



## AAC Publications

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### **Pik Free Korea, North Face, Barin, Solo First Ascent**

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Ala Archa

The left half of the north face of Pik Free Korea in the Ala Archa National Park. There are more than 25 routes and variations on this face; only the routes mentioned in the text are marked. (1) Studenin. (2) Barin. (3) Kustovsky. (4) Semiletkin. Photo by Lindsay Griffin

**Pik Free Korea (Pik Svobodnaya Korea, 4,740m) isn't just another mountain for Dmitry Pavlenko—it's the summit of his dreams. Though he has climbed the north face many times, creating his own route, solo, had been one of his most cherished ambitions. However, he believed the last logical unclimbed line to solo was completed during the winter of 2015 (Cheremnyh-Syschikov, 32 hours nonstop). Pavlenko was mistaken.**

In 2019, Pavlenko had a strong desire to attempt Kustovsky's Route (6A) toward the left side of the face, which had not had an ascent since the first in 1969. In the process of studying this route, he was surprised to see a beautiful and logical line cutting through it, finishing out right to the crest of the east ridge.

He left the Korona Hut one day in November 2019 with some ropes for fixing and a portaledge: he normally climbs capsule style in winter. That day, at the much lower Ratsek Hut, the temperature was -27°C. Broadly following the initial pitches of the Semiletkin Route [6A, 1988; this route soon moves right, traversing through the Kustovsky, to climb the wall even further to the right], he managed to climb a mixed pitch (V A1), and two rope lengths of ice, to reach the start of the main rock wall. Here, somewhat left of the line taken by the Kustovsky Route, Pavlenko first slanted up right over loose ground to a roof, beneath which he hung the portaledge. Next day he went back down, as felt he needed to warm his body. He planned to come back the following morning, but it was just too cold, and instead he went home to Bishkek.

In early December the days became warmer. In all, he made four separate trips to the mountain to work on the new route, including the one in December, on which he celebrated his 51st birthday on the wall. The route had extensive and sometimes dangerous aid climbing and some loose rock.

From the high point on his first attempt, Pavlenko continued past the ledge system where the old Studenin Route (6A, 1966) moves across to the left, and climbed straight up for two rope lengths (pitch six, A2; pitch seven, A3) to belay just below the point where he would intersect the Kustovsky Route. Pitch eight (A3) climbed through a succession of roofs, but where he cut through the Kustovsky, there was a section of extremely dangerous loose rock. At this point he found one of Kustovsky's ice screws, a lovely souvenir from the maestro. Another pitch of A3 led to the crux: pitch 10. Here, solid A1 up overhanging terrain led to a section of A4 where he was forced to drill three bathook holes. A fall from this section would inevitably lead to serious injury. The pitch finished on a good shelf.

Pitch 11 began with difficult A3 climbing leading to monolithic rock. Weighing his options, Pavlenko decided to traverse right, making seven bathook holes, before reaching features that led up to the capping roof. Five meters above this roof lay the start of the final ice slopes. Pitch 12, onto these slopes, started with a section of 80° ice, where unfortunately Pavlenko broke the pick of one of his tools. He was then faced with climbing around 100m of 40–50° hard ice with one tool, with little protection, and with half a kilometer of largely overhanging granite wall beneath his feet.

On March 11, at the end of pitch 13, he reached the summit ridge. The day was surprisingly sunny and calm. He rappelled the route and returned to an empty Korona Hut, drained, declaring, "I will never be able to force myself through such a test again." He named the route Barin (6A A4) in memory of a "good friend and cool guy," Edik "Barin" Mamykin.

Pavlenko brings a wealth of experience to his new routes. In 1997 he reached the summit of Makalu as part of the team that made a demanding new one on the West Face/West Pillar. In 1998 he made a big new route on the north face of Khan Tengri, and in 2004 the first ascent of the north face of Jannu with Alexander Ruchkin.

— Information from **Dmitry Pavlenko**, Russia/Kyrgyzstan, and Anna Piunova, mountain.ru, Russia

## Images



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Looking down the initial section of the wall to the (yellow) camp at the top of the ice slopes on Barin, north face of Pik Free Korea.

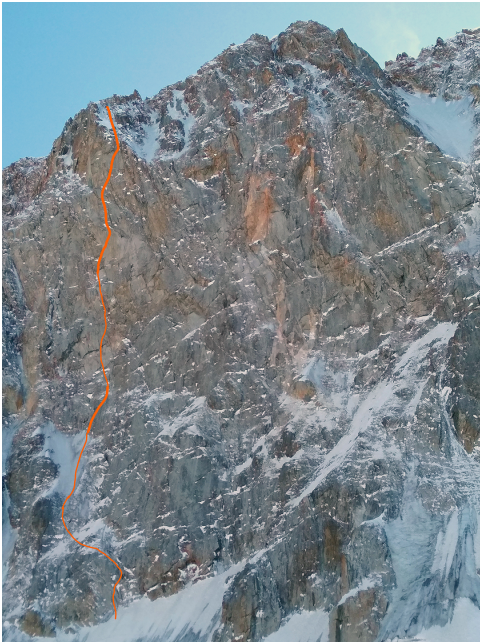


The portaledge camp in the middle section of Barin on the north face of Pik Free Korea.



Large, precariously situated flakes threaten the line of Barin on the north face of Pik Free Korea.





Barin, the 2020 Pavlenko route on the north face of Pik Free Korea.



A traverse across monolithic granite high on the north face of Pik Free Korea.



Dmitry Pavlenko on the summit (east) ridge of Pik Free Korea after the first ascent of Barin on the north face.

## Article Details

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