



University of Bristol Tajikistan Expedition 2005

Expedition Report

For Spen & Ian

Abstract

A team of eight climbers, made up of both current and former members of the University of Bristol Mountaineering Club, went to the Fedchenko glacier region of the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan, Central Asia, in summer 2005 for a six and a half week expedition.

Our objectives were:

- To porter our gear up from the head of the Vanj valley to establish a Base Camp at the Abdukagor Pass at an altitude of 5050m.
- To explore and assess the future and wider mountaineering possibilities of the region, undertaking a series of climbs across the area, including some first ascents and British first ascents.

- To continue from the Abdukagor Pass up the Fedchenko Glacier and establish a second Base Camp at the foot of Peak 26 Bakinshikh Kommisarov.
- To attempt a new route on the North Face of Peak 26 Bakinshikh Kommisarov.

We were successful in completing all of our objectives except the last. Our two strongest climbers, Simon Spencer-Jones and Ian Hatcher, set off to attempt to climb part of the North Face of Peak 26 Bakinshikh Kommisarov before joining the ridge and completing a traverse of the Peak Revolution massif. However, after leaving early on Wednesday July 13, they were not seen again. The rest of the group subsequently safely descended back down the Abdukagor Glacier to the Vanj valley and to the capital, Dushanbe.



Rob & Ed pause to enjoy the view descending the Abdukagor glacier

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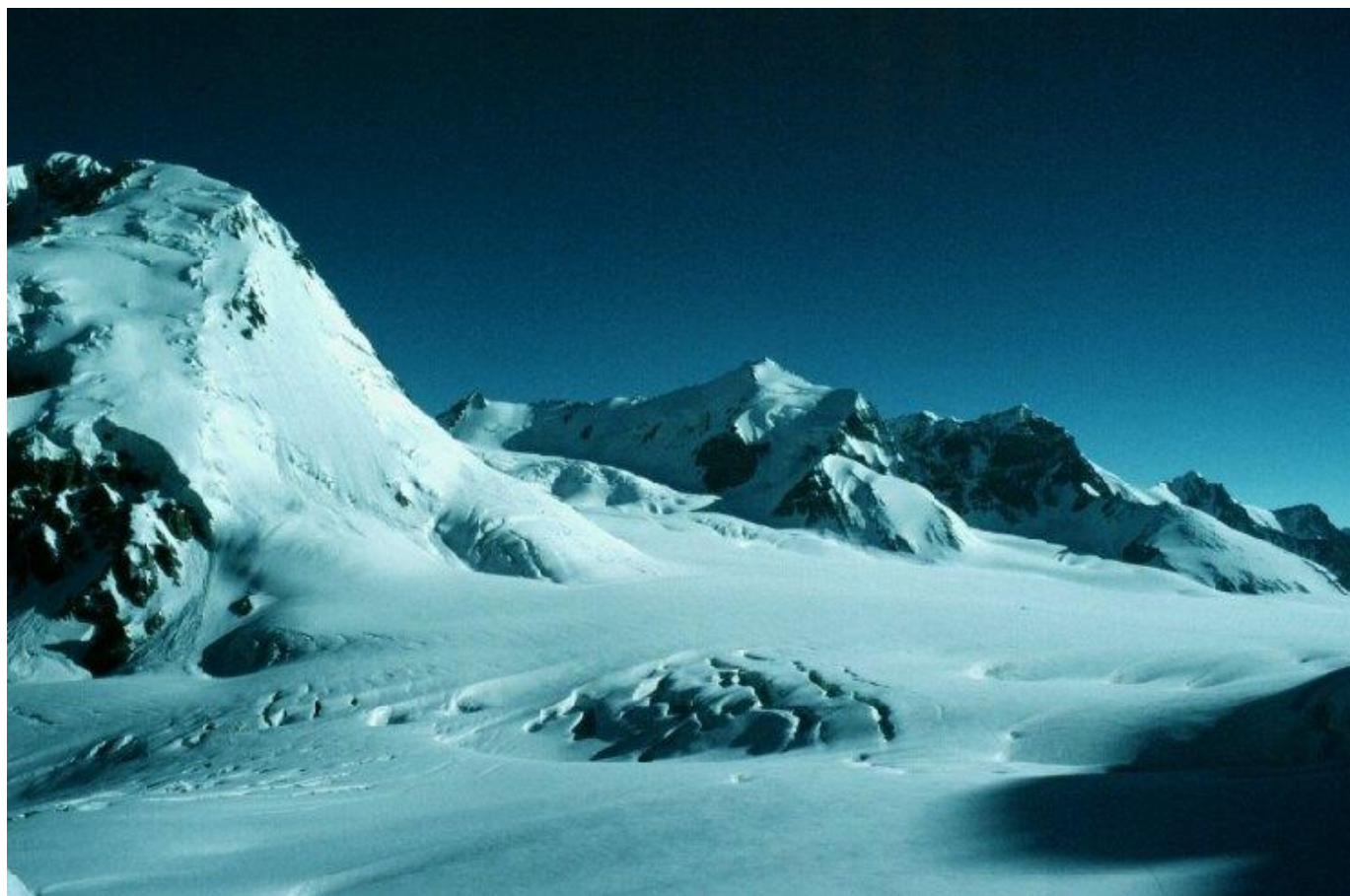
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Introduction

As a young group of mountaineers of varying experience, we wanted to go to Tajikistan because it was felt that it represented a very different, new, unexplored and a certainly challenging destination. The Pamir Mountains appeared to present us with a great opportunity not only for exciting climbing at high altitude, but also with some measure of exploration given the very small number of expeditions to the region and the lack of information available. Four of the team had climbed in Bolivia together two years ago, and for them, this trip offered an exciting progression in terms of the planning and organisation required and the sheer remoteness of the area. At the same time, our initial investigations into our proposed destination suggested that there would be sufficient climbing at an accessible grade to give a

good introduction to high altitude mountaineering for those less experienced members.

We quickly settled on the Fedchenko glacier region as offering the greatest possibilities, being high and remote with a huge number of climbing possibilities, yet sufficiently accessible to be within the remit of a six week trip. Research both online and at the British Alpine Club established that the region has been rarely visited with the exception of several 7000m peaks to the north, Peaks Communism, Lenin and Korzhenovskaya. The only documented visit of a British team to the area was from an Imperial College London team in 1992. Their expedition report was very encouraging, demonstrating the region and the climbing to be fairly accessible, and giving broad scope for further exploration.



View across the Abdukagor Pass & Base Camp I from the Peak Bronwen Couloir

Expedition Members



Simon Spencer-Jones (26), Expedition Leader

‘Spen’ was an omnipresent former President of the University of Bristol Mountaineering Club (UBMC), having spent nine years doing two back-to-back degrees, the second in Medicine which saw him qualify in June.



Amy Marshall (24), Medical Officer

Amy graduated from The University of Edinburgh with a degree in Fine Art before gaining a PGCE at Bristol. During her year in Bristol she was President of the UBMC. She is now an art teacher in Scotland.



Ian Hatcher (26), Equipment and Consumables

Ian was another Committee member of the UBMC during his time at Bristol and went on to graduate in 2001 as a Mechanical Engineer, subsequently staying on in the city to live and work.



Rob Lavin (27), Contingency and Contacts

Rob left Bristol in 2000 with an Aeronautical Engineering degree. Having recently moved north to Lancaster, he now divides his time between climbing and getting excited over all manner of things that fly.



Ed Bailey (22), Secretary

Ed is the last remaining student amongst the expedition members, having just completed his third year of Veterinary Sciences. He was yet another President of the UBMC, in its award-winning year of 2004-5.



James Byrne (21), Fundraising

James graduated from Bristol in 2004 with a Biological Sciences degree. Having spent the last year in Bristol, James is now planning his next trip, heading to Yosemite with several other UBMC members next year.



Sam Smith (23), Treasurer

Sam completed a degree in Physics in 2004 and, following a year off preparing for the expedition and working as a care assistant, is now heading to Swansea to study Medicine.



Stevo Nicholls (22), Logistics

Stevo graduated in June 2005 with a degree in Geographical Sciences. He was Equipment Secretary of the UBMC in 2004-5 and is currently avoiding getting a proper job by making plans for future travels.

Each member of the team had considerable climbing experience before going into this expedition. Some of the highlights are listed below:



Training in Scotland, January 2005

Spen:

Multiple Scottish winter and Alpine summer and winter seasons, climbing up to E4 trad rock, Scottish VI and WI6, Alpine ED. Notable ascents: Kyrgyzstan - Khan Tengri (7010m) W Ridge TD+/ED (solo, unsupported). Bolivia: Pequeno Alpamayo (5410m) SE face D+; Ancohuama (6427m) W face AD+. Alps: Salbitzijen W ridge ED1, Aiguille Dibona, Voie Maddier TD, Mont Blanc via Frenedo Spur D+. SPA, summer ML, MIA training.

Amy:

Multiple Scottish winter and Alpine summer and winter seasons, climbing up to trad rock E1, Scottish IV and WI4, Alpine TD. Notable ascents: Kyrgyzstan – Mailina (5825m) N Ridge AD. Bolivia – as Simon. Alps – Aiguille de Sialouze Voie Livanos TD+; Barre des Ecrins S Pillar TD. SPA, summer ML.

Ian:

Multiple Scottish winters and Alpine summers, climbing up to E1 trad rock, Alpine D. Notable ascents: Bolivia – Illimani AD; Sajama (6549m) AD (solo).

Rob

Multiple Scottish winters and alpine summers. Climbing up to Trad rock E1, Scottish IV and WI5, Alpine Difficile. Notable ascents: Alps - Pigne d'Arolla (3796m), N Face, AD+/D-.; Bolivia - Pequeno Alpamayo (5410), D+.; Scotland - Invernookie, III, 4; Mirror Direct, IV, 4.

Ed:

Scottish winter and Alpine summer experience. Trad rock up to E1, Alpine Difficile. Notable ascents: Alps - Aiguille de Sialouze south ridge traverse D; Barre des Ecrin North Couloir AD.

James:

Multiple Scottish winters and Alpine summers, climbing up to E1 trad rock, Alpine Difficile, Scottish III. Notable ascents: Alps - Traverse of the Barre des Ecrin AD+/AD/PD, Col des Bois Alvera Arete VI+ (Dolomites).

Sam:

Multiple Scottish winters and Alpine summer experience. Climbing up to Trad rock E1, Alpine Difficile, Scottish III. Notable ascents: Alps - Barre des Ecrin North couloir AD+; Aiguille de Sialouze S ridge D; Dent de Tsailon AD.



Rob descending Abdukagor to Camp 3

Stevo:

Scottish winter and Alpine summer experience, climbing up to Trad rock E1, Scottish III, Alpine Peu Difficile.

Expedition Itinerary

Day	Action
June 15	All but Ian fly to St Petersburg, sleeping overnight in the airport
June 16	Fly to Dushanbe, the craziest 5hr flight ever!
June 17	Arrive early morning, rest and shopping
June 20	Leave Dushanbe by truck, heading to the Vanj valley
June 21	Enter the GBAO autonomous region
June 22	Reach the end of the road at last!
June 23	Start portering from Geolog up to Camp One
June 24	Camp One established (3250m)
June 26	Camp Two reached (3830m), Stevo meets Ian down at Geolog
June 28	Camp Three set up (4430m)
July 01	Final day of portering as Base Camp I established on the Abdukagor Pass at 5050m
July 03	Poor weather early morning; Spen, Amy, Ed & Stevo undertake an afternoon reconnaissance to Point Ru (5440m), overlooking the Fedchenko glacier
July 04	Spen, Rob, Stevo, Ed, Sam & Amy successfully make the first ascent of Peak Volodiya (5847m)
July 05	Ed & Stevo make the first ascent of Peak Bronwen (5550m) overlooking Base Camp I. Spen & Amy put a new route up the west face of Tanymas (5900m)
July 06	Ed & Stevo climb Zero Gully on British Cosmonauts
July 07	Rob, Spen & Ed put up another route on Peak Bronwen on the northwest face. Sam, Amy & James also summit, repeating the previous route
July 08	Spen & James climb Fourth Gully on British Cosmonauts, while Sam & Ian climb Fifth Gully, bivvying overnight as a late descent became too dangerous
July 10	Rob & James climb a new route up to Pt. 5390 on the Tanymas Massif
July 11	Moving from Base Camp I round onto the Fedchenko glacier, using an intermediate camp in the middle of Fedchenko below Point Ru
July 12	Set up Base Camp II (5220m) high on Fedchenko, below Peak 26 Bakinshikh Kommissarov
July 13	Poor weather makes conditions difficult, but Spen & Ian set off to begin their planned traverse of Peak 26 Bakinshikh Kommissarov & Peak Revolution

July 14	Amy, Sam, Stevo & Ed climb Point Amy (5475m), a small rise at the foot of Peak Paris Commune
July 15	Sam, Ed & Stevo set off to climb Peak Grena (6500m); Amy & James follow to attempt a traverse of three unclimbed peaks west of Fedchenko. The weather closes in during the morning, confining both teams to their tents
July 16	Amy & James abandon their route, returning to Base Camp II. After attempting to retreat, Sam, Ed & Stevo are snowed in on a ridge at 6180m for a second night
July 17	The weather clears, allowing Sam, Ed & Stevo to return to Base Camp II, although snow conditions are difficult following the storm
July 18	Ed & Amy spend the day exploring the eastern edges of the high Fedchenko, while the others enjoy a rest day
July 19	Return to Base Camp I; stashes of food & fuel left for Spen & Ian
July 20	Descent to Camp Two, crossing a very dry and crevassed Abdukagor glacier for the last time
July 21	Rest day at Camp Two, lots of washing & sleeping!
July 22	Return to Camp One
July 23	Back at Geolog again, but find stash left there stolen
July 24	Met by a local Tajik at Geolog, who drives us down the valley, stopping at villages for food, arriving at the airfield at Vanj late at night
July 25	Fly back to Dushanbe from Vanj. Visit the British Embassy
July 27	Organise insurance & support to arrange helicopter searches over Fedchenko for Spen & Ian
July 28	Amy goes on a six-hour helicopter search of the Peak Revolution area, though no sign is seen
July 29	Flight back to London via St Petersburg. Searches continue for Spen & Ian after our departure

In Dushanbe

Ø Provisioning

Most of the things we wanted to buy were readily available in Dushanbe. There are no large supermarkets, but a central street, Rudaki, with lots of small food shops was the best place to find most of the things we wanted. There was a large open food market just north of the centre which is great for dried fruit and nuts, spices, fruit and vegetables and just about anything else you can imagine. It is also just a really interesting place to visit, with amongst other things butchers portioning meat with big axes! Allow plenty of time as many shops tend to stock only a couple of the things required (e.g. powdered squash drink), so it is necessary to spend a while shopping around.

There was also a small supermarket slightly away from the centre which stocks western type foods



such as instant porridge oats, smash and hot chocolate. However, couscous was impossible to obtain anywhere.

Ø Accommodation

There is a dearth of budget accommodation in Dushanbe. Our accommodation was organised in advance by K2 Travel, and we stayed in Hotel Tajikistan. This was a huge Soviet edifice, pleasant enough but overpriced at \$50 per person for a twin. The en suite rooms were small, taps would not turn off and the bathroom looked like it was only cleaned when the whole room was used as a shower cubicle. On our return

we were booked into Hotel Dushanbe, which was more central and with nicer rooms but generally shabbier than Hotel Tajikistan. Again, taps wouldn't turn off and there were almost daily interruptions to electricity and water supplies. At all times outside of Dushanbe we camped which represented the best accommodation of the trip!

En Route to the Mountains

Ø Transport To and From the Mountains

K2 Travel had organised a 4WD truck to take us, the porters and our gear to the Vanj valley via the Pamir Highway. It was an absolutely spectacular route, and worthwhile just for the views. The road was the worst any of us had ever experienced, including Andean and Indian routes. There were many bridges that had been washed away over the winter and in their places hairpin bends had been built out of mud and rubble. These



were often narrow with quite a drop at the edge. The 4WD was certainly necessary, but the truck was not. It was far too unwieldy and heavy for the smaller roads found in the Vanj valley itself, and was too big for the makeshift bridges. The truck eventually turned around after the roads became impassable for it; from here on smaller vehicles were used to get us to the road head. More effective transport would be several jeeps, which would probably



work out at about the same price (\$2500) and successfully make it all the way to the road head in the Vanj valley.

It was easy to find places to eat (mainly bread and soup), with the food being significantly better than any we had had in Dushanbe.

The toilets however, weren't, although the views were often stunning! Shorpu is the ubiquitous national soup, a sort of mutton broth with meat and vegetables of varying quality. Also available was Pilof – a Tajik take on fried rice – and Milupa – similar to Chinese wontons.

There is a military checkpoint a few kilometres short of Kalai Khumb to enter the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) region, where we queued up to show our passports and GBAO permits. Kalai Khumb is situated on the river bordering Afghanistan. We chatted with the policeman here and some other locals and bought food and drink in small shops. The road had improved again and exemplified the difference between the former Soviet state and its neighbour over the river. The Afghan equivalent was a narrow footpath occasionally cut into the cliffs joining small villages; simple huts without glass windows and small fields on any patch of flat ground.

Another checkpoint and we reached Vanj, which is sizeable enough to have an airstrip. After having our passports checked again we continued along the gorge happily trundling over a 7 ton weight limit bridge until we reached what was essentially a pair of wooden planks over a river. After some deliberation the river was forded, and the next



similar bridge was crossed even after we thought the game was up. However as it was getting dark we stopped for a while and after being told by the locals the road ahead was impassable due to some remaining winter snow, we set up camp knowing the truck would turn around in the morning.

Some of the porters went to the hamlet we had just passed and arranged a jeep to the snowfield blocking the road ahead. Doing shuttles, we all reached the snowfield and portered the luggage across while one of the porters walked to the next village and found a Soviet copy of a VW Combi. He returned with this and we were able to load all of the luggage and a couple of team members. The van ploughed off across the numerous fords in the river past Poi Mazar to the road head at Geolog only stopping to allow the harassed engine to cool down. The last section of the road was often impassable due to boulders and everyone had to clamber out and clear large boulders from the road on several occasions. Meanwhile the rest of us walked, and were not much slower than the van such were the problems with the road. Finally we made it to Geolog, a deserted mining base at the end of the road.

On our return journey we were picked up from Geolog as arranged by a local in his open-top truck. We spent the day being fed large amounts of bread, curds and tea, at a variety of houses en-route. Our driver tried to extract \$300 when we had been told by our liaison officer before he left that it would be \$100, but we bartered him down to \$175, from which point onwards he seemed more taciturn. Whilst \$300 is not a vast amount of money by western



standards for the service that he provided, you have to bear in mind that the average monthly wage in Tajikistan is around \$10. We also donated most of our tat and a rope, to our driver and other villagers. That night we slept on the grass outside the airport in Vanj. Fortunately K2 Travel had managed to arrange our flights for us (\$40 each plus some excess baggage charge), and the next

morning we left in a very small plane with the aisle full of boxes and buckets of fruit for a quite spectacular flight through the valleys back to Dushanbe. In retrospect, flying to and from Vanj is by far the most efficient route. The Pamir Highway was such an experience though that we felt going by land one way and air the other was the best of both worlds.

In the Mountains

Ø Portering

We used similar camps to those used by the Imperial College Expedition in 1992. They were as follows:



Morning at the first campsite on the road

- **Camp Zero:** The roadhead at Geolog (2700m)
- **Camp One:** Plateau just past a bridge crossing the main river to old mine workings (3250m)
- **Camp Two:** Flat grassy area by stream at the inside of the bend in the Abdukagor glacier below the lateral moraine (3830m)



Camp Three by the Abdukagor glacier

- **Camp Three:** Snow covered hump just before moving on to the glacier. Not used on the descent; some melt water available (4430m)
- **Base Camp I:** The broad plateau of the Abdukagor Pass (5050m)
- **Base Camp II:** Head of the Fedchenko glacier (5220m.)



The idyllic Camp Two

The portering was hard work, with each of us carrying between 25 and 30kg every day for 9 days. We also employed 4 mountain porters and a liaison officer. Trying to organize the porters was very difficult, as the liaison officer (owner of K2 Travel Igor Fedayev) seemed unwilling to translate our instructions directly. The porters kept leaving intermediate gear stashes such that it was hard to work out where all our food and gear was at any one time. Rather than the 20kg loads agreed beforehand, they were therefore carrying lots of small loads which was very inefficient. The problem seemed more one of communication than

willingness to work, so if future expeditions have a fluent Russian speaker then they should find it easier. The porters were Russian, Uzbek and Tajik mountaineers with all their own equipment for glacier travel, and were organized through K2 Travel.

The Route In

From Geolog we continued up the remains of the road and soon crossed the river. The road continued up over moraine to the broken lateral moraines of the dry Medvezhiy glacier. This is best crossed by going high up to the left where it is less crevassed. The road is rejoined on the other side and continues up through meadows to old mine workings by a river. Crossing the river, the road continued through more meadows before descending to a boulder field towards a bridge over the Abdukagor River. Passing the bridge (not crossing), Camp One is shortly reached on the left.



View from the sleeping bag, Base Camp I

From Camp One we continued following the deteriorating road alongside the river over moraine rubble to the snout of the Abdukagor glacier. Moving left, we then climbed a gully up the true right of the glacier i.e. along its north side. This continued to a point where it had been washed away into a deep ravine by a tributary river. Here we had to climb up high to the left to find a suitable crossing point, before dropping down to a slightly marshy plateau and stream alongside the lateral moraine of the glacier. We followed this up over spring snowfields until striking Camp Two at an ideal spot just before the 90° bend in the glacier. From Camp Two we walked slightly further upstream towards the steep part of the

glacier before turning left up a very steep vegetated slope. The best route proved to be climbing steeply over grassy slopes and ice worn rock towards a small col. The moraine ridge to the right looked inviting and was followed on the first day of portering, however it proved very unstable and treacherous. Reaching the col we continued over soft snow (scree on the way down) up to a flat snow hump a safe distance from the enormous tongue of hanging glacier above on the left. This became Camp Three. Some water was available by digging away exposed scree, but was very temperamental and disappeared in colder weather.

From Camp Three we were roped together, as we were soon on the glacier after climbing briefly further up the northern side. On the way up the glacier had good snow cover, but on the way down was heavily crevassed and broken up. We found the safest part was towards the middle. The glacier is sloped very gently, and the pass, which was the site of Base Camp I, was reached only after several false summits. From the Abdukagor Pass to the head of the Fedchenko glacier and Base Camp II was relatively straightforward. The middle of the Fedchenko glacier was much less crevasses than the western side.



Base Camp II after heavy snow

Weather & Snow Conditions

On the whole, the weather was very good. We had one day of snow which detained us at Camp Three after an abortive attempt to porter up to Base Camp I where we only achieved 200m of height gain, and whilst climbing at the col the mornings tended to be clear with cloud in the afternoon.

Climbing from Base Camp II we had some very bad weather, with two days of snow, then a clear day before a storm. After the storm the weather was clear for the remainder of the trip. The snow generally became very soft early in the day. It was worthwhile doing as much climbing as possible

before the sun rose, so we found a 2am start to be best. Dawn was at 4am, and the snow became very soft by 8am. This made certain routes which caught the morning sun very difficult logistically, as the snow could be too slushy to descend safely.



Rob threading his way through the crevasses descending the Abdukagor glacier

The Climbing

Between the eight of us we attempted or succeeded on the following climbs:

Ø Peak Volodiya

~5847m, PD, First Known Ascent



Sam emerges onto the summit of Pk Volodiya

This was our first climb, and six of us climbed together in two ropes of three. It was essentially a snow plod up the easiest line designed to help us acclimatize and familiarize ourselves with the conditions. We all made the summit in good conditions. The snow was very soft and potentially an avalanche danger on the descent. We set off at 4am and returned to camp having descended the same line at about midday.

As far as we can tell this was the first ascent of this peak. It is the spot height given between Tanymas and Paris Commune, obviously seen to the North from Base Camp as a distinct snow hump.



Spem silhouetted by Pk Volodiya behind

Ø Peak Bronwen

~5550m, PD, First Known Ascent

First climbed by Ed and Stevo, all of us climbed or descended this route at some stage. It is the mountain which flanks the true left of the Abdukagor glacier as you approach the pass. This route was reached by walking up glacier No.9 to the south of camp. We climbed over the bergshroud to reach the rounded shoulder on the west side and then climbed up good snow past rocks to an overhanging cornice just below the southernmost of the twin summits.



Ed on the summit of Bronwen, Tanymas behind



Our route up the East Face of Peak Bronwen

We traversed right under this large wave-shaped cornice, before climbing up over the bergshrund and on to the summit closest the Abdukagor glacier. As far as we know this was another first ascent. Descent was by the same or similar line.

Ø Peak Bronwen Couloir
~5550m, TD, First Ascent

Spen, Rob and Ed climbed the obvious couloir line on the right of the steep eastern face of Peak Bronwen. Reaching the top of the sustained 50° couloir, we climbed up the ridge a short way, over a bergshrund and then ploughed through very poor deep snow on the steep headwall to the summit with poor protection. We descended by the PD route described above.



The route up the northeast Couloir of Peak Bronwen

Ø The West Face of Tanymas
~5900m, D

Spen and Amy climbed a route on the West Face of Tanymas. The route was effectively sustained 45°-50° snow slopes until the ridge was met and then followed to the summit. This route benefits from being in the shade for much of the morning. The descent was made via the obvious ridge towards Peak Volodiya.



Our routes up the West Face of Tanymas (right) and Peak Volodiya (left)

Ø Zero Gully, West Face of British Cosmonauts Scottish II

The southernmost gully on the West Face of British Cosmonaut was a pleasant Scottish style gully climb which at its steepest was around 45° to reach a mini summit. Descent was initially by the same route then moved out southwards to easier ground. Climbed by Stevo and Ed.



Looking back from below British Cosmonauts



Ed leading up Zero Gully

Ø Fourth Gully, West Face of British Cosmonauts
~5500m, Scottish IV

Spen and James made an ascent of this short ice/mixed gully. The entry slopes were not too steep but several hundred meters were gained before the route proper started. The first two pitches were felt to be WI2, the second of which had a tricky mixed section where the gully was constricted. The third and fourth pitches were mixed and felt like a Scottish gully, but with good protection, and were probably worth Scottish IV, 4/5. Upon reaching the ridge we initially looked for a route to the summit to descend an easier slope near Base Camp I but due to slushy snow and the huge distance along the ridge we decided to abseil down the route. Despite its diminutive size James in particular found this to be the most rewarding and interesting mountaineering route he has ever done.



*View over Revolution & Bakinshikh Kommisarov
from the top of British Cosmonauts*

Ø Fifth Gully, West Face of British Cosmonauts
~5500m, Scottish III



*The southern end of British Cosmonauts, overlooking the
Fedchenko glacier*

Ian and Sam intended on taking one day to climb what was assumed to be a first ascent up the inviting mixed, but mostly ice, gully. We moved together on the less steeply inclined initial snowfield, before pitching the next section on the true left of the rocky border that separates the gully briefly in two. We then continued moving together (where we were surprised to find an in-situ nut) before pitching the upper section of what proved to be a deceptively big ice couloir. Arriving at the top slightly later than intended, we found that a traverse of the ridge to allow an easier descent was out of the question. We descended ~150m and due to increasing avalanche activity in the gully we were forced to bivvy on the rock ridge to the true right; by midday the gully played host to torrents of snow and ice every 5 minutes or so. After a warm enough night on the ridge we descended the couloir without incident, this time taking the line to the true right of the rocky border.



The West Face of British Cosmonauts, with Gullies Five, Four & Zero (left to right)

Ø Peak Grena

~6500m (the north col at 6200m reached),
Russian 3



Sam pauses en route to Grena

Sam, Stevo and Ed took the obvious line up the glacier to the left of the peak as you look at it from Base Camp II, into a deep bowl before climbing up to the shallow col on the ridge.

Here we were tent bound for two days by a fierce storm, frequently having to dig out the tent to avoid being buried. We descended back to Base Camp II when the weather cleared for fear of bad weather returning and being stuck without fuel and food.



The retreat from the ridge through deep snow, with the summit of Peak Grena on the right

Ø Traverse of Pt 5390 on the Tanymas Massif 5390m, ED1, First Ascent

Rob and James set off on the evening of 10th July with the intention of climbing a disjointed, but oddly compelling mixed line directly up to Pt. 5390. However, on arriving at the base of the route, they decided that since it was dark and they were unsure if the quality of the rock on the route, it would be prudent to climb via another route. A wide couloir lead to a col at about 5200m and this main couloir had a narrower, subsidiary couloir joining it. Rob and James opted for the subsidiary couloir. On reaching the top of the couloir they found that it didn't actually connect with the main couloir and ended at a spur. Hence a long, rising traverse on snow of varying quality was required to join the main couloir. On reaching the main couloir, the sheer (demoralising) scale of it was realised and the col was reached several hours later at about 02:00. After walking along the ridge for a while they decided to stay put until dawn. At about 05:00 and after couple of hours spent in a small two-man shelter, they continued traversing along the ridge, overcoming seracs and passing through rock bands with the consistency of cheese. Finally a couloir leading to pt 5390 was reached and the point was reached at about 08:00.



James on Pt 5390

Descent was intended to be by snow slopes, however these snow slopes didn't materialise and Rob and James had no option other than to descend a loose, rocky ridge by abseil. On the third abseil Rob was the second man down and the abseil anchor failed as he was descending. Luckily the



Pt 5390, Tanymas out of shot to the left

rope jammed and Rob (painfully) ended up on his back on a ledge about 40m above James. On receiving the gear from James, a second abseil anchor was constructed and after chopping the ropes, Rob descended safely to James. The further three abseils went smoothly and safely, although suitable anchors were becoming harder to find. On the last abseil, the two ropes were tied together since it was uncertain as to whether forty metres would be sufficient to get them to safety. The final abseil deposited Rob and James in a very soft couloir that was being bombarded by falling snow and rocks. A hasty retreat was made down this couloir and the bottom of the mountain was reached at about 16:00. Base Camp I was reached a further two hours later. The grade offered is very speculative and mainly a result of the objective danger!

Ø Traverse of Peak Bakinshikh Kommisarov and Peak Revolution

6834m (Kommisarov) & 6940m (Revolution),
Russian 5

Spen and Ian set off at 2am on the morning of the 13th July in light snow. No trace of them has been seen since. They were planning a traverse of the massif taking about five days, but with food and fuel to last them longer.



*Peak Revolution (left) & Peak Kommisarov from
Base Camp II*



*Spen on Point Ru, surveying Peak Revolution & Peak
Bakinshikh Kommisarov to the right*

Expedition Logistics

Planning

Information on the Fedchenko glacier region was hard to come by. Tajikistan was immersed in civil war for several years following the 1992 Imperial College expedition, and as a result was hardly visited by any foreigners. Indeed, it has largely been ignored by Western mountaineers. This was great from the point of view of our desire to undertake an exploratory expedition, but made planning quite difficult.

Ø Maps

We found good 1:100,000 maps of the area on the website of the University of California, Berkeley: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/tajikistan/100k.html>. These we found to be quite accurate if a little difficult to identify particular peaks. We made our maps by joining two adjacent sections of the University of California maps and cutting two overlapping A4 sized sections that we then printed double-sided and laminated.

Ø Flights

Flights were booked through Flight Centre. We flew Pulkovo Aviation Enterprise Gatwick – St Petersburg – Dushanbe. There are currently two flights per week from St Petersburg to Dushanbe, Mondays and Thursdays at 20:10. Return flights are Tuesdays and Fridays at 03:50. Do not expect to receive confirmation of your booking until shortly before you leave. Our outbound flights were only confirmed two weeks

before departure, and our return flights were confirmed after we had left. Apparently this is quite normal for flights to Tajikistan! We looked into alternative routes but they are few and far between.

Flying this route, we had a 24 hour wait in St Petersburg on the way out. We stayed in the Airport for this time. Returning we took a couple of days out to see St Petersburg – you need a visa to do this. It may be possible to fly another airline for the London – St Petersburg leg to reduce the time spent in the airport, however this would be more expensive and may be difficult to arrange due to the tendency for flights to be arranged very late.

Ø Visas and permits

We obtained visas through the Tajik embassy in Vienna, sending our passports by courier. All other permits were organized through K2 Travel. The most important is the GBAO permit. Unfortunately there are still Soviet levels of bureaucracy in Tajikistan, and even with local tour companies organizing everything we

were still delayed by a day getting the permits in Dushanbe.

Ø Logistics

With no fluent Russian speakers among us, we decided it would be essential to have logistical



support from a travel agency. We were in email contact with Great Game Travel (based in Dushanbe), Elena Travel and K2 Travel. We eventually opted for K2 Travel as they offered the best quote, well broken down into individual costs. They organized all the necessary paperwork, transport to and from the mountains, porters and a liaison officer, accommodation in Dushanbe, airport transfers and assistance in provisioning in Dushanbe. They were also able to order gas



Approaching Base Camp II

cylinders in advance. It cost just under \$10 000 for the whole team, with the vast majority of cost being portering and transport.

Ø Approach Route and Acclimatisation Profile

A combination of advice from K2 Travel and information gleaned from the Imperial College expedition report led us to plan a route up the Abdugagor glacier from the Vanj valley. Using our projected weights, we established a portering and acclimatization profile which was based around carrying a load up to the next camp, immediately descending and sleeping low, then carrying a second load up to the camp and sleeping there. Using the four camps as found by the Imperial expedition, this would have us with all our kit at the Abdugagor Pass in eight days, and well acclimatized. It was agreed porters would carry a 20kg load one day, then their own kit the next.

Medicine

Ø Planning and Preparation

Early in the planning of the expedition we created the role of Medical Officer, filled by Amy. Her responsibilities were to ensure that all members of the team were sufficiently trained in first aid and basic wilderness medicine, so that any one of us would be able to help if faced with treating a sick or injured climbing partner. An expedition medical kit was also put together. The contents were based on medical kits suggested by the Royal Geographical Society's Expedition Advisory Centre (in the course manual for their Wilderness Medical Training *Far From Help* course) and the British Mountaineering Club / UIAA Mountain Medicine Centre website, adjusted for the duration of the trip and the nature of the expedition. We also received help and advice in finalising the kit from doctors we knew, from the doctors and mountaineers on the *Far From Help* course and from members of the Mount Everest Foundation.

All team members undertook first aid training, and seven of the team attended the Wilderness Medical Training *Far From Help* course. One team member, Simon, had just qualified as a doctor. We took with us four copies of *Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine* by Dr Jim Duff and Dr Peter Gormly, one for each climbing team to take on routes. These proved extremely useful, being easy to follow and very small and light.



Dawn from below Peak Volodiya

Ø Evacuation Plans & Emergency Contacts

1. From Dushanbe

There are no Western-standard or private medical facilities in Tajikistan. The British Embassy staff use either the Russian military base, or a German

NGO that provides basic medical care with some western doctors. These are listed below, along with some other options, including dentists. In an emergency, we would call ORA International on their mobile number.

Doctors

ORA International

City Health Centre No. 1
17/11 Ac Rajabovs St.
Dushanbe
Tel./Fax: +992 (372) 21 64 42
Office: 21 82 44
Mobile: (917) 70 70 91

Dr. van Twillert

Dr. Burgdorf

Russian Military Hospital

120 Rudaki
Dushanbe
Tel.: 24 19 06 (Direct)
Tel.: 24 19 35 (Reception)

Nikoloy Volik

Medical Service Lt- Colonel

French Military Unit

Airport
Tel.: (919) 00 51 74 (Mobile)

Dr Poutout

United Nations

Med. Gorodok
Tel.: 24 32 94
Mobile: (917) 70 38 46

Dr. Khodjimurodov

Dentists

Russian Military Hospital

Tel.: 24 51 70
(Closed weekends)
Consultation: 40 Russian
Roubles

Andrey Vaisliy Vladimirovich

(Dept. Head)

Kadirov Maruf

Khudoiberdievich (Surgeon)

2. From the Mountains

There is no longer any form of mountain rescue service in Tajikistan. Evacuation by air may be necessary, in which case both Dushanbe and neighbouring Kyrgyzstan should be considered as destination possibilities. In an emergency, helicopter evacuation and subsequent medical attention would be sought in Dushanbe or Kyrgyzstan, followed by evacuation to the UK. In

a non-life threatening situation, evacuation by road to Dushanbe could be possible.

3. Embassies

The British Embassy in Tajikistan

Graeme Loten (Ambassador)

Margaret Belof (Deputy Head of Mission)

43 Lutfi St.

Dushanbe

The Embassy can be contacted on:
 Tel.: +992 (372) 24 22 21
 Mobile: +992 (917) 70 80 13

Ø Medical Management During the Expedition

On the expedition the medical problems we encountered were:

- Several cases of diarrhoea, some with nausea and vomiting. These were most common on the journey in and out from the mountains, although some lasted into our stay on the glacier. These required loperamide and anti-emetics.
- An aching back, requiring painkillers.

- A painful knee, requiring painkillers.
- A tooth abscess, which occurred upon reaching Base Camp I at 5050m, requiring painkillers and two courses of antibiotics (a second when the problem reoccurred).



Peak Kuznetskaya, south from Base Camp I

Food & Cuisine

Food had to be a compromise between fuelling our high calorie output and what we could realistically carry and eat. We were also limited by what is available to buy in Dushanbe. Amounts and types

of food were calculated on the basis of past trips made by team members. Below is the plan for provisioning that we calculated:

	Days	Weight per person (g)	Total Weight (g)	
Base Camp (6 days)				
Chapattis	2	150	2400	Weight for flour
Couscous	2	150	2400	
Noodles	2	200	3200	
Climbing (15 days)				
Smash	5	150	6000	
Noodles (flavoured)	5	170	6800	
Couscous	5	125	5000	
Portering (12 days)				
Pasta	3	200	4800	Used at low altitude
Chinese Noodles	3	200	4800	
Noodles (flavoured)	3	200	4800	
Pancakes	1	150	1200	Weight for flour
Smash	2	150	2400	

Breakfasts

Oats	23	60	11040
Hot Chocolate	23	15	2760
Dried Milk	23	15	2415
Raisins	23	15	2760
Sugar	23	25	4600
Flour	10	75	6000
Sugar	10	25	2000
Dried Milk	10	10	800
Baking Powder	-	-	-

General

Soup	28	80	17920
Fruit Drink Powders	36	50	14400
Salami/Jerky	6	40	1920
Cheese	-	-	2000
Soya	6	50	2400
Hot Chocolate	33	25	6600
Tea Bags	33	2.5	660
Oil	33	15	3960
Tuna (Tin)	4	210	6720
Salt	-	-	250
Herbs/Spices	-	-	500
Stock Cubes	18	6	864
Dried Mushrooms	-	-	120
Vegetables	2	125	2000
Tomato Puree	3	250	750
Chocolate	20	200	32000
Dried Fruit	33	100	3300
Nuts	1	300	2400
Desiccated Coconut	1	25	200
Dried Onion	-	-	500
Sun Dried Tomatoes	-	-	125

Total**104.87 kg**

In the confusion of lots of people buying provisions from lots of different places in Dushanbe, we didn't end up with quite the right amounts and had too much of some things (semolina) and not enough of others (chocolate). From the point of view of comfort and better health (every member lost a worryingly large amount of



weight) it would have been better to have taken more food. However, the reality of the situation was that we struggled to find some commodities in sufficient quantity in Dushanbe, and that our portering time would have been greatly extended with the extra weight more food would have brought.

Equipment

The weight of our gear was of paramount importance, partly because we had to be able to carry it all and partly to avoid excess baggage costs. In planning what to take we used what had worked on previous expeditions as the basis for our choices, then tried to minimize weight as much as possible. We were very happy with all the gear we took, with the possible exception of the Terra Nova Cosmos base camp tent on which the poles snapped on four occasions in fine weather, apparently due to the heat of the sun. Other items of kit that warrant



comment were the firesteels, lighters and lantern. The firesteels seemed like a good idea, but were tricky to use in reality, we sourced lighters locally, which was a bad decision since they were particularly unreliable and the lantern wasn't quite as bright as we would like emitting a comforting, but insufficient, warm glow. A Thermarest game kit was also taken and this was extremely useful in whiling away the hours under canvas. The final kit list including weights is presented here as a reference for future expeditions.

	Personal Quantity	Group Quantity
Climbing Gear		
Ice Axes	Pair	1 spare
Crampons	Pair	1 spare
Ice Screws	2	8 extra
Nuts		4 half-sets
Pegs		12
Slings	2 long, 2 short	
Screw-gate Karabiners	4	
Snap-Gate Karabiners	8	
Ropeman / Mintraxion	1	
Pulley	1	
Belay Device	1	1 spare
Abalokov Threader		4
Knife		4
Rope		4x60m & 2x50m
Tat (5mm)	10m	
Prussiks	3	
Harness	1	
Helmet	1	
Double Boots	Pair	
Trekking Poles	Pair	
Compass	1	
Bothy Bag		4
Strobe		4
Whistle	1	
Total Climbing Gear Weight: 78.8 kg		

Clothing

Baselayers: Tops	2	
Baselayers: Bottoms	2	
Underwear	4	
Socks: Liners	4	
Socks: Thick	3	
Gloves: liners	1	
fleece	1	
Thick	1	
Mitts	1	
Hats	2	
Balaclava	1	
Face Mask	1	
Sun hat	1	
Sunglasses	1	1 spare
Goggles	1	1 spare
Lightweight Jacket	1	
Mid-weight Jacket	1	
Insulated Jacket	1	
Down Jacket	1	
Fleece Trousers	1	
Shell trousers	1	
Gaiters	Pair	
Approach Shoes	Pair	

Total Clothing Weight: 61.0 kg**Documents**

Passport, insurance, etc

Total Documents Weight: 2.0 kg**Medical**

First Aid kit

Total Medical Weight: 9.2 kg**Camping**

Base Camp Tent	1
Single Skin Tent	4
Snow Pegs	60
Lantern for Big Tent	4
Shovel	4
Thermarest	1
Roll Mat	4
Sleeping Bag	1
Liner	1

Total Camping Weight: 54.7 kg**Cooking**

Stove: Petrol	4
Gas	3
Fuel Bottle	4
Stove bases	1
Stove Hanging Kit	4
Large Pans	4

Lightweight Pans		4
Mug	1	1 spare
Spoon	1	1 spare
Nalgene Bottles	2	
Lighter	2	
Firesteel		4
All Purpose Soap		4
Total Cooking Weight: 13.5 kg		

Repair Kits

Leatherman, Tent &
Stove Repair Kits, etc

Total Repair Kits Weight: 2.6 kg		
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Personal Kit

Rucksack	1	
Stuff Sacks	2	
Duffel Bag		2
Head Torch	1	1 spare
Wash Kit	1	
Binoculars		3
Pack of Cards		2
Reading Book	1	
Journal	1	
Camera	1	

Total Personal Kit Weight: 47.1 kg		
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View up the valley from Camp 2

Finance & Budget

Ø Expedition Income

	Amount (£s)
The University of Bristol Alumni Foundation	750.00
The Mount Everest Foundation	1400.00
The British Mountaineering Council	675.00
The Nottingham Gordon Memorial Trust For Boys & Girls	100.00
Old Bristolians	110.00

Grand Total External Income	£3035.00
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equivalent to **£319.38** per member

Ø Expedition Expenditure

	Per Person (where possible)	Calculated on a Group Basis
Camp food		411.43
Food and other expenses en route / in Dushanbe		285.71
Tajik visa	87.62	700.95
Flights	623.00	4984.00
Excess baggage charges		114.29
Insurance	234.30	1874.40
K2 Travel fee		5317.14
Hotel charges for extra days		342.86
Russian visas	51.75	413.97
Accommodation in St Petersburg		186.29
Airport transfers		55.17
Medical Training		760.00
Medical Supplies		184.00
Communal gear: tat, camping gear, scales etc		171.66
Hire of Sat Phone		255.00
Grand Total	£2007.11	£16 056.87

All the categories in the budget are, we hope, clear and concise. There is however one category, 'K2 Travel fee', which shall be elaborated on. K2 Travel is the travel company that arranged our logistics. Included in the

price are the costs of the GBAO permits, accommodation in Dushanbe, transport from Dushanbe to the head of the Vanj valley and back, airport pick-ups, interpreters, porters, petrol and butane/propane canisters.



Peak Paris Commune

Although the cost of the plane we took on the way back from Vanj to Dushanbe is included in K2 Travel's fee, future expeditions may find the price of the tickets useful. After some debate in the airport, it was decided that we were to pay US\$40 each, plus 1% of the fare for every kilo of luggage over 10kgs. This ended up costing just US\$47 each (bear in mind that we were carrying packs half our bodyweight). The plane was in good condition and there were few worries amongst us about its airworthiness. So on reflection, this would be an excellent, quick and good value method of transport for both legs of the journey.

Money-changing in Dushanbe is easy. There are many money changing shops situated on the main

streets, and the exchange rates are clearly displayed. Often no commission is charged. US\$ are the most useful currency to take. Typically the process would take less than two minutes with no forms of identification required.

The cost of living in Dushanbe is relatively low, however there is a distinct lack of budget accommodation. There are some very large and decrepit hotels but no hostels. A large room for two people costs typically US\$50 per person per night, and a smaller one around US\$30. This disparity may well disappear if more tourists visit and hostels open up.

Environmental Policy & Considerations

There were two separate scenarios for dealing with waste; firstly for the walk-in and walk-out where there was running water and rock and soil terrain, and secondly for the time spent at Base Camp and elsewhere on snow and ice. For the first situation, all rubbish was separated into burnable, non-burnable and biodegradable waste. The non-biodegradable rubbish was then stashed at each camp site and collected on the walk-out and taken back to Camp Zero at Geolog. The biodegradable waste, essentially foodstuffs, was well buried at each camp site. It was ensured that human waste would not contaminate water sources for either us or people living further down the valley. Toilet sites were also kept well away from each camp to promote good hygiene. Human waste at these camp sites was left in the sun to dry out and scatter, whilst paper was carefully burnt. This system appeared to work well judging by observations several weeks later on the walk-out. For the second scenario based on the glacier, all waste was again collected and separated. Biodegradable waste, although minimal, was taken to lower camps where it was subsequently buried. Excess fuel, both gas and petrol, was burnt off to

reduce the weight of kit on the walk-out. Human waste on the glacier was dealt with in deep snow pits, of a minimum one metre in depth, that were replaced every few days. The position of these pits is marked on the maps. Other waste was taken back to Camp Zero. Here all non-toxic waste was burnt, leaving just plastic wrappers, bottles and tin cans which were taken out with us to the largest town in the valley, Vanj. Here this remaining rubbish was deposited in the local waste facility, effectively a dump. Unfortunately, it was not possible to take our rubbish any further, due to the gas canisters being not permitted on aircraft. However, we feel that we managed to reduce our waste substantially and have dealt with it as responsibly and effectively as possible. Much care was taken to ensure that nothing was left behind, and this attitude meant educating and often cleaning up after the porters. Considerable signs of previous expeditions, mainly rusting tin cans, could be seen along the walk-in, but we were simply unable to take anything else out with us. Certainly we left the area in no worse a state than that in which we found it.



Spem & Amy make their way to Base Camp II along the Fedchenko glacier

Conclusions

Obviously the overriding and lasting memory of the expedition has been the tragically sad loss of Spen and Ian. This clouds what was otherwise a very successful expedition – everything that Spen, as Expedition Leader, was hoping for. We have begun the exploration of a new and very exciting mountaineering area, documenting our discoveries, experiences and climbs for possible future expeditions. In addition to this we have been successful in putting up new routes and making several first ascents of peaks in the area. The less experienced members of the team prior to this expedition enjoyed a highly successful introduction to high altitude mountaineering, with every member completing several routes of varying difficulty, length and character. We also felt that, both as a team and individually, we have

learnt a lot, logistically, psychologically, physically and technically.

We hope that the information that we have compiled here on the southern Fedchenko glacier, Abdukagor glacier and Vanj valley areas, as well as the topos of the mountains and routes we have climbed will be of great use to future expeditions. It is clear to us that this is a very exciting area with so many possibilities that we simply didn't have time to touch upon in our short time up in the mountains. Furthermore, we hope this report will stand as a testament to Spen and Ian, whose enthusiasm for climbing and love of the mountains did so much to make this and other expeditions possible.



Stevo on the lower slopes of Peak Volodiya, British Cosmonauts (left) behind

Acknowledgements

The expedition members would like to thank their friends and families for all of their support before, during and especially after the expedition. We would like to thank Dr Phil Wickens of the 1992 Imperial College expedition for his help and guidance; K2 Travel and especially Volodiya for organising the Tajik side of things; PHD for giving us some cracking deals on warm kit and OD for similar deals on their excellent single skin tents.

We would also like to thank the University of Bristol Alumni Foundation, The Nottingham Gordon Memorial Trust for Boys & Girls and Old Bristolians for the financial support that they gave. Finally, we are most indebted to The Mount Everest Foundation and The British Mountaineering Council for their financial support and for recognising the potential of the expedition.

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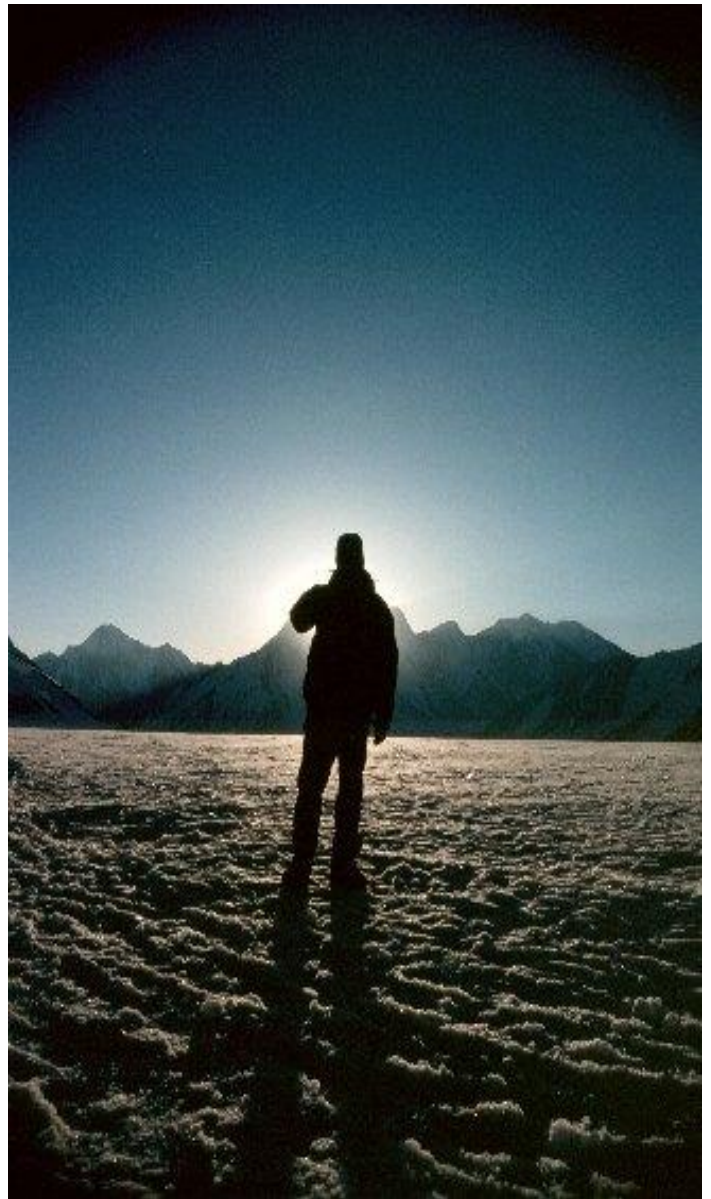
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Early morning at Base Camp I

In Memory of Simon Spencer-Jones and Ian Hatcher



All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible

T.E. Lawrence