

Western Kokshaal-Too 2009 Expedition



August 2009

Western Kokshaal-Too, Kyrgyzstan

Expedition Members: Tom Bide
Dave Gladwin
Urpu Hapuoja
Carl Reilly
Graeme Schofield
Tom Stewart

MEF Ref: 09/08

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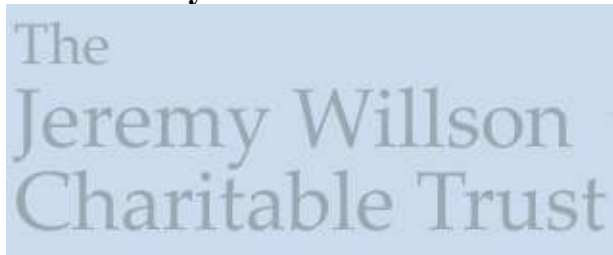
The Mount Everest Foundation



British Mountaineering Council



The Jeremy Wilson Charitable Trust



Walkers Nonsuch



England's Finest Toffee



Abstract

A team totalling 6 members, climbed 5 new routes in the Western Kokshaal-Too, Kyrgyzstan. Three of the members (Tom Bide, Carl Reilly and Graeme Schofield) had visited both the Bolivian and Peruvian Andes previously and therefore had experience of new routing in the Greater Ranges. For the other members this was their first taste of exploratory mountaineering in the greater ranges, although they had considerable experience gained in the European Alps.

The principal objective of the expedition was the first ascent of the North Ridge of Kizil Asker.

Expedition Members



Tom Bide, 27 yrs old, British, Geologist;

- Rock climbing all over UK and Europe (up to E2 and sport 6b+)
- British winter climbing (up to V)
- Continental ice climbing up to 4+
- Alpine climbing (up to TD+)
- Alpine climbing in the greater ranges (up to TD+)



Dave Gladwin, 30 yrs old, British, Ski instructor;

- Rock climbing all over UK and Europe (up to E2 and sport 7b+)
- Alpine climbing (up to ED2) (3 seasons)
- Alpine climbing in the greater ranges (up to ED2)



Urpu Hapuoja, 32 yrs old, Finnish, Ski instructor/ Aspirant guide;

- Rock climbing all over Europe (up to F6b and sport 7b)
- Continental ice climbing up to WI4
- Alpine climbing (up to D)
- Alpine climbing in the greater ranges



Carl Reilly, 26 yrs old, British, Postgraduate Engineering Student;

- Rock climbing all over UK and Europe (up to E3 and sport 6C+)
- British winter climbing (up to 6 VI)
- Continental ice climbing up to 5
- Alpine climbing (up to TD+)
- Alpine climbing in the greater ranges (up to TD+)



Graeme Schofield, 28 yrs old, British, Geography Teacher;

- Rock climbing all over UK and Europe (up to E4 and sport 7a)
- British winter climbing (up to 6 V)
- Continental ice climbing up to 5
- Alpine climbing (up to TD+)
- Alpine climbing in the greater ranges (up to TD+)



Tom Stewart, 33 yrs old, British, Project manager/ outdoor instructor;

- Rock climbing all over UK and Europe (up to E3 and sport 6b+)
- British winter climbing (up to VI)
- Continental ice climbing up to 4+
- Alpine climbing (up to ED)

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

Introduction

In August 2009 Tom Bide, Dave Gladwin, Urpu Hapuoja, Carl Reilly, Graeme Schofield and Tom Stewart met as an entire team for the first time in a stereotypical decaying soviet apartment block in downtown Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The adventure had finally begun. Three of the members (Tom Bide, Carl Reilly and Graeme Schofield) had visited both the Bolivian and Peruvian Andes previously and therefore had experience of new routing in the Greater Ranges. Dave Gladwin, Urpu Hapuoja and Carl Reilly had met on Denali, Alaska the previous year. Tom Stewart knew Dave Gladwin through partnering up for some impressive ascents in the European Alps.

The team visited the impressive Western Kokshaal-Too (Figure 1, Figure 2) which lies on the boarder of Kyrgyzstan and China. Although the region has seen previous alpine adventures, there is still many lifetimes worth of top quality climbing to be enjoyed. The majority of it exploratory in nature. The principal objective of the expedition was the first ascent of the North Ridge of Kizil Asker.

The month the team spent in Kyrgyzstan had its highs and lows, successes and failures, joys and suffering as expedition's do.

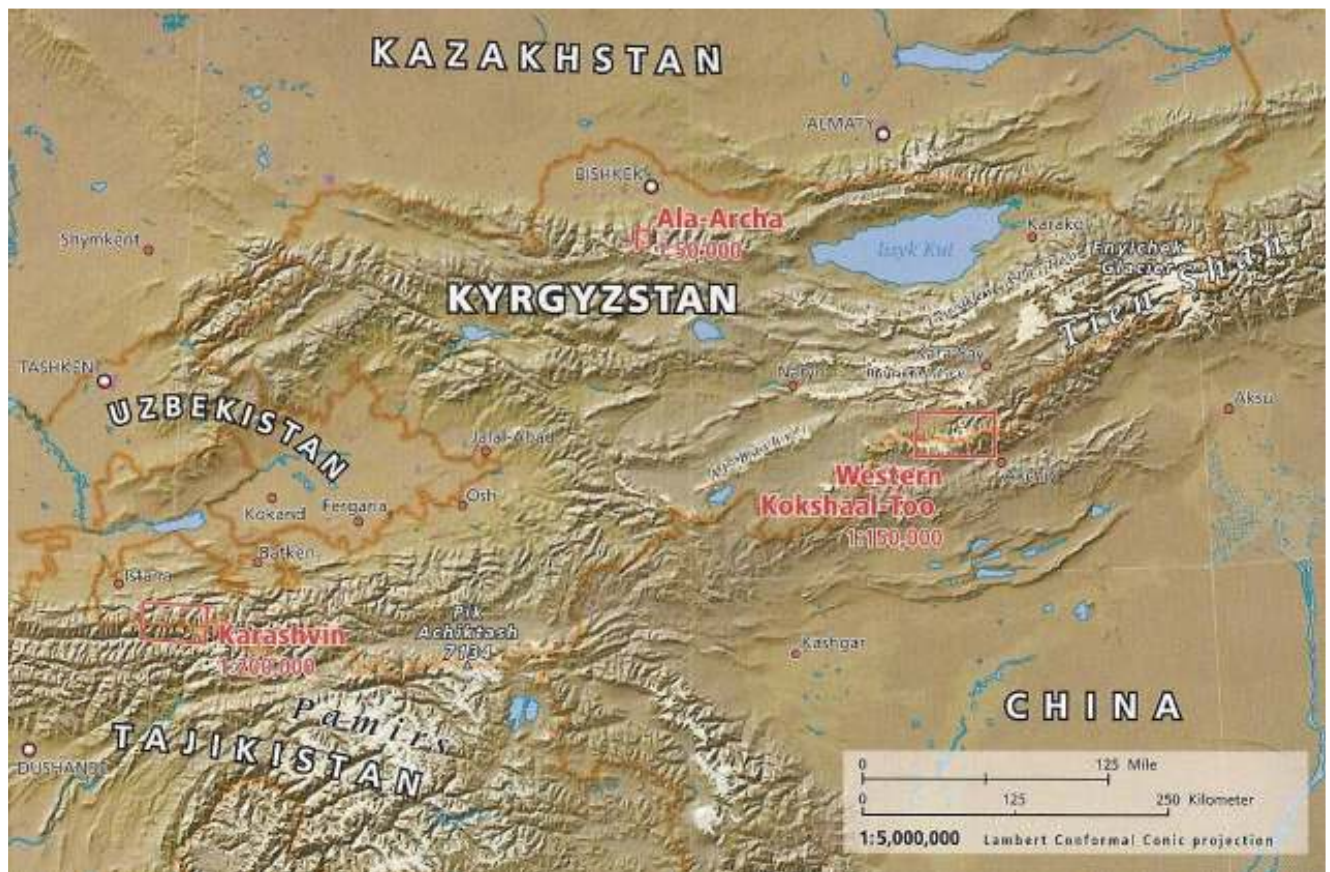


Figure 1 - Kyrgyzstan's mountain ranges ¹

¹ Kyrgyzstan A Climber's Map and Guide, American Alpine club

Map

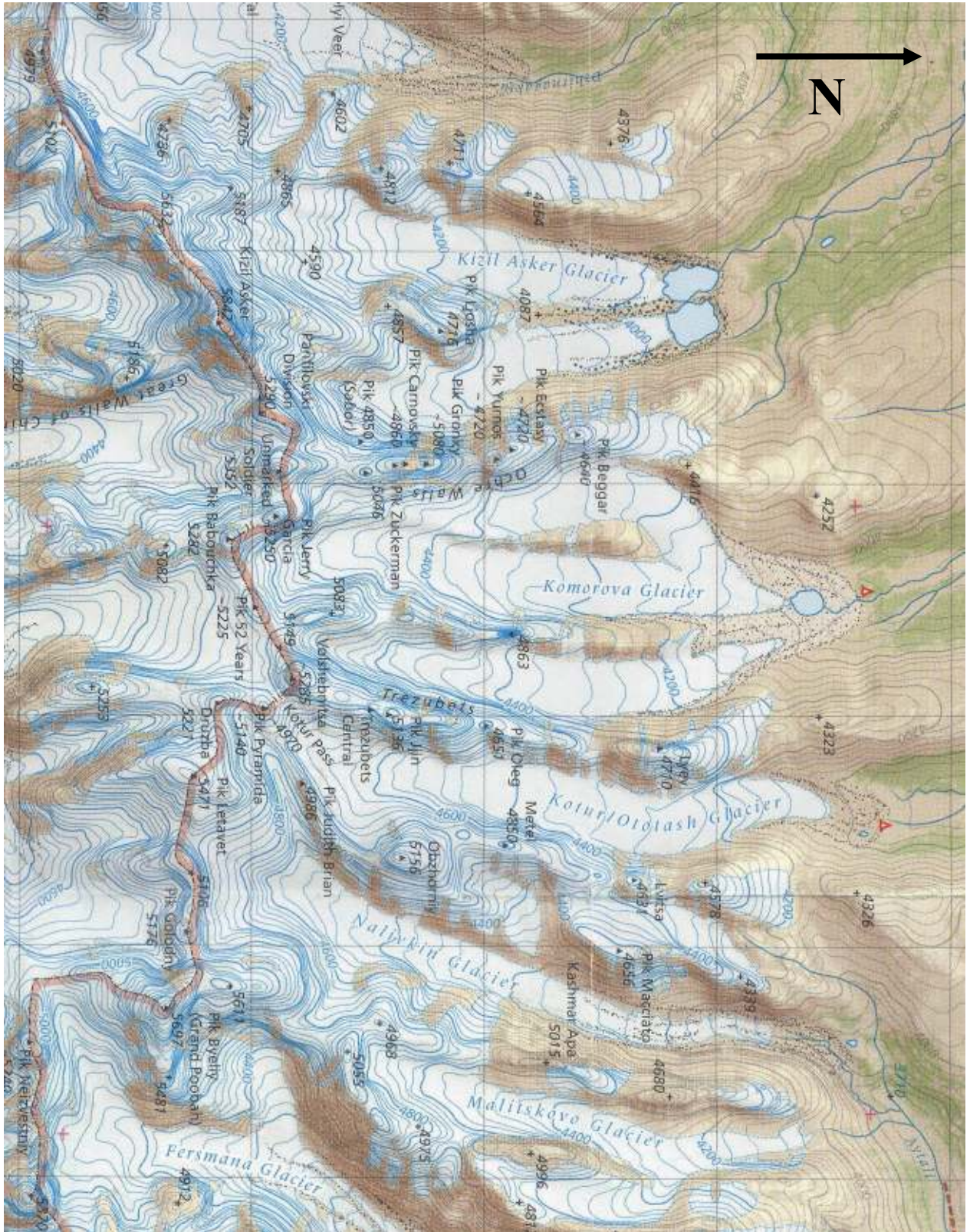


Figure 2 – Western Kokshaal-Too map²

² Kyrgyzstan A Climber's Map and Guide, American Alpine club

Research

Research Materials

The literary sources consulted in planning the expedition were:

- Expedition reports held by the Alpine Club, RGS and BMC
- Mountain Info; Climber & Climb magazine; Lindsay Griffin; 2004-2007
- Internet sites (google searches yielded a couple of photos taken by trekkers)

Maps

The American Alpine club have produced a 1: 50,000 climbers map for Kyrgyzstan. This is clear and easy to read and contains basic descriptions and information on each of the three regions it details; Al-Archer, western Kokshaal-Too and Karavshin.

Upon using this map the expedition found that some of the spot heights were up to 400m out (compared to altimeters). Also many of the peaks are not defined, especially on long chains of peaks.

Guide Books

There appears to be no English language guide books to climbing in Kyrgyzstan. Should someone put in the effort to write one then it could become an adventure climbing mecca for rock, ice, mixed and bigwall climbing.

There is a dated Russian language guide for the climbing in Al-Acher National Park. However unless you speak Russian or get it translated it seems of limited use as the topos are sketches which leave lots to the imagination!

Permission & Permits

Visas are required for Kyrgyzstan, up to 30 days can be purchased from the Kyrgyzstan embassy in London without invitation for £50. We found the embassy's postal service to be very efficient. Further information is available at the embassy's website. It is reportedly possible to purchase visas upon arrival at the airport in Bishkek.

Specific climbing permits are not required in Kyrgyzstan. However for the Western Kokshaal-Too boarder permits are required. These are to allow access in the restricted Chinese Kyrgyzstan border area. These were arranged for us by the agency at a cost of 25 Euros per person. The permits take five to six weeks to arrange.

The Agency - ITMC

We found ITMC to be a very professional agency, the office staff spoke good English and were relatively quick to respond to email. They have a lot of experience in guiding mountaineering groups all over Kyrgyzstan and have therefore a great deal of knowledge of the country. We found no hidden costs (which can not be said of other agencies we heard of). They come highly recommended, providing a professional, and friendly service.

Finances

Fund-raising

The expedition was granted BMC, MEF and Jeremy Wilson Charitable Trust funding for which we were most grateful; more information is available from their respective websites. More grants (dependent upon the expedition's aims and objectives) are also available; the Royal Geographical Society's website is probably the best reference for these.

We also managed to secure some free cereal bars from Walkers Nonsuch as sponsorship. Very tasty.

Costs

The expedition used ATM's when in Bishkek. However outside Bishkek ATM's are very rare. The Agency was paid in Euros, however Kyrgyzstan SOM is the local currency which was used for everything else. There are numerous booths in Bishkek to exchange Euros for SOM.

Accounts (Total for 6 people)

<u>Expenditure</u>		<u>Income</u>	
Flights	4500	BMC Grant	1500
Accommodation	182	MEF Grant	1050
Insurance	1380	J. Wilson Charitable Trust grant	500
Satellite Phone	228		
Transportation (inc driver, fuel)	1833	Total Grants	3050
Boarder Permits	273		
Food	456	Personal Contributions	5802
Total	£ 8852	Total	£ 8852

Insurance

Each expedition member arranged their own insurance through the BMC or Dog Tag. It should be noted that many policies will not cover Kyrgyzstan as it is seen as too remote. BUPA also have a competitive travel insurance policy. However it covers no personal possessions.

www.thebmc.co.uk

www.dogtag.co.uk

Accommodation

Accommodation

The expedition members arrived in Bishkek at different times. Dave arrived first and stayed in the Sakura house a family run hostel in the middle of Bishkek until the others arrived. This cost £2 a night in dorms and £4 in double rooms. It had a great travelling feel to it with backpackers and cyclist stopping for a few nights on their round the world trips or just on an explore of the 'Stans'. It was well run and very clean with hot showers, a communal kitchen, internet close by and a wealth of knowledge lying around the place.

Once the rest of the expedition members arrived we moved into two four bed self contained apartment on Soviet Street (the main street that runs north to south through the city). It cost 20 Euros a night, and although the outside gave the impression of a soviet gangster movie set, once inside it felt cosy and safe (Apart from Tom Stewart getting into a 'friendly' wrestling match initiated by a vodka fuelled local within five minutes of arriving). This apartment was organised through ITMC.

After leaving Bishkek we camped all the time, often by the side of the road, whenever Sergei (the driver/legend) got tired or whenever the truck broke down and his expertise as a former soviet army mechanic was required, hence the term Sergei the legend. This wild camping didn't cause any problems. However on the way back we were advised by the Agency that it was unsafe to spend the night between Naryn and lake Issyk-Kul as a group of 'bandits' had recently held up a German trekking group and taken their valuables.

Food & Cooking

Although slight adaptations may be needed to your western diet, we found that it was easy to get food with enough calories and nutrients to cover all the needed food groups. Everything we normally eat on this kind of trip could be bought at one of the many local markets or from the slightly more expensive supermarkets that are found scattered around the city.

It is probably recommended to buy all food from the markets in Bishkek as there is more range there and it is cheaper but if anything is forgotten you do drive through other towns such as Naryn which has a market and there are other little villages and roadside stalls that are passed on the way to the mountains but don't rely on these.

As all travel between Bishkek and base camp was via truck which wasn't a restriction, so we took big bags of: pasta, rice, potatoes and noodles, tins of meat and vegetables, dried meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, various soup powders and sauces, milk powder, oats, bread, spreads and few treats such as swiss roll for the rest days, these tasted incredible after a trip away from camp.

To be on the safe side, any specific foods or drinks for unusual diet requirement or high activity foods such as energy bars and drinks are probably best to brought from home.



Figure 3 - Base Camp

For cooking at the base camp we bought a mess tent from home (great idea) and all the essentials such as large pots and pans, pressure cookers and utensils we got from the market in Bishkek to enable us to make big meals for the whole team. We used lighter more compact kits for on mountain trips

Expedition's comments:

- Tins of tuna from the market were not what we expected. It appears that the cheap tins are 'fish bits' whereas the more expensive tins only available from the supermarkets are what westerners would expect.
- Chocolate bars vary greatly in quality, many are a synthetic chocolate, which is ok but not quite the same. Snickers and Mars bars can be bought, but at a price.
- Tubes of Pringles and bottles of Coke are worth their relatively expensive price tag after 3 weeks in the mountains
- Buying a small quantity of food to sample before purchasing the expeditions supplies can pay off.

- Hessian sacks are very useful for food and other kit when transporting them. These can be purchased at any Bazar.
- Most supplies can be brought very cheaply at the Bazar's, but quality tends to be variable. You can also shop at the supermarkets, but these are expensive.
- Melon and vegetables can be brought roadside on your journey and so can bread.
- To save weight we bought all batteries, cooking utensils, and wash kit in Kyrgyzstan.
- Pans and cooking utensils were available easily and cheaply from markets or supermarkets. A very good investment was a pressure cooker which cost 40 Euros. This saved fuel and allowed us to cook rice and pasta at altitude. These are hard to find, we found a specialist catering equipment suppliers in Bishkek.
- A pair of marigold gloves is a good investment to help reduce the pain of washing up in the cold glacial melt water.
- It can be beneficial to buy plastic bags and hessian sacks to bag or even double bag food stuffs for transportation. These can easily be bought from the market. Rope for tying the sacks and making guy ropes for the cooking shelter also proved useful.
- We invested in a mess tent before the trip. (Go-Lite Shangri-La 6) We only took the fly sheet and minimal pegs. We borrowed two 1.5 m pieces of wood to use as poles and some spare pegs from the agency. This meant it was only 1 kg of baggage allowance between the whole team. The shelter was far superior to the tarpaulins and dry stone walls we've used on past expeditions. It provided shelter from the wind and kept the heat in well when cooking allowing much more comfort.

Fuel

The expedition used MSR multi fuel stoves (XGR, Wisperlite and Dragonfly) alongside two jet boil gas stoves for bivis. These were run on unleaded petrol (98 octane) purchased from a petrol station. A 25L metal jerry can was borrowed from the agency. It is advisable to buy 98 octane unleaded from Bishkek as it is not so easy to find outside the capital. Although lower octane unleaded (92, 86 octane) is commonly available.

There are some outdoor shops in Bishkek which sell new screw thread gas canisters at European prices. We found these to be sold out. However the agency was able to supply us with numerous refilled canisters at 3 Euros each. We had no issue with these, although it is the first time we had encountered refilled canisters.

In total in 3 weeks at base camp we used approximately 10 litres of petrol and 8 gas canisters. We were amazed at the efficiency of the jet boil stoves even at altitude.

Water

On expedition we purified our water by filtering it through felt. Felt filters are available on ebay (biodiesel filters) with a 1 micron capability. Five of these were brought from the UK. They were used to filter the water before treating it with iodine crystals. A saturated solution of iodine and water, adding 10ml of saturated solution to each litre of drinking water (see 'Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine' for further details) [3]. Buckets were used to filter large quantities of water which could then be stored in multiple 5 litre water bottles.

It should be noted that there was a good clean water stream which never froze at the base camp we used. Many of the other streams had large volumes of glacial flour in it. This would not be suitable for drinking without extremely heavy filtration, clogging the filter rapidly.

[3] Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicines, Jim Duff, Peter Gormly, Cicerone, ISBN_13 9781852845001

Communications

In Kyrgyzstan it seemed hit or miss as to whether English mobiles worked. Some worked correctly whilst others would only receive texts. There seemed no reason for this. There were phone shops allowing calls to the UK at reasonable prices in Bishkek.

There were multiple internet cafe's / shops. These were relatively inexpensive, however care must be taken to find one with English language keyboards. Typing on a Russian language keyboard is not easy! There are cafes where each computer is set up with headset and skype, this is a very good and cheap way to make calls home.

Satellite phone

We hired a satellite phone from the agency for 10 Euros per day plus the credit. We purchased 20 credits for 20 Euros, this lasted approximately 40 minutes of call time to the UK. Split between the expedition members this was felt to be inexpensive for the safety it gave. When into the Western Kokshaal-Too do not anticipate seeing another soul.

The phone was small and easy to use, a modern type, little different to an every-day mobile phone. During the trip we did accidentally crack the screen of the phone cover for which we were charged an extra 100 Euros. The phone came with a charger for use with the trucks cigarette socket. However on our expedition the charger had broken. Future expeditions are advised to check the charger works before leaving the agency. However by switching the phone on for short periods only we managed to conserve the battery for three weeks with little problem.

We sent frequent texts to the wife of one of the expedition members who was in the UK. She then disseminated the information via email. This worked well and allowed us to save the credit in case of emergency. We then used the rest of the credit upon return to Bishkek.

Language

Russian is widely spoken and understood throughout the country. English will not get you very far, so a good phrase book is recommended. We used a lonely planet Russian / English book.

Basically, Russian is a very difficult language to master. None of the expedition would claim to be brilliant linguists, although Urpu can speak fluent English, Finnish, Norwegian and a reasonable amount Spanish, but that's Scandinavians for you! Even at the end of a month in Kyrgyzstan we could only manage the Russian word for 'thank you' and little else. Although Urpu fared a little better due to her vague memory of Russian taught at school.

We found few people who could speak English, although sometimes English speaking locals were found in unlikely places; taxi drivers and market stall holders. We managed to get by with the classic 'brits abroad' pointing and gesturing, we can't say that we're proud of our complete ignorance of the local language. However we got by without too many problems. The locals seemed to find it amusing rather than offensive.

Our driver Sergei spoke no English at the start of the trip, but was very willing for conversation and we slowly learnt some very basic Russian and Sergei some English. It is advisable to learn some basic Russian and it gets you a long way and the locals appreciate you trying.

A lot of children learn basic English at school so will come up to you wanting to say hello and other words. It is very funny.

We had bought the lonely planet Russian and Central Asian phrase books. The Russian phrase book was helpful on a few occasions. The Central Asian one however was no use as it did not have the Cyrillic text for the phrase, this is incredibly frustrating as no native speaker can read the transliterated phrase. Hence, it is hard to communicate unless you have good pronunciation. If they had included the Cyrillic for the phrase then you could just point to it and the native speaker can read it and understand you, and also they can correct your pronunciation.

Medical

Each member had a knowledge of mountain first aid, this was supported by the book 'Pocket First Aid and Wilderness, which we highly recommend [3]. The book is very small and light, well laid out, easy to understand, designed for expeditions and costs around £9.

The expedition took first aid equipment as recommended in most mountain / wilderness first aid books and iodine crystals for water treatment. We also took out a sterile kit each.

Vaccinations

It is advisable to see your local NHS travel clinic before you leave and for this to be at least 12 weeks before your trip for any vaccinations to be valid.

There are quite a lot of vaccines that are recommended but some are more relevant than others, usually depending on where in the country you are going and for how long. This just needs discussing with your doctor.

By going to <http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/travel/asia/kyrgystan.shtml>, you get a pretty good guide to what maybe required. These vaccinations include:

- Typhoid
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- TB
- Malaria
- Lyme Disease
- Rabies

Acclimatisation

After flying into Bishkek at 700 m we spent a few days purchasing supplies. We then visited the Ala-Archa national park. The peaks range from 4000-4800m and is a great place to get some height before you set off. This is only 45 minutes drive from the city centre, costing 10 Euros in a taxi. Here we trekked in and pitched tent at the Ratsek hut (3300 m). The following day the teams gained further altitude by undertaking further trekking, scrambling or climbing. Everyone reaching a minimum of 4300 m. After a second night at the Ratsek hut the team walked out to the road head and returned to Bishkek. The Ala-Archa national park has a large volume of high quality climbing to be enjoyed, we wished we had longer.

The journey from Bishkek to the Western Kokshaal-Too is initially flat at approximately 700 m above sea level. The second half initially gains elevation to 4000 m at which it stays for the last 100 km of off road driving. The drive takes between 2-4 days depending on whether you get stuck and takes you over high passes at 3300m and back down into valleys at about 2500m . So it is possible to get partly acclimatised on route, but you will feel a bit ropy at base camp. This approach obviously limits the speed of descent from base camp should for someone suffer severe altitude illness and require evacuation. It was anticipated that to drop 1000 m from base camp would take a minimum of 8 hours off road driving In the Western Kokshall Too, base camps tend to be at an altitude of 3800m, and the mountains reach heights of between 4500 – 5800m, this means that acclimatisation is essential. However, Once at base camp there are many easy walking and trekking peaks to get high

on. We tended to spend about 3-5 days high up on the glaciers closer to the routes at 4200m and then return to base camp for a day's rest and then head out again.

We did carry as part of our first aid kit various altitude drugs, as recommend by our local doctors. We suggest you seek professional advice on what to carry and how and when to use them. See the medical section for what we took.

Mountain Rescue

There is now a mountain rescue service available in Kyrgyzstan. It was set up to try and encourage adventure tourism and is still very much in its infancy.

We were registered with the mountain rescue service by the agency free of charge. This involved filling in a form requesting, name, DOB, address, emergency contact details etc and providing copies of insurance documents (minimum of 25,000 Euro rescue cover required).

The emergency rescue service appears to consist of the guides from a number of guiding agencies (such as ITMC) based in Bishkek. They have had some formal training by the Slovenian mountain rescue service. Their level of expertise or competence is not known, nor is their response time. However it may be possible to get a helicopter to base camp in an emergency as some of the agencies offer heli-skiing, therefore presumable these same helicopters could be utilised for emergency evacuation.

We estimate evacuation from base camp in the Western Kokshaal-Too to Naryn (nearest medical facility) via vehicle would take a minimum of 12 hours with an additional 7 hours required if it was necessary to get medical treatment in Bishkek. However a helicopter would obviously be far quicker once it has arrived at base camp.

Medication

The expedition took the following from the UK, provided by a GP with a covering letter in case of trouble at customs (however no issue was experienced):

Altitude Drugs:

Dexamethasone injections
Dexamethasone tablets
Diamox tablets

Pain Killers:

Nalbuphine Injections

Anti Biotics:

Amoxicilin

Pain Killers:

Codeine
Nurophen
Paracetamol
Aspirin

Other Medical Previsions:

Imodium
Sore throat sweets
Lip balm
Re-hydration sachets
Sun cream

Anti Biotics:

Ciprofloxacin
Metronidazole

The only instances where medical treatment were given were a couple of cases of suspected Guardia. The Guardia cleared up quickly with rest and a short course of antibiotics (2mg Metronidazole a day for 3 days).

Graeme suffered a knee problem, which was a reoccurrence of an old injury. This it was believed was brought on by carrying heavy loads.

Both Tom S and Dave suffered frost bite and frost nip from their ascent of the North Ridge of Kizil Asker, brought on partially due to being unable to light a stove storm as they sat out a storm in their bivi bags. This led to them being dehydrated, under-nourished and cold, thus particularly susceptible to frost bite. The frost bite was restricted to the tips of toes and fingers, Dave's big toes being the worst (Figure 4). This was treated by keeping the digits, clean, and warm for the rest of the expedition. They have recovered fully.



Figure 4 – Dave's foot with frost bitten big toe

Equipment

Each partnership had enough equipment to be self reliant, as climbing objectives were generally not the same.

- Depending on the team, either the same tent was used both at base camp and on trips away, or the more practical arrangement of leaving a tent at base camp and having a lighter weight tent to use when away.
- Clothing wise we used systems that would keep us warm and dry in the high mountains of the European Alps in summer. So a good down jacket but not expedition quality, people with double boots seemed happier than idiots such as Dave with lightweight summer boots (hence the frostbitten toes), thermals and mitts were needed especially for north facing routes. As temperature and weather was stable and often predictable these clothing systems were fine but on the occasions when a front blew in; which was a very slow obvious process the temperatures would often plummet dramatically
- We had a pair of long ranges walkie talkies, however they were only useable in 'line of sight', so two tin cups and piece of string would have been just as useful.....
- Each route was different so we packed more ice or rock gear depending on what we planned to encounter but as a general rule we took extra kit and two 60m half ropes in case of a forced retreat
- A significant amount of abseil tat may come in handy as many of the routes are descended by abseil, 10-15 m can easily be used on one routes decent. It would be advisable to bring this from the UK.

Our rack (per team of two) which we took to Kyrgyzstan consisted of:

- 8 ice screws
- 2 sets of nuts
- Couple of hexes and cams
- Abseil tat
- 8 runners
- Some longer slings

And personal stuff including a basic first aid kit and a bivi kit for most routes including day trips as we did not know how the weather systems worked

Weather

The weather was much better than we had anticipated. After doing our research we had envisaged at least a few tent-bound days. It appears that past expeditions have visited the Western Kokshaal-Too in July when the weather is warmer but more unsettled. These expeditions often experienced very instable conditions with numerous tent-bound days. More recent expeditions have visited the area in August when the weather is colder but more stable. These seem to have had better weather. Our trip in August had only 2 days where it would not have been advisable to climb. It therefore appears that August is the best time to visit this region, or we were just very lucky. Although conditions were often unsettled with snow squalls reminiscent of typical 'Scottish' climbing.

We had two days of snow (up to 10cm) at base camp, although this vanished within a couple of hours of the clouds clearing.

The highest peaks seem to take the worst of the weather and shield the lower mountains from the worst of the wind and precipitation. It was not uncommon to see large cloud banks covering the top of the highest peaks in the region (Kizil Asker, Ochre walls).

The weather systems could often be seen to be moving in from China (south) or the west.

Risks and hazards

There were a number of potential risks the expedition faced, both through the inherent hazards involved whilst mountaineering in a remote area and the more general risks of travelling in an unfamiliar country. Below are a number of the key risks we identified on the expedition and how we aimed to limit these risks.

Risks in the Mountain Environment

We were aware of the potential health risks of drinking non-treated glacial melt water at base camp. As mentioned earlier water was purified with iodine.

Objective dangers such as rockfall, avalanches and serac collapse were all apparent in the mountain areas we visited. We limited the risk by choosing routes carefully and attempting to spend as little time as possible in zones susceptible to these potential dangers.

As there was no possibility of **rapid** rescue from an external agency, an accident would have had to be dealt with by the expedition members. Although Kyrgyzstan does now have a mountain rescue service, see section entitled 'mountain rescue'.

Inherent risks whilst climbing in this environment such as falls, hypothermia, exhaustion and altitude sickness including pulmonary oedema were minimised through our previous experience and training, knowledge of our limitations and careful planning.

Risk of crime

Despite warnings to the contrary we found Kyrgyzstan to be safe for travelling. However as with all cities in the world there was a potential risk of theft. This was generally felt by the group to be a much larger threat in Bishkek than anywhere else in Kyrgyzstan. Although it is worth noting that a group of German trekkers were robbed between Naryn and the lake Issyk-Kul during August 2009 by a group of 'bandits'.

We always tried to be as vigilant as possible when we had all our belongings with us, as the amount of equipment we had in our possession probably made us an easy target. Travelling as a large group made this easier as one person could stay with the luggage at all times.

There is so little habitation in the Western Kokshaal-Too that theft at base camp would seem extremely unlikely. Having a driver based at base camp gives some security

Environmental and Social Impact Assessment

Our goal was to have as little environmental impact as possible on the areas we visited. But to be driving over 2000 km with a vehicle using up to 50 litres fuel per 100 km was not a perfect start. Anyway, other than that, we were trying to take care of environment as much as possible. Biodegradable soap was used for all washing needs in an attempt to have a neutral impact on the water quality of the streams. At the Base Camp we dug two holes: toilet and the compost. These were located well away from the water source and the tents. Our driver dig one more hole planning to bury lots of garbage but we managed to end up using it just as a burning spot for all the burnable garbage. When leaving the Base Camp we filled and covered the holes up and tried to make the area look as natural as possible.

All the other garbage was taken back to Bishkek, but we were unsure if the city really has a proper waste disposal system and/or recycling. It looked like everything got burned sooner or later. Locals didn't seem to care for the environment as we did.

All the surplus food and equipment we gave to our driver and the agency. It looked like they would have use for most of it, so it didn't end up in waste.

There was little if any social impact from the expedition as the Western Kokshaal-Too had been depopulated by the soviets as they deemed the boarder with China to be sensitive. We therefore saw only a few nomadic farmsteads in the region. The closest of which was approximately 15 miles from base camp.

Travel, Transport and Freighting

Further and more current advice on travel and visas is available from guide books and from tourist/travel agencies once in Kyrgyzstan

Flights

The expedition travelled separately as we were leaving from different countries. Carl, Tom B, Tom S and Graeme flew London to Bishkek via Almaty with BMI, and Uru flew Oslo to Moscow to Bishkek with Aeroflot. Dave flew London to Moscow to Almaty with Transaero as it was cheaper and it saved him about 50p during 3 days of travel compared to everyone else's 10 hours.

On the flights if one bag was stated as sports equipment then you were allowed double your normal luggage allowance so we had 40Kg per person in the hold plus hand luggage.

The Transaero flight was not the most luxurious with tractors coming to collect the baggage. And with no films, the entertainment was provided in other ways, like the nurse shining something like a radar gun into everybody's ears looking for Swine flu! The poor service was made up for by giving unlimited vodka's!

The guys flying direct to Bishkek had a straightforward flight out but on return ended up being delayed by a day due to the pilot being sick which they were informed as the flight was due to leave, although the airline did provide a hotel room in Bishkek for the length of the delay (10 hours) and also a hotel in London for those with missed connections.



Helping out after getting a flat tire 1 hour from Bishkek. We left here 6 hours later

Dave's homeward travel from Almaty (Kazakhstan) which although was on time had its ups and downs. One hour before my flight the customs guards explained that I had over run visa by 2 hours so could not leave the country but then proceeded to explain that by paying a 'fee'/bribe this shouldn't be a problem. So a half hour later with a substantially lighter wallet I left with the guard parting words of "you had big problem which we help you with, now you help us and keep quiet, you understand?" I nodded sheepishly. I guess I lied

The Baggage allowance was 20 Kg in the hold and 12 kg hand luggage; however the group managed to get more through by using a variety of tactics. The best being to request your bags go in special baggage so the delicate items do not get damaged. Then on the trip between the check in counter and the special baggage counter (usually at the other end of the airport) there is plenty of time to put in all those extra items you wanted to take but didn't have the allowance for.

Although the expedition approached before the flight they were unwilling to give discounted excess baggage rates to the expedition. We are aware that other airlines have offered reduced rates or extra baggage allowance to expeditions in the past, but believe this is becoming less frequent.

Internal Travel

Once in Kyrgyzstan all travel was by road. Getting around Bishkek was by mini bus which cost 10p short distance and 20p long distance and was a great way to see the city, get lost and meet the locals. Once we took a taxi but after a one armed taxi driver picked us up we decided to risk the mini buses in future.

Travel to base camp

We travelled by truck to base camp. From the agency we had rented a driver (Sergy, ex-soviet army mechanic) and an ex-soviet soviet army truck weighing around 16 tonnes and doing a top speed of about 50km/h on road and 60km/h off!!! The 6wd system gave it very respectable off-roading capabilities, however its comfort levels can't be said to be so good, noisy and bumpy are good descriptions.

We got off to a bad start with a 8 hour roadside delay caused by a puncture, flat spare tyre and ripped valve on a spare inner-tube. However after spare's were brought from Bishkek we experienced few problems considering the type of vehicle and roads we were driving on!

It can't be said that we have an easy trip into the mountains however. 24 hours of hard manual labour, digging 16 tonnes of Russian engineering from high altitude marshland gave us a work out! After leaving the last distinct dirt track to head for base camp we got the vehicle stuck in a bog. Within 10 m the truck had gone from leaving faint tyre tracks in the moorland to being up to all six axles in mud (Figure 5).

Initially we tried to chock the wheels with rocks and wood (which we had brought from Bishkek for just this eventuality) however this initial attempt just made the situation worse as the vehicle sank deeper as each of the 6 wheels dug down under power rather than move the vehicle backwards. The situation was looking bad. The front of the truck was especially deeply entrenched. We seemed so close, yet it no felt so far from base camp.

It was all hands to the pump for the next 24 hours as we dug out the wheels, jacked up the vehicle, placed rocks under them and then lowered the vehicle once again (Figure 6). At which point the rocks would be pushed into the ground. However inch by inch we gained height until the wheels were resting on a bed of firm rocks with all axels clear. With the engine bellowing nauseous fumes into the atmosphere the vehicle emerged from the bog. Defiantly a joyous moment, however surveying the impact we had on the landscape made us far less jubilant (Figure 7)

The biggest problem was making a firm platform from which to jack the vehicle up. We had to dig a large hole, in which to place the spare wheel, this spread the weight over a large enough area so as to allow the vehicle to be lifted.

Covered with mud we climbed back into the vehicle and set off for base camp once again. We decided to make one last attempt to reach a base camp at the bottom of the Kizil Asker glacier. We headed down the river basin but could not find a way through. We feel that it would be relatively simple with a smaller 4WD vehicle (Lada Niva or alike). After scouting out routes we decided to turn round and head for the Kormovora glacier base camp as we knew that this would be more easily accessible.



Figure 5 – Truck gets stuck in bog



Figure 6 – Digging out and jacking up the truck



Figure 7 – Surveying the damage. Low impact expeditions!!

Expedition Log

(8th August – 4th September 2009)

August

- Saturday 8th Travel to Bishkek, everyone arrived. The expedition is about to begin!
- Sunday 9th A day in Bishkek. Shopping and planning.
- Monday 10th Meeting at the ITMC agency. Taxi to Ala-Archa and walk up to 3300 m.
- Tuesday 11th Acclimatisation tramps and climbs, up to 4300 - 4500 meters.
- Wednesday 12th Walk down, taxi to Bishkek, shopping and meeting at the agency.
- Thursday 13th Start driving, flat tire, waiting. Got close to Naryn by midnight.
- Friday 14th Shopping at Naryn and driving a long day to the valley of Kokshaal-Too.
- Saturday 15th Driving off road towards the mountains, and got stuck in a bog. Shovelling.
- Sunday 16th A bit more shovelling and got loose. Decided to drive to BC at Komorova glacier. Put up BC at 3860 m. Dave and Tom S. walked to 4416 m peak and back down.
- Monday 17th Dave and Tom S. climbed a variation on 'Silent Bob' on peak Yurnos 4720m (Ocre Walls). Graeme and Carl undertook acclimatisation walk. Tom and Urpu climbed Pik Beggar 4640 m.
- Tuesday 18th Tom and Urpu rest day. Graeme and Carl acclimatisation walk. Dave and Tom S. climbed Sarah's Daddy, Peak Carnovsky 4860 m.
- Wednesday 19th Tom and Urpu climbed the north ridge of Pik 4863 (altimeter height 4920m). Graeme and Carl climbed walk to camp on Kormovra glacier.
- Thursday 20th Snowstorm. Tom and Urpu rest day. Graeme and Carl climbed attempt a climb, find rock too loose and head back to base camp.
- Friday 21st Tom and Urpu walked up to 4270 m to camp on the western glacier. Dave and Tom S.
- Saturday 22nd Tom and Urpu rested. Graeme and Carl walked up to middle glacier to camp.
- Sunday 23th Tom and Urpu climbed Pik Jerry Garcia 5110 m. Graeme and Carl climbed North ridge on unknown peak (AAC Map) Between peak Oleg and Peak Jin. Dave and Tom S. walked to Eastern Kizil Asker glacier to camp.
- Monday 24th Dave and Tom S. started to climb the north ridge of Kizil Asker. Graeme and Carl rested. Tom and Urpu rested.
- Tuesday 25th Dave and Tom S. second day on the north ridge of Kizil Asker. Graeme and Carl walked to Eastern Kizil Asker glacier to camp. Tom and Urpu rested. Snowstorm at night. Graeme walks back to base camp late a night due to knee injury.
- Wednesday 26th Dave and Tom S. rappel down from the "Sculptures Peak", the top of the north ridge of Kizil Asker, Stewart / Gladwin ridge or Sculptura Chokursu (Sculptures Peak). Tom goes to glacier to climb with Carl. Urpu having a rest day.

- Thursday 27th Urpu bouldering around BC, Graeme rest day. Carl and Tom walk to camp on Kizil Asker glacier Dave and Tom S. walked back to BC.
- Friday 28th Carl and Tom climbed West Face/South ridge on 5046 m peak (southern end of Ochre walls). Dave, Tom S., Graeme and Urpu rest day at BC.
- Saturday 29th Graeme and Urpu walked up to middle Komorova glacier to climb “4820” peak south for 4920 peak but turned back at 4550 m. Carl and Tom back to BC. Dave and Tom S. bouldering close to BC.
- Sunday 30th Leaving the BC. Backing and driving. Bouldering stop in the valley. Night at the Am-Bashy river.
- Monday 31st Driving pass Naryn to the lake Issyk-Kul. Night at the lake.
- September**
- Tuesday 1st Swim in the lake. Driving to Bishkek, sauna and night at Sergei.
- Wednesday 2nd In Bishkek. At the agency.
- Thursday 3rd A day in Bishkek
- Friday 4th Carl, Graeme, Tom, Tom S. and Urpu fly back to Europe. Dave travels to Almaty in Kazakhstan. The expedition is over!

General Comments

- Be very wary of the mountain bogs in the Western Kokshall Too, riverbeds tend to be the easiest way to approach base campsites.
- You will probably have to bribe border guards with cigarettes, fuel and melons, your driver will most likely sort this.
- Be wary of the police at Osh Bazar, they like to stop and search you and take you away to the police station.
- Gas cartridges tend to be refills, but these are very good, and seem to last a very long time. We got ours through the IMTC Agency.
- If new routing make sure you have plenty of abseil tat, especially for ice routes, where you will probably make a lot of abakalov’s.
- Always make sure your passport is at hand as the police will stop and ask you for it and you will require it at every border post of which there are three.

Routes

Grades

Grading routes in the mountains is always difficult due to factors such as changing snow conditions. We given the new routes we climbed speculative grades based on the conditions we found the route in during our ascent, but would be very happy to hear how other people find these routes.

Ala-Archa National park

Route: West face of Pik Bachichiki

Climbers: Dave Gladwin, Tom Stewart

Date: 11/08/2009

Grade: Diff

Description: A easy climb up the obvious ridge on the west face of Pik Bachichiki, getting to 4400m before bad weather turned us back

Decent: Via scree to the right.

Route: Single pitch rock routes

Climbers: Dave Gladwin and Tom Stewart

Date:

Description: Two new single pitch rock routes about 500m from camp just off the left of the path as walking uphill. Both routes were on granite and about 10m long.

Grade: VS 4c/5a.

Western Kokshaal - Too

Route: Variation on Silent Bob

Climbers: Dave Gladwin and Tom Stewart

Date: 17/08/2009

Description: Follow the Ice couloir, at about WI4 and then one pitch of hard ice and mixed at about WI 5+ / Scottish 6. We think it is a variation of a Sean Issac route Silent Bob on peak Yurnos 4720m

Grade: ED1 (WI5+, Scottish 6) 400m

Route: 'Sarahs Daddy' Ochre walls, Peak Carnovsky 4860 m (altimeters suggest 5000m)

Climbers: Dave Gladwin and Tom Stewart

Date: 18/08/2009

Description: It had pitches of WI3, WI4 and WI5. On the crux pitch the ice was about 3 - 4 inches thick and in places very poor. The rest was good ice. (Figure 8).

Grade: ED2, 500 m



Figure 8 - Sarah's Daddy

Route: North Ridge of Kizil Asker, but which is now known as the: Stewart / Gladwin ridge or Sculptura Chokursu (Sculptures Peak). Summit seemed to be about 5500m.

Climbers: Dave Gladwin and Tom Stewart

Date: 24-26/08/2009

Description: It was about 2km long, 1400m height gain, 1 day in, three days on route another day out. We think overall about ED2/3. A real full on battle, including three 18hr days, one storm, two bivis, with one on the summit in massive storm, frost bite and frost nip, 24hrs of no food or water, 1000m+ abseil descent on 20-25 abakalov's!

Approach to ridge:

Cross bergshrund and straight up left of seracs 50 deg max – 350m

R hand traverse to right of tower protectable with rock – 350m

Open gulleys to notch of ridge proper 55 deg – 150m

Ridge proper (Figure 9):

P1) WI2, M3 – 40m

P2) WI3 – 35m, Alpine V/VI- – 15m

P3) General mixed Scottish II/III

P4) Scottish VII – 70m (cut ledge for bivi)

P5) mixed ground – 65m

P6) r of next gendarme mixed, WI3 55deg

P7) mixed ground back to ridge

P8) crack M6/M6+ or Scottish VII/VII+ – 10m

P9) Pure rock Alpine V – 40m

P10) Right upwards tending traverse on bad rock, Alpine V - 50m

P11) Left of next gendarme, mixed – 30m

P12) Up rock fin on left hand side with hand jam , Alpine 6- - 20m

P13) Follow crest of ridge over mixed delicate ground then jump gap and traverse right, Alpine V

P14) Up steps then step left into chimney, IV/V

P15) Mixed ground to right slanting ledge, VI, into overhanging Alpine V rock move (rope jam) – 70m

P16) WI3 chimney into mixed ground – 10m pure rock IV, mixed 80m

P17) Traverse R of ice field under rock face into next gully – 30m

P18) Gully straight up – 30m, mixed 70 deg ice covered slabs – 100m then 60 deg and Scottish V for a short section

P19) R traversing mixed ground – 80m onto corniced ledge between two summits

Bivy 12pm 5500m

Descent:

- West face (possible new route if all sections form, unfortunately hanging glacier above so lots of spindrift and falling ice)
- Gully/ice line onto hanging ice field - 15 abs
- Simul climb right traversing over top of seracs
- Gully/ice line - 10 abs on amazing looking ice line!!!
- Onto glacier, back up to notch, down left of snowfield - 50 deg and back home for tea and biscuits

Grade: A complete mixture or 55/60 degree ice, WI3/4, Alpine V/VI, M6+/7 and loads of other stuff.



Figure 9 - Stewart / Gladwin Ridge

Route: North ridge on 4863 m peak (AAC Map) (Altimeters showed the summit to be 4920 m)

Date: Wednesday 19.08.2009

Climbers: Tom Bide and Urpu Hapuoja

Description: Gain the skyline ridge from the Kormaova glacier via scree or snow and continue along this until it steepens. Go up on the right below rocks on the ridge crest for 5 rope lengths to gain the summit (Scottish 2/3). (Figure 10)

Descent: Abseil down a broad colour on the east face

Grade: AD



Figure 10 - North ridge peak 4863 m

Route: North ridge on unknown peak (AAC Map) Between peak Oleg and Peak Jin (between Komorova and Kotur/Ototash glaciers) lay a series of peaks not shown on the map.

Climbers: Carl Reilly and Graeme Schofield

Date: 23/08/2009

Route description: After camping the night on the unnamed glacier between the Komorova and Kotur/Ototash glaciers the ridge was gained by the eastern slope. This was followed over an initial summit, footsteps believed to be from a British party who had arrived at the western Kokshaal–Too due to access issues to the Borkolody range. They had climbed this peak earlier in the week. Carrying on along the ridge a second higher peak was reached. The climb was undertaken un-roped. The route was descended by reversing the route. (Figure 11)

Grade: D



Figure 11 - North ridge on unknown peak (AAC Map) Between peak Oleg and Peak Jin

Route: West Face/South ridge on 5046 m peak (southern end of Ochre walls, altimeters showed 5200 m)

Climbers: Tom Bide and Carl Reilly

Date: 28/08/2009

Route Description: After camping the night on the Kizil Asker glacier the eastern fork was taken to access a smaller glacier between the Ochre walls and peak Sabor. This was followed until its end where the ridge summit ridge of 5046 m peak (southern end of Ochre walls) was gained via a snow slope, wide gully, and mixed ground (Scottish 3/4). The ridge was followed south. This included two short sections of climbing at about Scottish 5/6. Due to the time of day and unsettled weather the West face was abseiled directly from the summit. Four 60m abseils followed by and down climbing a large snow slope regained the glacier. This is a fantastic and varied route. (Figure 11)

Grade: TD/TD+ (two short sections of Scottish 5/6)



Figure 12 - West Face/South ridge on 5046 m peak. Looking South East on the Kizil Asker glacier.

Future Potential

There is much new route potential in Kyrgyzstan for the future, including virgin summits.

There are many unclimbed faces and ridges, rock, ice, mixed and bigwall lines of all grades to challenge both the current and future generations of climbers.

Below is a short list of a fraction of the potential objective in the Western Kokshaal-Too which the team saw whilst in the mountains and are believed to be unclimbed. More details and further images of these objectives may be available from the team, please don't hesitate to contact the team using the details below.

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Figure 13 - Ice gully on eastern flank of Pik Sabor

Ice gully on eastern flank of Pik Sabor

On the eastern flank of Pik Sabor lies the aesthetic ice gully seen in Figure 13. This was seen by Tom B and Carl as they made their way up the east fork of the Kizil Asker glacier. The line looked to be approximately 200m (although the team found judging distances in the range to be difficult due to the vast scale of the mountains). This looks a nice acclimatisation route due to its relatively low altitude. The grade would largely be dependent on the quality of the ice, however it would be expected to be in the IV/V range. Bullet hard ice was experience in areas of the range. Descent would be easy by rappelling the line.

Mixed line up west face of ochre walls

A Scottish style from the eastern folk of the Kizil Asker glacier, probably 1000m long, was seen on the west sides of the ochre walls topping out between 5046 m and Pik Zuckerman. This appeared to have tits difficulties at approximately half height.

Ridges

Long multi day traverses of many of the ridges look possible for well acclimatised and fit parties. The scale of these mountains means that many of these traverses would be multiple kilometres in length, making these committing endeavours. However they may not have too many technically serious sections.

West face of Kizil Asker

During the decent of Kizil Asker Tom S and Dave spotted a technically serious but aesthetic ice line. The risks of this serac fall on this line may be serious.

Big walls

There are numerous walls of granite of 1000 m plus. From a distance these appear to be very compact and therefore technically serious. These include the East face of the Ochre walls, Pik Ljoshja and west face Pik Gronky.

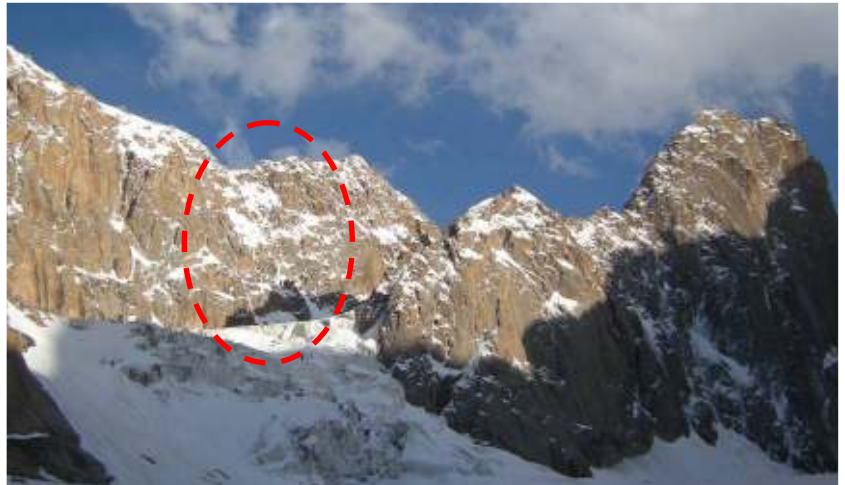


Figure 14 – Mixed line up west face of ochre walls
Highlighted area shown in Figure 15



Figure 15 - Mixed line up west face of ochre walls close up

Conclusion

All the team members agree the expedition was a great success especially considering that it was the first time in the Greater Ranges for some members. The main objective of safely undertaking exploratory mountaineering was successfully completed. Each team member managed to participate in a minimum of one new route.

The whole team thoroughly enjoyed the experience and hope to head to the greater ranges soon to undertake further exploratory mountaineering. There is still a lot of scope for new routes in the Kyrgyzstan, of all grades and of rock, alpine and big wall nature.

The people are friendly although the language barrier is often frustrating.

Contacts

We found the following people and places useful for planning and carrying out the expedition:

Agency

ITMC - www.itmc.centralasia.kg

Archive expedition reports:

BMC – www.thebmc.co.uk

Royal Geographical Society – www.rgs.org

Alpine Club – www.alpine-club.org.uk

Grants:

BMC – www.thebmc.co.uk

MEF – www.mef.org.uk

Alpine Club – www.alpine-club.org.uk

The Jeremy Wilson Charitable Trust - www.jwct.org.uk