

North Wales Western Kokshaal-Too 2010 Expedition.



## **Acknowledgments**

Matt Stygall and Dave Rudkin of the North Wales Western Kokshaal-Too 2010 Expedition would like to thank all charities, organisations and businesses for their financial support, without which this expedition would not have been possible. Thank you.

BMC

MEF

Mark Clifford Award

Welsh Sports Council

Mountain Equipment

## **Objectives**

To visit the Western Kokshaal-Too mountain range in southern Kyrgyzstan and attempt to climb Pik Biyley (apr.5600m, unclimbed) and the north face of Granitsa (apr.5400m, unclimbed). The aim is to attempt these climbs as a small self-sufficient team of two in alpine style with no aid.

## **Expedition Members**

Matt Stygall

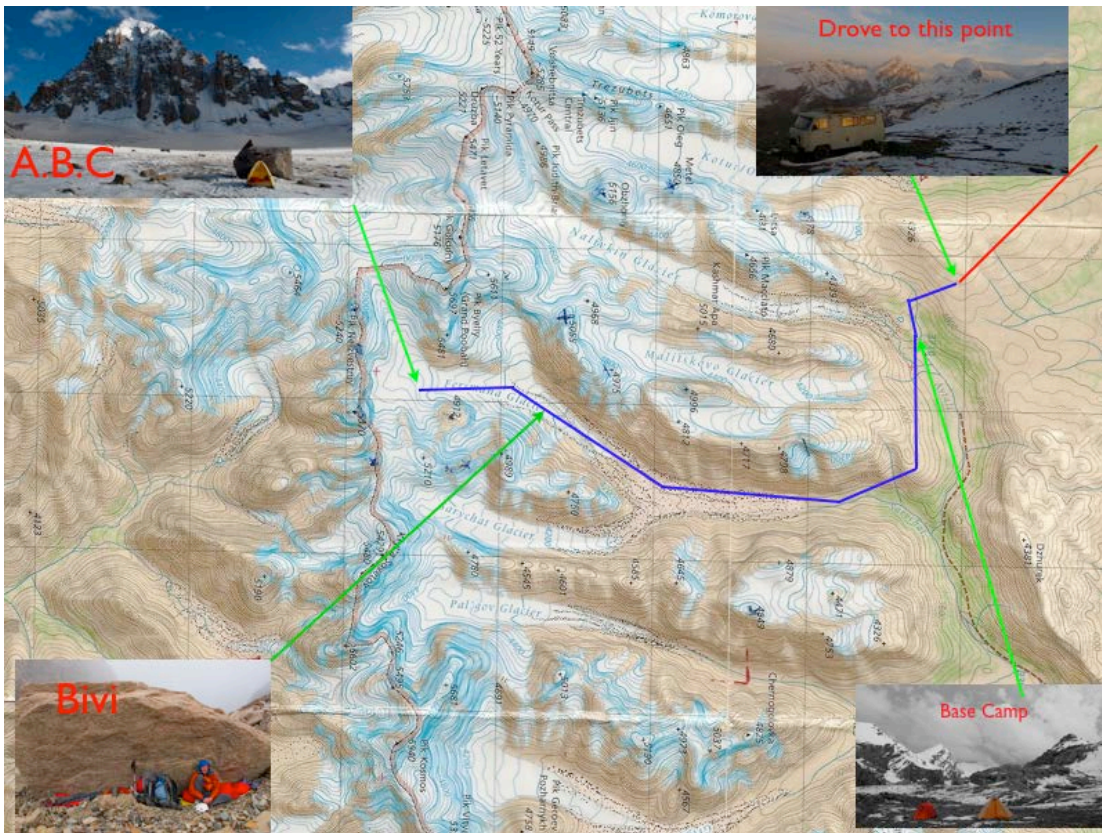
Dave Rudkin



## Maps

Kyrgyzstan Map used was from the American Alpine Club. Title: Kyrgyzstan A climbers guide. It seemed that ITMC had better maps of the area (1:25000) it would be worth asking them.

### Western Kokshaal-too Area





## **Visas & Permits**

Although it is possible to obtain one-month entry visas on arrival at Bishkek Airport, you should for ease of entry get a visa before travelling to Kyrgyzstan. Contact the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in London. Cost £60. It is normally possible to have one-month visas extended for up to an additional two months whilst in country. You should check carefully the validity of your visa before travelling.

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 40 Euros for two persons. The permits take five to six weeks to arrange.

## **The Agency**

We used a Bishkek based agency called ITMC. They were very professional and efficient. Our point of contact at ITMC, Margarita, spoke excellent English and went out of her way to be helpful. Their charges were clearly laid out, discussed and when necessary, they refunded any un-used services. ITMC are extremely knowledgeable about mountaineering in Kyrgyzstan, and are very active with exploratory expeditions all over the country. Highly recommended.

## **Cost**

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.

### **Finances**

<b>Expenditure</b>		<b>Income</b>	
Flights/transport	<b>£2610</b>	BMC	<b>£1500</b>
Accommodation	<b>£300</b>	MEF	<b>£1750</b>
Insurance	<b>£510</b>	Mark Clifford	<b>£500</b>
Sat. phone/medication	<b>£340</b>	Welsh Sports Council	<b>£1000</b>
Permits/Visas	<b>£160</b>		
Hardware	<b>£400</b>		
Food/fuel	<b>£780</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>£5100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>£4750</b>

### **Insurance**

Insurance was arranged through the BMC. Before and during our time away the FCO weren't recommending travel to certain parts of Kyrgyzstan due to political tension, this can invalidate the insurance. We contacted the insurers to clarify this and got the all clear.

## **Accommodation**

All our accommodation was arranged through ITMC. We stayed in hotels in Bishkek and a "home stay" in Naryn. All accommodation was comfortable and clean. In the mountains we took three tents, two at base camp (one for sleeping and one mess tent) and one lightweight single skin tent for ABC and beyond.

## **Food & Cooking**

The food available in Kyrgyzstan is generally excellent; there are roadside vendors (water melons galore), small shops, 24hr supermarkets and bazaars. We arranged a menu for the expedition in advance with ITMC, and all the expedition food was bought the day before we arrived so we could leave for the mountains quickly. This worked fantastically. We took all our mountain bivi food from the UK as we had support from High5. At base camp we cooked on a double gas burner, supplied by ITMC, this came with a large gas canister, which was a ball ache to carry to BC. In the mountains we cooked on a MSR Reactor gas stove, which proved, be efficient at melting snow.

## **Fuel**

ITMC sold us re-sealable screw fit gas canisters that had been re-filled, they seemed better than you would normally expect. Burning for longer at a stronger power. Well worth it.

## **Water**

In Bishkek and Naryn we drank bottled or boiled water without problem. We took Chlorine and basic water filters for the mountains, which wasn't needed.

## **SAT phone**

We hired a sat phone from ITMC. This was all arranged via email prior to our arrival. The phone was in good working order it had some numbers already programmed in and came with a car charger. We had to buy credit for the phone; this was easily done over the Internet.

We felt it to be an essential piece of safety kit and one that I would recommend future expeditions to consider. We did use the phone to stay in contact with ITMC though out the stay in the mountains e.g. when we arrived at base camp and a text every week to make sure we were ok. It was the only means of communication once you are in the mountain.

## **Language**

In Kyrgyzstan they generally speak Russian, a phrasebook was found to be useful. In the cities many people speak good English. ITMC speak excellent English. Our driver however spoke a little more English than we spoke Russia, but only just!

## **Acclimatisation**

On the approach journey to BC acclimatisation was a minor problem, as you travel from Bishkek (c700m) to BC (4200m) in 2.5 days. So some mild AMS was present when we were ferrying loads from the truck to BC. In the mountains, because of the rough nature of the glacier terrain, the going is generally slow approaching ABC, so acclimatisation less of a problem. From ABC there were many smaller summits and cols to climb to, which made acclimatisation achievable.

## **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.

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**

We took a standard Expedition First Aid kit inc. sterile needles etc, and added to this, strong painkillers, Imodium, and Diamox. With the kit we also had a Wilderness First Aid book that proved to be very useful and comforting.

## **Equipment**

### **Kit List For Western Kokshaal-Too, Kyrgyzstan.**

Personal

## **Haulage**



XLarge holdall

Climbing rucksack (big one)

### **Clothing**

Waterproof jacket & trousers  
Down jacket  
Insulated gillet  
Soft-shell jacket  
Medium-weight fleece  
Lightweight fleece  
Long sleeve thermal top  
Short sleeve thermal top  
Soft-shell trousers

Powerstretch bottoms  
Thermal bottoms  
Underwear  
Socks  
Hat  
Balaclava  
Gloves  
Mitts  
Gaiters

Shorts  
Trousers  
T-shirt  
Sunhat

Sandals  
Trainers  
Plastic double boots

### **Wash kit & stuff**

Toothbrush & paste  
Soap  
Razor  
Wet wipes  
Towel

Sunscreen  
Lip balm  
Medication  
Anti-bacterial gel

### **Sleeping Kit**

Heavyweight sleeping bag  
Lightweight sleeping bag  
Bag liner

Thermarest  
Karrimat  
Bivi bag

### **Cookware**

Bowl  
Mug  
Spoon

Flask  
Water bottles

### **Climbing Equipment**

Helmet  
Harness  
Ice axes  
Crampons  
Belay plate  
Prussik's  
Ropeman

Ice screw clippers  
Abolokov threader  
Spring leashes  
Rock boots  
Chalk bag  
Spare picks & tool  
Knife

### **Misc.**

Head torch  
Batteries  
Sunglasses

Watch  
Map & Compass  
Walking poles

Camera  
iPod  
Book  
Passport  
Insurance  
Passport photos

Money & credit cards  
Charger  
Mobile phone  
Pen & paper  
Earplugs

Team

### **Camping equipment**

BC tent  
ABC tent  
Mess tent  
Stove & pans  
Fuel  
Lighters

Water container  
Bog roll  
Bin bags  
Marigolds  
Sharp knife  
Shovel

### **Climbing Equipment**

Single rope 60m 9.2mm  
Half rope 60m 8mm  
3 sets of wires  
5 cams  
3 hexs  
10 screws

Pitons  
12 extenders  
Slings  
Krabs & SG krabs  
Tat

### **Food**

BC food  
De-hydrated meals (12 days)  
Power bars (12 days)  
Gels (12 days)

Drink sachets (12 days)  
Plastic bags  
Storage bags

### **Misc.**

2-person group shelter  
Sat. phone  
GPS  
First aid kit  
Water purification  
Permits  
Emergency information  
Phrasebook

Pocket first aid book  
Tent repair kit  
Seam sealant  
Gaffa tape  
String  
Sewing kit  
Multi-tool  
Thermarest repair kit



## **Weather**

The weather we encountered was unsettled for most of the trip. Very similar to an unsettled summer in the Alps! On arrival to the mountains the weather was very settled may be 8 days off high pressure. Conditions in the mountains were perfect. This did not last; the weather mainly came from the south/west (china). The storms would last 1-5 days bring varying amounts of snow. About a meter fell in the mountains. The weather in the kokshaal-too range is reliably unsettled and other expeditions should be prepared for this (bring something to do). But the weather we encounter at the start of the trip does prove that it is possible to have stable weather all you need is some luck I think.



## **Risk & Hazards in Mountains and Kyrgyzstan**

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.

We were very aware of the political situation in the country before we travelled. We kept a close watch on the foreign office website. It is worth noting that insurance is not valid if the advice given by the foreign office is not to travel.

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

Objective dangers such as rock fall, avalanches and serac collapse were all apparent in the Fersmana Glacier. 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 (a 20+km walk!). Although Kyrgyzstan does now have a mountain rescue service, see section entitled 'mountain rescue'.

Accessing the Fersmana Glacier from base camp involves crossing a glacial river; during our time there this was fairly exciting (even early in the morning when everything up stream was frozen). The river was always too wide to try and ferry packs across by rope (and would have definitely resulted in a full submerging), so we crossed one at a time with packs on (so as to always have some sort of bank support). If either member of the trip had lost their footing at this point it would have

resulted in injury, lost equipment and most likely an end to the trip.

Obviously, climbing as a pair in a remote mountain setting does leave the team fairly exposed and venerable if any one member is seriously injured. Fortunately, below ABC escape for a sole team member would be possible due to the nature of the glacier.

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.

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 that we would have a larger threat in Bishkek than anywhere else in Kyrgyzstan. We found Bishkek to be fine and a pleasant place to visit, Naryn however was different, Sassa our driver would not let us go out and about on our own and he kept a very close eye on the equipment during the 12 hours we were there.

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.

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 give us some security/safety

## **Environmental Impact**

We aimed 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, but the only means of travel. 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 buried any toilet waste (burnt the paper). This site was located well away from the water source and the tents. When leaving the Base Camp we tried to make the area look as natural as possible.

All the other garbage was taken back to Bishkek, but it is 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 the most, so it didn't end up in waste.





## **Flights/Transport**

We booked flights with BMI and they seemed to be reasonable. Baggage allowance was quite small (23kg each) so we needed to buy a sports equipment bag. Witch gave us another 30kg (cost was £30 each way). We did have some excitement at 5am when we were booking in because there was some confusion with the sports bag and they wanted to charge us £700 each in excess baggage! Thankfully it was all sorted out.

ITMC sorted our transport to and from the airport. And it was easy to get a taxi to travel around Biskek (the cost was minimal)

As mentioned before we travelled to the mountains in a 4xwheel drive van wont for better words. Our driver was an excellent and had a good knowledge of the area and how to get out of a sticky situation both at border controls and bogs!



## Expedition Log

14-15/8	Flight from UK to Bishkek
15/8	Sort payment and final arrangements with ITMC
16/8	Travelled to naryn
17-18/8	Travelled from Naryn to base camp
19-20/8	Established base camp
21-22/8	Walked up the Fersmana glacier to establish ABC (12 days supplies)
23/8	Acclimatisation/climb first evening of bad weather.
24/8	Walked back to base camp. 10 hours
25-27/8	Base camp. 2 foot of snow at base camp.
28/8	Walked back to ABC 14h deep snow.
29/8	Rest day
30/8	Attempt to climb retreat due to bad weather heavy snowfall. Tent bound.
31/8	Walked back to BC 14hours. Bad weather
1/9	Packed up BC
2/9	Travelled back to Naryn 12h (more snow)
3/9	Naryn to Bishkek stayed in hotel.
4-5/9	Rest and sight see in Bishkek (hotel)
6/9	Taxi from Bishkek to Ak Sai mountains. Walked in to the hut.
7/9	Climbed Schwaba 750m HVS/E1 rock route on Bachichiki.
8/9	Hut bound Bad weather
9/9	Walked out and got taxi back to Bishkek
10/9	Flight home.

## Potential Routes



Planned route on north face of Granitsa



we climbed route 3 on the topo. Schwaba 750m HVS/E1  
Bachichiki.

## Useful references:

**ITMC-** contact Margarita on [itmc@elcat.kg](mailto:itmc@elcat.kg)

<http://www.thebmc.co.uk/News.aspx?id=3297>  
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<http://www.alpinefund.org/Kyrgyz%20Climbing%20Overview.html>

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we were unsuccessful in our primary and secondary objectives; Pik Biyley and the North face of Granitsa, this was due to poor weather and avalanche danger. However, from an exploratory perspective we discovered a great deal. Kyrgyzstan is a welcoming country with masses of potential for adventurous mountaineers, with a mature enough infrastructure to make them reasonably achievable. Just get karma on your side and pray to the weather gods!

Once again enormous thanks must go to everyone involved in supporting this expedition, without this help the trip would not have been possible.

Any future mountaineers wishing to visit this area that need more information than found above should not hesitate to contact us.

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