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ISM team get up White Witch of Western Tien Shan

Western Tien Shan

Western Kokshaal-Too

Pat Littlejohn, assisted by two guides, Alain Delizee from Switzerland and Kyrgyzstan's foremost commercial operator Vladimir Komissarov, organized his third ISM expedition to the Western Kokshaal-Too during September. In 1998 he had set up Base Camp near the snout of the Ototash (Kotur) Glacier in the valley immediately east of that visited by the 1997 Anglo-American expedition (reported in INFO 182). Unfortunately, on that occasion the weather had been uncharacteristically poor and very heavy snowfall precluded climbing anything of significance.

In September 1999, travelling in a six-wheel-drive truck from the capital, Bishkek, Littlejohn once again reached the same Base Camp site and this time was blessed with more or less perfect weather. An Advanced Base was established towards the head of the glacier not far from the Chinese border at 4550m. From there the expedition operated in three teams and climbed six peaks around the glacier rim. Apart from the guides named above, other climbers involved in the ascents were Ingrid Crossland, Alan Dunworth, Joanna da Silva, Richard Smith and Jane Whitmore.

Several of the summits such as the fine snow peak of **Pik Obzhornay** (5155.7m), ascended via a shallow spur on the west flank at PD, or the elegant 5140m **Pik Pyramida** ascended by the straightforward North West Ridge (also PD) from the col on the Chinese frontier, had been climbed previously by a Soviet expedition that visited the region many years ago. However the main objective from the head of the glacier, referred to by the Soviets as Trezubets South (5285m) but actually to the south of the **Trezubets** (Three Teeth) and christened **Volshebnitsa** (White Witch) by the ISM party, still remained virgin. This was climbed in a 12-hour round trip from Advanced Base by Crossland, Littlejohn and da Silva. They chose the spectacular and often knife-edge crest of the North Ridge, the most difficult section of which, leading up to the foresummit, involved ice climbing in shallow 75-degree ice runnels thinly overlaying granite slabs. This section was rated Scottish IV, while an overall grade of Alpine D+ was deemed appropriate for the route.

In the meantime the remaining climbers had also been active, making the probable first ascent of a 5050m peak directly above Advanced Base on the ridge running east from the col towards Obzhornay. The summit was reached via the East Ridge and involved rappelling a prominent overhanging gendarme. This could not be re-ascended on the return, forcing the climbers to descend the steep and icy north flank; altogether an interesting outing at AD+ and christened **Pik Judith-Brian**. Two of the **Trezubets** were also ascended from the east. At least one of these had not been previously climbed.