



# MUZKOL 2015 TAJIKISTAN

MEF: 15/26

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# Contents

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Contents.....	2
Introduction .....	3
Team .....	4
Location.....	6
Research.....	8
VS Yatsenko.....	8
Latvian 2014 Expedition .....	9
Other contacts.....	9
Day-by-day Summary .....	10
Basecamp life .....	12
Routes .....	13
DofE Silver .....	16
Equipment.....	19
Climbing.....	19
Food.....	19
Tents / Shelter.....	20
Cooking.....	20
Communication .....	21
Logistics.....	22
Visas / Permits.....	23
First Aid and Injuries.....	26
Medical Kit.....	26
Expedition Accounts.....	28

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# Introduction

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In 1940, a Soviet military officer visited the Muzkol range's AkBaikal valley, gazed up at the five peaks of the ridgeline and declared "the passage of this route would have done credit to any master mountaineer". In the intervening years just one expedition had attempted any of the peaks and so our team of five set out to try and prove ourselves as master mountaineers. As it turned out, 75 year old Russian climbing beta is not always of the highest quality and whilst we successfully climbed four new routes a traverse of the ridgeline itself eluded us for its chossy, fractured mess was more suited to master levitators than climbers.

With only two and half weeks for the trip we eschewed a traditional approach to acclimatization and instead adopted the policy of "climb very high and then sleep there". For the most part this gamble paid off although we were sad to part ways with Al after only a few days as he was unable to shake off a bout of traveller's diarrhoea caught in Osh. We flooded our 4x4 in a river on the drive-in and then established a basecamp at 4700m followed by an ABC on the glacier at just over 5000m. James ticked off a solo repeat of the 2014 Latvian team's peak via a new route and then a few days later put in a sterling effort to summit on the main ridgeline at 5700m, soloing across the serac threatened face on hard, brittle ice and then completing the 10+ abalakov abseils on the descent in a twelve hour round trip.

More routes followed, including a repeat of James' first route by George and Clay, a solo of a different route on the same peak by Emily, and a musical mix-tape fuelled route by James and Emily which was halted by a steep, loose wall of rock.

The return journey was just as eventful with an impromptu sports day for the Tajik children, a game of hide-and-seek with a dodgy park official looking for a bribe and then having two of the team being denied travel home through Russia due to visa issues. Tajikistan is a great country to visit, easily accessible by road from Osh and playing host to stable weather, tremendously friendly locals and interesting routes (on terrible rock). We are most grateful all of those who helped make our little adventure possible.



## Acknowledgements

The expedition members would like to thank the Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council, the Alpine Club and the Austrian Alpine Club UK (OeAV Sektion Britannia) for their generous financial support which made this expedition a possibility. We are also grateful for the basecamp tent and other equipment loaned to us by Alpkit. Finally, thanks to Harry Bloxham for his daily weather reports, to Liz Tromans and Jay Conlon for acting as our emergency contacts back in the UK and to Oleg Silin and John Vincent for their advice on travel in the Muzkol range.



## Team

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### George Cave (26)

Climbing and mountaineering for past 9 years. Recent expedition experience looking for new routes/unclimbed peaks to Djangart, Kyrgyzstan (2013, MEF 13/21, 2 first ascents) and Altai, Russia (2012, MEF 12/22, 3 routes). Other recent expeditions including winter traverse in Moroccan Atlas, Greenland, Iran (April 2015) and many European destinations. 20+ alpine routes across five trips (Chamonix, Zermatt, Les Ecrins, Saas Fee), Scottish winter leads to IV 4, trad leads to E1. Google Earth guru.

### Clay Conlon (25)

6 years of mountaineering and climbing. Recent expedition experience with 3 weeks in Djangart, Kyrgyzstan (2013, MEF 13/21, 2 first ascents) and 3 weeks in Altai, Russia (2012, MEF 12/22, 3 routes). Other trips include Norway (2009) and three Alpine seasons in Chamonix (2014, 2011, 2010) climbing up to Alpine grade D. Climbed extensively across the UK in both summer and winter. Currently leading E1 on rock, five seasons of winter climbing across UK (inc. Northern Ireland & Scotland) up to grade IV. Former Vice President of University of Bristol Expeditions Society.



## Emily Ward (27)

Climbed mountain routes up to E2 in the Highlands, led pitches of Scottish VI 7 and TD+ in the Alps. Bigger days out include the Cassin on the Piz Badile, Je Vous Salue Marie on Sialouze and Fil la Plombe up to the Midi-Plan. Many classic alpine routes including the Kuffner Ridge and traverse of Mont Blanc in a day catching first lift up and intentionally walking back to town after. Leader of two previous expeditions to Kyrgyzstan in Western Kokshal Too (2013 & 2014) with five new routes in 2013 (4 summits being first female ascents) and five further peaks in 2014 including 2 or 3 by new routes.

## Alistair Docherty (22)

Been climbing and mountaineering for the past 17 years with Summer and winter climbing all over the UK trad climbing to E2. Sport climbing in France up to F7a+. Alpine climbing in Chamonix with ascents of rock routes to UIAA VI and mixed routes to D-. Geological mapping in NW Scotland. On the committee of the University of Bristol Mountaineering Club for 2 years. Works in Antarctica as a field assistant.

## James Monypenny (27)

Competent all-round climber, operating at on-sight E4, F7b+, M6, WI6, Scottish 6, A2+. Previous mountaineering expeditions to India, Patagonia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and Ecuador. Indian Karakoram 2013: First ascent of Jungdung Kangri 6160m (3 new routes, up to ED1), Piolet d'Or nomination. Peru and Bolivia (2012): Urus, Ishinca (solo), Cordillera Blanca. Huayna Potosi 6088m (twice, once French route, then normal route + paraglider). Patagonia (2012/13): Fitzroy, supercandeletera. Aguja Guillaumet, Brenner-Moschioni. Aguja Poincenot, Whillans-Cochrane.





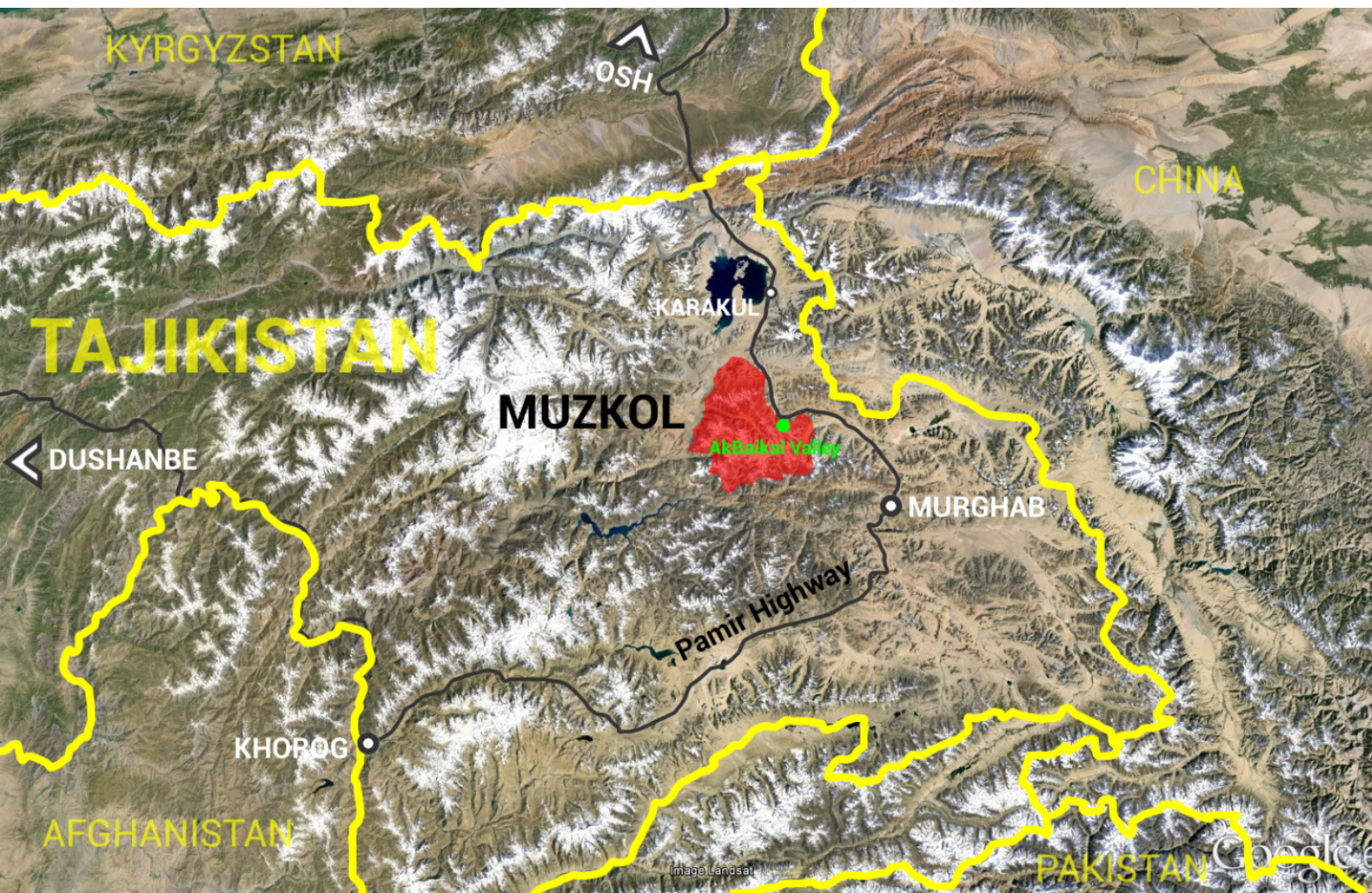
# Location

Tajikistan is a small country in central Asia, squeezed between China to the east and the other 'stans' of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Krygyzstan.

In the east of the country lies the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region which has just shy of half the landmass but only 3% of the population. It is an autonomous region connected to the outside world by only two major roads (both parts of the Pamir Highway): the Khorog-Dushanbe route to the capital and the Khorog-Osh route along which we travelled.



The Muzkol range lies in the centre of this region between the towns of Murghab and Karakul (on the edge of the stunning Lake Karakul). Much of the range is typically accessed with vehicle or animal support from the western side and the AkBaikal valley is one of the few major valleys which faces out directly onto the road. This results in it being slightly disconnected from the main system of valleys in the range and this, coupled with the lack of 6000m peaks in the area, is likely the reason for it being overlooked by previous Soviet expeditions.









Но вернемся к этой безымянной вершине, на гребне которой мы рассчитывали расположить свой высотный лагерь. Подходов к ней со стороны ущелья, ниже снежного цирка, виднелся небольшой холм красно-бурого цвета; ширка, виднелся небольшой холм выйти на контрфорс<sup>1</sup>, который спускался от стены на север; по нему можно было подняться к снежному гребню, оставляя снежный цирк справа, и уже по гребню можно было, как мы предполагали, подняться на вершину, шел правее того же также казавшийся отсюда доступным, шел правее того же красно-бурого холма в небольшое боковое ущелье, которое должно было привести на скальный гребень стены. С запада можно было подойти к вершине по гребню. Пока я и Блещунов изучали окружающие нас горы, лагерь начинал жить своей нормальной жизнью.

В четырех палатках разместились участники экспедиции; в одной была кухня и продовольственный склад. Здесь безраздельно хозяйничал Тагай. Последняя палатка была отведена под лабораторию. В ней Ашот Альбертович уже готовился начинать свои наблюдения над нами. Тагай занялся приготовлением обеда. Он собрал терескен, и вскоре сизый дымок костра взвился над лагерьем.

Валентин успел расставить несколько капканов у норки сурков и уверял, что завтра утром в них наверняка попадет зверек. А какой он забавный! Он неподвижно сидит у входа в свою нору на задних лапах и наблюдает за нами, близко подпускает к себе человека, но страх все же сильнее любопытства, и при дальнейшем продвижении он мгновенно исчезает в норе.

Вечером мы собрались на совет. Перед нами стояла задача: разыскать подходящее место для организации высотного лагеря. Олег Зеленский и Владимир Костенко должны были завтра привести аппаратуру с биостанции. Не дожидаясь их приезда, мы решили утром, разделившись на две группы, выйти на разведку. Перед нами была поставлена нелегкая задача. Надо было на высоте около 6000 м найти место, которое удовлетворяло бы трем условиям:

- 1) наличие удобной площадки для размещения всех наших палаток;

<sup>1</sup> Контрфорс — короткое, крутое ребро.



Панорама юго-восточной части Музкольского хребта. На горизонте вершины: X — Кунгур, XX — Музтаг-ата.



Пять вершин, как будто созданных для трансверса.

## Research

### VS Yatsenko

V.S. Yatsenko, along with other members of the Soviet Officer's club, travelled throughout the Muzkol range and in particular into the Ak Baikal valley in the 1940s. His experiences are catalogued in his 1950 book "In the Pamirs: travel notes of a participant in the Pamir Alpine expedition of 1940" which is [available in the RGS Library in London](#). We got hold of a copy (thanks to Jonathan White of the Alpine Club for his help!) and attempted to translate some of the (old!) Russian. Some of the text reads as follows:

"... Between him (meaning the western spur peak Pogrebetskiy) is hollow and ridge, raised high above sea level. This valley is a large snowy amphitheatre adjacent to the main ridge. The basin lies just to the south of us. The contour of the ridge it is very cut up. His broken line crowned five peaks rising over snow and ice wall. On this wall, only here and there seen naked from the snow dark rock. Hence, in any case, the wall seems quite impregnable. Five peaks on the ridge like would be created to traverse. Passage of this route would have done credit to any master mountaineering. The average height of the peaks reach 6000 m. The beginning of the traverse can serve as a step-down edge extending from the extreme right, that is the western summit of the ridge. The first vertex has two peaks in while the second - a single array. Rock Crown third vertex on the outline vaguely reminiscent of the Caucasian ridge tops Ulla-tauchan. But the fourth vertex is perfectly correct snow pyramid. Soft undulating contours of ice peaks of the last five finishes this.



In the centre of the amphitheatre of snow - the circus (it originates from the river Jong-su, a tributary Muzkol flowing north) rises higher, up to 800 m, outlier. The very nature of how to dedicate his vantage point for a group that engages in Traverse ... "

Some of the information has been collated into a Russian article on the risk.ru wiki, where the above translation comes from:

[http://wiki.risk.ru/index.php/%D0%92%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%88%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%8B\\_%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%8B\\_%D0%90%D0%BA%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%B9%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB](http://wiki.risk.ru/index.php/%D0%92%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%88%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%8B_%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%8B_%D0%90%D0%BA%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%B9%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB)

## Latvian 2014 Expedition

Oleg Silin (Riga, Latvia) and team travelled to Muzkol in 2014 and climbed three first ascents. More details of their expedition can be found at:

- [http://www.traverss.lv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1054%3A-2014-&catid=146%3A2014-08-04-07-24-50&Itemid=216&lang=ru](http://www.traverss.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1054%3A-2014-&catid=146%3A2014-08-04-07-24-50&Itemid=216&lang=ru)
- [http://www.traverss.lv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1060%3A-2014&catid=146%3A2014-08-04-07-24-50&Itemid=216&lang=ru](http://www.traverss.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1060%3A-2014&catid=146%3A2014-08-04-07-24-50&Itemid=216&lang=ru)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qD4rJCtT-Rk>

For more information please contact Oleg at [transport@skona.lv](mailto:transport@skona.lv).

## Other contacts

We spoke with a number of other people regarding climbing in the Muzkol region. These are listed below to assist future expeditions in their research:

- **John Vincent**  
Trip to Muzkol in August 2014  
<http://aac-publications.s3.amazonaws.com/aaj-13201213356-1437180039.pdf>
- **John Proctor**  
[john.proctor1982@gmail.com](mailto:john.proctor1982@gmail.com)  
Two well-documented trips to Muzkol, Tajikistan.  
<http://www.ukclimbing.com/logbook/crag.php?id=19720>  
<https://britishmuzkol2013.wordpress.com/>
- **Andrew Wielochowski**  
[andrew@ewpnet.com](mailto:andrew@ewpnet.com)  
Involved in many expeditions with EWP to Muzkol, although the last trip was 15 years ago  
<http://www.ewpnet.com/>
- **Bo White**  
[boalwhite@gmail.com](mailto:boalwhite@gmail.com)
- **Sharaf Saidrakhmonov**  
[pamirguides@gmail.com](mailto:pamirguides@gmail.com)

Additionally a Russian team made a traverse of a large part of the Muzkol region in 2012, visiting a small section of the AkBaikal valley in the process. More information can be found in the articles at <http://www.risk.ru/blog/195534> and <http://www.tkg.org.ua/node/22554>.



## Day-by-day Summary

Date	Activities	Weather
Wed 5 <sup>th</sup> August	EW lands in Bishkek. JM arrives in Bishkek from Almaty	-
Thu 6 <sup>th</sup> August	AD lands in Osh. EW, JM overland Bishkek to Osh	-
Fri 7 <sup>th</sup> August	Shopping in Osh	-
Sat 8 <sup>th</sup> August	Shopping in Osh. GC, CC depart UK.	-
Sun 9 <sup>th</sup> August	GC, CC arrive at Osh. Team drive to Ak Baikal valley, camp with locals	Cloudy and sunny
Mon 10 <sup>th</sup> August	GC, JM, CC drive and walk to set up basecamp EM, AD stay in yurts at base of valley	Cloudy, sunny with small snow flurry
Tue 11 <sup>th</sup> August	JM, GC attempt to climb peak No.6, JM summits EW walks up to basecamp, AD returns to Osh	Sunny, perfect clear skies
Wed 12 <sup>th</sup> August	GC, CC head up to scout glacier JM, EW walk in to set up ABC	Sunny, perfect clear skies
Thu 13 <sup>th</sup> August	GC, CC plan to climb peak No.6 but CC ill. JM, EW do not climb due to poor sleep at ABC. GC, CC walk in to ABC	Sunny, perfect clear skies



Fri 14 <sup>th</sup> August	Team attempt to climb Mt. Emily. EW instead goes to solo peak No.6. GC+CC ab off after first few pitches, JM solos to summit.	Sunny, perfect clear skies
Sat 15 <sup>th</sup> August	Rest day in camp.	Sunny, perfect clear skies
Sun 16 <sup>th</sup> August	GC, CC climb peak No.6. JM, EW rest day in camp.	Cycle of cloud, snow flurries, then clear
Mon 17 <sup>th</sup> August	JM, EW walk in to ABC. GC, CC rest day in camp.	Snow overnight. Sunny AM, rainy PM.
Tue 18 <sup>th</sup> August	JM, EW climb ridge between peaks No.2 & No.3. GC, CC walk in to ABC	Fine, sunny
Wed 19 <sup>th</sup> August	Rest day in ABC. GC, CC return to basecamp	Sunny with some clouds building, rain night
Thu 20 <sup>th</sup> August	GC walks down to arrange return transport. JM, EW return from ABC.	Cloudy, sunny with bursts of rain
Fri 21 <sup>st</sup> August	Walk out from basecamp to base of valley	Sunny AM, cloudy PM
Sat 22 <sup>nd</sup> August	Return drive to Osh	Huge storm PM on drive out
Sun 23 <sup>rd</sup> August	Drinking in Osh	-
Mon 24 <sup>th</sup> August	GC, CC return flights from Osh. JM, EW remain in Kyrgyzstan for more climbing	-







## Basecamp life

Our basecamp was small and functional and located on the grassy plains about thirty minutes' walk from the end of the glacier. The 3/4 man Alpkite tent was used as the permanent basecamp tent and when not on the glacier we also pitched the Firstlight and North Face single-skin for extra space and to sleep in. Water was sourced from a stream near to camp.

GPS co-ordinates for basecamp: [38.4717°N, 73.5574°E](#).

The weather during the first week was largely stable, with long periods of clear sky and sunshine and very little precipitation. The second week was more unsettled, with longer periods of precipitation including snow. There were no storms or thunderstorms in the 10 days we spent in the mountains and the weather in general was more benign and less severe than might typically be expected in mountain settings such as the European Alps.





## Routes

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Our original objective was to attempt the first traverse of the unclimbed ridgeline at the back of the basin. About halfway through the trip we realised that the ridge was in fact a long, committing, chossy mess.

Instead, we climbed four routes (one of which we repeated twice) of which three were new lines and the route to the summit of Pik 5792m is a first ascent. We propose the name of Mt. Emily for this summit and the climb represents the first ascent of any of the peaks on the main ridgeline.

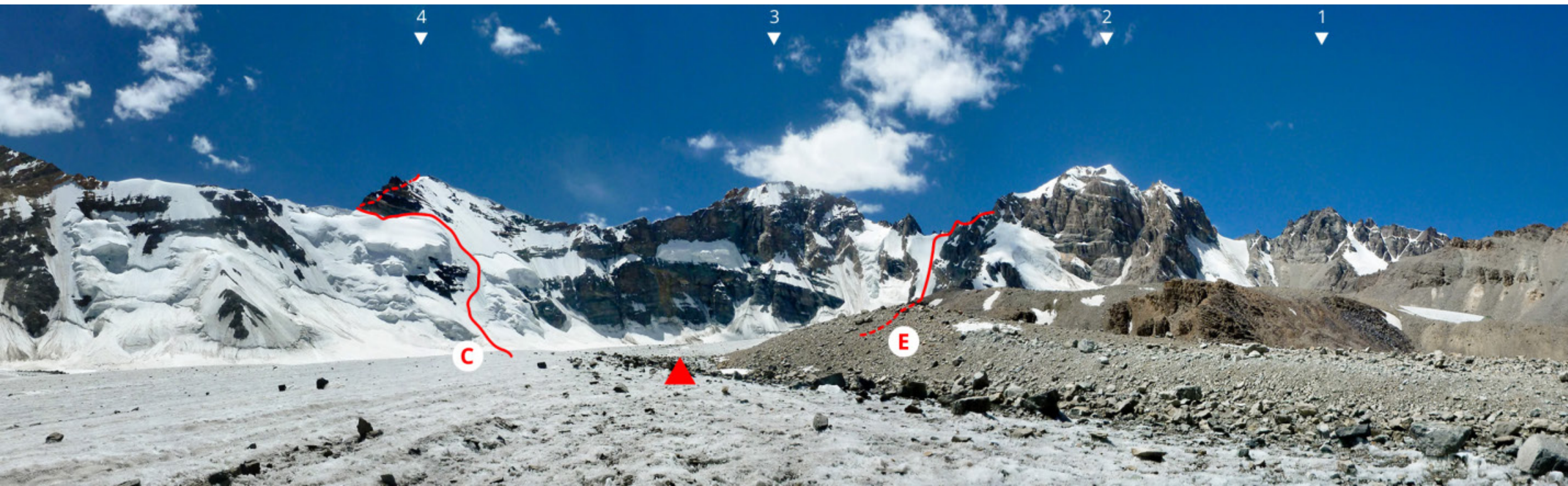
	<b>Route</b>	<b>Peak</b>	<b>Rough grade</b>	<b>Climbers</b>	<b>Date</b>
A	DofE Bronze N face	Pik 5560m*	500m, PD+, 50°	J Monypenny	11/08/15
B	W face & SSW ridge	Pik 5560m*	500m, F	E Ward	14/08/15
C	DofE Silver NW face & NE ridge	Mt. Emily (Pik 5792m)	800m, D, 75°	J Monypenny	14/08/15
D	DofE Bronze N face	Pik 5560m*	500m, PD+, 50°	G Cave, C Conlon	16/08/15
E	Pie Josh Horrorshow	Pik c.5700m	500m, AD, 55°	E Ward, J Monypenny	18/08/15

*\*First climbed by the Latvian team in 2014 via the NE ridge at 2B*





Panorama of the ridgeline which surround the glacier in the AkBaikal valley. The peaks have been numbered in keeping with VS Yatsenko's original numbering.







DofE Bronze (above) and Pie Josh Horrowshow (below)







## DofE Silver

*The story of the first ascent of the NW face & NE ridge of Mt.Emily, by James Monypenny*

I am by myself and climbing alone, on an icy face of an unclimbed mountain in the Pamir range of Tajikistan. It's about 5am, the sun is yet to rise and at the limit of my vision, looming ominously several hundred metres above, somewhere in the darkness is a large serac band, the dangerous ice cliffs threatening and menacing.

I wouldn't normally be willing to climb under such objective danger, but in this particular basin its actually one of the safer lines, nor would I normally be climbing alone, but on this occasion, having had my partner bail early on, I'm very glad for the extra speed afforded. The less time spent belaying and placing screws will mean less time under the dangerous seracs. I traverse rightward, weaving my way through a maze of bergschrunds with fading light from my dim head torch. As the sun begins to turn the horizon from dark black to ocean blue the wall kicks back to roughly 65 degrees. The softer snow runs out and I am left climbing cautiously up brittle black ice.

Whilst I have spent a lot of time soloing on rock, and a lot of time roped on ice, this is first time I have soloed something technically involved on ice. Surprisingly I felt confident and quite safe. Occasionally the ice would fracture quite badly so I took care to place each tool well and slightly further apart than



normal. As the horizon turned a mixture of pinks and orange I began following a thin strip of neve, wrongly thinking it was thick enough to ease my upward progression. This mini strip of neve leaned slightly leftward, taking me further from my intended course, and gradually steepening. As I ascended, and day fully broke, the convexities of the slope revealed the challenge ahead: a long (perhaps 500m) traverse on black ice.

The thought of traversing un-rope, on black ice, for so far, was draining. I began this process by doing a series of horizontal abseils: I would ab the full length of the rope, traversing as far as possible, lock off, then ascend up wards and rightwards. After repeating this process several times I realized that it was neither enjoyable nor very fast. And so I decided on a complete change of route plan and followed a direct line up to the ridge. Emerging onto the ridge and into the sun I felt a sense of relief, knowing that most of the technical climbing was behind me. However there was still allot of ground to cover and it didn't look easy.

I left behind a jacket and my rope and skirted under the large rock buttress. The terrain was now at an easier angle, perhaps 50 degrees, but a dangerous 50 degrees. Patches of hard ice lay hidden, waiting to trip a tired climber, not allowing me any respite. Then began the slog: 50-60 degree snow and ice for perhaps another 1000m.





I got down to business. After taking a short rest to re-fill my water bottle from a drip I set off and ten minutes later a volley of falling stones passed by my rest spot. At around 5000m I heard a trickle from the snow, could it be? I dug down and sure enough I eventually found a small stream of replenishing glacial water. The final summit ridge was around 500m long and a balancing act between the large cornice to the right, the avalanche prone slope to the left, and the occasional crevasse.

Around fifty meters from the summit I knew that all the difficulty and dangers were over and I suddenly looked around. It was as if the previous mental stress and intense focus had blinded me. Because surrounding me now, was an indescribable view. Himalayan giants filled the vista. My sudden appreciation for the beauty of the scene was over whelming.

My mind was filled with a kaleidoscope of emotions. Initially it was the sheer awesomeness, the thought that I was, more than likely, the only person on the planet experiencing this incredible view. Then a feeling of loneliness. The feeling that this incredible beauty should be shared and that whilst alone such experiences are special, but that no-one else can ever understand unless they are with you, having that same experience.







## Equipment

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### Climbing

We climbed all routes either as pairs or solo and this is reflected in the amount of gear we took. For ropes we took one set of 60m half ropes and a 60m single with a 60m tag line. This choice was due to a combination of ropes owned by the team and personal preference for climbing on half ropes vs single plus tag line.

We took 2 full racks, with the initial intention being to climb as two groups - one pair and one group of three. Al's early departure meant that all the routes we climbed were either done as a pair or solo. The majority of the climbing was on snow / ice and this was reflected with the rack carried on routes and the gear we placed. We often stripped down the rock gear to a minimum and carried a good selection of screws (6 - 8). A large amount of tat was also carried to allow a descent by numerous abalakov threads.

### Food

All food was bought on arrival in Osh, both in the market and from shops. With uncertainty on how we would get from the road to basecamp, we didn't want to overdo it and have excess food to carry down on the walk out. In the end we had almost exactly the right amount, but given that we bought food for five people but only had four for the majority of the trip this suggests we bought slightly less than might have been required.

**Breakfast** - Our standard basecamp breakfast was porridge, made with milk powder, along with raisins, honey and sugar. This was also supplemented with a variety of cereals for a few mornings, and some powdered baby food for alpine starts (an acquired taste and texture at 2am).



**Lunch** - Lunch was mainly a mixture of trail mix, cakes and chocolate bars plus occasionally some of the surplus carbs bought for evening meals. We bought around 7.2kg of trail mix (150g per person per day, for four people).

**Dinner** - We decided to buy a 50/50 split of basecamp and mountain food for evening meals, with a total of six of each. Mountain food mainly consisted of instant noodles, while evening meals at basecamp were a combination of pasta or rice along with dried meat, cheese, vegetables and a sauce.

## Tents / Shelter

**Basecamp** - Alpkit kindly provided us with a 3 person Zhota tent which was our permanent tent down at basecamp. This provided ample room for the 4 of us when we were sitting out bad weather and allowed us to cook under shelter. It was plenty big enough for 3 people to sleep in, however it would have been a bit of a squeeze for 4, and so we pitched one of the single skin tents when everyone was down at basecamp and one person slept in this.

**Mountains** - With the exception of Peak 6, all the other routes we attempted were done following a night spent on the glacier. We took two 2 person single skin tents with us, and apart from one night spent bivvying by George and Clay, all other nights were spent in a tent. This meant time spent up on the glacier was a little more comfortable for very little extra weight.

## Cooking

**Basecamp** - Our initial plan was to use multi-fuel stoves whilst down at basecamp to reduce the number of gas canisters we needed to carry in. We had difficulty finding suitable fuel in Bishkek and in the end we had to make do with aviation fuel. This was a poor substitute for cleaner fuels and along with the noxious fumes and covering cooking equipment in a thick layer of soot, it clogged the stoves to the point where they needed constant cleaning and maintenance to keep them working. We soon calculated that we had enough gas canisters to use the gas stoves down at basecamp as well as when in the mountains, and so we relied on these for the rest of the trip.

**Mountains** - We took one Jetboil and two small gas stoves to use in the mountains and were able to purchase fifteen gas canisters in Bishkek from ITMC. We decided to leave a few of these behind in the village at the bottom of the valley and only took eleven up to basecamp with us. Despite issues with the multi fuel stoves and the subsequent use of gas down at basecamp we still had plenty to cook all our meals.







## Communication

### Satellite Phone

A Thuraya XT Lite satellite phone was purchased by Emily shortly before the expedition. We received daily weather forecasts on the phone (sent for free through the Thuraya website), and it was carried by one pair when in the mountains. Unfortunately the phone reacted badly to the altitude and the screen became damaged during the second week preventing us from reading or sending messages although it was still possible to make phone calls. The damaged screen was fixed under warranty on return to the UK.

### SPOT Satellite GPS Messenger unit

This was primarily used as our back up method of communicating with the outside world and was purchased by George, along with a year's subscription before the expedition. The SPOT was carried by the pair that didn't have the satellite phone, meaning both pairs had a way of raising the alarm in an emergency.

The device is capable of sending out four different messages at the push of a button: the first two are pre-programmed with a personal message and the second two are meant for SOS situations and can notify the relevant rescue services of your location and state of distress. We used the SPOT to regularly post updates to Twitter and our expedition website at [www.muzkol2015.co.uk](http://www.muzkol2015.co.uk) during the trip.

### Walkie Talkies

We took a pair of 8km range walkie talkies with us and carried them when at least one of the teams was either on the glacier or in the mountains. We agreed 2x one-hour slots per day during which both pairs would turn on their walkie talkies and check in.

The proximity of the mountains to basecamp, along with the layout of the mountains, meant that we were almost always within range of each other. This gave an extra method of communication which proved especially reassuring on the few occasions where one member of the team was climbing solo.

### Power Packs

A couple of power packs were taken by the team, including one solar charged pack. These allowed charging via USB of the satellite phone, cameras, mp3 players etc.





## Logistics

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We decided from the beginning that our access to Tajikistan would be overland via the border crossing at the Kyzylart pass, since flying directly into Dushanbe (Tajikistan's capital) would have resulted in a two day overland journey to Muzkol. As it turned out, this was a great decision for the road to Muzkol from Dushanbe via Khorog was washed away in heavy rain a month before our departure which would have made the journey impossible.

### Getting to Kyrgyzstan

Al, George and Clay all flew from Heathrow to Osh via a change in Moscow on a combination of BA and S7 Airlines. Emily flew with Turkish Airlines from Geneva to Bishkek via Osh. Having spent the previous weeks in India, James flew from Delhi to Almaty, Kazakhstan and then travelled overland to Bishkek to join Emily and then onwards to Osh.

James would not recommend the road journey from Almaty as an entry point to Kyrgyzstan unless "you enjoy a 10 hour sauna in an earthquake".



## Osh to Muzkol

We arranged transport to Muzkol through Gulnara Apandieva who is the Chair of PO "Fazoi Pamir" and a director and translator for META (although the transport was arranged privately by her). Her contact details are:

Gulnara Apandieva

Chair of PO "Fazoi Pamir"

Director, Translator of META

91, Osh 2 str., 736600 Murghab, GBAO

E-mail: [a.gulnara.a@rambler.ru](mailto:a.gulnara.a@rambler.ru)

E-mail: [director@meta.tj](mailto:director@meta.tj)

Skype: gulnara.apandieva

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/gulnara.apandieva>



## Access to basecamp

One of the biggest gambles of the trip was whether we would find anyone living in the valley (as our conversations with the Latvian expedition suggested there might be) or whether we would be forced to undertake a 13kg load carry at altitude on the second day of the expedition.

Fortunately, Akilbek Zhanybaev and his family live in yurts in the AkBaikal valley during the summer months and we were able to pay for a lift up the valley in his 4x4. We hired two donkeys from him for the return journey two weeks later.

## Visas / Permits

### Kyrgyzstan

British nationals don't need a visa to enter and stay for up to 60 days.



## Tajikistan

Visiting the GBAO in Tajikistan requires both a general tourist visa (£20), along with a permit for the GBAO (£50), which can be applied for with a single application. In order to ensure our visa applications went through as quickly and smoothly as possible, we sent the following information:

- Covering letter giving an overview of the trip
- Passport
- Print out of flight tickets
- Colour photocopied picture of the photo page of passport
- One passport photo
- Special delivery bag to post it back (bought from the Post Office)

With this information, the visa applications were processed and returned in around one week. James' initial visa application was rejected, possibly due to a lack of flight details. A last minute trip to the embassy in London with further details and chocolates for the embassy staff went through with no issues.

## Access to the GBAO

On a number of occasions over the past few years the GBAO has been temporarily closed to foreigners, mainly due to fighting between locals and government forces (See more at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/73446>). Most recently was a closure in May 2015 that last around four days. A good source of up to date information for the region is META, which has a regularly updated Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/META-Murghab-EcoTourism-Association-310272659015481>.

## Park Fees

During the drive back to Osh, we were flagged down by a man who was claiming to be a Park Ranger for the Pamir National Park. Despite appearing to have legitimate ID we were suspicious because of the large fee he was requesting given we'd never heard of Park fees (around \$50 - we couldn't work out whether this was for the whole group or per person due to the language barrier). We agreed to meet him down at the next village where we were stopping for food, and after hanging around for a while he disappeared without further requests for money. The following information (taken from <http://www.pamirs.org/visas.htm>) suggests we were probably right to be suspicious, given 10 Somoni is less than £1:

*"There is also a fee of 10 Somoni payable on entering National Parks and other protected areas. However, beware of scams: some unscrupulous*





*individuals pose as Park rangers at places where there is definitely no National Park and try to collect much higher fees (the National Parks and other protected areas are clearly marked on Markus Hauser's maps). Some border guards and local police may try the same trick. Ask for documentary proof that an individual is authorised to collect fees and threaten to go to the police - again, bluff is a good weapon."*

## Border Crossing

Crossing the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan involved paying a lot of small bribes at each of the buildings in turn (~\$1 per person at each of seven checkpoints). Our driver handled this for us.

We found that a great way to ensure the border crossing went smoothly was to pick up the hitch-hiking border staff on route to the checkpoint. Our record was three chubby border guards and one other lady, plus our driver and four of us in a 5 seater.

## Insurance

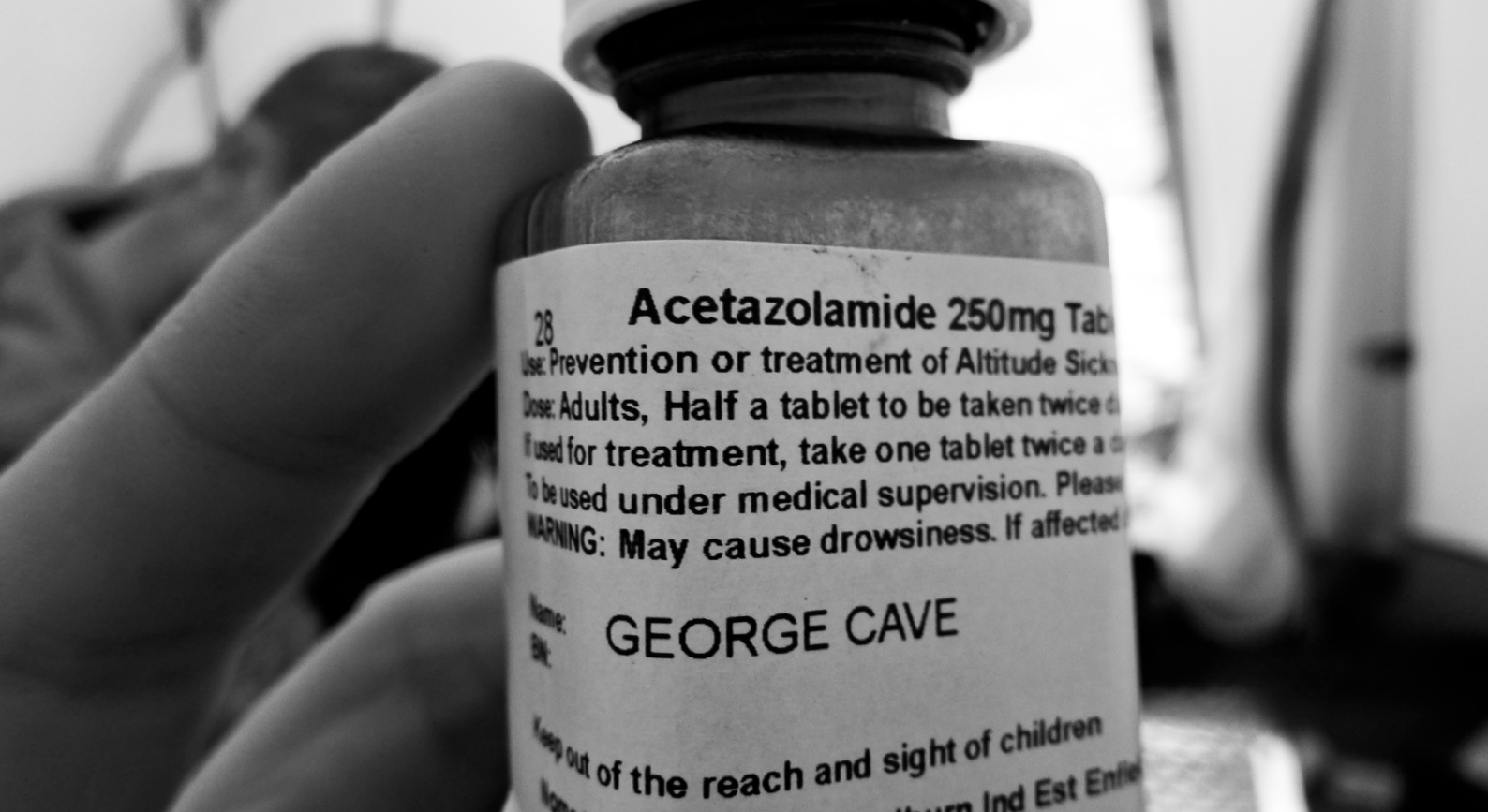
All the team members took out insurance that covered rescue, medical costs and repatriation, but decided not to get cover for lost possessions, curtailment, cancellations etc due to cost. Emily was covered through her Club Alpin Francais membership, whilst James, George, Al and Clay are all members of the Austrian Alpine Club and have the relatively basic cover that comes with this. During 2015 both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had a reciprocal healthcare agreement with the UK, meaning hospital treatment and some dental treatment was free. This agreement is due to terminate as of 1st January 2016.

George, Al and Clay also took out cover with Global Rescue, which isn't an insurance policy in the traditional sense, however the company "provides life-saving services for a member's transport from the point of illness or injury, no matter how remote, back to their choice of home country hospital." Below is their summary of the situation in Tajikistan as of July 2015, and we found them to be extremely helpful and quick to respond to any queries:

*"We have indeed done evacuations out of Tajikistan in the past and do work with local rescue organizations there. It is important to note that Tajikistan has large areas that are restricted military land and performing rescues out of these areas is very difficult. Also, all helicopters are owned and operated by the military. Gaining access to air assets in Tajikistan can take some time, and is up to the military as to when they allow a rescue mission to take place."*







## First Aid and Injuries

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Due to the remote location of the expedition it was important that any minor medical problems could be dealt with by the team and hence an extensive medical kit was procured. All of the team members had previously attended at the very least a 16-hour remote area first aid course, however a few of the team had more extensive first aid training and real life experience of dealing with injuries and illnesses in the mountains.

The two main complaints on the expedition were traveller's diarrhoea and altitude sickness. With the extremely quick ascent to altitude (1000m to 4300m in around 12 hours, then up to 4600m 12 hours later) a degree of altitude sickness was to be expected for the team members who were not already acclimatised. In an ideal situation this ascent would have been done over a longer period, however the time restraints on the trip meant we all agreed this was our best option. Unfortunately a combination of traveller's diarrhoea picked up whilst food shopping in Osh and altitude sickness meant that Al took the decision to descend back to Osh following a rough night at 4300m. A few of the team took Diamox for the first days of the expedition to reduce the risk of developing AMS, or at least lessening its severity. It's impossible to quantify how well the Diamox worked, however with the exception of a couple of tent bound days at the start of the expedition for Clay due to headaches and nausea the altitude didn't cause too many problems.

### Medical Kit

Each team member carried their own general medication such as paracetamol and diarrhoea relief (one team member was known to be allergic to penicillin and hence required specific antibiotics). The group medical kit was to be used for specific ailments requiring stronger prescription medication:

- Ciprofloxacin 250mg tabs (40 days worth)



- Azithromycin 500mg tabs (9 days worth)
- Co-Amoxiclav 625mg tabs (14 days worth)
- Tetracaine 1% minimum (x5)
- Flourescein 1% drops (x5)
- Anusol Cream
- Bactroban Cream
- Tramadol
- Co-Codamol 500mg/30mg tabs (x100)
- Prochlorperazine 3mg buccal tabs (x10)
- Acetazolamide (Diamox) 250mg tabs (x28)
- Dexamethasone 2mg tabs (x20)
- Nifedipine MR 10mg tabs (x28)

It can be difficult to acquire prescription only drugs in the UK for use on expedition through your GP, so we purchased these through Nomad Pharmacy. This arrangement was possible because George had completed a Wilderness Medical Training first aid course.

## Vaccinations

Information about vaccinations was provided through <http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk>:

- Confirm primary courses and boosters are up to date as recommended for life in Britain
- Courses or boosters usually advised: Hepatitis A; Tetanus; Typhoid.
- Other vaccines to consider: Cholera; Hepatitis B; Rabies.

All of the team members opted out from getting optional vaccinations due to the remote location of the expedition and low risk.

The area of Tajikistan we visited (Gorno-Badakhstan) is classified as having a "variable risk" of malaria on the NHS Fit For Travel website. This is defined as an area where antimalarials would usually be advised. However, the WHO website says the following: "The risk of malaria exists throughout the country, except in areas above 2500 m". Given we never descended to anywhere near 2500m whilst in Tajikistan there was no real risk of contracting malaria, and no precautions were taken.





# Expedition Accounts

We were grateful for the large quantity of grants received from the Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council, Alpine Club and Austrian Alpine Club UK (OeAV Sektion Britannia). Our experience of running several previous expeditions enabled us to run a very tight account – resulting in a very good value expedition!

It should be noted that the accounts do not include the additional ~£500 cost each for George and Clay's new flights home!!

Item	Expenditure	Income
Flights	£1,749.77	
In-county travel (to/from Osh)	£89.85	
Accommodation in Osh	£160.88	
Fuel (gas & aviation fuel for camp)	£49.37	
Food	£130.91	
Satphone / SPOT tracker	£130.00	
Visas (including GBAO permits)	£350.00	
Insurance	£487.50	
4x4 transport from Osh to valley	£627.45	
4x4 and donkeys from valley to basecamp	£132.16	
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£3,907.89</b>	
MEF Grant		£1,350.00
BMC Grant		£600.00
Alpine Club Grant		£800.00
Austrian Alpine Club UK		£800.00
<b>Total Grant Contributions</b>		<b>£3,550.00</b>
<b>Personal contributions</b>		<b>£357.89</b>
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>£3,907.89</b>