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Borkoldoy 2002 02/94



## BORKOLDOY 2002

(Kyrgyzstan)

A report of a short expedition to Khrebet Borkoldoy in 2002.

With thanks to      The Mount Everest Foundation  
                                 The BMC  
                                 The Sports Council of Wales



Mike Rosser on south ridge approaching Teke Tor, looking south with Peak Dankova in the background.

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## Acknowledgements

The Mount Everest Foundation, The Sports Council of Wales, The British Mountaineering Council, for their extremely generous assistance of grant aid. Marion and Mike Parsons for their advice and supporting information, which proved invaluable.

The staff at Adventureworks and Jagged Globe.

And with much thanks to Steve Smith and his staff at Torbay Hospital who thought it was a great thing to do and it couldn't have been done without them.

## **Objectives**

A visit to the Tien Shan was first considered at the end of a six week expedition to Alaska in 1999. The 'Celestial Mountains' had a magical ring and friends visiting them had spoken of the friendliness of the people, the ease of access, lack of officialdom and the desire of the Kyrgyz Republic to expand tourism as a major source of income. Vast mountain ranges with the majority of climbing concentrated around two areas in east and west Kyrgyzstan convinced us that this was a place to have an adventure.

Research was based upon the question '*Where in the Tien Shan do expeditions drive past on the way to the big stuff?*' Process of elimination led us to Khrebet (range) Borkoldoy, in the south of the country.

## **The Team**

Mike Rosser, 40+, Welsh, Executive for Adventureworks, an Expedition company. On his third implant, grey and beginning to be follicularly challenged. Been knocking around some of the more remote places of the planet for quite a number of years.

Jill Barrow, 40++, English, consultant, world traveller, various trips to the Alps, started life as an outdoor pursuits instructor at Ullswater, grandmother.

Sharon Abbott, 40-, British, Senior Instructor in the Peak District. Extensive UK rock and ice, many alpine trips and successful visits to big hills in the Himalayas, Africa and South America. One of the fit ones in the party.

Wayne Gladwin, 40-, Welsh, Senior Instructor in South Wales. Also extensive UK Rock and Ice stuff. Been up big things in Africa and South America with all the usual stuff being young and daft in the Alps. The other fit one.

Stephen Saddler, 40+, Scot, University Lecturer. A few visits to the Alps, many mediterranean beaches and Alaska. The old one in the party.

We were supported by a cook/porter, Rinat Bogdanov, a mining student from Bishkek, whose experience with past expeditions had somehow led him mistakenly to believe that Pat Littlejohn was God. (Pat must be some tipper)

We also had an extremely enigmatic driver, Brondig, nicknamed Bio. Our lives were regularly in his hands on some of the more interesting vehicular perambulations on our way to and from Khrebet Borkoldoy. His ability to change a tyre would earn him a place on a F1 team.

A motley crew, some who could be insured by Saga and were completely missed by the first flush of youth and others who were young, fit and hopefully able as they were intended for the load carrying.



In the Yurt hotel in Naryn. L to R - Sharon Abbot, Mike Rosser, Stephen Saddler, Jill Barrow, Wayne Gladwin

## **Travel to Kyrgyzstan**

There are flights every alternate day from Heathrow to the capital Bishkek, with a drop off at Baku, in Azerbaijan, on the edge of the Caspian Sea. Comparisons with other routes did show that the BA flight was competitive and appeared to provide the cheapest route. The next best alternative was to fly via Istanbul on Turkish Airways.

The trip got off to a difficult start when BA refused to allow any excess baggage without exorbitant penalties. It looked for a short period that the expedition was going to fail due to an £800 surcharge. The reason given by BA as post-September 11 security was clearly illogical and probably more to do with the 'Worlds' Favourite Airline's' inability to balance its books. Suffice it to say after some discussion the fee was paid and we proceeded.

A nine-hour flight brought us to Bishkek, a modern Airport with a reasonably quick progression through immigration, checking visas that had been purchased in the UK by post for £40. When Security and Police found we were off to go up the hills they became more friendly. A good initial experience in a country working hard to promote tourism.

It was hot, it was 4.00 am and we were fighting off migrant Khazaks wanting to carry our luggage, but after two years planning we had arrived in Kyrgyzstan.

## **Research**

The usual trawls were done through the Alpine Club Journal, BMC web site and the Expedition Advisory Centre at the RGS. All were extremely helpful and none indicating any activity in the Borkoldoy. Our agent Vladimir Birukov of Tien Shan Travel confirmed that there had been no ascents from the area of our intended Base Camp.

It was with some surprise and consternation three months before departure that we heard from Marion and Mike Parsons who had had an extremely successful trip to the Borkoldoy in 1994. Due to the title of Marion's paper

this had been missed in the initial research. A salutary reminder that web based research can lead to gaping holes in knowledge. Fortunately Marion and Mike were able to provide us with details of their trip and that of an Imperial College scientific trip in 1997. The Parson's trip had approached from the North and we were confident that we would be in unclimbed territory.

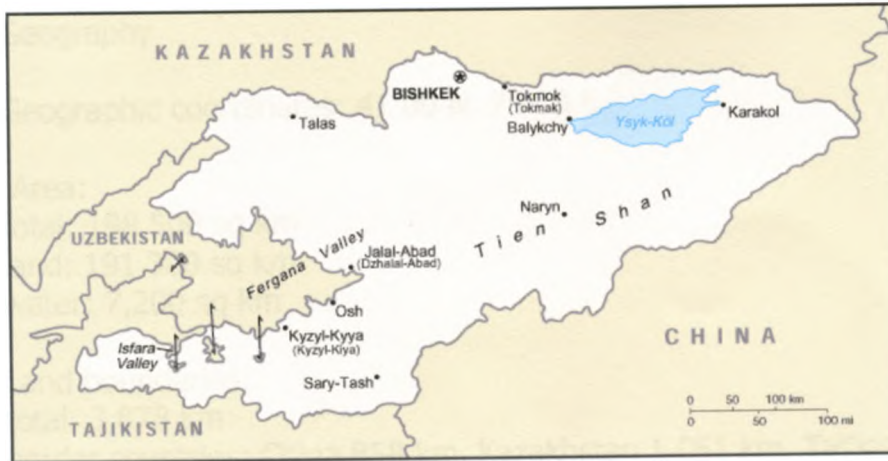
Back issues of High and Mountain gave additional information on the general area as well as Lindsay Griffin's detailed report of a visit to the Kokshall Tau south of the Borkoldoy.

### **Maps**

These were relatively easy to obtain. Initial studies being based on the Central Asia Aeronautical chart, covering Kazakhstan (south), Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (east), at 1:1,750,000. from GiziMap, Budapest. Fortunately this is stocked at Stanfords in London. This map provided the most accurate detail of roads that we found.

A 1:200,000 colour photocopy of a combination of sheets was provided by the agent who had researched possible base camps on a previous trip to Peak Dankova. (This local knowledge proved invaluable in saving time on finding a BC and in load carrying). On arrival in Bishkek we purchased from Tien Shan Travel a 1:200,000 sheet covering the Kokshall Tau and the Southern aspect of the Borkoldoy(\$7). Tien Shan Travel was set up by out-of-work Cartographers of the Russian Army.

### **Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, the people and their culture(s)**



## Geography

Geographic coordinates: 41 00 N, 75 00 E

### Area:

total: 198,500 sq km

land: 191,300 sq km

water: 7,200 sq km

### Land boundaries:

total: 3,878 km

border countries: China 858 km, Kazakhstan 1,051 km, Tajikistan 870 km, Uzbekistan 1,099 km

Climate: dry continental to polar in high Tien Shan; subtropical in southwest Fergana Valley); temperate in northern foothill zone

Terrain: peaks of Tien Shan and associated valleys and basins encompass entire nation

### Elevation extremes:

lowest point: Kara-Darya 132 m

highest point: Jengish Chokusu (Pik Pobedy) 7,439 m

Natural resources: abundant hydropower; significant deposits of gold and rare earth metals; locally exploitable coal, oil, and natural gas; other deposits of nepheline, mercury, bismuth, lead, and zinc

Environment - current issues: water pollution; many people get their water directly from contaminated streams and wells; as a result, water-borne diseases are prevalent; increasing soil salinity from faulty irrigation practices

Population: 4,685,230 (July 2000 est.)

Ethnic groups: Kirghiz 52.4%, Russian 18%, Uzbek 12.9%, Ukrainian 2.5%, German 2.4%, other 11.8%

Religions: Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5%

Languages: Kirghiz (Kyrgyz) - official language, Russian - official language  
note: in March 1996, the Kyrgyzstani legislature amended the constitution to



make Russian an official language, along with Kirghiz, in territories and work places where Russian-speaking citizens predominate

## **Government**

Country name: conventional long form: Kyrgyz Republic  
conventional short form: Kyrgyzstan  
local long form: Kyrgyz Respublikasy  
former: Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic

### National holidays:

1 January -- New Year's Day  
7 January -- Russian Orthodox Christmas  
8 March -- Women's Day  
21 March -- Nooruz  
1 May -- Labour Day  
5 May -- Constitution Day  
9 May -- World War II Victory Day  
31 August -- Independence Day

Important Muslim holy days, scheduled according to the lunar calendar, include Ramadan, the month of sunrise to sunset fasting; Orozo Ait (or Eid-ul-Fitr)

## **Economy**

Kyrgyzstan is a small, mountainous country with a predominantly agricultural economy. Cotton, wool, and meat are the main agricultural products and exports. Industrial exports include gold, mercury, uranium, and electricity. Kyrgyzstan has been one of the most progressive countries of the former Soviet Union in carrying out market reforms. Following a successful stabilization program, which lowered inflation from 88% in 1994 to 15% for 1997, attention is turning toward stimulating growth. Much of the government's stock in enterprises has been sold. Drops in production had been severe since the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991, but by mid-1995 production began to recover and exports began to increase. Pensioners, unemployed workers, and government workers with salary arrears continue to suffer. Foreign assistance played a substantial role in the

country's economic turnaround in 1996-97. The government has adopted a series of measures to combat such severe problems as excessive external debt, inflation, inadequate revenue collection, and the spillover from Russia's economic disorders. Kyrgyzstan had moderate growth in 1999 of 3.4% with a similar rate expected for 2000. Population below poverty line: 40%

Kyrgyzstan and its people continue to be dominated by the effects of the Soviet era. Independence is reflected in the peoples' pride for their country and their traditional ways of life, whether it be the nomadic herdsman or the small farmer. The confusion between the increasing use of their own language and the living tradition of Russian as the first language will decrease in time as the Kyrgyzstan language becomes the first language.

Although a Moslem country it does not suffer from a level of orthodoxy, with women 'as equals'.

Without reservation people were friendly, approachable and very welcoming. There will be lasting memories of gifts of bits of Marco Polo sheep and our arrival at a family guesthouse in Chok-Tal on Ysyk – Kul after a ten hour drive from Base Camp. We entered in the dark what appeared to be a shanty-town, only to be welcomed into an oasis of vibrant colour, comfortable and spotlessly clean beds and more fresh food than we knew what to do with.

### **Location of Khrebet Borkoldoy**

The Borkoldoy is 700km South of Bishkek. The main road to the Torugart pass, on the Chinese border, is taken to Naryn. Twenty kilometers South of Naryn the main road is left near Ak-Muz; East and then South towards Chatyr-Tash, where the peaks of the At-Bashy can be seen on the south side of the river plain.

Here the old military road which runs just north of east is taken along the north bank of the Mudurum. After three checkpoints where passports and permits purchased in Naryn are required. This track, now washed out in many places was used to provide access to this area just north of the Chinese border.

Travel by four wheel drive is essential ( although an ancient Lada seemed to negotiate it with ease) and eight hours brought us to Base Camp with Peak Dankova to our south-east and the many Virgin Peaks of the Kokshall-Tau to our South. The peaks of the Borkoldoy at 77'30", 41'00", seemed small and insignificant by comparison. An ideal location for a wee trip to Central Asia.



Khrebet Borkoldoy

### **Climate and Weather**

A range of web based weather information sites were queried, careful perusal of the three reports available to us and discussions with others confirmed that we could expect -10C at night and 40C during the day. This was also our experience although in the shade temperature rapidly dropped. It was generally felt that the level of ultraviolet radiation was higher than expected or experienced at similar altitudes elsewhere.

The weather was consistently hot and dry, although we did wake to six inches of snow at base Camp on our second day. This rapidly melted and was gone by the following day.

**Itinerary**

Date	Description
10 August	Fly to Bishkek: Heathrow, Baku (1 Hour stopover), Bishkek
11 August	Day in Hotel Pinara Bishkek, meet our agents Tien Shan Travel
12 August	Drive to Naryn, 8 hrs ( 4 WD ex military troop carrier), Stay at Yurt Hotel in Naryn
13 August	Drive to base Camp 8 hrs
14 –26 August	Explored major peaks of Borkoldoy North of Base Camp and plateau South towards the Kokshall-Tau
27 August	Return to Chok-Tal (10 hrs) on Ysyk-Kul for 'cultural' visit and swim in second highest land-locked lake
28 August	Return to Bishkek (4 hrs) to Hotel Pinara
29 August	Shopping and sight seeing in Bishkek
30 August	Fly to UK: Bishkek, Baku, Heathrow

**Currency**

Kyrgyzstan uses the Som, but nearly all transactions were completed in US Dollars. The exchange rate was 41 som to the dollar. There were no 'black-market' alternatives and buying things in dollars always equated to an exchange rate of 41 som. The Euro was welcome in Bishkek and Chok-Tal, but we saw little evidence of it and tourist purchases were always quoted in som and dollars.

We all carried cash in dollars and exchanged in the hotel into som at the same rate as anywhere else.

**Medical / Health**

The care required for a fit young party is minimal, however only some of us met this criteria, so we took a full expedition medical kit supplied through the kind offices of 'Adventureworks'.

The team were also very grateful for the advice given by Brian Cummins.

We did not need to have any particular inoculations prior to departure. We had no traumatic emergencies and medical concerns were confined to:-

UV damage, subsequently we all used factor 40 creams.

Some diarrhoea whose cause was believed to be from Water Melon.

Two cases of dysentery. One occurred on day two, and the second later on. Both were treated successfully with antibiotics whilst at base camp and on returning to the UK.

One case of acute mountain sickness. This occurred in a balding, fat, over-forty and unfit individual. The appropriate treatment of descending to Base Camp relieved the symptoms followed by some days of rest. He did not go beyond 4,500m for the remainder of the trip.

One case of self-inflicted alcoholic poisoning brought about by a few too many Choo-choos. This lethal activity is too be avoided particularly in the presence of hardened russian participants.

No use was made of prophylactic treatments for ASM and apart from the one incident we all seemed comfortable at altitude.

We took a water-free antibacterial soap in a pump action container, purchased in Boots in the UK. This was kept at the toilet and proved to be very useful. It is recommended that this is used in future expeditions and even extended to a second supply for use in the cook tent.

## **Food**

All food was supplied by the agents in Bishkek. Fruit and Veg were bought from roadside vendors on the way to Naryn. Some dairy products were bought in Naryn on our way to base camp to avoid spoiling. High altitude meals were taken from the UK in the form of vacuum packed pre-cooked meals, which were found to tolerable.

Two of the team were vegetarian and it was agreed that we would all be herbivores for the expedition. Some of the carnivores broke down in base camp at the sight of leg of Marco Polo sheep supplied by some local hunters.

Some small trout caught with pole and line were sampled but were found to be completely inadequate compared with the excellent smoked fish of Ysyk-Kul.

### **Fuel**

All base camp cooking was done with bottled gas. MSR stoves were used at high camps using petrol. These were trouble free after problems with overfilling of the fuel bottles were rectified.

### **Base Camp**

The site had been suggested by the agent who had passed it on the way to peak Dankova the previous year, when our initial enquiries had started. It was ideal, being on the east bank, on a river terrace with fresh water, at the foot of a valley running north into the Borkoldoy.

Khrebet Borkoldoy is about 17 kms East to West and 12 kms North to South. Base camp was at the Western end, 41° 14.125' N, 77° 31.738' E, at 3600m.

The site had the added advantage of direct vehicle access across dry grassland, somewhat reminiscent of the Cairngorm plateau, but a wee bit greener, so no load carrying, a great relief to all of us. Large tents supplied by the agents were of 'Eurohike' standard like large Vangos, entered through a conservatory. The tents were great in size but their quality was very poor. A large dining tent was provided, with a small cook tent.

The room with a view was constructed downhill out of the usual blue builders' tarpaulin and four poles. This had to be moved twice as the effects of dysentery rapidly filled the holes up.

Washing clothes and selves were done down stream with biodegradable soaps. Most dish washing was done at the back of the cook tent to avoid water contamination. Fresh water was taken thirty metres upstream from the camp.

Organic and paper rubbish were burned, but all plastics, metal and glass were bagged and disposed of in Naryn on the return journey.

The site was flat, with a course grass covering, good drainage and tent pitching was simple in ground that took pegs easily.

## Flora and Fauna

No species identification guides were available but a large number of 'alpine' species were seen, which were familiar to all of us. Fauna seen was restricted to Marco Polo Sheep, Ibex, Marmots, one Eagle and some Bunting-like birds.

It was felt that the presence of a family of hunters 500m below base camp armed with Kalashnikovs may have had some influence on what stuck its head above ground.

## The Climbing



Teke Tor 4,655m

Peak Alexander 4,655m

Ata Peak 4,855m

First impressions were of big slag heaps, but very colourful ones. Scree slopes a thousand feet long, criss-crossed by Ibex tracks, hints of glaciers and snow and rock summits. The main East-West ridge had southerly facing



glaciated valleys which provided, with the accompanying ridges the routes into our two higher camps.

The first few days were spent acclimatising and waiting for the snow to melt. Forays were made to investigate a higher camp in the base camp valley. Our very able, fit and keen youngsters found an excellent site at the foot of a lateral moraine just below the glacier snout at the head of the valley. A three to four hour walk-in got us to the high camp with a site requiring more than the usual amount of clearance of stones and boulders. A late start of 0600 was made the following day and taking the 400m snow ramp up the East face we were on the summit by 0930. The summit ridge had a snow cap to the North, but the high point was to the South along a simple traverse, with a single post-box sized block on the summit. The route was at PD, with some stone fall danger.

Our first ascent was named Peak Alexander at 4,655m. The descent was a simple backtrack on soft balling snow, long and tedious. Camp was returned to by 1300hrs, a five hour round trip. Rock gear was completely superfluous as there was nothing solid to attach it to. Standard UK approaches to snow anchors were perfectly adequate, but unused as the gradient allowed a moving approach except when surmounting the cornice.

Our second peak was approached initially by a long ascent, descent, then ascent to the next valley East from base camp, where a high camp was located. The high camp was at a similar altitude to our previous one, with a simple approach onto the glacier. Unfortunately a case of AMS required one of the party to need to descend accompanied by an altruistic minded and considerate member who gave up his one opportunity at a first ascent to make sure that the puir soul would get back to base camp safely.

This second peak was a long glacier walk culminating in a snow peak at about 4,850m. The route taken was a rising easterly stroll through some interesting crevassed terrain. This young team fairly shot up and down back to Base camp by early afternoon after a twelve hour day. Another first ascent giving us Ata Peak.

The third and final ascent was of the rock ridge dominating the view immediately north and west of base camp. It was felt that this could be completed in a day and the youngsters went for it in style. The ridge seemed interminable, loose rock and covered with fossils and that didn't include the old geezer's who fell by the wayside. They decided to admire the show of young athleticism and highly honed technique of the..... family of Ibex that led our climbing group to the summit. This pleasurable day out gave us Teke Tor at 4,655m. Eight hours up were eased by a mammoth scree assisted four-hour descent.

Our success at three first ascent in twelve days, on long yet not technical routes gave us a great deal of pleasure and noteworthy praise must go to the youngsters Sharon and Wayne who completed all three.

The three old yins basked in the knowledge that the youngsters would not have succeeded without their unflagging support and encouragement.

## **Conclusion**

A short trip to an area of the Tien Shan which had been visited only twice before by UK expeditions confirmed that Khrebet Borkoldoy is a suitable part of the Tien Shan for groups who are looking for a visit to a remote part of central Asia; to climb routes that are not technically difficult; to meet people of a very different culture than ours and to view what appeared to be hundreds of unclimbed 5-6,000m peaks of the Kokshall-Tau.

It was for all of us a remarkable time which would not have been given to us without the kind and generous assistance of The Mount Everest Foundation, the BMC and the Sports Council of Wales.

Jill Barrow  
Mike Rosser  
Sharon Abbott  
Stephen Saddler  
Wayne Gladwin

## Appendixes

### Accounts

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£</b>
MEF	900	Agents Fees	3,310
Sport Council of Wales	1,300	Air fare 5 @530	2,650
BMC	1,000	Excess Baggage charge	1,000
Jill	752		
Mike	752		
Sharon	752		
Stephen	752		
Wayne	752		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6,960</b>		<b>6,960</b>

### Notes

British Airways allowed no free excess baggage contrary to a verbal agreement. It was decided that it was cheaper to freight the excess back with DHL for us\$400

All members supplied their own equipment and arranged insurance cover

### Equipment

All the usual clothes for dealing with a dry climate at 40c to a snowy, windy one at -20c were taken.

Climbing equipment plus a walking axe and technical tool  
All, bar one took walking poles.

Two smallish rock racks remained unused throughout the trip and Ice screws came into their own securing washing lines.

The plethora of stuff the modern climber takes to the Alps for a summer's climbing and a camp in Argentiere.

Two Silva Multi-navigators (and essential instruction book) were used primarily for position fixing and altitude.

It was generally agreed that Wet-Wipes and dry-antibacterial soap were extremely useful.

Essentially we were like many expeditions post-Shipton, over-equipped especially in the technical department.