



Many Ascents in the Minteke Valley

Kyrgyzstan, Pamir Alai, Minteke Valley

In September, our group of 12 Dutch climbers—Sjoerd Boersma, Dennis Hendrikx, Robert Löwensteyn, Jeffrey Meesters, Martin Platteschor, Michiel Telkamp, Noor van der Veen, Anniek Verschuur, Regien Winnubst, and three coaches, Court Haegens, Boris Textor, and Bas Visscher—visited the Minteke Valley. The expedition was part of our Expedition Academy, a project of the Royal Dutch Climbing and Mountaineering Federation promoting expedition climbing for young alpinists.

The valley has probably been visited by Western climbers only twice. However, it's thought that most peaks would have been climbed in the past by climbers from Soviet states, presumably via the most accessible routes. In July 2019, a French expedition team climbed a route on the north ridge of Pik Tobokal (5,004m, 39°37'47.3"N 70°30'12.8"E) and the south face of Pik Achu (4,500m, 39°38'52.05"N, 70°32'23.02"E). In September of the same year, a group of Swiss alpinists visited the valley, climbing Kyzyl-Muz, Pik 3, and Pik Minteke and opening a traditionally protected rock route on Pik Achu (see AAJ 2020).

We arrived in the valley on September 7. Base camp was established at 3,000m (39.68361N, 70.46603E) on a plateau before the junction of the two branches of the valley, and both the east and south branches were explored. The previous French and Swiss teams had established base camp a bit higher up, in the east branch.

In the east branch, the most prominent mountain is Pik Stalin (5,190m). At first glance its north face looked like an interesting technical target; however, the group decided against attempting the face because of hard ice, no bivvy spots, an active serac, and a complicated descent. Fortunately, during the reconnaissance, the team spotted two ice lines on what they called Hidden Peak (ca 5,000m, 39.6250242N, 70.5122508E), located between Pik Stalin and Peak 3. The next week, in two teams, both routes were climbed from a 3,900 m advanced base on the glacier at the end of the valley.

Van der Veen, Winnubst, and Visscher climbed Diagonale du Fou (1,000m, TD- AI3 M4) in the east couloir. Hendrykx and Vershuu climbed Directe du Fou, a 400m ice line on the north face, joining the east couloir at 4,600m, for a total of 1,000m at TD+ AI5 M4. The two groups joined forces during the last part of the climb and descended from the ridgeline, about 100m below the summit, because they hadn't carried bivvy equipment. They returned to ABC after 27 hours of non-stop moving.

In the south branch, the prominent summit is Pik Minteke (5,482m, 39°35'0.8196"N, 70°27'51.4398"E), climbed by the 2019 Swiss team along the northwest ridge. During a reconnaissance, Löwensteyn, Meesters, Platteschor, and van der Veen scrambled up a small rock peak of 4,105 m at the entrance to the valley. From here the group envisioned a link-up of three peaks east of Minteke, one of which had been attempted on a solo climb by one of the Swiss team members.

In a first attempt, Haegens, Löwensteyn, Platteschor and Boersma climbed two of the three peaks. Starting from their 4,100m ABC on the right branch of the Kapa Typ Glacier, they climbed the west ridge to the peak they called Borborduk Coku (4,830m, 39°36'30.5"N, 70°27'11.9"E), meaning "Central Mountain" in Kyrgyz. The next day they continued, climbing the east face of the snowy peak they

named Ak Too ("White Peak," 5,149m). As they were not yet well-acclimatized, it felt too far to continue to the third peak, so they decided to turn around.

On a second attempt one week later, Boersma, Haegens, Platteschor, and Winnubst climbed Ak Too via the northeast face, following the 60° ice and snow slope then the rocky east ridge (up to 4c). They pushed on to reach the top of the third peak, which they called Pik Sindre (5,380m, 39°35'51.1"N, 70°26'06.0"E), named after a deceased friend of Boersma, grading their 700m route D.

The route on Pik Sindre (5,380m), climbing the northeast face to the top of Ak Too ("White Peak," 5,149m) and then on to Sindre.

During the same window of good weather, two other teams also went up the south branch of the valley. Meesters and Telkamp had their eyes on a technical line on an unnamed peak. From an ABC at the left side of the right branch of the Kapa Typ Glacier, they spent two days climbing the rocky north face with pitches of mixed quality up to 6c. On their third day on the route, they climbed the 400m-long ice ridge to the top, which they called Pik Luis (5,015m, 39.600713°N, 70.479784° E), named after a deceased friend of Telkamp. They followed their tracks back along the ridge and spent the fourth day descending the northeast face. Their route was 1,000m at ED 6c 70°.

Meanwhile, Hendrykx, Verschuur, and Visscher attempted Pik Elephant (ca 5,400m, 39°36'21.1"N, 70°31'04.2"E). From a camp at 4,000m on the left branch of the Kapa Typ Glacier, they climbed the 700m west face, with ice up to 50°, then started up the north ridge, bivouacking at 5,000m. They continued along the ridge, climbing seven pitches up to M5, before deciding to abandon the attempt because of horrible snow, ice, and rock conditions.

From the same ABC on the Kapa Typ Glacier, during another weather window, Hendrykx and Löwensteyn attempted an ice line on an unnamed peak between Pik Elephant and Pik Luis. After 400m of moderate climbing over ice and snow up to 50°, followed by two short, steep ice steps (70°), they reached a steep, very narrow ice gully. Finding very thin chandelier ice and no protection in the surrounding rock, the team decided to descend by rappel.

Finally, in a single-day push, Löwensteyn and van der Veen climbed Muhz Teke (4,948m, 39°38'24.1"N, 70°25'33.4"E), starting early at night from base camp. The route was without snow until 4,700m, after which the team climbed an icy 35° slope followed by a relatively flat 500m ridge with some rocky towers (III–IV) to the summit. They descended the ridge until they found a way off through a scree slope on the north side.

Team members also climbed a number of rock routes on surrounding cliffs. On the large limestone wall (39°40'12.90"N, 70°29'38.02"E) above the Swiss base camp, three routes were climbed, using traditional protection. Meesters and Telkamp climbed a 700m 6b line. Hendrykx and Löwensteyn climbed a 400m line of 12 pitches up to 6a, which they called Scharf. Visscher, van der Veen, and Winnubst climbed a 25-pitch, 800m line up to 6a+, Zigzag into the Night. All the teams descended the other side of the mountain, first descending to the stream coming from Kyzyl Muz, crossing it, and then following scree slopes back to the base camp plateau.

Shorter rock climbs were done by the team on the limestone walls directly above base camp. Haegens and van der Veen climbed a 150m ridge line (VI with one step of 5a) called Basecamp Tower. Löwensteyn, van der Veen, and Winnubst climbed a 200m line at 5b: Ibex Poop. Hendrykx and Visscher climbed a 100m 6a+ route, Velcro, and a 60m 6a, Zipper. Meesters and Telkamp climbed a 150m 6a route (F)Eline, and Hendrykx and Telkamp climbed a 300m line up to 6c, Vulture Nest.

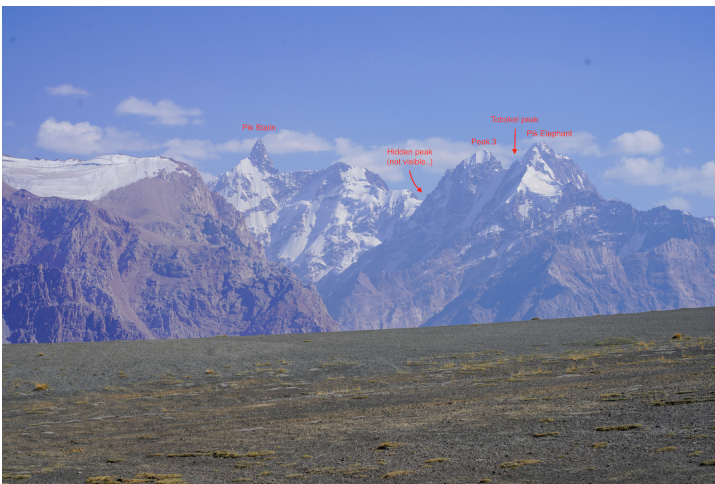
Overall, the ice and snow conditions weren't favorable for long ice routes, with either hard, bare ice or soft, airy ice, not good for anchors. Rock quality was mixed, with stable granite rock walls on Pik Sindre and around Pik Achu but some very loose, sandy rock on Pik Elephant. The weather overall was quite good, with some snowfall and strong winds up high but also longer periods of five or six days of stable weather.

– **Anniek Verschuur, The Netherlands**

Images



Distant view of peaks above the Kapa Typ Glacier from the north.



Distant view of peaks above the eastern branch of the Minteke Valley.



View of the 2022 expedition's base camp in the Minteke Valley.



The two lines climbed on "Hidden Peak," located between Pik Stalin and Pik 3 in the left branch of the Minteke Valley: (left) Diagonale du Fou (1,000m, TD-) and (right) Directe du Fou (TD+). The parties descended together from the ridgeline without going to the summit.



Borborduk Çoku ("Central Mountain," 4,830m) from the west, showing the finish of the first ascent route.



The lower part of the route on Pik Sindre (5,380m), climbing the northeast face to the top of Ak Too ("White Peak," 5,149m) and then on to Sindre.



The final part of the 2022 route up Pik Sindre (5,380m).



The 2022 route up the north face and summit ridge of Pik Luis (5,015m). The ascent took three days, followed by a fourth day to descend the northeast face.



The attempt on the west face and north ridge of Pik Elephant. The unnamed peak to the right also was attempted but not climbed.



An ice line attempted in 2022 on the unnamed peak between Pik Elephant and Pik Luis above the Kapa Typ Glacier.



Approach and descent routes followed on the ascent of Muhz Teke (4,948m).



The upper section of the ascent route on Muhz Teke (4,948m).



Climbing on the northeast face of Ak Too in the Minteke Valley.



During the attempt on Pik Elephant (ca 5,400m).



Meesters-Telkamp route (700m, 6b) on the limestone wall above the "Swiss base camp" in the Minteke Valley.



Scharf (400m, 6a, Hendrykx-Löwenstein) on the limestone wall above the Swiss base camp in the Minteke Valley.



Zigzag Into the Night (800m, 6a+, Vischer-van der Veen-Winnubst) on the limestone wall above the Swiss base camp, Minteke Valley.



Velcro (100m, 6a+) above the Dutch base camp in the Minteke Valley.



Vulture Nest (300m, 6c) above the Dutch base camp in the Minto Valley.



Zipper (60m, 6a) above the Dutch base camp in the Minto Valley.

Article Details

Author	Anniek Verschuur
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	271
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions