



## Alpomish, First Ascent and New Country High Point

Uzbekistan, Gissar Range

View to the north from Alpomish to Peak 4,643m (sometimes mistakenly called Khazret Sultan), in the center of the photo. Long thought to be the highest peak in Uzbekistan, Peak 4,643m was conclusively shown to be lower than Alpomish during ascents of both peaks in 2023. Photo by Eric Gilbertson.

**Until recently, it was widely accepted that the broad, rocky 4,643m mountain at 38.948396N, 68.172312E in the Gissar (Hissar) Range, on the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan border, was the highest peak in Uzbekistan.** This was based on the 1981 Soviet topographic map, the most accurate and recent map of the area. (In recent times, Peak 4,643m acquired the name Khazret Sultan, mostly in online sources, but another, better-known peak in Uzbekistan already had this name. Consequently, the name is not accepted by Uzbekistan's mountaineering community.)

While researching Peak 4,643m, possibly first climbed by Soviets in the 1960s, I realized that a border peak about 6km to the south, known as Alpomish in the local climbing community, was potentially taller than Peak 4,643m. Google Earth showed the highest points on each peak at exactly the same elevation (though this is often inaccurate). The Soviet map showed no spot elevation for Alpomish. Andreas Frydensberg (Denmark) and I laid plans to carry a differential GPS unit and sight levels to both summits and determine which was higher.

We planned to go in late August when snow levels would be lowest. Acclimatized from ascents of Pik Korzhenevsky (7,105m) and Pik Ismoil Somoni (Pik Communism, 7,495m), Andreas and I headed to the Uzbekistan border region, and on August 21 started our approach from Sarytag village in Tajikistan. We hiked southwest alongside the Dikondara River, cached a few days of food to pick up after we returned from Alpomish, and continued south over several glaciated 4,000m passes and many talus fields, around 23km in total. Our base camp was by a small tarn near an unnamed glacier below the steep east face of Alpomish.

The four-spired peak loomed above camp with 400m granite faces on each spire. The southernmost spire looked to be the tallest, which I verified with sight levels. Using the known location and altitude of the tarn and angular inclination measurements with the sight levels, I measured Alpomish at 4,660m to 4,670m— significantly higher than Peak 4,643m.

On August 23, we hiked to the east face and found a big gully leading up to the notch between the summit and the next spire to the right. We scrambled up the gully on scree until it was blocked by a huge chockstone. I led the face to the right to an overhang, then traversed left delicately to reach the top of the chockstone.

We continued up the gully to a constriction with a small waterfall in the middle, where we decided to belay again. Above the waterfall, ice filled the gully all the way up to the notch, and since we hadn't brought technical ice tools, I started up the rock wall to the left and eventually moved left to a ridge crest with a good belay ledge.

The next pitch would be the crux. I climbed a steeper finger crack directly up the ridge crest, then made a delicate traverse left into a cleft. I continued up the cleft, then crossed back right to nice ledges and eventually the gendarmed summit ridge. A final knife-edge led to the top.

I first verified with the sight levels that all the nearby spires of the peak were shorter—we were definitely on the highest point of Alpomish. I set up the differential GPS, but it had trouble acquiring satellites. So I pointed my sight levels toward Peak 4,643m, and with each level measured 10min–20min angular declination looking down at the distant summit. Clearly it was lower. There were no anchors, cairns, or any sign of human passage anywhere on Alpomish, so it seemed very likely we had made the first ascent. My handheld GPS recorded the summit at 38.89307N, 68.179583E. The sight level measurements showed that Alpomish is 25m (+/-8m) higher than Peak 4,643m, giving an elevation for Alpomish of circa 4,668m.

We made five diagonal rappels to reach the gully just below the ice as darkness set in, then downclimbed and made two more rappels to get into the lower gully. We staggered back into camp shortly before midnight. Our route was the Upper East Face (300m, 5.8).

To be absolutely certain about the relative elevations, I wanted to take measurements from the top of Peak 4,643m, looking back to Alpomish, so the next day we retraced our route over the glaciated passes, picked up our food cache, and hiked to the base of Peak 4,643m.

On August 25, we climbed the standard northeast ridge route, with long stretches of 4th-class scrambling on a knife-edge and two pitches of 5.7. On the summit, I used sight levels to measure 10min–20min angular inclination up to Alpomish. All six measurements showed that Alpomish is higher than Peak 4,643m, making it the highest point in Uzbekistan. We rapped off Peak 4,643m in a snow squall and hiked out to Sarytag the next morning.

— Eric Gilbertson, USA

**THE SEVEN 'STANS:** Eric Gilbertson and Andreas Frydensberg's climb of Alpomish was the penultimate summit in a four-year effort to reach the highest point of each of the seven nations whose names end with "stan," with most of these being challenging mountaineering objectives. In 2019, they climbed Noshag (7,492m, Afghanistan). In 2021, they tagged the summits of Khan Tengri (7,010m, Kazakhstan) and Pobeda (7,439m, Kyrgyzstan). In 2022, it was K2 (8,611m, Pakistan), without supplementary oxygen. And in 2023 they climbed Ismoil Somoni (7,495m, Tajikistan), Ayrybaba (3,139m, Turkmenistan), and Alpomish (ca 4,668m, Uzbekistan). Gilbertson reported that Pobeda (via the Abalakov Route) was the technically and physically the most difficult of the seven (technical climbing at high altitude with no fixed ropes, deep snow, serious objective danger, frostbite) and that Noshag was logistically the toughest (landmines and kidnapping hazards). Gilbertson's ultimate goal is to reach the high point of every country in the world. As of August 2024, he had climbed 143 of them.

## Images



On the last pitch during the first ascent of Alpomish.



The line followed up the east side of Alpomish for the probable first ascent of the peak. The steep granite walls are about 400 meters high.



View to the north from Alpomish to Peak 4,643m (sometimes mistakenly called Khazret Sultan), in the center of the photo. Long thought to be the highest peak in Uzbekistan, Peak 4,643m was conclusively shown to be lower than Alpomish during ascents of both peaks in 2023.





Making the approach to Peak 4,643m.



During the climb of Peak 4,643m via the northeast ridge.



The northeast ridge route on Peak 4,643m (sometimes mistakenly called Khazret Sultan).

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