



Unknown: First Ascents in the Djangart Region  
Неизвестный: Во-первых восхождений в **Джангарт** Регион  
Kokshaal-Too, Tien Shan, Kyrgyzstan

Final Report | 25 August 2010

**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.**

*How are you expected to come back to your everyday life? How do you sink back into those old rhythms like none of it ever happened? Like you just woke up from some dream? How do you look out a window and pretend you don't see the images that are burned into your mind's eye? How do you make sense of the minutiae that appears to spill into every crack of our "modern" lives, knowing that THAT is out there, and that it's REAL?*

*But most of all, how do you explain it to others? How do you explain to someone that there exists a whole other world out there, one that can only be accessed through the pounding of boots over ice and rock and the surging of leg and lung? That it's a land, for the most part, that they are not privy to? That those long, silent hours, distinctly devoted to "the task" can forge bonds greater than steel. But then when it's over, you're left wondering how it happened at all?*

*So how do you explain the feeling of being on the sharp end, on a completely unknown wall? The feeling of perfect resonance between ice and metal, just when you needed it? The ache in your arms that you know, despite the pain, aren't going to fail you because they just HAVE to work? To be the first pair of eyes to capture the light from those vaulted peaks? I guess in the end, you just can't.*

- Anonymous Friend of the Expedition Team



We would like to extend our sincerest gratitude towards the organizations and companies that provided financial and material support for our expedition: The Gore-Tex Shipton/Tilman Grant, The Mount Everest Foundation, The Jeremy Willson Charitable Trust, The British Mountaineering Council, The Welsh Sports Association, The American Alpine Club, JustRopes.com, and HemCon Medical Technologies. We would also like to acknowledge the tremendous services of everyone at ITMC Tien-Shan, specifically Asel our logistics coordinator and Sasha our driver. A very special thank you to the Alpine Fund for having us for a wonderful weekend of climbing with the kids they serve. The team recognizes the efforts of original team member Steve Beckwith in planning the expedition – unfortunately, Steve had to withdraw from the team to take a job in Australia. We also thank Vadim Kodysh of the 2008 Russian Djangart expedition and Graham Sutton of the 2004 British Djangart expedition for their assistance. Finally, our heartfelt appreciation is extended to the soldiers at the Uch-Koshkon military outpost who provided us with a warm bed and delicious meal just when we needed it most.

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## EXPEDITION OBJECTIVE

The joint Anglo-American team formed in late 2009 with the intent of climbing virgin alpine peaks. We eventually came across the Djangart Region of Kyrgyzstan's Kokshaal-Too Range, a relative white spot on a climber's map of the world. We set an objective of climbing three new peaks, in pure alpine style, during a three week stay in the region and originally identified Pt 5318, Pt 4911, and Pt 5025 as potential targets.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

The Djangart Region (Джангарт), alternatively translated to Dzhangart or Djungart, is a part of the Kokshaal-Too Range that forms the border between Kyrgyzstan and China. The Kokshaal-Too, or 'Forbidden Mountains' is part of the greater Tien Shan Range that covers most of Kyrgyzstan. The Djangart Region lies approximately 95 km south of the city of Karakol.

The region takes its name from the area's main river and a high pass. The Djangart Pass (N41 40.678 E78 48.951, 4158 m) separates the Djangart and Kaichi Valleys whereas the Djangart River flows from the Djangartynbashi Glacier on the east side of the Djangart Pass. The river roughly parallels the Kyrgyz-China border, with four glacial valleys running approximately north-south perpendicular to the two. From west to east, these valleys are the Djangartynbashi, Akoguz, N1, and N2. The glaciers in these valleys range from approximately 3500 m in elevation at the toe to 4000-4200 m at the head. Numerous peaks in the region exceed 5000 m, with the highest being Pt 5318 located on the ridge between the N1 and N2 Valleys. After passing the N2, the Djangart River turns to the north where it is joined by the Sauktor River and eventually reaches the larger Ak-Shyyrak River.

The mountains to the north of the Djangart River and south of the Ak-Shyyrak River are generally broader and lower in elevation, with the highest peak reaching 4891 m. The Kaichi Valley, which runs north-south on the west side of the Djangart Pass, provides access to the region from the military outpost of Uch-Koshkon (alternatively called Ak-Shyyrak). The Kaichi Region, as well as the Sauktor Region to the east, also offer unclimbed 5000 m peaks.

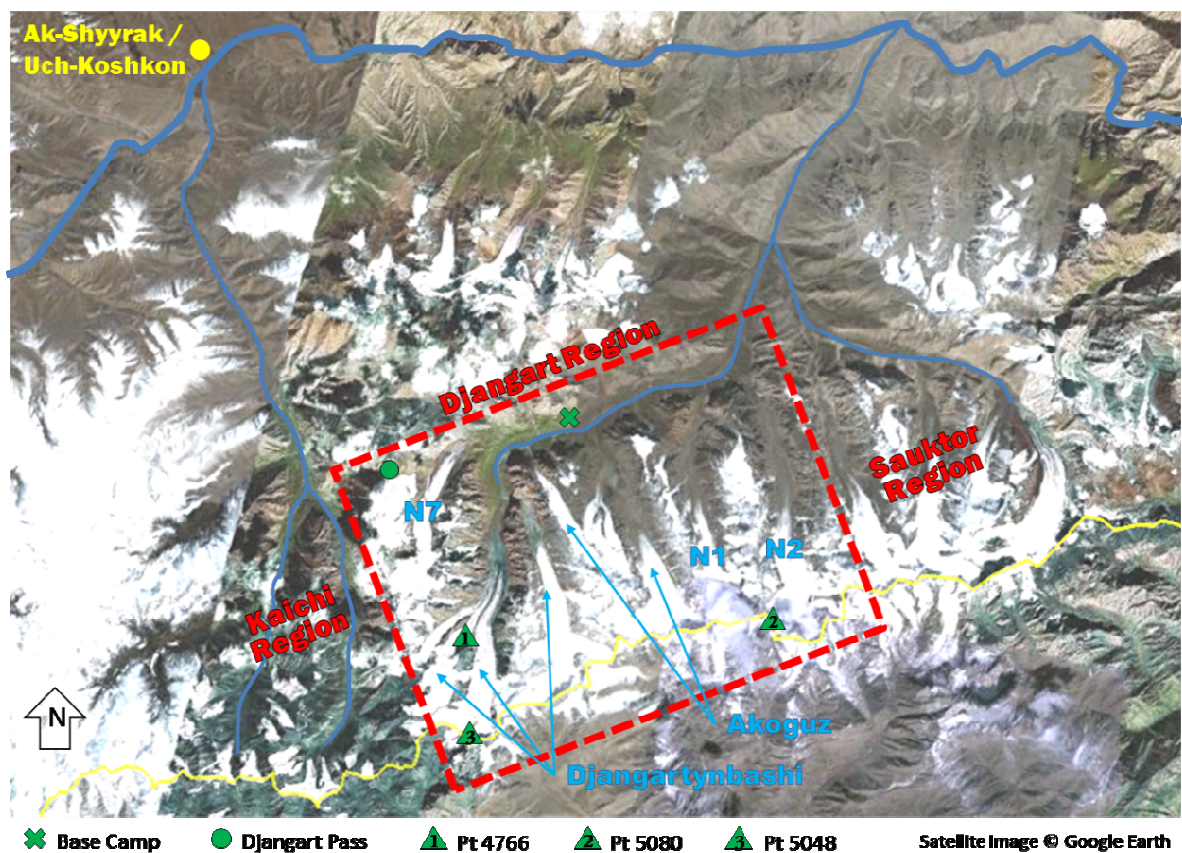


Figure 1: Overview Map

## TEAM AND CONTACT INFORMATION



**Matthew Leith Traver**, BMC, AAC | Expedition Leader, UK  
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Matt, 24, was raised in Hong Kong and resides now in Cardiff, Wales. He is the founder and co-owner of Beast Products. He enjoys many types of climbing including traditional, big-wall and alpine, in addition to his pursuits as a caver.



**Michael Patrick Royer**, AAC | Expedition Leader, US  
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Mike, 25, is a graduate student at Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania. He loves the adventure of alpine climbing in far-away locations. When not travelling, he practices his craft on the rock and ice crags of the Mid-Atlantic and New England.



**Daniel Phillip Clark**, BMC, AAC  
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Dan, 23, lives in Boston, Massachusetts, and true to his nature of being spontaneous and adventurous was a last minute addition to the expedition. He works as a building forensics engineer at Simpson Gumpertz & Heger and enjoys spending his free time climbing around New England.



**Christopher Richard Parenteau**, AAC  
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Chris, 25, recently left his job at Camden Partners in Baltimore, Maryland to pursue an MBA at the University of Colorado. After a rough trip, he mused that he'd take up beach vacations and bouldering.



**James Benjamin Maddison**  
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Jamie, 22, is a writer for *Climber* magazine. He financed his own trip in order to chronicle the team's misadventures and check out the region for bouldering, his foremost climbing passion.

## EXPEDITION SUMMARY

Four of the five team members (Royer, Traver, Parenteau, and Maddison) arrived in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on July 1, 2010 excited and eager to begin the expedition. The team members spent two days on logistics before spending the weekend climbing with kids from the Alpine Fund at nearby Chon-Kurchak, in Ala-Archa National Park. The final team member, Clark, arrived on July 5. All together, we finished sorting logistics and purchasing food and departed for the Djangart in a 6WD Comanche truck on July 6. Accompanying the team was Bishkek native Abdybek, an intern at the Alpine Fund who we intended to employ as a translator and expedition cook.

After two days of travel, we reached the Uch-Koshkon military border post. Lacking photo identification to go with his border permit, Abdybek was denied passage and had to return to Bishkek. Later that day, we were dropped off in the Kaichi Valley, the neighboring valley to the Djangart, due to impassable conditions on the track over the Djangart Pass. On his way back to Bishkek, the truck driver arranged for local nomads to meet us and over the next two days, four horses transported our food and equipment through the 4200m Djangart Pass. We set up a basecamp along the Djangart River, near the outflow of the Akoguz Glacier.

After a few days of acclimatization and reconnaissance, team members Clark, Royer, and Traver departed to climb peaks along the Djangartynbashi Glacier. Feeling ill, Parenteau remained in base camp with Maddison. After a day and a half approach, the trio set camp on the glacier under the north face of Pt 4766. The following day, the team climbed the face in a snowstorm, spending 22.5 hours (ascent and descent) establishing the route "Horseman's Horror" (D+, 700 m) which ascends an icy couloir leading almost directly to the summit. On route, the trio discovered that the nomads had cut 20 m off one of their half ropes, hence the route name. Clark, Royer, and Traver have proposed the name Peak Howard-Bury. The next day, the trio elected to return to basecamp due to avalanche conditions and the cut rope.

After a day of rest, the team split into pairs, with Royer and Traver heading for the N2 glacier and Clark and Parenteau heading for the N1 glacier.

After a perilous fording of the Djangart River, Royer and Traver made a lengthy approach up the broken N2 Glacier, heading for the east face of Pt 5080. Snow squalls the next morning prevented an alpine start, but Royer and Traver left at midday and ascended the southernmost couloir on the east face then followed the broad shoulder to the summit block. As night fell, heavy winds scoured the shoulder despite the relative shelter of the east face. At the ridge, just meters from the true summit, the pair elected to begin descent to avoid traversing into the full force of the wind. The route was named "Will Your Anchor Hold?" (TD-, 700 m) and the team proposed the name for Pt 5080, Peak Sutherland, both in honor of Traver's great-uncle who recently passed away.

Clark and Parenteau were less fortunate. During their approach, Clark collapsed and suffered a serious concussion. Parenteau escorted Clark back to basecamp, where a day later Clark collapsed again. Unable to make a medical diagnosis, the team arranged an evacuation with the assistance of Global Rescue. Accompanied by Maddison, Clark reached the Kaichi Valley and both were transported by vehicle back to Bishkek. Clark's medical consultations in Bishkek were inconclusive.

After Clark and Maddison departed, the rain and snow that was a daily occurrence throughout the expedition intensified. Determined to attempt one more climb, the three-man team of Parenteau, Royer, and Traver again headed to the Djangartynbashi Glacier to attempt Pt 5048. Delayed on the approach by a daylong storm, the trio reached camp at the base of the mountain on July 26. The next day Royer and Traver climbed the north ridge and northeast face of Pt 5048 under sunny skies, one of only a couple such clear days during the entire expedition. Parenteau remained in camp having had his boots filled with water in a posthole on the glacier. Royer and Traver named the route "Postcard for the Chief" (AD+, 650 m) and have proposed the name, Peak of Illumination.

The three remaining team members departed the Djangart Valley on July 31, again aided by horses in transporting loads to the Kaichi Valley. Due to a washed-out bridge, the trio unexpectedly had to trek over 12 miles to the Uch-Koshkon military post where they were treated to hot meals and warm beds before departing the next morning via truck for Bishkek. A soldier and a horse from Uch-Koshkon aided in bringing a load of gear down with the team, although some had to be left.

The team arranged and paid for the horse to make a second trip after their departure for Bishkek, offering the gear left behind to the soldiers.

## SYNOPTIC TABLE OF ACTIVITIES

01-JUL	Arrival of Royer, Traver, Parenteau, and Maddison in Bishkek. Sort Logistics with ITMC.
02-JUL	Sort Logistics with ITMC. Start food shopping.
03-JUL	Climbing at Chon-Kurchak with the Alpine Fund.
04-JUL	Climbing at Chon-Kurchak with the Alpine Fund.
05-JUL	Arrival of Clark in Bishkek. Complete food shopping.
06-JUL	Depart for Djangart. Camp in Barskoon Gorge.
07-JUL	Continued travel past Kara-Say and Uch-Koshkon. Abdybek denied entry. Dropped off in Kaichi Valley.
08-JUL	Reconnaissance of Kaichi. Clark, Parenteau, and Maddison to Djangart with first load on horses.
09-JUL	Royer and Traver to Djangart. Establish basecamp at confluence of Djangart and Akoguz Rivers.
10-JUL	Acclimatization and preparation of basecamp.
11-JUL	Climb north slopes above Djangart River to scout surroundings.
12-JUL	Clark, Royer, and Traver depart basecamp to camp at toe of Djangartynbashi Glacier.
13-JUL	Clark, Royer, and Traver ascend Djangartynbashi Glacier.
14-JUL	Clark, Royer, and Traver climb Pt 4766.
15-JUL	Clark, Royer, and Traver return to basecamp.
16-JUL	Rest day.
17-JUL	Royer and Traver depart for N2, Clark and Parenteau depart for N1. Both camp on north bank of Djangart.
18-JUL	Royer and Traver ascend N2, Clark and Parenteau begin ascent of N1 but are forced to return to basecamp.
19-JUL	Royer and Traver climb Pt 5080.
20-JUL	Royer and Traver descend to confluence of N2 and Djangart.
21-JUL	Royer and Traver return to basecamp, Clark and Maddison depart for Kaichi.
22-JUL	Rest day. Clark and Maddison evacuated to Bishkek via truck.
23-JUL	Rest day.
24-JUL	Royer, Traver, and Parenteau depart basecamp to camp at toe of Djangartynbashi Glacier.
25-JUL	All day rain/snow. Remain at location.
26-JUL	Royer, Traver, and Parenteau ascend Djangartynbashi Glacier.
27-JUL	Royer and Traver climb Pt 5048.
28-JUL	Royer, Traver, and Parenteau return to basecamp.
29-JUL	Clean camp and pack belongings.
30-JUL	Clean camp and pack belongings. Horses arrive.
31-JUL	Rain delayed departure for Kaichi. Truck stuck in mud 40 km away.
01-AUG	Team walks to Uch-Koshkon after bridge collapses and truck cannot reach Kaichi Valley.
02-AUG	Return to Bishkek in truck.
03-AUG	Finalize logistics and payment with ITMC.
04-AUG	Departure.

## WORKING WITH THE ALPINE FUND

Prior to leaving for the Djangart, we spent a weekend volunteering with the Alpine Fund, a non-profit organization that “uses the incredible mountain resources of Kyrgyzstan to help the country’s most vulnerable youth challenge themselves for future success.” Along with a half-dozen regular volunteers, we took ten kids for a climbing adventure at Chon-Kurchak, a sport climbing area 45 minutes outside Bishkek. It was an incredibly rewarding experience, one that we will certainly never forget. We recommend that any future expeditions to Kyrgyzstan consider supporting this organization. For more on the weekend, please see the expedition narrative, section 2: “Sister for Sale”.

Prior to departing for Kyrgyzstan, we solicited donations for the Alpine Fund from family and friends. We are so thankful for the more than \$2000, sleeping pads, rope (justropes.com) and quickdraws (DMM) that were donated directly. We know these contributions went to a wonderful organization that is making a tangible impact on the lives of Kyrgyz youth by using

a resource – mountains – that we all cherish.



## DESCRIPTION OF ROUTES CLIMBED

### Notes:

- The spot elevations provided are taken from Soviet military maps for the area dated 1976-1980. The accuracy of these maps has not been independently verified, but they are the only known set of maps for the region. [Maps are labeled K-44-86 and K-44-75R]
- The peak names included in this report have been proposed to the Kyrgyz Alpine Club. While unconfirmed, they are used in the text of this report for clarity.
- Route lengths are the approximate elevation change from the glacier to the summit.
- The three peaks we climbed are not the three peaks that we first identified as objectives. On-site reconnaissance found these routes to be more appealing and/or in better condition.

### PT 4766

**Approximate Coordinates:** 41°37' N, 78°51' E

**Access From:** Djangartynbashi Glacier

**Proposed Name:** Peak Howard-Bury [Пик Говард-Бери]

**Route Name:** Horseman's Horror

**Route Grade:** D+

**Route Length:** 700 m

**Team Members:** M. Royer, M. Traver, D. Clark

**Date of Ascent:** July 14, 2010

*Horseman's Horror* ascends the northwest face following a wide couloir of snow and ice that narrows as it reaches the east ridge. The route begins on the east side of the face, traversing slightly westward under a series of three large rock buttresses. The first 250 m is moderate snow climbing, with slopes increasing from 40 to 55 degrees. The upper couloir increases in steepness, with a sustained slope of 60-65 degree ice and bulges up to 70 degrees. The couloir continues to narrow with a large overhanging rock buttress forming the eastern boundary near the top. A short section of 80 degree ice bypasses a small cornice to gain the ridge. Just over one ropelength of moderate terrain along the east ridge reaches the summit.



See Appendix A for larger image.

P 1: Peak Howard-Bury (4766)

The ascent took approximately 12 hours in poor weather conditions, with approximately 0.4 m (1.25 ft) of snow accumulating during the day. Due to extenuating circumstances – the discovery that one of the two half ropes the team was using had been chopped to 40 m, likely by the horsemen who helped move the team's gear – the trio elected to descend the southeast face which appeared more amiable to downclimbing. The team was able to downclimb the first 500 m, but needed four rappels to descend a steep, confined gully. The descent took approximately 10 hours. The team would recommend that future parties descend the ascent route.

The approach up the Djangartynbashi Glacier is best made by following the eastern lateral moraine, then gaining the toe of the glacier near the center. Coming from the Djangart, this requires crossing the glacial outflow that is the headwaters of the Djangart River. During a second visit to the Djangartynbashi, the team used a snowfield (likely seasonal) to cross the river. It is also possible to ford the outflow just below the toe of the glacier. The receding glacier's lower section was unbroken, allowing for fast movement. It is possible to camp along the medial moraine directly below the route. This position can be reached in approximately 4 hours from the Djangart Valley or 2 hours from the toe of the glacier.

The mountain is named after British explorer Charles Howard-Bury who visited the Tien Shan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The route is named after the actions of the horsemen and the ensuing predicament on the mountain.

## PT 5080

**Approximate Coordinates:** 41°39' N, 78°59' E  
**Access From:** N2 Glacier  
**Proposed Name:** Peak Sutherland [Пик Сазерленд]  
**Route Name:** Will Your Anchor Hold?

**Route Grade:** TD-  
**Route Length:** 700 m  
**Team Members:** M. Royer, M. Traver  
**Date of Ascent:** July 19, 2010



See Appendix A for larger image.

P 2: Peak Sutherland (5080)

*Will Your Anchor Hold?* ascends the southernmost couloir on the east face of the peak. The couloir gradually steepens from 55 to 90 degrees, with a full pitch of vertical ice required to exit the couloir onto the more gentle slopes above. The route continues up 55 degree slopes on the east face before following the broad southeast shoulder to the summit ridge. High winds and heavy spindrift forced Royer and Traver to stop at the ridge, less than a ropelength from the true summit. The ascent took approximately 11 hours. The condition of the couloir was acceptable, with a 5 cm (2 in) layer of rotten ice covering solid, plastic ice. 0.3 m (1 ft) of snow covered solid ice on the east face, whereas movement up the southeast shoulder was hampered by pockets of waist deep, crusted powder. Royer and Traver descended the route in approximately 8 hours using a combination of pickets and V-threads for anchors.

The approach up the N2 glacier is particularly hazardous. Following the loose, steep moraine – either can be followed, but Royer and Traver used the western lateral moraine – is the only way to reach the glacier as the bottom of the valley is riddled with rock-covered ice cliffs. It is only possible to access the upper plateau by following the eastern edge of the glacier. The upper glacier is heavily crevassed, although the eastern side used during the descent seemed to be less fractured.

The mountain is named after Matt's late great-uncle, Captain Robbie L. Sutherland – a prominent Orcadian seafarer and author – and his late partner Inga Voy. Appropriately, the motto of the Sutherland clan is 'Sans Peur' or 'Without Fear'. While the route name could describe some of the anchors during the descent of the peak, it is also the title of one of

Robbie's

books.

PT 5048

**Approximate Coordinates:** 41°35' N, 78°52' E  
**Accessed From:** Djangartynbashi Glacier  
**Proposed Name:** Peak of Illumination [Пик иллюминация]  
**Route Name:** Postcard for the Chief

**Route Grade:** AD+  
**Route Length:** 650 m  
**Team Members:** M. Royer, M. Traver  
**Date of Ascent:** July 27, 2010



See Appendix A for larger image.

P 3: Peak of Illumination (5048)

*Postcard for the Chief* begins from a plateau in the glacier below the northwest face of the peak. The route gains the north ridge from the west, maneuvering between two large rocky outcroppings. One mixed move gains the top of a serac at the ridge. The route traverses along the ridge, staying on the western side. The ridge steepens to 55 degrees and becomes exposed, remaining (potentially deep) snow. After 1-2 pitches, the ridge broadens again. Here, Royer and Traver chose to an ascending and traversing line to reach the northeast face, on which conditions were more favorable, above the largest seracs. The northeast face is open, with a consistent slope of 55-60 degrees. At the time of Royer and Traver's ascent, it was predominantly snow, which was thigh deep in some locations where the crust was unable to support bodyweight. Royer and Traver followed the line closest to the north ridge. A short traverse of a broad ridge leads to the summit. The ascent took 11 hours under mostly clear skies.

Upon reaching the summit, the pair noted a second, higher summit on the south ridge that extends into China. The elevation of this peak is not indicated on the Soviet map. To reach this summit from Pt 5048 would require a highly technical ridge traverse and 1-3 pitches steep climbing on snow-covered, compact conglomerate. Not prepared to climb this terrain and unwilling to cross into China, Royer and Traver did not continue to this peak.

The pair descended the route in approximately 6 hours, downclimbing the entire way, and left no gear behind.

The approach is the same as for Pt 4766, but continues along the upper glacier to the plateau under the northwest face of Pt 5048. This 3 km section beyond the camp for Pt 4766 proved especially exhausting during the team's approach, with severe thigh-deep postholing. It took nearly 6 hours to cover the 3 km.

The peak is named to commemorate the one day of fair weather the team experienced during the trip whereas the route honors the soldiers at Uch-Koshkon who, unfortunately, are unable to receive mail.

## BOULDERING

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Maddison's main mission was to document the team's adventure, but he also visited the Djangart to boulder. The Djangart is littered with massive boulders, leaving Maddison – and the other team members – with plenty of worthwhile objectives. Though the rock was occasionally sharp, it wasn't hard to find quality problems near basecamp. During the trip, Maddison established 15 new problems, ranging from V0 to V6 (Font 7a), with a majority above V3.

## HISTORY OF THE AREA

The Djangart Region was first visited by Russians Letaveta and Engelhardt during a 1932 exploratory expedition to the central Tien Shan. It is reported that the expedition visited the Djangart, Kaichi, and Akoguz Valleys, but little documentation is available.<sup>1</sup> Members of the Alpine Club of Moscow State University organized a trip to the area in the 1970s, but were denied permits. During the Soviet era, the region was considered a Class B border zone and access was heavily restricted.<sup>1</sup>

In 2004, Ingrid Crossland and Graham Sutton accessed the region via helicopter and established a basecamp along the Djangart River at the head of the N1 and N2 Valleys. They explored both valleys and made two unsuccessful attempts to reach the summit of Pt 5318, one from each valley. They reached a high point of approximately 4000 m, stopped by rock walls and mangled hanging glaciers.<sup>2</sup>

In 2008, a group of six Russians from the Moscow City Central Tourist Club completed an extensive circuit of the Kaichi, Djangart, and Sauktor Regions. During the circuit, they climbed Pt 5291 (Peak Letaveta) from the far eastern branch of the Djangartynbashi Glacier, marking the first ascent of any peak in the Djangart Region. They also climbed two peaks, Pt 4748 and Pt 4826, in the Kaichi Region.<sup>1</sup>

While the Djangart Region is new to climbers, the lower valleys have been frequented by the military, both local and foreign hunters, and mineral prospectors. As a result of this activity, several abandoned buildings occupy both the Kaichi and Djangart Valleys, a few of which remain in use as hunting shacks. There is also an unfortunate amount of other remnants such as rotting telephone/communication poles, wire, trailers, a bicycle, tables, metal drums, and tools, just to name a few.

## LOGISTICS AND DETAILS

### PERMITS AND REGULATIONS

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There are no peak fees to climb in the Djangart, nor anywhere else in Kyrgyzstan. However, it is necessary to have a border permit, or *propusk*, if you wish to climb in a border zone, as is the case for the Djangart. Permits must be arranged in advance (approximately one month), and cost about £20 (\$30). It is important that all information on the document is correct as it is checked against your passport at border posts and by any border patrols that one may encounter. Border permits and photo identification are required for both foreigners and Kyrgyz citizens.

Permits can be obtained through one of the many logistics agencies that operate out of Bishkek. We used ITMC Tien-Shan to arrange all of our logistics and transportation. They were extremely knowledgeable, helpful, and professional. We highly recommend them.

### TRAVEL

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The team flew to Bishkek, the capitol of Kyrgyzstan, with connections in Moscow or Ankara. Manas International Airport (FRU) has limited options and flights were relatively expensive. Another alternative is to fly to Almaty, Kazakhstan and take ground transport to Bishkek. We prearranged airport pickup with the Alpine Fund, but a taxi to downtown Bishkek can easily be found for about 400 som. Bishkek is a modern city and most all goods and services are available. Almost every

person we met was friendly and helpful, excited to meet a foreigner. Prices were reasonable, although goods imported from the west cost about the same as they would at home. See the 'Food' section for more information.

Bishkek, with a population of approximately one million, is more spread-out than a glance at a map would indicate. We often resorted to taxi rides, which cost about £1 (\$1.50) anywhere within the city center district. Official taxis can be arranged via phone, but we resorted to using unofficial taxis that wait at intersections due to poor Russian language skills.

Travel to the sparsely populated mountain regions of Kyrgyzstan requires an off-road vehicle or a helicopter ride. We chose ground transportation for financial and environmental reasons, but might consider a helicopter in the future due to changing access conditions.

To get to the Djangart Region from Bishkek over land, it is necessary to follow route A365 to Balykchy, then follow route A363 along the south shore of beautiful Lake Issyk-Kul. At Barskoon, an improved gravel road, A364, heads south through the Barskoon gorge (Barskon, Barskaun, *Барскоон*) and over a pass to gain the high steppe. We camped in the gorge (about 6-7 hours from Bishkek) after a delayed departure. Once past the Kumtor Gold Mine, the condition of the road degrades. Most bridges are washed out and a vehicle capable of crossing a river is required. We used 6WD vehicles which were easily able to ford the numerous rivers. When Dan and Jamie were evacuated they took a 4WD UAZ 'loaf', which necessitated making some treacherous crossings of broken bridges.

Route A364, formerly part of the Silk Road, leads to Kara-Say, an outpost of the Kyrgyz military. Beyond this point, it is necessary to have a border permit. After Kara-Say, the track heads northeast following the Naryn then Ak-Shyyrak River basins. The track is very rough in parts and it is necessary to cross numerous tributaries, some fairly large. The road leads to Uch-Koshkon, another military outpost that sits near the intersection of the Kaichi and Ak-Shyyrak Rivers (about 10 hours from Barskoon or 16 hours from Bishkek). Located near the former Soviet mining village of Ak-Shyyrak, the outpost is sometimes called by this name. Ak-Shyyrak is the name for a village, river, and mountain range. Some older maps show route A364 continuing through to Inylchek (Enylchek) and eventually reaching Karakol. All reports suggest this road is no longer passable.

On arrival, we found the bridge near Uch-Koshkon – the only way to cross the Ak-Shyyrak River – to be partially washed out where the steel and wood ended and a dirt embankment led down to the east side. The remaining embankment was just wide enough to permit our truck to pass. Unfortunately, this embankment collapsed when our truck was on its way to pick us up and it is not likely that this bridge will be repaired anytime soon. Future expeditions should be prepared to travel on horseback or by foot (although fording the Kaichi River may prove challenging) from this point, approximately 25 km (15 mi) from the top of the Djangart Pass.

Once across the bridge, a dirt track leads up and over a ridge, then follows the Kaichi River, requiring several crossings. The track once continued up and over the Djangart Pass, but it has



P 4: The Comanche Truck near Lake Issyk-Kul



P 5: Kyrgyzstan's high plateau



P 6: Loading horses for the trip over the Djangart Pass



P 7: The track over the Djangart Pass



since been washed out. As a result, the truck dropped us in the Kaichi Valley and on his way back to Bishkek, our driver arranged for locals to meet us with horses. The four horses made two trips over the pass, dropping our gear on the north bank of the Djangart River near the Akoguz Valley. An old single-track trail extends the length of the Djangart on the grassy hillside of the north bank from where the old road ends a short way down the east side of the pass.

In the planning stages of our expedition, we had hoped the track over the Djangart Pass would be passable in the 6WD truck. While the road wasn't passable in at least one location, the surrounding terrain is mild enough that we believe passage may be possible. However, with the bridge at Uch-Koshkon now degraded, this option is no longer available. Adding the cost of the horses (1600 som/horse plus 1600 som/horseman, for two days each way) to the cost of the truck, a helicopter may be a more economical and less time-consuming transport method.

## FOOD

Our original concerns of withering away into gaunt, nutrient-starved climbers were eased upon visiting the Osh and Alamedin Bazaars in Bishkek. The bustling marketplaces, with many Kyrgyz, Russian, Korean, and Dungan vendors, proved to be a culinary goldmine for our expedition shopping.

We estimated food consumption at approximately one kilogram of food per day per team member, or a total of about 175 kg (386 lbs). The bazaars proved to be highly affordable, offering an extensive range of nutrition rich foods available in bulk quantities. The biggest challenge was transporting the food back to the apartment we had rented.

We found the most useful, expedition-worthy foods available in the bazaars to be:

- Dried fruit such as pineapples, tomatoes, kiwis and sultanas/raisins
- Fresh fruit such as bananas, oranges, and watermelons (for short term use)
- Nuts such as pistachios, peanuts, cashews, sesame coated peanuts, and almonds (all available salted or unsalted)
- Grains including pasta, oats, bulgur wheat, rice, beans, and ramen noodles
- Vegetables like potatoes and other more short-term items such as onions, cabbage, carrots, and green beans
- Spices such as garlic cloves as well as numerous ground spices
- Condiments and sauces such as ketchup, mayonnaise, peanut butter, nutella, soy sauce, jam, and tomato sauce
- Cooking ingredients such as olive oil, sunflower oil, butter, salt, sugar, flour, and yeast
- Wax coated cheese
- Sausages (potentially including horsemeat)
- Fresh bread and eggs (for short term use)
- Sweets including many types of hard candies, but also chocolates and chocolate-coated peanuts
- Drink mixes including tea, hot chocolate, and coffee

The total cost of our food (six people, 28 days) was between 45000 and 50000 som (\$1000-\$1100). We originally attempted to keep track of prices, but eventually abandoned the effort due to the chaos of purchasing so much in such a short period. Prices were reasonable, although western-brand items do carry a premium. Fruit was also particularly expensive.

After we were in the Djangart, we noticed that many of the products we had purchased were past their expiry date, some by up to a year. However, there isn't much of an alternative for bulk purchases and we



P 8: A vendor at the Osh Bazaar



P 9: 175 kg of food in our Bishkek apartment

never linked this to any specific digestive issues.

An alternative or supplement to shopping at the bazaars is visiting the small supermarkets that are common in Bishkek. One that was recommended to us was National (Народный). The prices per unit are similar to the bazaars, but bulk purchases are not an option. We purchased cereal and some other special items at the supermarkets since they couldn't be found in the bazaars. Another option is the larger Beta Stores on Chui, which has a larger selection; however, we didn't investigate this option until our return to Bishkek.

For cooking in basecamp, we rented three 10 l gas cylinders and a double-burner stove from the ITMC. We found that just one cylinder was more than sufficient for our three week stay, although cooking and eating habits may vary. We purchased two large pots and some cooking utensils at the Osh Bazaar, saving us the need to carry these bulky items on an airplane. We also purchased 15 butane/propane canisters (230 gr) from ITMC for use away from basecamp, using 10 during our stay.

## EQUIPMENT

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As with any extended trip to a remote area, our personal and communal equipment had to be carefully selected and coordinated between the team members. Apart from bringing the usual range of equipment and clothing that one would choose for a summer alpine trip, we also brought the following items:

### *Communication:*

- Thuraya Satellite Phone: This was rented from the ITMC and was invaluable to our efficiency and safety whilst in the Djangart. Reception was reasonable. Minutes cost 1€ each.
- One Midland XT511 Base Camp two-way Radio and two Midland GXT1000VP4 Handheld Radios: The three total radios worked well to allow communication between the two climbing teams and basecamp, although the range becomes more limited when blocked by mountains. Lithium batteries were more effective than the supplied rechargeable packs since the rechargeables took too long to recharge using our solar panel.
- Brunton Solaris 6 Solar Panel: Sturdy and reliable, the solar panel enabled us to keep the satellite phone fully charged at all times and allowed us to charge camera and iPod batteries.



P 10: Royer and Traver sorting gear in basecamp

### *Shelter:*

- REI Base Camp 6 Tent: We used this as a communal lounge and food storage tent in basecamp and were surprised with how effective it was, considering it is classified as a three-season family camping tent. It was sufficiently sturdy, spacious, had good vestibules, and was a far more cost-effective solution than specialized basecamp tents utilized by commercial expeditions.
- Personal Tents: In addition to the base camp tent, we had two one-man, three-season tents and two two-man, four-season tents that were used as personal shelter in basecamp.
- On-Route Shelter: We used a Rab Summit Superlite two-man bivy and a regular one-man bivy while on route. The Summit Superlite withstood the constant rain and snow with ease, and managed to shelter Clark, Royer, and Traver together after the climb of Peak Howard-Bury.

### *Climbing Gear and Protection:*

- Rock Gear: Although a much larger selection was brought to basecamp, each team typically carried five cams, four pitons (steel and titanium), and a full set of nuts while climbing. This was adequate for the chosen routes, but necessary protection could range up to a full rack. Although we climbed mostly snow and ice routes, rock gear was used in several anchors and was instrumental during the descent of Peak Howard-Bury.
- Snow Pickets: We brought 13 0.6 m (24 in) pickets to the Djangart, of which ten were homemade from 6061-T6 aluminum. A team typically carried five pickets on route. Pickets were an essential piece of protection on many of the snow slopes.

- Ice Screws: Each team carried seven ice screws on route (2 x 10 cm, 3 x 13 cm, 2 x 22 cm). The short screws were valuable in areas of thin ice and the long screws were used to make V-thread anchors for rappel.
- Ropes: In total, we brought three sets of half ropes (8 mm x 60 m, 8.5 mm x 60 m, 9 mm x 60 m), one set for each team and another set as a spare. Two sets of Maxim Unity ropes were provided by JustRopes.com, who also donated a rope to the Alpine Fund.

#### *Cooking:*

- Basecamp Stove: We rented a two-burner propane stove and three 10 l gas tanks from ITMC. Just one 10 l gas cylinder would have been sufficient due to the early departure of three people.
- Climbing Stoves: We had an assortment of four canister stoves and purchased 15 fuel canisters (230 gr) from ITMC. A team typically carried 1-2 stoves and 1-2 canisters while away from basecamp.

#### *Footwear:*

- Approach Shoes: Each team member had light boots or trail shoes that were very useful for the hike over the Djangart Pass, reconnaissance hikes, and approaches.
- Climbing Boots: While some team members brought both single and double boots, we all chose to climb in double boots. Temperatures weren't too cold, but double boots were selected in order to keep feet dry.

#### *Miscellaneous:*

- Duffel Bags: We brought a random assortment of bags, generally 90-120L in volume, including some large dry bags. They were essential for transporting gear and food on the horses.
- Spare Cord: This was critical for lashing gear to the horses, as the nomads did not bring any of their own. It was also useful as a clothesline.
- Mini-scope: Although not essential, it proved useful in basecamp to survey peaks in the distance or at least to muse over potential lines to pass the time.

## HEALTH, MEDICAL, AND INSURANCE

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When travelling to such a remote location, health concerns are paramount. The team was prepared to deal with potentially serious issues for a prolonged period of time. When preparing for our trip we considered all of the worst-case scenarios with which we could realistically cope. We settled on a comprehensive medical kit with which all members became familiar. Our medical supplies were divided into three kits: one for basecamp, and two identical smaller kits for use on route (one for each team). The contents of the basecamp kit was more extensive, including medications and antibiotics for various afflictions, minor surgical tools such as a scalpel and saline solution, an assortment of bandages and wound-treatment items, and documents listing the kit contents, dosages, interactions, and treatment options. The on-route kits were pared to a minimum of a few painkillers, altitude medication, a SAM splint, an Ace bandage, and hemostatic bandages provided by HemCon Medical Technologies. The only time the medical kits were used was when Clark suffered a lacerated wrist when he fell on a reconnaissance trek. The significant wound was treated with iodine and antiseptic cream and remained wrapped for ten days.

Aside from on-hand medical equipment, we were prepared for serious issues by individually purchasing rescue insurance from Global Rescue or the British Mountaineering Council. It is important to note that rescue insurance is typically not medical insurance. Rescue insurance will cover the cost of evacuation when needed, but will not cover the cost of medical treatment. Unfortunately, we are now familiar with the use of rescue insurance.

On July 18, Clark and Parenteau forded the Djangart River and approached the N1 Glacier. Clark, who was slightly ahead, was found by Parenteau lying on the ground and in an incoherent state. Ruling out altitude sickness, Parenteau escorted Clark back to the Djangart Valley. Clark remained incoherent for several hours; the first thing he remembers is the sting of the cold water when he was swept into the Djangart River as the pair tried to cross to get back to basecamp. Roped up, Clark made it across with the assistance of Maddison. The next morning Parenteau made it across when the river was lower. At this point, Clark felt fine besides having a sharp headache.

A day later, Clark stood up after dinner and immediately collapsed, seemingly unconscious to Parenteau and Maddison. At this point Parenteau and Maddison initiated an evacuation through Global Rescue. Two days later, Clark and Maddison hiked back to the Kaichi Valley where they were met by a truck sent by ITMC. In Bishkek, Clark sought medical attention.

*“Base on looks alone, the Kyrgyzstan National Hospital leaves much to be desired. Fortunately, the doctors that staff the facility are knowledgeable. They do speak some English, however a translator would expedite the situation. Modern facilities are available at nearby clinics in Bishkek, including CT, MRI, and X-Ray scans. These services are moderately priced, with the cost ranging from \$30 - \$50. Compensation for medical advice given by doctors at the National Hospital is approached on a “what you can afford” basis. Numerous pharmacies are located around the hospital and most items require prescriptions. Most of the medication available is distributed from Western European companies.”*

- Dan Clark

After a clear CT scan, Clark was diagnosed with a severe concussion and he and Maddison chose to stay in Bishkek to wait for the return of the rest of the team. During this time, Clark collapsed again while walking down a sidewalk. Once back home in Boston, Clark has received additional medical consultations that are still ongoing. An EKG revealed a potential disturbance, indicating a potential heart arrhythmia may be causing low blood pressure and in turn causing Clark to collapse.

While this incident was emotionally stressful, the team is relieved and thankful that the situation was not worse and that Clark could easily be escorted back to basecamp after his initial collapse and concussion.

Aside from the two incidents described above, the only other health concern was diarrhea. We treated all water with iodine or chlorine dioxide, but still suffered from stomach ailments. This is typical on such an expedition to a foreign country and was not unexpected.

## WEATHER AND GROUND CONDITIONS

We found the weather to be predominantly unstable, experiencing some form of precipitation 21 out of 23 days between drop-off and pick-up. Many days consisted of off-and-on showers, with the frequency typically increasing in the afternoon. On several days during the trip rain lasted for periods of several to 18+ hours. Only on a few occasions was the rain heavy, but it was often persistent enough to necessitate taking shelter in a tent. Fortunately, we only heard thunder a few times. The storms typically produced snow above 3800-4000 m, with this level reaching as low as 3600 m during the coldest part of the night.

Temperatures were generally mild; at our basecamp location, situated at approximately 3250 m, nighttime lows rarely dipped below freezing, although they were typically close. Daytime high temperatures varied greatly, ranging from approximately 7° C (45° F) to 25° C (77° F). On sunny days it was warm enough to lounge in shorts and a T-shirt, whereas on overcast days it was common to sit around in a belay jacket. The wind was never severe at basecamp, although it was occasionally gusty. On-route conditions were similarly mild, but we did experience high winds and extended periods over overcast skies/fog where the weather is trapped by the higher peaks along the border.

We noticed a distinct change in the route conditions from our arrival on July 8 to our departure on August 1. During this time, snowfields dried up on several peaks, leaving exposed rock and scree. However, due to the constant precipitation, even daily changes were prevalent. Future expeditions may consider earlier or later months to find conditions that are more consistent. We generally perceived that we were witnessing the transition between spring and summer conditions.



P 11: Typical overcast conditions with some low clouds



P 12: Clouds obscure Pt 5048 despite otherwise clear skies

On both the N2 and Djangartynbashi Glaciers we encountered crusted snow that resulted in thigh-deep postholes. This made approaches painstakingly slow. Postholing was also a problem on the lower part of Peak Howard-Bury (4766), until the slope steepened and became ice. We encountered pockets of waist deep snow on the upper shoulder of Peak Sutherland (5080), although in some places the crust was able to support body weight. Similar conditions existed throughout the route on Peak of Illumination (5048). Lack of cold nighttime temperatures prevented the snow from consolidating. Moving in the early morning hours still resulted in nightmarish postholing.

One of the most critical aspects of maneuvering within the Djangart Region is the flow of the Djangart River. The river level increases greatly through the course of the day. Most mornings, a place to ford the river can be found; the knee to thigh deep water is cold and flows fast, but it is possible. We also found places to cross using large boulders near both the Akoguz and N1 glaciers. A snow patch, likely seasonal, permitted crossing at the Djangartynbashi. By the afternoon, the river reaches waist to chest deep and it is not safe to cross. The boulder crossings were completely submerged. Clark and Parenteau's attempt to cross during the medical emergency nearly turned disastrous.

The increasing level of the Djangart River dictates that you must be at the head of a valley the night before an approach. Unfortunately, this can add up to two days round trip to a climb. An alternative would be to establish a basecamp on the south bank of the Djangart. However, lateral movement between the glacial valleys is considerably more difficult on this side of the river.

## GEOLOGY

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Even within the small confines of the four glacial valleys previously described, the rock type varied dramatically. There are pockets of granite, marble, limestone, and conglomerate rock. In general, the rock became more solid moving up the valleys (to the south) and towards the Sauktor Region (to the east).

In the Djangartynbashi, the rock was typically a compact conglomerate offering few placements for protection. The valley itself was fairly wide with a gentle slope that left the glacier nearly crevasse-free. In contrast, the peaks toward the head of the N1 and N2 Valleys were comprised of coarse granite that offered good protection and would likely allow for movement up rock faces. The N1 and N2 Valleys are generally steeper and are thus more restrictive of glacial flow. As a result, the glaciers are heavily crevassed.



P 13: Rock quality varies throughout the Djangart Region

The rock walls along the Djangart River and in the lower reaches of the glacial valleys were generally the most unstable. Large amounts of rockfall consistently showered down these faces during our stay. To the north of the Djangart River, large scree slopes indicate poor rock quality.

## FINANCES

EXPENSES		
	USD Total	GBP Total
<b>Transportation to Kyrgyzstan</b>		
US-Bishkek Flight - Royer & Parenteau (2)	\$ 2,760.20	£ 1,730.53
US-Bishkek Flight - Clark	\$ 1,453.00	£ 910.97
UK-Bishkek Flight - Traver	\$ 698.35	£ 437.84
Bishkek to China - Traver	\$ 399.13	£ 321.88
Excess Baggage Fees	\$ 220.00	£ 137.93
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 5,530.69</b>	<b>£ 3,539.16</b>
<b>Transportation within Kyrgyzstan</b>		
Transport to / from Airport	\$ 10.87	£ 6.81
Roundtrip Transportation to Djangart	\$ 1,862.48	£ 1,167.70
Horses in Djangart	\$ 1,065.22	£ 667.85
Taxi Rides in Bishkek	\$ 69.35	£ 43.48
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 3,007.91</b>	<b>£ 1,885.84</b>
<b>Visas and Permits</b>		
Border Permit -- Standard (2)	\$ 87.00	£ 54.55
Border Permits -- Expedited (2)	\$ 220.22	£ 138.07
Border Permit Abdybek	\$ 49.60	£ 31.10
US-Kyrgyz Visa	\$ 240.00	£ 150.47
UK-Kyrgyz Visa	\$ 257.43	£ 161.40
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 854.25</b>	<b>£ 535.58</b>
<b>Supplies</b>		
Food, Cooking Utensils	\$ 1,170.31	£ 733.74
Medical Kit	\$ 93.36	£ 58.53
Basecamp Stove Rental	\$ 31.00	£ 19.44
Fuel	\$ 148.80	£ 93.29
Stove and Fuel Canister Replacement Costs	\$ 53.91	£ 33.80
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 1,497.38</b>	<b>£ 938.80</b>
<b>Lodging</b>		
Bishkek Lodging	\$ 347.20	£ 217.68
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 347.20</b>	<b>£ 217.68</b>
<b>Equipment</b>		
Sat Phone Rental and Units	\$ 589.00	£ 369.28
Two-way Radios	\$ 136.00	£ 85.27
Solar Charger	\$ 92.00	£ 57.68
Pickets	\$ 20.00	£ 12.54
Tent (basecamp)	\$ 339.20	£ 212.66
Tent (mountain)	\$ 398.97	£ 250.14
Duffel Bags	\$ 87.69	£ 54.98
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 1,662.87</b>	<b>£ 1,042.55</b>
<b>Insurance</b>		
Insurance - Mike and Chris	\$ 435.10	£ 272.79
Insurance - Dan	\$ 217.55	£ 136.39
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 652.65</b>	<b>£ 409.18</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>		
Alpine Fund Intern	\$ 10.87	£ 6.81
Tip For Sasha	\$ 65.22	£ 40.89
Website / Media Costs	\$ 10.87	£ 6.82
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 86.96</b>	<b>£ 54.52</b>
<b>Expedition Total</b>	<b>\$ 13,639.91</b>	<b>£ 8,623.31</b>

FUNDING		
	USD Total	GBP Total
<b>Grants</b>		
W.L. Gore Shipton-Tilman Grant	\$ 5,000.00	£ 3,134.80
Mount Everest Foundation	\$ 2,791.25	£ 1,750.00
Welsh Sports Association	\$ 1,435.50	£ 900.00
British Mountaineering Council	\$ 1,276.00	£ 800.00
Jeremy Wilson Charitable Trust	\$ 1,196.25	£ 750.00
AAC Mountain Fellowship (MPR)	\$ 700.00	£ 438.87
<b>subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 12,399.00</b>	<b>£ 7,773.67</b>
<b>Total Personal Contributions</b>	<b>\$ 1,240.91</b>	<b>£ 778.00</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 13,639.91</b>	<b>£ 8,551.67</b>

Note: Purchases were made in a combination of USD, GBP, EUR, and KGS. The amounts listed here are the best approximations since exchange rates fluctuated throughout the trip.

## PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE EXPEDITIONS

In many alpine areas of the Greater Ranges, the potential for future expeditions to establish new routes is seemingly limitless. The Djangart is no exception. As shown on the Overview Map (Figure 1, Page 4), there are three areas within the central Kokshaal-Too Range with great potential: the Kaichi, Djangart, and Sauktor. While we focused on the Djangart sector, through research and during the approach we became familiar with all three.

### KAICHI (КАЙЧЕ)

The start of this area's potential begins with the two inviting valleys that diverge around a distinct pyramid-shaped peak, Pt 4152 (P 14). In the eastern valley, one can see many peaks that also overlook the N7 Valley, forming the dividing ridge between the Kaichi and Djangart Regions. If climbed from the Kaichi, many of these summits (e.g. Pt 4870, Pt 4770, Pt 5041, Pt 4977, Pt 4969, and Pt 4924) are guarded by 400-500 m of rock that must be climbed before any of the true mixed/snow/ice can be reached. These would certainly make for long and demanding routes. At the head of the eastern valley is a moderate looking peak, sitting prominently on the Chinese border adjacent to the Kaichi Pass.

The ridge dividing the eastern and western valleys continues beyond Pt 4152, though it remains at a lower elevation than its neighbors. The climbing would be mostly on rock, with some small snowfields or glaciers present near the highest peaks (e.g. Pt 4731).

In the western valley there are a number of aesthetic peaks with some potential mixed lines. What was around the corner and further down is unknown to us, but it will undoubtedly be worthwhile. The summits of these peaks are generally below 5000 m.

It is important to note that we first travelled through this region in early July, a time when late spring conditions are still prevalent. It appeared that some snowfields had dried up when we passed through this area a second time in early August. Due to the lower elevation of these peaks, this isn't unexpected.

The only peaks to have been climbed in this region are Pt 4826 (Peak Engelhardt) and Pt 4748 (Peak Alexander Morozov), both climbed in 2008 by the Russian expedition led by Vadim Kodys.

### DJANGART (ДЖАНГАРТ)

There is still astounding potential for new routes on unclimbed peaks in the Djangart, with only four established climbs including those made by our expedition.

One glacier that remains completely unexplored is the N7, which lies between the Djangartynbashi and Kaichi Valleys. Travelling the lower portion of this glacier would require navigating a complex icefall. This is the westernmost glacier that feeds into the Djangart River and is at a somewhat higher elevation than the other main glaciers. Pt 5041 sits at the head of the valley (P 15).



P 14: Pt 4152 in the Kaichi Valley



P 15: Pt 5041 and the N7 glacier



On the Djangartynbashi Glacier (location of Peak Howard-Bury and Peak of Illumination) there are a wide range of routes to be had, from easy snow plods to steep mixed lines to long rock routes. Northwest of Peak Howard-Bury is a cluster of inviting peaks including Pt. 5041 and Pt 5081. Pure snow and ice routes exist in narrow couloirs on both of these peaks, although both are predominantly rock of an unknown type. A few gently sloped, snow covered peaks sit to the west of Howard-Bury. At the head of the central branch of the Djangartynbashi Glacier (east of Howard-Bury), exist two appealing peaks that may be worth a visit for future parties: Pt 5144 and Pt 5066 (P 16). These sit to the northeast of Peak of Illumination on the high ridge that divides the two main branches of the Djangartynbashi.



P 17: The upper east face (N1) of Pt 5318 from the Djangart Pass

The easternmost branch of the Djangartynbashi was explored by the 2008 Russian team that also climbed Peak Letaveta (5291) from the southwest. The Russian team traversed across the head of the Akoguz Glacier, but no peaks have been climbed from this valley. Both the 2004 British team and the 2008 Russian team ascended the N1 glacier, but neither was able to ascend any peaks for various reasons.



P 18: The upper west face of Pt 5318 from the N2 Glacier  
*The area of Peak Sutherland (Pt 5080) is a route only the masochistic and ill should ever venture to. I cannot recommend what future prospects exist as my memories of this area have been deeply repressed. All I can recall is steep walls of rock, spindrift avalanches, and teetering piles of choss stacked upon groaning sheets of ice."*

- Matt Traver

One peak that has been an objective of all the teams that have visited the region is Pt 5318, the highest in the region. It remains unclimbed, perhaps due to the steep rock buttresses or mangled hanging glaciers that guard its lower flanks. Pt 5318 sits on the ridge between the N1 and N2 Glaciers, where it is joined by Pt 5172 and Pt 5271. Peak Sutherland (5080) sits at the head of this ridge, although it is separated from these three peaks by Lugovera Pass, first ascended by the 2008 Russian team.

While Clark and Parenteau were turned back from the N1 Glacier due to medical issues, Royer and Traver made the third visit to the N2 Glacier. From what the pair saw, this area offers the most promising rock quality (granite), with Pt 5318, Pt 5172, and Pt 5271 offering steep rock or mixed lines ascending from the glacier. Ascending the N2 is not a pleasant experience, however, and the thorny groundcover, loose moraine, and broken glacier all provide a significant challenge. In addition to the three peaks listed above that sit on the west side of the glacier, Pt 5051, Pt 5290, and Pt 5168 on the east side are all unclimbed. These peaks appear to offer easier routes to the summit, although Pt 5168 also features a 200-300 m granite wall.

The area north of the Djangart River was traversed by the 2008 Russian team, but in general it is of less interest than the main glacial spurs that extend from the Chinese border. The peaks in this area appear to offer more gradual snow slopes. No peak in this area has seen an ascent, including the highest peak Pt 4891.

## SAUKTOR (CAVKTOP)

The 2008 Russian team was the first recorded expedition to explore this sector, although two paths over high passes are shown on the 1980s vintage Soviet military maps. We had hoped to venture to this region, but it was too far away – two to three days from basecamp to a climbing destination – especially given our change of basecamp location. The ridge that separates the Djangart and Sauktor Regions extends further to the north, forcing a change of course in the Djangart River. This rocky ridge looks appealing in the evening light, although the rock quality is unknown. The ridge is also an added barrier in accessing the Sauktor from the Djangart, although a shortcut up-and-over prevents trekking to the confluence of the two rivers.



Peaks in this region that looked appealing to us, seen in photos provided by the Russian team, include Pt 5168, Pt 5025, and Pt 5112. From the photos, the rock appears to be granite of similar high quality to that found at the head of the N2 and N1 glaciers.

## ALTERNATIVE IDEAS

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Of course, there are things to do within these regions other than first ascents, many of which were pondered on rainy days in base camp:

- Following an increasingly in-vogue trend, there is a multitude of futuristic and punishing traverses and summit link-ups available for the more adventurous types.
- For an aquatic adventure, one could pack raft the Djangart River from its source, the Djangartynbashi Valley, into China. This would make for a wild ride and would certainly raise the eyebrows of the Chinese officials once you roll into Xinjiang province. Keep an eye out for Chris' walking pole and watch out for the wooden table (yes, that's right) at the start of your ride.
- As Mr. Howard-Bury [roughly] said: *hunting ibex is not entertaining as they are a slow, large target and abundant as snow on a glacier. Instead, you could go hunting for the illusive Marco Polo.* Count your blessings before you go and make sure you have a good excuse if you get caught, as these ultra-fluffy sheep are endangered.
- There are good possibilities for ski mountaineering, low-level trekking, or a combination of the two that would make a wild sojourn through the entire Kokshaal-Too Range (as yet undone).
- Reading and eating, a highly enjoyable activity for many, is best reserved for more conventional holidays.

## TIPS FOR FUTURE EXPEDITIONS TO THE DJANGART AND KYRGYZSTAN

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- Google Maps and Google Earth do not present accurate representations of the terrain (although the satellite images are helpful). In some cases, entire mountains are flattened. The Soviet military maps are somewhat better, although very out of date and of insufficient detail for anything other than identifying major peak elevations.
- Be prepared for volatile weather including rain, sleet, and snow. Expect to climb in these conditions, as weather windows are measured in hours, not days. An alternative would be to visit the area earlier or later in the year. Some expeditions to other areas of the Kokshaal-Too have found weather to be more stable in September.
- With the bridge over the Ak-Shyyrak River no longer open to vehicle traffic and unlikely to be repaired soon, it will be necessary to approach on foot, or in a helicopter. Finding nomads with horses to haul gear may take a day or two, so plan accordingly.
- Snowshoes or skis would be very useful to avoid postholing on the glaciers, although they would be extra weight to carry over the lengthy moraine approaches.
- Bring extra vodka and cigarettes, both highly desirable in rural areas, as you never know how many people you might want to thank.
- Carrying reserve cash, more than you may think, is a good idea. Horse transport cost more than we expected and we only made it back to our truck thanks to a loan from our driver (although other issues complicated that matter).
- The locals and the soldiers are very keen on climbing gear and clothing. Your kit will be a valuable bargaining tool or make a nice thank you gift.
- Carry some dedicated cord for the nomads to use for lashing gear, as they typically don't have their own. We brought approximately 50 m of 3 mm cord and all of that was used up, in addition to our cordelettes and (unknowingly) a chunk of our climbing rope.
- Do not bring as many nuts and legumes as we did and bring more chewy orange sweets.
- Be prepared to drink fermented horse milk, which is often provided as a gift. Unfortunately, there is no adequate training you can do to stomach the sour taste. Add a lot of sugar.
- Go on the Don Whillan's diet and make yourself obese pre-expedition. This will give your body ample reserve when you get cold and/or hungry.

## EXPEDITION NARRATIVE, BY MICHAEL ROYER

### FORWARD

This narrative was originally presented on the team’s expedition blog. Thus, it was written to accommodate both climbers and non-climbers. Recorded in 11 parts, the narrative chronicles our journey from my perspective and doesn’t necessarily represent the views of my teammates. It is presented here as a more complete summary of the expedition, although the style is more colorful.

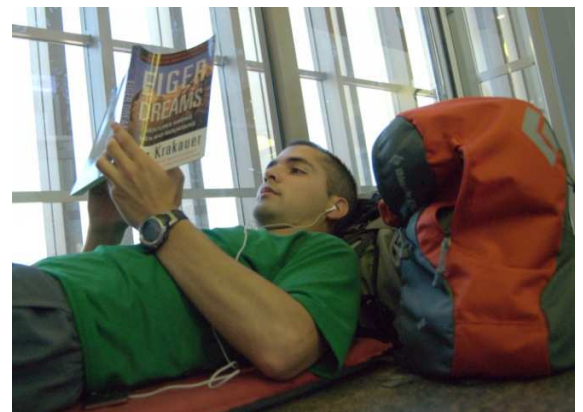
Mike

### 1. BISHKEK

Whenever I told people I was going to Kyrgyzstan for a climbing expedition, I almost immediately got a slightly confused look: “Where’s that?” After explaining that it’s west of China, north of Tajikistan, east of Uzbekistan, and south of Kazakhstan, the look rarely changed. At least I tried. Sometimes I got the follow up, “Is that safe?” if the person was up on the news. I would assure people that we were monitoring the situation closely and had contingency plans.

Bishkek, the capitol of Kyrgyzstan, is a modern city of one million people with Soviet roots. It was also the jumping off point for our expedition. We found the city with a few scars from the recent violence, but there seemed to be little change in the daily patterns of life. We were greeted by extremely friendly people and thoroughly enjoyed our stay.

After 14 hours of flying time and a 10 hour layover in Moscow, Chris and I touched down at Manas International Airport at 5 a.m., drained from the lengthy trip. We were to meet Matt and Jamie in the terminal; it couldn’t be too hard to find our teammates, right? Well, the thing is, we’d never seen them before. The team had come together over the internet, with Steve Beckwith and I having climbed a route together in Peru in 2009. Steve, unfortunately, had to take a job in Australia at the last minute and leave the team, breaking the transatlantic link. To non-climbers, going on an expedition with people you’ve never met seems insane. To climbers, that’s just how things work.



P 19: Moscow airport bivy

Chris and I made our way through the passport control, got our bags, and wandered into a throng of people waiting at the door. We pushed our way through; we didn’t need a ride. We pushed our way right on to the doors with no sign of Matt or Jamie. Uh Oh. They were supposed to be there with our ride (courtesy of the Alpine Fund – Thank You!).

One of the taxi drivers kept pestering us, but we insisted we had a ride. He kept at it though, and eventually we were using his cell phone to call Arianna, our contact at the Alpine Fund. No answer. We decided to take another look around and luckily, spotted Matt and Jamie outside. They also had Arianna’s husband (sorry, I’m horrible at remembering names), who had brought a van to take us to downtown Bishkek. There was an eager energy rolling through us as we made the 45 minute trip. It was good to be together, finally.

After getting a bit lost and wandering the backstreets of Bishkek, we found the hostel where we had arranged rooms. It was underwhelming, but we dumped our bags and headed out into the city, stomachs empty after the long journey. Looking at the map in Matt’s guidebook, the city center didn’t look far away. We soon found out that a block in Bishkek is BIG. We walked for hours, also learning that Bishkek is a late-rising city. As we walked down the main street, Chui, around 8:30, we finally found a place that appeared to be opening. After massive language-barrier-induced confusion, we each had a weird dumpling on our plate. Hmm, not the best choice for a restaurant, but it would get better. For the most part we had great food, although most of the restaurants in Bishkek, at least the ones we frequented, offer international cuisine.

We wandered around for several more hours, eventually making our way to the ITMC Tien-Shan office where we met Asel, our logistics coordinator. We took care of some details and she arranged an apartment for us so we could get out of the tiny bunkroom that was far too small to allow us to sort all our gear. We spent the afternoon moving into the apartment, amused to be living in a Soviet apartment tower. We ate dinner at a delicious Korean restaurant before falling victim to an early, jet-lag induced sleep.

Up early the next morning (Friday), we had lots to do: more payment and logistics details to work out with ITMC, gear purchases for the Alpine Fund, and food shopping for the expedition. The first two were easy, but food shopping for three weeks for six people with no refrigeration possible, now that's a task. We made our way to Osh Bazaar, an open-air market and one of the more popular shopping venues in the city. Having taken a sneak peak the day before, we knew what to expect. We bought 25 kilos of pasta, about 10 kilos of nuts, 5 kilos of dried fruit, some sausage, a hunk of cheese, and some other miscellaneous items. It seemed like so much as we were carrying huge backpacks through the market, but when we got back to the apartment, we realized it was almost nothing. Going by the estimate of 1 kilo/person/day for a total of about 175 kilos, we had a very long way to go.

We spent Saturday and Sunday climbing at Chon-Kurchak, a crag in nearby Ala-Archa National Park, with the Alpine Fund. The complete description of the weekend can be found in the next section. Anyway, early Monday morning Arianna dropped off late-arriving (who could blame him, he had two-weeks' notice of the expedition after Steve had to change plans) Dan at the apartment. With the team complete, we headed back to Osh Bazaar. After the taxi dropped us off, we noticed all the gates were closed. Maybe it was too early? After wandering around for a bit and buying some potatoes from a vendor set up outside the main area, we asked (more of a hand gesture/charade) a girl about the closed gates. She informed us the Bazaar wouldn't be opening. Crap. We had 125 kilos of food to buy and were supposed to leave the next morning!

We made another run to ITMC to get more details taken care of - there are too many little things to consider when you're heading to an infrequently visited area. Asel told us a different bazaar, Alamedin, should be open. We took a taxi across the city and made quick work of getting 100 kilos of food: rice, beans, flour, ramen, fresh veggies, bread, oranges, bananas, spices, nutella, tomato sauce, oil, butter, salt, more salt that we thought was sugar, soy sauce, ketchup, mayo, more mayo we thought was olive spread, tea, drink mix, jam, sweets, cookies, chocolate bars, more nuts, more fruit, more sausage, and more cheese, among some less memorable items. Loaded to the max - Matt's backpack, full of potatoes, actually broke - we took a taxi back to the apartment and dumped our goods. After some debate, we calculated that we still needed more (it takes a lot of food!). Matt, Dan, and I headed back to the market, getting the rest of the things on the list just as the stalls were closing - we literally had to scramble to get out of the gate they were shutting. Chris and Jamie headed to a supermarket to get some things that weren't available in the market: cereal, trash bags, good batteries, lighters, and some other things I can't remember now.

It was quite a day's work and we spent thousands and thousands of som (1\$ = 46 som). At first we tried to keep track of what we spent, but it soon became too hectic as we rushed around. We later learned, as we sat around bored in the basecamp tent, that most of the food was expired, some of it by several months. Oh well, we had to eat.



P 20: Chris, Mike, and Matt counting money at ITMC



P 21: Jamie browsing at the Osh Bazaar

## 2. SISTER FOR SALE

It was just one of those things. You're the volunteer, but you walk away having gained much more than you had to offer. That's the best way I can describe our weekend with the Alpine Fund.

We stumbled upon the Alpine Fund's webpage early in the expedition's planning stages while searching for information on mountains in Kyrgyzstan. We instantly wanted to help. We got in contact, and although we couldn't offer a long term commitment (though we would have loved to), we agreed to help run a weekend climbing adventure at Chon-Kurchak, a local sport climbing crag just outside Bishkek in Ala-Archa National Park.



P 22: Chon-Kurchak in Ala-Archa National Park

In their own words, *"The Alpine Fund is a small, locally based, non-profit, non-governmental, secular organization that uses the incredible mountain resources of Kyrgyzstan to help the country's most vulnerable youth challenge themselves for future success. We offer children and young adults from orphanages and street markets the chance to escape the confines of their daily surroundings and challenge themselves in a mountain environment. Through hikes, climbs, education programs, individual mentoring, and college scholarships we seek to gain the trust of these youth and work with them to brighten their future through education and mountain adventure."* I can't say it much better. It's an outstanding organization full of outstanding people with an outstanding mission.

Besides the weekend clinic, we wanted to use our manpower resources and expedition press to help raise awareness and funds. Through the generosity of our friends, family, and complete strangers, we managed to raise over \$2000, donated 10 sleeping mats, a new rope (justropes.com), and a set of 10 quickdraws (DMM).

Now back to the story.

After sending our gear ahead in the Alpine Fund van, we took a taxi to the Alpine Fund office. There we met Abdybek, one of the Alpine Fund interns who we also hired to come along during our expedition as a translator and expedition cook. We jumped into an empty mini-bus, not quite sure what to expect. There was some nervous energy among the team, but the weekend was something we'd been anticipating for a long time. Soon, a group of 10 rambunctious kids streamed into the bus along with five Alpine Fund volunteers (Gaetan, Nargiza, Frieder, Anoeshka, and Maik) and two Alpine Fund Interns (Salavat and Abdybek). The mini-bus was packed full, with a few of the volunteers sitting in the aisle as we slowly made our way out of Bishkek and into the mountains. Although none of us speaks Russian or Kyrgyz, we enjoyed observing the inquisitive and nervous chatter of the kids as they scoped us out. The kids came from both CPC-Osh and CPC-Dordoi, so they were getting to know each other too. Much thanks to the volunteers and interns who translated for us throughout the weekend!

After some confusion finding the right roads, we made it to Chon-Kurchak where we met up with Arianna, the Alpine Fund's director, and later Dave, another volunteer. We learned that the area had previously been a mostly pristine end-of-the-road location, but the recent construction of a resort changed the feel a bit. It was still a beautiful place.

After a brief discussion of the rules, the group broke into teams. We were in charge of setting up topropes while another group set up tents and the third group gathered firewood. The difference in liability/paperwork between what we'd have to deal with at home and the five minute discussion we had that morning was intriguing. We were essentially four strangers to these people, yet we were responsible for the climbing safety of the group. In a way, it was refreshing.

Matt belayed Jamie while Chris got a belay from Gaetan. Somehow, I was left with one of the kids, Elgegit (spelling?), as a belayer. Leading with a very inexperienced belayer isn't confidence inspiring, but neither



P 23: Matt enjoying his time with the Alpine Fund

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is climbing on a static rope. I essentially considered my two climbs free solos, of which I am not a fan. Thankfully the terrain was moderate. Note: the Alpine Fund would LOVE some new ropes, like the one donated by justropes.com. The four they had previously included a half rope, a static rope, a ragged old rope, and one acceptable rope. If anyone out there can help, please get in touch.

By lunch, we had five topropes set up on routes of varying difficulty. After a delicious meal prepared by the interns, the weekend truly began. In a rush of energy, the kids were giving the climbing all they had. The routes weren't exactly easy, ranging from maybe 5.5 to 5.10, but youthful energy is relentless. We belayed for a couple hours, learning a few words from the other volunteers to help guide the novice climbers. A few of the kids were naturals, taking to the rock like experienced veterans. Others found it more difficult. Regardless, big grins were compulsory. There's nothing like seeing the smile when someone completes a route for the first time.

I won't pretend that I was able to learn the names of all ten kids when I don't even know then Russian or Kyrgyz words, but at least a few stories are worth sharing. There was a girl who we affectionately called Lynn Hill (a famous rockclimber). She's shy; I don't think she spoke more than five words the entire trip (at least to us). On her first go, she didn't get very far up the easiest route and didn't seem very interested. By the end of the weekend, she'd worn us out. With a look of steely determination, she'd go up and down a route, getting a little further than the time before until she could climb the whole thing. It was amazing.

P 24: The look of determination

There were a couple of the boys who were quite good climbers, even tackling some of the tougher routes, although we had to beg them not to grab the bolts! One of them moved with the precision and technique of a seasoned veteran. I remember one time when I watched this kid scramble up to a ledge near the start of the route and help his friend work through the crux move. It was so cool. But what's really amazing is that they were just simply having fun. They enjoyed the pure essence of being outside, away from the city. They didn't care about grades, style, or expensive gear. They weren't in it for the onsight, redpoint, or to send their project. They just climbed up and down the rock because it was fun.

P 25: Climbing action at Chon Kurchak



I'd be remiss if I finished this blog post without mentioning my new favorite t-shirt: "Sister for Sale, (Will take any offer)". Better yet, the young man wearing it probably had no idea what it meant.

P 26: My new favorite shirt

Most of the kids took a break in the afternoon to explore a waterfall up the canyon, but after a delicious dinner of plov, a traditional Kyrgyz dish, they were back at it for round two. As the day wore on, the kids became more comfortable with us, borrowing our gear, stealing our water, and generally doing the things kids do. Belaying endlessly was exhausting work, but it was also the most fun I've had in a while.

That night we sat around a campfire. Even with the language barrier, everyone enjoyed themselves. We sang songs for each other, enjoyed quirky talents, and chatted about our favorite part of the day. For both us and for the kids, it was inspiring to see such an international group, with at least half a dozen countries represented. It was soon time to go to bed, but if we needed a reminder we were hanging with a bunch of fun-loving kids, it came as our tents were pelted by flying shoes. Never a dull moment.

Sunday entailed more climbing and by the early afternoon, everyone was worn out. Before we left, we played a game requiring quick recall of everyone's name. If it had been survivor, the four of us would have been voted out immediately.

The bus ride back was a bit subdued, mostly due to the high frequency of naps. We all parted ways back at the Alpine Fund office, with the difficult goodbye a reminder of how fast bonds can form. We were just a blip in their life and them in ours, but I hope we had some impact on them because I know the weekend affected us. More than ever, I can see just how much a mountain adventure can change a young adult. Just as we are deeply affected by our climbing adventures, these kids are creating memories, building confidence, and learning all kinds of lessons that can be applied to everyday life, but that can't be learned from a textbook.

We hope to continue supporting the Alpine Fund when we get back home, and maybe return someday to volunteer. If anyone is looking for a cause to support, the Alpine Fund is as good as any. Especially if you're a climber, you know the power of an outdoor adventure.

### 3. OVER THE MOUNTAINS AND THROUGH THE WOODS

The sat phone was dead. I mean really, completely, totally dead. Coming back to the apartment late the night before departure, we saw it hadn't charged and wouldn't even turn on. Problem. The next morning, the morning of our departure, Asel sent two more chargers with Sasha, our driver, who parked the strangely-out-of-place Comanche truck in the tiny alley outside our apartment. We tried to charge the phone as much as we could, but the apartment owner was excessively pushy, and scowled at us as we lingered with our last few bags, hoping to eke out a few more minutes of charging time.

The cigarette lighter in the truck was also broken, so through phone calls with Asel and garbled gesturing, we informed Sasha that we had to go to the ITMC office. While Sasha set out to fix the cigarette lighter (the man is a MASTER mechanic), we charged the phone. We also realized we had no way to charge the phone with the solar panel. After trying several adapters at ITMC with no luck, Dan and I set off for some stores that might have the adapter we needed and Matt came along to go to the ATM (we had forgotten this the day before - luckily we remembered, it would really save us). A couple hours later, we returned without an adapter but with a few miscellaneous parts. Dan expertly rigged up an adapter, splicing together pieces, and we all cheered when it worked. Now about four hours late, we were finally on our way, cruising the streets of Bishkek in our monster truck.

Not an hour into our journey and we were pulled off the side of the road. Ugh. Something (a hose?) had broken. Thankfully, with Sasha's skill, we were back on the road in about 20 minutes, although we were a bit concerned about how many times we'd be stopping to fix the antique Russian vehicle that very well may have been used in Afghanistan.

About five hours later and still plodding along like a giant tortoise, we stopped at a tiny restaurant on the shore of the beautiful Lake Issyk-Kul. Abdybek helped us order a delicious local dish called Manti, dumplings filled with chopped onion and mutton. We'd spend the rest of the trip dreaming about a big plate of Manti waiting for us on our return.

It was late in the evening as we turned off the main road and headed up Barskoon Gorge. We were awe-struck by the beautiful mountainscape: towering evergreens, gushing river, lush grass. We gained elevation slowly, but soon stopped by some old abandoned buildings, unable to go further for the night as the pass above was covered in dense clouds. Chris, Dan, and I set up camp as Sasha laughed at Matt and Jamie rolling out their sleeping bags under the truck.

We still had a long way to go and were up and out just after 6 a.m. the next morning. We gained the pass through 30-something switchbacks on a well-graded road, then spent several hours moving across a high plateau. We eventually left the main road - it continues on to the



P 27: Trying to charge the sat phone



P 28: Sasha's skills were a valuable asset



P 29: The luxurious Comanche truck

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Kumtor Gold Mine - and utilized the truck's full 6WD capabilities as we bypassed washed out bridges and ducked in and out of washes. The rugged power of the truck also meant one seriously bumpy ride – there was no type of suspension system meaning we were tossed about like rag dolls. Sleeping or reading was a tedious task; thankfully, there was a beautiful landscape at which to stare.

By about 11 a.m. we made it to the first border post, Kara-Say. We hopped out of the vehicle and handed our documents (border permit and passport) to two soldiers who staffed a gate. They gave them a look, and handed them back. That was easy. We gave them a bottle of vodka and some cigarettes, having been informed that they are quite happy to receive these gifts at their remote location.



P 30: An illicit photo of Kara-Say

We didn't get far before stopping again, this time at the main outpost. Sasha and Abdybek went inside to talk to the chief while we waited outside. We were greeted by a handful of friendly soldiers. Dan traded his PSU hat for a military one and we gave them more Vodka and cigarettes. They didn't want it just for themselves though, and soon we found ourselves passing around teacups full of Vodka (all except for Matt who expertly seemed to dodge the potent spirit). Everything seemed fine as we jumped back in the truck.

Back on our way, we travelled northeast along the barely recognizable "main road" that heads northeast, paralleling the Kyrgyz-China border. As we stopped for a late lunch, we found that a jar of pasta sauce and a jar of Nutella had busted open in Dan's pack thanks to the lurching and jostling of the truck. It made a huge mess that we cleaned as best we could. Those were the second and third casualties after we found our bananas looking more like baby food. As we were cleaning, we were approached by two soldiers on horseback. They checked our documents and had a friendly chat with Sasha, seemingly giving him directions to our next destination, the military outpost near Ak-Shyyrak that we believe is actually called Uch-Koshkon. Somehow, Dan convinced them to let him ride their horse, and he went for a little trot. Only Dan could pull that off.

By late afternoon we rolled up to the gate at Uch-Koshkok. Like we had done previously, we produced our documents. This time, however, there was a problem. They told us the Abdybek couldn't go any further.

"What?"

"Him (points) – nyet."

"What?"

Abdybek, 17, is an intern with the Alpine Fund. The Alpine Fund offers jobs facilitating the outings to selected kids who go through their programs. When we first got involved with the Alpine Fund we inquired about hiring someone to come along and act as a translator. We soon had hired Abdybek to come along as a cook (he loves to cook), translator, porter, and camp companion. Unfortunately, Abdybek didn't have his identification document with him, which is required along with the border permit (we don't know if he forgot it or doesn't have it). We pleaded with the soldiers at Uch-Koshkon, but they wouldn't budge. At Kara-Say, Abdybek had come running back out to the truck and grabbed our last bottle of Vodka to give to the chief - we didn't realize until later that it must have been a bit of a bribe. We frantically gestured, but got nowhere. We couldn't believe it. Dejected, we dug in our bags for a few cigars and two packs of cigarettes that had been left. We took them back out to the soldiers, although the chief had already gone back inside. Amazingly, the mood seemed to shift. Suddenly, a man jumped in the front of the truck, Abdybek got in with us, and we were off. In his broken English, Abdybek joked that there must have been a call from the president. We all laughed. All was well.

Or so we thought. We made our way up the Kaichi Valley, the next valley system over from the Djangart, our destination. Sasha had managed to communicate earlier that he probably couldn't get over the pass, but we held out hope. As the late afternoon sun bathed the peaks in warm light, we stared, awe-struck. The mighty Comanche powered through the Kaichi River several times, much to our delight. We passed a herd of cows and a herd of horses, then some shacks, although we saw nobody. The Russians who visited the area in 2008 had arranged horses in this valley. We thought maybe the guy in the front cab with Sasha was the man who had helped them. We were wrong.

The truck pulled off the road a couple miles from where it crests the pass. The road looked fine, but Sasha indicated that he couldn't go any further. We tossed our bags out of the truck, not pleased. When we tried to talk about going over the pass with horses, the guy with Sasha was confused. After a lengthy session of gesturing, we realized he was just there to get a ride back to Bishkek and that Abdybek had to go too. Ahh! Frantic phone calls to Asel who translated to Sasha.

In the end, the truck left with us sitting there incredulous. Sasha would try to find and arrange for horses to meet us on his way out, but there were no guarantees. If they were coming, they'd be there by 2:00 the next day. If they didn't, we'd be in for a major change of plans. Let the nervous waiting begin.



P 31: We were left wandering in the Kaichi

#### 4. WILD HORSES

I was up early; I tend to get pretty anxious about things. Matt, Jamie, and Dan soon followed. Unable to sit idle while awaiting the outcome of Sasha's quest for horses, we decided to break into two teams: Matt and I would head up to the Djangart Pass to assess the possibility of carrying the loads ourselves while Dan and Jamie would head up the southwest fork of the Kaichi Valley to getting a closer look at some potential objectives, should we be stuck in the Kaichi. Each team took a radio and we figured we'd be back around lunchtime. We left a radio outside Chris' tent; he was still sound asleep.



P 32: The Djangart Valley from the Djangart Pass

The thin air stung our un-acclimated lungs as we labored up the steep switchbacks heading out of camp. We paused for frequent breaks, both to rest our weary bodies and to admire our surroundings. We watched as Dan and Jamie, little specks in a vast wilderness, disappeared behind a hillside. We kept in frequent radio contact, more sounding off with little jabs than anything serious.

Matt and I reached the pass just before noon, about two hours after leaving camp. The straight-line distance isn't far, maybe 3 km, but switchbacks and a healthy 800 m of elevation gain meant ferrying loads up and over the pass – requiring maybe four or five trips each – was out of the question. We'd have spent far too many days in the process.

We hunkered down on the north side of the pass to escape the wind that was strafing the very top. We sat for a few moments, engaging our mind with possibilities. We snapped some photographs and used Matt's scope to check things out, but cold from the wind we retreated quickly. About three-quarters of the way down, we radioed Dan and Jamie:

"How's it going? We're almost back at camp."

"Dan's cut his wrist."

"What?"

"Dan fell and cut his wrist, he needs help."

We had expected Dan and Jamie to be back in camp already, and figured they were joking around. We gave a little laugh and went on our way. Soon though, we realized it wasn't a joke at all.

Somehow, the radio managed to rouse Chris, and he started off towards Dan and Jamie with a medical kit. He didn't know where they'd gone and didn't take the radio with him, so he was soon far off course. Matt and I stayed in contact, keeping a watchful eye from the hillside above camp. As we saw Dan emerging from the tributary valley and making his way across the braided channels of the main Kaichi River, I ran down to



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meet him with our other medical kit. Dan isn't much of a whiner, so I knew it had to be pretty serious.

Dan unwrapped Jamie's handkerchief and at first, it didn't look too bad. When I got a closer look though, there were two nasty gashes right on the underside of Dan's wrist. Luckily they weren't quite deep enough to hit the veins. I poured on some iodine as Dan writhed with the stinging pain. By the time we had it smeared with antiseptic cream and bandaged up with gauze and athletic tape, the rest of the team had arrived. We sat by the river for a few minutes, thankful that it wasn't any worse but cognizant that Dan would have to be careful; it was painful for Dan as he flexed his wrist, not exactly conducive to climbing. It was about 1:30, so we decided to make our way back up to our camp in case the horses showed up. Nothing.

We sat on the grassy hillside a bit bewildered; this wasn't how things were supposed to go. Always the planner, I was probably the most dejected. I had said earlier that I'd give the horses a 2% chance of showing up, but in the back of my mind I still had hope. 2:00 came and went as we sat discussing our options. The previous day, amidst the confusion, the guy getting a ride to Bishkek had possibly said that someone, a local hunter who we presumed managed the herds we had seen in the lower valley, would be coming back in six days. Not wanting to completely abandon the Djangart, we decided that we'd spend the first 10 or so days in the Kaichi, climbing what we could and possibly meeting this mystery horseman. Then, with less food, we could attempt to ferry loads over to the Djangart for the last week if nobody showed up. It was a reasonable plan, but I still felt a little let down. When we had walked the road to the pass that morning it was in fair shape, with just one major obstacle about two-thirds of the way up. Why couldn't Sasha have at least tried? Oh, to be able to speak Russian.

2:21 p.m. As we stood up to go about the chores of setting up a basecamp, four horses sauntered over the hilltop. Saved! In a frantic rush, we started packing, negotiated prices, cooking food, and somehow determined that there was too much stuff to take everything in one trip. It wouldn't be cheap (the horses cost us 18000 som, or about \$360), but at least we were getting to where we wanted to go.

P 33: Dan's wrist, after many days of healing



It took a long time to get things packed up and loaded onto the horses. At 4:30, Dan, Jamie and Chris set off over the pass, hoping to get as far down the other side as possible. We wanted our basecamp to be at the outflow of the N2 and N1 glaciers, but realizing the late time, we conceded that we couldn't get that far and settled for the outflow of the Akoguz. Matt and I stayed behind with the rest of the gear.

P 34: One of the nomads and his horse



The horses returned just after 9:30 the next morning. Proving that sarcasm is universal, one of the horsemen joked that they had to go back down, leaving us there. Amused by the alarmed look on our faces, he burst out laughing. We loaded up the horses and set off for our second boring walk up to the pass. I was given the responsibility of leading one of the horses that was heavily burdened, giving it a head start while the others were still being loaded. It went well for a while as I plodded along, listening to my iPod, but he soon became stubborn and I found myself tugging on the cord more than moving. Luckily, the horsemen caught up and took over.

Along the route, as we descended in the Djangart, we got magnificent views of the peaks along the Djangartynbashi glacier, the easternmost of the four valleys that run perpendicular to the Djangart Valley. Of particular note was Pt 5048. We'd seen it before – it's the logo on our webpage – but seeing it in person was majestic.

About four hours after departing the Kaichi, we crested a small hill and saw familiar tents pitched on a flat grassy bench above the Djangart River. At last, eight days after arriving in Bishkek, basecamp.

Oh, and how could I forget, Jamie celebrated his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday that evening by eating an orange. Yep, an orange.



P 35: The Djangartynbashi Valley captivated our imaginations

## 5. LIVING IN THE DJANGART

Life in basecamp is an exercise in patience and managing boredom. The first few days aren't bad, there are general set-up tasks that take some time: gathering stones for a fire pit and cooking area, making sure the tents are pitched taught, organizing food. There are daily chores like making a water run and cleaning the dishes. But for the most part it's all about waiting: waiting to acclimate, waiting for better weather, waiting for your body to recover...

In all, Matt and I spent the least amount of time in basecamp, but it was still tedious. We'd spend days reading, playing chess (mostly Jamie and I), occasionally joining Jamie on a bouldering foray, listening to music, or just joking around. It's fascinating to see group dynamics developing in such a closed system. Probably more strange to anyone who hasn't been there though is the recurrent discussion themes: bodily functions, food, toilet humor...well, you get the idea.

Our basecamp was situated on a flat grassy area about 300 m from the Djangart River and about 500 m from a small side stream that provided better water, at least early in the morning when the flow was lower. We lived in harmony with several marmots and at least one family of weasels. Luckily, none of them decided to investigate our food supply. There were loads of flies, both the regular kind and large, biting horse flies. There were a few mosquitoes, but they weren't a major problem, nor were the handful of spiders that enjoyed the refuge of my tent. Jamie got the worst of the insects, especially early in the trip, when he had some huge welts from being bitten. We didn't see anything larger than a marmot until our last climbing foray, when I stumbled up a herd of ibex. There are, apparently, wolves and bears that live in the area. We didn't come across any, but were asked by the horsemen and soldiers if we had seen anything.

The Djangart Valley was not the pristine wilderness we expected. We knew the lower valleys had long been a hunting ground and were possibly explored in the 1970s as a source for tin. Unfortunately, we found copious evidence of human despoliation. Rusting metal littered the valley: an empty trailer, sledges, tables, drop toilets, a bicycle, large fuel drums, loads of wire, tools, a stool, buckets, dishes. We found a lot. It was also clear that telephone or electricity had been run into the valley a long time ago, though by the time of our visit all that remained were remnants of collapsed poles. I guess the only upside is that the poles provided us with some fuel in the treeless alpine environment. Perhaps more egregiously, the Kaichi was also strewn with trash.

Without Abdybek, we took turns cooking, although Dan liked to do the most experimenting, seeing what he could create with our limited resources. Nobody really complained about cooking, it was a nice diversion to eat some time (pun intended, sorry). We soon realized that some things that had tasted good in the market were in fact nearly inedible, whereas other things (e.g. sugar/salt) we had completely mixed up. We survived. Typical meals included pasta, ramen, macaroni and cheese (thanks Dan for brining the powdered cheese from the US!), potatoes and rice, and calzones, among other less edible concoctions. Bread quickly became a staple; we'd make a fresh batch from scratch almost daily. Matt was especially fond of bread making. Later in the trip, fries and/or potato chips were a daily treat.

For protein, we had brought a handful of sausages but they didn't seem to last too long (and were possibly horsemeat...hmm). So, after the first few days, we were left with mostly nuts and dried fruit. Most of the dried fruit ended up tasting less inviting than advertised, so in reality, we were left with loads and loads of nuts: peanuts, cashews, pistachios, walnuts, nuts I've never seen before. You name it, we had them all. I don't think any of us will eat another nut for a year. I cringed at the jars of mixed nuts when I went to the grocery store yesterday.



P 36: Killing time and keeping a journal



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Perhaps the most challenging aspect of life in basecamp – and in the mountains - was the weather. It rained. Often.

P 37: One of the more interesting pieces of trash

For the first ten or twelve days, the weather was pretty consistent. That is, it was consistently changing. Showers would roll in and out in hourly intervals. The sun would come and go. This meant that we'd constantly have to jump into the communal tent (a large 6 person REI tent where we stored all the food and did the cooking – it's not a fancy mountaineering basecamp tent, but it worked quite well) to avoid the showers. When the sun wasn't out it would get chilly, and we generally lounged around in belay jackets and insulated pants. When the sun did shine, it could be excessively warm, requiring only shorts and a t-shirt if desired. And so it went, in and out of the tent, in and out of clothes. All day, every day. Thankfully the storms weren't severe – we rarely heard a roll of thunder – but they became increasingly frustrating as the trip wore on.

Surprisingly, the nighttime temperatures never got too severe. In basecamp at 3250 m we rarely saw frost and it never snowed. It snowed at one camp at about 3600 m, but just during the coldest hour of the night. In general, the snowline was at about 3800-4000 m.

P 38: The Djangart River in the morning

About midway through our stay, the weather pattern changed – hooray!. Or not. Instead of scattered showers, we got all day soakers. Several times it rained for more than 12 straight hours. Often it was a light rain, but occasionally it built to a steady, moderate rain. On our last night in basecamp, the bowls we left outside showed it rained over an inch in a 12-hour span.

P 39: The Djangart River in the afternoon

Reflecting the fickle weather, the Djangart River also had a mind of its own. On most days it would transform from a swift-flowing but fordable stream to a raging torrent of silt-laden glacial runoff. By the afternoon, a boulder-hop across the 8-10 m wide stream would be completely engulfed as the river grew to be waist to chest deep and 15-20 m wide. This proved to be a great logistical challenge for getting to the peaks. From our basecamp on the north side of the river, the only glacier we could access without crossing the river was the Djangartynbashi, although on our second trip up that glacier we used a snow patch to cross the river near its head and found the approach much easier. When the two teams set out on the N1 and N2 glaciers, we had to camp across the river for the glacial outflow, only able to cross early in the morning when the flow was at its lowest point. Even then, at the widest point in the river, the extremely fast flow of the bitterly cold, thigh deep water made crossing just barely possible. It may be advantageous for future parties to set objectives in a single glacial valley and set up a basecamp on location. Setting camp on the south side of the Djangart is possible, but traversing to the various glacial valleys is more difficult on that side of the river.

Climbing was definitely our respite from the boredom of basecamp. Although the weather didn't get better on the routes, at least we were out there doing what we love.

## 6. IT'S WHAT?!?

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"The rope is cut!"

"What!?"

"The rope is cut, it's about 20 m short!"

"How did that happen!?"

We still don't know exactly what happened, but can only assume that the horsemen who helped us haul our gear also helped themselves to some of our rope. It was definitely all there when we got the ropes (multiple flakes to get the kinks out), it was definitely all there when we packed our bag (Matt flaked them into the dry bag), it was definitely not all there when we started climbing.

After a day and a half approach – we could do it faster now, but the moraine we chose to follow was a hellacious disaster, but that's part of the peril of exploring new routes – we started up the peak just above our camp. Without a topo for that specific area (it was left in the US as we had expected to be climbing further to the east), we didn't know what



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P 40: Pt 4766 (right) coming into view

we were climbing, but it looked awesome: a perfect snow/ice couloir to very near the summit of an otherwise rocky pyramid. As we saw later, it was Pt 4766, sitting at one of the dividing points for the Djangartynbashi Glacier. We'd come up the glacier hoping to climb Pt 5048, which we had seen from the Djangart Valley, and perhaps another peak. When we arrived on scene, 4766 was calling our name and we decided it would be a worthy climb before continuing up the glacier to climb 5048.

We reached our camp on the glacier in the mid-afternoon. Some large boulders left in the medial moraine and a nearby run-off stream made for a hospitable camp. With 5048 obscured by clouds at the head of the valley, but with otherwise clear skies (relatively), we lounged around listening to music after constructing a windbreak for our small campsite. When the weather began to roll in around 5:00 or 6:00, we hurried to cook up some ramen before diving into our tent and bivy. We set the alarm for 4:00 a.m. – the route didn't look that huge – and went to bed hoping the weather would roll through as it often did.

After hitting snooze once or twice, we got up around 4:30. It had been clear most of the night (I generally don't sleep well in tiny tents, so I was up), but now was overcast. Overcast in the Djangart is fine weather, so we packed our bags. Just as we were leaving though, the snow started. It wouldn't relent for a solid ten hours. Luckily, it wasn't heavy enough to stop us, just enough to keep us wet. The route finding would be straightforward, we reasoned, and the slope steep enough that avalanche danger would not be a problem.

Matt led off, laboriously and frustratingly postholing his way up the first 200 m, which gradually steepened to 55 degrees. As we approached a large rock buttress that we had identified the previous day, snow was sloughing off the higher slopes; never enough to take us down but enough to keep us on our toes. Sloughing snow is actually a welcome sign, as it means the snow isn't accumulating to unload as a larger avalanche.

We got the second rope out of our bag and roped up to begin belayed climbing. Dan led the first pitch, but didn't get very far before the green rope ran out. It seemed a bit odd, but maybe the scale of the face was screwing with our perception of distance, a common issue. Often two half ropes aren't exactly the same length, so with little concern I just ran off to the next belay (Matt saw how much was left on his rope, the brown rope – a lot – but I was already in move-fast-its-an-alpine-climb mode). We gathered at Dan's belay station and Matt took the next pitch. There were a few words, but we went on. As he was climbing, I was restacking the ropes so Dan could have an easier belay. I got to the end of the green rope, but there was A LOT of brown left. I flaked the excess out – about 20 m! WHAT IS GOING ON?! I looked up at Matt, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. I looked at the ropes again. The tail at the end of Dan's knot didn't have the factory seal. That's weird. Where the heck was the rest of our rope? I shouted up to Matt to inform him of the problem.

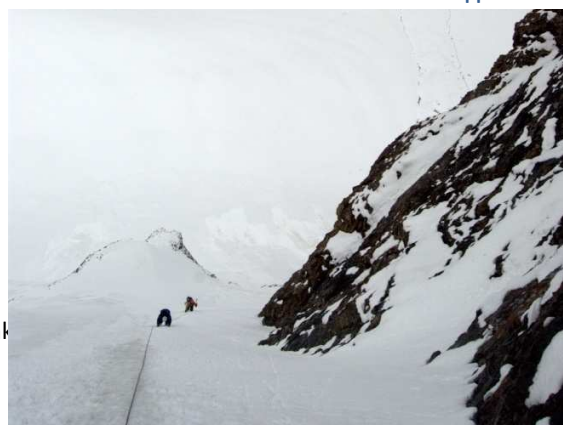
Matt made an anchor at the end of the 40 m pitch and Dan and I climbed up. We speculated that the horsemen had cut our rope, but that didn't help solve our predicament. What to do, what to do? We already weren't moving extremely fast; we were un-acclimated and inefficient on our first climb together. 40 m pitches would take ages. I proposed



P 41: Camp on the Djangartynbashi Glacier



P 42: Matt at the start of the upper couloir



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that we throw the 40 m rope in a bag and simulclimb on the remaining 60m rope. To me, the terrain was well within my comfort level. Matt was a bit more hesitant whereas Dan would go along with just about anything. I offered to lead to whole thing and Matt agreed to the idea. (I know, I know, when simulclimbing the climber less likely to fall should second. In this case, I wasn't worried about Matt falling and psychologically it was easier for him, always the more cautious, to second.)

We kept chugging along; now simulclimbing, we moved a bit faster. I placed a screw every 20-30 m, enabling us to get in at least 120 m before having to set up an anchor and re-shuffle gear. The 'hero' ice was soft and sticky, gradually increasing from 55 to 70 or 75 degrees. After a few segments, the falling snow began to taper off. I grabbed my camera from my bag and snapped a few photos of Matt and Dan on the face. We got into a beautiful rhythm and progressed smoothly up the face. The climbing was just challenging enough to keep things interesting while not raising my nerves. Bliss.

**P 43: Beautiful climbing above the Djangartynbashi Glacier**

Leading the rope team after an extended segment of simulclimbing, I placed my last screw and yelled down that I was going to gun it for the ridge, about 60 m above. After Matt expressed his concern, I relented and traversed to the other side of the couloir. I threw in a sketchy nut, pounded in a marginal piton, and shoved my shoulder into a corner of the wall that arched over the couloir, reminding me of Pinnacle Gully on Mt. Washington. I belayed Matt and Dan up to the frigid stance.

With a refreshed rack of gear, I set off for the top. After a half rope of 70 degree ice, the slope relented just before the ridge. I plowed my way through two-foot deep powder, desperately trying to reach the line of sun just above me. The last few meters to the knife-edge ridge involved some tricky climbing on steep, 80-degree snow-plastered ice. Not helping was the tug on the rope I received to inform me I had reached the end. I kept going, pulling my way onto the ridge after Matt had started climbing. I gazed around at a magnificent display: the fresh snow frosted the surrounding landscape of 5000 m virgin peaks. I took a few steps down to the other side of the sharp ridge, pounded in two pickets, and belayed Matt and Dan the rest of the way to the top.

Unfortunately, just as they reached the ridge, the clouds closed in and we were engulfed in another whiteout snowstorm. I collected the gear and headed up the ridge towards the summit, postholing along the way and groveling over some mixed rock-and-powder terrain. Almost there, Matt started moving again as we continued simulclimbing. As I scrambled over the final few meters, I threw my arms up and let up a shout. My first unclimbed summit. Success never felt so sweet.

I belayed Matt and Dan up as the snow and wind intensified. Together on the summit, we sat there for about three minutes before heading back down in reverse order. It's a shame the weather couldn't have held out for just 30 minutes longer.

Now, you'd think the story was over; after all, we'd made the summit. Not so fast. Earlier when we had reached the ridge, we peered down the backside and saw a downclimbable snow slope. It looked like a faster descent than the alternative of making 40 m rappels down the face we had just climbed. Let's go for it, we agreed.

As we began to downclimb, belayed from anchors, the visibility became almost zero. We chose to keep descending in the treacherous conditions. At one point, I had downclimbed the full 60 m ropelength, but was completely unable to make an anchor – fresh snow over choss, nasty stuff. I stayed in place while Matt and Dan connected the 40 m rope, hoping to get me far enough down to find a suitable anchor. I didn't find much better and belayed Dan and Matt down on one of the crappiest pairs of stubby screws I've ever placed. I took the lead again, searching for a way down in the low visibility. On top of the white-out, darkness was now setting in. I traversed the slope, growing increasingly nervous about avalanche conditions. No dice, I came to a steep ravine. I opted for the more direct route straight down, spotting a gully that cut diagonally back across the face. The terrain below didn't look hospitable, but maybe, just maybe, there was a shot this gully could lead us all the way down.

After the others reached me, I set of, using our joined ropes to travel 100 m through deep powder. At the end of the rope, things looked promising, but I couldn't see too far around a corner. I belayed Matt and Dan down before setting off again. After another 100 m, our luck ran out. Cliff. Waterfall flowing over cliff. Hey, at least the snow had stopped.

With no other options, we had to begin rappelling using our shortened rope. Matt made his way over to a rock wall that flanked the gully and cleared some cracks of ice and dirt, building an anchor with two nuts. And so it began. We had no

idea where the steepening gully would lead us and no idea how many rappels we'd have to make. Would we get stuck above a blank cliff face? The poor rock quality wasn't exactly conducive to confidence-inspiring anchors. Matt rappelled off into the pitch black. As we watched his headlamp fade away, Dan and I shared our concerns.

In the end, it only took four raps, but in our exhaustion-induced stupor it seemed like a dozen. The whole time, Matt remained positive: "One way or another, we're getting down." For our last rappel, we used two Abolokovs to edge over the final half-frozen waterfall. Reaching the snow cone at the bottom and shinning my headlamp into the space below, I realized we could walk the rest of the way down the slope to the glacier. Relief.

It was after 3:00 a.m. as we wandered back down the glacier to the refuge of our tent. Cold and exhausted from 22+ hours on the go, we dropped our packs. It's a strange feeling that you get after completing such an arduous and lengthy climb. As tired as you are, you can't just crawl in your sleeping bag and fall asleep. It takes a while to decompress from the high tension of living on the sharp end.

We brewed some warm water to restore our comfort. I think Matt, always the hungry one, even cooked up some food. I barely had enough energy for the warm water and was the first one in the tent, which we had to shovel out from the foot plus of snow that fell during our climb. The bivy, used by Matt the previous night, was buried and soaked, so all three of us crammed into the smallest two-man tent I've ever been in. Yeah, it was like three sardines, but I still slept surprisingly well. A sleep of satisfaction.

Intense sun woke us the next morning; it's amazing how hot it can get on a glacier. Munching on some food, we chatted about the climb. We decided on the name "Horseman's Horror," quite descriptive of the rope-snatching and of the climb itself (well, more the descent, the climb was delightful). We coined Pt 4766 Peak Howard-Bury after an early British explorer of the Tien Shan whose diaries Jamie had read and graded the 700 m route D+. Not done with the naming, only half in jest Matt proposed calling the descent route Lenin Gully. It was probably delirious hallucinations, but he swears he saw an image of Lenin in the oppressive rock walls that bound the gully.

We discussed the possibility of climbing another route the next day. It would be a stretch on our food, but we could do it if we wanted. There were so many options luring us, but in the end, our sensible sides won out. The fresh snow would make movement slow and left the avalanche danger high. Having only one good rope would further exacerbate the issue. We spent several hours basking in the sunlight, drying our gear, and refueling for the walk out. We set off around 1:00 p.m., taking a much more efficient route back to camp, where we arrived around 5:30. We were completely exhausted, but it was the good kind of exhaustion that reminds you that you've just accomplished something. Welcome to climbing in the Djangart.



P 44: A proud look back

## 7. HARD WORK

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Toes are numb.

Nope, feet are numb.

Nope, lower legs are numb.

Matt and I stumbled onto the south shore of the Djangart River, breathing sighs of relief after an early morning crossing. Even at its lowest, the thigh deep river put up a fight as we struggled across. As we put our pants, socks, and boots back on, I was at least thankful that the acute pain had taken away the nauseous feeling in my stomach to which I'd awoken an hour earlier. The night before, we walked down the Djangart Valley staying on the north side of the river, knowing we'd have to cross early the next morning. Unfortunately, I woke up dry heaving, a slightly more severe consequence than the usual diarrhea. In the alpine, that's just something you have to push through if you want to climb.

After making it a short distance up the trail, Matt could tell I wasn't feeling it. He stopped and waited on a large rock, but I told him to continue so I could relieve my troubled digestive system – I'll spare any more details than that, we aren't in basecamp anymore.

We knew the approach would be long, but I don't think either of us quite expected the challenge we got. We'd only taken 48 hours of rest after our last climb. Perhaps it was the boredom of camp or maybe our ambition getting the better of us, but we (well, mostly me) moved pretty slowly. The terrain didn't make it any easier. After the early morning ice bath, we were hampered by knee-high thorn bushes. At first we tried to weave our way through, but eventually just dealt with getting stuck by the thorns. We inefficiently meandered up the slopes on the west side of the glacial outflow, eventually gaining the moraine. We stayed high, choosing to deal with loose blocks and rockslides rather than navigate the ice cliffs below. Progress was painstakingly slow.

By lunch we were running parallel to the smooth, dry glacier and decided to drop down. Looking ahead, we could see a large serac barrier cascading down the slope. Our objective, Pt 5080, sat on the west side of the glacier, but there was to be no easy approach. We traversed the glacier, making our way to the east side where a less broken section allowed access to the upper glacier. As storms rolled through, we had to stop twice to take refuge under large boulders that sat like giant mushrooms with icy pedestals (the rocks shade the ice, so the ice around them melts at a faster rate). By late afternoon, we had come to the point where the glacier turned from dry to wet. We'd been jumping exposed crevasses as we progressed up the lower glacier, but now we were facing the added threat of crevasses hidden by snow bridges.



P 45: The ugly approach up the N2 Glacier

We roped up and Matt led the way, once again frustrated by knee to thigh deep postholes. Matt prodded his way along, inspecting for crevasses. We had crossed at least a dozen snowbridges when suddenly my feet were dangling in space. Luckily, the extra surface area of my arms and pack stopped me before I could even yell "crevasse!" I yelled anyway and Matt stood alert while I used my axe to extricate myself. Phew.

It was getting late but we were still progressing, albeit slowly. Our objective gradually came into view, but with darkness closing in and each laborious step sapping our energy, we set course for a somewhat protected alcove on the west side of the glacier. Night set in as I dug a platform for the tent while Matt sacrificed his dry clothes to get water from a trickle that was cascading off a nearby cliff. After cooking up a pot of ramen, it was 10:00 p.m. Settling into the warmth of our sleeping bags as the wind howled, we left our plan as 'to be determined.' After the 13.5 hour approach, it was too late for an alpine start. We decided we'd get some sleep and re-evaluate in the morning, potentially resting for the day.

I woke up at 5:00 a.m. as snow fell on our tent. Typical -- back to sleep. I woke up at 10:00 a.m. to the heat of brilliant sunshine.

"Should we go for it?"

"It's a late start, but there's no such thing as a good weather window around here."

"Let's do it."

It took us some time to pack our things and get some food, so we set off around 11:00. It took at least another hour of plodding up the glacier to reach the base of the route. The east face of Pt 5080 is divided by a series of couloirs. We'd picked 5080 after seeing photos of the couloirs taken by Vadim Kodysh, leader of the 2008 Russian expedition that had trekked over a nearby pass. With the two couloirs on the right at most risk of being obliterated by falling seracs, we chose the left-most couloir. The steepest of the three, it would also provide a nice challenge.



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Matt started up and we were moving efficiently under clear skies (a nice change from the last climb). Reaching the top of the couloir, the ice steepened to a vertical cascade. With only seven screws, we had to break the steep section into two shorter pitches. I'm all for running it out, but not on marginal quality vertical ice. Letting out an exclamatory yell after cresting the crux waterfall, I cruised up gentle terrain to finish out the rope length, threw in some rock gear, and belayed Matt up. Matt then took over as we simulclimbed up moderate terrain. Now late afternoon, a biting wind slowly built and chilled us with its icy wrath.

As the rope stopped moving, I grew increasingly impatient in the cold wind. Matt was around a corner, out of eyesight or earshot. Too cold to keep standing, I decided to keep moving, and eventually got to where Matt and I could communicate. He threw in a belay anchor and brought me up. The snow was chest deep on a 50-degree slope. Progress was near impossible. Frustrated, Matt allowed me to give it a go. After an intense 20-minute effort, I looked back and saw that I had made it about 10 meters. Ugh, I needed a new tactic. Trying everything, I ended up using my ice tools to create fist cracks in the top layer of snow. It wasn't consolidated enough to take full body weight, but I found that if I jammed both my mittens into the man-made cracks, pulled up and distributed my weight over the length of my shins, I could just manage enough leverage to progress. I went on like this for a good 30-40 meters before the snow began to harden and I could move in a more traditional manner. Who knew a 50-degree snow slope could be so challenging?

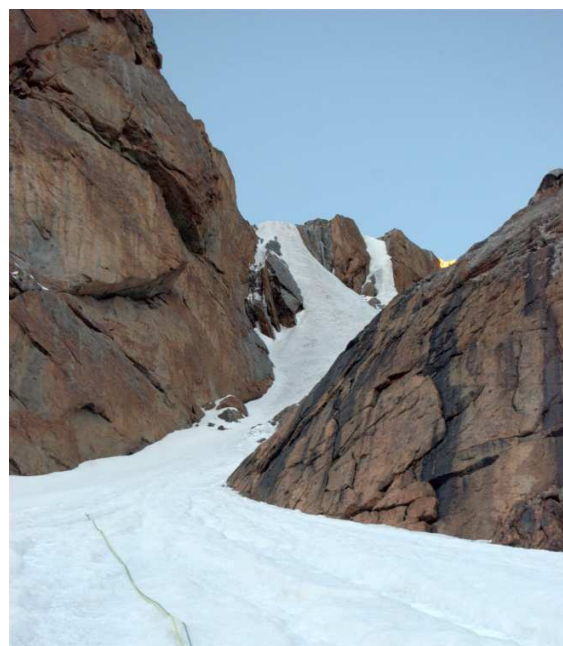
We continued up, swapping leads as the angle steepened slightly. The wind built in a deafening crescendo, slamming our exposed faces with spindrift. Talking required shouting. Even donning our warm belay jackets, each belay was a test of will. Darkness fell and the wind only strengthened as we neared the summit. Matt led a pitch up to a rock band, which as best we could tell marked the summit. To get to the true summit would require traversing around the band and facing the full force of the wind. We looked at each other, hands and toes numb, and both knew it was time to descend. Standing on the true summit didn't mean anything to us; the route was complete.

We used up all of our pickets making the first five rappels. From there, we used V-threads to anchor the 8-10 remaining rappels. It was tedious work. Thankfully, the wind abated as we made our way into the shelter of the couloir. The morning hours wore on; 2:00, 3:00, 4:00 a.m. We double-checked each knot, knowing mistakes are all too often made on the descent. All we had to do was look the other person in the eyes to see the fatigue festering in our empty bodies.

We stumbled into camp at 6:45 a.m., battered and worn out. It was light, but it would be another hour before the sun reached our camp to reheat our frozen limbs. We boiled water, eager to drink after carrying only a liter each, all of which we drank during the 20-hour ordeal. Replenished, we sunk into our sleeping bags and rested for two hours until the heat of the sun was too unbearable.

We slowly loaded up our bags and set off at 1:00 p.m., postholing our way back across the upper glacier. Reversing the treacherous approach took seven hours, even though we took a somewhat improved route to avoid some of the crevasses. Neither of us had a name for the route or the mountain, but we didn't care. We got our second taste of success and it hadn't lost any of its luster. Since then, the route has been

P 47: A beautiful view while climbing



P 48: The upper couloir, looking tamer than reality



P 49: The eyes of fatigue



P 50: Ominous clouds gather of Pt 5080 after our climb



dubbed *Will Your Anchor Hold?*, TD-, 700 m. We propose Peak Sutherland for the mountain, in honor of Matt's recently departed Great Uncle. *Will Your Anchor Hold* is the name of his book.

By the late evening, the swift-flowing Djangart River was too dangerous to cross. Not interested in pitching our wet tent, we put our sleeping pads in the grass, cooked some food, and went to bed. Sleep wouldn't come easy though. When we had reached the Djangart we'd managed to hear over a crackling radio that Dan would be getting evacuated. We didn't get too many details, so we were left to ponder what could have gone wrong.

## 8. LIFE ISN'T FAIR

Matt and I got up early for one more frigid crossing of the Djangart. We practically ran back to basecamp, anxious and eager to get the full story on Dan. We dove into the shelter of the basecamp tent just as a steady rain blanketed the valley. What could have gone wrong? Four days earlier we'd parted ways all healthy and eager to climb. Now we were losing one of our team members? It couldn't be.

In a rush of words, Jamie, Dan, and Chris spat out a complex story. Dan passed out. Moraines, cliff, lost trekking pole. Dan wanted hot dogs. Where's Mike? Who's Matt? Chris was swept into the river. Dan and Jamie were nearly pulled into the river. Another collapse. Truck coming. Jamie and Dan leaving today. It all melded together as I tried to piece together a story told by three observers. Once Jamie and Dan left, Chris filled in some pieces, but I still feel like the puzzle isn't complete.

Dan, a true climber, didn't want to go; the rest of us knew it had to happen. Even though Dan looked perfectly fine, the risk of something worse happening while in a less hospitable location was too great. There were hugs all around as Dan and Jamie made a dash for the Kaichi during an afternoon break in the rain. Matt and I sat around, a bit shocked at the quick turn of events. A pall overtook camp as the gloom of the rainy, overcast day continued. We feared the worst but hoped for the best, optimistic about a reunion in Bishkek. We had to go on, but for the remainder of the trip something would be lacking. Dan, the last minute addition to the team, had brought an energy that helped counter the doldrums of life in basecamp. Eager to get after it, it wasn't fair that he was the one who had to go.

In the end, sometimes you have to make the hard decisions that allow you to come back and fight another day. I know getting his trip cut short has left Dan with an insatiable itch to get back out there. The doctors in Bishkek weren't much help, only recognizing that he'd suffered a concussion during the first collapse. He did manage to wait around in Bishkek (although he collapsed again) and the team got to share a celebratory beer. Doctors in Boston are now investigating the possibility that Dan has a heart arrhythmia that causes his blood pressure to drop, resulting in the sudden collapses.

## 9. RAIN SHADOW

After Dan and Jamie left, it rained for the next day and a half. Fitting. Finally, on the morning of July 23, it was clear enough to wash both body and clothes in the river. The next day, Chris, Matt, and I would set out for some unfinished business: Pt 5048. It was the one objective that could leave us disappointed if we didn't at least give it a go.

Both to get some extra recovery time and to break up the approach, we used our typical strategy and left camp late in the afternoon, heading for



P 51: Dan and Jamie depart for the Kaichi



P 52: A challenging bridge crossing in the smaller UAZ "loaf"



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P 53: Pt 5048 and Pt 4766 at dusk

the Djangartynbashi Glacier. Still feeling the malaise of basecamp and lingering effects of the divided team, I didn't try to move too fast. Thanks to the knowledge gained on our previous trip, we took an alternate approach route, using a snow patch to cross the river and gaining a grassy hill on the east side of the valley. Just as I crested the hill, I startled a large herd of ibex that quickly scrambled 500 m up the adjacent scree slope. Oh, to be able to ascend with such ease. We set up our camp just in time to jump in our tents as rain fell. It relented briefly and we sat staring at 5048, shrouded mysteriously in a cloud. As we went to sleep, the rain began again. It wouldn't stop for 18 hours.



Sitting, or rather laying, in Matt's tiny two-man (probably more of a 1.5 man) tent isn't fun; there's not really enough room to sit up. Chris didn't have it much better in his bivy. We let out sighs of frustration as the patter of rain on the tent held steady. At 2:00 p.m., it finally subsided and we crawled out to stretch our legs. Estimating the rest of the approach to be about six hours, we decided to stay put for the day and continue in the morning. If we had gone, it would have made an alpine start unfeasible.

Matt and I played some rock jenga while Chris laid in his bivy and read. It remained clear until dinner, but as soon as we started cooking, another storm rolled in. Luckily it was short lived and we went to bed with relatively stable weather and high hopes for the next day. By morning, it was back to overcast. Go figure.

P 54: Plodding our way up the Djangartynbashi Glacier

We were out of camp around 9:00 a.m., quickly reaching the toe of the glacier and making rapid progress up the dry glacier under a light rain/sleet. Unlike the N2, the lower reaches of the Djangartynbashi are crevasse free, allowing easy access. By noon we had reached our previous campsite and were optimistic we could make it to the base of the route we had scoped out on 5048 in just another hour or two. That turned out to be just a bit off. Six and a half hours of vicious, oftentimes waist-deep postholing later, and we finally reached camp. During that effort, both Chris and I had splashed into streams under the snow that filled our boots with water. As we cooked, we desperately tried to dry our boots. Up until that night I hadn't been wholeheartedly into the climb, but seeing 5048 bask in the post-storm alpenglow lit my fire.



P 55: Working our way up the north ridge of Pt 5048

It was a chilly night with my boots drying on my feet. Already having dropped any excess body fat during the previous two excursions, I could do little to keep myself warm even with my nice sleeping bag. I didn't even need the alarm to go off at 2:00 a.m., I'd been awake most of the night. Matt and I jostled about in the tiny tent, getting our clothes on and boiling a pot of water. Chris put on his boots, but decided his feet were too cold and gave up on his last chance to climb during the trip.

Matt and I packed our bags and left camp at 3:15 a.m. We made quick progress and by sunrise had gained the north ridge that projects out towards the glacier, needing only one short pitch of belayed climbing. Amazingly, after days of overcast skies and rain, it was finally clear and gentle wisps of high cirrus clouds indicated fair weather would last for some time. We swapped leads up the exposed, photogenic knife-edge ridge. To avoid pockets of deep snow that hampered progress, we escaped to the northeast face, which would lead us all the way to the summit ridge on gentle 55-degree slopes. A few battles with pockets of deep snow were the only obstacles, and we were standing on the summit by 2:15 p.m. All smiles.



Unk

The only disappointing moment of the day came when I crested the final summit ridge and saw, much to my astonishment, that a second, higher summit existed to the east. Without topos we couldn't be sure, but we have since concluded that the higher summit is indeed in China and is unmarked as a point elevation on the Soviet map. Slightly worried about crossing the border, mentally not prepared for more climbing, but mostly just unwilling to commit to a treacherous traverse to this summit – it appeared to be dangerously difficult powder snow pockets over a very compact conglomerate rock – we dropped our gear and called our route complete. Enjoying the rare opportunity provided by the fair weather, we snapped lots of photos, took a moment to record a video thank you for our sponsors, and snacked on some dried fruit before beginning the descent.



P 56: Climbing the northeast face of Pt 5048

The moderate steepness and soft snow conditions allowed me to downclimb the whole route, cleaning all the pickets that Matt used to make quick rappels. We were pleased that we didn't leave a single piece of gear on the route. We rolled into camp around 7:45 p.m. and Chris, a new uncle, had water waiting for us. We cooked up some ramen, packed some gear, and for once had time for a full night of post-climb sleep. We had time, I didn't say we slept well. Matt and I both had another fitful night before rising early to (hopefully) avoid some of the postholing on the glacier. As it ended up, we were still cursing while dropping thigh deep into the ice crusted snow, but we made it all the way back to basecamp by 4:45 p.m., walking the last few miles in a daze.

P 57: Our one and only summit shot

Once again we couldn't come up with a route name or a peak name, although we graded the route AD+, 650 m. Subsequently we have coined the route "Postcard for the Chief" in honor of the friendly, hospitable soldiers at Uch-Koshkon, with a slightly deeper personal meaning for me. We propose the name Peak of Illumination to commemorate the rare weather.

After a third and final successful outing, I felt a calm come over me as I slept in basecamp that night. Alpine climbing is a blast: the beauty, the intensity, the endurance, the freedom. At the same time, it is a tremendous amount of hard work. I was physically and mentally drained - it's like running a marathon in three consecutive weeks with only a marginal diet to refuel your body. I could tell I had lost my edge physically, with only the adrenaline of the pursuit keeping me pushing forward during the last climb. Still, as I lay in the tent that night, aching all over, it somehow felt good.

## 10. WILL WALK FOR FOOD

After returning from our climb of Pt 5048, we had two days of anxious waiting before the pre-arranged horses were to arrive. Asel ensured us that the nomads would show up; there was just too much money at stake. The money they made off us - about \$350/person (there were two of them) – is far greater than average yearly income in Kyrgyzstan (~\$268). Maybe we overpaid, but we were in no position to bargain. We were still nervous wondering if they'd show up.

On the positive side, there were cleanup tasks to keep us marginally busier than regular days in basecamp: cleaning the stove, bleeding excess fuel, packing up trash, sorting gear. The rainy days continued as we waited impatiently for a chance to shower and wash clothes.

As Matt and I sat hunched over next to the river trying to clean a month's worth of greasy grime off our pots and stove, four horses strolled down the hillside. We had asked for five since we'd only be taking one trip this time, but hey, they showed up. We were happy. We gestured to confirm that we'd head back over the pass the next morning since it was already 5:00 p.m. I hurried to prepare dinner – rice, potatoes, and cashews cooked in a chicken broth and topped with a tasty mixed spice that we were never able to identify. It had been a big hit among us before the last climbing foray, but the nomads barely touched it. Oh well.



Unk

We spent a few awkward hours lounging around, mostly unable to communicate with one another. The horsemen, this time a father and son, enjoyed our photos and video. We crawled into bed around 8:00 p.m. as it began to rain, the nomads sharing the communal tent with Chris. We loaned a sleeping bag and belay jacket to the son, who didn't seem as comfortable in the cold. It rained and rained. I was up for long stretches of the night and was hopeful when the rain stopped around 2:30 a.m. The respite was short-lived, however, as the rain picked up again 15 minutes later. We had hoped to leave around 6:00 a.m. to meet Sasha at our pickup location at 10:00 a.m. I was up at 5:00 a.m. to finish packing what I still had laying about and Matt was up shortly thereafter. It continued to rain but we were hopeful the hearty nomads would still give it a go. We knew our Gore-Tex suits would keep us dry, so we didn't mind yet another rainy walk.

P 58: The horses returned and so did the rain

By 6:30 or 7:00 we hadn't seen the horsemen leave the tent. They called us in and told us to sit; we weren't going anywhere soon. All five of us sat in the communal tent and sipped chai as the rain held steady and the minutes ticked by alarmingly slow. At one point I grabbed a bowl that we'd left outside the night before and found it filled with an inch of water. Around 9:30 we phoned Asel to inform her we'd be drastically late. She confirmed that the truck would be waiting for us whenever we got there.

By 10:30 everyone was fed up. A brief slow-down in the rain was enough to get us up and moving. It took another hour and a half to finish packing the bags and get the horses loaded. After a last-minute inspection for any remaining trash, we departed at 12:07, heading home at last. The walk back over the pass was tortuously dull. Low clouds fogged everything in as a light drizzle continued to dampen the mood. Not helping was my upset stomach, my constant companion for much of the expedition. We moved slow, worn by our previous labor, unable to keep up with the horses as we had on our arrival. After the 3.5-hour climb, we shuffled through the snow that had accumulated on the pass and then bolted down the other side as the rain and clouds began to clear.

Chris saw it first, Matt and I a few minutes later as we straggled over the hill above the pickup location: no truck. I'd used every last ounce of my energy on the presupposition that a truck would be waiting at the end. Now we just had one more twist in the journey.

We phoned Asel who said that the truck had been held up in deep mud about 40 km from our location. Fortunately, it was moving again and would get to us that evening or the next morning. We were told to stay put. So, we paid the horsemen their exorbitant asking price (20000 som or \$435) using all of our remaining som and dollars, spare 500 som we saved for a meal on the ride home, and sent them on their way back down the Kaichi. Luckily we had gone to the ATM before departing Bishkek.

Seeing no signs of Sasha, we settled in for the night, frantically pitching a tent as a severe wind and rain storm blasted camp. Because of the delay the nomads had wanted food earlier in the day, so we were down to about one dinners-worth of ramen and a few bags of nuts (we'd dumped and buried most everything else, besides a few things the nomad's wanted for themselves). We hadn't eaten more than a handful of nuts all day, but with no truck we couldn't use up our last meal. We went to bed hungry. Wet, cold, and famished, I was in the most pessimistic state I'd been in all trip.

Throughout the night, the mix of the gentle rush of the Kaichi River and pervasive wind kept sounding like the rumbling of a truck engine, but as we awoke to sunny skies, nobody was there. I told Matt I didn't think Sasha was coming, speculating that the bridge at Uch-Koshkon might be out. After all, when we'd crossed it on our way in, the dirt embankment leading off the bridge was partially washed out, remaining just a few inches wider than the truck needed. Matt chided me for being so pessimistic.

We waited until about 8:30 before phoning Asel. She managed to convey that, as I had suspected, the truck couldn't get across the bridge, but Sasha was looking for horses. We informed Asel the horsemen from the previous day had taken all our money, but asked if Sasha could loan us money that we'd repay in Bishkek. In a complicated tangle of phone calls between Asel, Sasha, and us over the next few hours, we had horses, then no horses and would have to walk, then one horse, then potentially no horse and would have to get a helicopter! It was like a perverse game of telephone.

Matt and I remained calm, formulating a plan to haul as much of our gear as possible using Jamie's bouldering mat as a sled and hoping to figure out any obstacles along the way as we got to them. We were confident that Asel and Sasha were doing everything they could (which they were) to remedy the unfortunate but faultless circumstance. Chris was a bit more

frantic, unwilling to walk because we'd have to cross the Kaichi River. Despite our admonitions, he phoned Global Rescue and the US embassy multiple times, but neither was in a position to do anything other than arrange a helicopter that we'd pay for. By early afternoon, Chris relented and joined Matt and I in preparing to drag our gear out. We made a pile of all the non-essentials: propane tanks, stove, pots and pans, books, toiletries, radio, rope, Jamie's spare harness, a large base camp tent, binoculars, and a duffel bag full of trash. Unwilling to part with our personal gear (climbing gear is expensive – it would have been more economical to pay \$2000 for a helicopter), we were still laden with probably 400 lbs of stuff (we also had a large bag that Dan had left when he was evacuated). I was extremely unhappy leaving any trace of ourselves in the wilderness, even if there was already loads of trash lying around. In the end, we had no choice. With little food remaining, we needed to get out fast.

Around 1:00 p.m. we set off. There was a chance a single horse would be coming, but we couldn't stand waiting around any longer. The going was SLOW. Within five minutes the rough road had trashed the bottom of Dan's bag that I was trying to haul. Matt and I talked things over; there was no way we'd get out this way, it'd take days. Matt dropped his backpack and ran to get Chris who'd wandered off ahead. Begrudgingly, we concluded that a helicopter might be the only choice.

We phoned Asel again who told us we should call Global Rescue if we needed a helicopter, but that we should wait a few more hours to see if the horse would make it. Chris went back down the road to retrieve his bag. Instead of Chris returning, however, it was a horse! Matt let out a scream of joy and pumped his fists in the air - he was the most ardently opposed to relying on a helicopter. The horse, carrying Chris' gear, came up to where we were standing. It was a sturdy military horse with a soldier named Bakyt (we think) from Uch-Koshkon. Not knowing our knowledge of the situation, he scribbled on a piece of paper to explain the bridge collapse. I saved the scribble as a nice memento of the occasion.

We loaded five large duffel bags onto the horse, making a run back up to our leftover pile to grab a few more items, although we still had to leave a fair bit. [Note: We arranged for and paid Bakyt to return to get the remaining stuff. Since we would already be on our way to Bishkek, we offered the gear as a gift.] The horse was heavily burdened and we each carried a heavy backpack. It wouldn't be an easy 12 miles, but we'd make it. Bakyt was extremely friendly and we chatted along the way as best we could. When we reached the Kaichi River, he ferried us across one-by-one on the horse. The water would have been chest deep; there's no way we could have crossed it on foot that day and even in the morning it would have been a challenge. It took us six and a half hours to get back, but Bakyt seemed impressed that we could keep pace with no breaks.

We strolled up to the gates of Uch-Koshkon, grinning, at 7:45 p.m. We gestured and talked with Sasha in the strange form of communication we had developed, learning that the embankment of the bridge had collapsed that morning as he was going over, the truck had been stuck, and the military had helped him free it. The commander of the base came out. In a good mood, he offered that we shoot his AK-47; he smiled and told me I was a good shot. Matt on the other hand, had never touched a gun and fired into the ground. We offered the soldiers the extra half rope from the pair that had been cut and Jamie's bouldering mat, in which they seemed keenly interested. Chris gave Bakyt his wristwatch and I gave him my binoculars. They were all smiles. Perhaps they were surprised by our generosity, but they'll never know how happy we were to get help on the way out.



P 59: A lighter moment with Bakyt after reaching Uch-Koshkon

The entire walk back all we'd wanted to do was get in the truck and start the drive to Bishkek; we desperately wanted food and a bed. We wouldn't have to wait until Bishkek though, as the commander offered us to dine with the soldiers and stay the night. On the menu, Marco Polo, fresh kill of the day's hunt. We grabbed a few things and went inside the gates, likely a place where few westerners have ever set foot. Sasha, former military himself, stayed with the commander while we got a tour from Bakyt, the 2<sup>nd</sup> in command of the approximately 15 man post. Eventually, we made our way to Bakyt's private quarters. We sat in his living room while his wife presented us with an absolute feast: Marco Polo, bread, bread pudding, lard balls, milk, chai. Having had no meat for three weeks and little food in the last two days, it was disturbing how gluttonous we were. We couldn't help it. As we ate, we were entertained by the Bakyt's two young daughters, age 2 and 3, the proud owners of a new couch, a.k.a. Jamie's bouldering mat. Bakyt threw in the only English language DVD he had, some strange concert from the 1980s that was held in Moscow. It was paradise.

We finished dinner and Bakyt had the other soldiers fix beds for us. We had a small taste of the comfort before the commander came in and offered us another meal! This time we went to the main kitchen and a huge mound of Marco Polo was presented on a platter in front of us. We ate as much as our already full stomachs would allow before calling it quits and heading to bed. A marginally comfortable bed never felt so good. All three of us lay there awake, caffeinated to our limits from the dozens of cups of chai we had sucked down. Off and on throughout the night I lay staring at the ceiling, unable to fully grasp the reality of our situation.

We were up at first light the next morning, Sasha anxious to get moving. We had another plate of Marco Polo with Bakyt and commander. As we were leaving, we dug through our gear and gave them a balaclava, sunglasses, and a pair of gloves. They seemed a bit taken aback by our continued generosity, but the meal and bed were worth much more at that moment. We wanted to send them a package in the mail, but learned that the only way they can get things is to go to Bishkek or Karakol. We settled for giving the commander, who offered to take us hunting if we returned, our email addresses. Hopefully we hear from him.

We sped away, making fast progress in a slightly smaller truck than we'd ridden in before. Shocks were a welcome bonus, resulting in a much more peaceful trip. A broken hose delayed us for 20 minutes, but again it was no problem for Sasha. Reaching the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul by 2:00 p.m., we happily realized we'd make it back to Bishkek that night. After feasting on a plate of Manti, we took a dip in the warm lake while we waited for a van to meet us. Sasha had to turn right around and head back to pick up another group. Packed to the max, the van sped away. So close. At the Kyrgyz version of a highway rest stop, we phoned Jamie only to learn that Dan had moved his flight up - he had to get back to work - and would be leaving early the next morning. Our long awaited reunion would be short-lived.

We rolled into the courtyard of the apartment bloc at 7:45 p.m., 'home' at last. After unloading and a round of hugs, we made the first quick attempt at showering away the grime before heading out for pizza and a beer. Delicious. We never got to eat our last four packs of ramen, but I'm certainly not complaining.

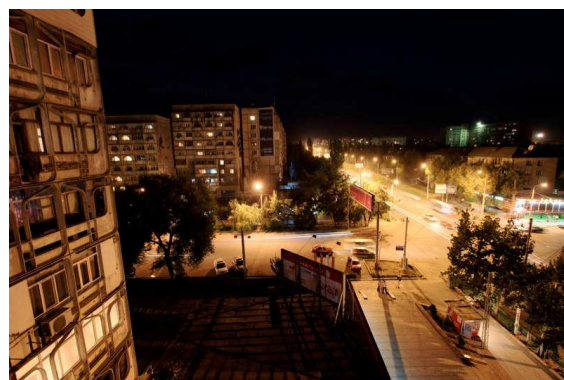
## 11. A LONG WAY HOME

The reunion was short but sweet, stories flying in both directions. Chris, Matt, and I stayed up all night with Dan, helping him get his luggage into the airport-bound taxi at 4:00 a.m. We then promptly crashed, but couldn't sleep for too long as we had business to take care of with ITMC in the morning.

Matt and I got up early, checking the internet and grabbing a delicious breakfast before heading to ITMC where Asel was happy to see us. We settled our debts, having to pay for the horse and ITMC's equipment that we had to leave behind. We ran a bit over our budget thanks to all the money we spent on horses, but at the end of the day, we had an incredible trip. We can't thank our sponsors enough for making it possible.



P 60: Lake Issyk-Kul



P 61: Back in Bishkek



P 62: The team on our last day together in the Djangart

Returning to civilization is a blessing and a curse, and I think we all had somewhat different feelings. Personally, at times I felt like I'd never left Bishkek – the rest of the trip just seemed like a blur. At others, the lingering aches and pains were stark reminders of the experience while the little irritants of society made me want to run away again.

We spent the afternoon souvenir shopping then shared a fabulous dinner with Arianna and her sister, learning of some upcoming changes to the Alpine Fund. We hope it will remain a strong organization and have pledged to continue supporting their efforts.

Chris and I left the next day, August 4. My return trip would take 43 hours, the worst of which would be 15 hours in the oppressively hot Moscow airport. I finally made it to my apartment at 11:00 p.m. EST on August 5. The scale in my bathroom only confirmed what I could see in the mirror: 139 pounds, 15 less than when I left on June 28.

The questions you get when you return from an expedition always seem so mundane. 'Did you have a good time?' 'What was it like?' There's really no way to fully explain what it's like to people who weren't there. Only Matt, Dan, and I really know what it was like to toil in the unforgiving, indiscriminate mountains of the Djangart. The experience is uniquely ours.

I've been asked several times, 'Would you do it again?' I think it's a rather frivolous question, but I always get the impression people expect me to say no. I'll admit that on the surface climbing is a rather frivolous sport. We travelled half way around the world to thrash our bodies, risking our lives to climb to the top of a chunk of rock. Oftentimes, those who don't climb can't see past this. They can't see the personal growth that comes from testing physical and mental limits. They can't see the bonds built between ropemates. They can't see the essence of distilling life to a singular focus amidst an awe-inspiring landscape. I'm alright with that though, for I can see the value of these things. It's what keeps me going back again and again.

## EPILOGUE: MELANCHOLY SATISFACTION

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It's a strange cocktail of reminders that let me know I was just on a lengthy expedition: not enough holes in my belt, empty cupboards, the stench of filthy clothes, extreme jet lag. Mostly though, it's the empty feeling where a huge goal used to sit. It's bittersweet to sit on my comfortable couch, sleep in my warm bed, and take a warm shower.

For eight months, I worked tirelessly to apply for grants, plan logistics, sort equipment, and scour photos for objectives. Every day I was motivated to work a bit harder, anticipating an amazing trip. That eagerness is now gone, replaced with the satisfaction that a lot of hard work has paid off: I climbed three beautiful virgin peaks. To me, first ascents exemplify the highest level of climbing achievement because you are following in nobody's footsteps. With no prior knowledge of the route, you must make all the right decisions to succeed.

My sense of melancholy satisfaction is pervasive both physically and mentally. It has lingered since the day I woke up in basecamp after returning from our final climb. Matt and I talked about it that morning, neither of us able to completely capture the feeling in words. It lingered with me as we spent the final days packing up base camp and hauling gear back over the Djangart Pass to our pickup location in the Kaichi valley. It struck deep as I lay awake at 3 a.m. in the warm bed provided to us at Uch-Koshkon when we finally made it out of the mountains. I still get subtle reminders of accomplishment when my achy muscles, still battered from intense toil in an unforgiving environment, twinge as I walk up a flight of stairs.

Soon, these empty feelings will fade, replaced by a renewed desire to seek adventure, to really *live*. Soon, I'll be eagerly planning my next expedition; the remnants of 2010 Djangart Expedition – photos, blogs, memories – will sit on the digital shelf, awaiting a rainy day in the future when it's time to reminisce and perhaps bring back some of that melancholy satisfaction.

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2. Harlin, John, Editor. 2005. "The American Alpine Journal." The American Alpine Club. P 340-341.

## APPENDIX A: PHOTOS

### The following photos included:

1. Peak Howard Bury (4766)
2. Peak Sutherland (5080)
3. Peak of Illumination (5048)

Thousands of full resolution photographs from the expedition are available. Please contact Mike ([mroyer4@gmail.com](mailto:mroyer4@gmail.com)).

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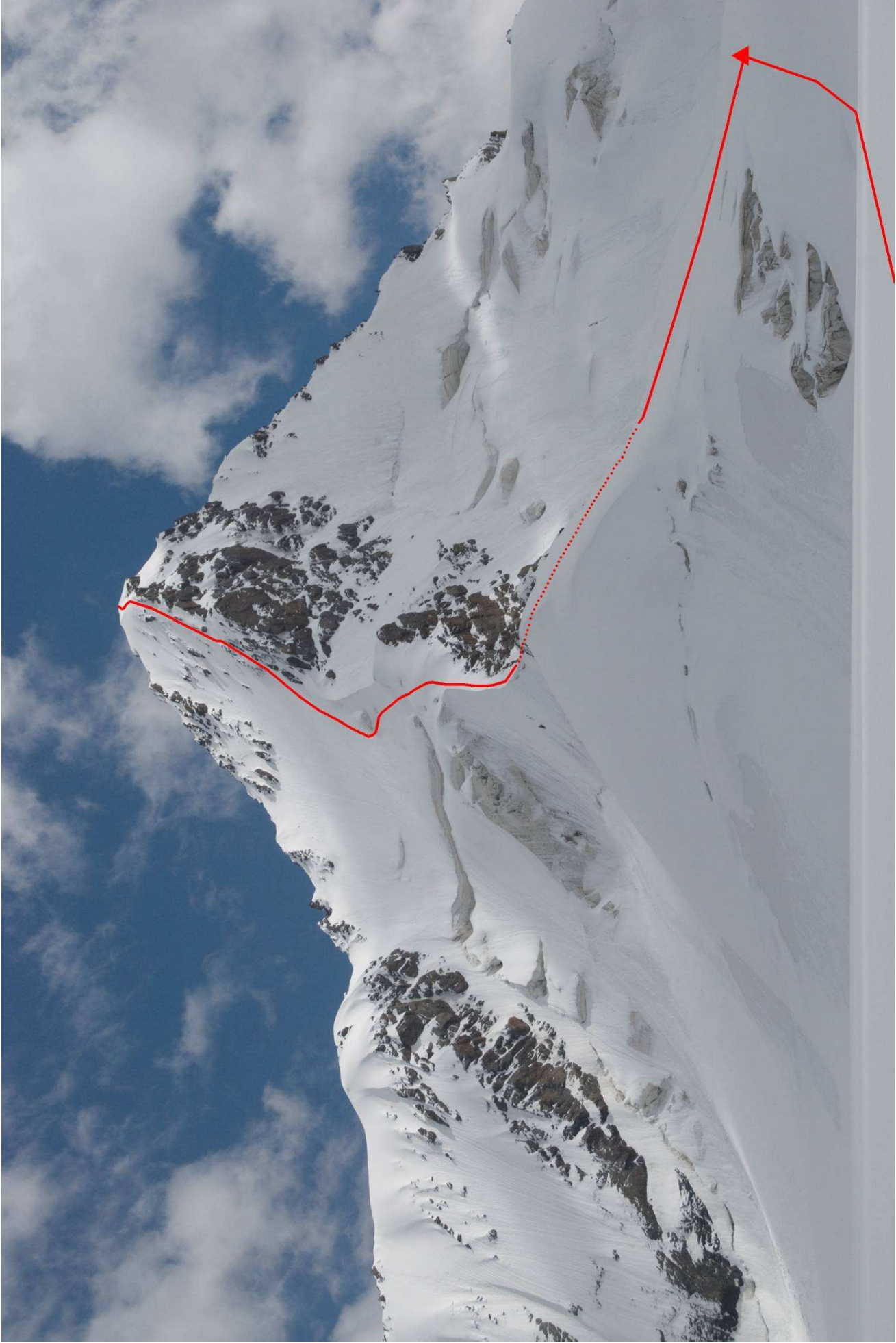
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Peak Howard-Bury | Horseman's Horror



Peak Sutherland | Will Your Anchor Hold?



Peak of Illumination | Postcard for the Chief