



AAC Publications

Pik Voennyh Topografov, South Face, Impromptu

China, Tien Shan

The upper south face of Pik Voennyh Topografov with the line of Impromptu (2021). Photo by Anatoly Dzhuliy

Pik Voennyh Topografov (Military Topographers Peak, 6,873m) is the third-highest mountain of the Tien Shan. Prior to 2021, only three routes had reached the main summit: the northwest ridge (Vodokhodov, 1965), northeast ridge (Korenev, 2003), and south ridge (Dzhuliy, 2006; see AAJ 2007). Our plan was a new route on the south face, left of the ridge climbed in 2006. [Past AAJ reports have referred to Pik Army Topographers, but "Military Topographers" is a better translation.]

On August 10, Dmitry Grigorev, Sergey Nilov, and I arrived by helicopter at the standard Khan Tengri Base Camp (4,046m) on the South Inylchek Glacier in Kyrgyzstan. The same day we began ferrying equipment toward the mountain. The Zvyozdochka Glacier was heavily loaded with snow, so it took a week to move us and our gear the 20km to Chonteren Col (5,500m) on the frontier ridge with China, between Voennyh Topografov and Pik Pobeda (7,439m). This week gave us enough acclimatization to make an attempt on our objective.

On August 20 we made four rappels from the col to the Chonteren Glacier and crossed it below the south face of Voennyh Topografov, spotting a line of mostly snow and ice leading to the summit. At the start, we found a crevasse at 4,840m where we could camp for the night. We also fixed our four ropes on the initial section of the face.

Next day we added 13 pitches, stopping at a snow terrace at 5,468m. Although it was a comfortable campsite, the wind was strong and we spent two hours making a snow wall to shelter the tent. On the 22nd we climbed a further 18 pitches to reach an altitude of 6,056m. Although we spent three hours working into the night, we only managed to excavate a poor ledge and were unable to get a good night's rest. Next day the weather was bad and we stopped early, after nine pitches, at 6,382m. Fortunately, there was a big crevasse that was more than suitable for a luxury camp.

On the 24th conditions were still bad, but we climbed 12 pitches and prepared our tent site in a sheltered place beneath a large overhanging rock at 6,657m. We planned to reach the summit the next day, but the weather was so bad that we were only able to fix the four ropes before returning to the tent. We tried again on the 26th. However, after reaching the top of the second fixed rope, Dmitry (Grigorev) felt so unwell that we had to return to our campsite below the rock. Later, in a Moscow hospital, he was diagnosed with a blood clot on a lung; at the time we thought he was experiencing a bad attack of high-altitude sickness.

Fortunately, the following morning he felt better, and as the weather was now good, we continued. We gave Dmitry just two sleeping pads to carry in his pack, and Sergey and I took the rest. Above the fixed ropes, we climbed three more pitches to the summit.

Sergey Nilov starting the descent of the northwest ridge of Pik Voennyh Topografov with the summit of Pik Pobeda behind. Photo by Dmitry Golovchenko

The obvious descent was along the northwest ridge, as this leads directly to Chonteren Col. However, it is much longer than any line from the south. After four hours we had descended to around 6,800m, where we dug out a good ledge beneath a snow mushroom. As we continued down on August 28, we had to stop at times because we couldn't see where to go. At 5 p.m., in strong wind and snowfall, we

had to camp at 6,058m, disappointed that we hadn't reached the col.

After waiting through snowfall during the morning of the 29th, we moved down in improving visibility and reached the col by midday, the 10th day after leaving this col to start our climb. We then began our descent toward the Zvyozdochka Glacier. Again, the weather forced us to stop early, at 5,311m, below a large snow wall. On the 30th the weather was amazingly good, so we were able to descend to the glacier and cross it. With one more camp at 4,441m, we reached Khan Tengri Base Camp on August 31. This is a large, fixed camp, but the season had already finished, the last helicopter having left five days earlier. It was totally deserted and, sadly, resembled a huge garbage dump. We discovered some abandoned food, including 100 eggs. These were never going to last until 2022, so we decided to "rescue" them. I have never eaten so many eggs in one day!

The next day, after more eggs, we started down the South Inylchek Glacier, Dmitry carrying just a few items of personal clothing and Sergey and I the rest. That night a huge snowstorm covered us while we were erecting the tent, but on the following day the weather was brilliant— we managed to dry our clothing and sleeping bags, and reached the Mertzbacher Meadow at 3,400m, the first green grass we had seen.

On September 3, following a good trail, we got to Willow Camp at 2,940m, and on the 4th, after crossing the At-Djailoo River, we reached the road—a week after we had started home from Chonteren Col. Before long we were enjoying the restaurants of Karakol.

Dmitry had been lucky: first when the clot went to his lung rather than his heart, and second when he managed to get off the mountain under his own steam without too much damage to his lung.

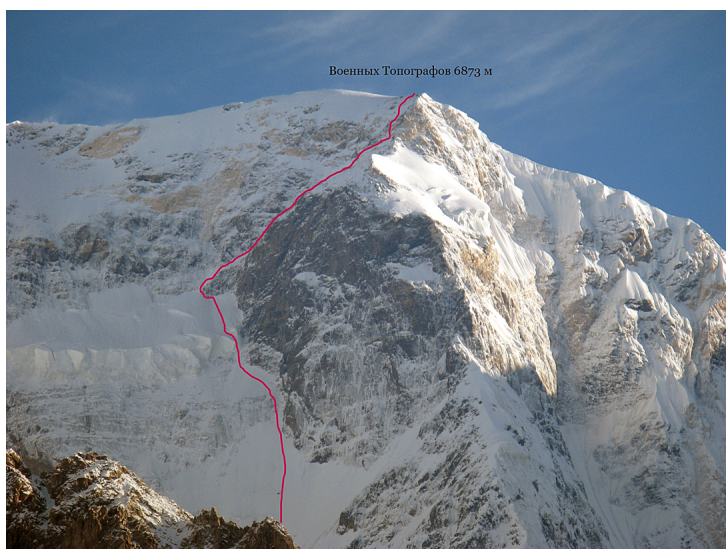
In all, we had spent nearly a month on this adventure. Our new route, Impromptu (5B or TD AI3), had just over 2,000m of elevation gain and around 3,000m of climbing.

— **Dmitry Golovchenko, Russia**

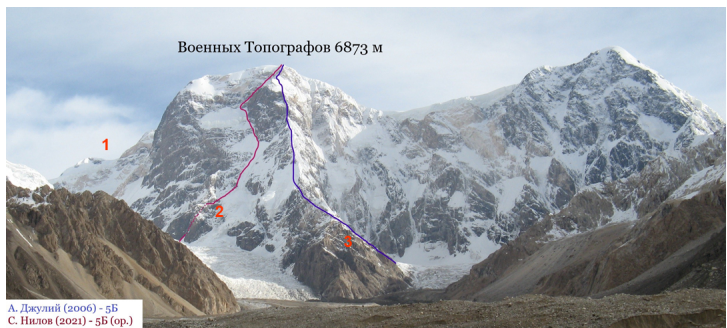
Images



Aerial view from the south of (A) Pik Pobeda East, (B) Khan Tengri, (C) Pik Voennyh Topografov, (D) Pik 6,747m (a.k.a. Pik Engilchek), and (E) Chonteren Glacier. (1) Northwest ridge (1965), descended to Chonteren Col in 2021. The Zvyozdochka Glacier, used for the approach to Chonteren Col, is hidden beyond. (2) South face (Impromptu (2021)). (3) South Ridge (2006). Chen Zhao, CC BY 2.0,



The upper south face of Pik Voennyh Topografov with the line of Impromptu (2021).



The south side of Pik Voennyh Topografov and to the right Pik 6,747m (sometimes called Pik Engilchek) with (1) Northwest ridge (1965), (2) South face, Impromptu (2021), and (3) South Ridge (2006).



The 2021 line of descent (the northwest ridge) from Pik Voennyh Topografov to the Chonteren Col. Dmitry Golovchenko



Sergey Nilov in the middle part of the south face of Pik Voennyh Topografov with a view of the Chonteren Glacier in China below and unnamed, probably mostly unclimbed peaks in the distance.



Sergey Nilov climbing into the narrows on the right side of the large serac barrier on the south face of Pik Voennyh Topografov.



Sergey Nilov at around 6,300m on the south face of Pik Voennyh Topografov. The upper buttress of the 2006 Dzhuliy route on the south ridge is visible to the right.



Dmitry Grigorev and Sergey Nilov further down the northwest ridge during the descent from Pik Voennyh Topografov. The summit of Pik Pobeda is visible behind.



Sergey Nilov.



Sergey Nilov concocts a meal from the many eggs found abandoned at Khan Tengri Base Camp.



The abandoned Khan Tengri Base Camp with some of the eggs visible on the right.



Sergey Nilov starting the descent of the northwest ridge of Pik Voennyh Topografov with the summit of Pik Pobeda behind.

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