



AAC Publications

Chokko Zemleprohodtsev, Northeast Face

Kyrgyzstan, Pamir Alai, Jiptik Valley

Oliver Noble at the crux mixed traverse on Chokko Zemleprohodtsev. Photo by Christopher Elliott

In May 2025, Oliver Noble, James Young, and I traveled to the Jiptik Valley to attempt the northeast face of Chokko Zemleprohodtsev ("Explorer Peak," 5,050m, 39.591803°N, 70.565173°E), which I had attempted with Russell Bate in the summer of 2023 (AAJ 2024). Learning from that experience, we came much earlier this time, hoping for a more persistent freeze. However, while ferrying supplies up-glacier, we observed that the mountain was drier than it had been in 2023. Despite this ominous sign, the northeast face's obvious ice line looked largely intact.

After receiving a perfect five-day forecast, we decided to truncate our already short acclimatization period and attempt the route immediately. At 3 a.m. on May 14, we crossed the bergschrund. Moving quickly up the opening snow and ice pitches, we passed the 2023 high point (about 4,700m) in late morning. From there, we entered a rock band comprising a corner and loose gully. A smear of 80° ice the width of a highway lane took us to the base of a roof and a delicate mixed traverse, which proved to be the crux of the route (M5).

Above this, an off-vertical ice pillar—the route's most eye-catching feature—led into undulating rolls of jewel-toned, lower-angle ice. After a short gully exit, we topped out just before sunset. We bivvied at the junction where the ridges leading northwest to Khergiani Peak and east to Yuzhny Peak connect with the summit ridge of Zemleprohodtsev, whose high point lies south of the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border. [The peak was climbed from the south and east in the Soviet era.]

We did not have a permit to climb in Tajikistan, so it would have been unwise to continue to Zemleprohodtsev's summit. This was both a naked fact of political boundaries and a convenient excuse, since the summit ridge appeared to comprise extremely loose rock glued together with sun-rotted snow. Accordingly, we headed back down the northeast face in the morning, rappelling our route.

We originally had plans to climb other routes in the area, but shortly after returning to base camp, new forecasts indicated the arrival of very warm weather, not dissimilar to what I had experienced in 2023. These data correlated with a declining interest to continue climbing and the arrival of intrusive thoughts about book-ending the expedition with a stopover in Chamonix. In the end, dreams of croissants and gondola commutes to alpine day climbing won out and we headed out.

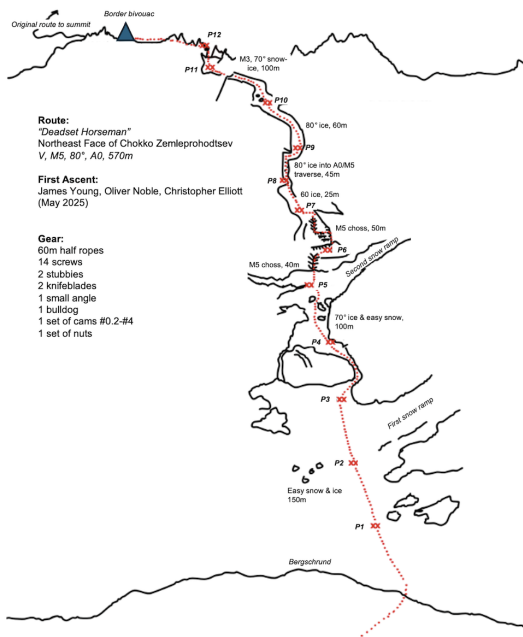
We named our route Deadset Horseman (570m climbing distance, 80° ice M5 A0) in honor of 500 years of Kyrgyz horse culture, which helped power our expedition logistics. The Yuzhny-Zemleprohodtsev-Khergiani cirque presents a range of attractive possibilities. Two gullies on the north side of Yuzhny look like they could have particularly good ice climbing, given suitable conditions.

—Christopher Elliott, Canada

Images



The line on the northeast face of Chokko Zemleprohodtsev. The sunlit summit (5,050m) lies over the border in Tajikistan and was not attempted.



Topo of Deadset Horseman on the northeast face of Chokko Zemleprohodtsev.



Oliver Noble at the crux mixed traverse on Chokko Zemleprohodtsev.



Climbing on the northeast face of Chokko Zemleprohodtsev.

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