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Mount Everest Foundation Expedition Reference 11/22

The compiler of this report & the members of the expedition agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purposes of private research.

1. Summary

This report describes the New Zealand Women's Mountaineering Expedition to Afghanistan in July / August 2011 and their successful second ascent of Koh-e-Baba Tangi (6516m). The focus of the report is in describing the logistics which may benefit other expeditions to the Wakhan Region.



Looking across the Panj river to the village of Kret with Koh-e Baba Tangi behind.

Kohi-e-Baba Tangi is a beautiful mountain of the Hindu Kush, located in the upper Kezget Valley, accessed via the Wakhan Corridor in the far north east of Afghanistan. Expedition members Pat Deavoll and Christine Byrch ascended Koh-e-Baba Tangi via the previously unclimbed North West spur over 5 days reaching the summit on 9th August 2011. They descended via the West Ridge over 2 days. The West Ridge is the route of the first ascent by an Italian team lead by Carlo Alberto Pinelli in 1963.

The team entered Afghanistan from Tajikistan at Ishkashim, at the western end of the Wakhan Corridor. The Wakhan is inhabited by Ishmaeli Moslems who receive considerable aid from many donors, including the Agha Khan, and appear to be remote from the turmoil and Taliban that inhabit the rest of Afghanistan. The Wakhan people were incredibly friendly, generous and helpful, and at no time did we feel threatened or in any danger from the political situation.

2. Introduction

Climbing in the Hindu Kush

The mountains of Afghanistan's High Hindu Kush are located in the north east of the country, and flow into the long finger of land known as the Wakhan Corridor, which separates Pakistan and Tajikistan. Peaks in the Wakhan Corridor were hugely popular in the 1960's and 70's, particularly among European climbers who would often reach the area overland via the "hippy trail." They were enticed by generally easier access than found in other parts of the Himalaya/ Karakoram, more stable weather and the ability to climb without the constraints of a restrictive permit system.

But after the *coup d'etat* in 1978 and the Soviet Invasion in 1979 the climbing became strictly off-limits and remained so for almost 30 years. Nowadays, the mountains of the Hindu Kush are gradually being revisited by climbers, who report the area to be remote, safe and worlds apart from the on-going war with the Taliban. Then, in 2003 Carlo Alberto Pinelli, an Italian mountaineer who in the 1960's climbed extensively in the area (and was one of the first ascensionists of Koh-e-Baba Tangi) organised an expedition he called the Oxuz: Mountains for Peace, with the objective of climbing Noshaq (7492m), Afghanistan's highest mountain. He wanted to let the Afghan's know they had not been forgotten by the climbers who had benefited from their generous hospitality. The successful expedition effectively marked the beginning of a new era of climbing in the region. Over the past five years a steadily increasing number of expeditions have, once again, enjoyed the superb climbing in the Afghan Hindu Kush.

The Wakhan Corridor is a beautiful valley through which the Panj River flows east to west. An unsealed road runs up the middle of the valley, linking the many small villages, and with views to the peaks up numerous side valleys.

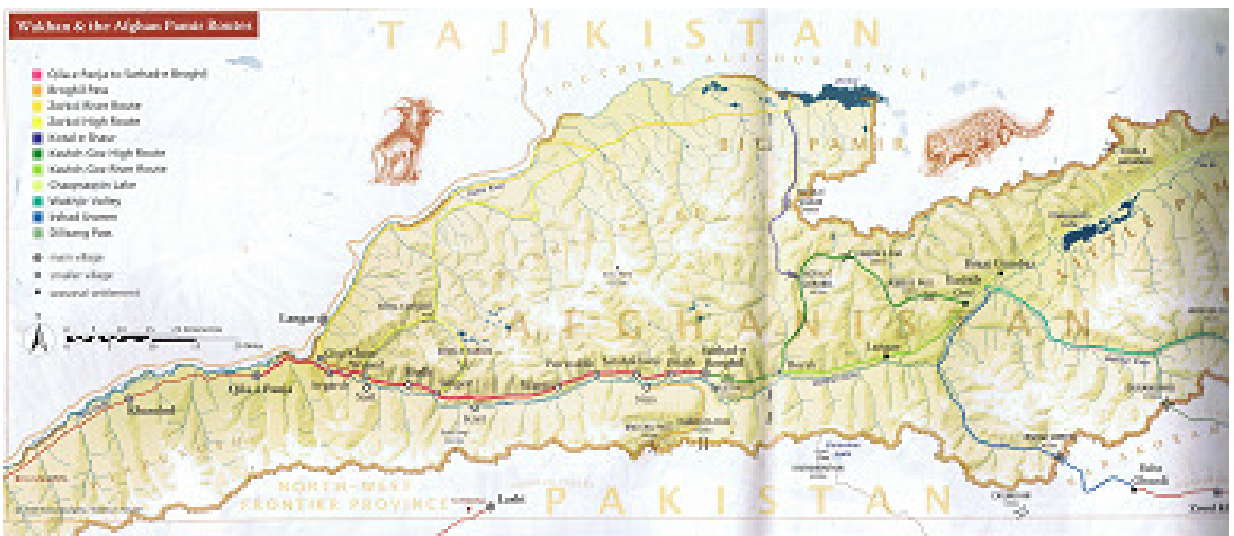


The Wakhan Corridor is the north east 'finger' of Afghanistan



Views of the Earth, Copyright © 2006 by Christoph Hormann <http://earth.imagico.de/>

Aerial view of the Wakhan Corridor

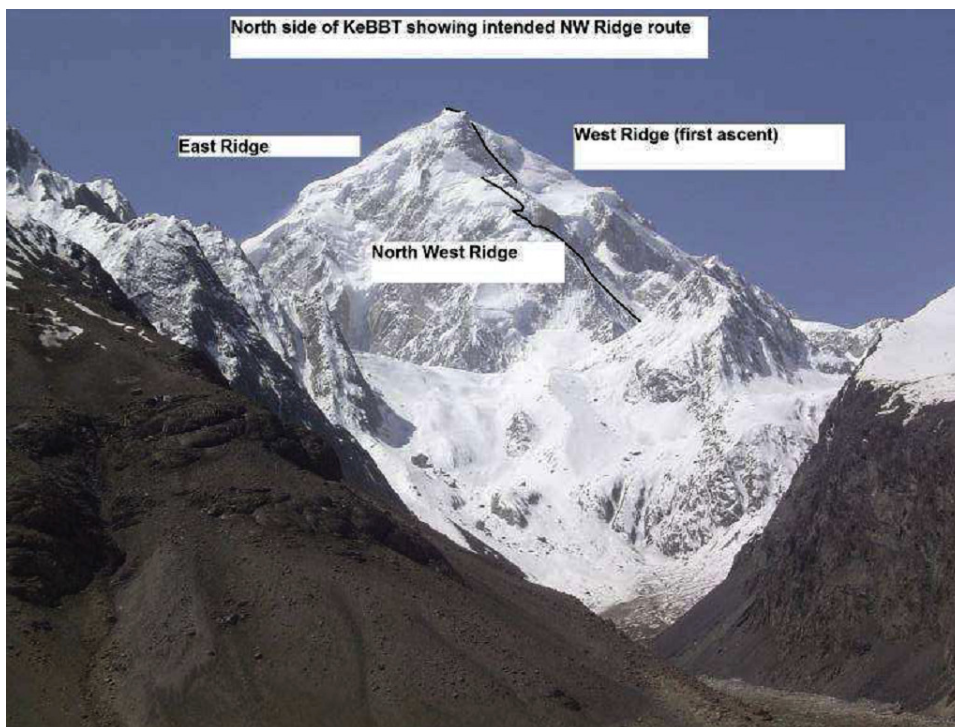


Villages of the Wakhan Corridor

Koh-e-Baba Tangi

Koh-e Baba Tangi is in the upper Kezget Valley, about mid way along the Wakhan Corridor. It is certainly a beautiful mountain, easily visible from the floor of the Wakhan valley, towering behind the village of Kret, and is considered by many mountaineers to be the most fascinating peak in the Afghan Hindu Kush.

Koh-e-Baba Tangi was first climbed by an Italian team, including Pinelli, via the West Ridge in 1963, including Carlo Alberto Pinelli. A team of Italian women attempted to repeat the original West Ridge route in September 2008, but were turned back by too much snow.



Koh-e-Baba Tangi

Motivation for the Expedition

A basic guidebook to the area - *Peaks of Silver and Jade. A Mountaineering Guide Book of the Afghan Hindu Kush* written by Carlo Alberto Pinelli and Gianni Predan was published in 2007. This guide book, together with a long seated desire to climb in Afghanistan, prompted Pat to organise this expedition. Information and photographs in the guidebook, and from the internet, suggested a possible route via the North West Ridge.

3. Expedition Members

Pat Deavoll

- 51 years of age, New Zealander, Journalist/ Event manager/ Climber

Pat has alpine, rock and ice climbed at a high level for almost 35 years. Pat began her climbing career in 1977, and by 1980 had climbed all the 10,000ft peaks in New Zealand. She has rock climbed to a high standard and was the NZ Women's Sport Climbing Champion in 1994. More recent mountaineering highlights within New Zealand include ascents of the Caroline Face of Mt Cook and the first female ascents of 'Logans Run' (grade 6+) on the South face of Hicks and the 'Hidden Balfour Face' (grade 6) on Mt Tasman. She has also been part of the first female team ascent (with her sister) of the Central Gully of Douglas Peak (grade 5+) and the South Face of Mt Aspiring (grade 5).

She spent 1985/86 in the Himalayan and Karakoram Ranges, completing many unsupported traverses and ascents in very remote regions. More recently, she spent 120 days waterfall ice climbing in the Canadian Rockies, leading water fall ice to grade 7 including lead ascents of highly acclaimed test

pieces Sea of Vapours (WI 7), Acid Howl (WI 6+) and French Maid (WI 6+) and a significant new route on the Terminator Wall, Stuck in the Middle (M7, WI6). These days she specializes in making first ascents of mountains in the Greater Ranges, and has taken part in ten expeditions since 2001; to Pakistan (3), India (3), China/Tibet (2), Nepal (1) and Alaska (2). She is highly skilled in organizing expeditions to Asia, and has five first ascents to her name.

Christine Byrch

- 50 years of age, New Zealander, Researcher / Beekeeper

Christine is a keen mountaineer and ski tourer and has made numerous ascents within Mt Cook National Park, highlights of which include such classics as the Syme - Silberhorn traverse of Mt Tasman, and the East, West, and Zurbriggens Ridges of Mt Cook. She and Pat Deavoll were the first female climbing partnership to climb the Central Gully of Douglas Peak (grade 5+). Christine has climbed in Alaska, including an ascent of Ham and Eggs on the Mooses Tooth, and a new ice route on Mt Dickie in the Ruth Gorge. Christine has mountaineered in Pakistan and Africa to an altitude of 6000m. She has enjoyed ski mountaineering trips to Alberta (Canada), the Alaska Range, and the Antarctic Peninsula. Closer local to home, she has climbed, skied, and tramped extensively in the Arthurs Pass National Park and Aspiring National Park.

Satyabrata Dam

- 46 years of age, Indian, Mountaineer / Adventurer / Author

Satya joined us as a non climbing member of the expedition and it was wonderful to have his support.

Satya is a globetrotting thrill seeker and a die-hard adrenalin junkie. Life for Satya must be lived on and off the edge. At the age of 10 when he stepped on his first Himalayan Glacier and looked up awestruck at the peak he was about to attempt, he knew then that he was born to climb and the mountains of this world would become his home, friends and family. Since then he has been climbing and exploring all the mountain ranges across the globe and beyond. Over the past 35 years, some of the things he has done include:

- Climbed the highest peaks of all the 7 continents, including Mt Everest (seven summits)
- Skied to the North and South Poles
- Climbed the second highest peaks of 5 continents (I am one of the three people in the world to have done this)
- Climbed more than 350 peaks worldwide
- Walked the length of Africa from Tunisia to South Africa
- Traversed the ancient Silk Route from Mongolia to Istanbul
- Skied across the Greenland ice cap
- Visited 134 countries and climbed to the highest spot of nearly all

Following his passion, he has become the only person in the world to have successfully led expeditions to the three poles (Mt Everest, North and South Poles) and the first submariner in the world to 40

do so as well. For 22 years he was a submariner in the Indian Navy and has now taken voluntary retirement to devote more time to adventures.

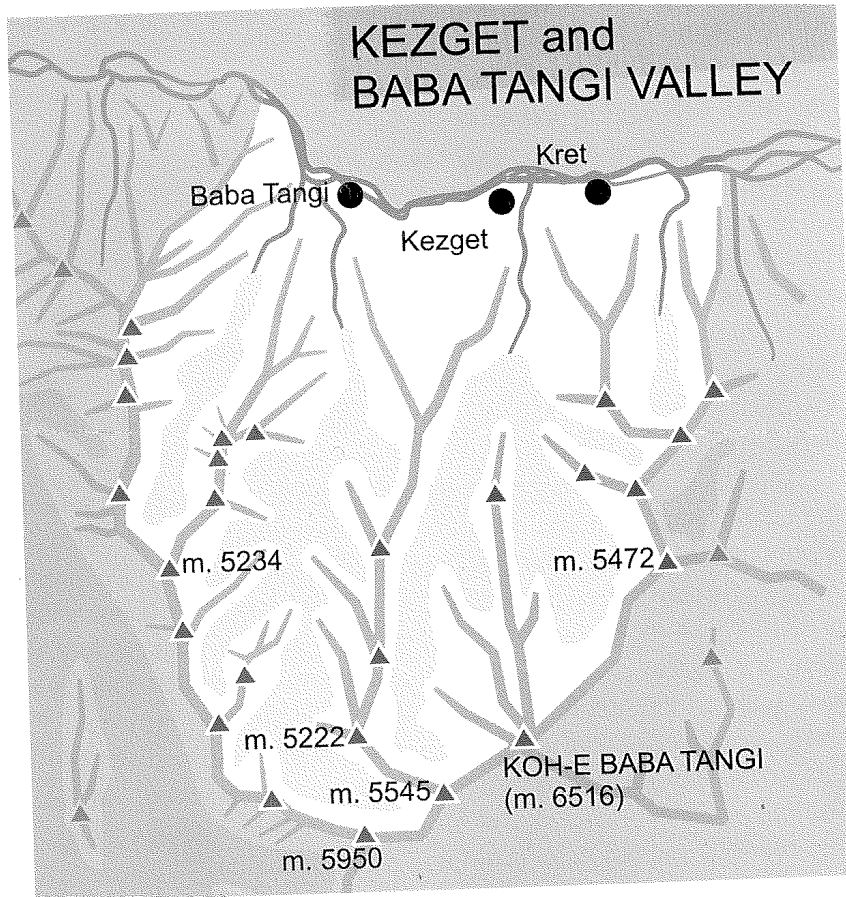
4. The Climb

The "climbing season" for the Wakhan Region is said to be June through to September. I would suggest going earlier rather than later. By July / August, conditions were typical of late summer, with ice / firm snow on steeper slopes with some soft snow accumulation on gentle slopes. For the first 2 days of our climb (lower slopes) we could hear water running beneath the ice. We used ice screws for protection on the way up (carried but did not use snow stakes) and abseiled off slings and ice screws at the top of our descent.

The weather was stable, with fine clear skies except for 2 or 3 days when it snowed late afternoon and overnight. Night temperatures at base camp were around -6 to -10°C and about 10°C cooler on the

upper mountain. In the lower valley it was calm, although I think a lot of the time there were winds blowing up high, as it was on our summit day.

Koh-e-Baba Tangi is located at the head of the Kezget Valley, beyond the village of Kret. The Koh-e-Baba base camp used by our expedition and the Italian Women in 2008 is located at about 4600m. It is not the most comfortable of camps, being on white glacial covered by moraine, but there is plenty of water. Base camp is two short days walk with an elevation gain of 1600m from the village of Kert.



Sketch of Kezget Valley

Our first 10 days at base camp were spent acclimatizing to the altitude. There were few easy slopes to acclimatize on, the best being that leading to a col at the head of the valley at 5200 m. We climbed this slope twice, once on a day trip and once to spend two nights at the col. In retrospect, perhaps the best option for acclimatizing would have been to ascend the West Ridge, the route of the first ascent.

On August 4th Patricia and I set out to climb Koh-e-Baba Tangi, which we did over 5 days, beginning via the North West spur, and then crossing a high shelf to summit via the West Ridge. We descended via the West Ridge over 2 days. We had 5 camps on the mountain and seemed to always end up at a relatively flat spot for the night.

Within the Kezget Valley, Koh-e-Baba Tangi is the obvious objective. We enjoyed climbing the North West spur, and the West Ridge would also be a great (less technical) route. Beyond the Kezget Valley, there are many other climbing objectives which could be found in Pinelli's guide book, or perhaps if you have more time, by going to look.



Koh-e-Baba Tangi with our 4 camps marked

The following account of our climb is taken from Pat's blog site on the Berghaus website (<http://www.berghaus.com/community>). Other accounts are available on the internet, but this is the most detailed.

The route would begin with a 500m ice face of 60-80deg, and then progress into a narrow ice gully. From there we weren't sure what would happen, but hoped a few days of climbing would bring us onto the summit plateau, and then the summit. We would either V-thread our way back down the route, or traverse over the mountain and come down the West Ridge. Those were the plans ...

... we knew we had to come up with a plan for dealing with our pack-loads, should we not be able to carry them on the steep terrain. I would do the leading, we decided, while Christine would jumar the rope with the heavier 'seconds' pack. If this proved too strenuous we would haul. On August 4th we waved goodbye to Satya, who promised to raise the alarm if we hadn't returned in 10 days, and headed up the glacier to an Advanced Base Camp under the ice face. That night we camped under a crystal clear sky, with beautiful views of Tajikistan and the Pamir Mountains to the north.



Sunset at Advanced Base Camp with the Pamir Mountains in the background

The next day the ice face went surprisingly well. The bergschrund proved no problem and after seven pitches we were perched beneath a 'bulge' of about 80deg ice. "Time to try out our plan," we deliberated, and I passed my pack to Christine, who then attached hers to the end of one of our double ropes. Off I went and it didn't seem too long before I'd dispatched the pitch and Christine was seconding towards me. The pack, dangling 60m beneath us, duly followed. Another couple of pitches of lesser angle, and we reached a small col that offered a good camp for the night. I set about chopping a platform from the ice while Christine melted water. We were on a high- the day had gone well and we were on our way!



Day one: Under the bulge and Camp one

The next morning we were up at 3am in an effort to be packed up and away by five. We knew we had a narrow ice gully to climb but weren't sure where the gully would exit, and wanted to give ourselves plenty of time for hauling the packs. Things went slightly array when I climbed the wrong way on the first pitch, but we soon had ourselves back on track and Christine led quickly out beneath a large ice cliff and into the base of the gully, where we discovered to ice to be rotten and fragile. But after a few moves it improved and I quickly started to enjoy myself. Here I was, climbing good steep ice, on a mountain in Afghanistan! How lucky I was! I felt confident and happy and knew that, if the weather stayed settled and if we broke the mountain down into sections and dealt with each as they presented themselves...we would climb Koh-e-Baba-Tangi.



Day 2: the base of the ice gully, and further up.

After the first pitch the gully relented in angle and widened. Above, it was ringed by a cornice that even though it was small would prove hard to climb through, so I began to lead out to the right, hoping to breach it where a buttress of rock butted against the ice. Not such a good move, as once Christine reached me and we began hauling, the pack swung into the rock and lodged there. We yanked and tugged and jiggled to no avail, and in the end Christine abseiled back down and freed it. By now the day was done, and we chopped out a ledge at the apex of the ridge and settled in for another fine night.

Day 3 also resulted in an early start and we were hoping for the same fine weather that had been gracing the expedition from the start. But once the sun rose we could see a series of dark clouds marring the western sky, and although we weren't that concerned, we did wonder what they would bring. Now that we'd exited the ice gully we were confronted with a large rock buttress, and deciding to try and get around it on the right hand (northern) side, we set off trudging in deep snow. We were soon hot and bothered. Rounding the ridge, we could see ahead of us was another steep ice slope, fringed by a nasty looking bergschrund.

I tried my hardest to climb across this but couldn't find any purchase in the rotten snow, and kept falling in a heap on the ground. Then I dragged the rope out to the right for 30m, climbed across a bridge and started a rather nasty traverse back across the top of the schrund, worrying that with the ice so fragile and unconsolidated Christine would have a hard time jumaring. I was glad to get to the left hand end and start climbing upward, where the ice improved dramatically. Above me was a steep ice slope with no indication of where I'd be able to exit. I ran out the full rope length and built a belay. As predicted Christine had an awful time crossing the schrund and teetering along the traverse - the pitch must have taken us a good three hours. In the meantime the sky was darkening.

Sometime mid-afternoon it started to snow and the temperature dropped. At this stage we'd reached the spot on the ridge adjacent to the summit plateau, and ran around looking for somewhere to camp. We settled on a sloping ledge and settled in for a rather uncomfortable night of cooking and melting in the tent.



Day 3: reaching the end of the nasty traverse; a snowy camp.

At 4.30 am next morning it was still snowing, and we gratefully settled back into our sleeping bags, but by 8am it had started to clear so we upped, and set about trudging through deep snow to the western side of the plateau. At 4 pm we stumbled across a perfect camp site at approximately 6000m - flat and sheltered from what was now a persistent wind. We pitched the tent and set about preparing for a 600m climb the next day that would take us to the summit. After four days climbing we were starting to feel jaded and it was good to assume there would only be one more day of ascent.

Next morning we were away at 4.30am and climbing mixed ice and snow slopes towards the summit ridge. It was bitterly cold and the wind hadn't let up- hence we were both wearing every stitch of clothing we had with us. At nine we were beneath what we thought was the summit and I led off up a moderate ice pitch, only to discover to our disappointment that the ridge went on up...and up. But an hour later, after traversing beneath a large cornice, suddenly there was the true summit ahead...and then I was there! Christine followed and soon we both stood on top looking west into Pakistan, north into Tajikistan and east into China. We took lots of photos.



Day 5: summit pics

It was a magic moment, only marred by the bitter cold, and it wasn't long before we were heading down and back to our camp. We were very happy. Back at camp mid afternoon we collapsed in a heap- we were very tired. The next day, we decided, we would start down the West Ridge (the route of the original ascent) in the hope of being back at basecamp in two days. It would be a nice touch to do a traverse of the mountain.



Day 5: Descending off the summit.

At six the next morning we were standing at the edge of the plateau wondering which way to go. Below us was a large granite buttress and there seemed nothing for it but to abseil over the edge, which we duly did, very aware that if our ropes jammed we would have a hard time dealing with them in our depleted state. But things went well and five abseils later we were at the left hand end of a long snow/ice traverse that took us to the top of the West Ridge proper. Here we found cairns and an old camp site of the original ascensionists, complete with firewood!



Day 6: Which way to go? And abseiling off the high shelf.

We began a scrambling descent down the 1500m rocky spur. At the end of the afternoon, by good fortune as there were few flat areas, we came across another cleared campsite and decided to stop for the night- our seventh on the mountain. We were down to the last of our food- exhausted, hungry and keen to be down. But it was a beautiful evening, and we didn't bother pitching the tent and instead lay under the stars.



Day 6: Final camp on the mountain- on the ledge; completing the descent next morning.

Next morning we completed the descent and elated, arrived on the glacier. We were so excited- we'd made it! Then Christine spied a figure in the distance. There was Satya, who'd spent the last week at base camp alone, waiting for our return – he was coming up the glacier to meet us!

5. Administration and Logistics

Language

Few people in Tajikistan or Afghanistan speak English. Those that do seemed to be at (or had just left) high school. Place names were spelt differently on our various maps. In Tajikistan we organised transport and accommodation through an outfitter, and in the Wakhan, we employed an interpreter to help us to arrange porters and transport, and would recommend that others do the same.

Afghanistan

Pat had arranged with Gyasi of Wakhan Tourism to: provide us with base camp equipment (cooker, cook tent, pots and pans, table and chairs etc); help us get Wakhan permits; collect us from the border post at Ishkashim; and to arrange transport to Kret. However, Farad (Gyasi's staff in Ishkashim) was

sick when we arrived, and although he did eventually come and collect us in a taxi, he did not have equipment for us and was not well enough to help us with obtaining our Wakhan permits. Farad's friend Adab who has his own outfitting company did help us with shopping in the bazaar, obtaining permits and organising transport. Adab was fantastic and I would recommend him. Organising our own equipment in Ishkashim was OK and much less expensive than hiring through Gyasi.

For our base camp we bought at the bazaar a pressure cooker (580 Afghani) and a bucket (180 Afghani) and sacks (10 Afghani each) for porter loads as we did not have enough bags or packs for all our food and equipment. We were given base camp pots, plates and cutlery from someone at the Guest House in Ishkashim, and which we left at the Guest House. All of this can be bought at the market.

Food

We bought most of our supplies at the bazaar in Dushanbe. We also bought some more supplies at the market in Khorog, including tinned butter.

At the Dushanbe Bazaar which is open every day early morning to late evening, we bought walnuts, dried fruit, onions, potatoes, tinned fish, salami, tinned tomatoes, milk powder, tea, biscuits, dish wash liquid, clothes washing soap (all for 450 Somoni). Some prices: salami (17 Somoni); dried apricots 25 to 35 Somoni/kg depending on quality; nuts 50 to 70 Somoni/kg depending on quality; 2.5kg sweet biscuits 40 Somoni; onions 1 Somoni/kg.

There was a **supermarket on Ruddaki Avenue** across the road from the Avesto Hotel that seemed to have most of the things that we bought at the market and was only a little more expensive. I bought there single serve packets of instant oats (1.5 Somoni each) and Russian chocolate bars (about 12 Somoni each).

We had relied on buying some food in Ishkashim, but were unable to buy everything we wanted. When we left Ishkashim (late August) there was a much greater range of fruit and vegetables than when we arrived (mid July). There were also a few more items such as milk powder, which we did not find in July. I would recommend buying all food in Dushanbe and not relying on buying any food in Ishkashim or Khorog, and definitely nothing beyond Ishkashim.

In Ishkashim we bought: rice, lentils, potatoes, flour, garlic, chickpeas, sugar, happy cow cheese, jam, baby formula (instead of milk powder), pasta and apples (1340 Afghani).

Also in Ishkashim we bought two full 5kg gas cylinders with which we received a free cooker head (5000 Afghani). The storekeeper agreed to let us return both gas cylinders, and when we did he would give us 1000 Afghani on return. The gas cylinders were great and lasted us all our time at base camp.

Fuel

We had a Jetboil gas cooker to use while we were climbing and were able to buy gas canisters in Dushanbe. These contained butane only, not a butane propane mix. They were OK at altitude. We bought 5 canisters (this is all they had) from a sports shop on Rudaki Avenue, which I think was:

Tourism Academy - Shop Outdoor Gear

Alpec, Rudaki Avenue 148.

Phone 224-52-91 or 93-453-59-09

We also had two MSR multi-fuel stoves as a back up in case we could not get gas for the Jetboil and to use at base camp if we had to. We were not able to buy kerosene in Tajikistan (definitely not in Dushanbe or Khorog) or in Ishkashim, only petrol which we bought in a 5l container in Khorog (65 Somoni per litre) but had it taken off us at the Tajikistan - Afghanistan border. We ended up buying about 6l of petrol (350 Afghani) in Ishkashim and carried it in 1.5l Coke bottles with no problems.

Interpreter and Porters

Very little English is spoken in the Wakhan, and so Adab's friend Dawood accompanied our team as an interpreter to Kret to arrange porters for us (\$US 40 per day). Porters were arranged through the Community Leader. This all went smoothly, with most discussion to do with which of the many willing men would get the job. It wasn't necessary to arrange porters in advance. With Dawood's help we arranged for porters to come up to our base camp on a certain day to help us back down with our equipment.

We employed 8 porters to carry loads up to our base camp, and 6 porters to carry loads back down to Kret. All were paid for 3 days at a rate of 500 Afghani per day. The walk up to base camp took 2 days (climbing 1000m on the first day!) and then one day back to Kret. On the way up, we stayed at a well used bivouac. On the return, porters took one day to reach base camp and one day carrying loads down to Kret. Porter loads were around 20kg.

There was a notice at the Ishkashim guest house setting out fixed rates (negotiated between porters and some tourism organisation) for yaks, horses, donkeys, porters and guides. The notice suggests buying scales in the market to weigh loads. We paid a bit more than these rates and heard of a trekking group who were to go to Noshaq base camp but were quoted such high rates they decided not to go.

The porters who helped us were fantastic. Some had been to base camp previously with the Italian women's expedition and took us to that spot. The porters were all really kind and happy and generously shared their tea and naan with us. One or two spoke a smattering of English (how are you, what is your ambition in life).

6. Information Sources

Mountaineering

These are the information sources we had for mountaineering in the Wakhan Corridor

Accounts of the first ascent of Koh-e-Baba Tangi lead by Carlo Alberto Pinelli in 1963 in:

- *The American Alpine Club Journal 1964. pp 324-235*
- *The British Alpine Club Journal No. 308 May 1964.*

A Russian map of the Wakhan Region obtained from the British Alpine Club (free to members)

<http://www.alpine-club.org.uk/>

A basic guidebook to the area - *Peaks of Jade and Silver: a mountaineering guide book to the Afghan Hindu Kush* written by Carlo Alberto Pinelli and Gianni Predan.

Accounts of 2009/10 expeditions to the Wakhan Corridor available through the following links:

(<http://www.thebmc.co.uk/News.aspx?id=3873>; <http://www.bmc.co.uk/News.aspx?id=3797>; <http://www.bmc.co.uk/News.aspx?id=3852>; <http://www.bmc.co.uk/News.aspx?id=3167>). All expeditions describe a friendly and welcoming population and huge scope for future mountaineering.

Information about the Wakhan Corridor / Afghanistan

There is a lot of more general information about trekking in the Wakhan on the internet (the Lonely Planet Thorntree Forum is good). Here are a few links:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/thread.jspa?threadID=1969816> (really good information)

<http://climbafghanistan.com/index.html> (Mountain Unity)

<http://www.mockandoneil.com/wakhan.htm> (useful maps, names of porters)

http://www.akdn.org/publications/2010_akf_wakhan.pdf (good map of Wakhan)

www.afgnso.org – a website for NGO's giving information on incidents involving foreign aid workers in Afghanistan.

The Pamirs 1:500,000 A tourist Map of Gorno Badakhshan - Tajikistan and Background Information on the Region. Published Sponsored by UNESCO. Distributed by Gecko Maps info@geckomaps.com.

Tea with the Taliban. Travels in Afghansitan written by New Zealander Ian Robinson which includes a description of his journey on horseback through the Wakhan Corridor and the small Pamir.

7. Permission and Permits

A permit is not required to climb the mountains of Afghanistan. However, visas to visit both Afghanistan and Tajikistan, as well as a permits to travel through the Gorno Badakhshan Region (Tajikistan) and the Wakhan Region (Afghanistan) are required.

Tajikistan

Visa

There is plenty of good visa information (including costs) on websites of consulates outside of Tajikistan. Be sure to get a **double entry** visa. Pat obtained her visa (and GBAO permit) from the Tajikistan Embassy in Bruxelles quickly and easily (\$NZ 216.17).

I (being a bit less organised) relied on getting my visa on arrival at the airport in Dushanbe. After some waiting, I was given a double entry visa valid for 6 weeks at the airport for \$US33. Apparently the consular office is open for passengers off all flights, even those in the middle of the night (as our flight was). I had a letter of introduction from Shagarf of Pamir Silk Travel but this was not necessary. Shagarf advises not to rely on getting a visa at the airport as officials can be fickle.

There is a lot of discussion on the internet about whether a letter of introduction is required to obtain a visa. Note that both Pat and I obtained a visa without a letter of introduction.

Beware for border scams – Satya had the date of his Tajikistan Visa changed by Tajikistan border police and had to pay to be let into Tajikistan on our return.

GBAO Permit

A GBAO permit for travel in or through the Gorno Badakhshan region can be obtained at the same time as a visa from a Tajiksitan Embassy outside of Tajikistan, which is what Patricia did. GBAO permits are not issued at Dushanbe airport. Shagarf (Pamir Silk Travel) arranged for Foresh to get my GBAO permit for me (I did not need to accompany him) from the Office in Dushanbe for \$US40. Foresh was able to get the permit in about one hour on a Monday morning. You can get one yourself very cheaply (less than \$US 10) but it takes about a day. There is good information on how to do it on the Lonely Planet Thorntree forum website.

Afghanistan

Visa

Getting our Afghanistan visas from the consulate in Canberra, Australia, took about 2 ½ months and cost \$NZ 385. Do not leave anything to chance – keep calling to make sure everything is OK and visas are being processed. We had letters of introduction from Gyasi of Wakhan Tourism (\$US 10 per letter) but also needed a letter from Gyasi to say that he was not a terrorist and would look after us and had a record of successfully looking after tourists.

Wakhan Permit

Permits to visit the Wakhan corridor are obtained in Ishksshim. We got our permits with the help of Adhab. Adhab would normally charge \$US 25 per permit, but as he was doing it on behalf of Gyasi, the cost was \$US 50 per permit. You can get the permit yourself, which would be much cheaper, but would take all day as you need to visit the border police, the local police and the Governor of Ishkashim District. You will need four photos and four copies of your visa and passport information page to obtain Wakhan permit. We were given 2 pieces of paper (for the border police at Kazideh and Kala-e-Panja) and a letter to take to the Governor of Wakhan District at Khandut.

Photocopies

Take passport photos and plenty of photocopies (about 6) of passport information page and visas for both Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Often copies will suffice instead of showing passport at checkpoints and for getting the Wakhan permit. There are copy places in Dushanbe, Khorog and in the Ishkashim bazaar.

8. Finances

Tajikistan

There are plenty of money changing booths in Dushanbe. We used local currency except for vehicles/transport, GBAO permit, Tajikistan visa, and some accommodation which we paid for in \$US. There were 2 ATM machines in the Hotel Avesto foyer, one delivering \$US and the other Tajikistan TJ Somoni.

Afghanistan

Note that there are no banks, ATM's Western Union or anything like that in Ishkashim. Take plenty of \$US cash. It seemed that most people wanted to be paid in local currency, especially the porters from Kret. We paid for transport Ishkashim to Kret in \$US. Accommodation was paid for sometimes in Afghani except for the guest house in Ishkashim where we could pay in \$US. We paid Adhab (for helping to get our Wakhan permits), Gyasi and Dawood in \$US. We changed \$US for local currency at a stall in the Ishkashim market.

Exchange rates

\$US1 = 4.8 TJ Somoni

\$US1 = 64 Afghani

Budget (all converted to \$US)

Expedition Costs (for 2 climbers):		Expedition Income:	
Flights New Zealand to Tajikistan	\$US 5,200	Number of members	2
Insurance	\$US 800		
Climbing Food and Equipment bought in New Zealand	\$US 450	New Zealand Alpine Club grant	\$NZ 1000 (\$US 800)
Medial and first aid	\$US 200		
Food and Equipment bought in Tajikistan & Afghanistan	\$US 300	Grant from Berghaus UK	\$US 6000
Transport in Tajikistan & Afghanistan	\$US 1,175	Grant from Mount Everest Foundation	GBP 1200 (\$US 1920)
Accommodation in Tajikistan & Afghanistan	\$US 680	Personal contribution	\$US 1,485
Porters & Interpreter	\$US 500		
Visas and Permits	\$US 700		
Incidentals (meals and drinks)	\$US 200		
TOTAL	\$US10,205	TOTAL	\$US 10,205

Grants of Equipment and Other Support included:

- Beattie Matheson / Berghaus UK– clothing
- Back Country Foods (New Zealand) – freeze-dried meals at wholesale price

- Icebreaker (NZ) – woollen socks
- Southern Approach / Black Diamond – equipment for Pat Deavoll
- Horleys Intelligent Sports Nutrition – isotonic drink sachets.

9. Insurance

Our insurance policy was underwritten by ACE Insurance Ltd., and obtained through the offices of the New Zealand Alpine Club Inc., PO Box 786, Christchurch, New Zealand, ph ++ 64 3 3777595. This insurance did not cover any event resulting from war or terrorism.

“I believe any person traveling to Afghanistan or any other of the world’s war zones, would have to accept that there would be risk to their life and property, and that even a top insurance policy such as the NZAC policy with ACE may not respond to pay a claim, if the loss arose from war, invasion or civil war.”

10. Travel, Transport and Freighting

Travel

Patricia and I chose to fly to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, and to travel by road to the Afghanistan border and cross at Ishkashim. This avoids travelling by road in Afghanistan near Mazir-e-Sharif and from Faizabad to Ishkashim which are reported to be unsafe areas. There are many contradictory reports as to when the border is open. We crossed both times at about 10am. The most reliable information seems to be that the border is open daily 9am-4pm, except Saturdays when it closes at 2pm and Sundays when it is closed all day.



Map showing routes Dushanbe to Ishkashim

Transport

Tajikistan – Dushanbe to Ishkashim

Apart from our airmiles, transport was by far the greatest cost of our expedition was transport. Prior to our arrival in Dushanbe, Pat had asked Shagarf of Pamir Silt Travel to arrange transport and accommodation for us from Dushanbe to Ishkashim. I think the 4WD that Shagarf arranged for us Dushanbe to Ishkashim was a good price (other travellers had paid more) and certainly Shagarf and his staff Ortonbeck and Foresh were all very pleasant and very helpful. We travelled in a Landcruiser with a driver, Gordo, who did not speak English but this didn’t cause any problems. Shagarf had organised accommodation for us en route (2 nights) and this was all fine. The transport cost was divided by 4 passengers (3 climbers and one trekker we picked up in Dushanbe). There was room for most of our gear and food in the car, with the rest on the roof.

On our return, we called Ortenbeck from the Tajikistan / Afghanistan border and he arranged for a taxi to collect us from the Tajikistan border post and take us to Khorog. From Khorog to Dushanbe we caught a shared taxi. There is no problem catching a shared taxi from downtown Khorog. However Ortenbeck arranged for the taxi to collect us (and all our gear) from where we were staying (with his mother) which saved us dragging our gear down town.

There are 2 routes from Dushanbe to Khorog. One is via Kulob-620 km (mostly valley) and the second is via Tavildara (a mountain road)-550km. From Khorog to Ishkashim border is another 110 km. We went Dushanbe to Khorog via Tavildara on the way to Ishkashim (2 ½ days) and on the way back via Kulob (one long day, leaving Khorog around 10am and arriving Dushanbe about 2am).

Afghanistan – Ishkashim to Kret

The 4WD from Ishkashim to Kret was expensive and arranged for us by Adab with some vigorous negotiating on his part with what seemed to be a transport collective at the Ishkashim bazaar (not organised through the driver). There was a lot of negotiating and even still the price was high. It would have been really difficult to organise without Adab or someone who spoke Afghani.

For the return journey from Kret to Ishkashim, we asked our interpreter Dawood to send a 4WD from Ishkashim to collect us on a certain day. However, hearing that the river was flooding, he sent the 4WD 2 days early with instructions to wait for us at Kret. This was really good of Dawood as the river had indeed almost cut off the road when drove through (a day early).

Transport Costs

\$US 10 taxi from Dushanbe airport to Avesto Hotel.

\$US 754 4WD from Dushanbe to Afghanistan / Tajikistan border, 550 km via Tavildara (shared between 4 people)

\$US 40 for taxi from border post to guest house in Ishkashim, Afghanistan (shared between 3 people)

\$US 380 for 4WD Ishkashim to Kret (shared between 3 people)

\$US 380 for 4WD Kret to Ishkashim (shared between 3 people)

3000 Afghani to be able to drive through a field where the road had been washed away by the river
1200 Afghani for taxi Ishkashim to border

440 TJ Somoni for a taxi from the border to Khorog

380 TJ Somoni / \$US 80 per person for 4WD 'shared taxi' Khorog to Dushanbe, 620 km via Kulob

90 TJ Somoni for taxi from shared taxi drop off to Acted Guest house (at 1am)

\$US 10 for our host at the Acted Guest House to take us to the airport in his own car.

Freight

We did not freight (by courier or post) any equipment or stores as I had done a little research and was unsure that it would arrive.

11. Food and Accommodation

Tajikistan

Food in Tajikistan is good and inexpensive, with lots of vegetables, fruit, meat, and delicious bread (samosa 1.5 somoni, bread 2 somoni, tea 2 somoni).

Accommodation was all fine. Pat had booked accommodation in Dushanbe before we left home, and the rest was organised by Shagarf for our trip to Ishkashim. Guest house prices include dinner and breakfast.

Dushanbe

Avesto Hotel

105a Rudaki Ave

Dushanbe, Tajikistan

(0)37 221 04 61

\$US70 per night for 2 people (without a receipt), air conditioned room with a (great) breakfast. The hotel is a relic of the Soviet era.

Acted Guesthouse

178 Mirzo Tursunzoda

City Centre

Phone: 918 689 925

Mobile: 2245781 (this is for Sadona, the daughter, who speaks good English)

\$15 per person per night. We didn't ask about food, but may have been included. Nice place in the family's home, can use their kitchen, only beds for 3 people. The father took us to the airport for \$US10.

Kali-i-Kumb

Stayed at the guest house, not sure how much choice there is (70 somoni per person per night).

Khorog

Stayed at Llamo Guest house, which was really good, up on the hill so cool and quiet (97 somoni or \$20 per person per night with dinner and breakfast).

Khorog on return

Stayed with Ortenbeck's mother in her apartment, \$US 20 per person per night. Really good, lovely mother and lovely food.

Afghanistan

Ishkashim

Pamir Marco Polo Guest House, Ishkashim, \$25 per person per night for bed, dinner, breakfast, \$30 with lunch

Kret

Stayed at the only (?) guest house. Dinner - potatoe and lentil stew, yoghurt, rice and naan; Breakfast - naan, hot milk and sugar; Lunch – yoghurt and naan. \$US 25 per person.

Kala-e Panj

Stayed at guest house which was owned by the family of the driver who brought us from Kret back to Ishkashim. Made us chips with our dinner! 1000 Afghani per person (dinner, bed, breakfast)

12. Communications

Telephone

There are 3 mobile networks that cover Ishkashim and the Wakhan Corridor, patchily, up to Kala-e Panj or Sargez. Roshan (Afghanistan network) is said to have the worst coverage. Indigo (Tajikstan network) is said to be the best. The other network is Beeline (also Tajikistan). We had a cell phone from home with global roaming, but would recommend buying a local sim card, much cheaper. From the telephone booth in Ishkashim, a call New Zealand cost about \$US .50 per minute.

I had heard that there is a satellite phone at the Police HQ in Sarhad, and that satellite phones can be rented in Ishkashim for \$5/per day. We didn't check out either of these options.

Internet

There are plenty of internet cafes in Dushanbe, and 2 in Khorog. There are none in Ishkashim.

13. Medical Arrangements

We took with us from New Zealand an extensive medical kit including altitude drugs. We used only Nurofen and Paracetamol for headaches (our own and the porters); Ciproflox for stomache problems; and Diamox as a prophylactic for altitude sickness.

There is a little kiosk in the Ishkashim Bazaar that sold a wide range of medicines if you need anything extra. There is a regional hospital in Faizabad and (apparently) a smaller hospital at Ishkashim. There are several Basic Health Centres in the Wakhan Region (including at Sarhad and Sargex) often staffed by foreigners. It would be a good idea to ask locals what is available if and when you visit as when we were there, there were two new centres being built at Shpekhret and Qala Hurst (I think).

14. Expedition Diary

- 17th July Arrived in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, at 1am. Christine got her Tajikistan visa at the airport. Stayed at the Avesto hotel (\$70 per night for 2 people). In the afternoon met with Shagarf of Pamir Silk Travel to finalise / pay for transport to Ishkashim, and to finalise accommodation along the way. Shagarf arranged for Foresh (works for Shagarf) to obtain a GBAO permit for Christine next morning before 10am. Shopped for food in the market accompanied by Foresh who was very helpful as no English was spoken in the market.
- 18th July Our driver Gordo arrived about 9am with his air conditioned Toyota Landcruiser which made for a very comfortable drive. Foresh also turned up to make sure all was in order and that we left Dushanbe. Finally left Dushanbe until about 12.30 pm and arrived at the guest house in Kala-i-Kumb about 7.30 pm. Stopped for lunch along the way. Ate dinner at the guest house; dinner was meat, potatoes, salad, plum juice, and naan at the guest house; and for breakfast naan and jam, tea and plum juice. Cost \$15 per person per night.
- 19th July Left Kala-i-Kumb about 8am and arrived in Khorog at 1.30pm. Trvelled along th Panj River looking across at Afghanistan. Stayed at Llamo Guest house which was really good, up on the hill so cool and quiet (97 somoni or \$20 per person per night with dinner and breakfast). Did a little more food shopping in the Khrog bazaar and bought 5l of petrol at the petrol station.
- 20th July Left Khorg at 6 am and arrived at the Ishkashim border crossing at about 9am. We crossed the border with no problems (except that our petrol was not allowed into Afghanistan). Stayed at Marco Polo Guest House in Ishkashim (\$25 - \$30 per person per night). Ishkashim is at about 2700m asl.
- 21st July Shopped for food and equipment in the Ishkashim bazaar. With the help of Adab, obtained permits to visit the Wakhan region. Adab also arranged, with a great deal of negotiating, transport to take us to the village of Kert at the 'transport collective' (\$380 for Toyota Surf vehicle).
- 22rd July Left Ishkashim at 6am and arrived at Kert (3190m asl) around 5pm. This was a slow trip on rough roads. Had one flat tyre and one stuck on a rock episode. Stopped at 2 police checkpoints and reported to the Governor of Wakhan Region in Khandud. Arranged 8 porters to take us to our base camp, leaving next morning at 8am. Several of the porters had been 2 years previously with the Italian Women's expedition.
- 23rd July Patricia unwell, so delayed departure by one day. Didn't seem to cause porters' any problem. Walked around viillage – lovely vllage, very scenic beneath in the shadow of Kohi Baba Tangi.
- 24th July Left at 8am with porters who actually arrived a lot earlier (around 6am I think). Should have left earlier as got very hot. Arrived at camp site about 2pm (4180m). Some of us and porters had headaches. Porters slept under bivvy rock with blankets and sleeping bags. Ate tea and naan.

- 25th July Left 8am for base camp at 4600m. Porters took us to the site of the Italian Women's base camp. Arrived around 12.30 pm. Paid porters. Porters left after having a cup of tea. Porters very happy and kind, sharing tea naan and comach (like naan but nicer) with us. Porters left about 2pm and we were alone.
- 26th July Base camp refinement. Pleasant day time temperature, at night -6°C
- 27th July Walked to the col at the head of the valley at around 5200m, and back to base camp.
- 28th July Rest day
- 29th July Walked around to the base of the North West Ridge to view our proposed route.
- 30th July Snowed overnight and until around 9am. Packed for acclimatisation trip, walked up glacier to camp at 4970m.
- 31st July Snowed overnight. Walked on and camped at the col at the top of the valley (5200m).
- 1st August Started up peak to east but too loose and rocky. Camped for 2nd night on col
- 2nd August Back to base camp.
- 3rd August Packed for climb.
- 4th August Left in the afternoon and walked around to the glacier below the NW ridge. Camped on the glacier (4800m).
- 5th August Left camp 7am. Crossed schrund and climbed for about 4 pitches. Then steepened and hauled leaders pack for 4 pitches. Then a couple of less steep pitches to arrive at camp site around 7pm.
- 6th August False start then down and around bump, up and across to ice gully. Steep climbing, hauled both packs for one pitch. Caught one pack on buttress and had to descend to free it. Camped at top of steep gully. Some lenticular clouds in sky. Camp at 5590m.
- 7th August Left 6am started. Climbed over buttress and out to left on soft snow. Crossed bergschrund with some trouble. Steep ice above. Began snowing about 30m. Camped about 4pm at 5800m.
- 8th August Still snowing at 3am, misty and foggy. Cleared about 8am. Left about 10am to cross to shelf and climb up to camp on flat and sheltered site about 2pm. (5890m). Windy in night.
- 9th August Up at 3am, left at 4.30am. Climbed up to West ridge and followed original route to summit. Straight forward, with two short ice pitches. Arrived at the summit at 10.30am. Windy and cold but so beautiful. Fantastic views from the summit and from the ridge on the descent. Altimeter reading on summit was 6315m (should be 6500m!). Back at camp at 2pm.
- 10th August From camp on shelf, walked up to and abseiled down buttress to west. About 5 abseils on slings and ice screws. Traversed left to West Ridge. Descended to camp on a small ledge at 5500m. Obviously used before as a camp.
- 11th August Left around 6am and down to glacier about 9 am and back to base camp by about lunch time.
- 12th August Tidy base camp, pack up.

- 13th August Satya left to get porters one day early.
- 14th August Porters arrive at 5.30am. Walk back to Kert. Vehicle is waiting as river is rising. Drive down valley to Kala-e-Panja. Stay at guest house.
- 15th August Drive to Ishkashim. Stay at Marco Polo Guest House again.
- 16th August Leave for border. Taxi to Khorog. Stay with Ortenbeck's mother.
- 17th August Day in Khorog
- 18th August Shared taxi Khorog to Dushanbe. Marathon trip 10am to 2am next morning but very beautiful and interesting to return via the low route.
- 19th August Arrive in Dushanbe about 2am. Stay at Acted Guest House until flight out on 23rd.

15. Conclusion

A successful and enjoyable expedition to a beautiful part of the world.



Porters on the walk back to Kret

16. Contacts

Tajikistan Contacts

Shagarf Mullo-Abdol, Director, 'Pamir Silk Travel' Co.

Arranged transport and accommodation for us Dushanbe to Ishkashim.

Phone: (+992 3522) 22277, 22299, 22338 office

(+992 93) 505 23 61 cell;

(+992 91) 927 99 82 cell;

E-mail: shagarf@pamirsilk.travel

shagarf@gmail.com

skype: shagarf

www.pamirsilk.travel

Ortenbeck, Pamir Silk Travel Co

Works with Shagarf, based in Khorog

Organised transport and accommodation for us Ishkashim to Dushanbe

Phone: +992378824392

Phone: +935 777555

Afghanistan Contacts

Adab Shah Gouhari

Ishkashim, helped us with Wakhan permits, shopping and organising transport. An all round helpful person who speaks really good English.

Wakhan Travel and Tourism Promotional Company

Mobile: 0093 798 414748

Email: agarkan@gmail.com

Dqwood Pazhman (pronounced Day-ood)

Translator in Ishkashim, speaks good English, came with us from Ishkashim to arrange porters at Kret

Mobile: 0093 799 600377 (Roshan)

Mobile: 0093 600 2399 (T Cell)

Email: dqwood.pazhman@gmail.com

Ghyasi Sadruddin

Wakhan Tourism

Main Office

New City

Faizabad

Badakhshan

Phone 0093799576159 Ghyasi

pamirbsc@gmail.com Ghyasi

wakhan.tourism@gmail.com

Farahd

Wakhan Tourism

Main Ishkashim Bazaar Road

near Bazaar Road,

Ishkashim.

Mobile: 0093797622978

Afghanistan Guides

We did not engage any mountain guides in Afghanistan, but we did meet three men who have worked as guides in the Wakhan Corridor and have had some training in Europe. They are **Malang Darior**, **Hafir Khan** and **Ali Gorg**. All speak English.

We met Malang at Kazideh (ph 0794766067 Indigo). He has a guest house at Kazideh, 4WD and will guide and/or arrange porters for climbing Noshaq and treks to base camp. Malang was one of the first Afghan people to climb Noshaq, with Hafir Khan in 2007 (see <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav072109.shtml>).

We met Hafir Khan while he was building a medical centre Qala Hurst (I think) and we met Ali Gorg in Kert just as he was setting off for work setting up a clinic at Shpekhret. Hafir Khan had been on the (unsuccessful) Italian expedition in 2008 and was able to give us information on their route and base camp location.

17. Acknowledgements

The expedition acknowledges with gratitude the assistance of the following organisations for financial assistance:

- the Mount Everest Foundation,
- Berghaus UK
- the New Zealand Alpine Club,

and the following companies for providing equipment and provisions:

- Southern Approach / Black Diamond
- Back Country Foods
- Beattie Matheson / Berghaus UK– clothing
- Icebreaker (NZ)
- Horleys Intelligent Sports Nutrition