

# Kyrgystan

## Djungart Expedition 2004

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**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.**

If you are considering an expedition to the Djungart area or other parts of the Kokshaal Too Range and require further information then please feel free to contact Ingrid Crossland or Graham Sutton.

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**CONTENTS**

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Page</b>
1.1	Location	4
1.2	Previous Activity	4
1.3	Objectives	4
1.4	Achievements	4
1.5	Conclusions and Future Recommendations	5
<b>2.0</b>	<b>The Expedition</b>	
2.1	Map and Location	6
2.2	Background	6
2.3	Objectives	7
2.4	The Expedition	7
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	
3.1	Political Situation and Travel Advice for Kyrgystan	14
3.2	International Flights	14
3.3	Permission and Permits	14
3.4	Languages	15
3.5	Support in Kyrgystan	15
3.6	Accommodation	15
3.7	Food and Provisions	16
3.8	Transport and Logistics	16
3.9	Equipment	17
3.10	Weather	18
3.11	Water	19
3.12	Waste Disposal, Environmental and Social Impact	19
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Expedition Accounts</b>	20
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Map of Djungart</b>	21
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Photographs</b>	22
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	30
<b>8.0</b>	<b>Useful Addresses and Contact Details</b>	31
<b>9.0</b>	<b>Bibliography</b>	32
<b>10.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>	
10.1	Itinerary	33
10.2	Food List	34

## **1.0 SUMMARY**

### **1.1 Location**

In Kyrgystan, Djungart is located in the Kokshaal-Too range to the South of the Eastern edge of Lake Issyk-Kul, near the Chinese Border.

### **1.2 Previous Activity**

To the best of our knowledge, only one expedition had previously been into the Djungart area, this being a Russian team undertaking geological and glacial research, but no climbing or mountaineering.

### **1.3 Objectives**

To be the first climbing expedition to access the Djungart range; To climb the highest peak (5318m) and other surrounding mountains in the area; To research, assess and photograph the possibilities for virgin peak ascents and interesting new routes and lines for future expeditions.

### **1.4 Achievements**

With no photographs and only a 1:200,000 scale map to go by our base camp location was chosen as it gave us access to two separate valley systems. A thorough reconnaissance of both these glacial valleys was achieved and it appears that they are connected via moraine gullies and a glacier situated in a rock bowl between the two. Unfortunately no peaks were climbed due to a combination of factors; The terrain was very different to what we had anticipated with more big wall potential (for which we were not equipped) than friendly snow slopes. We were unable to place advanced base camps as high as we had intended due to lack of suitable drinking water and no snow melt potential. Base camp was ultimately too far away from the glaciers and the mountains we had hoped to climb and as an unsupported team of only two we were limited in terms of time, given the amount of carrying we had to do between base camp and advance base camps. Weather conditions were also incredibly warm for the time of year and many of the upper slopes looked unstable. We did however explore and open up a new area for mountaineering in Kyrgystan and have gathered significant information which should make any subsequent expeditions to Djungart far better informed than we were prior to arrival.

## **1.5 Conclusion and Future Recommendations**

Djungart is a stunningly beautiful, completely unspoilt, natural environment. Although it was disappointing that ultimately we were unable to climb any of the peaks it was an extremely rewarding trip and we certainly weren't disappointed by the overall experience of being there. From the reconnaissance undertaken we believe Djungart does offer significant climbing potential, both alpine ascents and big wall. For alpine ascents in particular it would be advisable to establish a base camp as far up the right hand valley as possible, beyond the most complex, crevassed part of the glacier. However as this would be very close to the Kyrgystan/Chinese border there may be some issues regarding permission to helicopter in (which would be the only realistic way to access a base camp at this location). Ideally it would be better to go later in the season, probably September, to ensure slightly colder conditions. However, helicopters from At-Jailoo, Maida Adyr and Karkara only fly from the beginning of July until the end of August at the latest. To charter a helicopter from Bishkek outside of this season would be considerably more expensive. To explore some of the valleys adjacent to Djungart it may be possible to trek in with horses to base camp locations similar to ours at an altitude of about 3000m. The nature of the terrain leading up to the glaciers however is unlikely to be suitable for horses. From our experience, taking dry bags and items that could facilitate sizable river crossings would be useful in extending the possibilities for exploration in most areas surrounding Djungart. Satellite photos would also be of considerable use.

## 2.0 THE EXPEDITION

### 2.1 Map and Location



In Kyrgystan, Djungart is located in the Kokshaal-Too range to the South of the Eastern edge of Lake Issyk-Kul, near the Chinese Border.

### 2.2 Background

During my first visit to Kyrgystan in 1999, I became fascinated by the country, its mountain ranges and the immense opportunity for exploratory climbing in the region. I returned to climb virgin peaks there in 2000 and 2001 and in 2002 worked for 6 months on a voluntary basis for Vladimir Komissarov's organisation (ITMC Tien Shan) in Bishkek. My role in the office during the spring involved advising enquiring parties from all over the world on destinations for mountaineering expeditions, virgin peaks and new routes within Kyrgystan and the safety of visiting certain areas and arranging all formalities and logistical support. I also edited and partly re-wrote the organisation's Alpine Catalogue (which provides information on the country's mountain ranges and mountaineering potential) and compiled disparate information on routes in various areas, incorporating historical Russian ascents and more recent new routes and first ascents. With the maps and information sources available in Bishkek in general and ITMC in particular I researched areas where there had been no previous climbing/mountaineering activity. I was particularly attracted to the Djungart area due to the lack of information on it! Vladimir Komissarov (a source of much local knowledge) knew of only one

expedition that had been there, a geological expedition doing glacial research, but no climbing. Although he contacted some of the team members on my behalf they claimed not to have any photos. The map of the Djungart area indicated that the highest peak in the range was 5318m. The main reason Djungart had not previously been climbed in was almost certainly due to the fact that the area only appeared to be accessible by helicopter, making it a costly expedition location.

### **2.3 Objectives**

To be the first climbing expedition to access the Djungart range; To climb the highest peak (5318m) and other surrounding mountains in the area; To research, assess and photograph the possibilities for virgin peak ascents and interesting new routes and lines for future expeditions.

### **2.4 The Expedition**

The expedition was planned with two distinct phases, a five day acclimatisation trip to the Ala Archa National Park, followed by the main expedition to the Djungart range.

Once safely ensconced in our flat near the centre of Bishkek, we enjoyed a few hours of rest before getting down to the serious business of expedition food shopping. An extensive culinary road map had been drawn up by Ingrid prior to leaving the UK and so we had a day and a half immersion in the wonderful ‘Osh Bazar’ market and the more western style Turkish owned ‘Beta Stores’ supermarket.

The sweltering heat of over 30° C did start to take its toll but Russian ‘Baltika’ beer (now available in Tesco’s we discovered on our return to the UK!) and Turkish ice cream soon washed the dust away.

We arrived at the Ala Archa park entrance following a 45 minute drive which gradually left the city behind and approached the mountains via a valley dotted with country houses known as ‘dachas’. Once past the park entrance (where a small fee for tourists, driver and car is payable) the road deteriorates (having been partly washed away by serious flooding in 2003) but is passable and climbs gradually up to the site of the old Alp Lager at about 2000m which was a large alpine training camp during the Soviet era and is now partly derelict.

We stayed in the hostel at the Alp Lager but it is also possible to camp up on the alpine meadow by the river, a nice spot with good views which allows you to split the following day’s walk.

Ingrid, having worked in Bishkek, was very familiar with the walk up to the Ak Sai glacier at 3300m, in fact she’d taken great pleasure in describing the way it would feel when heavily loaded and unacclimatised. Our sacks were too heavy, loaded with rock and ice climbing gear, camping equipment and food. Without sacks it’s a leisurely half day’s

walk up to the main climbing base camp and back, loaded down leave 5-8 hours to arrive at the Ak Sai glacier.

The way up passes firstly through trees, then alpine meadows and finally up steep hillsides and moraine until the sadly dilapidated 'Ratsek Hut' is reached with superb views of rock spires and alpine peaks, which glow invitingly at sunset.

The alpine camp surrounding the Ratsek Hut had over 30 tents perched on the moraine, with many nationalities in residence. A Soviet Style training course was taking place with Siberian participants being schooled in techniques and using equipment we'd never seen in the Western Alps. The equipment may have been ancient but there was no denying their skills. These people were tough and impressive.

The sweltering heat of Bishkek had not boded well. In these nearby mountains there had been storms of rain and snow during the preceding few weeks, temperatures had been unseasonably high and it was one of the wettest summers anyone could recall. This generally warm unsettled pattern was to be a feature throughout our trip.

For some straight forward non-technical acclimatisation we decided to ascend the normal route up Uchitel Peak (Teacher's Peak). It was close to the camp so we started late allowing a big overnight storm to well and truly pass. The route starts straight from the Ratsek camp passing a large boulder ominously covered in plaques to climbers who had been killed in Ala Archa. We passed interesting rock spires with a few equipped lines on them and so found ourselves on the rubble slopes approaching the snow line. The snow was soft, thigh deep in places and had avalanched down many of the gullies. A storm hit us on the summit ridge which was just rain and sleet, no freeze at the marked height of 4527m. Other teams had encountered waist deep snow on Box Peak (4240m) and all the tremendous looking faces surrounding the Ak Sai glacier appeared to be totally out of condition.

We spent the next couple of days above 3300m exploring the glacier and dodging storms, then dropped back down to the Alplager, in under 4 hours including a lunch stop!

Back in Bishkek another frantic day of expedition shopping ensued before we were on our way to Karakol. Leaving Bishkek at 8am we were driven by Igor, a member of the Kyrgyz ski team, whose VW van was perfect for the more straight forward transportation requirements of the expedition.

The roads outside Bishkek are poor and deteriorating. We travelled along the south shore of Lake Issyk-Kul which allowed us some respite in the form of a stop for a swim in it's fantastically clear water with a backdrop of snowy mountains. We tried our best not to recall the reports we had heard of it's use in the Soviet era as a testing ground for submarines and a dumping ground for nuclear waste!

We arrived in Karakol at 2.45pm and overnighted in the 'Alplager' on the outskirts of Karakol. A characterful wooden building, in the style of a Swiss Chalet with acutely



angled roof, it stood out like a sore thumb next to rows of box like flats struggling to stay erect as their concrete crumbled.

Our transport for the next stage of our journey was provided by the ITMC local agent and an old friend of Ingrid's. Formerly the Mountaineering Training Camp Manager in the Soviet era, Anatoli had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Karakol range and local climbing route information. His battered 4 wheel drive took us over the Chon Ashu Pass and 5 bruising hours later we checked through the border zone military guard post at Maida Adyr and half an hour later arrived at At Jailoo, a surprisingly pleasant situation next to the huge glacial Inylchek River.

The camp at At Jailoo is relatively new, constructed, owned and run by a Russian woman who has a real love and passion for the surrounding nature.

There was a superb wooden dining room, dorms, small rooms and yurts to sleep in for a fee and free camping. The piece de resistance was the traditional sauna, wooden panelled with showers and outside plunge pool with a fantastic view of the hills (if you could stay in the freezing water long enough to enjoy it!).

We were due to fly into Djungart by helicopter the following day but nobody at the camp knew anything about it and had never even heard of the area. A few hurried calls on the satellite phone went some way to calming our nerves and justified the expense of our eBay purchase!

Poor weather and military training activity stopped all helicopter flights for the next two days. We were desperate to explore the surrounding hills and acclimatise further but had to sit all packed up and ready to leave at any minute should the helicopter appear so we passed the time playing the only game of cards we could remember between us and trying not to read all our books too quickly! We were shown incredible hospitality and fed royally by the staff of the camp who sensed our frustration in waiting as the days passed. We also shared the camp with a team of Czech climbers that were on their way to climb Khan Tengri (sadly a number of these climbers were killed shortly afterwards in some of the worst serac falls and avalanches that Khan Tengri has suffered for many years).

On the third day the helicopter finally arrived. The Czechs piled on and were whisked off to the Khan Tengri base camp. It returned with a team of Brits just as an enormous dust storm hit camp. The shock of the highly exciting landing was etched into their faces as they ran for cover towards the dining hut. The storm passed and at last it was our turn. We loaded all our kit into the belly of the MIG 8 helicopter. Together with the crew we numbered six, although some of the 'crew' were superfluous and had merely come along for the ride having never previously flown into Djungart.

25 minutes later the pilot shouted that we were at our designated co-ordinates and that we should point to our exact drop off spot for base camp. He touched the chopper down, rotors still running over head, our kit was unceremoniously thrown out and they were off, turning right over us 10 feet above and quickly disappearing back down the approach

valley. After three days of waiting and uncertainty, this was one of the most exhilarating moments of the expedition, touching down at our base camp (of which we had not seen any photos) and realizing that we were out there completely on our own for the next 16 days.

There wasn't much time to revel in this feeling as a wall of water was rapidly heading our way and about to descend on us! We quickly covered the bags with a tarp, threw a tent up and dived inside to wait out the storm – Welcome to Djungart!

Base camp (**Photo 1, Page 22**) was sited at the end of a rock ridge with a glacial valley on either side (**See map on Page 21**). When planning the expedition we had studied this map and chosen our base camp site for its proximity to these two valleys. Once there however the 1:200,000 scale of our only map was of little assistance. The terrain was considerably more challenging than we were equipped for, with vertical rock walls rising directly above our base camp and continuing up both valleys. We decided our best option was to reconnoiter these valleys with a view to setting up an advanced base camp from where we could climb to the summit of Peak 5318 (the highest peak in the area).

A heavy storm of sleet and rain put paid to any early start on our first day. We improved our soggy base camp, put up tarps and dug our toilet pit, quite a task in the soil covered moraine. Later that day, as we took our first steps up into the left hand valley, it soon became apparent that it was likely to be tough going; deep springy tuft grass, acres of groin high spiky plants and steep loose scree, with no animal paths to follow (apart from marmot routes between burrows!).

Following our brief look into the left valley we had a full day reconnaissance into the right valley. The terrain was similar to that of the left valley, rock walls (possibly a type of granite) with loose moraine and scree slopes below them, interspersed with large areas of the worst spiky plants imaginable! There were very few obvious places to put an Advanced Base Camp that were far enough up the valley, safe from potential rock fall, with room for a tent and available drinking water.

Having looked into both valleys we decided to establish an ABC in the left valley first, mainly because there were a few more places to pitch a tent (**Photo 2, Page 23**) and we had spotted at least one promising way up towards the ridge.

The next morning we were just leaving base camp when we spotted three Kyrgyz horsemen on the opposite bank. We took off our packs and waited for them to cross the river (possible only on horseback). Their approach came as something of a surprise to us as we had flown in by helicopter specifically because, as far as we knew, there was no other way in. They were obviously as amazed to see us as we were to see them. We communicated in pidgin Russian (their first language being Kyrgyz), offered them a brew (which they refused) and the last of our apples (Ingrid made the faux pas of giving the smallest apple to the leader!). The oldest, largest and clearly the leader of the three carried a rifle slung over his shoulder and insisted on seeing our passports and permits, although it was clear that he was not an official of any sort. Even his two companions

raised a wry smile when he asked to see our documents! In general they were friendly enough but were concerned that we might cross the Chinese border further up the valleys. Perhaps they thought this could bring possible trouble to the Djungart area and themselves as this was clearly on their regular hunting circuit.

Two days of load carrying later we had an established ABC. A long scree filled narrow gully with vertical walls appeared to offer a way up to a ridge, but we could not see what it lead to. Higher up the valley were hanging glaciers above steep walls, not options we could consider.

We spent the next couple of days exploring further up the left valley, we followed moraines most of the way, eventually ending tight up against walls on the right of the left valley head (**Photo 3, Page 24**) with Peak 5318 right above us, still out of sight and no viable way of approach for a lightly equipped team of two.

Our next foray was up the aforementioned scree filled gulley (**Photo 4, Page 25**). At last we were going upwards, all be it slowly, more like one step forwards two steps back on tottering rubble. We eventually reached the top, still surrounded by big walls leading to rock spires and pinnacles but no easier option or summit ridge as we had hoped for. We did get a view down a similar gully on the other side, apparently heading into the valley to the right of our base camp. This had a glacier entering it from the left but appeared to be another dead end. We descended back down the gully in a snow storm, which cleared enough to show ice green glacial pools far below and interesting peaks in adjoining areas of Djungart.

Having failed to even see Peak 5318, despite all our efforts, we decided to dismantle ABC, drop back to base camp and repeat the whole process in the right hand valley.

The way up the right valley was slightly easier than the left. Trial and error led us to follow the river all the way up to the glacier, skirting round scree and moraine rubble filled slopes until we reached our chosen spot, the only flattish grass patch just big enough for half a tent. Two hours later we'd excavated enough boulders and spiky plants for the other half of the tent, nothing was easy!

Our new ABC was high up on the left side of the valley on a sheltered spot between moraine ridges (**Photo 6, Page 27**). Our water source was a trickling run-off from the glacier higher up. We had pitched close to the wide gully which we thought must join the gully we had accessed from the other side (**Photo 5, Page 26**). The scenery was much the same as before, sizable rock walls above the main glacier with subsidiary glaciers joining it. Opposite our Advanced Base Camp was a wall set back and separated from the main glacier by moraine. It bore a resemblance to the North Face of Ben Nevis with some attractive lines (**Photo 7 Page 27**).

Higher up the valley, on the right, smaller glaciers flowed past rock walls to join the main flow (**Photo 8, Page 28**). The snow and ice conditions appeared to be poor, with evidence of recent avalanches and rock fall.

Although we were surrounded by interesting possibilities the conditions forced us to leave them for another trip. We could however still explore the rest of the valley up towards the Chinese border. We followed a prominent moraine ridge for several kilometers passing spectacularly steep rock walls, however it wasn't until we had traveled for a good 3 hours that we had our first glimpse of Peak 5318. It was impressive, steep walls rising out of the glaciers with what appeared to be two steep couloirs up the North face leading right up to the summit slopes (**Photo 10, Page 29**). As we carried on under the peak its vertical South side appeared with another glacier running down from a ridge. To its right this ridge would probably be directly above our high point in the left valley. Spectacular though it was there was no possibility of us ascending any of the visible lines, either ice or rock, given the conditions and our lack of gear. This was a disheartening realization.

As we continued towards the Chinese border we spotted, through binoculars, what appeared to be a large square concrete marker on a shoulder overlooking the valley. We decided to go no further, not wishing to chance any encounter with Chinese border guards, however unlikely that was.

Our expedition was effectively over. We took a good photographic record, slides and some digital images, broke camp and returned back to our base camp to chill out and rest before the helicopter arrived. Chill out was not the phrase as temperatures at base camp over the next few days reached 25-30 degrees centigrade, scorching! We attempted to explore another connecting valley, from where the horsemen had come, but our attempts to cross the river were thwarted, the water levels were just too high and the flow too fast.

Having finished our food supplies, read all our books and got completely fed up of our only card game, we were very relieved to hear the helicopter coming up the valley but suffered a few minutes of angst as it flew right over us and disappeared. We could only presume that they had gone for a look-see at our expense! There were a few additional passengers who jumped out for pictures of Djungart, as did most of the crew!

We had expected to fly back to At Jailoo, however with no say in the matter for us it transpired that we were going back to the main helicopter base at Karkara, where Anatoli was already waiting with his car. Flying to Karkara meant that our return road trip would take about half the time of the approach road journey into At Jailoo. The flight was a fantastic 35 minutes, hanging out of the MIG's portholes snapping every photo opportunity of the ridges and valleys below, what a way to travel!

We planned to overnight back at the Alplager in Karakol. However Anatoli had a surprise up his sleeve. We'd commented on the honey sellers lining the road and he promised we'd stop for 'The Best Honey' later. He suddenly pulled down a side lane which became a heavily rutted track, severely testing the lack of suspension on his battered mark II VW golf heavily laden with our expedition kit!. At the end of the track a gate opened on to a rustic farm, his brother's place.

We were made to feel like honored relatives, plied with plov and chai accompanied by jam, honey, milk, butter and cream, all produce of their land. We were in heaven given that our last meal had consisted of a boiled cough sweet, which was all we had left the night before! This was followed by a tour around the back hills guided by his daughters who were as sure footed as mountain goats and totally at one with nature. We picked fungi, berries and tree sap to eat, a fantastically rewarding and enlightening experience. The bird life was also incredibly rewarding, with eagles circling overhead and a beautifully colored Hoopoe bird right on our path.

Anatoli dropped us at the Alplager in Karakol that evening. The local family and kids were delighted to see us again and insisted we join them for lunch the following day before leaving. A banquet of water melon, apricots, plumbs, homemade jam, bread and cakes all washed down with endless cups of chai under the shade of a tree. Again the hospitality we were shown was truly humbling and one of the most cherished memories of our trip.

The final leg back to Bishkek along the North shore of lake Issyk-Kul was uneventful, which was a miracle given the night time road conditions and lack of road lighting or oncoming vehicle headlights! It was a tiring five and a half hour drive for Igor, who had only just driven over from Bishkek that morning. Arriving at midnight we were too late to find flat accommodation so checked in to Vladimir Komissarov's new venture, the 'Alpinist Hotel', for our first night back in Bishkek.

The final few days were spent soaking up the atmosphere of the city of Bishkek, sight seeing and partying with Ingrid's friends.

### **3.0 ORGANISATION**

#### **3.1 Political Situation and Travel Advice for Kyrgystan**

Politically Kyrgystan is a small, independent republic previously of little interest to the rest of the world. However, following troubles in Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, there is now a coalition air base, the US portion of which is likely to remain there permanently. Publicised terrorist attacks between 1999 and 2001, with incidents involving Western hostages, focussed on the area to the South and West of Osh, an entirely different part of the country to the Djungart region. There have been no reports of specific terrorist threats to British Nationals in or visiting Kyrgystan over the last few years.

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)) provides regularly updated travel advice for Kyrgystan. It is advisable to check this when planning an expedition as insurance cover may not be effective in areas where travel is not recommended by the Foreign Office.

#### **3.2 International Flights**

With a limited time frame the most straight forward means of getting to Kyrgystan from the UK is with British Mediterranean Airlines (a franchise of British Airways) who fly from London Heathrow direct to Bishkek's Manas Airport a couple of times a week. The only disadvantage with this is their low baggage allowance (23kg hold baggage and 6kg hand baggage) and their excessive excess baggage charges (£17 - £23 per kilo). All customer services for British Mediterranean Airlines are handled by British Airways, but British Airways has no discretion to allocate additional baggage allowance. British Airways Customer Services did their best to be helpful, but despite numerous attempts to arrange for some extra baggage provision prior to departure the best they could come up with was to advise us to plead our case on the day and hope we met with a sympathetic ear at check in. We were lucky at Heathrow but got heavily stung in Bishkek on our return journey.

If time is not a constraint then Turkish Airlines fly to Bishkek via Istanbul and Uzbekistan Airways fly via Tashkent. There are also numerous airlines that fly regularly to Almaty in Kazakhstan, which is about a 4 hour road journey from Bishkek. Although prices for flights to Almaty can be cheaper, transit visa arrangements can be problematic and costly.

#### **3.3 Permission and Permits**

##### **Kyrgyz Visas**

Tourist Visas for Kyrgystan were arranged through the Kyrgyz Embassy in London ([www.kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk](http://www.kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk)) in the month prior to departure (the Embassy usually requires seven working days to process Visas). Invitation Letters are now not officially required but it is advisable to give the name of the Kyrgyz tourist or mountaineering

organization providing supporting logistics on your visa application form (in our case we used ITMC). Although it is now possible to obtain a one month Visa on arrival at Manas Airport in Bishkek it is probably easier and less hassle to obtain one in advance.

### **Permits**

The only permits necessary for climbing in the Djungart area were Border Zone Permits (Djungart lies on the Kyrgystan/Chinese border). These were arranged by ITMC Tien Shan in Bishkek and cost US\$10 per person. ITMC require one month's notification in advance to arrange these permits.

### **3.4 Languages**

Kyrgyz is the first state language and Russian the second state language. Russian appears to be more widely spoken in Bishkek and Kyrgyz more widely spoken in smaller towns and throughout the countryside. Some of the young adults in Bishkek speak English as it is increasingly being taught in schools and higher education colleges. Although it is usually possible to find someone who speaks English in Bishkek, once out of Bishkek this is less likely. In general the Kyrgyz and Russians are very friendly people and making even a small amount of effort to speak their language warms people to you. My limited Russian was indispensable for communication and a few basic words of Kyrgyz went a long way in breaking the ice.

### **3.5 Support in Kyrgystan**

Virtually all the arrangements for internal travel and accommodation in Kyrgystan were arranged via e-mail from the UK through a combination of ITMC in Bishkek and personal contacts from previous visits.

### **3.6 Accommodation**

#### **Bishkek**

While in Bishkek we stayed predominantly in small private flats which we rented at an approximate average cost of US\$15 a night. The only exception to this was on return to Bishkek after the expedition when we arrived at midnight, a day earlier than anticipated. On this occasion we used the new 'Alpinist' Hotel part owned by Vladimir Komissarov of ITMC. This hotel charges US\$40 a night for a clean, high quality twin room with western style en-suite bathroom and the price includes breakfast. It is located at 113 Panfilov Street, a 10-15 minute walk or 5-10 minute taxi ride from Panfilov Park, the Ala-Too Square, TSUM department store and main Centre of Bishkek.

#### **Ala Archa**

The hostel at the Alp Lager cost us about US\$5 for a cramped double room with dodgy light, it is over looked by a new alpine hotel to attract the tourists at US\$80 a night!

## **Karakol**

In Karakol we stayed at the charming Alplager, a triangular, wooden, Swiss chalet style building on the outskirts of town. The Alplager is run by a very friendly and hospitable Kyrgyz family, whose young children not only spoke English but endeavored to teach us better Russian and some Kyrgyz! The Alplager charges US\$6 per person per night and they will provide meals at additional cost if requested. There are apple and apricot trees in the grounds and their home made jam ‘verenya’ is to be highly recommended. The outbuildings of the Alplager also house an entire store of antique climbing gear left over from the era of Soviet mountaineering training camps, a bit like a Plas y Brenin that time forgot!

### **3.7 Food & Provisions**

Apart from the few items we stuffed in pockets from the UK, the majority of expedition food supplies were bought in Bishkek mainly from the Turkish owned ‘Beta Stores’. Most fresh vegetables and domestic or hardware items were bargained for in the city’s ‘Osh Bazar’ (see Appendix 8.2 for full expedition food list). Fruit, particularly melons are cheap and in plentiful supply during the summer and are sold along the roadsides between Bishkek and Karakol. It is always worth stocking up on additional water melons and fresh fruit as these are much appreciated at more remote military and border zone posts and are a gesture which should ensure problem-free passage, the odd packet of cigarettes can also be thrown in for good measure.

An average meal out in Bishkek of reasonable standard cost about US\$8 – US\$10 a head including drinks.

### **3.8 Transport and Logistics**

#### **Bishkek to Ala Archa Alplager (42km)**

From Bishkek to the Alp Lager in the Ala Archa National Park is approximately a 45 minute drive. A local taxi will take you there for about US\$12 and you must cover the cost of park entrance fees (US\$3 for a car, driver and two passengers). You can arrange for the taxi to pick you up at the same place at a designated date and time, again you will have to cover the cost of the taxi and driver’s park entrance fees.

#### **Bishkek to Karakol (392km)**

There is a reasonably passable road between Bishkek and Karakol via either the north or the south shores of Lake Issyk-Kul. The north shore via Balykchy is more developed and a better road but there is more traffic. The south road is not as good but doesn’t get as much traffic and the road runs closer to the lake (good for a swim stop!). Both roads are perfectly passable without the need for a four wheel drive but will take at least 5 hours.



### **Karakol to At Jailoo (approx. 180km)**

There is a mixture of poor quality road and rough mountain track between Karakol and At Jailoo and at least a four wheel drive vehicle is essential. The journey takes about five and a half hours on a good run and is exhaustingly bumpy! We organized this leg of the journey through ITMC.

### **Helicopter**

We made bookings for the helicopter in advance through ITMC who only charge what they are charged by the helicopter company (it would be difficult to go through the helicopter company directly unless you are a completely fluent Russian speaker). On the outbound journey we flew from At Jailoo to Djungart (approx. 25 minutes) and on the return journey we flew from Djungart to Karkara (approx 35 minutes). When chartering a helicopter you are expected to pay each way costs for single journeys as the helicopter has to fly to or from it's base to ensure your part of the journey. The helicopter was a MIG 8 that would have comfortably seated at least a dozen people with expedition luggage. Safety was an interesting non-feature as the crew lit up cigarettes whilst refueling and there was no sign of a parachute in case of emergency! The cost of the helicopter finally worked out at about US\$1435 per hour, this rate varies per year and is dictated by the helicopter company. There now appears to be 3 helicopters in Kyrgystan all owned and operated by different companies, prices however don't seem to vary between them.

## **3.9 Equipment**

### **Emergency Communications**

Motorola Iridium Satellite Phone model 9500

### **Emergency Evacuation Arrangements**

In the event of an emergency we would have used the Satellite phone to contact ITMC who also operate Kyrgystan's Mountain Rescue.

### **Medical**

Comprehensive medical kit including antibiotics (Ciprofloxacin) and strong pain killers (Dihydrocodene Tartrate 30mg)

### **Navigation**

Garmin Geko 301 GPS  
Avocet watch Altimeters  
Compasses

## **Climbing**

Light Alpine rack including some ice screws  
Two Mammut Phoenix 60m 8mm super dry ropes  
Telescopic ski poles (essential when carrying heavy loads over moraine, which we ended up doing a lot of!)

## **Clothing**

Normal Alpine clothing was taken including a full set of waterproofs, down jackets and plastic boots.

## **Camping**

For Base Camp we used a two person Ultra Quasar tent and for Advance Base Camps we used a North Face Mountain 25.

## **Cooking and Gas**

Having arranged the purchase of gas canisters from Bishkek in advance we took an MSR Wind Pro and an MSR Superfly stove with MSR BlackLite cooking pots.

We used two types of canister gas, both Korean make; Alpgas (liquefied petroleum gas) and Kovia (a propane gas mix). The latter was quicker to cook on and thus preferable. Both came in 280ml canisters.

We originally purchased thirty five new canisters at US\$6 per canister, reckoning on just less than one and a half canisters per person per day for twenty five mountain days (this assumed we may have to melt snow for water). We actually used only eleven canisters, two in Ala Archa and nine in Djungart. We sold the remaining canisters to ITMC at a slight loss, making our average cost of gas used an expensive US\$8 per canister. Refilled canisters are sometimes available and are cheaper but not necessarily reliable. Vehicle petrol can be purchased for multifuel stoves but tends to be very dirty.

### **3.10 Weather**

By all accounts it had been a very wet summer in Bishkek and there was a lot more snow on the peaks of Ala Archa than was normal for the time of year. This was not snow left over from the spring, but from recent snow fall in the few weeks preceding our arrival. It was also very warm, which meant that the quality of this snow was poor and on acclimatisation on peak Uchitel (4527m) the snow towards the top was mid thigh deep and not frozen.

In Djungart it also seemed exceptionally warm for the time of year. There were regular storms from late afternoon towards early evening sometimes continuing overnight, but even at our Advanced Base Camps this meant rain and sleet rather than snow. The

freezing level appeared to be above 4000m. The only snow we encountered on the ground was old rotten snow from avalanche debris. Uppers slopes appeared unstable and there was visible avalanche activity.

### **3.11 Water**

In Bishkek we drank bottled water or boiled tap water and in Karakol we drank bottled water only.

In Ala Archa we drank from a fresh waterfall near the Ratsek Hut on the Ak Sai glacier. There is a stream of fresh water but with over 30 tents at this camp during the week we were there this was likely to be contaminated and not suitable for drinking without treating or boiling.

In At Jailoo we drank straight from a fresh water stream, the water tasted good and we suffered no ill consequences. The woman who runs the camp there said it was mineral water which remains at a constant 5° C throughout the year even when it is minus 30° C in the winter. She is very proud of the camp location and the quality of the water and is very environmentally aware and pollution conscious regarding waste disposal and water usage.

At our Djungart base camp we drank from fresh water which also appeared to be spring water and there seemed to be no need to treat or boil it.

We found more limited sources of fresh water at our Advance Base Camps, both of which were positioned on moraine quite high above the main glacial flow. There were some trickles of water but these had a habit of drying up.

### **3.12 Waste Disposal, Environmental and Social Impact**

In Djungart we dug deep toilet pits away from fresh water supplies and completely buried them before departure. We also buried vegetable waste. All plastic, paper, bottles and cans we took out with us and disposed of them in bins in Bishkek (from where they are usually recycled by the local population).

We believe that our environmental and social impact to the Djungart area was minimal. The area is generally uninhabited, we saw no one apart from three horsemen on their hunting rounds and we left nothing apart from a few cairns.

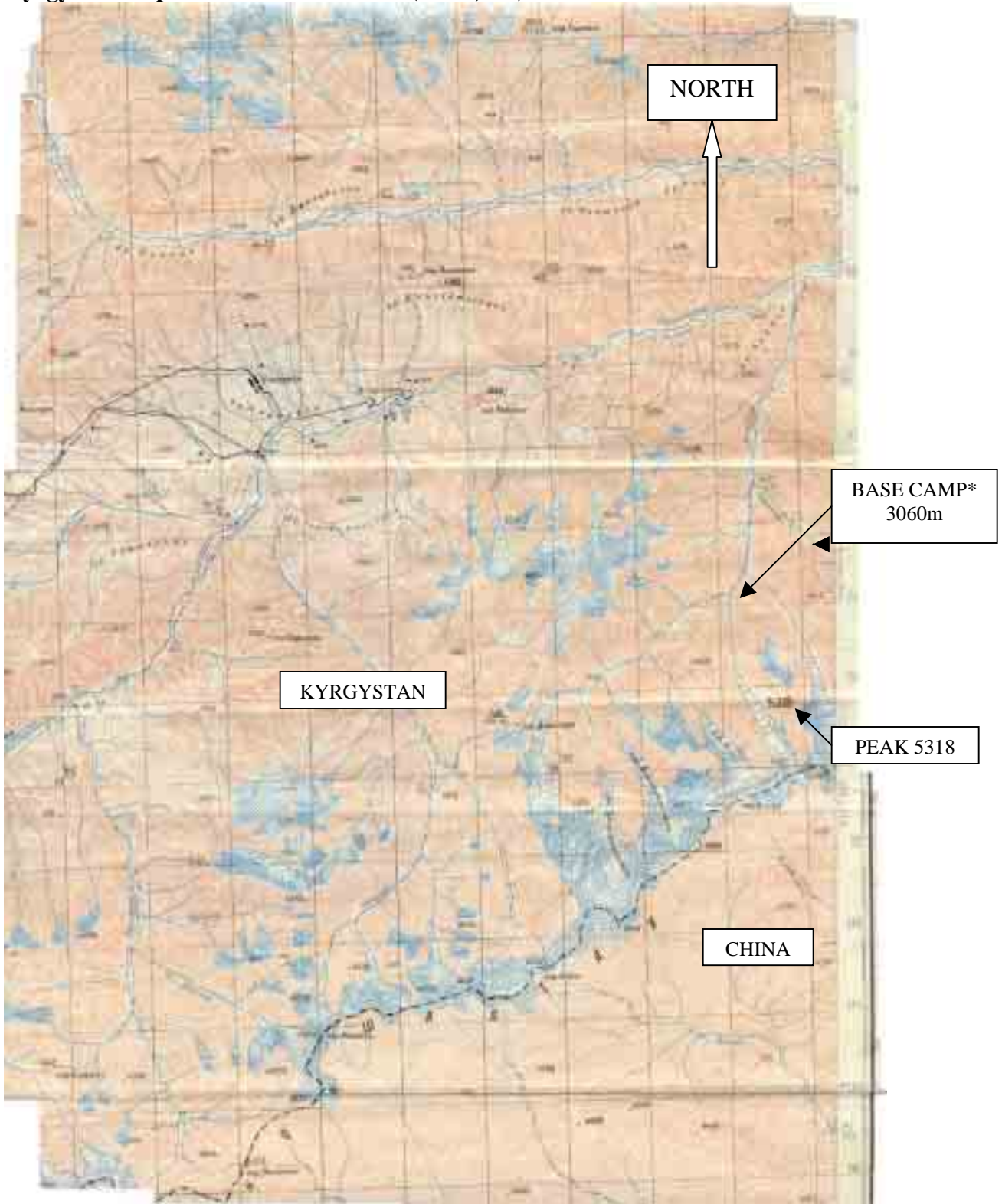
**4.0 EXPEDITION ACCOUNTS****Financial Summary of Expedition Accounts**

US\$1.75 to £

	<b>US\$ (Group Expenses)</b>	<b>(£) (Expenses Per Person)</b>
Annual Mountaineering Travel Insurance		190
Airfare (British Medeterranian Airlines)		657
Visa		66
Excess Baggage (10kg)	340	
Bishkek Airport Tax (US\$ 10 Per Person)	20	
Border Zone Permits (US\$10 Per Person)	20	
Sat Phone SIM, Network & Call Charges	100	
Total Road Transport	460	
Helicopter Transport to and from Base Camp	3000	
Total Food Costs	270	
Gas Canisters	90	
Total Accommodation Costs	160	
Totals in currency	4460	913
Totals in £ Sterling for group	2549	1826
<b>Total cost of trip for group in £</b>		<b>4375</b>
		<b>Group Income (£)</b>
MEF		650
BMC		700
Expedition Member Contribution (£1512.50 per person)		3025
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>4375</b>

#### 4.0 MAP OF DJUNGART

**Kyrgystan Map Number: K-44-XIX (1:200,000)**



\*Base Camp Co-ordinates: N41° 44' 32.6 E078° 56' 52.5

**6.0 PHOTOGRAPHS**

**Photo 1: Looking up the Right Valley from Base Camp (3060m)**





**Photo 2: Walls on the West Face of the Left Valley above Advanced Base Camp (3545m)**



**Photo 3: High Point reached from Left Valley (approx 4000m) looking South towards the Chinese Border.**





**Photo 4: Graham ascending gully from Left Valley**



**Photo 5: Right Valley connecting gully, Ingrid load carrying!**





**Photo 6: Right Valley Advanced Camp (3500m) looking North towards Base Camp**



**Photo 7: North Face of the Ben? West side of Right Valley (approx 3500m)**



**Photo 8: Glaciers joining main flow from West side of Right Valley**



**Photo 9: The West Flank of the Right Valley from our High Point (approx 4000m) looking towards the Chinese Border.**





**Photo 10:** North Face of Peak 5318 as seen from about 4000m from moraine of Right Valley



**Photo 11:** East Face of Peak 5318 viewed from highest point reached on Right Valley



## 7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### UK

Many thanks to the **Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council and the UK Sports Council** for their financial assistance, without which we simply couldn't have afforded to undertake this expedition, particularly when two team members dropped out and we were left as a team of only two.

Additional thanks must also go to the following individuals and companies for their assistance with equipment and logistical organisation:

Mike Sharp (**High Latitude Services** in Sheffield) for his advice and assistance with satellite phone services.

Cheryl at **Ffestiniog Travel** for sorting us out with a good deal on the air tickets.

Sidsel Woxen (Ingrid's mum) for paying Ingrid's air fare!

**First Ascent** as employer for allowing Ingrid the time off and for use of Black Diamond, MSR, Thermarest and Platypus equipment.

**Terra Nova Equipment Ltd** for loan of an Ultra Quasar Tent.

**DMM** for donation of **Mamut** ropes and equipment.

**Crux** and **POD** for loan of rucksacks.

**POD Imaging** for scanning slides.

**Mountain Hardware** for loan of technical clothing.

### KYRGYSTAN

Ayana Hamisova for her support in every aspect of organization before, during and after the expedition!

Vladimir Kommissarov for the original idea of exploring Djungart and his encouragement and enthusiasm in our efforts to do so.

Igor our thoughtful driver who turned up with water melon just when we needed it!

**ITMC Tien Shan** for permit and transport arrangements.

The staff at the At Jailoo camp for the sympathy and lovely food whilst we awaited our helicopter flight, we were sorry not to stay there again on our return from Djungart.

## **8.0 USEFUL ADDRESSES AND CONTACT DETAILS**

### **ITMC Tien-Shan**

1A Molodaia Gvardia St.  
Bishkek 720010

Tel: (996) 312 651404  
Tel: (996) 312 651221  
Fax: (996) 312 650747  
E-mail: [itmc@elcat.kg](mailto:itmc@elcat.kg)  
Website: [www.itmc.centralasia.kg](http://www.itmc.centralasia.kg)

### **Alpinist Hotel**

113 Panfilov Street  
Bishkek  
Kyrgyzstan  
Tel (996) 312 441522  
E-mail: [alpinist@elcat.kg](mailto:alpinist@elcat.kg)  
Website: [www.alpinist/hotels/centralasia.kg](http://www.alpinist/hotels/centralasia.kg)

### **British Embassy in Kyrgystan**

There is no British Embassy in Bishkek. The nearest British Embassy to Bishkek is in Almaty, Kazakhstan. For consular advice or emergency assistance in Bishkek the contact is:

Michael Astoparthis  
British Honorary Consul  
c/o Fatboys Café  
104 Chui Avenue  
Bishkek 720040

Tel: (996) 312 680815  
Mobile Tel: (996) 312 584245  
E-Mail: [fatboys@elcat.kg](mailto:fatboys@elcat.kg)

### **Kyrgyz Embassy in London (for visa arrangements)**

[www.kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk](http://www.kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk)

### **British Foreign Office (for travel advice)**

[www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

## 9.0 **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Forbidden Mountains – The Most Beautiful Mountains in Russia and Central Asia by Paola Pozzolini Sicouri and Vladimir Kopylov published by Indutech

Odyssey Guide Book to Kyrgystan by Rowan Stewart and Susie Weldon (ISBN 962-217-675-5)

Lonley Planet Central Asia by John King, John Noble and Andrew Humphreys (ISBN 0-86442-358-6)

Mountaineering Possibility of Kyrgystan by Vladimir Komissarov (available from the ITMC Tien Shan office in Bishkek and Ingrid Crossland in the UK)

**Articles and expedition report summaries about climbing in Kyrgystan published in various issues of:**

Berghaus/High Mountain Info

British Alpine Journal

American Alpine Journal



## 10.0 APPENDICIES

### 10.1 Itinerary

- 19<sup>th</sup> July 2004 Depart London Heathrow Airport at 14.00  
20<sup>th</sup> July 2004 Arrive Bishkek 04.20. ITMC check and pay for arrangements, change money  
21<sup>st</sup> July 2004 Shop in Bishkek for food for Ala Archa. Ala Archa pm, Alplager for night (2000m)  
22<sup>nd</sup> July 2004 Ala Archa – Walk up to Ratsek Hut with full kit, food etc. Camped on moraine at 3300m  
23<sup>rd</sup> July 2004 Ala Archa – Bad weather, tent bound. Rain at 3300m. Lots of snow on peaks.  
24<sup>th</sup> July 2004 Ala Archa – Climbed Peak Uchitel (4527m). Weather mixed, snow storm mid afternoon  
25<sup>th</sup> July 2004 Ala Archa – Walk up Ak Sai glacier to 3725m, rain and sleet storms pm. Slept at 3300m  
26<sup>th</sup> July 2004 Ala Archa – Walked down to Alplager where we were picked up. Back to Bishkek  
27<sup>th</sup> July 2004 Shopping and expedition organizing in Bishkek  
28<sup>th</sup> July 2004 Left Bishkek 8am, via south shore of lake Issyk-Kul to Karakol. Arrived Karakol 2.45pm  
29<sup>th</sup> July 2004 Jeep from Karakol to At Jailoo (5 ½ hours rough roads). Camped at At Jailoo (2655m)  
30<sup>th</sup> July 2004 At Jailoo – Poor weather prevented helicopter flight  
31<sup>st</sup> July 2004 At Jailoo – Fantastic clear weather. Why no helicopter flight? No information  
1<sup>st</sup> August 2004 At Jailoo – Mixed weather, dust storm. Last of 4 flights out. Djungart 5.30pm (3060m)  
2<sup>nd</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Rain am, snow on tops. Established BC. Walk up to 3300m on left valley.  
3<sup>rd</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Walk up right valley on moraine to high point of 3725m. Slept at BC 3060m  
4<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Walk up left valley on moraine to high point of 3650m. Slept at BC 3060m  
5<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Carried one load up left valley. Established left ABC at 3545m. Back to BC.  
6<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Second carry to left ABC. Slept at left ABC (3545m)  
7<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Storm am. Rain at ABC. Climbed gully to 4150m. Snow storm on decent  
8<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Weather clear and sunny. Walk up left glacial moraine to 4000m. Slept ABC  
9<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Dismantled left ABC and walked back to Base Camp. Slept at Base Camp  
10<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Rest day at Base Camp (3060m)  
11<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Walk up right valley (heavy packs). Set up right ABC at 3500m  
12<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Walk up right valley moraine to 4000m, identified Peak 5318. Back to ABC  
13<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Dismantled right ABC. Walked down to Base Camp. Slept at Base Camp  
14<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Rest day at Base Camp (3060m)  
15<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Thwarted attempt to cross river and explore other valley. Slept at Base Camp  
16<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Djungart – Packed up Base Camp  
17<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Helicopter from Djungart to Karkara. Drove Karkara – Karakol. Karakol Alplager  
18<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Left Karakol in afternoon. Drove to Bishkek. Arrived Bishkek about 11.30pm  
19<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Bishkek  
20<sup>th</sup> August 2004 Bishkek  
21<sup>st</sup> August 2004 Bishkek  
22<sup>nd</sup> August 2004 Depart Bishkek 07.25. Arrive London Heathrow 13.00 (approx 10 hour flight)

**10.2 Food list**

Packs of Rama Noodles	16 Packets	Beta Stores
Pured Potatoes	1 Large Packet (8 portions)	Bishkek corner shop
Pasta	4 Packets of 500g	Beta Stores
Rice	1 Large Packet (8 portions)	Bishkek corner shop
Bread	4 Loaves	Beta Stores
Cheese (3 types)	3 Blocks	Beta Stores
Soft Cheese	4 Packets of Kiri Cheese	Beta Stores
Biscuits (mixed sweet & savory)	6 Packets	Beta Stores
Ginger Cake Biscuits	3 Packets	Beta Stores
Sesame flapjack	4 Blocks	Beta Stores
Rizzer Sport	4 bars	Beta Stores
Other Assorted Chocolate	10 bars	Beta Stores
Assorted Sweets	0.5kg	Beta Stores
<b>Fish:</b>		
Tins of Tuna	4 Cans	Beta Stores
Sardines in Tomato Sauce	1 Tin	Beta Stores
Herring in Dill and Mustard Sauce	1 Tin	Beta Stores
Salmon in Mustard and Honey Sauce	1 Tin	Beta Stores
<b>Fruit &amp; Vegetables:</b>		
Onions	1kg	Osh Bazar
Carrots	1kg	Osh Bazar
Baby Cucumbers	1kg	Osh Bazar
Peppers	1kg	Osh Bazar
Cabbages	3 Medium Sized	Osh Bazar
Lemons	2	Osh Bazar
Dates	0.5kg	Osh Bazar
Pistachios	0.5kg	Osh Bazar
Apricot Kernels	0.5kg	Osh Bazar
Roasted Peanuts	0.5kg	Osh Bazar
Apples	1 Bucket!	En route to Karakol
Water Melons	2	En route to Karakol
Yellow Melons	2	En route to Karakol
Fresh Herbs	1 large bunch Coriander	Osh Bazar
Tins of Fruit (Pineapple, Lychee, Mango)	3 Tins	Beta Stores
Tins of Tomatoes	2 Tins	Beta Stores
<b>Drinks:</b>		
Fruit Juice (Orange, Apple)	4 1L Cartons	Beta Stores
Tea	1 Packet Beta Tea Bags	Beta Stores
Coffee	1 Box of 25 Sachets	Beta Stores
Hazelnut Cappuccino	1 Box of 8 Sachets	Beta Stores
Cappuccino	1 Box of 8 Sachets	Beta Stores
<b>Condiments:</b>		
Raspberry Jam	1 Jar	Beta Stores
Sugar Cubes	1 Small Packet	Beta Stores
Condensed Milk	1 Tin	Beta Stores
Salt	100g	Bishkek corner shop
Black Pepper	1 Small Packet	Beta Stores
Mayonnaise	1 Packet	Beta Stores

Kyrgystan Djungart Expedition 2004 – MEF 04/39

**Domestic Items:**

Tarpaulin	1 Large Size, 1 Medium Size	Osh Bazar
Washing Up Bowl	1 Medium	Osh Bazar
Heavy Duty Large Woven Food Sacs	4	Osh Bazar
Rubbish bags	1 Roll	Beta Stores
Toilet Paper	8 Rolls	Beta Stores
Scrubbing sponges for washing up	2	Osh Bazar
Twine	2 rolls	Beta Stores

**From UK:**

Couscous	8 Packets various flavors	UK
Mexican Rice	2 Packets	UK
Tube of Pesto Sauce	1 Tube	UK
Soup	2 Packets	UK
Herbal Tea Bags	3 Boxes mixed flavors	UK
Soluble vitamin C tablets	2 tubes	UK
Veggie Oxo Cubes	2 boxes	UK
Power Energy Gel	6 packets	UK
Cigarette lighters	3	UK
Toblerone	Pack of 6 medium sized bars	UK Duty Free