



AAC Publications

"Pik Butterfly," West Ridge

Kyrgyzstan, Pamir, Eastern Zaalayskiy Range

In August 2019, we made an exploratory expedition to the Eastern Zaalayskiy, close to the border with China and Tajikistan. Our primary goal was a new route on the highest mountain in the region, Pik Kurumdy (6,613m), which has probably been climbed only twice. However, due to difficult weather conditions and limited time, we changed our target to the virgin Pik 4,890m, which we had previously spotted on the map as an attractive alternative.

We established base camp at around 3,600m in the valley of Kyzyl Su, on the west side of the glacier. On August 21, we crossed the glacier to the east side and continued further east, up scree and rocky slopes with no real climbing difficulties, to a bivouac at about 4,200m near the ice tongue coming down from the cirque below Piks 4,892m and 4,890m.

Next day we reached the cirque about 100m higher, crossed it, and started to climb the north face of the west ridge. Gaining the ridge required six pitches of ice up to 60° and was technically the most difficult part of the route. We then followed the crest to a small basin at about 4,650m, where it was possible to set up a comfortable camp. As it had now started to snow, we opted to bivouac here. On the 23rd, we left the tent with lighter backpacks and followed the ridge upward, simul-climbing the whole way on exposed but easier terrain. There was one 40m section of 55–60°. We avoided the rocky parts, which were very brittle.

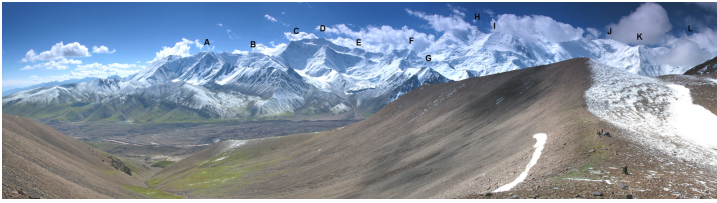
We reached the summit at 10:30 a.m., and our altimeter recorded a height of 4,892m—almost identical to the altitude on the Soviet military map—and a position of 39.523750°N, 73.682990°E.

We regained the tent, spent another night there, and the next day descended to base camp, with some rappels. Our “rack” had been seven ice screws and a snow stake—completely sufficient for the route.

We named the summit Pik Кепелек, which means “butterfly” in Kyrgyz. While climbing, we'd been surprised by a large number of butterflies, most likely carried up by air currents from the meadows below. We graded the 600m route D WI3 50–60°. As for Kurumdy, we will probably come back. The Butterfly adventure was our first experience climbing a virgin peak, and we loved it.

– Małgorzata Ilkiewicz and Maciej Nieścioruk, Poland

Images



Looking southeast into part of the Eastern Zaalayskiy Range. (A) Pik 4,892m. (B) Pik Көпөлөк (Pik Butterfly, 4,890m). (C) Pik 5,262m. (D) Pik Alexander Gybaev (5,368m, first climbed in 2008). (E) Pik 5,086m. (F) Pik 5,068m (G) Pik Molly (4,748m, first climbed in 1999). (H) Zarya Vostoka (a.k.a. Eastern Sunrise, 6,349m, first climbed in 2000). (I) Pik 5,998m. (J) Kurumdy East (6,384m). (K) Kurumdy Sharqi III (6,086m). (L) Kurumdy Central (6,613m).



Pik Көпөлөк (Pik Butterfly) in the Eastern Zaalayskiy and the line of the 2019 Polish route on the west ridge. The rounded snow dome to the left is an unmarked peak on the ridge between Piks 4,890m and 4,892m; it is higher than 4,900m and probably unclimbed.



The top bivouac at 4,650m on the west ridge of Pik Көпөлөк (Pik Butterfly), with the Kyzyl Su Glacier below.



Maciej Nieścioruk on the initial ice wall leading to the west ridge of Pik Көпөлөк (Pik Butterfly).



The north-facing ice wall leading to the west ridge of Pik Көпөлөк (Pik Butterfly).

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