



South Muysky Ridge, Eighteen Ascents

Russia, Buryatia

Pik Mechta from the south. The ridge falling towards the camera, separating the southwest face (left) from the unclimbed east face (right) is the Boyko-Tkachenko route. Photo by Evgenia Leontyeva
In 2019 a small team organized by Evgeny Glazunov visited an area of the South Muysky Ridge, northwest of the town of Baunt, about 200km east of the northern tip of Lake Baikal (AAJ 2020).

They made the first ascents of several granite peaks and climbed some striking routes. In the summer of 2020, Glazunov returned with 11 other climbers: Grigory Abramov, Alexey Boyko, Evgenia Leontyeva, the brothers Andrey and Dmitry Panov, Alena Panova, Polina Penkina, Anastasia Ramazanova, Daria Sycheva, Anatoly Syshchikov, and Pavel Tkachenko. In less than three weeks, they tallied a truly impressive list of new routes and first ascents of peaks.

The team reached Baunt on June 27 and next day transferred to a giant all-terrain vehicle, which carried them to the point where their trek into the mountains would begin. After waiting out a period of heavy rain, they walked north with heavy packs for two days, June 30 and July 1, for around 25km, through feasting mosquitoes, to reach a base camp at 1,616m (55°25'44.49"N, 112°37'25.98"E) in the valley south of Pik Kart (2,661m).

On July 2, Abramov, Glazunov, and Sycheva opened the bidding by making the first ascent of Pik Modelistov (2,590m) at 1B. The Panov brothers headed to a buttress at the northern end of Pik Kart's west face, where they climbed Sounds of Youth (600m, 12 pitches, 5A 6c). The rest of the team transported equipment to a spot below the wall of Kart, hung it out of reach of hungry animals, and scoped possible routes.

Next day, Abramov, Ramazanova, and Sycheva climbed the north ridge of Pik Admirala Makarova (2,544m, first climbed in 2019) at 3B, while a party of three women, Leontyeva, Panova, and Penkina, and another team of Boyko and Tkachenko, put up two new routes on the west face of Kart.

Boyko and Tkachenko climbed the wall more or less directly below the summit in 17 pitches at 5B. The climbing distance was 825m, with difficulties up to 6c+ A2. This was one of the hardest climbs of the expedition; the pair recommended a double set of cams and the Russian Spectre-like drive-in hooks for thin, blind cracks. The corner system in the upper face had unstable rock, and there were also dangerously loose roofs that the pair fortunately managed to avoid. The route was named Cascade.

The three women climbed a buttress well to the left, finishing on the northwest ridge, thus unable to see the bear that visited camp during the climbs. The route involved friction climbing and some aid where the corner systems were too wet to free climb. The lower wall took 13 hours, above which eight easier pitches were negotiated during four hours of twilight and darkness. They were unable to complete the route that day and spent a short but cold night huddled together on a ledge (and eventually invaded by mosquitoes) before reaching the ridge via a couple of pitches early the following morning. They continued to the summit via the east flank. The three women arrived at camp at around 10:30 a.m. to be greeted by much-needed borscht and tea. They named their 16-pitch route The Choice Is Yours (5B 6a+ A2).

The team was not yet done with Pik Kart. Glazunov and Syshchikov were attracted by the prominent chimney system on the left side of the west face, left of the Panov Brothers' route Sounds of Youth.

They completed this new line, Big Chimney, in 12 pitches (615m of climbing, some moving together) at 5A with four pitches of 6c. On the same day Penkina, Ramazanova, and Sycheva climbed the northwest ridge (2A).

Most of the group then returned to the first camp to bring up more food for the second part of their trip. While they were away, Penkina and Ramazanova climbed Pik Polyarnikov (2,466m, first climbed in 2019) via the east flank and south ridge at 1B, and the Panov brothers returned to Kart, where they climbed a new line to the right of the 2019 Glazunov-Oleneva-Tkachenko route. The new route was named Kuhelklopf (685m of climbing, 12 pitches, 5A, generally 5c–6a with one pitch of 7b). This route finishes via the last three pitches of the 2019 route.

On the 9th, all 12 climbers crossed north over the Razvedchikov Pass to a campsite in the Vetvistaya Valley, and then stayed there throughout the following day in heavy rain.

On the 11th the team planned to cross Alenka Pass to the north and drop into the valley below the Pik Mechta (Dream Peak, 2,590m, 55°30'35.4"N, 112°39'16.7"E). However, before leaving, Leontyeva "decided to climb along the ridge above camp in order to take some photos, but as sometimes happens, I didn't manage to stop in time and ended up on a summit I named Pik Altair." The route was 1B. She was late back to camp and received a telling-off for not taking a radio with her. That evening the team crossed the pass and placed a new camp below the southwest face of Pik Mechta.

Perhaps the finest new route achieved during the expedition was Der Fliegende Hollander (The Flying Dutchman), a logical line up the middle of the 800m southwest buttress of Mechta. Glazunov, Panova, and Syshchikov started up the wall at 5 a.m. on July 12 and climbed 22 pitches, generally from 40m to 50m in length, to reach the summit at 4:40 p.m. They were back in camp by 7:30 p.m. Despite heavy rain during the middle of the ascent, the team climbed the entire route free, with seven pitches of 6b and above, and a crux of 6c. The first third is mostly steep slabs, after which the line follows a succession of chimneys and cracks, for a total climbing length of 1,110m and an overall grade of 6A. The line lies to the right of the route climbed by Glazunov, Oleneva, and Tkachenko in 2019.

On that same day, Boyko and Tkachenko made the first ascent of the south ridge of Mechta, gaining a pronounced notch at the foot of the ridge via the southwest flank. They met the previous team on the summit. The 550m route was 4B with some pitches of 6b/6c. At the same time, Abramov, Leontyeva, Penkina, Ramazanova, and Sycheva climbed four new peaks on the east side of the valley. They first reached the Prazdnichnyj Pass, then headed north to Chudovishche (2,577m). Returning to the pass, they then headed south along the crest, crossing Tatyana (2,446m) and Medikov (2,548m) to reach Krasavica (2,549m). The overall grade of this excursion was 3B III.

The 13th was a day of rest for all except the Panov brothers, who had stayed in Mechta base camp the previous day to coordinate radio communications. The brothers put up what is now the easiest route on the southwest face, climbing between the original 2019 route and Der Fliegende Hollander. Starting with 200m of easy climbing up a rightward sloping weakness, Dragon has a further 750m of climbing, mainly at 4–6a with one pitch of 6b.

On the 14th, Glazunov and Syshchikov made the first ascent of Pik 2,420m, on the opposite side of the valley from Mechta, naming it after the great Yekaterinburg mountaineer Alexey Bolotov (southeast flank and spur, 2B). At the same time, Penkina, Ramazanova, and Sycheva repeated the north ridge of Pik Tatyana (2,446m, 1B) from Prazdnichnyj Pass.

The following day, Boyko, Glazunov, Syshchikov, and Tkachenko tried the impressive east face of Mechta, reaching it by crossing a pass they named Molodets. However, unlike the west side of the mountain, the east face proved monolithic, with little in the way of natural protection. This forced them into placing bolts and fixing some rope. Late in the day, low on bolts and after a broken drill bit, they were washed off the wall by a heavy thunderstorm. On the 16th they removed their ropes and retreated to camp.

Meanwhile, Grigory Abramov had slipped away from camp and soloed the peak immediately north of Pik Alexey Bolotov, naming it Pik Stega (2,452m, 3A) in honour of a deceased friend. The Panov brothers, Alena Panova, and Penkina made an interesting traverse, reaching Chudovishche from the Prazdnichnyj Pass and then continuing east along the ridge over peaks 2,600m and 2,627m, which they called respectively Pik Maksa Fraya and Pik Bushueva. Although a lot of this was III and IV, toward the end of the traverse there were two pitches of 6a. They descended east to the valley and then walked back over Prazdnichnyj Pass. The overall grade was 4A.

It was time to head for home. The Razvedchikov Pass had proved high and unpleasant during the approach to Mechta base camp, so the team decided to try another route out from the mountains, spotted during the ascent of Alexey Bolotov. Crossing the Parabola and Papanina passes, with heavy rucksacks, while "drowned in obscurity and mist," was one of the most memorable moments of the expedition. In one long day of nearly 24km, they reached their first approach camp, and after a second long day arrived back at Baunt on July 18. They had left nothing behind in the mountains.

— Evgenia Leontyeva (evgleon.ru), with additional material from Alexey Boyko, Russia

Images



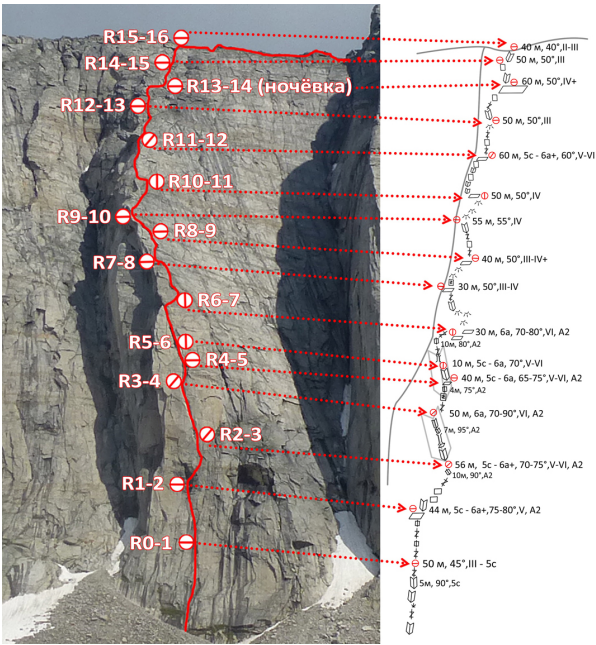
The west face of Pik Kart. (1) Big Chimney. (2) Sounds of Youth. (3) The Choice is Yours. (4) Cascade. (5) 2019 route. (6) Kuhelklopf. All routes except 5 were climbed in 2020.



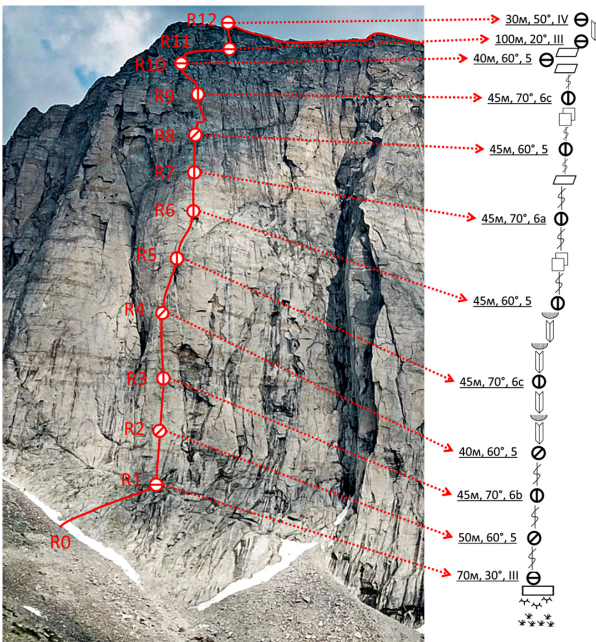
The southwest face of Pik Mechta. (1) Original 2019 route. (2) Dragon. (3) Der Fliegende Hollander. (4) South Ridge.



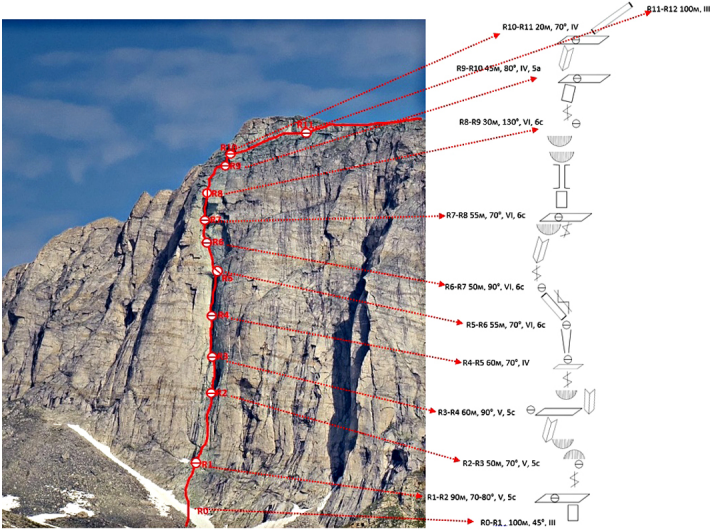
Looking northwest from Krasavic to (A) Medikov, (B) Tatyana [the apparent summit between the two was not visited during the traverse], (C) Prazdnichnyj Pass, (D) Mechta, (E) Chudovishche, (F) Maksa Fraya, and (G) Bushueva.



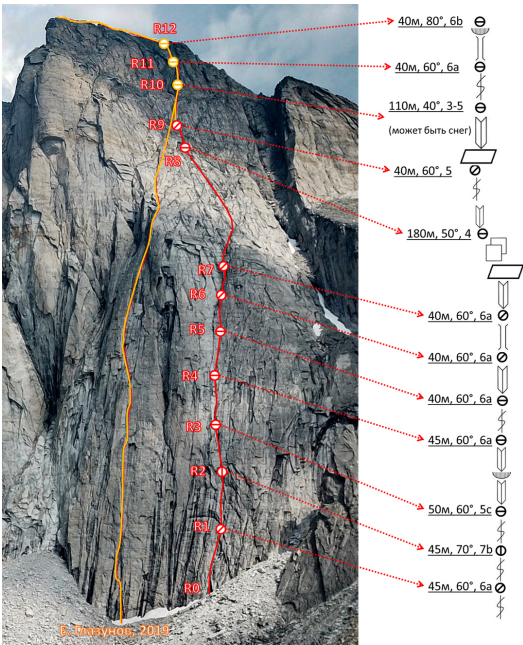
The Choice is Yours on the west face of Pik Kart.



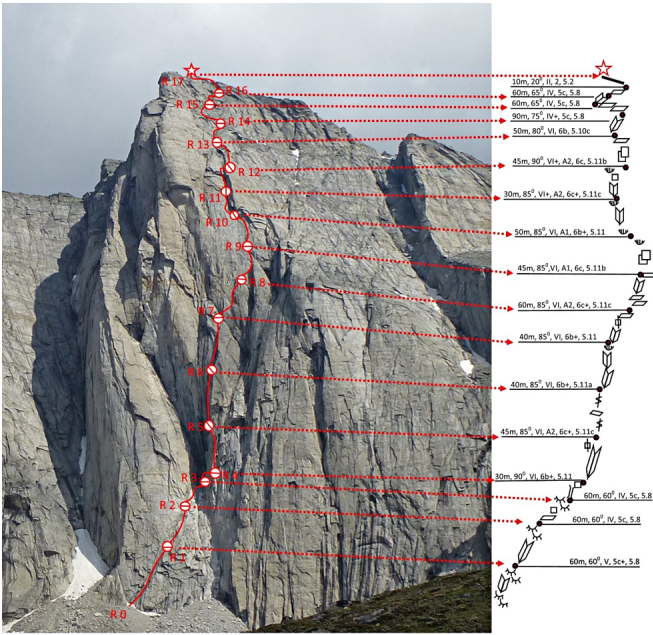
Sounds of Youth on the left side of the west face of Pik Kart.



Big Chimney on the far-left side of the west face of Pik Kart.



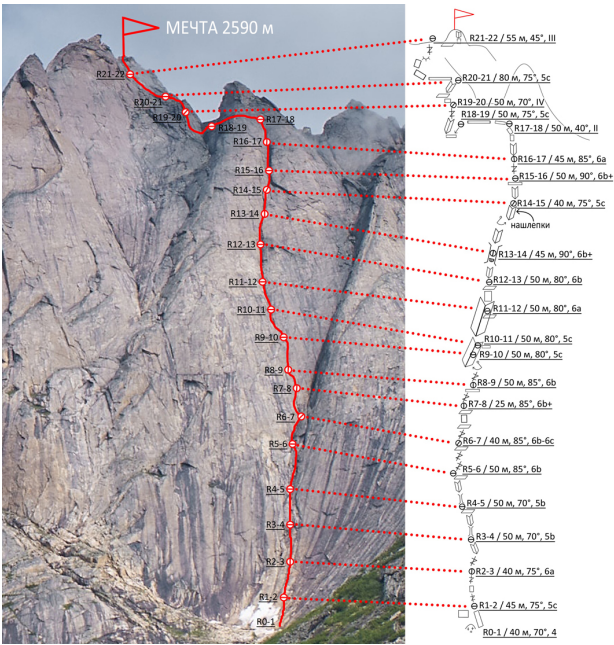
Kuhelklopf on the main west face of Pik Kart.



The route Cascade on the main west face of Pik Kart.



Evgenia Leontyeva (front left), Polina Penkina (back), and Alena Panova on the summit of Pik Kart, having completed the first ascent of The Choice is Yours on the west face.



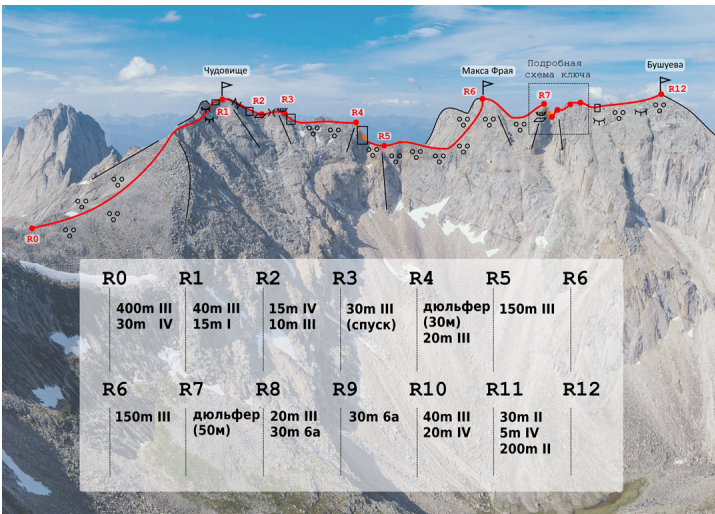
Der Fliegende Hollander on the southwest face of Pik Mechta.



Pik Alexey Bolotov from the east with the first ascent route marked



Pik Mechta from the south. The ridge falling toward the camera, separating the southwest face (left) from the unclimbed east face (right), is the Boyko-Tkachenko route.



The Chudovishche – Bushueva traverse seen from the south.



Evgenia Leontyeva tackles an awkward corner during the first ascent of The Choice is Yours, Pik Kart.



On the first ascent of Der Fliegende Hollander, southwest face of Pik Mechta. Sergey Glazunov



On the first ascent of Der Fliegende Hollander, southwest face of Pik Mechta.



During the first ascent of Cascade on Pik Kart.



MuiskyClimbingOne



MuiskyClimbingTwo



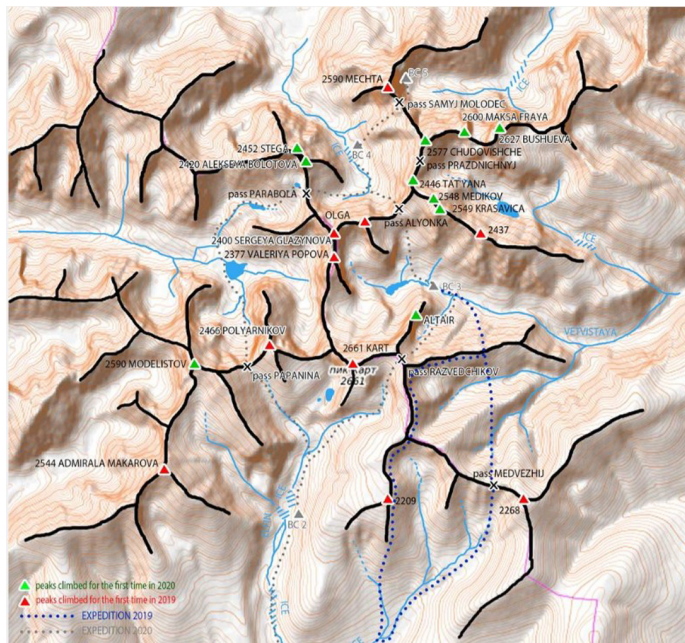
Looking across the granite slabs and walls on the west face of Pik Kart to the approach valley coming up from the south.



Evgenia Leontyeva on the west face of Pik Kart.



Evgenia Leontyeva follows on the first ascent of The Choice is Yours, west face of Pik Kart.



Map of the area of South Musky Ridge visited by the 2020 expedition.

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