



AAC Publications

Pik Communism, Second Winter Ascent via New Route on North Face

Tajikistan, Pamir

The north face of Pik Communism (C) as seen in winter from Pik Korzhenevskaya. (D) Pik Dushanbe. (1) Bezzubkin Route (1971). (2) Barca (2020). The 2020 climbers' line above the plateau was up the face left of Route 5 (Borodkin) to Pik Dushanbe. (3) Chochia (1988). (4) Czechoslovak Route (Belica-Mareka, date unknown). (5) Borodkin Route (two starts, 1968). Photo by Winter Snow Leopard Project

Five years ago, Sergey Seliverstov from Kyrgyzstan came up with the idea of the Winter Snow Leopard: completing the five great high-altitude mountains of the former USSR in winter. These include four 7,000m peaks and 6,995m Khan Tengri, which was formerly considered a 7,000m summit. Thirty years ago, before there was a name for the feat, legendary Kazakh Valery Khrishchaty was on target to complete the set, having made the first winter ascents of Pik Communism (a.k.a. Kommunizma or Ismail Samani, 7,495m, 38°56'34.68"N, 72°0'57.59"E) in February 1986, Pik Lenin (7,134m) in January 1988, Pik Pobeda (7,439m) in February 1990, and Khan Tengri (6,995m) in February 1992. Tragically, Khrishchaty was killed during the approach to Khan Tengri in 1993, before he could complete a winter ascent of Pik Korzhenevskaya (7,105m), the last of the five.

In January 2018, Seliverstov and three friends climbed a new route in winter on Korzhenevskaya (AAJ 2019), leaving him only Pik Communism in Tajikistan to complete his Winter Snow Leopard goal.

Seliverstov and 12 other climbers from Russia and Kyrgyzstan flew to Moskvina Base Camp (3,680m) on January 9, 2020. They split into four teams headed by Vitaly Akimov, Mikail Danichkin, Seliverstov, and Pavel Vorobyov. Approaching up the Valtera Glacier, the team dug a large snow cave below the north face of Pik Communism at 4,960m, then subsequently stocked it. For their ascent, the climbers chose a new, steep, but relatively safe line on the 1,000m north face, leading to the upper plateau at around 6,000m. This lay a little to the right of the original route up the wall, the August 1971 Bezzubkin Route (5B), which finishes up the north ridge of Communism. The new line lies between the Bezzubkin and Chochia (1988, 5B) routes on the lower north face.

Due to the lack of any suitable place to establish a camp on the wall, the team climbed and fixed 32 pitches. The first section was the steepest, with the crux, a passage of vertical ice, located at around 5,350m. The next third of the face was less steep, perhaps 60–70° in parts, but with the characteristic bulletproof blue ice of winter. Arranging protection here proved difficult. The top section was less complicated (50–60°), but proved to be hard work at this altitude and low temperature; the minimum temperature recorded down in base camp—about 2,000 meters lower—was -33°C. It took the team 18 days to establish Camp 2 just below the plateau at 6,000m. This camp and the wall below never received any sun, but they were at least sheltered from the strong winds, sometimes up to 100 km/h, that blew across the plateau.

From Camp 2, the team had to cross the plateau, climb up to Pik Dushanbe (6,960m), which is traversed on the Normal (Borodkin) Route, and then follow the ridge east of Communism to the summit. Danichkin's team went first and established Camp 3 in a snow cave at 6,200m on the far side of the plateau. On January 29 they climbed the northern slopes of Dushanbe and placed their Camp 4 a little below the top of this peak. They attempted the summit next day but were driven back by a storm.

In the meantime, Seliverstov's group crossed the plateau and placed a camp above the snow cave at

6,450m. On the 30th they climbed to 6,900m, below Danichkin's camp, and put their tent in the shelter of a huge serac. The next day, Viktor Filinov and Alexander Moroz from Seliverstov's team started from this camp before dawn, and after a difficult time reached the summit just before 2 p.m., completing the new route, Barca, with an overall grade of 6A. Later the same day they were followed by Maxim Cherkasov, Mikail Danichkin, Andrey Erokhin, and Artur Usmanov, all leaving from the higher camp. The calm, sunny weather was somewhat offset by a temperature of -47°C. They returned to their respective Camp 4s, and then all climbers descended to base camp.

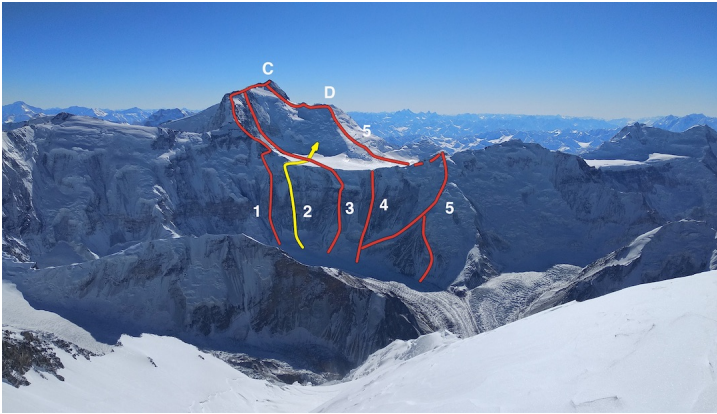
After two days' rest and with the only forecasted weather window beginning on February 7, Alexander Moroz, Alexey Usatykh, and Seliverstov climbed back to their Camp 4, moving faster due to better acclimatization. The wind next day was predicted to be 50–70 km/h, yet in the morning it didn't seem at all bad. All three made the summit between 11:35 a.m. and 1:10 p.m. Seliverstov thus became the first Winter Snow Leopard, and Usatykh, who arrived last on top, the second. Moroz became the first person to climb the mountain twice in a single winter season.

Back at Camp 4, they were told the forecast still predicted 80 km/h winds on the 9th, and were strongly advised to descend to the plateau the same day. They did, reaching the snow cave at 11 p.m. It was the right decision, as the following day was indeed wild at high altitude. The trio continued down, stripping the ropes on the lower north face, and were back in base camp that evening.

In the meantime, Danichkin and Usmanov had been part of a team making an alpine-style push on Korzhenevskaya, which lies about 13km due north of Pik Communism. They followed the route Ol'cha, opened by Seliverstov in the winter of 2018. A few minutes after Usatykh reached the summit of Pik Communism, Danichkin and Usmanov stood on top of Korzhenevskaya, with Danichkin thus becoming the third Winter Snow Leopard.

– Lindsay Griffin, from information provided by Anna Piunova, mountain.ru, Russia

Images



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Approaching the lower north face of Pik Communism. The 2020 route of ascent climbed the 1,000m curving gray ice line above the right-hand climber.



Approaching a steep section of bulletproof winter ice on the lower north face of Pik Communism.



A section of hard winter ice on the lower north face of Pik Communism.



A climber (circled) at work on the middle section of the lower north face of Pik Communism during the first ascent of Barca.



Moving unroped on the upper slopes of the north face of Pik Dushanbe.



The summit of Pik Communism from Pik Dushanbe. The route climbs the snow slope left of the rock to reach the ridge, then back right to the top.



Looking north from Pik Communism's high plateau to Pik Korzhenevskaya. See AAJ 2020 for routes on this side of the mountain.



A panorama from the summit of Pik Communism looking from southwest (left) to north. The flat-topped peak below and in the foreground is Pik Dushanbe (6,960m) with the great north face plateau below and to the right. The distant high summit left of center, with a steep, shaded, northeast face, is Pik Moskva (Moscow Peak, 6,785m).



Camping shelters at Moskvina Base Camp (3,680m). During the winter ascent of Pik Communism, the temperature here fell to -33°C .

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