



## AAC Publications

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### **Ak-su North, North Face, Nose Direct in Winter**

Kyrgyzstan, Pamir Alai, Karavshin

**From September 20 to October 7, 2002, two legendary alpinists, Pavel Shabalin (Russia) and Ilyas Tukhvatullin (Uzbekistan), climbed the Nose Direct on the north face of Ak-su North (a.k.a. Rocky Ak-su, 5,217m).** They made 11 portaledge camps and graded the route 6B 5.9 A5 (1,950m of climbing). Shabalin led every pitch. This was his 10th ascent of the wall, each by different a route (AAJ 2004).

Nearly 20 years later, this time in winter (January 2–8, 2021), the Russians Ratmir Muhametzjanov, Alexander Parfenov, Nikolay Stepanov, Alexey Sukharov, and Vyacheslav Timofeev (from Krasnoyarsk, Novosibirsk, and Moscow) made the second ascent. Winter ascents of this 1,460m-high north face are rare and highly respected in the Russian climbing community, and in this case especially so, as the ascent was made in less than half the time of the original climb (6.5 days up; one day for the descent). While this can be put down to progress over the last 20 years, a bigger team and swapping the leader every day also certainly helped.

The team reached the area in December, using 11 horses to transport their equipment through fresh snow to a ruined barn in the Laylak Valley, where they made base camp. The temperature there hovered around -25°C, but this must have felt balmy to the Siberian contingent, who were experiencing -37°C at their homes before leaving for Kyrgyzstan.

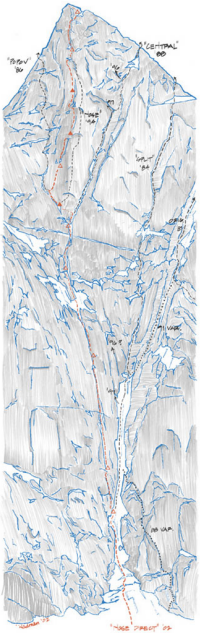
The team acclimatized by carrying gear to the foot of the wall at about 3,800m—seven hours and 700m of ascent through snow sometimes up to waist deep—and by climbing Pik Badigan (4,660m).

Once on the route, they used two portaledges, one hung below the other; they had to make hasty repairs the first night when one of the supporting bars broke. Approaching the Nose, the prominent prow on the headwall, there were hard, run-out sections of thin ice. Parfenov led the route's difficult aid (which he felt was not A5), taking one fall above the crux.

On the last day of the ascent, Ak-su reminded them it was winter, with a fierce gale that covered their face masks with heavy frost. However, by the time they were on the final 200m of relatively easy climbing, the wind had died and the sun appeared, giving them a brief respite before starting their rappel descent of the face.

— Information from **Anna Piunova**, Mountain.ru, Russia

## Images



Topo of the Nose Direct route on the north face of Ak-Su North.



Seen from the Laylak Valley, the nearly 1,500m-high north face of Rocky Ak-su with the higher Snowy Ak-su (5,355m, Ak-su South) behind. The Nose Direct is the leftmost of several lines that climb directly up the north face headwall to the summit; it lies about 50 meters to the left of the original Nose (Shabalin, et al, 1994), adding eight new pitches up the very steep rock of the prominent headwall prow. Many other routes are not shown.



The Nose Direct on the north face of Rocky Ak-su (5,217m). The route is the leftmost of several lines that climb directly up the north face headwall to the summit; it lies about 50 meters to the left of the original Nose (Shabalin, et al, 1994), adding eight new pitches up the very steep rock of the prominent headwall prow. Other routes are not shown.

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