



## AAC Publications

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### **Upper Ala-Archa Gorge, Pik Kochevnikov, Northwest Face and West Ridge**

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Ala-Archa

**The first time I went to Upper Ala-Archa was not at all for mountaineering purposes.** We had planned to spend about a week there to do some ski touring. But the idea of potential new ascents settled in my mind almost immediately.

When I got home, I started researching the mountain area to the southwest of the main summits of the Ala-Archa, in the upper gorge of the Ala-Archa River. I browsed maps and gathered information about possible existing routes or tracks. From September 3 to 9, our small team explored this area and established two new routes on a mountain we called Pik Kochevnikov ("Nomads Peak," 3,460m, 42.47996°N, 74.47557°E). After consulting with local Ala-Archa climbers, it seems most likely the mountain had not been climbed before.

There may be two reasons for this. Firstly, the relatively low altitude and "small" size of the wall were not interesting for climbers in Soviet times, as it did not promise any prizes in the national mountaineering championships. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the area was simply forgotten.

The approximate route along the northwest face of Kochevnikov had been thought out before the start of the expedition, based on the pictures I had taken the year before. When Alexander Lange, Denis Sushko, and I arrived in the valley, we finalized the ascent line. Although the chosen wall is not huge, nonetheless, to climb about 400m of vertical drop on a fairly steep northwest face was quite an exciting challenge.

Obviously, we wanted to climb in what we thought was the most logical way, doing less aid and more free climbing. However, we were prepared for all eventual surprises. We had to bring water as well as some food with us, as we planned to stay on the wall for two or even three days.

It became clear pretty soon that we wouldn't be able to climb all pitches free. The terrain is very steep and compact, and the cracks are mostly very thin. Here you can either climb with runout, with the risk of deep falls with bad consequences, or do aid climbing. The last one also was not easy. The crux pitch was done using skyhooks.

In about the midpoint of the wall, under the overhangs, we were lucky to find a small ledge. However, we had to do a bit of work to organize a decent bivouac spot.

We climbed about 400m of vertical, of which about 300m were on a steep wall with free climbing up to 6b and aid climbing up to A3. The route was named 'Wall of Shadows' because the sun only illuminated our line for one hour before sunset.

When we went down to the base camp, we had a feeling of some incompleteness. Our route was quite hard, but not very long. So, next day we went to explore in different directions to get a better view of the neighboring peaks. Conclusion: we would climb the same summit but via its west ridge. It did not look so difficult as our previous route, so we could climb it in one day. Sasha decided to stay in the base camp and devote time to further exploring the area.

Denis and I departed from base camp not very early, but by 8 a.m. we had started the climb. The line

runs logically along the ridge, only occasionally skirting some steep sections to the right and left of it. The first steep section of three pitches is a quite enjoyable climbing up to 5c. Then another section of easy terrain, and afterward two short sections of broken and steep rocks. Finally, some more easy climbs to the top.

The quite pleasant route is about 325m of vertical drop, includes five pitches from 4c to 5c. There is a section of loose rock under the top which can be cleaned, then it will be a very nice D+ route. The route is named A20.

Other attractive, unnamed rock peaks are found in this area, and the relatively short approach (about 10km) makes even weekend trips from Bishkek feasible. See the photos below for other potential objectives.

— **Maxim Foygel, Russia**

**Images**

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