal route (the north rib to the west ridge). Simon felt unwell and descended from 7,000m to wait at our high camp at 6,600m while I continued. Late in the day I reached the last rocks on the route. The real summit is either 300m east or west of that point. I believe it is the east top, but suspect that most parties doing the normal route only reach the heavily corniced point that lay to my west. I continued up and to the east until there were only a few meters of snow and ice—and a cornice—above me. At this point I turned back to reach our high camp by dark.

– Markus Gschwendt, Austria

Images



Simon Taffner at 5,250m on the knife-edge summit ridge of Majlina (5,285m) during the Ak-tau traverse.



Simon Taffner battling steep, unconsolidated snow at around 5,100m on the approach to Majlina during the Ak-tau traverse.

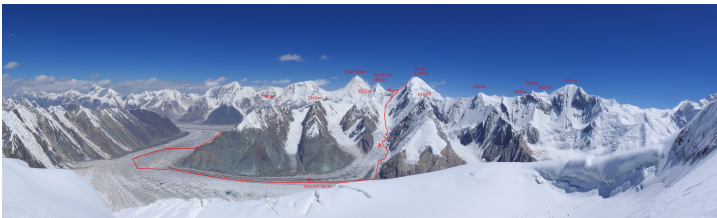


Descending the steep snow face below the col between Ak-tau and Pik Pyramida. The narrow glacier

below was followed down to the Zvezdochka Glacier, part of which is visible top left, to return to base camp.



Markus Gschwendt and the difficult glacier just descended from the obvious col almost in center, between the snowy Pik Pyramida (high and on the left) and Ak-tau.



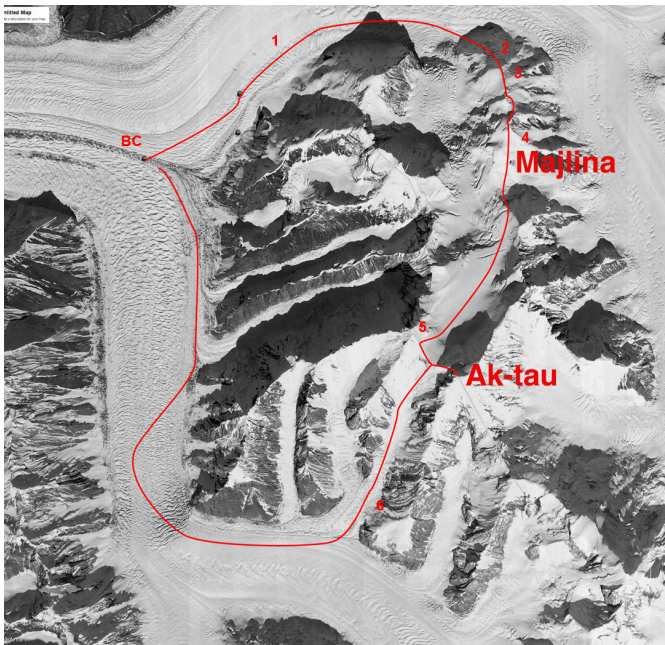
The view north from the Abalakov Route on Pik Pobeda over the Ak-tau Group to Khan Tengri.



The majestic north face of Pik Pobeda with the Abalakov Route (and camps) marked. The Normal Route climbs the obvious snowy spur well to the right, and then makes a long and committing crossing of the skyline ridge to the summit.



Simon Taffner on a steep snow face at 5,100m during the approach to Majlina.



The traverse through the Ak-tau Group completed in late July and early August 2018. Numbers represent camps.

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