

Alichursky Mountains Ski Expedition

**A report on the exploration and unclimbed peaks of the Bazar-Dara Valley
in the Tajikistan Pamirs**

8-30th April 2016

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Stefan Jachmich at Camp 3, 4,525m

**Sponsored by the Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council, the
Julie Tullis Memorial Fund and the Austrian Alpine Club**

Members:

Alex Reid (in absentia) Derek Buckle, Anna Bushe, Stefan Jachmich

With thanks to Kudaibergen Mamadiev and Jyrgal of Pamir Central Asia

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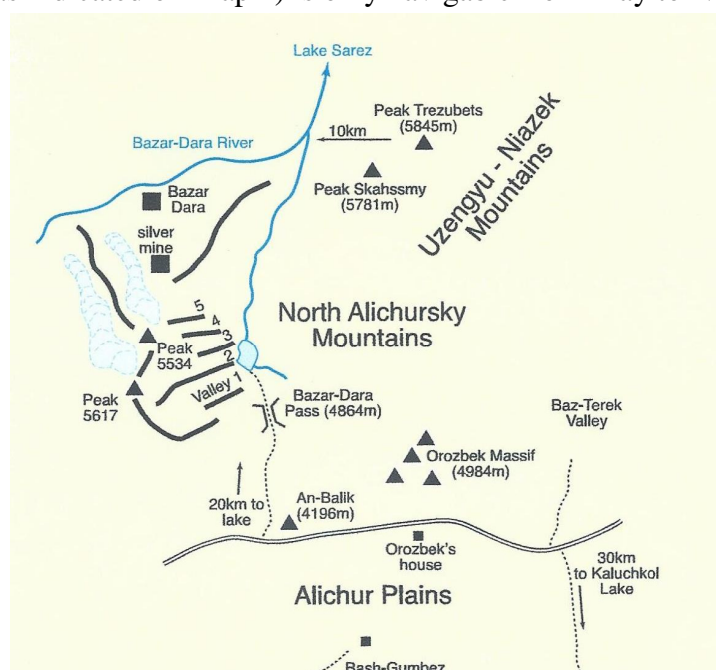
Summary:

Over a period of three weeks between the 8th and 30th April 2016 the team travelled to the Bazar-Dara Valley in the Alichur range of the Tajikistan Pamir. After first flying to Osh in Kyrgyzstan the border was crossed at the 4,280m Kyzylart Pass before passing the Karakul lake en route to Murgab. From Murgab a short drive led to the road-head at Bazar-Dara from where it was necessary to continue northwards on ski to a series of camps leading to the final camp near Bazar-Dara lake. This is thought to be the first visit to the valley under essentially winter conditions.

From the two higher camps members of the team made what are believed to be first ascents of three peaks; PK4985 (which we named Pik Perestroika) *via* its south ridge on 14th April, PK4918 (which we named Pik Glasnost) *via* its south face on 16th April and PK5021 (which we named Pik Druzhba) *via* its southwest gully and west ridge on 20th April, in addition to exploring several of the major side valleys of the Bazar-Dara Valley.

Introduction:

The inspiration for our expedition to Tajikistan came from a lecture by Matt Traver at the Alpine Club in July 2014. Matt and a colleague, Jamie Bunchuk, travelled to the Alichursky mountains in September 2013 to make a documentary about a Kyrgyzstani-Tajik hunter and herder called Orozbek and while there ventured into both the north and south Alichursky mountains. He subsequently published an account in the *Alpine Journal*.¹ From the photographs that Matt showed it seemed as though the terrain bordering the Bazar-Dara Valley in the northern Alichursky range (see map 1) would offer good ski-mountaineering opportunities and on discussing this with him he agreed that this was so. Access to this area is easy during the summer months as a well-defined track follows the valley to a disused silver mine to the north of the Bazar-Dara pass. According to the Russian military map this 4,464m pass (not 4,864m as indicated on Map 1) is only navigable from May to November.



Map 1. North Alichursky range taken from M. Traver, *Alpine Journal*, 89-93, **118**, 2014

Little information exists concerning the mountains bordering the Bazar-Dara pass and undoubtedly many are unclimbed. Matt himself did not attempt any near the pass nor did he have the opportunity to explore the side valleys marked on his sketch map. Moreover, it is improbable that anyone, mountaineers or otherwise, have ventured far into the Bazar-Dara valley under conditions of heavy snow cover. It was our intention to ski into the valley from the highest possible point navigable by a four-wheel drive car and to establish a base camp at or near the Bazar-Dara lake. From here we planned to explore the adjacent valleys and attempt some of the presumed unclimbed peaks in the vicinity.

The Climbing Team:



Alex Reid, 25, (Leader in absentia), British, Medical student (3rd Year) and part time Outdoor Instructor (WML and MIA trained). AC member. Extensive Scottish winter and mountaineering experience, multiple trips to the Alps in summer and winter. Previous expedition experience to Kyrgyzstan (Djangart), 7 first ascents of 4-5000m peaks and attempt at Khan Tengri. Leads rock VS 4c, winter IV and mountaineering to AD, competent ski-tourer.



Derek Buckle, 71, British; Part-time consultant, essentially retired. AC member & past VP. Has extensive mountaineering experience throughout the world; notably Tibet, Greenland, Kyrgyzstan (Tien Shan), Tajikistan (Pamirs), Russia & Georgia (Caucasus), India (Garhwal, Himachal Pradesh, Zanskar), China, South America (Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador), Antarctica (Antarctic Peninsula) and numerous trips to the Alps. He has made over 60 mountain first ascents plus many first British ascents and new routes. Leads rock to 5a/5b, ice to WI5, Mountaineering to TD and is a competent ski-tourer.



Anna Bushe, 31. British, Outdoor instructor, (WML, ski mountain leader and SPA). AC member. Ski touring experience in the Alps and Scotland. Experience of summer mountaineering to AD, UK multi-pitch summer and winter climbing.



Stefan Jachmich, 44, German, Physicist. Presently working at a Research Centre in UK. AC Member. Climbing experience in Britain and the Alps (rock and ice). Extensive ski touring experience, mostly self-guided tours, in Alps and Norway. Participated in expeditions to Greenland, Antarctica and China, which included several first ascents up to 2770m height and grades AD.

Support Staff & Administration:

In-country logistics were arranged by Kudaibergen Mamadiev of Pamir Central Asia, (www.pamirhighwayadventures.com), a company that has offices in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It was they that provided our letter of invitation which was an essential part of obtaining both our visas and permits. On arrival in Osh we were met by Jyrgal, who was to be both our driver and link man for both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In common with many other Kyrgyzstanis, Jyrgal lived with his family in the Tajik town of Murgab but spent a considerable amount of his time in Osh. He spoke reasonable English in addition to Russian and the local languages.



Jyrgal, our affable link man

Itinerary: (See also Appendix 1 {for daily itinerary} & 2 {for key GPS locations})

1. The journey to the Bazar-Dara road-head (See Map 2)



Map 2. Tajikistan and the Pamirs

Access to Tajikistan's eastern Pamirs is most easily accomplished through the Kyrgyz city of Osh rather than the more lengthy journey *via* the capital, Dushanbe. At the outset we had some concerns about visiting Tajikistan as the Foreign Office were advising against all bar

essential travel there despite the fact that their web site only quoted a single incident in 2014 (in Dushanbe). As it was difficult to get a more detailed perspective on the issues, I visited the Tajik Embassy early in January in the hope of some clarification. By chance, my unscheduled appointment led to a long discussion with the UK Ambassador who reassured us on all counts that the country was safe, that the border with Kyrgyzstan was open, and that we would have no problem obtaining permits to enter the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast; all of which as it turned out was true.



The team at Osh

All was going exceptionally well until virtually the last moment when Alex, the expedition leader, had to withdraw for pressing personal reasons. It was a disappointment to both him and the team, but after a quick change of logistics we were on our way. Our flights from the UK took us *via* Istanbul, where all three of the team finally got together, and from there

to Osh. At only about 1,000m Osh is not an ideal acclimatisation city so after the minimum of time

there we continued by car into Tajikistan following the main M41 trunk road south. On leaving the outskirts of Osh the potholed metalled road carves its way through the Pamiri chain passing few significant habitations until finally reaching the small town of Sary-Tash (3,615m) where we stopped for lunch. Sary-Tash is the turn-off for those wishing to see, or climb, Pik Lenin (7,134m), but we continued to climb south to the



Osh from Synaman-Too

Kyrgyz border. Some way further on the road reached its climax at the Kyzylart Pass (4,280m), close to the Tajik border post. Passing through each of the border posts was a convoluted affair (customs, drugs, military and passport controls) but was only time-consuming and not problematic.



Arrival in Tajikistan

Having passed through into Tajikistan the road slowly descends towards the Karakul Lake, which at this time of the year was frozen, before rising again to the Akbajtal Pass (4,655m). From this pass the road gradually descends to Murgab (3,630m) after an 8-9 hour day and a total of approximately 400km. Our overnight stay in Murgab was a welcome relief after the long drive and we were treated to a pleasant meal of Marco Polo sheep while our hostess stoked the individual coal fires in our bedrooms. On a good day Muztaghata (7,546m) can be seen from Murgab but on both the outward and return journeys it was hidden from view by hazy clouds.

Leaving early on 11th April we almost immediately crossed a military check-point but once again this was a formality rather than a problem. In cloudy weather, and with increasing quantities of snow on the road, we followed what appeared to be an endless line of Chinese lorries over the Najzatash Pass (4,314m) and towards Alichur. About 14km short of Alichur we stopped by a farmstead at the mouth of the Bazar-Dara Valley at 3,902m.² Deep snow clothed the track leading up the valley so we would be on foot from here and the start of our exploration proper.



Anna enjoying Murgab's hospitality

2. Exploration and climbing in the Bazar-Dara Valley (see Map 3)

In the mist it was not a pleasant prospect to leave the comfort of the car but within a short time we were geared up, our haul-bags attached and we were saying goodbye to Jyrgal. It



Leaving the Bazar-Dara road-head

would be almost two weeks before we met up again. Hauling around 30kg of food and equipment at almost 4,000m was a serious challenge to our sub-optimal acclimatisation schedule and all bar Stefan rapidly began to feel the strain. We had 20km to go to the Bazar-Dara lake and it became immediately obvious that this distance would take several days. On the first day we barely made 7km before being forced to make Camp 1 at 4,047m on a broad plateau in the centre of the valley.

It came as something of a relief when the poor weather predicted for the 12th April arrived with a vengeance. The night itself was broken by the howling of wolves and high winds and in the morning extensive blown snow was a serious problem. We decided to stay put and acclimatise further until the conditions improved. By the next morning the wind had abated so we decamped to move further up the valley. While we did not follow the summer track it was mostly visible one side or other of the valley and would serve as a useful marker in poor visibility. As it happens, we simply travelled along the broad valley bottom until conditions dictated otherwise. After passing a few derelict buildings the slope gradually increased and the going became more of an effort as poor acclimatisation began to take its toll. Eventually we stopped to make Camp 2 at 4,349m on a slightly inclined plateau some 6-7km from Camp 1 surrounded by a number of exploratory and climbing opportunities.



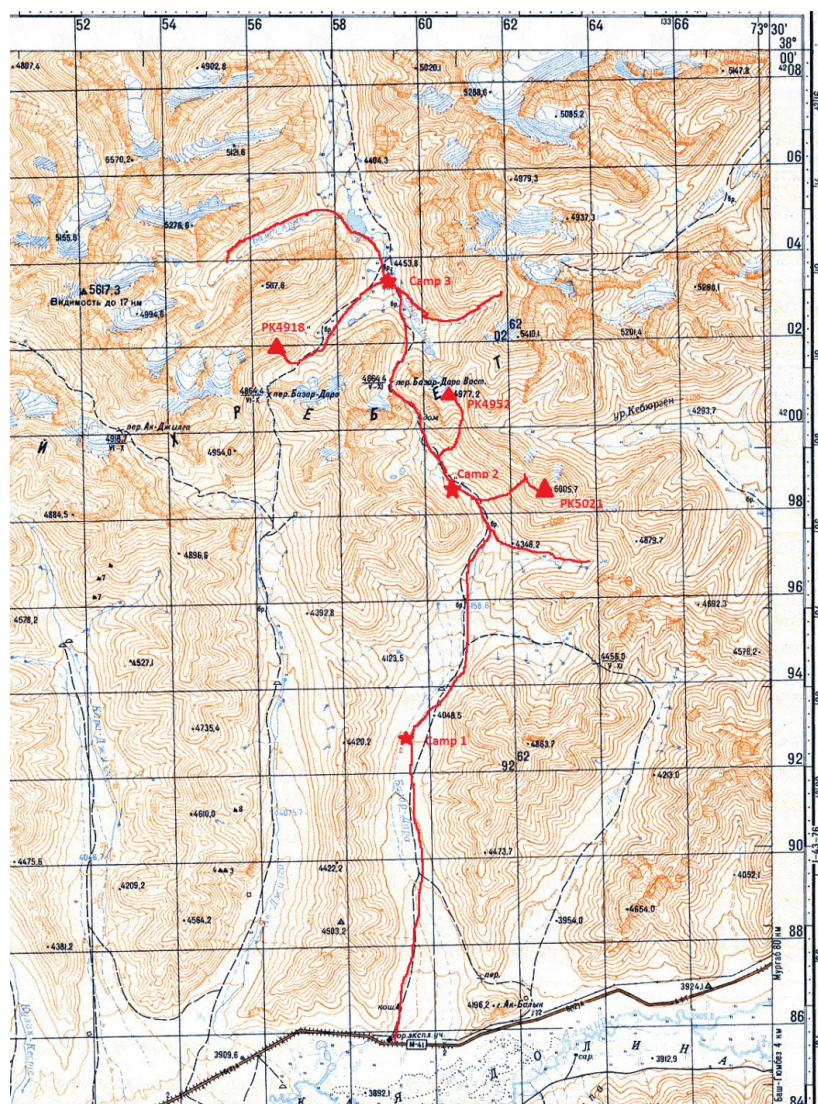
Camp 1, headaches and all



Camp 2 at 2,490m

We were awoken by bright sunlight on the morning of 14th April so a decision was taken to stash some food and as much of the technical equipment as possible at the 4,664m Bazar-Dara Pass so as to increase the chances of placing our final camp close to the Bazar-Dara lake. Stefan, as usual, hauled the heaviest load, but still managed to keep way ahead of Anna and myself. Under 3 hours (*ca.* 3km) later we were stashing

the gear and admiring the view from the pass. It was not possible to see the lake, however, as the pass meandered somewhat before dropping northwards to the lake. Skiing back to Camp 2 was a delight but on arrival Stefan, still bristling with energy, decided to climb the obvious peak to the NNE. Climbing the south ridge on skis until the last few metres gave access to the rocky summit at 4,952m to achieve what we believe was the first ascent. We subsequently named this peak Pik Perestroika in recognition of the Russian reformative movement that opened up Tajikistan to the West.



Map 3. 1:100K Russian map with camps and routes marked

The following day we broke camp to relocate near to the Bazar-Dara Lake. With lightened loads and greater acclimatisation the climb to the Pass was an easier affair than the previous day and it was a joy to ski up through the snow clad mountains. With the stash collected we then continued through the narrow pass before descending gradually to a broad snow-covered plateau at 4,525m where we situated Camp 3 some 4-5km beyond Camp 2 and about 2km south of the lake.



South face of Pik Perestroika from Camp 2



Stefan in the Bazar-Dara Pass

Establishing camp was an interesting affair since the snow had the consistency of a soft mousse. Once skis were taken off we sank half a metre and ended up wallowing up to our thighs. The only way to move around easily was to forge a consolidated trench around the tents and to the selected toilet area. We realised that to enter this valley on foot at this time of the year would be impossible.

The 16th April was another fine day on which the plan was to explore the valley to the west of the camp (designated Valley 1 in Map 1¹). Skirting the foot of the massive immediately to the west took us easily into the valley where we saw abundant evidence of recent avalanches, particularly on the southern faces. Keeping well towards the valley centre we kept left of the central peak that sported a snow ridge and gully leading directly to its apex. At this point Anna decided to return to camp while Stefan and I zigzagged up the 35-40° face to reach the short rocky ridge



Anna testing the snow depth at Camp 3



Stefan reaching the summit of Pik Glasnost

that lead to the summit. Scrambling over this ridge was a treacherous affair on account of the non-supportive snow, but we eventually covered the 150-200m to make the first ascent of PK4918 which we subsequently called Pik Glasnost in recognition of the Openness Programme associated with Perestroika. The



Stefan and the Pik Glasnost panorama

summit afforded magnificent views, particularly towards the southwest. A superb ski took us back to the valley where Stefan narrowly avoided a crown-wall avalanche by fortuitously falling after striking a hidden rock. We heard the sound of the break before realising how close it was to our line of return. It did not take a second though to ski lower into the valley well away from any further danger. It was becoming abundantly clear that we would not be able to climb any peak at this time of the year unless on skis because of the unconsolidated nature of the snow.



The narrowly avoided avalanche

The next day we left to explore the valley almost due east of Camp 3. We climbed up the easy valley slopes taking care to avoid the extensive avalanche debris descending from the slopes to the south, but on reaching 4,924m it became obvious that this valley offered no ascent possibilities. A combination of this and the onset of incoming clouds dictated a retreat to camp. The afternoon gradually became mistier with some snow flurries, as if to vindicate our decision.

By the morning of 18th April the weather had improved but Anna decided on a rest day while Stefan and I skied down to the lake to investigate Valley 2. Unfortunately even on skis the snow failed to support our weight and we ploughed a deep trench up the valley to a height of 4,587m before deciding to call it a day. Despite the poor snow conditions the valley did not appear to offer any peaks suitable for ski mountaineering, or any other type of climbing for that matter! One interesting observation was that the



The uninviting Valley 2



Looking north to Bazar-Dara lake and beyond

snow cover to the north of the Bazar-Dara Pass was noticeably higher than that to the south. As we looked northwards it disappeared at around 4,400m and the lower mountain slopes were essentially bare. The trudge back up to camp was exhausting but we did notice an abundance of animal tracks, thought to be those of marmots, that seemed to have a preference for following the compressed snow made by our skis.

By now it was becoming clear that there were few additional climbing opportunities within easy reach of Camp 3 so we planned to relocate back to Camp 2. Climbing the 150m back to the pass was a relatively leisurely affair after which we skinned through the easy angled

terrain until it steepened and we were able to ski back to the site of Camp 2 where we re-pitched our tents.

Following a particularly cold night on the 20th April we planned to attempt the 5,000m peak to the south-east of the camp. An easy skin led across the snow-covered track after which we made a rising traverse to meet the broad gully descending roughly south-westwards towards the valley. As the slope steepened we zig-zagged up the excellent, stable snow to reach a corniced col at



Derek taking a break at the Bazar-Dara Pass



The west ridge of Pik Druzhba

4,856m. At this point Anna elected to return while Stefan and I continued approximately eastwards to the base of a short, rocky outcrop. Continuing on foot we reached the compact summit to make the first ascent of PK5021 (marked as 5,006m on the Russian map) which we named Pik Druzhba (Friendship Peak), by continuing the theme of Russian openness. Returning to our skis, a brilliant ski led directly back to camp to complete an excellent day out.

The next day we awoke to a cloudy but bright day on which we skied down the valley to the first major side valley on the left (east). We then skinned up this valley in the hope of climbing the 4,879m peak at its head. After much deliberation we continued eastwards to skin up a broad couloir that led to a fine col at 4,629m that had a rocky pinnacle at its mid-point. Since neither PK4879 nor any other easily skiable peak was



Anna & Stefan on the 4,629m Col

possible from this col we decided on discretion before skiing back to



The rocky pinnacle on the 4,629m Col

camp. We observed that the snow cover by now was diminishing rapidly and the mountains were considerably barer than when we arrived. Moreover the exposed rock on these peaks is highly fragmented and unstable and deemed by us to be unsuitable for climbing on foot even if the intervening snow was firm enough to allow travel on foot.

As it snowed somewhat overnight we delayed moving about the next day and before too long a certain degree of communal lethargy had set in. Eventually we agreed to remain in camp hoping for better conditions on the morrow when we planned to relocate back to Camp 1. The 23rd April dawned fine and the early sun quickly roused us from our sleeping bags and

energised us to get moving. By now there was a certain degree of euphoria about closing the gap between us and the road-head but our inability to get the satellite phone to register with the provider was making the logistics of an early pick-up quite demanding. Nonetheless, we decamped and some 3 hours later had arrived back at the site of Camp 1, where, by some strange magic, Anna managed to connect with Jyrgal on the satellite phone. While we still do not know why we had



The home straight to the road-head

problems connecting at the higher camps there was now a strong urge to reach civilisation and get some proper R&R so we arranged to be collected from the road-head at midday on 24th April.



Excavating the car

As it turned out this was a good decision for several reasons. First and foremost there were no exciting climbing opportunities from Camp 1 now that so much snow had evaporated, but, just as importantly, one of the dehydrated meals was contaminated and I was wracked with food poisoning. Acute D&V is unpleasant at the best of times, but stuck in a tent with outside nightly temperatures plummeting to below -10°C it is not something to be recommended. While the others appeared to operate as normal my efforts to dismantle the tent and tow the haul-bag to the road-head were comparatively dismal and it was a struggle all the way. Eventually we reached the road-head only to find that, for some unknown reason, Jyrgal had decided to try his hand at snow driving and managed to get the car stuck in a significant drift. Fortunately an hour or so later it was extricated and back on terra firma ready for the journey back to Murgab.

3. The return to Osh

Before leaving the UK Matt Traver had asked if we could deliver some photographs and films to Orozbek who, in the summer, lived with his family in a yurt on the Alichur Plain.



The yurt at Murgab

With large quantities of snow remaining on the Plain it was unlikely that the family would have moved from their winter residence in Bash-Gumbez and this turned out to be the case. With a shortage of available time we therefore gave the package to a hunter/herder at the junction of the main road with Bash-Gumbez who knew Orozbek and promised to deliver it before continuing on to Murgab.

With a day to spare in Murgab we visited the Madyan hot springs some 30-40km from the town. Until 4 years ago these springs were regularly frequented by the locals, and had a herder in residence, but a major land-slide had obliterated the original road and now they were only accessible *via* a very rough track suitable only for 4-wheel drive vehicles. As a result they received few visitors and were in a poor state of

repair, but usable nevertheless. We managed to soak for well over an hour at a luxurious 44°C before returning to Murgab.

On 26th April we retraced our route back to Osh where we completed the round of tourist activities. These included a walk up to Synaman-Too, the triple-headed outcrop overlooking the town, a day trip to see the 12th Century minaret (fire tower) and its associated mausoleum at Yzgon, and a trip into the Kyrgyz-Ata national park, one of only two such parks in Kyrgyzstan.



The dilapidated hot springs at Madyan

By now our time was exhausted and on 30th April we flew back to the UK via Istanbul.

Future opportunities in the region:

In contrast to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan is comparatively rarely visited by western mountaineers. To some extent this probably reflects the additional bureaucracy required to enter Tajikistan but it may also be on account of the Foreign Office recommendation to go only if essential. In 2006 when I last visited the country, as part of an Alpine Club expedition,³ corruption was rampant among officials, and it may possibly be still, but we did not encounter any problems at all during our visit.



The panorama at Camp 3

Literally hundreds of mountains in the height range 4,000-5,000m border the Bazar-Dara Valley. Undoubtedly some of the easier lower peaks have been ascended when the track over the Bazar-Dara Pass is open (May to November) but it is unlikely that any have received ascents under winter conditions. From our experience to enter this valley under snow without skis would be foolhardy and, even with skis, avalanches can be prevalent and significant. Rock climbing appears to be a non-starter on account of the fragmented, unstable nature of the strata. Similarly, many of the 'attractive' steep faces are unlikely to yield to assaults unless the hapless climber enjoys the prospect of continuous post-holing and trenching!

Conclusion:

Ski-mountaineering in the Bazar-Dara Valley was an interesting experience which would have been heightened by a more prolonged acclimatisation period. A longer stay in Murgab, or possibly a day or two in Alichur, would have been advisable but these towns offer very little in the way of attractions for those spending extended periods in them. As it was we successfully established three camps in the Bazar-Dara from which we explored several of

the side valleys and accomplished the first ascents of three significant peaks in the region of 5,000m.

Income & Expenditure:

INCOME:

MEF Grant:	£1,000.00
BMC Grant	£ 550.00
Jullie Tullis Memorial Fund	£ 200.00
Austrian Alpine Club Grant:	£ 600.00
MCoFS Grant	£ 200.00
Additional personal contributions:	<u>£2,971.00</u>
Total:	£5,521.00

EXPENDITURE:

Flights to and from Osh:	£2,040.00
Visas & permits:	£ 300.00
Insurance:	£ 250.00
Satellite phone:	£ 53.00
Dehydrated meals and other mountain food:	£ 300.00
In-country costs (to Pamirs Central Asia):	£2,228.00
Miscellaneous in-country expenses	<u>£ 350.00</u>
Total:	£5,521.00

Bibliography & Notes:

1. M. Traver, *Alpine Journal*, 89-93, **118**, 2014
2. Heights of camps and key waypoints are GPS measurements unless otherwise noted
3. T. Sparrow, *Alpine Journal*, 27-39, **112**, 2007

Maps:

A 1:500,000 English language map of Tajikistan is available but by far the most useful is the 1:100,000 Russian Military map J43-075 which is available free on-line. Copies are also available from the Alpine Club library collection.

Satellite pictures are freely available from Google Earth, www.googleearth.com

Sponsors:

The expedition was supported by the following sponsors to whom we are especially grateful:



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Julie Tullis Memorial Fund



Austrian Alpine Club



Mountaineering Council of Scotland

Appendix 1

Daily Itinerary:

Friday 8 th April (Overnight on plane and Osh)	Whole team met in Istanbul for the continuation flight to Osh where we met with Jyrgal our driver and in-country link man.
Saturday 9 th April (Overnight hotel in Osh)	An easy day in Osh visiting the bazaar for last minute provisions and enjoying the excellent Kyrgyz food.
Sunday 10 th April (Overnight hotel in Murgab)	Made the arduous 8 hour (400km) drive to Murgab <i>via</i> Sary-Tash and the border at the 4,280m Kyzylart Pass.
Monday 11 th April (Established Camp 1 at 4,057m)	Continued the relatively short drive south to the 3,902m high Bazar-Dara road-head a little before Alichur from where we began the 7km walk in to Camp 1.
Tuesday 12 th April (Camp 1 at 4,057m)	After a snowy night strong winds and blown snow confined the team to the tents. A good opportunity to acclimatise further.
Wednesday 13 th April (Camp 2 at 4,390m)	Decamped to relocate north to Camp 2 on a snow plateau some 6km further up the valley beyond a derelict group of buildings.
Thursday 14 th April (Camp 2 at 4,349m)	Carried a stash of gear and food to the Bazar-Dara pass at 4,664m before returning to Camp 2. With energy to spare Stefan skinned up PK4982 (named Pik Perestroika by us) NNE of camp <i>via</i> its south ridge to make the first ascent.
Friday 15 th April	Decamped to relocate to Camp 3 on a snowy plateau 4-5km further

(Camp 3 at 4,525m)	north on the far side of the Bazar-Dara pass, collecting the stash en route.
Saturday 16 th April (Camp 3 at 4,525m)	Explored the valley due west of camp (Termed Valley 1 by Matt Traver) until it was possible to attempt the peak lying at the bifurcation of the split valley. At this point Derek and Stefan climbed the 35-40° south face on ski to the rocky summit ridge. This was climbed on foot to make the first ascent of PK4918 (named Pik Glasnost by us).
Sunday 17 th April (Camp 3 at 4,525m)	Explored the valley due east of Camp 3 to a high point of 4,924m. No obvious access to safe summits from here so returned to camp in poor conditions.
Monday 18 th April (Camp 3 at 4,525m)	While Anna rested at Camp 3 Derek and Stefan skied down to the Bazar-Dara lake to explore Valley 2. Although undulatory, this valley is relatively flat with some impressive views. With no obvious climbing opportunities under the prevailing conditions a high point of 4,587m was reached before returning to camp.
Tuesday 19 th April (Camp 2 at 4,349m)	With few remaining opportunities available the team decamped to re-cross the Bazar-Dara pass and return to Camp 2.
Wednesday 20 th April (Camp 2 at 4,390m)	In excellent conditions the team planned to attempt the peak southeast of camp 2. An easy ski led across the track from where a steep, broad south west gully was climbed to a corniced col at 4,856m. Derek and Stefan then continued roughly eastwards to the foot of PK5021 (named Pik Druzha by us) the last 5m of which were climbed on foot to make the first ascent. A brilliant ski led back to camp.
Thursday 21 st April (Camp 2 at 4,390m)	Following a windy night we skied down the valley to the first side valley on the left in the hope of climbing the 4,879m peak at its head. Skinning up the broad east facing broad couloir led to a fine col topped by a rocky pinnacle at 4,629m but as this offered little opportunity to progress further on ski we returned to camp.
Friday 22 nd April (Camp 2 at 4,390m)	Following a night of snow flurries a degree of group lethargy set in resulting in a day of rest to recoup lost energy.
Saturday 23 rd April (Camp 1 at 4,057m)	With little more to explore from Camp 2 the team relocated back to Camp 1 where a significant loss of snow cover was observed. Following a final attempt by Anna to get a response from the satellite phone a decision was made to exit the valley a few days early and return to civilisation.
Sunday 24 th April (Overnight hotel in Murgab)	Food poisoning from the night before vindicated our decision to leave early but it was still a struggle for Derek to haul and carry the 7km back to the road-head where we then had to excavate Jyrgal's car from deep snow drifts. A short drive took us back to Murgab with good food and hot showers.
Monday 25 th April (Overnight hotel in Murgab)	Visited the abandoned but still functional hot springs at Madyan some 30km from town, passing a collection of petroglyphs en route.
Tuesday 26 th April	Made the long drive back to Osh following the route by which we

(Overnight hotel in Osh)	entered Tajikistan.
Wednesday 27 th April (Overnight hotel in Osh)	Walked through the market area to climb Synaman–Too, the triple-headed outcrop overlooking Osh, from where a good view of the town was afforded.
Thursday 28 th April (Overnight hotel in Osh)	A day of real tourism involving a drive to Yzgon to see the 12 th Century minaret (watch tower) and associated mausoleum. Unfortunately the accompanying madrasa was destroyed in 1913 by the incoming Russians. A good opportunity to mingle with the local population in the extensive bazaar.
Friday 29 th April (Overnight hotel in Osh)	An exploratory visit to Kyrgyzz-Ata, one of Kyrgyzstan's two national parks situated 40km from Osh.
Saturday 30 th April (Home)	Up very early for the return flight to Istanbul and from there back to the UK.

Appendix 2

GPS Coordinates & Heights of Key Locations

Location	N coordinates	E coordinates	Height	Comment
Bazar-Dara road-head	37°47.703'	073°23.972'	3,902m	11/4/16, start towards camps
Camp 1	37°51.338'	073°24.379'	4,057m	11/4/16, flat plateau
Camp 2	37°54.557'	073°24.914'	4,390m	13/4/16, inclined plateau
Bazar-Dara Pass	37°55.787'	073°23.896'	4,664m	14/4/16, gear stash
PK4982 Pik Perestroika	37°55.678'	073°24.822'	4,982m, 4,977m on Russian map	14/4/16, 1 st ascent <i>via</i> S ridge
Camp 3	37°56.787'	073°24.077'	4,525m	15/4/16
PK4918 Pik Glasnost	37°56.284'	073°22.138'	4,918m	16/4/16, 1 st ascent <i>via</i> S face in Valley 1
High point in valley due E of Camp 3	37°57.033'	073°25.637'	4,924m	17/4/16, poor conditions, onset of deteriorating weather
High point in Valley 2	37°57.657'	073°21.651'	4,587m	18/4/16, no obvious climbing objectives
Col SE of Camp 2	37°54.727'	073°26.064'	4,856m	20/4/16, steep ascent of SW gully
PK5021 Pik Druzhba	37°54.506'	073°26.458'	5,021m, 5,006m on Russian map	20/4/16, 1 st ascent <i>via</i> SW gully and W ridge
Col SE of Camp 2	37°53.288'	073°27.162'	4,629m	21/4/16, no easy ski summits from here

Appendix 3

Weather:

The poor weather predicted for day 2 in the mountains resulted in high winds and extensive wind-blown snow. It kept us tent bound all day. Apart from this one day the weather pattern was consistently good during our stay, although distant visibility was sometimes limited. Temperatures hovered around -10°C overnight but with the rising sun they increased rapidly. Sun glare and facial burning were perennial problems. Conditions underfoot changed markedly during our trip. The extensive snow cover met on our arrival was considerably diminished when we departed two weeks later and the lower peaks were noticeably stripped of snow. It is worth mentioning that the snow that we encountered was of low load-bearing capacity. It was not unusual to sink up to half a metre or more on removing our skis; a particular problem when setting up camps and moving around the tents.

Appendix 4

Flora & Fauna:

While the Bazar-Dara Valley is undoubtedly used by the local herdsmen for grazing, the heavy snow cover on our arrival in early April disguised all vegetation. Tufts of coarse grass were beginning to break through on our departure, although there was no evidence of flowers. No trees grew in the valley.

Despite the absence of greenery wild animals did populate the valley. On the first night we heard what we assumed were wolves and the occasional large, but unidentified, bird could be seen. Later in the expedition large numbers of grouped footprints from what we assume were rodents (possibly marmots, although we did see one mountain hare) were observed. Interestingly, these frequently made use of the hardened ski tracks that we had made on the inward journey.



Animal tracks following the ski trail