



AAC Publications

Pik Alpinist, Northeast Face, Trophy Hunt

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Western Kokshaal-too

Dane Steadman (25), Jared Vilhauer (42), and I (41) traveled to the Western Kokshaal-too mountains of Kyrgyzstan for the month of September.

We choose this time frame based on two factors: 1) the temperatures are significantly cooler than in midsummer and therefore better for ice climbing objectives, and 2) the weather seems to be more stable, with less afternoon convective buildup and precipitation. However, when winter does come early to the Tien Shan, it can make travel into and out of the region challenging, and most people said we should be out of there before October. Generally, we found good weather and cold enough temperatures for most objectives, with the exception of those facing due south. We also had an uneventful exit from the mountains, although we snuck out just before a winter storm covered the roads in snow on September 30.

After ten days of acclimatizing and window shopping for different objectives, we set our sights on an elegant and sustained ice line on the northeast face of Pik Alpinist (5,482m). [Pik Alpinist (41°03'04"N, 77°43'59"E) divides the Chon-turasu and Essledovatley glaciers. The peak's first known ascent was in August 1993, when a team led by Mikhail Lebedev climbed the east face—well to the right of the 2023 line—over four days. They finished up the north ridge to the summit. Two additional routes ascent the complete north ridge (1996) and northwest face (2001); see AAJ 2022.]

Given the amount of steep ice climbing on our line, we determined our best strategy was to attempt the route without carrying bivy gear. We left our camp at the base of the wall at 3 a.m. on September 24 and crossed the 'schrund shortly thereafter. Using 70m ropes, we made 16 pitches, many of which required 10m or more of simul-climbing through difficulties up to AI4 on the steeper pitches and 60m or more of simul-climbing on the lower-angle sections.

High on the face, we climbed a mixed pitch with thin ice (M5) up and left of the direct fall line to avoid a pitch of steep WI 6 ice. The mixed pitch deposited us on the upper southeast face about 200 vertical meters below the summit. We climbed snow and some ice up this aspect for roughly four rope lengths, which brought us to a point below a long cornice guarding the summit ridge. This pushed us on a slightly rising traverse to the southern snow and ice fields. Jared chopped through the cornice and gained the south ridge, exactly 60m from the true summit, at 8:15 p.m. We walked up the easy ridge for a few minutes to the top, high-fived, took a selfie in the dark, and left.

We walked back down the south ridge for a few minutes and then downclimbed through the cornice. From there, we simul-downclimbed the traverse of the south snowfields, placing ice screws in the same locations as on the way up, until we regained the top of the southeast snowfields. From there we rappelled our line of ascent, with the exception of a few deviations in hopes of finding thicker or better ice. We made 18 rappels using our 70m ropes on mostly V-thread anchors. The limestone rock was very compact and made rock anchors challenging, both on the way up and down. However, we did leave a few stopper and piton anchors when necessary. We were back at camp 27 hours after departing.

Alpine climbing is inherently difficult to grade, due to the number of factors that can affect the

perceived difficulties. Nonetheless, we felt our new route, Trophy Hunt, was AI5+ M5; it gained 1,100m from 'schrund to summit. We would like to thank the American Alpine Club for their support of this expedition through a Cutting Edge Grant.

– **Seth Timpano, USA**

Images



Pik Alpinist (5,482m) from the northeast. (1) Trophy Hunt (Steadman-Timpano-Vilhauer, 2023). The route wrapped left under the summit cornice to finish on the south ridge. (2) Lebedev Route (1993), the first ascent of the peak, finishing up the north ridge.



Pik Alpinist (5,482m) from the northeast. (1) Trophy Hunt (Steadman-Timpano-Vilhauer, 2023). The route wrapped left under the summit cornice to finish on the south ridge. (2) Lebedev Route (1993), the first ascent of the peak, finishing up the north ridge.



Seth Timpano leading the second of five steep pitches up the headwall in the middle of the northeast face of Pik Alpinist. Dane Steadman and Jared Vilhauer climbed this section while simul-climbing, as Timpano was forced to continue for 80 meters to find a suitable anchor.



Dane Steadman following one of a pair of twin runnels on the headwall of the northeast face of Pik Alpinist. The steep ice visible in upper left constituted the crux pitch (WI5+) of the route.



Dane Steadman at a hanging belay near the top of the ice headwall on the northeast face of Pik Alpinist. The peak in back, across the Essledovatley Glacier, is Pik Korolyova (5,816m).



Jared Vilhauer following a steep pitch on the ice headwall of the northeast face of Pik Alpinist.



Approaching the steep ice pillar high on the northeast face of Pik Alpinist. The team bypassed this to the left (off-picture) up mixed terrain and a thin runnel.



Seth Timpano on a mixed pitch high on the northeast face of Pik Alpinist. A thinly iced runnel allowed the team to bypass a very steep ice pillar.



The southwest side of Pik Korolyova (Koroleva, 5,816m) seen from high on Pik Alpinist.

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