

Grigoriev Valley, First Ascents and Peak Dankova Variation

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Western Kokshaal-Too

Climbs And Expeditions

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On August 30, thanks to the logistics of our excellent agency ITMC, Maarten Altena and I were dropped off just 10km from base camp. Over two days we ferried loads to a site at 3,500m at the confluence of the Grigoriev and Palgov rivers. We made an advanced camp on the Grigoriev at 4,100m and on September 5 set off for Peak 5,081m, a border peak at the southern head of the glacier. We climbed 300m of ice on the northwest face to a shoulder at 4,850m. The ice kept shattering, and what was supposed to be a warm-up route became a terrible struggle. We plowed across a gentle hanging glacier covered in deep snow and up the last section of the west ridge to the summit, our first over 5,000m. Ten rappels from Abalakovs got us down through the heat of the sun, with meltwater gushing over our clothes. The route was AD, and we named the peak Moker, Dutch for sledgehammer.

From the same high camp we climbed Peak 5,161m, another border peak farther east, hoping it would provide more suitable warming up than Moker. On September 7 we reached a 4,800m col on the frontier, west- southwest of the mountain, where we met strong southerly winds from China. Good névé on a 300m, 40° face led to the top. We descended the same way (PD+) and named the summit Peak September.

Back in base camp we rested and prepared for our main objective, the west ridge of Dankova (5,982m), the highest peak in the Western Kokshaal-too. On the 14th we reached the foot of the south face, avoided two overhanging steps via a gorge to the right, and arrived at a 70m wall. This was UIAA III but dreadfully friable; it led to a precarious leftward traverse on snow, thinly covering loose gravel. A second rock barrier was climbed via snow-filled cracks (II) to the west ridge. We then climbed an ice bulge that strongly reminded us of the Nollen on the Monch in Switzerland (four pitches of 60–70° with one vertical section), reached a hanging glacier at 5,200m, and camped for the night.

Next morning, as we worked our way up 40–50° névé leading to the upper rock band at 5,800m, we repeatedly debated turning around because of the intense cold. The couloir we intended to climb turned out to be hideously brittle rock covered in verglas, so we moved north in search of easier passage. To our great surprise we found a piton at the top of the northwest face, possibly dating back as far as the 1972 ascent (see note below). We went back to the couloir and entered into a dose of Scottish winter climbing, albeit with far less oxygen. After 30m things improved and we waded 70m through hip-deep snow to the summit. We rappelled and downclimbed the route, leaving no equipment in place, and graded the route D+.

Winter was kicking in, and our good weather vanished as we carried gear out to the dirt road. All that now separated us from an immense heap of mouthwatering shashliks was a bumpy two-day truck ride.

Arjan de Leeuw, *The Netherlands*

Editor's note: The first ascent of Dankova probably took place in 1969, when N. Strikitsa's party is reported to have climbed a 5B route up the huge southwest face. In 1972 a hard mixed route was completed on the northwest face, which rises almost 2,000m above the glacier. In 1998 a team led by Valeri Boiko added another 5B route to the southwest face. The west ridge of Dankova was climbed integrally, over the lower rock crest, during the Soviet era (party unknown). However, the upper ridge is a tapering triangular slope, and it is possible the Dutch climbed new terrain until close to the upper rock band.

- **Author / Photographer:** Arjan de Leeuw
- **Publication Year:** 2015
- **Caption:** Peak 5,161m from the northwest and route of ascent. The lower summits on the crest to the right are ca 4,800m.



- **Author / Photographer:** Arjan de Leeuw
- **Publication Year:** 2015
- **Caption:** Dankova from the Grigoriev Glacier to the southwest. (1) Dutch west ridge route (2014). The original route up this ridge gained the lower rock arête from the south and followed the full crest. (2) Approximate line of the 1998 Boiko Route on the southwest face.

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- **Publication Year:** 2015
- **Caption:** Details of the 2014 Dutch route on Dankova.



- **Author / Photographer:** Arjan de Leeuw
- **Publication Year:** 2015
- **Caption:** Peak 5,081m from the upper Grigoriev Glacier to the north, with the route of ascent on the northwest face.



- **Author / Photographer:** Arjan de Leeuw
- **Publication Year:** 2015
- **Caption:** Peak 5,161m from the northwest and route of ascent. The lower summits on the crest to the right are ca 4,800m.



- **Author / Photographer:** Arjan de Leeuw
- **Publication Year:** 2015
- **Caption:** Looking down the west ridge from the summit of Dankova. The original route followed the sharp crest from near its base. In 2014 the Dutch climbers came up from the left and joined the original line high on the mountain.

