

# Kuksay 2007

...an expedition to the remote West of China to attempt unclimbed peaks around the Kuksay glacier, Xinjiang Province. Sponsored by the Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council, DMM and Mountain Equipment



MEF expedition reference : 07/08A

The team were John Allen (leader), Neil Willatt, David Barker, Richard Taylor, Joe Howard, Kevin and Isobel Mulligan.

## SUMMARY REPORT

Departed UK 17<sup>th</sup> July from Heathrow to Bishkek via Moscow with Aeroflot. From Bishkek our organisers on the ground (Novinomad - very good) arranged overnight accommodation and onward road transport to Torugart Pass on the Chinese border. Be warned - if getting Kyrgyz double entry visas at the airport, do not allow them to issue you with a group visa, it causes a lot of hassle at the border. Get individual visas for every member of the party. It doesn't cost any extra.

2 days hard road travel to Kashi, then a further day to Subax, the start point for the walk to base camp. Porters, our interpreter John and our cook Hu joined us at this point. Kong negotiated for porters on our behalf. Provision of portering is well organised at Subax since it is also the start point for Mustagh Ata base camp. Our head porter was Nurbay from Chiatuk village. Three days walk to base camp was extended to 4 because of the difficult terrain on the 9 kms up the north side of the glacier. We helped the porters as much as we could (acclimatisation permitting)- their Chinese bosses helped very little. Local Kyrgyz porters were excellent - expert with pack animals (camels and donkeys) and hardworking. We formed good relationships with them, especially those from Chiatuk village.

One donkey was badly injured on the first day on the glacier due to a fall - it was bleeding heavily from a wound to its cheek. Fortunately Joe is a farmer, and he intervened, applying pressure and then expertly stitching up the wound using our sewing kit. The porters were amazed and grateful, as was the donkey!

We arrived at Base Camp at 4500m on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 26<sup>th</sup> July rest day (and it was snowing).

**27<sup>th</sup> July:** Kevin, Isobel, Richard, Joe and myself crossed the glacier to the central rognon and all climbed pt 4976m as an acclimatisation peak, except Isobel who was feeling the altitude. This was climbed by a broad snow couloir due east of the summit, followed by the summit rocks. We named this Kichinekey Tagh (Kyrgyz 'small mountain'), and the route was graded PD. It had two pitches of Scottish III toward the top of the couloir.

**28<sup>th</sup> July:** John and Dave headed for the far side of the glacier to attempt pt 5582m, the peak immediately west of Kala Peak, while the others aimed to climb the North Face on Kala. All camped together by river on south side of glacier.

**29<sup>th</sup> July:** Initial slopes of 5582 not problematical, and by 4.00pm we had a high camp at approx 4900m under a protective 15m rock outcrop.

**30<sup>th</sup> July:** Leave tent at 0640 (with hindsight too late). Move together over early part, first unroped, then roped, up to about 3 pitches below the start of the rock band at

about 5300m. Pitched the rest of the route (8 pitches). Crux pitches were Scottish IV, through the rock band, although the last 4 pitches on the headwall were relatively unprotected due to the unconsolidated nature of the snow. Summited at 3pm, weather good. Descent to the left of the ascent route by abseil from snow bollard on the summit plateau, followed by rock anchors and one abalokov, then down climbing and traversing to avoid avalanche prone slopes. Back at high camp at 20.00hrs after 13 hrs climbing.

Chiatuk 5582m North West face route 700m TD Scottish IV 70°

**31st July** : Leave high camp early and return across the glacier to Base Camp - rest day tomorrow. Others had made a start up Kala but abandoned due to dodgy slopes.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Aug** : Dave, John, Richard and Joe head back to the broad glacier basin below Chiatuk to attempt new routes on 'the barrel', a rocky buttress not given a height on the map, and pt 5496m. Kevin, Neil and Isobel head off down the glacier to attempt pt 5485m, the fourth summit (marked with a height on the map) up from the snout on the south side of the glacier.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Aug**: 0200hrs leave our high camp on the glacier. Richard and I head for 5496m, Dave and Joe for 'the barrel'. We quickly encountered poor snow conditions on 5496 - a thin crust over bottomless sugar snow. This made upward progress pretty arduous, and caused some avalanche concern. We quickly decided to abandon, and headed to 'the barrel' to join the other two. Climbed this in 10 pitches plus moving together, excellent snow and ice except for last few rope lengths. Summited around 10.00. Descent in 7 abseils following roughly the line of ascent - 1 snow bollard and 6 abalokovs in perfect ice, followed by lots of down climbing. Back in high camp just after 1300hrs - 11 hours for route and descent.

Yilpiz (Kyrgyz 'snow leopard' ) 5315m approx, North face route TD Scottish III sustained, 60°

**4 - 6 August**: Bad weather - heavy snowfall each night, with snow continuing through the day, only easing in the afternoons. By the 6<sup>th</sup> pretty concerned that Kevin, Neil and Izzi have not returned from 5485m.

**7<sup>th</sup> Aug** : About 1415 the three musketeers arrive back. They have had a minor epic, but summited on the peak. They had to surmount about 500m of hideous scree to gain the tongue of the glacier, which they followed to the top. Some route finding was needed to avoid the worst snow conditions, and Isobel had a fall which was self arrested using an ice axe brake.

Tiltagh (Kyrgyz 'tongue mountain') 5485m, West face route PD

**9<sup>th</sup> Aug** : Weather still poor, no further alpine climbing has been possible, but on the 7<sup>th</sup> August John, Joe and Richard put up Kuksay's first trad rock routes, on the buttress above and to the east of base camp -

'Come to Daddy' HVS 5a 60m 2 pitches - takes the obvious diamond shaped buttress via a central line

'You're mine now' HS 4a 40m The large slab up the hill from Come to Daddy, on it's right hand side via cracks.

Porters arrive and we begin to evacuate the mountain.

**11<sup>th</sup> Aug** : Arrive Kashi, sight seeing day tomorrow

**14<sup>th</sup> Aug** : Arrive Bishkek, flights back to UK tomorrow

**MEDICAL NOTES**: Apart from the usual chapped lips, small cuts and bits of sunburn, there were few medical problems in the human team. One donkey needed four stitches in a face wound. Kevin used Diamox briefly to help with altitude induced headache, and found that its diuretic properties are considerable. I suffered a perianal haematoma

just as we arrived at base camp. This is a soft tissue injury, similar to a blood blister, but on your bum. This was bleeding quite a bit, so Dave reluctantly offered to treat it. This involved piercing it with a hypodermic needle, then treating with antibiotic powder. After this, the problem subsided.

**COSTS:**

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>COST per person(£)</b>
Bmc Insurance	240
Visas	45 (china), 30(Kyrgyz double entry)
Flights Heathrow - Bishkek	620
Novinomad - Kyrgyz accommodation and transport	160
Ersh travel ( hotels, meals, portering, Food, transport, permits etc)	1100
Satphone costs (adamphones.co.uk)	8 (based on 4 in team)
High altitude food and fuel	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>2078</b>

Other Comments: Our ground organiser in China was Kong Baocun, president of the China Xinjiang Mountaineering Organisation (CXMO). We found him to be dishonest, difficult to deal with and very manipulative. We would certainly not recommend him to any other expedition visiting Western China

When the team members who climbed Tiltagh travelled down the south side of the kuksay glacier, they noted that it might be easier to establish a base camp via that side of the glacier. Certainly a base camp on that side would be in alpine meadows, and free of objective dangers such as rock fall. This is not true of the site we used, although it was reasonably safe.

Photographs of some of the routes and the travelling are available on the internet by following this link:

<http://www.alienmountain.com>

and clicking on the links to 'kuksay pics' or 'kuksay report'

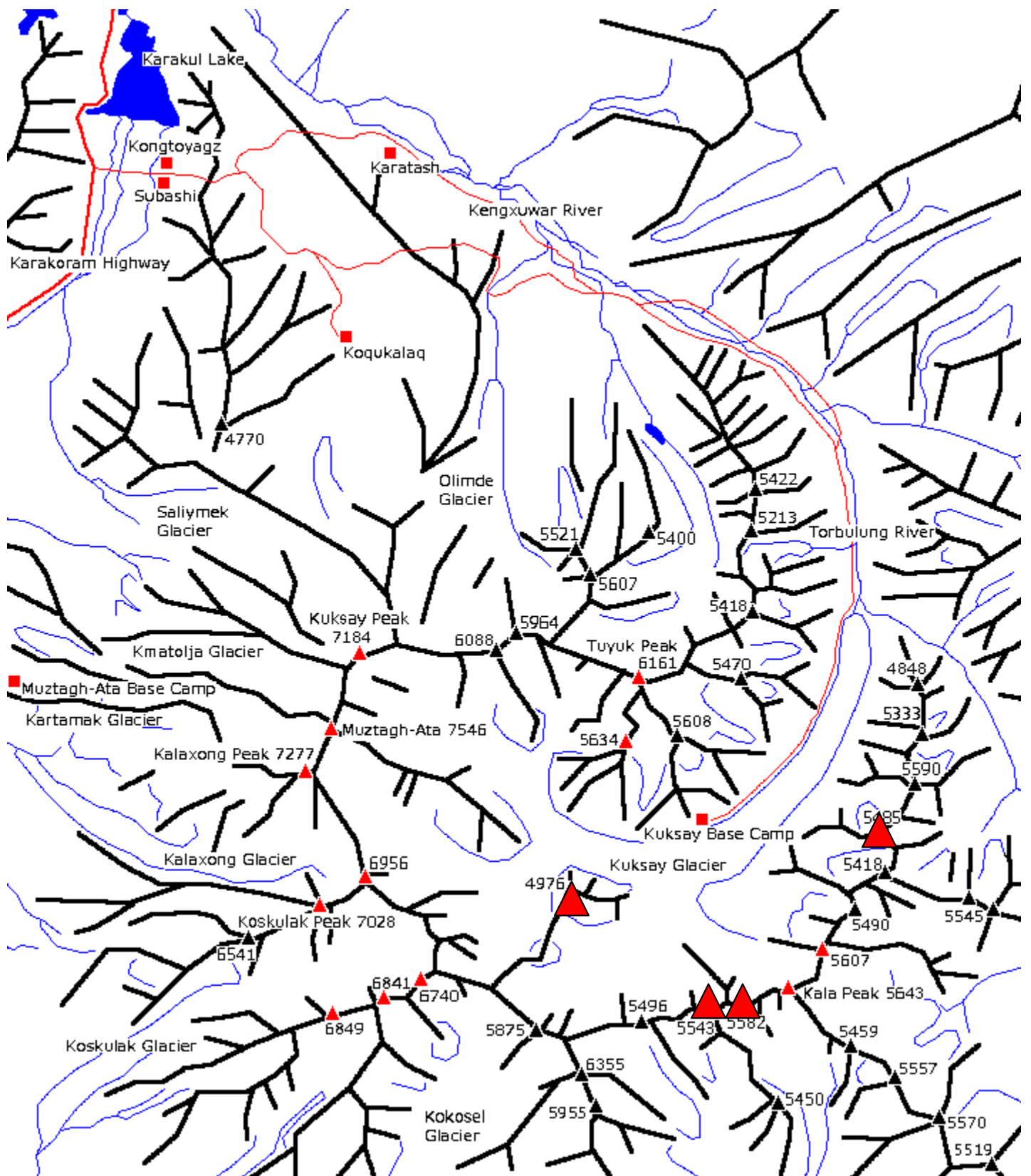
As a team we would like to thank our sponsors, especially the Mount Everest Foundation for their financial support and for the advice of the committee. The compiler of this report and the members of the expedition agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purposes of private research.

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## MUZTAGH-ATA SKETCH-MAP



Muztagh-Ata and surrounding mountains: climbed peaks - red, unclimbed peaks – black. Peaks climbed by British Kuskay shown enlarged

