

The Kyrgyz Djangart expedition 2011



Final Report

Expedition Reference 11/17



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Contents

1.	Aim	3
2.	Summary	3
3.	Introduction	
	3.1 Purpose	3
	3.2 Geography	4
4.	Team members	5
5.	Expedition Log	6
6.	Description of climbs	17
7.	Finances	23
8.	Flora and fauna	25
9.	Acknowledgements	28

1. Aim

The expedition's objectives lay in the Djangart Range of the Kokshaal-Too. The area has seen little climbing activity with very few visitors to this inaccessible area of southern Kyrgyzstan, which sits close to the border with China. With endless opportunities and little quality information on the area, the expedition set out to explore climbing possibilities in the range, but with the principle objective being the unclimbed Peak 5318. It had been planned to establish a base camp in the Djangart Valley, giving relatively easy access to selected climbing objectives.

2. Summary

The expedition logistics were organised through ITMC and were shared with Cati Llado and Tomeu Rubi from Mallorca. Cati and Tomeu climbed independently throughout the expedition. The expedition left England on 15th July and returned on 11th August 2011. It had been planned to establish a base camp in the Djangart Valley and spend the duration of the trip working in the Djangart region. However, plans to hire mules to transport expedition equipment over the Djangart Pass (4200m) and into the Djangart Valley did not work out. As a result base camp was established in the Kaichi Valley. This made walk-ins considerably more time consuming and arduous, thus affecting the expedition's ability to achieve its objectives. Nonetheless, there was a team of Kyrgyz geologists camped in the Kaichi valley who were most hospitable and always welcomed us back from our climbing forays with hot tea. The expedition failed to summit Peak 5318 due to avalanche conditions, but it was successful in putting up new routes on Peak Emma (4783m) and Peak Laetitia (4950m). Peak Emma was a relatively straightforward peak of grade AD, with an ascent of the west rib and north ridge. Peak Laetitia provided more a technical mixed climb of grade TD.

3. Introduction

3.1 Purpose

The expedition members initially had their sights set on Mt Shivling in the Gangotri, India. Work commitments meant that it would not be possible to climb in this region due to the ideal climbing season falling at a time when members were not available to climb. Consequently attention had to be diverted elsewhere. I had climbed in the Tien Shan in 2007 in the Inylchek area and the idea of climbing virgin peaks and the opportunity to explore new territory was most appealing. We started to research climbing possibilities in Kyrgyzstan and this led us to an expedition report from Matt Traver, who had led a group to the Djangart region in 2010. With so much still unexplored, and great climbing lines recommended, this was then set as the destination for the expedition.

Further research found that ITMC could provide logistics for the trip. Arrangements were subsequently made through ITMC for transport, base camp, visa and border permit arrangements, but only as far as the Kaichi valley.

3.2 Geography

Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country, formerly under soviet control, in Central Asia. The country borders China to the east and south; Kazakhstan to the north; Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the west. Much of the snow melt from the surrounding mountains discharges into the vast inland sea of Lake Issyk-Kul. Lake Issyk-Kul is the major holiday destination for Kyrgyz people as well as for Kazakh people across the border.

The Djangart range is a relatively inaccessible area on the southern border of Kyrgyzstan. It is essentially uninhabited except for nomadic farmers grazing in the valleys at lower elevations. There are no made up roads into the area, but a network of tracks in varying conditions and roadworthiness exists. Many of these were probably constructed during the soviet era for the purposes of mining and moving military personal to secure the border regions.

Movement in this area of the country is monitored by the military border post at the head of the Sary Say Valley, close to Kary-Say.



4. Team members

Richard Tremellen



Richard has a passion for the outdoors which started on a four week Outward Bound course in the Lake District in 1980, where he learnt the basics of rock climbing and endured many hours trudging uphill. Since then, his travels have taken him far and wide and have included a two year trip around the world. Richard's climbing outside the UK has taken him to the Himalaya, Caucasus and the Tien Shan as well as his annual trips to the Alps, where Alex has become his regular climbing partner in recent years.

Alex Brighton



Alex is a teacher. Outside of the classroom, he has taken pupils ice climbing in Norway, winter climbing in Scotland, climbing Alpine 4,000ers and climbing bolted rock routes in Sardinia when in need of a break from the cold. His personal interest in mountaineering beyond the U.K. began at university as a member of the Oxford University Officer Training Corps. Since then, the alpine season has become an annual fixture in his calendar. He has also climbed in the Canadian Rockies and to higher altitudes in the Peruvian Andes.

5. Expedition Log

15th July We flew Aeroflot from London Heathrow to Moscow with onward flight from Moscow to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. No complications and everything reasonably straightforward. All expedition baggage reaches destination undamaged.

16th July Arrive early morning in Bishkek. Pick up pre-arranged transfer from Bishkek airport and arrived at the ITMC depot in Bishkek at 6.30am. Had to wait until people turned up for work at 8.30. Sorted out expedition gear and loaded it onto the truck. Designated driver, Revil, took Richard, Alex, Cati and Tomeu in 4x4 truck to Tamga on the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul for night in hotel.



ITMC depot in Bishkek



Richard and Alex at Lake Issyk-Kul

17th July Set off early from Tamga early en route to Djangart. Multiple breakdowns make for slow progress. At one point we had to return to Barskoon, not far from Tamga, to carry out repairs. Locals helpful in resolving matters. New hoses and water pump obtained from somewhere and fitted before the journey could continue.



Passing trade in Tamga



Broken down again

Good opportunity to watch everyday life in Kyrgyzstan. Enjoyed lunch with Kyrgyz family while truck was being repaired. Osman was the head of the house and clearly proud to have foreign visitors. His family seemed more shy and inconvenienced by the occasion. The onward journey took the dirt road south. The route was not entirely obvious and an added complication was the collapse of a bridge in 2010 at Ak Shirak, necessitating a significant detour westwards. The route followed a narrow, muddy and uneven track. The weather took a turn for the worse until late afternoon. When it was starting to get dark the

expedition stopped at a nomad encampment and was invited into the yurt for chai. The nomads were extremely hospitable and we stayed the night with our tents beside the nomad's yurt.



Osman and family in front of his house



Inside the yurt for chai

18th July Following breakfast in the yurt, the expedition continued its onward journey to the military border post near Karasay. Passports were inspected and climbing permits stamped. From the military base the route followed the Sary Say valley. Soon entering a steep sided gorge the truck clung precariously to the edge of a long drop down to the fast flowing Kaichi River. Once down at river level there were a number of difficult river crossings to tackle. Amazingly the truck managed to get through in one piece without breaking down. Finally the valley floor opened out. It was more fertile here and near the end were three large frame tents where a group of geologist's had recently established a camp. This was as far as we were going and all the expedition equipment was unloaded from the truck. An officer, Almass, from the military base near Karasay had joined us for this last leg of the journey. We made arrangements with him for horses to carry the expedition equipment over the Djangart Pass the following day. The expedition stayed the night in one of the geologists tents which was a much appreciated gesture.



The nomads see us off



Family at Kara-Say military base

19th July 24 hours of rainfall kept the team where they were. Horses turned up at 9.45am, but not enough to carry all the equipment and the prices were inflated to more

than the team actually had. The horsemen were unprepared to negotiate and simply rode off into the mountains to go hunting. They returned a few hours later and didn't even stop as they rode through. As a result it was decided to establish base camp in the Sary Say Valley, not far from geologist's camp and adjacent to the Kaichi River. This was going to mean longer walk-ins and the associated difficulties with achieving multiple climbs in the Djangart Valley.

20th July The first big walk-in to the Djangart Valley over the Djangart Pass (4200m). Long and tiring trek with overweight packs and provisions for the first mountain attempt. Richard and Alex set off shortly after Cati and Tomeu, who were load carrying and returning to base camp the same day. The Djangart Valley is abundant with flora and fauna. Not only did we see numerous different varieties of wild flowers in bloom, we saw many birds, particularly eagles and birds of prey. We were also lucky enough to see a wolf. It had been basking in the sun resting against a rock and we startled it as we walked through. Once in the valley floor, we had to cross the river - easier said than done! The water was fast flowing and there was a strong chance of being washed away, especially with heavy packs. After a 10 hour hike, Richard and Alex reached a suitable place in the Djangart Valley, at the tributary of the Akoguz glacier, to set up camp for the night. Too exhausted to enjoy the setting or investigate the route for the next day, the camp was set a meal was prepared and we settled into our bags for the night. A hard way to celebrate a birthday!



Just below the Djangart Pass



Alex at our first camp in the Djangart Valley

21st July Crossed the river and made an ascent of a rock rib on the north west flank of Peak 4783. The lower slopes consisting of loose rubble, gradually coming onto better rock quality. On the higher flanks rock cliffs barred the way and alternate routes had to be explored before finally coming out onto the snow slopes of the summit ridge. From there deep snow made progress slow and tiring. Finally reached the brow of the ridge to see Peak 5318 for the first time. Decided that the going was too hard and progress too slow to continue, so opted to bivvy on the snow ridge. This was made worthwhile by the spectacular surroundings and

the opportunity to survey route possibilities on Peak 5318.



Rock rib north east flank Peak 4873



Deep snow on summit ridge



First view of P5318



Bivvy on P4873

22nd July Made an early start when the temperature was low and the snow was firm. We followed the heavily corniced slopes, sometimes steep, with the final mixed ridge falling steeply either side and then completed the first ascent of Peak 4783. Took an alternative descent route via a wide snow couloir funneling into an ice gully. This was followed by steep rock cliffs and it was hard to find a feasible way down. For a moment regretted the decision to take a different route down as it looked like an ascent back up might be necessary. After a long delay exploring possible routes a way was found. A final a series of abseils was required to ascend to end of Akoguz glacier.



View to the summit of P4783



Final abseil

Walked out from the Akoguz glacier and then camped the night at the end of the valley where it meets the Djangart Valley.

- 23rd July Long trek back over the Djangart Pass to base camp in the Sary Say Valley in clear weather conditions. Found a crossing point on the river that was marked with small cairns on either side and concluded this must be the preferred crossing point of the Traver expedition in 2010. We were to use this again when we returned to attempt Peak 5318. Reached base camp late in the afternoon and were warmly welcomed by Vitaly and Ulan, two of the geologists in the neighbouring camp. We were welcomed into their tent for tea.
- 24th July Rest day at base camp and an opportunity to recover aching muscles and to eat well. Made plans for the next trip.
- 25th July Gentle start to the day. Packed kit and set off for the easy trek from base camp to the foot of Peak 4950. Camped in Kaichi Valley on a grassy knoll adjacent to a water spout at the foot of Peak 4950. Views south to the Chinese border at the end of the valley.
- 26th July Attempted ascent of Peak 4950. Firstly over loose rubble at lower level, making straightforward but tedious climbing up to the foot of the ice couloir. Once in the couloir, we followed the line of the couloir which started snowy becoming icy as it increased in steepness to 60°. Finally coming out of the snow and ice couloir after a couple of hours climbing, came out onto wide slopes requiring a diagonal traverse on 70° snow and ice.



A 100m rock step at III/IV followed by a further traverse across slopes on soft snow. Into a further ice gully which exited onto the foot of the summit block at 4765m. From here we found the going dangerous and spent an hour trying to negotiate loose snow at 80°. Descended a short way to a place suitable for a bivvy at 4650m and another attempt in the morning.

- 27th July Miserable night with no tent or sleeping bags and heavy snow from midnight meant descent was necessary. We returned to base camp where we were greeted by Cati and Tomeu who had returned the previous day from their first climbing objective on the Djangbartynbashi glacier where they had been successful in making a first ascent.
- 28th July Rest day. Preparations for an attempt on Peak 5318. Windy all day and rain in the afternoon. Cati and Tomeu set off in the morning for an attempt on their second peak.
- 29th July The team was visited at base camp by the chief in charge of border control in the area. First of all a check of passports proved satisfactory, but this was followed by a demand for border permits. Revil, the driver who brought us to the Sary Say Valley, had mistakenly driven away with the signed and stamped permits. We had a copy of the original permits which were accepted initially, but soon became a problem after closer inspection when they realised that not all the necessary stamps were in place.



The invalid border permit



Alex, Vitlay (geologist), Captain Ebek and Richard

The language barrier made explanation difficult but soon photographs from the 2010 Traver expedition were passed around. These included a picture with the border chief in with members of that expedition. The problem with the border permits disappeared immediately and the matter was not mentioned again. Once the soldiers had departed, we completed the packing of our kit for the trek into the Djangart Valley for attempt on Peak 5318. We camped at an old mine works past the glacial lake, a couple of hours beyond the pass, in a derelict wheeled hut.



The old miner's hut



Yaks in the valley

30th July An early start with an ongoing trek into the N1 valley, which took an age to reach. River crossing was easier, knowing where the 'Traver boulders' were located. Once in the N1 valley it was an arduously long hike over moraine and loose rubble to N1 glacier. When the glacier became severely crevassed we climbed out to the east side of the glacier and followed an easier windrow south along the lip of the glacier. We found a great spot to camp, sheltered, flat and with running water, but decided we needed to get onto the mountain itself before stopping. We continued for a further hour or so before finally settling on a reasonably sheltered spot at 3790m, but with no water. Made an attempt to level the area and set up camp above the N1 glacier and at the foot of Peak 5318. It started raining when the camp was nearly set and continued for most of the night.



View onto N1 glacier



View to P5318 summit

31st July Packed up in the dark and it was dry. Set off early, having stashed some food for the return journey and surplus equipment. Started an ascent of Peak 5318. Before long it started to snow, getting increasingly harder. Within an hour the snow forced a bivvy. Found a spot, which was not ideal, and set up the bivvy. After a while it was evident that the snow would continue for some time, so settled into sleeping bags. The snow continued all day keeping the team pinned down in their sleeping bags.

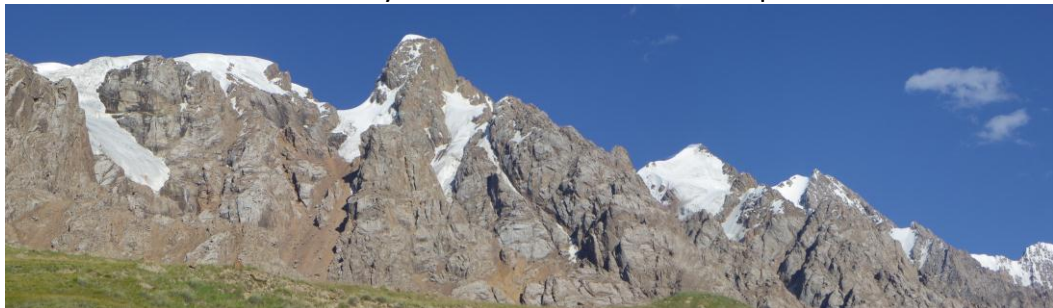
1st Aug The snow storm raged throughout the night, but by early morning had stopped after 36 hours and the weather was starting to clear and visibility started to improve. Packed up for another attempt. It had been the plan to climb to the saddle between the main summit and the north summit and camp there, setting off early the following morning to complete the climb. Continued up the west flank of the mountain, weaving through boulder fields and rock ribs. Not technically difficult, but extremely slow going due to the deep snow that had been laid on the loose boulders. We reached the first snow field and were crossing it to attain the rock rib to the north summit. Suddenly the ground shifted slightly and a large downward curving crack formed above us ready to avalanche. The altitude was 4750m and a fast escape was necessary. The climb

was over. We made our descent, collecting stashed gear from the bivvy spot from three nights before. It was a long tiring descent down the glacier and moraine to the end of the N1 Valley and into the Djangart Valley once again. Then westwards back up the Djangart Valley as far as the end of the Akoguz Valley, where we camped for the night.

2nd Aug An early start and the long trek back to base camp, following the trails laid by yaks and marmots. We were definitely getting fitter and stronger which made the going quicker. Soon we reached the Djangart Pass at 4200m, where we met Cati and Tomeu who were making their way back into the Djangart Valley for an attempt on another mountain. We returned to base camp with a warm welcome from the geologists and tea in their kitchen tent. The geologists had made a sauna in an unused hunter's camp further up the valley on the other side of the river. A sauna and a chance to get properly clean for the first time was a most welcome treat.

3rd Aug A rest day and an opportunity to rest and recover aching muscles as well as sort out and repair gear.

4th Aug We were woken early to a loud engine noise and the ground trembling. Looking out of the tent, we saw a bulldozer tracking past. It seemed an odd thing to see in such an isolated place, but evidently the geologists had discovered something of significance (perhaps gold) and the bulldozer was there to create vehicular tracks into the mountains in order to extract whatever had been discovered. Trekked into the Kaichi Valley and started another attempt to climb Peak 4950.



We had planned to camp at the foot of the s-shaped snow and ice couloir but, having made such good time, decided to continue up it. In the short period between visits the conditions had changed and the ice was much thinner with melt water runoff in some places. We continued to the top of the couloir and levelled off a small, but good, bivvy site there just as the night was closing in.

5th Aug



Started at 1.00am, not wanting to be caught out by soft snow conditions from the heat of the day. Starting with steep 70° snow and ice slopes and a diagonally rising traverse. Attained the 100m rock step at grade II/IV which was climbed in the dark. Dawn was breaking as we crossed the next snow slopes and then into the ice gully leading onto the summit block. Soon reached the place where retreat had been necessary on the previous attempt. The snow conditions on the 80° slopes were little better than before and it was difficult to place decent anchors. We progressed gingerly around a rock buttress and up steep slopes onto a short arête. From here the mixed climbing that we thought would be fairly straightforward proved more challenging. Continuing first up a fairly easy couloir and rock step, and then some more snow slopes winding through rock sections. Finally we reached the an awkward ice gully which was blocked at the bottom by a difficult rock step. Once past these, the final 50m of firm snow slopes at 50° led to the summit.



Richard on the summit



Alex on the summit

The first ascent of Peak 4950 was now complete. Descent to base camp was long and extremely tiring. We took a different route down from the summit block, which presented its own set of problems, but avoided the loose 80° snow at the top of the northern glacier. Once onto the west glacier, we found the snow and ice conditions were changing as the time progressed. We went down the main glacier, avoiding the ascent route of the s-couloir, and found the conditions difficult. There was already noticeably less snow on the ground and the crevasses on the glacier were opening up. Continued down to the end of the glacier where we stopped for the first time, exhausted. Stripped down as the day was warming up, ate some food and drank.



Alex exhausted



Richard exhausted

After an hour we continued down, through the rubble field and finally onto the grassy slopes of the Kaichi Valley and then to the Sary Say Valley and reached base camp after fifteen hours on the move. Cati and Tomeu were at base camp to welcome us. They had returned from their final trip into the mountains 2 hours beforehand.

6th Aug Final day at base camp. Deep blue sky and not a cloud in sight. We organised our equipment and packed in preparation for departure.

7th Aug Didn't sleep well and felt sad to be leaving, but pleased to be returning home to see family. Had everything packed up and then waited, not certain what time we would be collected, or even of the truck would make it. We had a spare day in hand just in case of such an event. The day had started cloudy and wet, but changed as a 6x4 truck appeared in the distance to pick the team up for the long journey back. Cati and Tomeu had originally planned to depart on the 10th August, but decided to return early. There was plenty of space for all four on the huge 6X4 truck. In the front of the truck with the driver, Sasha, was Captain Ebek, the border chief who had checked our permits. Warm greeting all round were followed by loading the truck with the expedition gear. We had planned to give our surplus food to the geologists, but found this was not the right protocol - we were obligated to give it to the soldiers at the military base at Karasay. This was a clear case of 'pulling rank'. There was more to come. Farewells to the geologist over, the truck made its way up the valley back to the military base. Once there the surplus food was unloaded as expected. There was also a large amount of other kit loaded onto the truck. It turned out that Almass, the officer that first led us into the Kaichi Valley, was leaving. Soon all his belongings were on board as was he and his heavily pregnant wife - they were heading for Karakol, to the east of Lake Issyk Kul. We were heading for Bishkek, to the west of Lake Issyk Kul. The pecking order was quite evident as the young soldiers ran around and jumped to the orders of the officers, who stood around laughing and smoking. An hour later Sasha re-appeared from within the military base and the journey continued. Retracing the outward journey route, avoiding the collapsed bridge at Ak Shirak, we were soon to get last views of the mountain range we had been climbing in. Before long the weather was to close in over the mountains of the Djangart and they would be shrouded in heavy cloud. Continuing past the nomad encampment where we had camped on the way out, past the muddy side route to the drillers and finally onto the graded dirt road to

Karasay. From here Sasha was able to drive at speed for an hour before reaching the passing. It was now dark and the road wound its way down through a series of 30 switchbacks that Sasha had to negotiate with care as the road dropped in elevation by 1000m. From the relatively easy driving, except trying to avoid random cows and shepherd in the darkness. Almass had expected Sasha to turn off into Barskoon to drop him off, but Sasha continued past the turning. No longer protected by military protocol, or able to pull rank, Almass had to put up with it. He was dropped off along with all his possessions at a bus stop on the main road after 10pm and with no buses likely until the next day. The truck pulled away and by 11pm we were in Tamga where we stayed the night at the same hotel.

8th Aug Set off after breakfast for the drive from Tamga to Bishkek, with a stop for lunch at Tokmok. Reached the ITMC depot in Bishkek at 4.30 pm. Unloaded the truck and settled the final bill before being dropped off at the Alpinist Hotel.

9th Aug Spent the day in Bishkek exploring the city, the wide avenues, parks and soviet statues.



Watched the changing of the guard in the centre. Went to visit the famous Osh Bazaar - a sprawling area of covered and uncovered market, selling almost anything imaginable, but less busy, bustling and colourful than expected.



Market fare

We were stopped by a group of men in plain clothes. One produced an ID card suggesting he was a policeman. They wanted to know if we liked Kyrgyzstan. Then checked passports and wanted to check us for drugs, which is apparently becoming a problem in the city. Then wanted to start searching wallets - we refused and walked off, thinking it was part of a 'sting'. The matter over we left the Osh Bazaar and headed back to the hotel have walked further than some of the trekking days in the mountains. Met up with Cati and Tomeu in the evening for our final meal, drinks and farewells.



Changing the guard



The entrance to Osh Bazaar

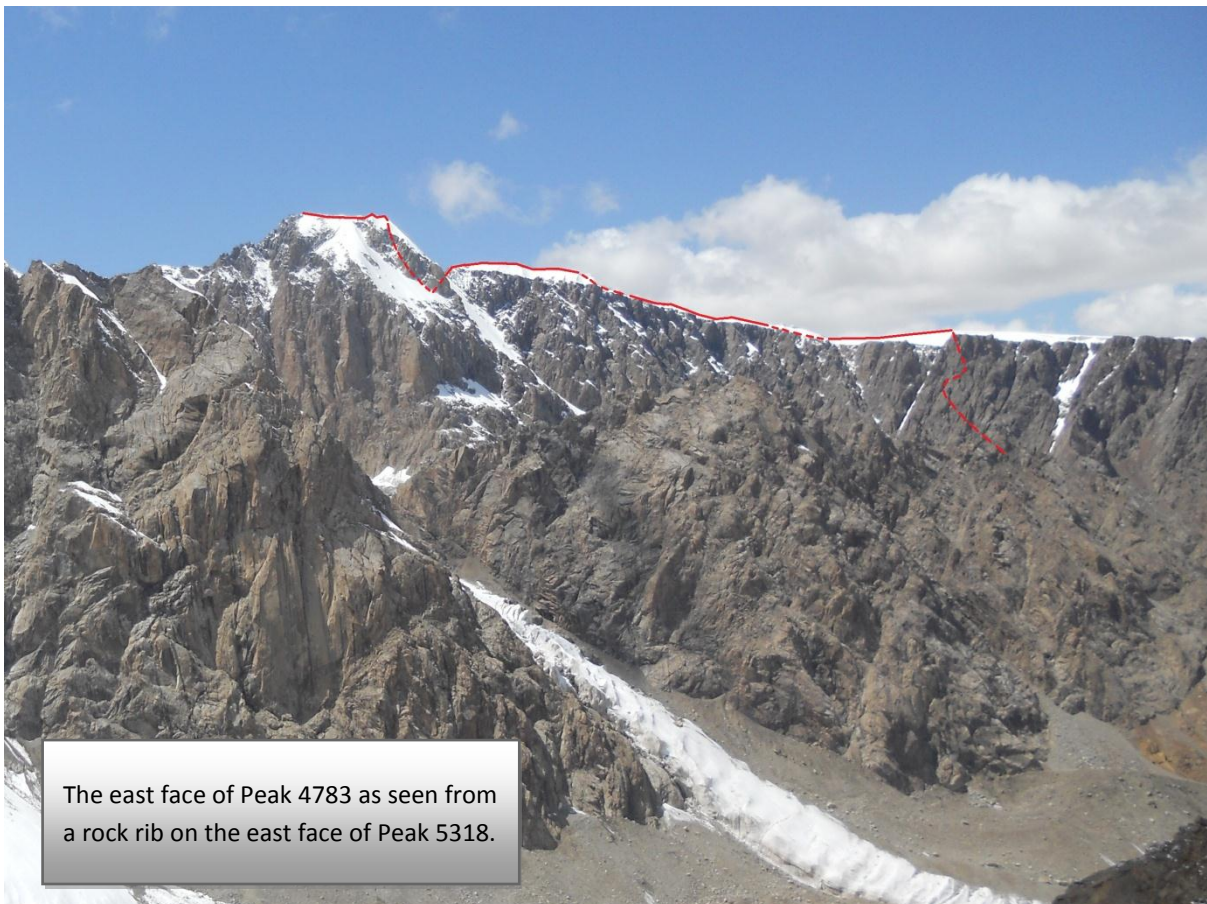
10th Aug Checked out of the hotel, exchanged our final Kyrgyz Soms for Euros and were driven to the airport by Revil. Racing all the way at dangerous speeds was clearly a statement to say it was the truck that was slow and not his driving. Departed Kyrgyzstan and arrived at Moscow where it was wet and grey. 4 hours wait for the connecting flight.

11th Aug Arrived in England

6. Description of climbs

The expedition benefitted from maps of the area which provided helpful guidance. However, the maps were from the soviet military and dated to 1980. As such, although of huge benefit for guidance purposes, there were clear issues of accuracy. Some summits are omitted and contours do not always show a true picture of mountain features, so can only be taken as indicative. Furthermore, it is clear that all the glaciers have retreated significantly since the maps were produced - in some cases as much as three kilometers.

Peak 4783



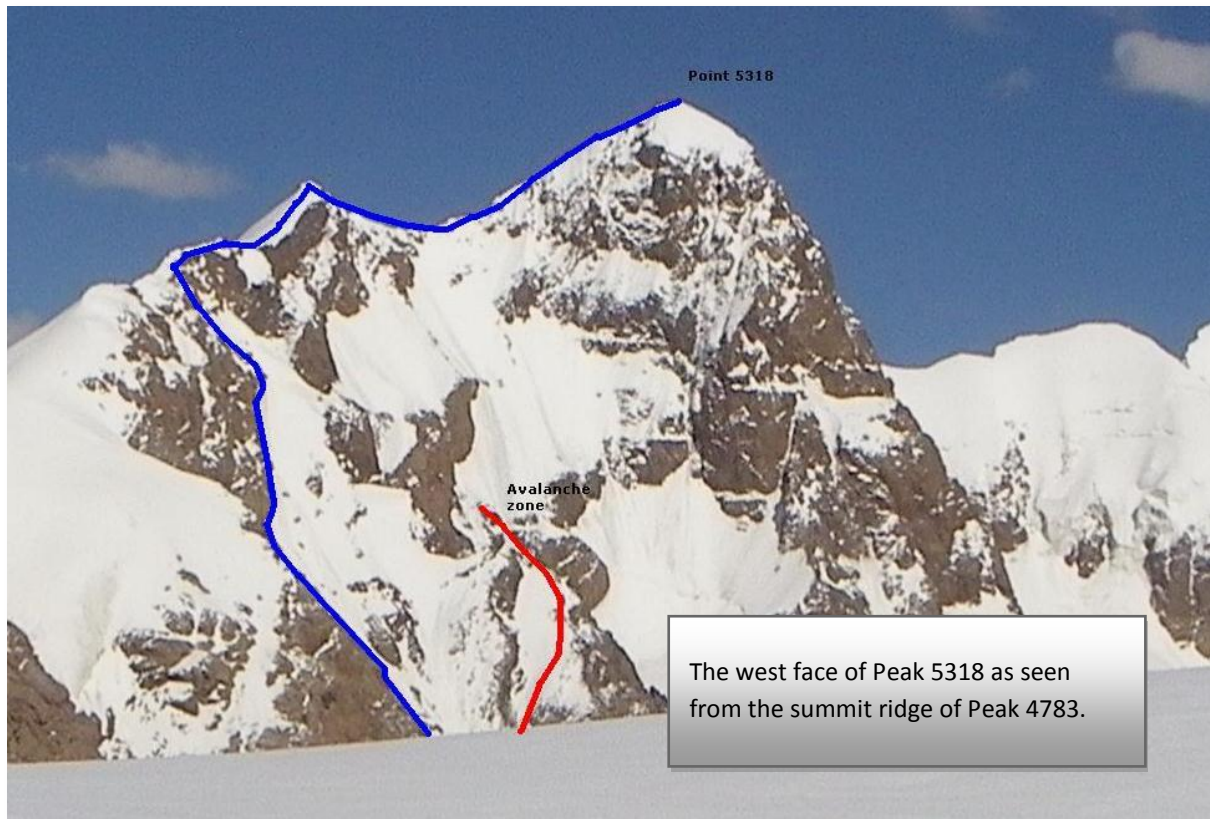
The east face of Peak 4783 as seen from a rock rib on the east face of Peak 5318.

The first objective of the expedition was Peak 4783. The purpose of this ascent was to evaluate viable route options for Peak 5318, the prime objective for the expedition. A long and arduous trek from Base Camp in the Sary Say Valley, over the Djangart Pass (4200m) and into the Djangart Valley. Taking the Akoguz glacier valley, a southerly tributary of the Djangart Valley and then an obvious rib on the west face to the summit slopes. The ascent was relatively straightforward, but route finding was problematic at times on the west face. The photograph indicates the route, but as the ascent was from the other side it is not clear to see. Climbing off the face and onto the summit ridge proved frustrating at times when. After 700m of down climbing we found ourselves at the top of massive rock pinnacles with no access onto the summit ridge. Down climbing was necessary prior to picking through an

alternative route up. We had to try three different routes to achieve the summit ridge. The summit ridge was finally attained mid-afternoon and the heat of the day had by this time made the snow soft. After an hour or so of wading through waist deep snow it was agreed that no further progress could be made. We dug out a snow hole to set up a bivvy. An early start the following morning took advantage of lower temperatures and firm snow. The final ascent of the snow slopes was steep in places and yet straightforward on good firm snow. Having arrived at the end of the snow slopes, which were heavily corniced, there is an easy descent of 75m to a col. On reaching the col, Richard suffered shooting pains to his left knee and was unable to continue. However, after a brief rest and having taken some pain killers, we proceeded again gingerly. An 85m ascent up an easy ridge followed by a gently rising traverse along a tricky mixed ridge led to the summit. Peak 4783 was grade AD (1200m) and named Peak Emma, after Richard's wife.

Due to Richard's knee, a direct descent route was taken off the side of the final summit ridge down a broad snow couloir on the west face. This was in preference to the long traverse of the summit ridge along the route of ascent. The couloir was wide at the top and narrowing. The funnel aspect caused some anxiety and we therefore kept to the edge of the couloir in case of avalanche. Once down the couloir funnel, the route followed down an obvious ice gully. Occasional rock and ice steps had to be descended until finally coming out into a wider area of loose rock, now below the snow line. Following this natural route with the snow melt run off to our right (north), the route came to a halt. Now in a rock amphitheatre with steep rock walls to the north and south and long steep 300m cliffs below. We had to consider the option of ascending the 800m back up to the summit and retracing our original steps along the ascent route, but on a final reconnaissance noted a small notch in the rock wall to the left (south), through which we found escape possibilities via a number of long abseils, finally coming out onto the snout of the Akoguz glacier.

Peak 5318



Although there have been a couple of previous attempts on the mountain, it remains unclimbed and was the prime objective of the expedition. Being set at the eastern end of the Djangart range of mountains adds to its inaccessibility. It also adds to the issues of elevation. The walk-in alone entailed 900m of elevation to the Djangart pass followed by a fall of 900m in elevation to the end of the Djangart Valley, and a further 400m rise in elevation along the N1 valley and glacier to the foot of the mountain. The trek to the end of the N1 valley was long and the approach to the start of the climb along the N1 valley was extremely arduous. Firstly over endless moraine and then onto the glacier before climbing out onto the east flank of it and along a narrow windrow forming the lip of it and then onto the place we camped. The lower flanks of the mountain are not technical, but are made up of frustratingly loose boulders that move with each step, making it tiring and tedious work, typical of all mountains in this range. We set off from our camp at the foot of the mountain in poor weather and limited visibility. Before long the weather had closed in completely and it began to snow. A bivvy was forced at 3790m. In haste we found a reasonably sheltered spot, but the rock beneath us was very uneven and extremely uncomfortable. It soon became apparent that the snow would be set for some time, so we settled in, making ourselves as comfortable as we could on our rocky ledge. The snow storm continued for over 36 hours and effectively added two days to the climb. When conditions had improved sufficiently, we continued to push a route up the west face. Negotiating our way across loose boulder fields between rock ribs, we found the boulders even more tiresome than

before as they now had a few inches of snow covering them which made foot placement more problematic. However, we continued in this fashion, steadily gaining altitude. We were aiming directly for a rib to the north summit, a little further south than the route planned from the summit ridge of P4783. We kept going for a short while longer and came to the top of a rock outcrop. We then needed to cross a snow field to the next section of rock rib. We had reached halfway up it and suddenly we felt a movement beneath our feet. Above us was a huge curving crack and the area we were standing on was ready to avalanche. We had reached 4750m with relative ease, but retreat was necessary. We did, however, feel that given the right conditions a climb to the summit should be reasonably straightforward.

Peak 4950



This peak was first spotted on the first trek up to the Djangart Pass. Located to the south of the Kaichi Valley and on the east flank of the Sary-Say Valley. Although it is not the highest in the chain, Peak 4950 is the most prominent summit. The north west face of Peak 4950 has an obvious S-shaped snow and ice couloir forming the access to the upper snow fields and then onto the mixed summit block.

From base camp there is a short walk south down the Sary Say Valley to a point where it splits. The west fork is the Airu Tor Valley and the east fork is the Kaichi Valley. The foot of

the climb is just an hour walk along the Kaichi Valley, where a water spout cascades off the mountain, joining the Kaichi River at the valley floor. On our first attempt we camped on a grassy knoll at the foot of the mountain adjacent to the water spout with a plan for a rapid lightweight ascent. Having already made a reconnaissance trip to the foot of the s-gulley the previous afternoon, we set off in the dark of the early hours and reached the foot of the couloir by 7.00am.

The couloir provided pleasant climbing with firm snow and ice. Gradually increasing in steepness as we gained elevation, we came out of the couloir after a couple of hours. From here the slopes opened out, and so did the views. A steep 70° ice climb, followed by a rising traverse before coming to the next obstacle. A 100m rock step grade III/IV brought us out onto wide snow slopes. First we had to go around a circular corniced ridge and then across snow slopes. Looking onto the summit block, the rock cliffs to the south were unclimbable, so we crossed the snow slopes rising diagonally and into an ice gulley. The snow was soft and we found ourselves sinking to our waists as we made our way across to the foot of the ice gulley.

The gulley was 50° to 60° with one awkward step half way up, and it brought us out onto a ridge leading to the summit block. We continued ascending the ridge, until we found the route barred and descended back to the top of the ice gulley. From here we had to go round the ridge via 80° snow slopes above the north glacier to the mountain. We found the snow loose and it was like wading through cotton wool - impossible to make decent footholds, handholds, axe holds or even anchors. After struggling for a while we decided to descend to a bivvy spot with the hope of better snow conditions in the night to continue our climb to the summit.

We struggled to find a decent place to sit it out, but finally settled on a site we thought might work. We made ourselves as comfortable as we could but, as the sun went down and the temperatures began to drop, we put on our down jackets. The temperatures were extremely low and it soon started to snow. With neither tent nor sleeping bags we were ill-equipped for a night on the mountain in those conditions. After a freezing and miserable night it was still snowing in the morning and we knew we would have to descend.

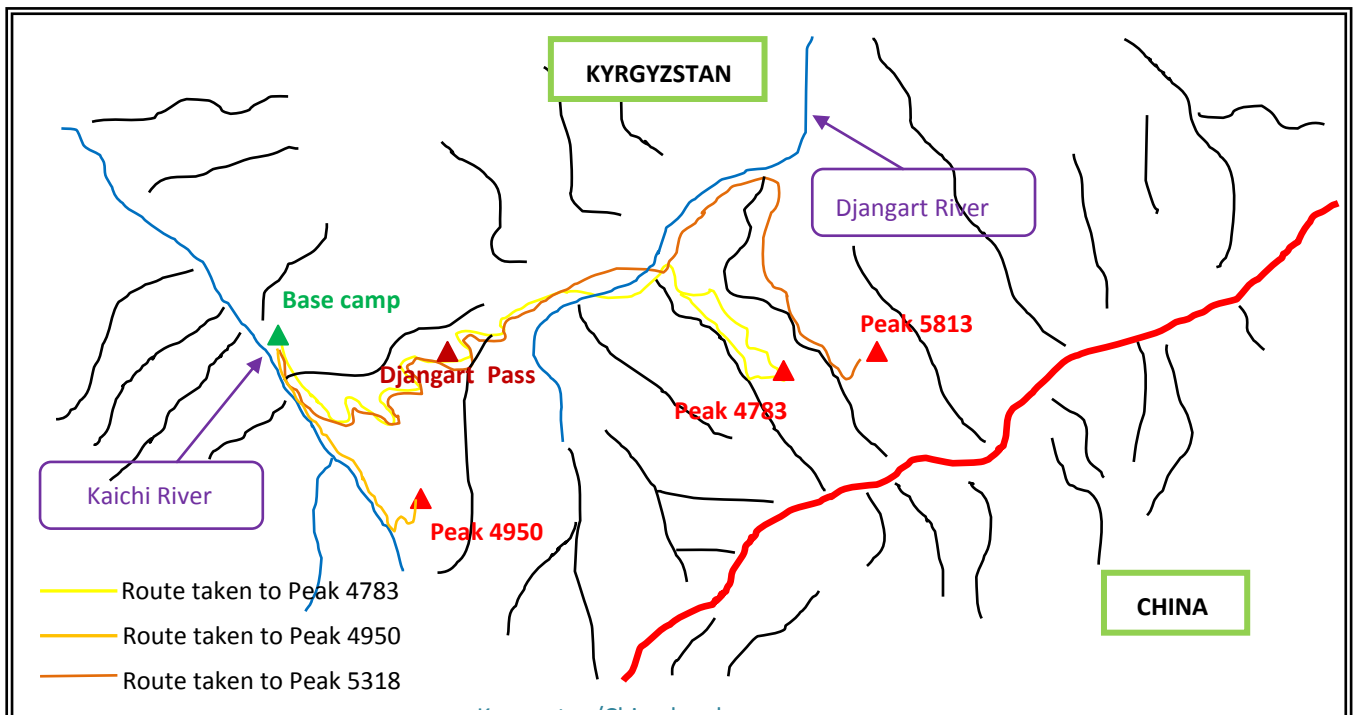
Unhappy that the route was incomplete, we returned for another attempt. This time we continued to the top of the s-couloir before bivvying - this time with sleeping bags. We found the ice conditions in the couloir had changed. The ice had thinned significantly and there was quite a lot of melt water run-off down the couloir.

Starting shortly after midnight, we had soon overcome the 70° ice slopes and reached the rock step. Finding our way up it in the dark, we came out onto the snow slopes above as it was getting light. Despite the early hour, the snow was troublesome in places, with the crust collapsing under our weight. We went up the ice gulley and reached the steep 80° snow slopes once again. This time the snow was still loose and problematic, but we slowly made

our way around the ridge and then rising steeply to attain the summit block itself. From below it had looked relatively straightforward, but the climbing proved harder in places than expected. The next two hundred metres gave climbing at Scottish Grade 5. One particularly difficult ice coated block barred the way to an awkward narrow ice gully which had an overhang at a point where there was a kink in the gully, making it tricky to pass. Once out of the gully, we were onto the final slopes to the summit. A further 50m of firm snow at 4000 and we had completed the first ascent of Peak 4950.

On the descent we came down from the summit block via a different route. Trying to avoid the loose 80° snow, we opted for a more direct route onto the top of the glacier on the north west side of the mountain. This turned into a bit of an epic with a number of interesting manoeuvres and some abseiling before coming out onto the snow slopes. Down the glacier, with the s-gully to the west of us, we found the glacier had much less snow cover than the previous descent and crevasses were opening up. We continued our descent down the mountain and returned to base camp. It was a very long and tiring day.

We called the mountain Peak Laetitia, after Alex's wife. The route is called The Phoenix and is grade TD and 1200m.



7. Finances

Financial details are presented below. Numbers are quoted in UK pounds (GBP) for convenience. Costs were incurred in GBP, USD, Euros and KGS but the best approximations have been used for exchange rates.

Expenditure:

<u>Item</u>	<u>GBP</u>
Airfares	1443
Airport charges	82
Transfers	43
Transport in Kyrgyzstan	957
Accommodation in Tamga	46
Accommodation in Bishkek	126
Insurance	664
Visas	160
Border permits	54
Expedition food	655
Base camp	250
Kitchen equipment	220
Satellite phone	347
Solar charger	68
Generator and fuel	46
Gas cylinders	40
Maps	10
Medical supplies	48
<u>Equipment</u>	<u>380</u>
	5639

Income:

<u>Grant</u>	<u>GBP</u>
Mount Everest Foundation	1250
Gore – Shipton Tilman	2958
Army Mountaineering Association	250
<u>Austrian Alpine Club</u>	<u>500</u>
	4958

8. Flora and Fauna

The landscapes of Kyrgyzstan are varied. Much of it is barren and stark, but the Djangart Valley is a hidden gem. Even in contrast to the neighbouring valleys of the Kaichi, Airu Tor and Sary Say valleys the Djangart Valley was a complete haven for flora and fauna. During our time there, we saw a huge number and diversity of flowering wild plants. On each journey we noticed more flowers that we hadn't seen previously. Some plants were vaguely familiar and may have been seen in Europe, but the majority was not. We wished we were more knowledgeable about plants and plant names, but knew that botanists could have a field day in the valley.



There were always marmots for company in the valleys. These large rodents would chatter to each other as they stood on their earth mounds beside their burrows, quickly escaping down their holes as they saw us approaching.



Marmot standing guard



Fox watching us

At one camp spot we watched a fox sitting and staring at us before running off. The real excitement was disturbing a wolf that had been basking in the sun by a large rock. The big woolly animal was shaggy and obviously losing its winter coat

Hunting is part of everyday life in Kyrgyzstan and a major trophy is the large Marco Polo sheep, with huge curling horns. Secretive animals living high in the mountains they are rarely seen. We didn't see any, but we saw several sets of horns lying around. We did, however see a herd of Ibex. They were high on a rocky outcrop to our north, looking down on us in the valley. We watched them for a while as a group of about fifteen wound their way around the rocky pinnacles.



Impressive Marco Polo sheep horns



Ibex horns

In addition there were farm animals including sheep, goats, horses, cows and dogs, but it was a delight when a herd of yaks made their way down the Djangart Valley as we made our way up it on a return trip to base camp. They had found a grassy slope to graze on. On our next journey into the valley we found the herd again, but this time they were near the bottom of the valley, not far from the N1 valley. They were free to roam at will and it was only a week later than a man on horseback appeared and enquired after his heard of yaks. We gave him directions and his rode off into the Djangart Valley.

A couple of animals we didn't see, but would have liked to were the snow leopard and the bear. On our first trek over the Djangart Pass (4200m) there was snow on the ground and there we saw droppings and footprints from a bear. On our first climb, on Peak Emma (4783m), we saw the footprints of the snow leopard on the long snow summit ridge.

There were many species of bird, which would have delighted an ornithologist. Small thrushes, finches and the like, but also birds of prey. At different times we watched eagles and other birds with their huge wingspans soaring past. On Peak Laetitia we were accompanied by one at the summit.



A mighty eagle

9. Acknowledgements

Richard Tremellen and Alex Brighton would like to extend particular thanks to its sponsors, without whom the expedition would not have been possible.

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	<p>British Mountaineering Council approved status</p>