

Footsteps in the Zhungar Alatau

Kazakhstan 2009

MEF

 **Vango**

BT 

MEF ref 09/21

Zhungar Alatau Expedition Report

Kazakhstan

August 1st – 23rd 2009

MEF REF 09/21

Report Date: 27th November 2009

Jamie Goodhart

AIM

The intention of the expedition was to conduct exploratory mountaineering in the southern region of the Zhungar Alatau Range in Kazakhstan (circa N44 °32 E80 °04) summiting a number of unclimbed peaks in the process. We were successful in our aim.

NB – There are various spelling for the range we visited. To keep the report consistent with grant applications Zhungar has been used throughout. A selection of alternative spelling is listed below:

Duzungarian
Dzungaria
Jungaria
Zungarian
Dzungar

Sponsors of the expedition were:

The Mount Everest Foundation
Vango
BT

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Photo Right - The Zhunger Alatau viewed from near Saryabel



Abstract

In August of 2009 a team of 5 British mountaineers travelled to the relatively unknown Zhungar Alatau Range in Kazakhstan to conduct exploratory mountaineering.

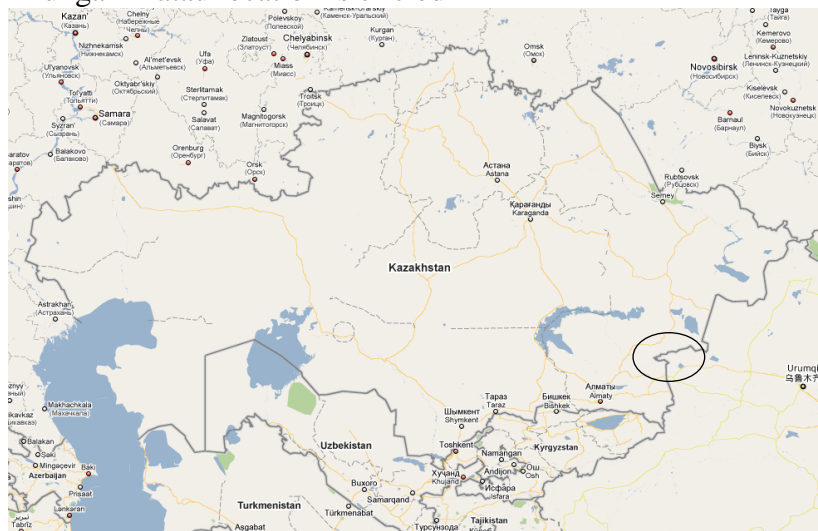
After being unable to establish base camp in the location planned due access difficulties, mainly regarding river crossings, the team reassessed and kept a low Base Camp. This had the effect of increasing the length of walk ins, however gave the team more flexibility. 4 days were spent climbing in the valley of the Kyoabl–Kapacau River, followed shortly after by 5 days in the valley of the Tblwkah River. A number of other peaks were also accessed more directly from Base Camp.

In the 17 days in the region the team now including two Kazakh nationals climbed 16 peaks, a number of which may not have been climbed before. This report describes the endeavour in detail, and additionally comments on the flora, fauna, geology, people and the mountaineering potential of the region.

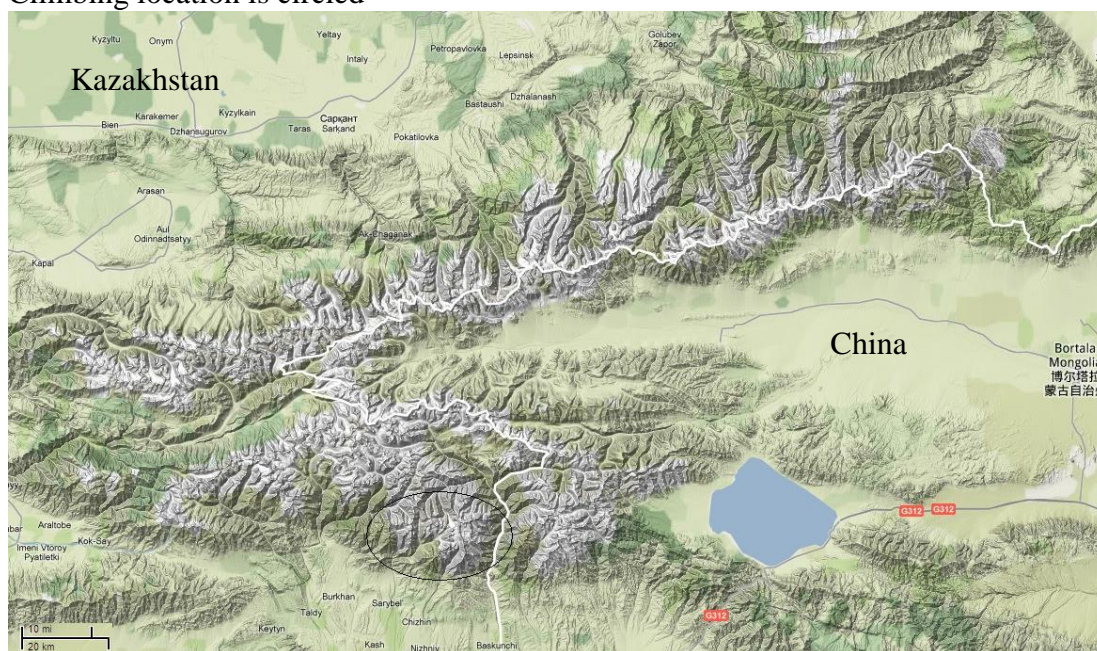
Introduction

The expedition was conceived and led by Stuart Worsfold who discovered the location of the Zhungar Alatau range while investigating the general area. Stuart completed the feasibility investigation quite early on in the planning phase and was in communication with our local contacts/agents (Kan Tengri) before the other 4 expedition members were confirmed. The region was particularly attractive because there were no records or knowledge (including in Kazak circles) of any mountaineering activity in the southern part of the range, giving the possibility of unclimbed peaks. We managed to procure maps of the region which we believed were made by the Russian army by aerial survey in 1968 (although this turned out not to be completely the case). One reason the army were thought to be involved is that the Zhungar Alatau is strategically important as it forms the border with China. For clarity maps are given below:

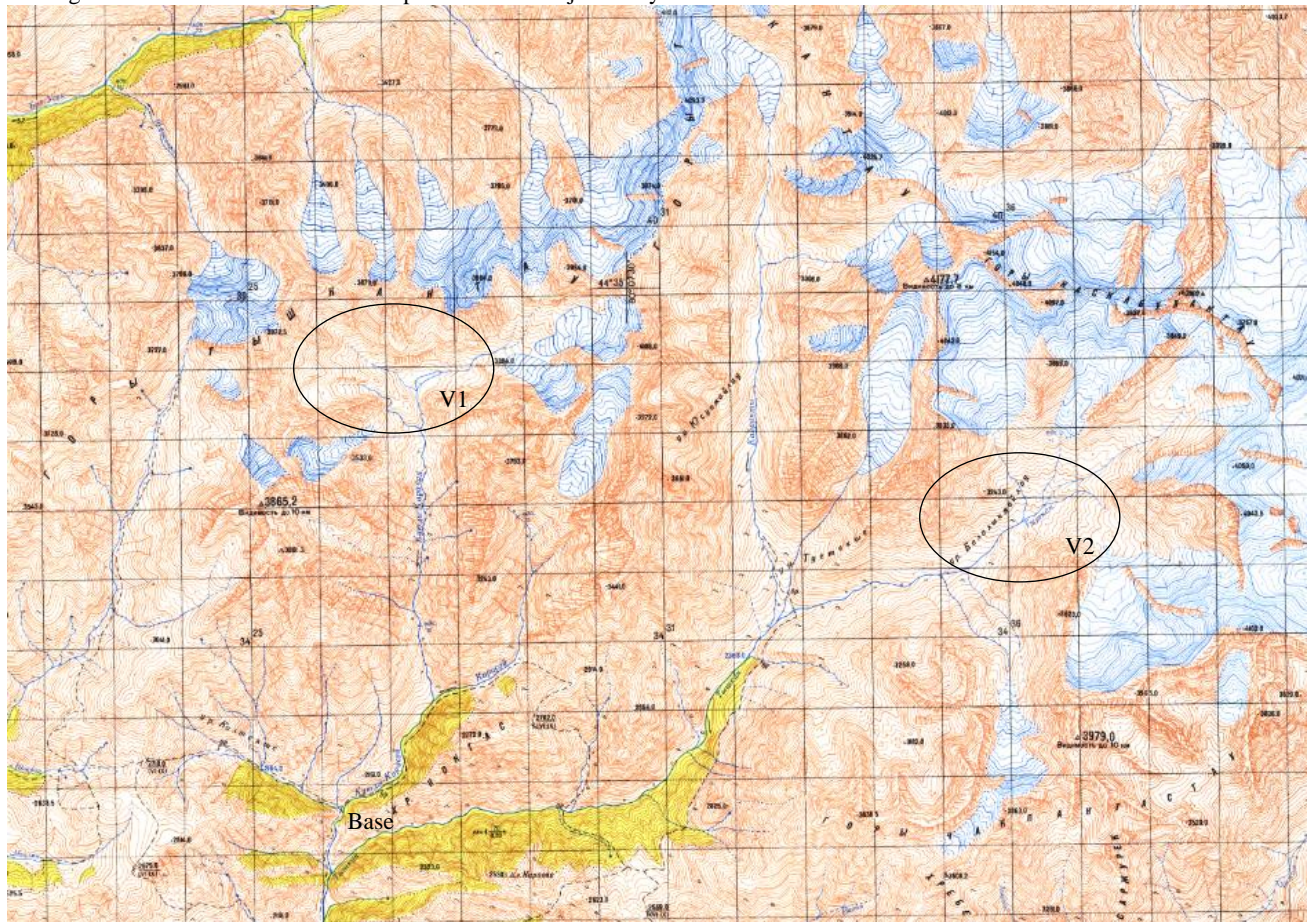
Zhungar Alatau location is circled



Climbing location is circled



The region we visited in detail. Base camp and the two major valley basins we visited are marked



The area we visited was alpine in character, with glaciers beginning at circa 3000m as can be seen on the location map. Base camp was at the confluence of two rivers the Kyoabl–Kapacau and the Tblwkah. The range itself rises abruptly out of the Kazakh steppe with a virtual absence of foothills.

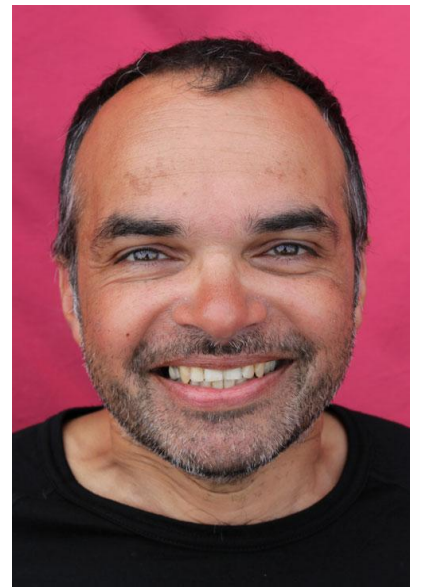
The team explored two main basins during their 17 days in the region and climbed 16 peaks. This report describes the undertaking in detail and comments on other salient topics.

Expedition Members





Stuart Worsfold 38
Expedition Leader
Tree surgeon



Paul Padman 45
Detective Inspector



John Temple 75
Retired



Liam Hughes 25
Recruitment Consultant



Jamie Goodhart 26
Report Author
Consultant British Telecom



Uliya Polyakova
Base Camp Cook
/Manager



Andrey Gundarev
Interpreter/Liaison
Officer/Guide

Expedition Diary

1st August 09

The team met at Heathrow terminal 4 for a direct flight to Almaty.

2nd August 09

The team arrived in Almaty Airport and were picked up by Andrey (from Kan Tengri) and driven to a Hotel (The Three Rivers (Translated)). The hotel was from the Soviet era and had lost none of its original charm! After a few hours sleep Andrey returned to take us shopping for food for above base camp (at well stocked supermarket near the hotel). We took in a few sites in Almaty and then returned to our hotel for some more rest. The team went out for a spectacularly good meal near the hotel then had an early night.

3rd August 09

Breakfast at 7am, Andrey returns with a driver and a minibus. We head to Khan Tengri headquarters in Almaty to pay for the trip (in dollars), load up supplies, base camp equipment and pick up our cook Uliya. This was reasonably efficient all in all and after approximately an hour we were on our way.

We drove the 325km into the Kazakh steppe, after 4 hours we reached the town of Jarkent/Zharkent. We stopped outside a military base here in order that Andrey could get our permits authorised. This took approximately 1.5hours and we had no real problems. We then drove on to, and through Saryabel, the last town on our route to the mountains. About 5/6km from Saryabel is a military boarder post. We had our permits checked and 15 minutes later we were at the roadhead.

We unloaded at a small dam which seemed to be regulating the irrigation system in the area. It was getting quite late so we decided to try and establish a camp for the night as far up the mountain as we could. This turned out to be about a 35minute (load carry) from the roadhead. We did three heavy carries and completed transporting the last loads as it was getting dark. Our camp was 50m beyond a river crossing. Our driver left to return on the 20th August.

4th August

In the morning we surveyed our camp. We were in the V between the Kyoabl–Kapacau and Tblwkah Rivers, we had planned to move up to a higher base camp in the Tblwkah Valley. However, looking at just the first river crossing seemed to rule this out. We decided to spend a day reconnoitring the area in 3 teams to get a better understanding of the land.

Liam and I went back to the road head and followed an alternative valley east, climbing two small tops. One was named Kapacau and one was unnamed as far as we are aware (Point 2664m). We returned via the valley where we had originally intended to place base camp, needing to cross the river in the process. This proved very difficult and took us over an hour with various failed attempts. It would have not been possible with loads.

Stuart and Paul went up the river running north, the Kyoabl–Kapacau, this river was slightly easier to cross many due to a large number of fallen trees and the river being smaller. Paul and Stuart crossed it five times. On the way back Paul discovered a rising traverse through the forest back across to the

valley where we were camped. This was to prove very useful as it cut out the river crossings and became known as the Padman Traverse.

John and Andrey pushed up the Northern bank of the Tblwkah River. Following a good high for some 4km before it disappeared.

When we reconvened we decided that none of the routes taken would be suitable for carrying loads higher and we would make permanent base camp where we were (pictured below) even though this was going to mean much longer walk ins.

Base Camp looking down valley



Base Camp looking up the Tblwkah Valley



5th August

We packed for 4 days and through some heavy rain pushed up the valley of the Kyoabl–Kapacau river (accessed via the Padman traverse) and set up Camp 1 at 3043m. Andrey who has been with us returned to Base Camp. However, after some further exploring by Paul and Stuart (in poor visibility) we quickly moved our camp to near two abandoned huts they found in a flat valley at 3156m. It was a beautiful location as we were almost completely surrounded by peaks. The valley and the huts are pictured below.

Huts and First Valley, The First Hurrah* is visible along with the back of the Christaline peaks #



6th August

Jamie, Stuart, Paul and Liam climbed The First Hurrah 3939m as a acclimatization and training peak. It was straightforward, however we did have bad weather coming in while on the summit (buzzing axes). Jamie and Liam returned via a glacial lake named Loctash.

The First Hurrah

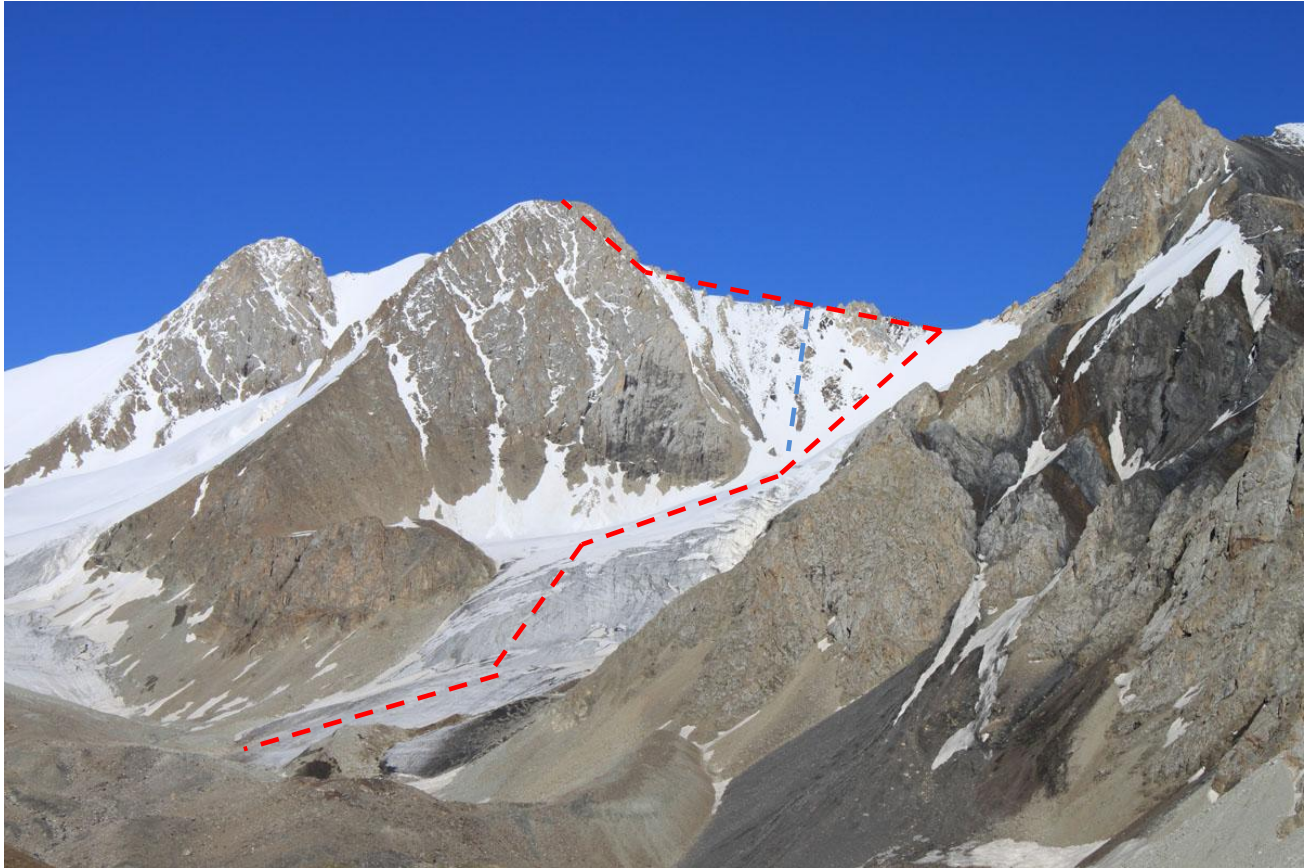


John explored locally to the huts

7th August

Jamie, Stuart, Paul, Liam and John all climbed Julie Tau 3996m. This was not our original objective. However, as the morning progressed it was clear our original objective (seen to the right in the photo below) would have been too great a challenge, so we changed to Julie Tau. John Temple ascended by a slightly different route. Julie Tau is picture below with the routes we took.

Julie Tau



8th August

Jamie and Liam climbed three peaks on a ridge line. Mt Caroline 3905m, The Cairn 3910m and Tash Tau 3877m (All pictured below). The ridge was gained between Tash Tau and The Cairn by a snow slope to the right of the main couloir. Mt Caroline was climbed first, (skirting The Cairn) then the Cairn, followed by Tash Tau. The descent from Tash Tau was via a ridge directly back to the valley.

Mt Caroline – Liam and Jamie Pictured on summit



The Cairn * and Tash Tau #



Over the same period Stuart and Paul, climbed the Christaline Peaks. These were approached from the col between Mt Caroline and the peaks. A picture of the Christaline Peaks is below.

Christaline Peaks – Stuart and Paul are visible on the ridge

*



The team regrouped in the afternoon and after a short rest walked back to Base camp. The return journey was via the “hunter’s trail” a vague and intermittent path which Stuart identified.

9th August

Rest Day Base Camp, Uliya and Andrey climbed Peak 3638m to the East of Base Camp returning to Base Camp in the evening.

10th August

The team left base camp with 5 days worth of food to explore the valley of the Tblwkah River where we had originally intended to place base camp. We travelled approximately 10km up river and set up a camp at circa 2400m.

11th August

We broke camp reasonably late and set up Camp 2 at 2983m. People were tired and the weather was mixed. The peaks we were to climb came into view and the some limited exploration around the camp was completed.

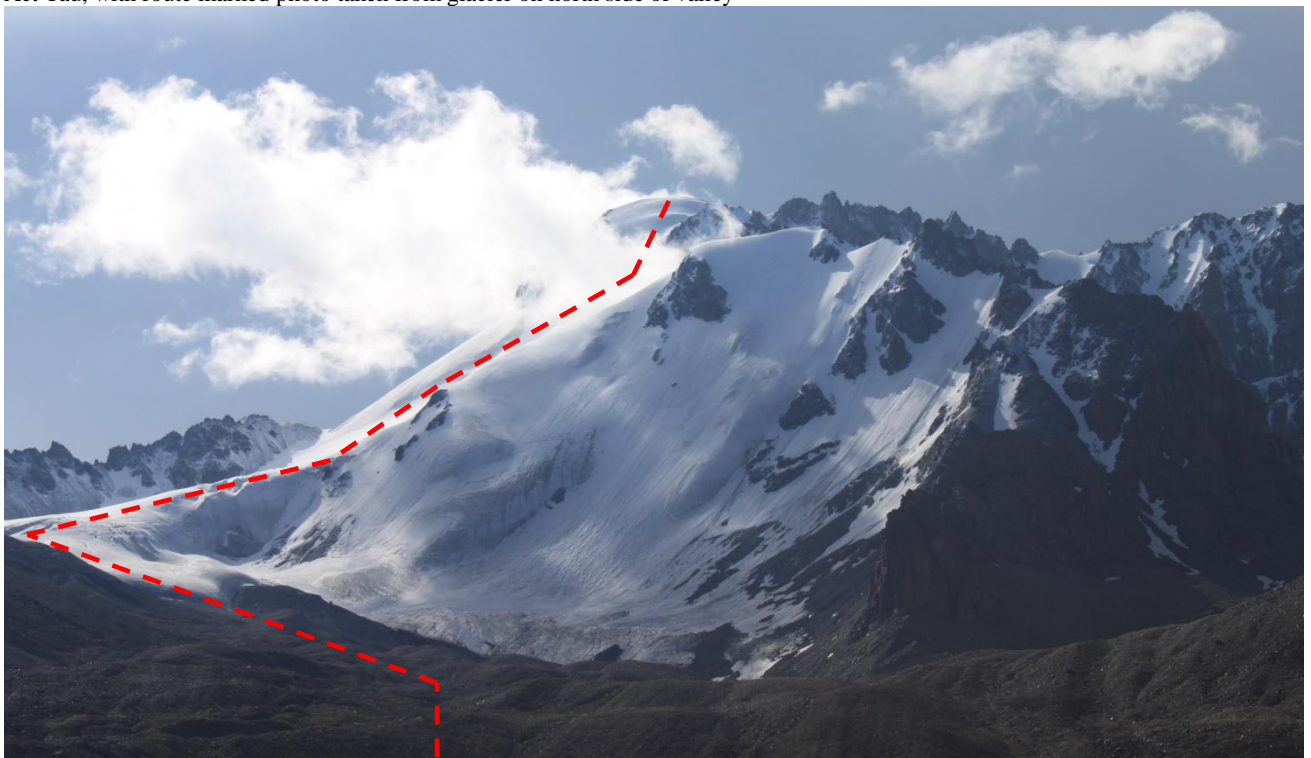
12th August

The team rose early, but the weather was poor and it was decided to postpone major assents that day. Later in the day Stuart, Paul and John went further up the valley to investigate possible routes to Jasmine Tau. Jamie and Liam explored the glacier directly north of Camp 2, photographed Act Tau and climbed The Cross (3877m). This had a survey cairn and on the summit. In the late afternoon Stuart and Paul relocated their camp further up the valley to ease the ascent of Jasmin Tau the following day.

13th August

Jamie and Liam left camp around 4am and walked up frozen moraine to base of the glacier running down the left hand side of Act Tau's northern face. They then crossed this glacier and moved onto the face and continued to the shoulder, turning towards the summit and summiting in glorious sunshine just before 8am. (See picture for route).

Act Tau, with route marked photo taken from glacier on north side of valley



Stuart and Paul climbed Jasmine Tau (see Photo) to approximately 30m short of the summit. Where there was a survey post. The gully which they used for their descent (south face) suffered a major rock fall approximately a minute after they exited.

Jasmine Tau, with approximate route marked



John soloed a peak named Fern Tau (3623m)

Fern Tau (Summit not visible)



In the afternoon the team met at Camp 2 and then descended to the confluence of the Tblwkah and Kaupakmbi rivers below Camp 1 and made a new Camp. Two Kazakh hunters visited. See below.



14th August

The team explored the valley which ran directly north from the overnight camp for approximately 1 and half hours before retracing their steps and returning to base camp.

15th August

Rest day at base camp. Liam, Andrey and Jamie walked to Saryabel, and hired a taxi to Jarkent to buy some additional supplies, returning to base camp in the early evening.

16th August

Rest day at base camp.

17th August

Jamie and Liam climbed to point 3821m (see below) and returned to base camp that evening. Point 3821m is just short of Bnanmoctb. The terrain was very vegetated much of the way.

Point 3821 viewed from the near the roadhead



Stuart and Paul and John travel up the Kapacau River heading for Tut tau. John returns to Base Camp later than night as planned.

18th August

Rest day, Jamie and Liam walk to Sarybel for more supplies and return via a traditional Yurt dwelling where they are invited in for tea. See below.

Yurt



Stuart and Paul move their camp ready for an ascent on Tut tau 4080m.

19th August

Rest day, Jamie and Liam did some local rock climbing.

Stuart and Paul return having successfully climbed Tut Tau 4080m, see below.

Tut Tau - View down summit ridge



20th August

The team carry all equipment and rubbish back to the roadhead. Driver arrives on schedule and team return to Almaty.

21th August

Day in Almaty.

22th August

Flight to UK.

Potential for further activity

There is potential for a vast amount of further new activity in the Zhungar Alatau. There are undoubtedly many more unclimbed peaks in and near the area we explored. There are then of course

1000s of new routes on these mountains. There is also plenty of rock climbing to be had. One particularly impressive area for this is shown below.

View from the confluence of the Tblwkah and Kaupakmbl rivers



The Zhungar Alatau have great potential for Ski Touring. The snow is believed to be very consistent during the winter season, although the cold will be severe. Temperatures in the nearest town apparently average -10 to -15 °C winter and do fall to -30 °C. If we were to return to the area (during summer) we would try to hire a team of horses and set up a higher base camp. There is definitely access for horses to over 3100m.

Notes on the Geology of the Basin, Dzungar Alatau

This section was written by John Temple. (Grid references refer to our maps of the region)

The southern face of the range rises as a 1000m wall from the steppes. The impression is of a classic block-faulted massif. The accordant summits culminate at about 4200m at the east end of the basin and decline westwards to about 3700m over a distance of perhaps 20km. The watershed is about 10km north of the boundary fault. The drainage pattern is sub-rectilinear suggesting cross-faulting. The upper valleys are broad and were once glaciated, with small seemingly active glaciers surviving at their heads. A exception to the dignified general retreat may be that centred on 360330 the surface moraines of which are somewhat convoluted. The lower valleys are narrow gorges and focus on the confluence at 261306 where we made base camp.

Exposed in at least a couple of places 326362 and 390360 are what appear to be thrust planes which presumably pre-date the cross faulting. A significant proportion of the rocks in the area appear to be granitic, often quite coarse-grained but evidently without much mica. Some boulders of the stream bed around 285335 have much darker minerals and the large crystals indicate a plutonic origin. The summit rocks of Fern Tau (367343), 3623m are fine grained layered igneous rocks placed almost level on top of the granitic rocks. The moraine at the foot of the east face of Fern Tau includes coarse igneous rocks showing a purple tinge in good light. The receding glacier has exposed a 30cm wide basalt dyke at 374350. Recently fallen blocks of dense greenish rock occur at 275377.

Sedimentaries are represented by a limestone complete with small resurgences just above the Kapacau River at 285335. On the south ridge of Julie tau at 300378 are shales, vertically and possibly limey. The summit of that mountain is of a quartzite breccias. The rocks in the gorge below our base camp comprise flinty hard, vertically dipping sediment siltstone of fine grey tuffs, somewhat metamorphosed. Mining has been attempted at 288328 and probably in the area around 275380. Rock samples will be passed on the geological section of the Natural History Museum.

Flora and Fauna

No detailed recordings of the flora or fauna of the area were undertaken. The following is general observations only.

The flora of the area was Alpine in character and very unspoilt. As the steppe gave way to the limited foothills, the trees began. The trees were interspersed with untouched lush and productive Alpine meadow in the lower reaches of the mountains. Wild strawberries and raspberries were plentiful and were eaten in large quantities.

Variably towards the top of the zone, circa 2000-2500m, trees became considerably less common. Circa 2300-2900m a band of juniper was often found, it grew very densely and could cause great hindrance to progress. Above this zone was further alpine meadow, however it was much less dense and mainly consisted of relatively short grass. This meadow became more scrub like towards 3200m and disappeared almost entirely over the next few hundred metres. A selection of pictures of flora is available on request.

The most notable thing about the fauna in the area was the absence of large mammals. In the 17 days in the region with the exception of marmots and (semi) domesticated cattle/horses the only mammal seen in the area was a single large Stag. Kazakh culture is believed to put much focus on hunting, and this seems the likely explanation.

Marmots were plentiful in the extreme, particularly above the juniper zone, and their warning whistles were a familiar sound in the advanced camps. Although none were seen alive, two skulls of Chamois were found. Some of the team were also lucky enough to witness a mass gathering (circa 10,000) of dragonflies in an Alpine meadow close to the Padman Traverse. Large grasshoppers and crickets were also common.

Conclusion

We succeeded in meeting our stated objective. As a group we climbed 16 peaks in total, which we believe was a good number considering the limited information on the area, the terrain and the size of the group. We believe we have brought back a lot of useful information about the region and its, flora, fauna, geology, history and logistics etc.... We have over 1000 photographs of the region many detail potential new routes. Please contact the author for details.

It was clear that some of the peaks we climbed had been climbed before. However there were nine with no indication whatsoever. They mostly had rocky summits without cairns. I am working on the premise that two thirds of these were unclimbed, although I think it will be hard to ever know for sure.

The Zhungar Alatau is a fantastic place to go for relative remote alpine mountaineering. I would thoroughly recommend it, and the company who organised our logistics.

Acknowledgements

The team wish to particularly thank their three sponsors for their support:

The Mount Everest Foundation - who provided a grant

BT - who provided use of satellite phone handsets

Vango - who provided tents.

Appendices

A: List of Peaks Climbed

In order of ascent, with height, location, date climbed, and who was in the party. Potential first ascents are marked *

Point 2664m

N 44° 30.263' E 080° 07.010'

More of high point

Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart

4/08/09

Kapacau

8295ft

N 44° 30.446' E 080° 06.188'

Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart

4/08/09

First Hurrah *

3939m

N 44° 34.968' E 080° 07.081'

Stuart Worsfold, Paul Padman, Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart

6/08/09

Julie Tau *

3996m

N 44° 34.144' E 080° 07.444'

John Temple, Stuart Worsfold, Paul Padman, Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart

7/08/09

Mt Caroline *

3905m

N 44° 34.777' E 080° 05.437'

Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart

8/08/09

The Cairn *

3910m

N 44° 34.736' E 080° 05.228'

Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart

8/08/09

Tash Tau *

3877m

N 44° 34.736' E 080° 05.228'

Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart

8/08/09

The Christaline Peaks *

3956m N 44 35 07 .0 E080 05 44 .9

3896m N 44 34 56 .4 E080 05 42 .1

3847m N44 34 56 .5 E080 05 51 .4

Stuart Worsfold, Paul Padman

8/08/09

Peak 3638m

Circa 3638m
Circa N 44° 30' E 080° 10'
Andrey Gundarev, Uliya Polyakova
9/08/09

The Cross

3877m
N 44° 34.193' E 080° 12.374'
Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart
12/08/09

Ak Tau *

4162m
N 44° 32.126' E 080° 14.513'
Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart
13/08/09

Jasmine Tau

4042m
N44 34 16 .0 E080 14 40 .3
Stuart Worsfold, Paul Padman
13/08/09

Fern Tau *

3623m
367343 West of Act Tau
John Temple
13/08/09

Peak 3821m

3821m
N 44° 32.126' E 080° 14.513'
Liam Hughes, Jamie Goodhart
17/08/09

Bnanmoctb

3865m
NNW of 3821m
Andrey Gundarev, Uliya Polyakova
18/08/09

Tut Tau *

4080m
NE of Julie Tau (GPS broken)
Stuart Worsfold, Paul Padman
18/08/09

[B: GPS References, Other significant locations](#)

Roadhead

N44°29.414' E080° 04.541

1719m

Base Camp

N 44° 30.311' E 080° 04.552'
1859m

Padman Traverse Top

N 44° 30.818' E 080° 05.454'

Padman Traverse Bottom

N 44° 31.331' E 080° 05.354'

Camp 1, First Valley

N 44° 33.507' E 080° 05.446'
3043m

Hut (Camp 1b), First Valley

N 44° 34.014' E 080° 05.556'
3156m

Loctash – Glacial Lake First Valley

N 44° 34.507' E 080° 07.007'
3522m

Camp 2 Second Valley

N 44° 33.010' E 080° 12.099'
2983m

Col under The Christaline Peaks

N 44° 35.040' E 080° 05.255'
3718m

[C: Contact Details](#)

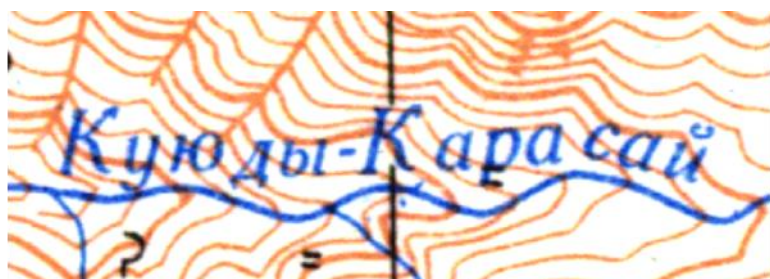
For further information on the expedition please contact

Jamie Goodhart
133 Hubert Grove, London
07918 644327
Jamiegoodhart@hotmail.com

Details of our local agents Kan Tengri can be found at <http://www.kantengri.kz>

[D: Russian and English Names](#)

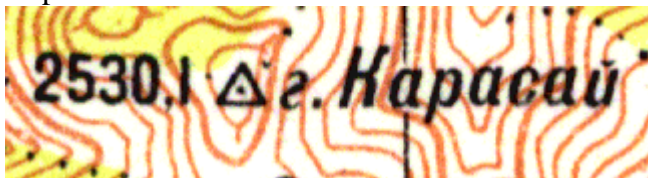
Кюабл – Карасай,



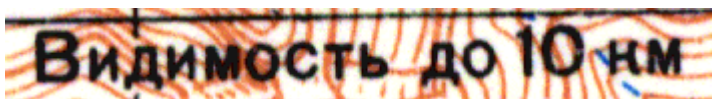
Tblwkah



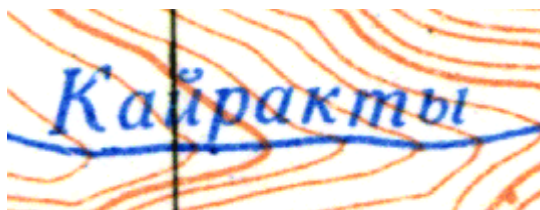
Карасау



бнанмоctb



Каураkmbl



E: Porter Availability

The team did not investigate the use of porters in any detail, however it would have probably been possible to hire either porters or more likely a number of horses from the local area if so desired.

F: Expedition Finances

A grant of £1300 was graciously received from the Mount Everest Foundation, 3 tents (2 Vortexes and a Helium) were provided at heavily discounted rates from Vango and Satellite phone handsets were loaned by BT free of charge. Other than this the members of the expedition used their own/existing equipment and paid costs out of personal funds. A breakdown is provided below:

Expedition Finances

Income		Expenditure	
Personal Contributions	£1284 GBP + \$7450 USD	Flights	£2454 GBP
MEF Grant	£1300 GBP	Permits, Logistics, Base Camp (inc Food), Hotels, Airport Pick Up, Liaison Officer, Cook (Kan Tengri bundle) transport	\$6950 USD
		Expedition food for above Base Camp & Petty Cash	\$500 USD
		Satellite Phone Sim Cards (x2)	£130 GBP

The personal contributions of each member totalled: £257 GBP & \$1490 USD.

[G: Grades](#)

The routes by which the peaks in this report were climbed ranged between a walk in some cases to Alpine AD however most of the mountaineering routes climbed were PD or PD+.

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

