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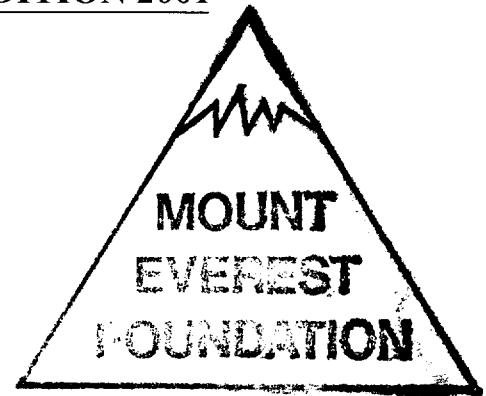
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BRITISH WESTERN KOKSHAAL-TOO EXPEDITION 2001

MEF 01/37

23rd August – 24th September 2001



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John Allen
Peter Berggren
Hilda Grooters
Tim Riley



The inspiration for the trip, our first view of the Khrebet Kyokkiar – August 2000.



Appetite for Kyrgyzstan – a bowl of laghman at the Osh Bazaar.

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1. Expedition Summary

1.1. Introduction

In the far east of Kyrgyzstan lie the Tien Shan mountains, a range of vast glaciers and peaks up to 7000m. As one moves westward, between the border with China and the huge lake, Issy-Kul, the mountains become smaller in stature and separate into individual ranges.

While returning after a visit to one of these ranges, the Khrebet Kokshaal-Too, in 2000, a range of mountains was seen on the horizon to the south, forming the border with China. They looked very interesting: all were snow-capped and dark shadows on the faces showed a steepness, which suggested some quality of rock and technical interest. They were marked on the map as the Khrebet Kyokkiar and enquiries showed that no climbers, of any nationality, were known to have visited this area. So the idea was spawned to return with a team of willing participants, persuaded with the description of potential adventure.

1.2. Expedition Objectives

The objectives of the expedition were to explore and make first ascents in the unvisited mountain range of the Khrebet Kyokkiar.

1.3. Team Members:

Although described as "British", due to unforeseen circumstances the original members changed and in the end final team were 40% "other nationalities"! Not everyone had climbed together previously, but one of the best aspects of this trip was felt to be the continuous motivation and good humour and enjoyed by the team.

David Gerrard, 30, British, Leader

John Allen, 62, British

Peter Berggren, 28, Swedish

Hilda Grooters, 37 Dutch

Tim Riley, 27, British

1.4. Achievements

Two separate mountain ranges previously unexplored by mountaineers were visited: the Gory Sarybeles and the Khrebet Kyokkiar. Five summits were climbed, two additional routes ascended to a summit plateau and two failed summit attempts made. Considering the lack of certainty in achieving our objectives, the expedition was very successful with only one day of enforced inactivity. The ranges visited were relatively accessible alpine mountains, which offer much good quality exploratory mountaineering with a range of objectives. Contact with local people is an enjoyable and interesting part of a visit to the region. The climate and living conditions are pleasant and the mountains are rich in wildlife.

Gory Sarybeles, 7 days

Four summits were climbed by the team and an unsuccessful attempt made on a route on one of these summits.

The western side of this small, but defined range was approached from a base camp in the Kurumduk valley c.3300m reached by 4WD. The mountains were climbed from high camps 2-3hrs easy walk from BC. This range consists of snow-capped limestone

summits, between 4200m and 4600m, with little or no glaciation at lower levels. Two valleys ran into the range: one, dammed at the end, formed a spectacular lake surrounded by sheer rock faces. There were many steep rock faces in the range, which would give routes 500m – 700m as well as many ice and mixed lines up shaded faces and runnels. The western side of the range looked as though it would also yield similar good quality climbing, steep buttresses having been seen on a skyline. There are many more interesting summits to achieve, the easier route being of a modest standard, with many fine lines up faces which should offer good technical climbing with straightforward approaches and descents.

Khrebet Kyokkiar, 14 days

One summit was climbed and two routes were ascended to a summit plateau. One unsuccessful attempt was made on another summit.

The main valley of this range was reached from Chatyrtash after a day with pack horses and a day load carrying after reconnaissance. BC was situated in this main valley with one high camp placed three hours further up the valley and another high camp three hours walk up an offshoot valley.

The Kyokkiar is a more isolated alpine area, with higher summits and bigger faces, although glaciated approaches to mountains did not look difficult. Access requires the use of horses for efficient transport of kit. A long “C” shaped valley, flat and level at about 3100m, the main drainage into the Aksai from these mountains, splits the range. The river was almost dry, allowing easy travel by foot (possible by horse) until it rose at its eastern end.

To the west of this valley were rugged hills with some outstanding looking crags estimated at 200m high. To the east and south of the main valley the summits rose to mid 4000m. Faces that fell directly to the main valley were close to 1000m, continuous rock, with the northern aspects also holding some ice and snow. The east-west “offshoot” valley has impressive steep to overhanging rock walls, c.500m on the north side (south facing), whereas to the south larger buttresses and walls were split by two high corries. These held many snow and ice lines, c.500m, leading to a ridge crest at c.4400m. At the end of this valley the pleasant grass hillside changed to moraine and then to a benign looking glacier, the south wall of which had many steep looking gullies, c.300m – 500m.

The eastern end of the main valley rose gently through boulder fields and scree to a pleasant flat area, where the valley abruptly ended in smooth slabs. Above the slabs lay a glacial basin with many more alpine summits in the high 4000m, including the highest marked in the range at 4960m.

Weather

Generally good. Mornings were almost always fine, but from midday brief storms were almost guaranteed to blow in. Broken cloud would remain for the afternoon with hail showers of up to half an hour and strong, cold winds at altitude.

Later in the trip there were snow showers, which generally lasted longer but melted quickly. At the end of the trip we experienced two days of very heavy snowfall, when half a metre fell, transforming the area to winter and making foot travel far more arduous.

Ascent Summary

The names included in the report are currently for the expedition's reference only. They are believed to have been first ascents, as no recorded mountaineering information is known, but many were not difficult. Areas are unlikely to have been explored or mountains climbed by local people, unless they were hunting. They would also be unlikely to travel much further than possible by horse. Information on the ascents made has been given to the Kyrgyz Alpine Club, who traditionally approves the names once the ascent is confirmed and if no other local names exist. A request has been made to use the Kyrgyz or Russian words for the names chosen.

Gory Sarybeles

- Pt. 4435, (Horizon Peak), NW slopes, F, 31st August 2001. David Gerrard, Hilda Grooters.
- Pt. 4550, (Cat's Ear South), NW Face and N Ridge, AD+, 31st August, Peter Berggren, Tim Riley.
- Pt. 4275, (Peak Kul-Su), NE Ridge, F, 3rd September 2001, David Gerrard, Hilda Grooters.
- Pt. 4375, (Cloud Peak), SW Ridge, F, 3rd September 2001, David Gerrard, Hilda Grooters.

Attempt made on the obvious narrow couloir on the valley face of Pt. 4275, by Peter Berggren and Tim Riley, 3rd September, involving climbing to Scottish V. Retreat made in poor weather after 200m.

Kyokkiar

Offshoot Valley

- Pt. 4445 (map 4487m?), (Pawprint Peak), SW Ridge, F, 11th September 2001, David Gerrard, Hilda Grooters.
- The obvious LH gully in the first corrie ascended to the summit plateau, 300m, Scottish I, Peter Berggren, Tim Riley.
- "The Bounty" - Route climbed to just below the summit plateau of Pt.c.4200m in the first corrie of the offshoot valley. 500m, TD, Scottish V, 18th September 2001, Peter Berggren, Tim Riley.

Main Valley

Attempt made on Pt.4765, NW Face by obvious ramp line to shoulder and then the upper snow slopes to the summit ridge. Attempt halted at 4600m.

2. The Expedition

2.1. Planning and Preparation

Most of the organisation was carried out via email contact with the travel / logistics company, ITMC, in Bishkek, in the months previous to departure. A good knowledge of access to the region had been gained from our 2000 visit, but we were still uncertain how good the marked roads were to the Kyokkiar or how we would get into the range from where we would leave the vehicle. Liaising with the military in the area, ITMC suggested that an approach to the settlement of Chatyrtash could be gained by 4WD vehicle. From here horses could possibly be hired from locals. On this we were relying, if not, it would be a long walk. There were no guarantees!

The necessary equipment was reserved for the period of the trip: truck, driver, gas cylinders, radio etc. Members details were sent for ITMC to organise the visa invitation, border permits and police registration. Accommodation and taxi transfers were arranged also. We spent the nights before leaving Bishkek in an apartment arranged by ITMC, where we had more freedom to sort gear and food.

The cheapest reliable airfares were purchased from Facts Travel in London, a direct flight with British Mediterranean including four nights stay in the posh Hotel Pinara (£2.50 per night upgrade!).

No equipment sponsorship was sought, mainly because most of the group had most items. Standard alpine gear was adequate with the usual additions for a long stay in the hills. A local gear shop offered a generous discount for the items we needed.

All food was to be purchased in Kyrgyzstan. From the previous year we knew that a perfectly adequate menu could be bought in the supermarkets and bazaars.

Enquiries were made to British Mediterranean for a possible excess baggage allowance. Hilda was granted an increased allowance for medical equipment, but the rest of us were refused anything official due to the flight being fully booked. We were advised to arrive early and seek sympathy! We duly prepared a plan B to smuggle gear in pockets and bumbags and wear as many clothes as possible.

2.2. Execution.

The city

We were met at the airport at 04:00 by the taxi driver and taken to an apartment where we slept for a few hours before meeting Ayana, our contact at ITMC. Paperwork was collected and the details discussed. Much friendly advice was also given on the best places to buy things, how to avoid over enthusiastic police checks, good places to eat and how to please the locals in the mountains (booze and fags – surprise!).

The bulk of the supermarket shopping was completed in the afternoon, with carbs, dried nuts, fruit, spices and vegetables bought in the amazing Osh Bazaar the next day. Anton, a local student of English, accompanied us for aid, but we didn't encounter any situation that required any more than a sense of humour to overcome.

We bought fresh melons and greens by the roadside on leaving Bishkek early the next morning and arrived in Naryn for a lunch of laghman.

A few more luxuries, vodka and fags, were bought before setting off for Akmuz, where we swung a left and headed high into the hills toward the border post. A gift of a melon and cigarettes put the guards at ease and photographs were even welcomed. A long gradual descent through steppe took us down to an open valley, where a huddle of ruins coincided with a group of black dots marked on the map as Chatyrtash. We weren't going to be getting any horses there. In the gathering dusk

the white outlines of the Kyokkiar were just visible behind foothills split by impressive gorges. Between the foothills and us lay a very wide, open river, which we would have to cross. Vladimir, the director of ITMC, had mentioned a bridge. He had also expressed doubt as to its condition. We had solved how to travel 99.99% of the distance to our objective; now the potentially insurmountable problems of the last 0.01% were becoming evident.

“Oi, babushka, is this Chatyrtash?” called out Misha to an elderly lady milking a goat. She croaked some Kyrgyz in return and Misha shook his head in incomprehension as she scuttled back toward her yurt with a full pail. We took it as confirmation.

The next couple of hours were spent driving backwards and forward along the valley, calling in at a military post where we stood for an hour with the guards while our papers were checked. We then turned around and reversed our tracks. We were confused, but Misha seemed to have purpose. Eventually we stopped the truck when the track in front of us suddenly disappeared, washed away in some past flood. Tents were pitched and we crashed.

The next morning brought clear skies and a great view of the mountains. They were suitably spiky. Until then, the whole range had been a square inch of celluloid, now, looking through binoculars at the summits, we became inspired. All we had to do was work out how to travel the next 20kms of foothills and ravines to get there with all our kit. The map indicated a track around to the south of these mountains, which the military had confirmed was navigable, but our intended approach, had been from the north, through an obvious deep cut valley which led into the range. With lack of alternative advice, as a means of getting closer to the mountains and in the general spirit of exploration we thought we would take the truck and follow the track. On the advice of some local soldiers who came by on horseback, Misha carefully avoided the half repaired bridge that spanned the river and drove through the shallows to pick us up the other side. A track soon pared off the main trail and took us southward, past a sign, in Russian and ENGLISH, welcoming us to the hunting reserve of Sarytash. The track headed into the hills, the treacherous nature of the road helpfully indicated by international road signs warning of a slippery surface (!), before dropping down again to the river level.

As we reoriented ourselves in the new valley, we saw a ridge of impressive snow-capped summits and rock walls that didn't quite fit onto our minds' eye view of the area. As we orientated the map we saw that the contours in this area showed only a mere indication of what we were looking at, without a hint of permanent glaciation. Worth a look, we thought.

As we passed through a village we were guided us across a river by two children on horseback. Misha then, unexpectedly, deemed any further travel by truck impossible. Still some way off any decent view of the Kyokkiar, we turned our attention to the new range and soon found a suitable spot to park the truck; a stones throw from the hills, in a wide open valley, with a fresh water river 200 yards away.

An afternoon's walk up the foothills of the valley gave us perspective and objectives to discuss over dinner. Hilda, John and I would try an easy looking peak at the valley end, which should give good views, while Tim and Pete fancied the right hand of the two most prominent peaks in the valley.

The Gory Sarybeles

The next day some of the local lads rode by to investigate the strangers. Sorting and packing gear was interspersed with demonstrating plastic boots and our lack of

horsemanship. They looked somewhat surprised when we shouldered our rucksacks and left camp on foot. As we would be told many times, four feet are better than two. In order to avoid wet feet crossing the rivers in the valley, John, Hilda and I made a long detour above the source. One of the two narrow valleys that cut into the range from this side, was naturally dammed and formed a fantastic blue lake, surrounded by steep smooth limestone walls, the Oyzin (lake) Kul-Su. Our tent were pitched at the flattest riverside spot we could find with perfect views of countless lines on the surrounding limestone faces.

A snow shower just before we woke added atmosphere to our start the next morning. We planned to ascend slabs and scree to a broad ridge, which led to the summit plateau or our mountain. We worked out a way up the initial steepness by linking grassy ledges. Here John decided to return to the tent, Kyrgyz cultures had knocked the stuffing out of his bowels and a day of good views appealed more than a hypoxic wander over the tops.

The slabs and scree turned out to be straightforward and we ascended, building cairns for a bad weather retreat, without problem to the broad ridge. Some gully scrambling saw us on the snow ridge as stormy showers blew in. We weathered these to gain superb views over the range from the summit, which we recorded as 4435m. To the west a series of snow domes led toward an interesting profile of steep buttresses and to the north repeating rows of limestone faces rose from barren valleys to snow dusted tops.

Return to the tent was straightforward, with the luxury of a bumslide descent and we decided to make our meagre rations last another evening and have a relaxed walkout the next morning.

Tim and Pete's happy faces greeted us at the truck and Misha served us with a taste laden soup, while dicing tomatoes and cucumbers to make a salad. Unexpected morsels of meat in the soup were later linked to a small furry carcass abandoned behind the truck, one less marmot in the valley. Tim and Pete's route had gone well, and they recounted their ascent through mouthfuls of food.

We made a later start than intended – the entertainment provided by Dave clinging to a galloping horse was too good to miss. Pete and I, prepared for anything, headed up the grassy slopes to the right hand side of our mountain. The line of our intended route became obvious during the approach and we found a comfortable camp on the last patch of grass after about 2 hours walking.

After a quick brew we went for a look in the valley. Steep walls formed the sides but there were snow slopes, which offered a possible way through the avalanche prone slopes of the highest peak in the area, at the end of the valley. There was very little in the way of glaciation. The way to our line up the mountain negotiated slabs covered in scree and looked straightforward.

During our evening meal we reasoned that, with the summit probably only 900m above us, a dawn start should allow plenty of daylight hours to get up and down and would also ease the ascent up the scree.

Having woken at 5am to reasonable snowfall we were happy to doze for another hour until it was light. With an improvement in the weather, excuses had run out and we were forced into action.

The scree, slippery due to fresh snow passed better than expected, but the scale of the mountains was deceiving and we never seemed to make progress. The scree itself appeared to consist of a bizarre mixture of granite and limestone.

The first snow was good neve, but it soon turned to powder on top of hard ice. The angle was easy so ropes were not required, but with the snow getting deeper and softer the going was arduous.

We climbed higher, avoiding areas of rock and weathering several squalls, but with such an impressive trench formed we were unlikely to lose our way down for quite some time.

Pete took over the lead for the whole top section because I was knackered. The route was vague, until just below the summit when the sky cleared and we were provided with a knife-edge ridge to follow. Here we abandoned all our gear and went light for the top, only to discover a bit higher that the ridge would require a rope after all. In fact it turned out to be very compact limestone, but where there was a crack it was usually formed by a detached block. The climbing was not, difficult but unprotected. A pitch and a bit saw us on the top with a reading of 4545m. The view was fantastic, from the gentle hills near Chatyrtash to our neighbouring summits, down into China and the back of the Kokshaal-Too and on to the Tien Shan.

One long abseil from the summit at about 3pm saw us back on the insecure snow slopes. Less than 2 hours later we were back at camp sipping tea and looking back up to our "Cat's Ear Peak"..

Tim Riley

A cluster of peaks attracted our attention next. An obvious twisting gully was visible on the valley face of one of them, while to the left we could see a way around the steep face to gain a scree bowl, which should lead to summits behind.

Two of the local guys offered us horses, but turned up the next day with two less than expected. After carefully explaining in pictures a way of ferrying everyone up to the proposed highcamp, Hilda and John opted to walk. This was not a bad choice, as they were only half an hour slower than us and had fully functioning hips when they arrived.

An evening recce speeded up the approach the next morning and we could hear Tim and Pete's calls as they started on their gully. We reached the ridge with some straightforward scrambling and were quickly on the easy slopes to a col between two summits. Unroped, we made our own pace and Hilda and I pulled ahead to reach the col as storm clouds moved in. Our previous summit was masked in thick, grey, ominous looking clouds, heading our way. The well-defined summit was quickly gained up 100m of scrambling and quick photos snapped in the whipping wind before we sped down, alert for electricity. We retreated down the scree in flurries of snow to find John, who had descended earlier, sheltering and scoffing chocolate.

Snacking while waiting for the weather to make up its mind, Hilda's enthusiasm for returning for the second peak encouraged us uphill again, but the continuing uncertain weather persuaded John that the tents were a better option. Thankfully bad clouds and lightning stayed away long enough for us to summit, although views were somewhat limited. Another speedy bumslide saw us off the summit slopes quickly, as the clouds returned and we scrambled the last hundred metres in cascades of hail.

The uncertain afternoon weather had also perturbed Tim and Pete, who had abbed off after several pitches, unwilling to commit to an unknown summit in poor weather.

The snow turned to rain lower down and kept us company for the rest of the evening and into the night.

Some time after arriving by horse back we recovered the use of our legs enough to go for a wander. Pete and myself were keen to try the obvious gully up the front buttress

of north peak. On closer inspection it looked as though it would be possible to climb the gully to the cave, then zigzag up rocks to the left to regain ice above and then on to summit slabs covered in snow. This looked the most precarious part. Descent was a bit of concern as we had only a vague idea that we should go down in the direction Dave and Hilda were planning to go up.

A 6am start the next day saw us at the bottom of the gully soon after dawn.

Having made the decision to go without packs we quickly climbed the first 150m at Scottish 1/2. Before the cave it steepened to grade 3 and we roped up.

Exiting the gully was easy and a natural line traversed left over awkward piled blocks and then up to a series of narrow gullies. A brief look around clarified which line to take and gave enjoyable climbing at grade 3. This was where we intended to continue up a corner system to regain the gully. The next section proved harder than expected and gave a short pitch of mixed 5 & 6, this took some time, as hunting for gear placements was difficult. The weather had now been bad for a long time and felt more ominous than previous. With the added threat of lightning on the exposed top slabs and an unknown summit we opted to bail out, having satisfied ourselves that we had done enough so that if we get a chance to come back we could continue up the next, hopefully easier section back into the gully.

Tim Riley

In the clearing mist of the next morning we discussed what the next plan should be. With a potential ten climbing days left after moving site, we decided to pack up and shift camp.

The Khrebet Kyokkiar

Two o'clock the next day we were back at the bridge. When we enquired about the possibilities of hiring horses with two soldiers, we were invited in to their *zastava* for tea and fresh bread, while one of them prepared to come with us. A few kilometres down the valley we stopped at a yurt, pitched on the flats by the river. Cows and horses wandered around and two kids created mischief while their nanny grazed. The soldier and his wife were friends of the family who lived in the yurt and we were invited in to share bread and cream with kymyz and tea.

When the man of the family returned with his brother we discussed horses: how many, how much, how far. With the aid of a map and Misha's elaboration, our destination was made clear. The lads would have to find an extra horse from a neighbour, but a deal was struck to get us all into the hills with our kit. The only uncertainty was when.

Next day we packed the kit into sacks ready to go, but there seemed to be a distinct lack of horses arriving. The afternoon was spent lounging until it was clear we were going nowhere that day, so out came the tents again.

The next morning we woke up in a thick mist, not good weather for finding horses, but we were assured by Misha that the brothers had gone off early to round them up. Come late morning blue skies arrived and so did the horses.

All the packs were strapped on the animals and we were each given a beast to ride. Our hips soon felt dislocated as the horses struggled up the hillsides under our loads and they deserved a rest before descending steep hillside into a narrow gorge. We crossed a fast flowing river with some trepidation before starting the long haul out of the gorge on the other side.

The soporific effect of the afternoon sun soon had John nodding off and lolling from side to side on the back of his horse, which responded to the apparent commands of

its rider by making erratic uphill and downhill turns. The rest of us almost fell off our mounts with laughter, while the Kyrgyz lads had newfound respect for John's horsemanship.

An icy squall of hail blew in as we crested a rise and took stock of our route. We weren't following the intended or most logical path on the map and we had to quell feelings of unease with trust that the boys were following a hunting trail which took the best line. With communication limited to basic Russian words and complicated miming routines, sometimes we had to wait and see how situations developed.

A steep scree descent on foot brought us to a broad open col, where a military patrol of rather well fed looking officers with hunting rifles caught up with us, riding with us for half an hour, until our paths diverged. They were friendly, and wished us well, without wanting to inspect our paperwork. They rode off and joined another group, which had made camp and were engaged in roasting an animal. Our two guides peered through binoculars, then smiled and rubbed their stomachs. "Marco Polo" they said, indicating the type of mountain sheep, which was now subject to the inevitable law of the food chain.

We dropped from the col into a steep sided valley, where the boys announced "palatki" and made a shape of a tent with their hands. Somewhat frustrated we pulled out the map, knowing that this wasn't the main valley we had indicated as our destination, but the boys insisted that it was impossible for horses to go further: "Pishkom" they said pointing up the valley, letting their fingers do the walking. Downstream the valley narrowed between rocky bluffs, while up the valley the river cut a deep gorge between the hillsides. We didn't let our disappointment spoil the farewell as we shared a canister of kymyz and waved them into the dusk.

The next day we devoted to reconnaissance: how to get from where we were to where we thought we wanted to be. There were only two choices: Tim and Pete took the downhill gorge route, while John, Hilda and I contoured uphill where the map indicated we should be able to drop over a col into the main valley.

Two hours after leaving the camp, we walked out onto a granite promontory, and stared at the view that had opened out in front of us. The hillside dropped steeply, disappearing amongst the ravines to the valley bottom, hundreds of metres below us. Across the valley were huge, featured walls of limestone, which we reckoned to be close to 1200m in height, rising to what looked like a continuous snow plateau. The steep sided valley ran away to the east, where we could see more big, dark faces streaked with snow and impressive pinnacled ridges leading to corniced summits.

We returned to camp for lunch and compared notes: both of us had reached a point where the way forward looked difficult and had returned, expecting the other party to have found a way through to the main valley. Neither of us willing to make a positive judgement on what we'd seen, we decided to swap directions and explore through to the end.

Hilda, John and I split up on the descent into the gorge, John stayed high on the hillside, while Hilda and I followed the river into the gorge. We managed to keep our feet dry, crossing the river on stepping-stones when one bank disappeared, or following sheep tracks over short spurs to bypass sections of sheer gorge. After almost two hours of boulder hopping and scrambling we could see the opposite side of the valley and soon popped out of the ravine onto sloping hillside.

The valley floor was only a couple of hundred metres wide and, formed by a river outwash, perfectly flat. Steep limestone walls rose hundreds of metres over our heads, casting the whole valley into shadow. An hour later Hilda and I were below the ravines we had looked down into that morning. On a flat grassy area, the best

looking campsite, we found the remains of a hunters fire, complete with obligatory discarded vodka bottle and the charred bones and skull of an ibex. The rest of the hillside looked void of any comfortable camping spots.

From below, we chose the most fruitful looking gully to ascend and after an hour panting up steep scree and traversing steep hillside we arrived at the col where we had enjoyed the morning's views, thankful to be somewhere familiar before the sun disappeared. We were soon back at camp and surprising John, peeling spuds by the river, who was expecting us from the other direction.

In the morning we couldn't agree on the best direction for gaining the valley. Hilda, Tim and Pete headed uphill, while John and I felt that a downhill start to the day was the better and headed down the gorge. We arrived at the hunter's camp as a hail storm arrived and sheltered behind a boulder. As the weather cleared up we left the sacks behind the boulder and returned to the camp up the gully, arriving at the tent as another heavier storm blew in. Eating the scraps left by the others, who had started their second carry, we watched snow fall and contemplated staying until morning. Persuaded that by the time we would arrive, the tents would be up and we'd be greeted with hot food we got doing with the second load. It was dark by the time we spotted the torches on the hillside in the main valley and it seemed an eternity until we reached them. Stoves were brewing and hot drinks were soon ready.

After the next morning sorting gear and testing the temperature of the campside stream with various body parts, an investigation of the large looming faces at the end of the valley was in order. The valley walls were so close together and high, that much of the valley was in shade. Sun only arrived at the campsite at 9:30.

This exploratory day gave us a feel for the objectives in the area. Following the main valley eastward we soon left the outwash riverbed to pass through boulder fields into a higher continuation valley. Goat tracks led across steep scree to where the valley flattened out again below an impressive ice streaked face, probably the highest in the area, which we reckoned to have 1300m of vertical height gain. The lower half was impressively steep, forming either blank slabs or overhanging walls, while the top half of steep to moderate snow fields was dotted with buttresses and capped with an impressive pinnacled ridge. An obvious snowy ramp offered the easiest line across the lower face, leading to a square shoulder from where we thought one could gain the upper snow slopes.

Slabs dropping down from this face sealed the end of the valley, hiding the rest of the range from view. A diagonal corner fault line was the most obvious weakness to gain the top and hopefully the summits, which were just revealing themselves.

Tim, Pete and John returned the next day to set up camp below the face and spend a day checking it out. Hilda and I set off to find a way into an offshoot valley opposite the base camp, for we had spotted an accessible summit, which we hoped to bag in the day.

After a late start, we followed goat's tracks through the slabs, which shielded the initial slopes into the valley, from where we could see two obvious summits, one straightforward the other more elegant and challenging. To either side steep cliffs rose straight from the grassy valley, a big overhanging face on the south and cold, ice-streaked buttresses facing north. Further up the valley the north faces fell back to form corries, Ben-like in appearance with continuous smears and gullies leading up to a corniced plateau.

Gaining an obvious col above a long scree slope we put on crampons and followed an easy snow ridge, soon picking up the tracks of what we were convinced was a big cat, possibly a snow leopard. The summit arrived and we built our cairn, surveying what

we could of the surroundings through the clouds that had followed us up the valley. Below us the valley had become glacial, with the walls at first steep with enough inviting ice lines to keep one busy for a month before they relaxed to form broken snow slopes. The altimeter showed us to be at 4435m, almost 1300m above our campsite. Our watch said 4 o'clock – time to get a move on and get down.

The next evening we joined the others, who had found a campsite with a prime view below the impressive face. They had spent the day exploring some of the higher corries, which lay above a steep scree scramble from the camp. The following day Hilda and I decided to try to breach the slabs while Tim and Pete spent the day tackling the initial hard-looking pitches below the snow ramp on the face. Scree and easy scrambling, brought us to within 100m of what looked like the top of the slabs, before a continuous layer of verglaze over 45 degree slabs forced us into an obvious gully cleft. After several awkward chockstones this ended in a smooth walled chimney choked with icicle rimed chockstones for good measure. Our rack being too meagre to safely climb the slabs, or retreat once we had climbed them, we descended and returned to camp.

Pete and I decided to explore around the back of the mountain under which were camped, in order to gain a better idea of the topography of the area. With an approach up slabs and streams we avoided the scree, covering the receding glacier, which is never a joy to walk on. At the end of the steep valley the slopes opened out, leading up to a ridge with a very minor top. We decided not to climb it, intending to save our strength for the following day. There were many gullies in the steep valley sides, some had starts that actually looked impossible and others were threatened by seracs. Bad weather again came in at mid-morning and slowly cleared later on.

In the afternoon we had a recce up to the bottom of the big face. First impressions were good and the right hand side of a slab, leading to the snowy ramp, appeared climbable, although not easy.

A dawn start the next day saw Pete and myself negotiating the scree to the start of the face. The intention was to simply fix ropes as far as would still reach the ground to speed up a predawn start the following day.

The weather soon became unsettled so I opted for crampons on the first severe rock pitch. The scale of the slabs gradually became apparent when I ran out of blades having not even reached the first steep section. Pete made a fine lead on some rather suspect pegs, aiding for the most part. Shallow placements were common which only enabled progress at a slow rate and made belays awkward. My next lead involved some great free climbing up a corner system until it became a little too great, when I resorted to aid after a short fall onto a collection of gear placements. Eventually we could reach out left for a tongue of ice and were delighted when it gave good placements.

At the next belay we called it a day. When it came to fixing the ropes, safety in numbers was in order. The common theme of poor placements in good rock and good placements in bad rock ensured that plenty of both were equalised.

In good spirits we returned to the tent, glad to hear about the others adventures during the day. Expecting the time to be about 2ish I was confused when it started to get dark. A check of the watch showed it to be nearly 6pm.

Tim Riley

That night we all crammed into the same tent for food and discussed the next day over pasta cooked to the delicate consistency of bog mire, drizzled with the finest tomato puree and Russian salami. Tim, Pete and I would have a crack at the big face.

The first light of dawn found us at the top of the ropes, secured with seven pieces of gear in a variety of shallow or poor placements. Pete led off as I worked on removing the gear and then followed. Above, a cave had been formed in the gully by a huge chockstone, around which a tongue of ice crept, ending frustratingly high off the floor. After an initial valiant free attempt to reach the ice, Pete took to aid, swinging from slings until a move sideways brought him to the ice. Minutes later he was up and we followed, arriving with fingers of fire from hot aches.

Another easy pitch and we moved together up to a shoulder, from where we could see the snowy ramp extend across the face. Ropes were stowed as the angle was easy and the snow firm, although the situation was very impressive. Steep buttresses overlooked us, dripping with fangs of ice and below us the face cut away, overhanging to the valley floor. We were aiming for a weakening in the seracs halfway across the face, which we could hopefully reach via a gully threading its way up the buttresses, but when no easy way could be seen from close up we stopped to snack while thinking again.

We decided to continue along the ramp to the shoulder, from where we could hopefully gain the snowfield and work our way up to the summit. The ramp continued as a scramble until the final 200m demanded a rope to secure us across deep 60-degree snow. The shoulder gave us excellent views into the upper glacial basin, where the summits were all above 4700m, the highest at just over 4900m was still some way off with the approach not fully visible.

Here we put on our plodding heads and "postholed" a gradually ascending line across deep crusty snow. The winds, which brought the afternoon cloud and showers were bitter and strong. In the valley, the steep rock walls were protecting and one could spend afternoons lightly clad, while winds blasted the summits and plumes of spindrift swirled around the corniced ridges. As we gained height, the snow became less deep and one could dig through to hard ice. I halted at the base of a buttress and let Pete, who had the ice screws, lead through, followed by Tim. As the rope came tight I climbed after them and all three of us were soon at a narrow, corniced col formed between two large towers of rock, within 200m vertical from the summit. It was late, five o'clock, and we were sure that we couldn't top out and return in the day. The pitches immediately ahead, which would take us onto the ridge crest, looked great, but at about Scottish V they would be time consuming, even more so after a night out with minimal bivvy gear. The snow was shallow and would provide little shelter. After a short discussion we opted for descent.

Our two-and-half-hours of ascent was descended in forty-five minutes and we arrived back at the col to look for likely ways off. Steep slopes fell directly to the glacier, but were only partially visible, so we descended into a gully that proved surprisingly easy and led us down to moraine slopes in half an hour. We packed our crampons and made haste over the dry glacier. From our exploration the day before, I knew that we had to descend to the lower valley down the long icy groove through the slabs, which Hilda and I had failed to climb, and I was anxious to locate the top of the gully before the darkness confused us. A duff decision to follow a frozen watercourse to avoid the steep rubble sides of the glacier soon had us changing back into crampons and scrambling out again, arriving at the top of the slabs as the last of the light disappeared.

Chockstones were quickly slung and we slid down a full 50m of thickly verglassed slabs to a ledge. For the next ab, I could only find one peg placement with no backup, so nailed my colours to the mast and descended first, using my feet as much as possible. Another full 50m brought us to a sheltering wall, which I recognised as our picnic spot from the day before. Back on familiar ground we descended the last few hundred metres quickly, surprising John and Hilda who had expected us to have suffered a night on the hill. We brewed tea and noodles before crashing, disappointed to have missed the summit, but happy with another great day's climbing which had revealed more of the area to us.

The next, perfect, morning we dried kit and packed, having decided to head back to the valley Hilda and I had visited a couple of days previously.

The following morning we awoke to the worst weather yet, thick black clouds up the valley and proper snowfall. We whiled away the morning updating diaries and playing cards until the weather looked good enough to keep our kit dry as we packed. As soon as we ventured outside, more snow fell and sent us scurrying back into our tents. Finally we made a break, under the threat of running out of daylight before the next camp, and arrived with a beautiful, atmospheric sunset through clouds and mist.

We had camped below the first corrie in the valley, intending to have a leisurely ascent of a gully which I had estimated to be a straightforward III / IV, but a closer view as we walked up the moraine revealed definite pitches of V, possibly VI. Rather too much for an eight o'clock start, we thought, so turned our attention to taking the easiest line up the corrie to the summit plateau.

The previous evening, we had attempted a lentil dish as a change from rice and pasta, but after an hour of boiling the little brown bullets, we'd given up and eaten the lentils semi-raw. We were now suffering the after affects, with astonishingly continuous, violent bursts of wind. Hilda was suffering somewhat worse than the rest of us, with the fermenting concoction inside her alternately forcing its way upward and then downward. As Hilda and I had to make pauses to let this mixture settle, Tim and Pete pulled away and reached the plateau a couple of hundred metres ahead of us. The usual threatening afternoon clouds were chasing us up the last of the grade I gully as they descended past us, with the forecast that fierce weather was imminent. Sure enough, as we approached the top of the gully, boiling, black clouds were all around. My ice axe sung so loud with electricity, as my head poked over the lip, that I immediately ducked down and shouted to Hilda to descend, throwing two snow-stakes from my sack into the gully. We backtracked as a fierce hailstorm swept in and continued down until the shower eased, a couple of hundred metres lower. The weather continued to be too unsettled to persuade us upward again so we continued down to the tents, where Hilda crashed out to do internal battle with the evil bean.

Strength returning, Hilda and I thought we'd try for the top of the plateau again the following day, keen to get a last final view over the range, while Tim and Pete geared up for an early start on the gully line. Continuing pains during the night kept Hilda in bed the next morning, so John and I pottered around camp, spotting tiny moving specs in the gully, before we packed up and headed down. The weather stayed excellent throughout the day and Tim and Pete joined us at BC a few hours after we arrived, looking as pleased as punch with their route.

Climbing by torchlight we reached the top of the first pitch, the angle became steep and we stopped to rope up. We had seen this gully yesterday and the line was compelling.

With the first predictably poor rock belay, Pete set off and soon placed a good ice screw. This first section was vertical for a few meters on thick but narrow ice. An easing in angle allowed quick progress to the next belay. We were encouraged by the quality of the ice, continuing up the narrow gully enabled the next steep section to be reached. This was sustained on ice of variable quality, which Pete completed on rope stretch. Another pitch on reasonable ice followed and marked the start of some easy ground where we waded together for 150m. Four more easy pitches followed and the ridge was nearly within reach. Unfortunately at this point the ice stopped and revealed unstable blocks under a thin covering of snow. With the only alternative being very bold rock climbing on either side we decided to start our descent from there. It was our intention to abseil down the line of ascent. We made ice threads all the way down with a short section of down climbing in the middle. 10 rope lengths saw us on the bottom snowfield coiling ropes. Back at the packs we shook hands – we were pleased with ourselves.

Some time later we arrived at the tent left by the others who had headed back that day.

A quick brew and a snack of noodles was all there was time for to reach base camp in the light. Grateful for the load carrying efforts of Dave, Hilda and John, we had light packs and made good time.

Approaching the tents from across the glacier we waved. The last few steps into camp and I couldn't contain my smiles. 'I'm sorry Dave but you should have joined us – It was brilliant!'

Tim Riley

As Hilda left the tent the next day for an early morning pee, she exclaimed at the amount of fallen snow. When we all woke up, the valley was white and mist shrouded. Intermittent snowfall throughout the morning kept us in the tents. A brighter afternoon and the need to return to the first camp to meet the boys and the horses, forced us out and we cleared up the camp, burning all our paper and packing the rest. The steep ascent was unsteady with huge packs and wet snow underfoot, but as we reached the top of the final gully we came out into thick mist and a deep blanket of snow. Familiar with the route, we followed the river back to the first campsite with conditions dramatically different to those we had had on arrival. Thunder sounded in the thick clouds and the snowfall became slowly heavier. We arrived at the camp and were dismayed to find evidence of horses, but no-one in view. A large arrow had been drawn in the snow and we found a scrap of paper with another arrow drawn in charcoal – they had been and gone. As little snow had fallen since the arrows had been drawn, we thought they couldn't be far, so bellowed into the mist for ten minutes, until we gave up in preference to pitching the tents and getting some hot food inside us.

The snow continued to fall at a worrying rate and our tent was half covered as Hilda and I left the large tent after dinner. Alarms were set to wake up at hour intervals and check on the snowfall in case we had to dig ourselves out.

Half a metre of snow had fallen in the night, but in the morning the mist gradually cleared and the sun broke through leaving us with the beginnings of what looked to be good weather. With no sign of the boys returning, we prepared to pack everything out ourselves, chucking all degradable dispensables, but keeping some food in reserve as we expected a tough walkout, maybe two days if conditions were bad.

With waistbelts pulled as tight as we could get them, we began the uphill grind out of the valley. With a steady pace we made surprising progress and reached the

highpoint of the walk-in three hours later, from where we had amazing, crystal views to the horizon. Everything we could see was white, deeply blanketed in snow, and we thanked our luck that the weather was so good. It was hard work, but the beauty of our new environment was undeniable. If the storm had continued, escaping from the mountains would have been truly grim.

The long downhill slog was the most arduous part, but we arrived at the river to ponder the best means to cross the strong flowing current. We stripped from the waist down and put on our walking boots, ready for a wetting. With months of tramping experience in New Zealand, Hilda choreographed us through a sideways-arm-linked-line-shuffle to the other bank: the Bluebellies meet Monty Python.

Clothes back on, we warmed up on the steep ascent out of the gorge, following the horse tracks of the boys' retreat. From the top we could see the main river valley and the position of the yurt and we could sense the end. The summits behind us were turning red with the sunset, but we felt we should press on and slog it out to the yurt. Darkness was soon upon us as we followed more tracks along a ridge, intending to drop down the hillside when we felt we were above the yurt. Distance passed slowly as we struggled on and we inevitably headed downhill too early, thinking we'd come out by the river and then traverse along the bank. Progress slowed and rests became more frequent, as soon as one person fell forward to rest on their sticks, the others followed. We struggled in and out of dips and hollows until over a rise we saw the flat expanse of the river at our feet. We could hear a dog bark and smell a fire burning. The dog must have alerted the boys, for soon afterwards we saw two torches and heard a shout as Misha and one of the boys came out of the darkness to greet us with concerned faces and strong hugs.

Twenty minutes later we were collapsed around the table in the yurt being fed bread and cream with endless cups of tea passed into our hands. We described our adventures in mime and gesticulation as we were gently scolded for missing the arrangement with the horses, the boys explaining how they had struggled out in the snow, sheltering with the horses, before continuing out that morning.

The next morning we were invited in for a farewell breakfast of Marco Polo sheep, freshly shot, perfectly prepared and cooked in a huge wok over the dung fire. The meat was exquisite: tender and succulent, cooked with no more flavouring than a pinch of salt, diced chunks of lean meat were served with bread in a bowl, washed down with tea and cups of kymyz. Far better than the welcome offered by McDonalds back in "civilisation".

3. Organisation

3.1. Languages

The national language is Kyrgyz, but Russian is spoken by almost everyone. All the people at ITMC spoke perfect English, but amongst the population at large few people spoke English, mainly younger people who were studying at college. One is unlikely to find a driver who speaks good English.

None of us spoke any Russian, but we picked up crucial words as we went along, with the aid of a dictionary and phrasebook. Undoubtedly there would be more to gain being able to speak Russian, particularly in learning about and understanding what life was like for the people who lived in the border regions, but complex miming routines and sketches on paper got our message across in most cases and amused people no end. If situations did not resolve themselves as planned, we had only our shortcomings with the language to blame.

3.2. Support in Kyrgyzstan

There is a choice of travel companies in the capital, Bishkek, listed in the Lonely Planet Guide to Central Asia. They offer a variety of services to assist mountaineering and trekking trips in the country.

The firm ITMC had been recommended to us, we had used them last year and found them to be very helpful and professional. We had communicated frequently by email in the preceding months and they had organised in advance our visa invitations, military permission for climbing in a border area, local police registration, city accommodation and taxi transfers. Doing so had saved much time and after arriving in the country we only had to sort our shopping before setting off for the mountains. They also gave much friendly advice while in the city on such things where to shop, eating out and accommodation. The police in the city are not the most honest, on the lookout for drugs or antiques smugglers and can try it on with innocent travellers. ITMC prepared a document for us in Russian, to show to the police in the event of being approached, explaining our purpose in the country and to contact them if there were any concerns. Any valuables, tickets, cash can be left with them while in the mountains.

3.3. Transport and logistics

Our plan was to hire a truck and driver to get us to the mountains and find locals with horses for hire to get us into the range. Travel went amazingly well, considering our lack of initial knowledge, with only one day in the whole trip where we were forced into being idle for lack of transport.

Misha, the driver was of great help in assisting with achieving our objectives once in "the outback". Our rough objectives had been translated to him in Bishkek, so despite our drastic lack of Russian and his poor English, once we were in the area and could elaborate with the aid of a map he was able to make useful enquiries with the locals on our behalf. We found people willing to help, with the military at the number of "zastava" being the most reliable source of local knowledge.

Wheels

ITMC had received confirmation from the military that we could reach Chatyrtash by 4WD, although, from then on, negotiation of roads and rivers was left to ourselves. We hired a "GAZ 66" from ITMC for the duration of the trip to allow us the flexibility of moving base and travelling where we saw fit. A variety of ex-soviet military vehicles are available to hire from this company, from eight-seater VW van

sized cars to 20 seater six-wheel drive trucks. The GAZ had bench seats for ten, providing enough room to store gear inside the truck, cook and travel in comfort, as well as enough off road capability to get us most places, although we only left the tracks for c.1km. Misha, the driver also lived in the van during the trip.

Hooves

ITMC had enquired beforehand with the military in the area, as to the possibilities of hiring horses locally. Seeing as everyone in the area owns any number of horses, the answer was positive, although whether we would find enough horses or be able to hire them from someone convenient to the mountains was less certain. Although we were given the offer of using horses in the Sarybeles, it was not necessary. However, hiring horses was crucial to getting into the Kyokkiar range, without, we would have had to have made two heavy load carries, including a river crossing, which would have taken a day each way, just to reach a suitable basecamp.

We were fortunate that our enquiries with the soldiers near the bridge at Chatyrtash guided us to a family living in a yurt next to the main river, right by the foothills of the Kyokkiar. This family, friends of the officer, were extremely hospitable, and provided us with enough horses to carry us and our gear to the Kyokkiar in a one-day push. Here we had our only delay, as one horse had to be borrowed from a neighbour. The way into the range was well marked, a frequented trail by hunters, we surmised, although it did not end in the main valley, but in a parallel valley. For a future visit we would advise attempting to follow the river we crossed, until it meets the river flowing out of the main valley of the Kyokkiar. This would enable loads to be carried far further by horse.

Working on advice from ITMC that 100 som/horse/day would not be an unreasonable price and the standard South American rate of \$5/burro/day as an upper limit we had an idea how much to spend. In the end they set a lump sum of 5000 som (c.£80) to get us and our gear into the hills and back, which they said was a day's journey each way. This included the inflated price of borrowing their neighbour's horse.

Considering that there were herds of horses all around it did seem strange that it took time to gather enough beasts, but when they loaded each horse with one of us and two sacks it was clear that only the strongest were fit enough. The guys we hired the horses from were competent horsemen and very professional in their approach. The horses were strong and healthy and well looked after.

3.4. Local People

The main valleys, in the areas we visited, were populated by Kyrgyz. They tended animals (sheep, cows, horses) during the summer months and spent the winters in the towns. All were friendly, including the soldiers and many offered invitations to visit them in their homes. They were generous with their food: mainly bread with cheese, butter (masleh), cream (smetana), yoghurt (airan) and kymyz (fermented mares milk). Although rather anxious of the effects of the kymyz on our bowls we were soon quaffing bowlfuls, without ill effects.

We felt that in most situations, reciprocating generosity in kind was most appropriate and did so as much as our supplies would allow. We were well aware of the fact that we were the first Europeans and climbers in the area and we wanted to create a good impression, striking a balance between being generous for services without appearing an endless source of wealth. Taking as much fruit, veg and useful items from the markets as spare room in the truck would allow would be very appreciated. Polaroid cameras, which provide instant photos for people with whom we came into

contact would have been well appreciated, as well as being useful in the mountains. Everyone we met was keen to pose for photographs.

Although friendly, we were informed in no uncertain terms that the area had a strict "no bolting policy" and that they would deal with anyone caught infringing this rule in the harshest of ways.

As a rendezvous for return from the mountains, we had explained in mime and pictures that we should be met at the drop off point on the evening of the 19th September, for us to head out together on the 20th. They were true to the plan, but due to the very poor weather on the collection day we were late arriving and uncertain as to whether we would turn up they had headed off, probably less than an hour before we arrived. They had to endure a very uncomfortable night in the open in the storm and on our arrival had been preparing to return for us early the next day, after drying out. We greatly appreciated this generous effort.

3.5. Food

We had two food strategies: one relying on the fact that we would find four footed transport and could therefore carry luxuries such as potatoes and fresh veg and a more Spartan diet planned if we had to load carry all the food ourselves. All food was bought in Bishkek. The only food we felt that we lacked was dried mashed potato, which we would purchase in the UK in the future. We bought more packet noodles as replacement. We spent the first evening in Bishkek "test-driving" the various brands of food to determine the most palatable, which we bought in bulk the following day.

Most of the food can be bought at the Osh Bazaar, with any items not found there available in supermarkets, the best-stocked being Beta Stores, marked in the Lonely Planet.

Our carbohydrate came from pasta, rice, noodles, potatoes and flour (chapattis). Pulses and barley are also available, but less was bought because of their longer cooking time. We found no good tinned meat, but some excellent preserved salami from Beta Stores became our main protein and lasted very well. Recognisable brands of tinned fish could also be found, but were high in liquid content. A variety of shrink wrapped hard cheese from Beta Stores was also excellent and lasted well. For main meals we added a variety of vegetables; garlic, onions and carrots lasting to the end.

For hill food we bought black bread, which lasted about ten days from purchase, to be eaten with cheese and salami. The usual selection of chocolate bars were purchased and dried nuts and fruit were bought by the kilo in Osh Bazaar.

We drank coffee, tea and dried fruit juice. Tomato puree was the staple sauce, although an evil chilli/garlic poison was also bought, relished by Misha, hated by us. Any number of herbs and spices could be bought by the measure in the bazaar.

3.6. Equipment

Emergency

The truck could have returned to Bishkek in a long day of driving from Chatyrtash.

Radios can be hired from ITMC, with a quick lesson in their use. They had a twice daily routine call with us and other expeditions. We were provided with two radios, one heavy for remaining with the truck, one lighter for taking with us. Due to the lighter radio requiring a 30' aluminium mast and car battery to function, we declined to take it into the mountains of the Kyokkiar and accepted the risk. BC was one day's walk from the truck, from where we would have radioed to ITMC in an emergency.

ITMC are closely connected with the rescue services and are able to arrange helicopter rescue. An incident in the past where an insurance company has not yet paid for a rescue has left the company wary. Check with ITMC as to their preferred insurers, otherwise there may be a delay, while they confirm with the company that rescue will be covered. Take certificate copies to leave with them.

Climbing

Climbing equipment was packed for the variety of climbing styles we anticipated: mixed alpine / rock: a light rack of wires, a couple of cams, a few pegs, slings and quickdraws. Snow stakes and ice screws were taken for protection on snow. In the event the easier routes required gear for emergency use only. Tim and Pete planned to tackle more technical routes so took more gear. We took an excess of what we planned to carry on routes in case of retreat. We all took two short ice tools and telescopic skipoles, very useful for balancing with heavy loads and crossing streams. Glaciers were negligible, but exploring the upper basin of the Kyokkiar would warrant a full crevasse rescue kit.

The area offers climbing of many varieties. We were not expecting such huge rockclimbing potential and left our rockboots in the truck. Gear taken should be suitable for alpine length climbs of either pure ice, mixed or pure rock, depending on one's objectives in the area. The rock is compact limestone, so the addition of extra blade pegs would not go amiss. There did not appear to be a profusion of spikes to abseil from, so we expected to lose gear during a retreat.

Clothing

Conditions were similar to the European Alps and the clothing was taken to suit, with the addition of down jackets for evenings. Precipitation was mostly of hail, with snow showers toward the end of the trip, which were the only reason to wear a fully waterproof shell. Day temperatures were warm low down, but winds high up were bitterly cold.

One member wore leather boots (La Sportiva), which were perfectly adequate; others wore plastic double boots for climbing, with leather walking boots for trekking. The temperatures at the end of the trip reached c. -15C at night, so boots should be worn depending on individuals sensitivity to cold.

Navigation

Compasses and altimeters were taken.

Camping

We took four tents in total: a Terra Nova Hyperspace, Quasar, Solar II and a Mountain Hardware Approach. This gave us flexibility of having a comfortable base camp arrangement with the lightest combination of tents for highcamps. In the end the Solar II was not taken into the Kyokkiar. The Hyperspace provided enough room for all five of us to eat together, play cards etc and was used in combination with the Approach for five people at highcamp.

Cooking

We had a double gas burner to use in the truck, provided by ITMC and a variety of gas and petrol stoves for the hills. We took cylinders filled by ITMC for use with the gas stoves, but decided to leave them in the truck when we walked in to the Kyokkiar.

We took MSR Whisperlite International and Dragonfly petrol stoves and an Optimus multifuel stove. They all ran on 76 octane petrol from the petrol station which we filtered through filter paper.

The stoves functioned with different efficiencies: the Whisperlite being the best and very effective, the Optimus slower to boil, but the Dragonfly barely managed to boil a full pot of water. The Optimus and Dragonfly were cleaned several times throughout the trip.

Water was taken from streams all the time (no snow melt) and was either boiled, filtered or purified with iodine before drinking because of the presence of animals and the worry of giardia. In the Kyokkiar we began to drink straight from streams without ill effects. All the streams in both regions were clear water, unaffected by glacial sediment.

Domestic

We bought the following useful items in the Osh Bazaar:

- Polypro rope for the horses.
- Heavy gauge plastic sheet for protecting sacks in the open.
- Large enamel pot
- Pressure cooker: excellent chip pan.
- Stirrers, scrapers and scoopers
- Large woven plastic sacks for carrying gear on horses
- Wooden boxes

John also had the bright idea of bringing along a pair of industrial strength washing up gloves, which proved a godsend when washing clothes or dishes in the icy water.

3.7. Medical Report

First hand climbing experience in Kyrgyzstan from 2 expedition members in the previous year, a medical report from Dr. R. Albertyn (Expedition Doctor Motorola Pamirs Expedition 1999) and the assistance of Jenny Last (Pharmacist Cirencester Hospital Cirencester) were of great help in putting the medical kit together. As one of the expedition members was a General Practitioner we were able to take specialised medications (see appendix) and equipment. In view of bulk and weight we kept the kit to a minimum, acknowledging that we were going to a remote part of the world with no medical facilities. We opted not to take intravenous fluids. We anticipated a kit for 5 expedition members and 1 driver for a period of 4 weeks. In altitudes of 3500 – 5800 metres the arterial oxygenation falls below 90%. Altitude illness is common and marked hypoxaemia can occur during exercise. This was anticipated in putting the medical kit together. Bayer kindly sponsored us 100 tablets of the antibiotic Ciproxin. This greatly reduced the costs of our medications. No other pharmaceutical companies were approached. A licence from the Home Office for the carriage of controlled drugs was not needed as we were below the upper limit. We requested a covering letter from the Kyrgyz Embassy in London as some authorities in other countries are not always sympathetic to a member of the public carrying controlled drugs. We didn't encounter any problems in Kyrgyzstan. British Airways granted one of us an increased baggage allowance for the medical kit. An outbreak of diphtheria was occurring in all the states of the former Soviet Union. We followed the CDC recommendations for vaccines (Hepatitis A, Typhoid and as needed booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria or polio). Prior to departure we contacted ITMC re. helicopter rescue services providing transport from the area of the expedition to the (inter)national airports/hospitals in case of a medical emergency. Details of our Travel Insurance Scheme were faxed/e-mailed to ITMC and forwarded by ITMC to a private rescue company named Tien-Shan RTM. To avoid delays in rescue and necessary medical treatment we sent personal/expedition details to each other, The Travel Insurance Companies, ITMC and the British Embassy in Kazakhstan. During the expedition we had access to a mountain radio which gave us the ability to expedite any rescue. Fortunately no medical emergencies took place. During the expedition 2 members suffered a gastroenteritis and 1 member suffered a knee sprain.

Reference:

The High Altitude Medicine Handbook, 2nd edition, Andrew J Pollard and David R Murdoch.

Motorola Pamirs Expedition 1999, Medical Report, Dr R Albertyn

www.cdc.gov/travel/easteurp.htm (Health Information for travellers to Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union, NIS)

Medical List

Antibiotics

Erythromycin tablets 250 mg, 56 tablets, expiry 03.2003, Penicillin allergy, 1 x4/day
Ciproxin tablets 500 mg, 80 tablets, expiry 10.2004, respiratory/urinary/skin infection, 1 x2/day
Amoxicillin capsules, 30 capsules, expiry 02.2003, respiratory infection, 1 x3/day
Flucloxacillin capsules, 40 capsules, expiry 07.2003, skin infection, 1 x4/day
Metronidazole tablets 400 mg, 42 tablets, expiry 02.2004, giardia, 2 grams at once or 1 x3/day
Trimethoprim tablets 200 mg, 50 tablets, expiry 07.2005, urinary tract infection, 1 x2/day
Amoxil vials for injection 500 mg, 6 vials, expiry 01.2002, 1 vial tds if unable to swallow tablets
Benzylpenicillin injection 600 mg, 2 vials, expiry 05.2001, meningitis
Bactroban ointment, 15 grams, expiry 10.2001, skin and fungal infection, x2/day
Fucidin cream, 30 grams, expiry 05.2004, skin infection, x2/day
Chloromycetin eye ointment, 5 grams, expiry 04.2001, conjunctivitis, x4/day

Painkillers

Paracetamol tablets 500 mg, 70 tablets, expiry 01.2006, mild pain, 2 x4/day
Diclofenac Sodium tablets 50 mg, 37 tablets, expiry 03.2002, joint pain, 1 x3/day
Diclofenac Sodium capsules S/R, 42 capsules, expiry 05.2002, joint pain, 1 x2/day
Diclofenac Sodium suppositories 100 mg, 5 supps., expiry 01.2004, unable to swallow, 1 per 24 hrs
Diclofenac Sodium injection 75 mg/3ml, 3 vials, expiry 03.2002, ureteric colic/migraine
Codeine Phosphate tablets 30 mg, 84 tabs., expiry 05.2001, mild to moderate pain/cough, 1-2 x4/day
Pethidine injection 50 mg/1ml, 5 vials, expiry 04.2004, severe pain, 50-100 mg 4 hourly

Gastro-intestinal system

Indigestion tablets, 40 tablets
Losec tablets 20 mg, 9 tablets, expiry 10.2001, severe indigestion, 1 in the morning
Prochlorperazine (Stemetil) tablets 5 mg, 55 tablets, expiry 03.2003, nausea and vomiting, 1 x3/day
Buccastem tablets 3 mg, 30 tablets, expiry 01.2004, nausea and vomiting, 1 or 2 x2/day
Metoclopramide (Maxalon) tabs. 10 mg, 40 tablets, expiry 05.2003, nausea and vomiting, 1 x3/day
Metoclopramide injection 10 mg/2ml, 2 vials, expiry 05.2003
Senokot tablets 7.5 mg, 48 tablets, expiry 04.2004, constipation, 2-4 tablets at night
Loperamide hydrochloride (Imodium) tablets 2 mg, 60 tablets, expiry 07.2004, diarrhoea, 4 mg at once followed by 2 mg after each loose stool for up to 5 days
Anusol ointment, 25 grams, expiry 04.2003, piles, morning and night and after each bowel movement
Rehidrat sachets, 10 sachets, expiry 10.2004, dehydration

Acute mountain sickness/pulmonary oedema/cerebral oedema/frostbite

Azetazolamide (Diamox) tablets 250 mg, 224 tablets, expiry 00.0000, altitude sickness, 1x2/day
Dexamethasone tablets 2 mg, 30 tablets, expiry 12.2002, cerebral oedema, 8 mg at once followed by 4 mg 6 hourly
Dexamethasone Sodium Phosphate injection 4 mg/1ml, 5 ampoules, expiry 07.2003, cerebral oedema
Nifedipine M/R tablets 20 mg, 32 tablets, expiry 08.2004, pulmonary oedema, 1 x3/day
Aspirin tablets 300 mg, 70 tablets, expiry 01.2002, frostbite, 1 tablet a day

Allergy

Piriton tablets 4 mg, 50 tablets, expiry 08.2003, allergy/hayfever/itchy skin, 1 tablet 4 hourly
Hydrocortisone injection 100 mg, 1 vial, expiry 05.2005, anaphylaxis
Adrenaline injection 1 in 1000, 1 vial, expiry 02.2004, anaphylaxis

Miscellaneous

Multivitamines, 120 tablets, expiry 02.2004, 1 tablet daily
Nirolex lozenges, 24 lozenges (for dry tickly coughs)
Salbutamol inhaler, 1 inhaler (breathing difficulties), expiry 09.2002, asthma/breathing difficulties, 2 puffs 4 hourly
Temazepam tablets 10 mg, 56 tablets, expiry 05.2002, sleeping difficulties, 1-2 tablets at night
Sterile eye drops, 10 single disposable units
Amethocaine eye drops, 2 units (topical local anaesthetic for eyes)
Daktarin cream, 30 grams, expiry 03.2003, fungal infections, twice daily
Cotrimazole pessary 500 mg, 1 pessary, expiry 08.2005, thrush, insert one at night
Water for injections 10 mls, 10 vials
Diazepam rectube 5 mg, 1 rectube, expiry 03.2002, fits, for rectal use
Depo-Medrone with lidocaine injection 2 ml/vial, 1 vial, expiry 12.2002 (intra-articular and tendon sheath injection)

3.8. Maps

American flight navigation maps (1:500,000 – large area, from Stanford's) give a good overview of the country, while soviet maps of some vintage (late sixties) and of some scale (1:500,000) give a better appreciation of local topography.

With respect to geography we found the Russian maps we bought in Bishkek to be good, although their accuracy was masked somewhat by the scale, 1:200,000 being the best scale we found. The maps are old, the roads marked may or may not be there and could be in any condition, not always navigable even with a 4WD. Settlements marked on the map may not exist anymore. The map shop in Bishkek is marked in the Lonely Planet Guide.

3.9. Information sources:

- The Lonely Planet Guide to Central Asia – very useful prior reading for a visit to Kyrgyzstan.
- The travel company ITMC, Vladimir Kommisarov, Director and also President, Kyrgyz Alpine Club, email: itmc@elcat.kg
- American flight navigation maps.
- Locally bought soviet maps (c.1970)

For a flavour of mountaineering in this region of Kyrgyzstan:

- High Mountain Info 182
- Article by Pat Littlejohn – High 210, May 2000
- MEF Report “Anglo-American Kokshaal-Too Expedition 1997, Lindsay Griffin.

3.10. Accounts

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| <u>Expenditure</u> | |
| Airfares x 5 | 3050 |
| Hire of truck, accommodation, | 1000 |
| Food, domestic purchases | 400 |
| Insurance | 500 |
| | |
| | Total |
| | 4950 |
| <u>Income</u> | |
| British Mountaineering Council grant | 1100 |
| Mount Everest Foundation grant | 640 |
| Personal contributions | 3210 |
| | |
| | Total |
| | 4950 |

3.11. Contacts:

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Mount Everest Foundation

British Mountaineering Council

PODSACS

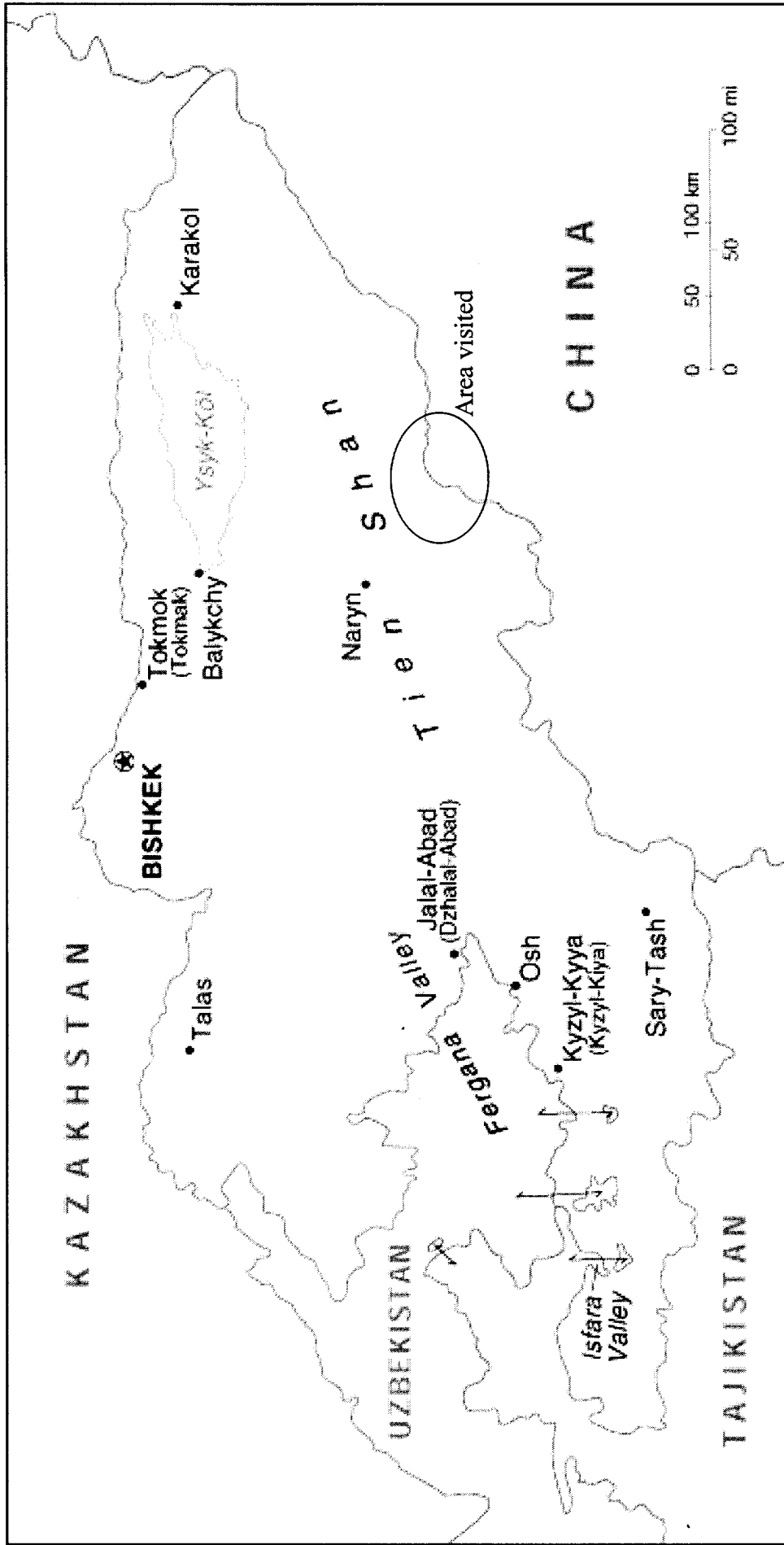
Jenny Last, Cirencester Hospital Pharmacy

Dr. Rick Albertyn (Expedition Doctor, Motorola Pamirs Expedition 1999)

Bayer

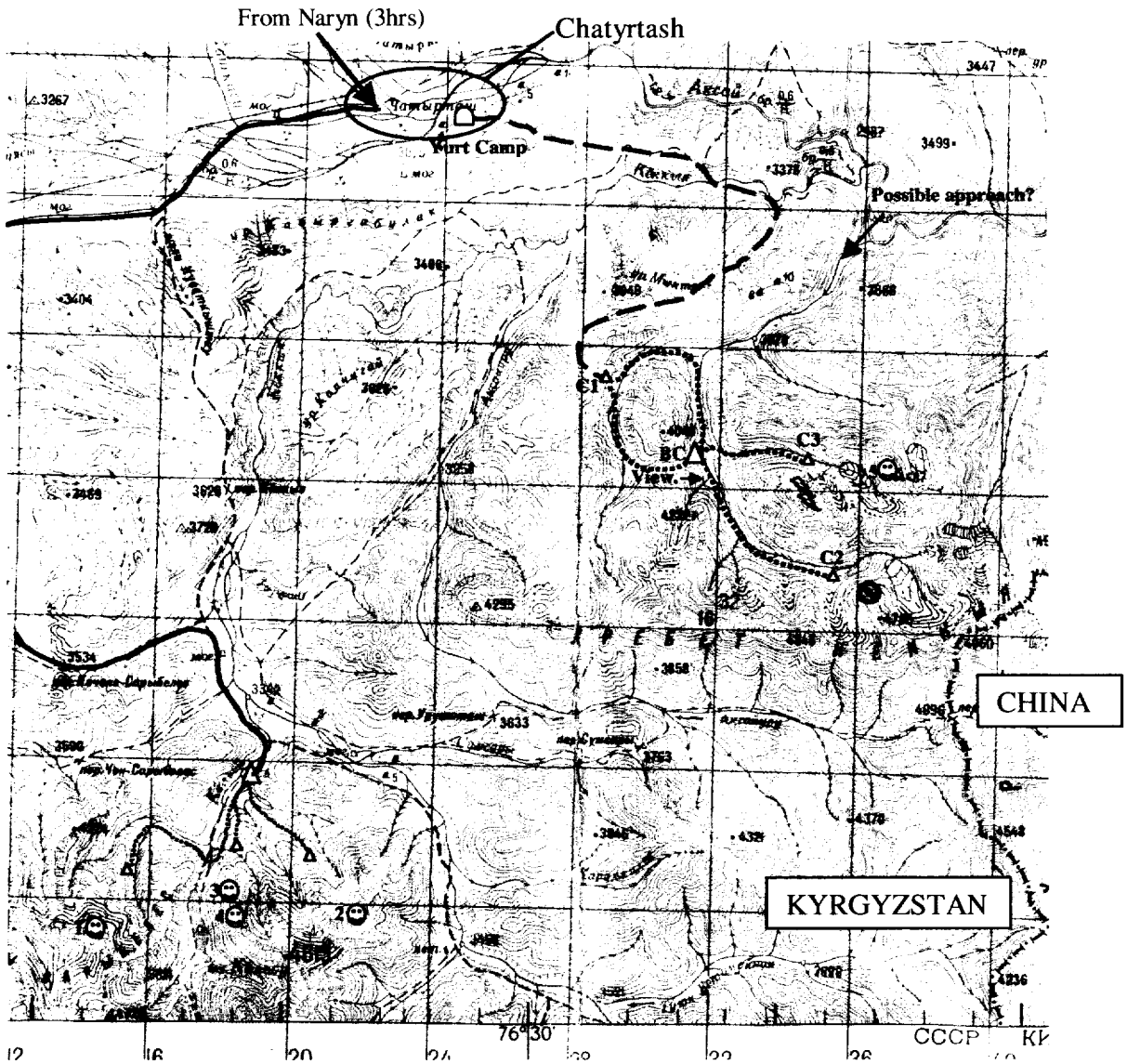
The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purposes of private research.

HAPPY CLIMBING!!!



Map of Kyrgyzstan showing area visited.

British Western Kokshaal-Too Expedition 2001 – Map of region visited



Key:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| Travel: by truck | ————— |
| by horse | - - - - - |
| on foot | |
| Summit climbed | ⊙ |
| Attempted peak | ⊗ |
| Route climbed | ↗ |
| Base camp | △ |
| High camp | ▲ |

1. Horizon Peak
 2. Cat's Ear South
 3. Peak Kul-Su
 4. Cloud Peak
 5. Pawprint Peak
- "View" –photo 7 taken here.

The Gory Sarybeles



Photo 1. The west arm of the Gory Sarybeles from BC, Kurumduk Valley.
A – Cat’s Ear South, ascended from valley V; B – Cloud Peak; C – Peak Kul-Su; D – Horizon Peak.



Photo 2. The view south down the Kurumduk valley from BC, with the Lake Kul-Su hidden in the valley on the left.



Photo 3. The lake, Oyzin Kul-Su.



Photo 4. The view north-east from the top of Horizon Peak, Oyzin Kul-Su in the deep valley. A – Cat's Ear South; B – Cloud Peak; C – Peak Kul-Su.



Photo 5. Looking west from the plateau near the summit of Horizon Peak.



Photo 6. Camp below the cwm of Peak Kul-Su. The obvious gully line marked was attempted by Tim and Pete.

Khrebet Kyokkiar



Photo 7. Our first view into the main valley of the Khrebet Kyokkiar, looking east from the col between our first and base camps. BC – basecamp position. A – Pawprint Peak with ascent marked; B – peak attempted; C – plateau top out for the easy gully ascent and “The Bounty”; “O” – “Offshoot Valley”



Photo 8. View from the approach to Pawprint Peak, looking back toward the line of “The Bounty”. Route was abseiled..



Photo 9. Looking into “Coire na Ciste” with line of easy ascent gully marked and “The Bounty” just off picture to the right.

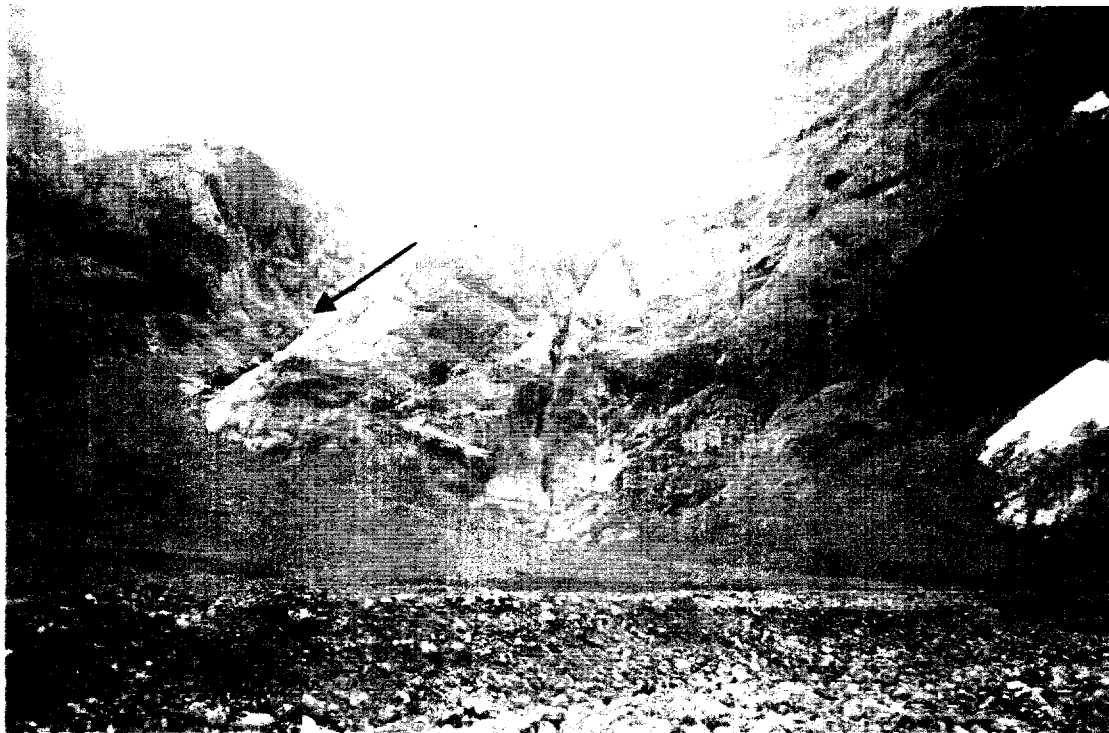


Photo 10. The slabs, which fall from the face of the attempted peak (next page), sealing off the end of the main valley. Line of abseiled descent shown, c.100m.

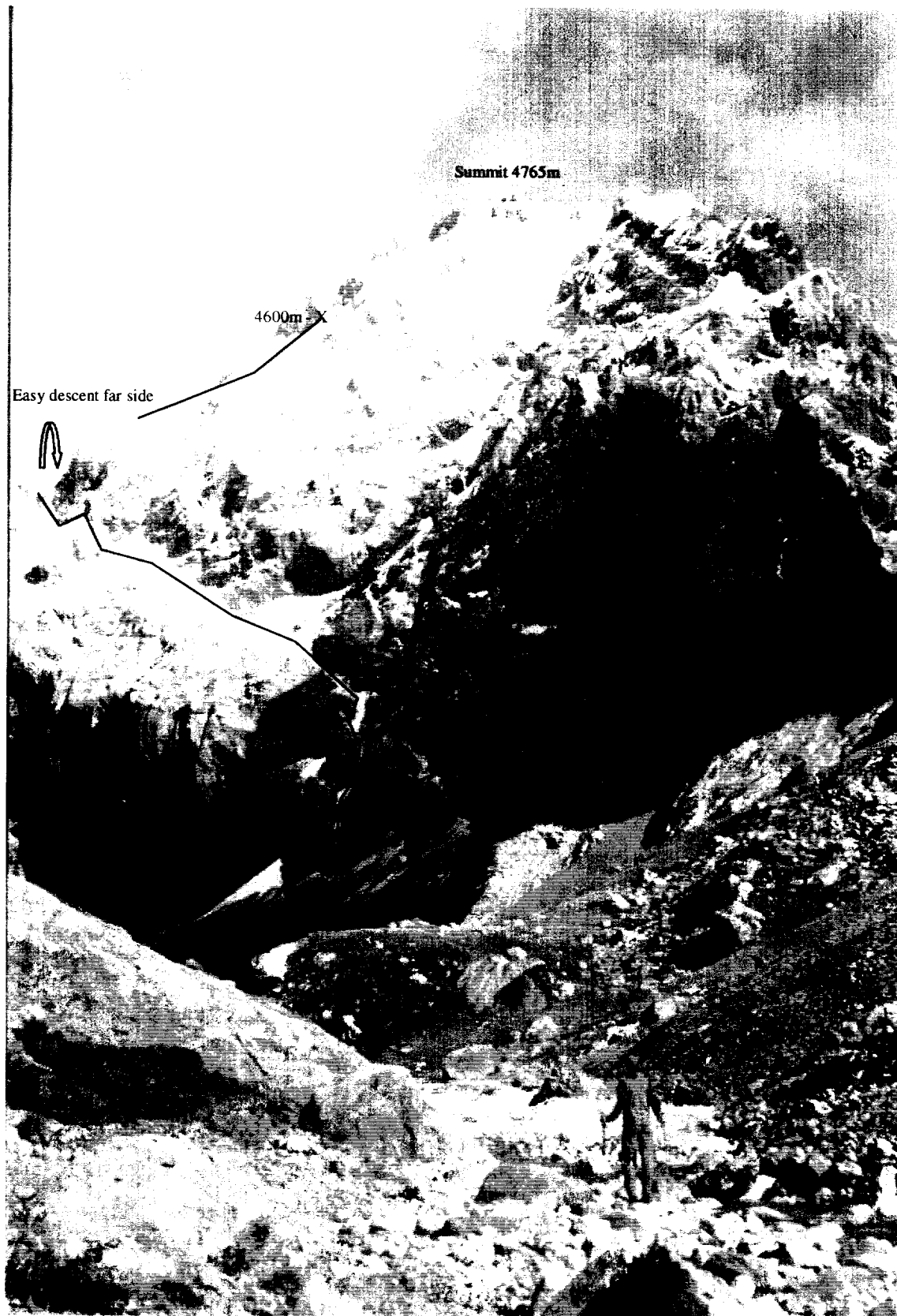
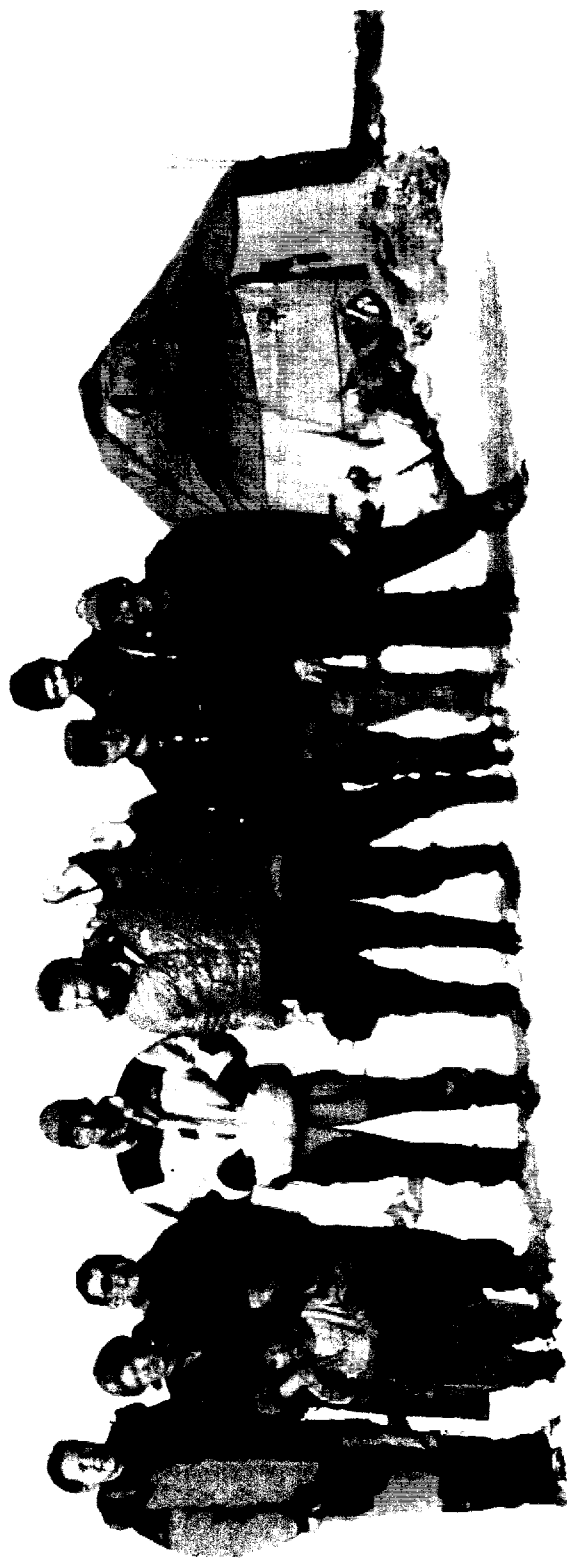


Photo 11. Peak attempted by Peter, David and Tim at the end of the Main Valley.
X - marks highpoint, B - marks summit height, actual summit not visible on this picture.



Photo12. The last campsite, leaving the Kyokkiar in deep snow.



The farewell at the yurt.