



## AAC Publications

---

### **Pik Semenova Tian-Shanski, Northwest Face**

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Kyrgyz Ala-too, Ala Archa National Park

Route 3 is the 2015 Aitken-Potockiy Route. See photos below for other routes.

**The Ala Archa is a popular and easily accessible mountain group, lying only 40km south of Bishkek, and contains some of the best alpine, rock, and ice climbing in Kyrgyzstan. As yet there is no guidebook in English. The highest summit is Pik Semenova Tian-Shanski (4,895m), and Aleksey Potockiy (Kyrgyzstan) and I wanted to complete a new climb up the snow, ice, and rock of its ca 1,000m northwest face.**

On August 28, 2015, we acclimatized with an ascent of Uchitel (4,527m), which was a straightforward six-hour round trip from the Ratsek Hut, first climbed in 1938 (Russian 1B or Alpine PD). Next day we went to the Korona Hut (ca 3,800m), and at 6 a.m. on the 30th we left to ascend the west-facing Korona Glacier to the gap between its First and Second towers. Korona (4,860m) is one of the most famous and beautiful peaks of the Ala Archa and aptly named "Crown" because of the six steep and jagged rocky towers that form a rim atop the ice and rock massif.

We followed the left side of the glacier, initially 15°, then mainly 35–50°, until ca 4,700m. There we crossed a bergschrund, climbed a short, steep ice pitch of Scottish 3, then followed easier slopes to the base of the Third Tower, which we climbed via 150m of rock at British V Diff with several short sections of VS, including an awkward, strenuous, and exposed chimney. We reached the top in five hours from the hut at an overall grade of 3A (AD+). This climb has been done many times before, but the first ascent is unknown.

On September 1 we camped at 3,900m on the Uchitel Glacier, at the bottom of the northwest face of Pik Semenova Tian-Shanski, after a five-hour walk from the Ratsek Hut. We left camp at 7 a.m. and climbed the initial 120m slopes (30°) of the face. Above this the angle increased to 50–55° and remained so until a steeper section (65–70°) led to a pronounced snow shoulder at around two-thirds height. Above, 50° ice led to the final three largely rocky pitches, at first in a gully then a steep ridge. The rock was insecure, but the standard only V Diff to S. We summited in very poor visibility, caused by a dramatic change in weather to heavy snowfall, high winds, and thick, low clouds.

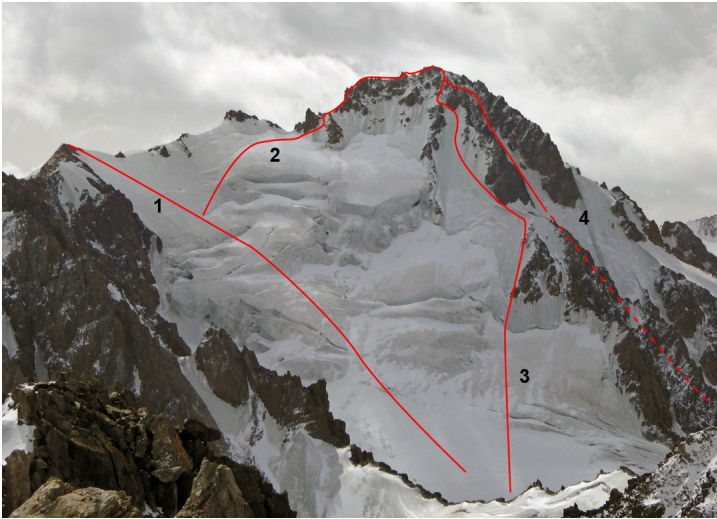
We were hoping to descend either the Evsyukov Route (3A, 1972) or the Plakushchev Route (3A, 1987), which lie on less steep ground farther left on the northwest face toward Skrabina (4,753m), left of a large serac formation. However, due to very poor visibility, we strayed onto the glacial seracs at ca 4,700m and were then unable to climb back up due to the bad weather and the need to descend quickly. We continued rappelling from Abalakovs, mostly in the dark, accompanied by high winds, snowfall, and spindrift. About 12 rappels, one over an impending wall of seracs and another down a vertical ice wall, took us to easier ground. We eventually reached our tent at 1:20 a.m. on September 3 after an 18-hour day.

The Kyrgyz Alpine Club confirmed our route on Semenova Tian-Shanski was completely new and agreed with our proposed grade of 4A (Alpine D).

Mark Aitken, U.K.



## Images



The northwest face of Pik Semenova Tian-Shanski (4,895m) seen from Uchitel. (1) Evsyukov Route (3A, 1972). (2) Plakushchev Route (3A, 1987). (3) Aitken-Potockiy Route (4A, 2015). (4) Fedorov Route (5B, 2013). The left skyline ridge leading to the summit was first traversed, via the summit of Skrabina (4,753m, off picture left), by Shubin and friends in 1955 (4B).



Aleksey Potockiy on the lower section of the northwest face of Pik Semenova Tian-Shanski during the first ascent of the route in 2015.



A heavily laden Aleksey Potockiy approaches the site for high camp at the foot of the northwest face of Pik Semenova Tian-Shanski. (1) Evsyukov Route (3A, 1972). (2) Plakushchev Route (3A, 1987). (3) Aitken-Potockiy Route (4A, 2015). (4) Fedorov Route (5B, 2013). The left skyline ridge leading to the summit was first traversed, via the summit of Skrabina (4,753m, off picture left), by Shubin and friends in 1955 (4B).

Article Details

Author	Mark Aitken
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	0
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions