

Jiptik Valley 2016



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Mental Test



Austrian Alpine Club (UK)
Österreichischer Alpenverein - Sektion Britannia

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1 Summary

In July 2016, our team of four (Ciaran Mullan, John Proctor, Phil Dawson & Robert Taylor) travelled to the Jiptik valley, part of the Pamir Alai range in south-west Kyrgyzstan. The main objective of the trip was the unclimbed north face of Muz Tok, with 3 other unclimbed peaks as possible side-objectives. Two members of the team, John Proctor & Robert Taylor, succeeded in climbing the face of the triangular pyramid which jutted out of Muz Tok towards the north, but were unable to surmount the short final head wall that linked this face to the true summit of Muz Tok. The three unnamed and unclimbed side-objectives were not summited and so remain possible first ascent opportunities for future expeditions.

2 Introduction

The idea of this expedition came about from John's previous attempt to reach the Jiptik valley in 2014 to climb the north face of Muz Tok, which was unsuccessful due to political reasons [1]. That expedition was forced to change plans and never reached the valley. Nonetheless the seed had been sown and the expedition idea emerged again late 2015 with John recruiting a new expedition team. Information about the area was gathered from other trip reports, Google Earth, John's previous experience and a book known as "The classification table" (Классификационная таблица) which documents all the Soviet era ascents of the region. Valuable information about access was also gained from a friend of the team, Tim Dobson, who went hiking in the Jiptik valley in 2013.

3 Planning and Organisation of the Trip

3.1 Transport

Ciaran, John and Phil flew to Osh from via Istanbul, whilst Rob travelled via Moscow. The former option is quicker and easier but Rob was limited by his job.

We employed the aid of Batken travel services to facilitate our journey by 4x4 from Osh to Batken and onwards to the trail head. Whilst this leg could have almost certainly been made cheaper by taking local public transport (Marshrutka or shared taxis along the route, the cost was considered worthwhile for increased efficiency and reduced stress. There is some anecdotal evidence that the local public transport can take routes with sections in Tajikistan and/or Uzbekistan – border crossings that may be permitted for locals but potentially problematic for wealthy foreigners. These issues are discussed in more detail in the 2014 report [1].

However, in 2014 there were two excursions across politically sensitive borders that could not be avoided, and this was what prevented the 2014 expedition from reaching the Jiptik / Karavshin area. West of Batken the road passed into Tajikistan (at Chorku), then back into Kyrgyzstan, then into the enclave of Tajikistan (Vorukh) inside Kyrgyzstan, then back into Kyrgyzstan. These borders regularly got closed due to fallings out between the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments, and/or locals, over the most trivial issues.

Since 2014 it appears that this difficult access situation has been improved enormously. Firstly, the new road has been completed which cuts out the need to pass into Tajikistan at Chorku. Secondly, Batken travel service has found a new approach to the Karavshin and Jiptik areas which cuts out the need to pass through Vorukh by hiking over a mountain pass which gets you into the Karavshin valley upstream of Vorukh. Clearly, these developments are most welcome. We suggest, that now is the time to go and climb those granite big walls in the Karavshin! This year, we all purchased Tajik visas in case it was necessary, but did not encounter a single checkpoint of any kind all the way from Osh to the new roadhead at Sary Zhaz.

3.2 Equipment

3.2.1 Clothing

Clothing was varied across the team but broadly consisted of lightweight waterproof jackets/overtrousers, insulated jackets, softshell/fleece midlayers and synthetic/merino baselayers. The technical clothing was a mix of brands (Rab, PHD, Patagonia etc.), though Ciaran mostly brought apparel designed and made by himself. Each team member had a pair of La Sportiva boots, either Nepal Extremes or Baturas. This clothing was generally sufficient to keep the team comfortable.

3.2.2 Shelter

The main tents used were an Alpkit Kangri and a Vango 2-3 person as basecamp (the Vango was also used for one acclimatization trip). Then for lightweight summit attempts one climbing pair had a Black Diamond Firstlight, and the other pair had a Rab tarp. We also all had some form of waterproof bivvy bag.

Each person had a warm to expedition standard down sleeping bag of different styles; two Alpkit Pipedreams, The North Face blue kazoo and Mountain Equipment Classic 750 (a womens length bag modified by Ciaran to be long enough).

3.2.3 Climbing Gear

Climbing equipment was taken on the premise that we would be climbing as two teams of two. Each team had a pair of 50m or 60m half ropes, a rack of nuts and cams and a selection of ice screws as well as the standard of crampons and two technical axes each. In addition, each team member had their own selection of glacier/ self-rescue gear (prusiks/ ascenders etc.)

3.2.4 Food

We brought a small amount of high nutritional value food from the UK with us:

Item	Quantity
Freeze dried meals	12
Energy gels	24
Energy bars	16
Effervescent sports drink tablets	2 (Tubes of 10)

Then the majority of our food was bought once we were in the city of Osh. We were able to buy most food items in the bazaar, and only a few items needed to be purchased from a supermarket-style shop. We bought basic carbohydrates consisting of rice, oats, pasta, noodles, potatoes and bread (a split between Kyrgyz-style white bread round that lasted about 1 week, and a dense black bread intended to last for 2-3 weeks, though some of it went mouldy within 1 week). Then we supplemented this with vegetables (onions, carrots, beetroot, tinned tomatoes, some fresh tomatoes) and sources of protein (tinned fish, beans, nuts). Spices were abundant in the market stalls and we were also able to pick up other foodstuffs such as cooking oil, milk powder, chocolate, dried fruit, more nuts, sweets, sugar & honey.

3.2.5 Cooking Equipment

We brought three liquid fuel stoves and two plastic 15L containers which we filled up at a petrol station near Batken. This decision was based on John's previous experience of attaining stove fuels in the country with petrol being the only choice, however on this trip our travel organiser, Zhunusbek, did have access to standard butane/propane gas canisters (which we turned down as we had no compatible stove attachments). We used two of the stoves (MSR XGK EX and MSR Whisperlite Universal) for most of the cooking, saving the third (another MSR XGK EX) in reserve to be a clean fully functional stove for use on the key summit attempts. All three stoves were still functional by the end of the trip, without needing any repairs. One of the 15L petrol containers (a generic plastic folding liquid container from Mountain Warehouse) sustained a small leak on the walk into basecamp, most likely due to undergrowth scraping against it as it was carried on a donkey. This led to worrying about running out of fuel later on in the trip, so we also did some of the cooking on an open fire in the hut by our basecamp, using wood we collected nearby.

3.2.6 First Aid and Medicines

A first aid kit was compiled using information from reports written by other expeditions, the Cicerone book "Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine", advice from John Proctor's former GP, Dr. Stuart Blair and advice from Drs. Michael Finegan and Paul Hine.

Here is what we took:

Medicines:

- Painkillers – Diclofenac, Ibuprofen, Paracetamol, Aspirin
- Altitude-related illnesses (see ref. [2] for detailed information on acute high-altitude illnesses and their treatments):
 - Acetazolamide [Diamox] (treatment for acute mountain sickness [AMS])
 - Dexamethasone (treatment for AMS and high altitude cerebral edema [HACE])
 - Nifedipine (treatment for high altitude pulmonary edema [HAPE])
- Metronidazole (antibiotic - main treatment for suspected giardia)
- Ciprofloxacin (antibiotic - main treatment for bacterial diarrhoea or suspected typhoid)

- Piriton (antihistamine)
- Imodium
- Sennocot
- ORS (Oral Rehydration Solution) – Dioralyte
- Insect repellent
- High factor suncream
- Domperidone (anti-nausea)

Instruments:

- Tweezers
- Safety pins
- Protective gloves
- scissors

Reference material:

“Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine”, Cicerone

Dressings & Wound care:

- Plasters of different sizes
- Plaster tape
- Blister coverings
- Gauze squares, absorbent pads, wound dressings of various sizes
- Bandages, slings
- Duct tape
- Sealed antiseptic wipes (alcohol based)

With regards to medical experience; John had completed a basic outdoor first aid course, Robert had a great deal of first aid training through his work formerly as a life-guard and latterly in the offshore industry and both Ciaran and Phil had both attended a basic outdoor first aid course organised by their hiking club.

Ciaran was ill during the walk in, Robert and Phil became ill at different times during the walk out. All three took ciprofloxacin, Robert also took metronidazole and imodium.

Malaria is not found in south-western Kyrgyzstan, for this reason we did not take anti-malarial medicine.

3.2.7 Power Supplies

To charge electronics devices brought and used whilst at basecamp (including one dedicated Garmin GPS device, 3 cameras, mobile phones [used for photography, GPS tracking, etc.] and multiple headtorches), we brought three separate sources of power:

- *Battery powered USB charger* - A device made by John that uses AA batteries to very efficiently charge devices via USB.
- *Selection of disposable batteries* - A mix of alkaline batteries mainly for headtorch use and to supply the battery powered USB charger.
- *Solar panel* - A budget (Clas Ohlson) solar panel with rechargeable power bank unit also used for charging phones and cameras. This panel was surprisingly useful and durable given the low cost (about $\frac{1}{5}$ of the price compared to panels marketed as outdoorsy or rugged), and took between 1-2 days to fully charge under the strong sunlight (could also operate through clear PVC window of the tent).

4 The Expedition

4.1 Map of Peaks in the Jiptik Valley

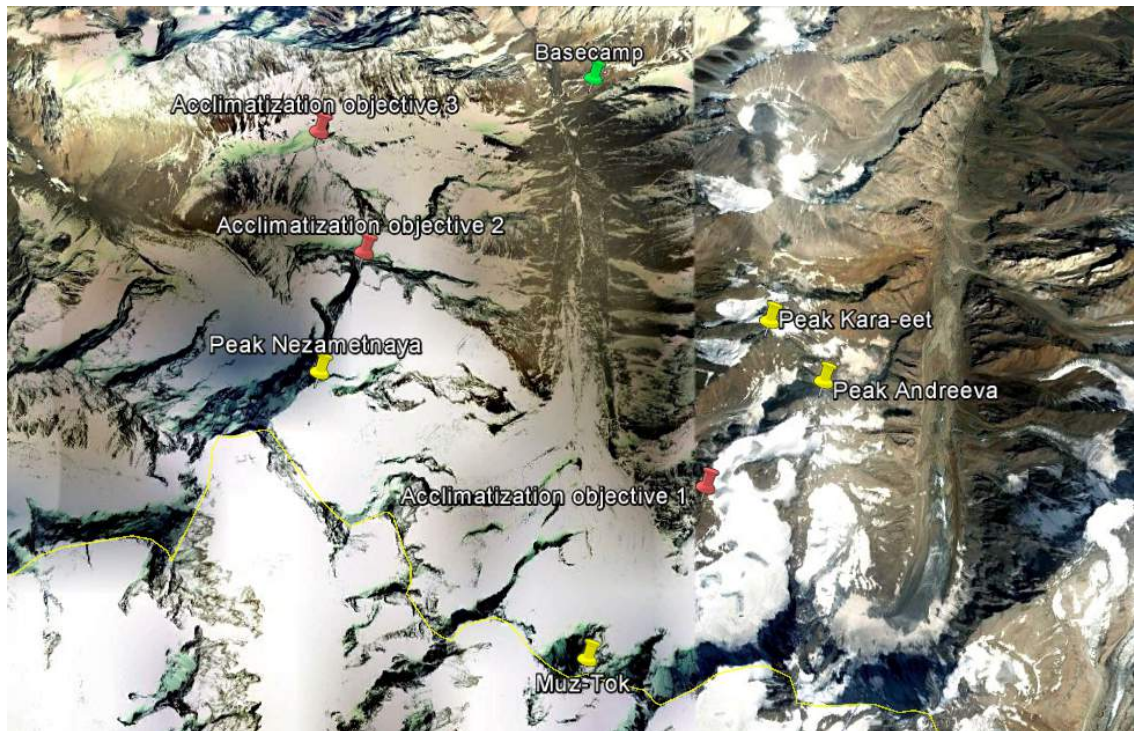


Figure 1: Satellite image of Jiptik valley with some key peaks highlighted. Red pins indicate unnamed and unclimbed peaks, yellow pins represent peaks ascended by at least one route. Map data: Google Earth [3].

4.2 Itinerary

- 29th June to 1st July - Ciaran, John & Phil arrived in Osh and acquired the supplies for basecamp.
- 2nd to 5th July - Ciaran, John & Phil travelled to Sary Zhaz (a small settlement at the end of the road) via Batken in a 4x4 vehicle. Then completed the walk in to basecamp in two and a half days.
- 6th to 7th July - Ciaran, John & Phil went for a first acclimatization trip, but did not summit the intended objective.
- 9th to 10th July - Ciaran, John & Phil went for the second acclimatization trip, altering the objective due to inaccessibility from an unclimbed peak to a new route on a named peak; Nezametnaya. However, did not complete the new route.
- 8th to 10th July - Rob completes the same walk in to basecamp after delays due to airline delays and missing baggage.
- 12th July - Ciaran, John & Phil walk to the base of Muz-Tok intent on an ascent of the north face starting around 10pm that night. Returned to basecamp as the face was not freezing enough to prevent rockfall.
Rob acclimatizes by summiting a subsidiary peak of Kara-Eet.

- 13th July - The whole team of four set off for similar plan of ascent of Muz-Tok north face. Heavy rain started and again the ascent was abandoned for that night.
- 15th to 17th July - John & Rob ascend the north face of Muz-Tok, though the summit was blocked by a further wall, so abseiled down rather than summiting descending the north west face.
- 16th to 17th July - Ciaran & Phil attempt the north face of Muz-Tok a day later but only reach the bergschrund before turning back due to warm conditions.
- 18th to 19th July - Ciaran & Phil set off to repeat the same subsidiary peak of Kara-Eet that Rob summited. Ciaran made the summit but Phil had to turn back.
- 20th to 21st July - All the team walk out from basecamp back to Sary Zhaz.

4.3 Accessing the Valley

We were picked up from the hostel in Osh in the morning by Zhunusbek (our local contact from Batken travel services) to drive to the road head, a nomad settlement named Sary Zhaz. The drive took the majority of the day and included an hour or so driving up a dried up river bed. The nomads had dug out a flat section of ground for tents to be pitched. Here we arranged our gear ready to be loaded onto donkeys for the walk in the following day (we took 6 donkeys to carry all our food and gear).

The first day, we crossed the high pass from Sary Zhaz into the Karavshin valley, stopping for the afternoon in an apricot orchard. We stopped early for the evening on the way up to the second high pass as Ciaran had become ill. Fortunately the drugs we'd taken with us did their job and he was mostly recovered by the morning.

A second long day took us out of the Karavshin valley, and down into the Jiptik valley, where we camped by the old soviet weather station From which a couple of hours took us to our base-camp a kilometer or so beneath the base of the Shchurovsky glacier where we there was a make-shift shepherds hut which we used for food storage and cooking.



Figure 2: Approximate map of the walk in route (seen in red) from the end of the road at Sary Zhaz to basecamp. Map is orientated north with the Jiptik valley continuing on towards the Kyrgyz-Tajik border (seen as yellow line). Map data: Google Earth [4].

4.4 Acclimatization

4.4.1 First Trip (Ciaran, John & Phil)

The first small objective was an unclimbed peak south east of basecamp, labelled as "Acclimatization objective 1" on figure 1. We could avoid walking on glacier by traversing the rocky side of it, which we did for few kilometres before cutting off the main valley and ascending towards the objective. We set up a lightweight camp beneath an overhanging boulder (sleeping bags, roll mats and bivvy bags). Interestingly, this particular boulder consisted of a magnetic rock that visibly altered a compass direction nearby it. Most of the rock so far had been granite or a variety of softer stone, and this was (to our knowledge) the only magnetic rock we came across throughout the trip.

The night's sleep was blighted by fairly heavy snowfall with air temperatures only just below freezing, causing a large water run off from the warm boulder to our sleeping bags. The bivvy bags protected us well, except that Phil's was not pulled up enough when the precipitation started, resulting in the down turning to a thin, wet pancake. We scrapped our plans from an early start attempt on the unnamed peak, as the lengthy boulder field towards it would be far slower with this blanket of snow. Instead we simply ascended some scree to increase our acclimatization, reaching a spot height of 4110m, before returning to basecamp.

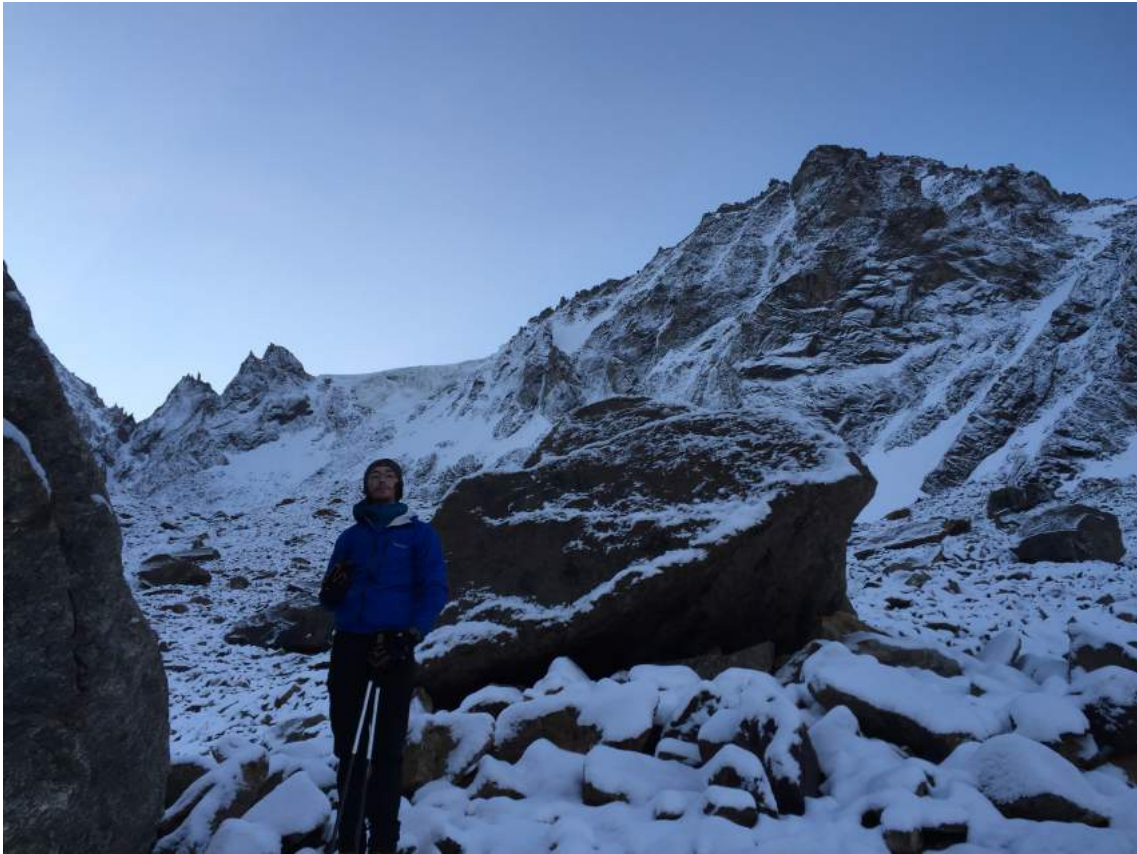


Figure 3: Phil standing in front of the first objective (most prominent peak, slightly to the right), an unnamed peak of height around 4500-4600m, that remains unclimbed. Photo credit: Ciaran Mullan.

4.4.2 Second Trip (Ciaran, John & Phil)

For this acclimatization trip our planned objective was another unnamed peak of across on the other side of the valley (see "Acclimatization objective 2" on figure 1). The peak is around 4700m (Google Earth estimates 4660m and Soviet military maps state 4708m) and has had no known attempts. However, after walking up the moraine to the foot of the glacier from which the peak protrudes, we could see no viable option for ascending this glacier. We had planned to keep moving fast by walking along the scree to the right hand side of the glacier, but even in the time we spent contemplating tactics there were some significant rockfalls straight across that route. The glacier itself was dry but steep and heavily crevassed. Through our binoculars we could not see a complete path that avoided crevasses all the way up, so we altered our plans and headed further south down Jiptik valley.



Figure 4: The glacier towards our second acclimatization objective (not quite visible in this shot, further back on the right). The scree to the right hand side was the intended path, before we saw the amount of debris falling on it. Photo credit: Ciaran Mullan.

We passed a band of rock then headed up a boulder strewn hill towards the next glacier south of the original target. As we reached the plateau of this new glacier at an altitude of around 4150m, we pitched the tent on snow and took the rest of the day off. There was a gully joining this glacier with the previous one, which we ascended the next day in the early hours of the morning (as it seemed a particularly hazardous chute for rocks when the sun hit it). The col at the top of the gully gave us a brilliant vantage point and the unnamed peak was directly across from us. However, to return down the gully safely within the same we set a latest return time of 7am, which would not be enough time to cross the glacier and climb anything (and the unnamed peak seemed like it could possibly be more difficult terrain than we were expecting, see figure 5c). So instead we carried on upwards from the col, heading west towards peak Nezametnaya (labelled as such on figure 1). In the Классификационная таблица ("The classification table", the Soviet archive of ascents) peak Nezametnaya is listed as 5250m and has been climbed by the SW ridge from the Schurovsky glacier. We were approaching from the NE side, so most likely a route not previously done. However, we only reached a height of 4700m before turning back to ensure the return gully was still in shade when descending. Google Earth does suggest the summit is at a lower altitude of 4950m, so it's possible that with a couple of hours more time this would be a fine objective.



(a)

(b)



(c)

Figure 5: (a) The gully between the two glaciers that we ascended and descended. Photo credit: John Proctor. (b) Ciaran descending towards the gully after the attempt on peak Nezametnaya, with peaks of the opposing side of Jiptik valley far behind. Photo credit: John Proctor. (c) The unnamed, unclimbed peak originally intended as our second acclimatization objective. Potential for good quality rock climbing route to the summit on the protruding granite spur. Photo credit: Ciaran Mullan.

4.5 The North Face of Muz-Tok

For several days, John, Ciaran and Phil walked up the glacier to below the face only for the night to be far too warm to even consider attempting to climb our planned route, the lower section into which is funnelled anything falling from higher on the face. During this time Robert finished his acclimatization. Finally receiving a more optimistic weather forecast, it was agreed we would attempt the face as two teams setting off a day apart Rob and John were to have the first attempt at the face with Ciaran and Phil planning to try the day after.

John and Rob set off on for the face at midnight. After it taking them two hours to navigate the final section of glacier to the bottom of the face, they simul-climbed up the initial snowfield and past the bottleneck. After a rightwards rising traverse. They slowed down once they hit the rocky rib which had to be traversed to reach the gully system that would hopefully lead to the top of the face. They followed these gullies until the sun hit the face, causing falling ice to rain down, at which point they escaped onto the adjacent rock rib.

They kept climbing through the day in the hope of finding a bivvy spot large enough that the tent could be pitched, aiming for what looked from the ground like a snowy ledge above the cornice topping the gully system. However, when they reached it they discovered a knife edge ridge of ice and soft snow. They found a ledge only large enough for a sitting bivvy and had a couple of hours sleep and made an effort to refuel and rehydrate.

Leaving their ledge, John led off up steep poorly consolidated snow until a steep rock wall was reached. The wall was difficult and Rob switched to using aid tactics but was nonetheless unable to make headway. After twice swapping leads, no progress had been made and Rob and John made the decision that the route wasn't going to go.

The original planned descent route was down the soviet era route via the west ridge, an option that was now unavailable. They climbed back down to their bivvy site and abseiled of the other side of the ridge to gain the west face. After a few abseils they gained easier ground. At this point the face was again beginning to warm up and rockfall was becoming a real danger. The rope was put away and they soloed down to the glacier to return to base camp

In the mean while, Ciaran and Phil had set off for their attempt but had decided to back down before becoming committed to the face, feeling uneasy about the snow conditions.

According to their GPS units, John and Rob reached a maximum altitude of 4928m. They believe that the top of the route would be climbable with a larger rack and by a climber with more aid climbing experience. Packing rock shoes could also be an option.

There is one other matter relating to Muz-Tok, on which it is appropriate to comment. The mountain has twin peaks (we are not talking here about the distinction between Muz-Tok and the main Peak Schurovsky, but the fact that Muz-Tok itself has twin peaks). At the time of our ascent we believed that these peaks were most likely joined by an easy



Figure 6: Topo of the north face route on Muz Tok. Photo credit: John Proctor.

snow traverse but looking carefully at some of the photos that we took during our trip (e.g. figure 7) it appears that this may not be the case. So any party arriving at the more northerly summit after an ascent of the north face may find that their trip has an additional sting in the tail. . . They may have to make a difficult traverse to the south summit, or find a way down to the way John and Rob descended – involving getting very close to the serac shown.



Figure 7: Photograph of Muz-Tok showing (potentially) difficult traverse between the peaks. Photo credit: John Proctor.

5 The Team

John Proctor, 34. Lecturer, University of Salford.

John has been climbing for 11 years. He has 9 years and over 25 routes of Alpine experience gained in the Tien Shan, Pamirs, Pamir Alai, Mont Blanc Massif, Valais Alps and, in winter, the Atlas mountains in Morocco. Highlights are first ascents in the Pamirs (2013) and Tien Shan (2010, with Robert Taylor), the Norman-Neruda route (D+) on the north face of the Lyskamm, south east ridge of the Dufourspitze (AD) and the east ridge of the Weisshorn (AD) in the Valais Alps in August 2011, the Dent du Geant (2015) and the west face of the Tete d'Ouanoums in the Atlas mountains (AD/D) in March 2009.

John leads on rock up to E1 and winter climbs up to (occasionally) grade V – for example Tower Ridge (IV,3 Ben Nevis), and Savage Slit (V,6 Northern Corries of Cairngorm). He regularly rock climbs on mountain crags and sea cliffs – for example Munich Climb on Tryfan, Old Man of Stoer, Breeches Rock. He has also climbed a number of new routes on the sea cliffs near Berwick-upon-Tweed, and climbed in Norway and New Hampshire. He holds the (summer) Mountain Leader qualification. This was John's fifth expedition to climb new routes in central Asia.

Robert Taylor, 26.

Robert has been climbing since 2008 and since then has climbed extensively in the UK and abroad. Robert's main interest is alpine climbing, as fast and light as possible. He has made first ascents in the Tien Shan up to 5,000m (with John Proctor) and has 7 years experience of Alpine climbing. Highlights are Charlet-Bettembourg (north west) couloir on Aiguille du Chardonnet (TD-), Frendo Spur (D+) on the Aiguille du Midi, Moine Ridge (AD) on the Aiguille Verte, Aiguille Du Bionassay traverse to summit of Mont Blanc (AD), North Face of Tour Ronde (AD, solo), Hornli ridge on the Matterhorn (AD).

Robert has lived in Scotland for his entire life and regularly winter climbs. Highlights are Menage a trois (V, Beinn an Dothaidh), Parallel Gully B (V, Lochnagar), Savage Slit (V), Honeypot (IV), Yukon Jack (IV) in the Northern Corries of Cairngorm, Tower Ridge (IV) on Ben Nevis.

He leads on rock up to (occasionally) E3, and has also climbed water ice in the French Alps and Norway (WI5 lead, Sabatorfossen). His rock climbs on mountain crags and sea cliffs include Titan's wall (E3) and Torro (E2) (Ben Nevis), The Steeple (E3), Endolphin Rush (E3), Prophecy of drowning (E2) and Voyage of faith (E3) (Pabbay) and The Bracken-Clock (E2, Pavey Ark).

Ciaran Mullan, 22. Student, University of Manchester.

Ciaran has been climbing for 4 years and has had 3 seasons of alpine climbing. Highlights are the Dent du Geant (AD), Aiguille de Bionnassay traverse (AD), Traverse of Pointe Lachenal (AD), the SE ridge of the Aiguille de l'Index (AD), Mont Blanc and the Gran Paradiso. He has climbed water ice in Norway up to WI4 (Rjukan) and led up to M5+ dry tooling (Left Wall at White Goods, Clwyd). He has also done UK winter climbing up to grade II/III in the Cairngorms and Snowdonia (e.g. Tower Slabs, Cwm Cneifion). He leads on rock up to HVS (Sustenance, Stanage Plantation) and has done multipitch rock climbing in Snowdonia (Tryfan, Idwal slabs). He is a keen fellrunner and has done the Welsh 3000s challenge in 10 hrs 45 minutes, as well as the Welsh 1000s.

Philip Dawson, 21. Student, University of Manchester.

Phil has been climbing for 7 years. He has spent time over the last two summers in the Chamonix region gaining alpine experience with notable ascents including the Dent du Geant (AD) and the Aiguille du Bionnassay traverse (AD).

He has had two seasons of British winter climbing. In the 2013-14 season he climbed routes up to grade III such as Ladies gully on Clogwyn y Garnedd and in the 2014-15 season he climbed routes up to grade V (Point five gully V 5 on Ben Nevis). He has also made an ice climbing trip to Norway, leading up to WI3 (Kjøkkentrappa WI4, in easier than normal condition). He has dry tooled up to M7 with routes such as Apple M7 and Subculture M6+ at White Goods, Clwyd. He regularly trad climbs up to E1 with routes such as Fools gold E1 5c at Bus Stop Quarry or Embankment 3 E1 5b at Millstone,

with the occasional harder route such as Commander Energy at The Roaches and Regent Street at Millstone (both E2 5c). He has also done multipitch rock climbing in Snowdonia (Tryfan, Idwal slabs).

6 Miscellaneous

6.1 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our sponsors; Mount Everest Foundation, the Christopher Walker trust, British Mountaineering Council and the Austrian Alpine Club (UK), for their generous contributions towards our expedition. We would also like to thank Michael Finnegan for medical advice and being our primary contact for sending route cards, Alex Ritchie for sending us weather updates, Paul Hine for being our backup doctor and Tim Dobson both for being our secondary contact for route cards, and for his valuable information gained from his visit to the valley.

6.2 Expenses

The breakdown of the key trip expenses is below. John provided his share out of his own pocket so did not receive any of the grant money.

Income		Expenditure	
MEF Grant	£1650	Insurance	£1600
Christopher Walker Trust Grant	£1000	Flights	£2160
BMC Grant	£850	Satellite Phones	£400
AAC Grant	£400	Medicine & First Aid	£420
		Food	£150
		Permits	£90
		Donkeys	£370
		Transport	£230
		Accommodation	£230
Total	£3900	Total	£5650

7 Appendix A: Panoramic Images



Figure 8: Panoramic photo of the Jiptik valley peaks. Shot from the subsidiary snow peak of Kara-Eet, looking approximately south-west. Photo credit: Ciaran Mullan.



Figure 9: Second panoramic photo of the Jiptik valley peaks. Shot from the subsidiary snow peak of Kara-Eet, looking approximately east. Photo credit: Ciaran Mullan.

8 Appendix B: A Guide to the Jiptik Valley

Extensive research into the history and background of climbing in the Jiptik valley was done prior to the expedition, drawing on our experience from previous expeditions. In “On Thin Ice”, Mick Fowler wrote about his impressions of the Pamir Alai mountains in the run-up to his 1990 expedition:

“Notwithstanding renamings, broken history and general uncertainties, there appeared to be many possibilities for exploratory mountaineering.”

It is fair to say that this statement remains true 27 years later. The sources of confusion are many; poorly recorded expeditions, renaming of peaks, websites which are wrong, loss of information upon the collapse of the USSR, etc. etc. It is not possible to be completely certain that your objective has not been climbed before, but in our view you can be reasonably certain if you do your research carefully. Since most climbing in the region is done by climbers from the Russian-speaking world an ability to google in the Cyrillic alphabet and translate at least a few basic phrases is essential. The sources we used for our research were as follows:

1. The Классификационная таблица маршрутов на горные вершины СССР (classification table of routes on the high mountains of the USSR). This book lists the principal routes climbed on the high mountains of the USSR. Each route gets a one-sentence description (e.g. “north ridge” or “west face”), Russian grade, year of first ascent and name of the first ascensionists. We were able to have a look at the 1989 edition, which we borrowed from Phil Wickens. We understand that there is also a copy in the Alpine Club library in London. Since the expedition, we found out that something similar is now published by the Russian Mountaineering Federation [8].
2. Googling for the principal mountain and mountain range names in Cyrillic alphabet. Relevant results are often found on websites skitalets.ru, mountain.ru, alpklub-spb.ru, risk.ru. See links [9] [10] [11].
3. The American Alpine Journal (AAJ) – a reasonably comprehensive record of climbs done by climbers from the English-speaking world.
4. The Soviet military maps, available to download for free from maps.vlasenko.net. Unfortunately these are often available only in 1:100,000 resolution (in fairness, the Soviet Union was a very big country to map!). The date is written on each map, generally they were done in 1970s and 1980s. So the glaciers have receded a bit since then. The quality of surveying is, in our view, as good as on the British OS or French IGN maps. In JP’s five expeditions, he has never come across a spot height on a Soviet map that was not within 30m of that measured with GPS. It is possible to put a GPS-compatible WGS84 datum onto the Soviet map [12]. So there is no need for expeditions to make do with google maps!
5. Having said that, google earth does have its uses. Ground-level photos are featured on google earth – what used to be panoramio - (though not necessarily labelled correctly or in the correct location), the aerial photos are recent so can give a more accurate reflection of the current state of the glaciers and current footpaths can often be spotted. It is worth reading an article on UKclimbing.com about the use

of google earth for researching expeditions, which JP contributed to last year [13]. Generally, google earth underestimates height and therefore steepness rather than overestimates.

From these sources we can say the following about mountaineering history of the Jiptik valley. It has almost certainly been used by herders for grazing animals since time immemorial but the first recorded exploration of the valley by outsiders was when the Russian explorers Alexei Pavlovich Fedchenko and Olga Alexandrovna Fedchenko visited in 1871 (at a much later date, a glacier leading into the Jiptik / Schurovsky glacier was named after Olga Fedchenko – not to be confused with the famous glacier in Tajikistan named after Alexei Fedchenko). The Fedchenkos named the principal peak at the top of the valley, and glacier leading it, after Alexei's old University tutor, Grigori Efimovich Schurovsky. Nowadays the highest peak at the top of the valley (just over the border in Tajikistan) remains known as Peak Schurovsky, whilst the slightly lower peak on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border just to the west is known as Peak Schurovsky West and also as Muz-Tok. Fedchenko's party attempted to progress up the Schurovsky glacier by tying themselves to large horizontal wooden poles which they hoped would prevent them from falling into crevasses. They gave up after 10 hours having only advanced 4 km. Conditions on the glacier are a bit better now. Records of modern expeditions in the Классификационная таблица begin from 1969. Since the end of the Soviet era there have been some Russian expeditions who have recorded their climbs on websites and two western expeditions led by Paul Hersey in 1996 and 2008.

The peaks which have names, to our knowledge, are recorded on the sketch map in figure 10. We can provide a copy of the Soviet map with WGS84 datum, and google earth placemarks for the principal peaks, on request (*john.proctor1982@gmail.com*). Our knowledge of ascents of the various peaks is listed on the following pages.

We have included also peaks surrounding the upper section of the Kshemysh glacier, the next glacier along to the east of the Jiptik / Schurovsky glacier. Direct access to Kshemysh glacier would involve passing through Tajik enclave of Vorukh but objectives surrounding the upper section of the glacier can potentially be accessed from the Jiptik valley via the Schurovsky pass (marked in figure 10).

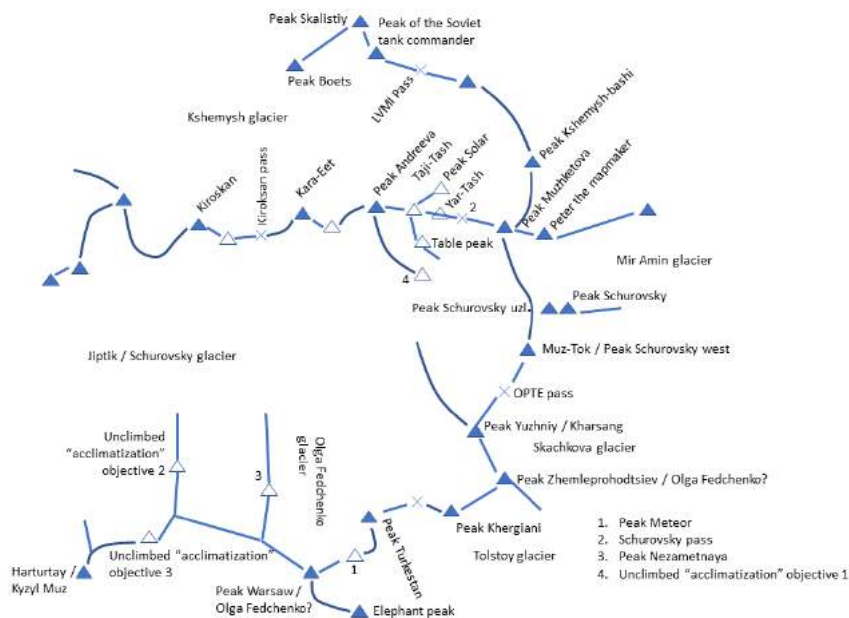


Figure 10: Sketch map of the Jiptik valley with named peaks marked.

- **Harturtay / Kyzyl Muz 5127m (Soviet map)**

2008: Main spur on north face (Stegosaurus spur) climbed by Hersey / Tan / Zimmerman to summit ridge, but not to summit. V, 5.10, AI4 M4 (AAJ 2009).

Harturtay was also climbed by Hersey's previous trip to Jiptik in 1996 (AAJ 1997). It does not feature in the Классификационная таблица but is referred to as Harturtay on Russian websites.

- **Unclimbed "acclimatization" objectives 2 and 3**

2: 4660m on google earth, 4708m on Soviet map.

3: 4618m on google earth, 4620m on Soviet map.

Both described as unknown on a recent Russian website [14]. They do not match up to anything in the Классификационная таблица. We suggest these are potentially good easier unclimbed objectives. Figure 11 below is a photograph of the one at 4708m that we took whilst acclimatizing on Peak Nezametnaya. In the centre is a ridge leading to the peak which is potentially very good climbing on granite. The lower section of the glacier in the photo (leading down to the Jiptik / Schurovsky glacier on the right) is not in a very safe condition but the flat upper section pictured should be accessible via the Olga Fedchenko glacier from which you can get to the col from which we took this photo.



Figure 11: Photograph of peak 4708m (unclimbed objective 2).

- ***Peak Nezametnaya (Peak imperceptible)***

Listed as 5250m in the Классификационная таблица and 4950m on google earth. Классификационная таблица says it has been climbed by the SW ridge from the Schurovsky glacier. It is not really clear what route this is, as the main Schurovsky glacier is some distance to the east of the mountain. Possibly, the route could be an extension of the route we took on acclimatization; which took us around to a point on a ridge roughly to the west of the peak.

- ***Peak Warsaw / Fedchenko***

5120m on google earth, 5190m on Soviet map but 5484m in the Классификационная таблица. Climbed by NE ridge, W ridge and S ridge according to the Классификационная таблица. Also a traverse has been done from Muz-Tok to this peak.

- ***Peak Slon (elephant)***

5370m (Soviet map). Dated 1969 on the internet [14] but not mentioned in the Классификационная таблица. May have been climbed from Tajik side – could make nice traverse from Peak Warsaw / Fedchenko.

- ***Peak Meteor***

Ca. 4780m, exact position on ridge not clear. Climbed via SE ridge (1969) and NE ridge from Koroleva glacier (1975) according to the Классификационная таблица.

- ***Peak Turkestan***

No spot height is given on the Soviet map, but the Классификационная таблица gives 5200m. Google earth says 4950m but image on google earth bears little relation to the actual mountain so height is probably also wrong. Mountain is NOT “unnamed and unclimbed” as stated in the 2009 AAJ. According to the Классификационная таблица it has been climbed from:

West ridge from the Olga Fedchenko glacier (1969).

South face from the Tolstoy glacier (1969).

North face (presumably also from the Olga Fedchenko glacier) (1975).

The east ridge could be a hard unclimbed objective.

A labelled photo taken by the 2010 Russian expedition [9] has Peak Fedchenko as a minor subsidiary peak on the ridge between Peak Turkestan and Khergiani.

- ***Peak Khergiani***

4930m on Soviet map. Классификационная таблица says climbed via north ridge from Schurovsky glacier in 1969.

- ***Peak Zemleprohodsiev / Fedchenko***

Labelled as Fedchenko on one map online[A], but as Zemleprohodsiev by the 2010 and 2013 Russian groups [9] [10]. Route description given in the Классификационная таблица for Zemleprohodsiev is consistent with this location, but not the height. The Классификационная таблица says it is 5,409m whilst this location on google earth is just 5,000m. 2010 Russian group note this discrepancy. Has been climbed by E ridge from Skachkova glacier (i.e. Tajik side), and also as a small detour from the traverse along the frontier ridge.

- ***Peak Yuzhniy / Kharsang***

4615m on google earth, 4800m according to the Классификационная таблица.

Routes:

E ridge from OPTE pass.

NE ridge.

- ***OPTE pass***

4520m on google earth and looks relatively straightforward. Snow covered in imagery from August 2008 on google earth.

- ***Muz-Tok / Peak Schurovsky west***

5066m according to Soviet map. Has been climbed as part of traverse from peak Schurovsky uzl. to Peak Fedchenko. Could find no information anywhere about any route on the north face.

- ***Peak Schurovsky uzl.***

Классификационная таблица says 5,200m. Peak is on Tajik side, slightly set back from frontier but included as start point of traverse according to Классификационная таблица. First ascent was along north ridge from the Schurovsky glacier, but it is not clear how / where they got onto the ridge.

- ***Peak Schurovsky (the main one)***

5560m according to the Классификационная таблица, 5590m according to Soviet map. Only ascent listed is from the south side from Mir-Amin glacier (Tajik side). An ascent along north ridge from north side would almost certainly be a new route, but looks quite hard.

- ***Peak Muzketova***

5009m according to the Классификационная таблица. 2 routes:

N ridge (1969) – from Schurovsky pass.

Centre of north-west face (1978).

Also done as part of traverse from Kshemysh to Zemleprohodtsiev in 1973.
An ascent of the face overlooking the Kshemysh glacier would be new route. Russian 2010 photo [9] shows some seracs but there could be a way through. The 2010 Russian party also say there were rockfall problems though – even at night (whilst they were camped on the glacier).

- ***Peak Kshemysh-Bashi***

5282m (Классификационная таблица), 5290m (Soviet map). Has 3 routes according to the Классификационная таблица:

NE ridge from Ivanova pass 1969.

W face, SW ridge from 1969.

N face 1973. Route goes up ridge on left (east) side of the face.

There is lots more north face to go at – 1200m high. Looks quite snowy in photos so not quite vertical. Rockfall problems (according to 2010 Russians) even at night.

- ***Peak Dangerfield (our informal name – don't ask)***

Is a reasonably prominent 5100-5200m peak but we can find no info about it. Itskovich's website lists it as unknown [14]. It may be the Peak of 25 years of the People's republic of Poland, 5207m in the Классификационная таблица. Climbed from Kshemysh glacier over gendarmes. In that case, other new routes still to go at.

- ***Peak of the Soviet Tank Commander***

Also a lack of information on this one – but too close to the (relatively speaking) popular Peak Skalistiy to have much chance of not being unclimbed.

- ***Peak Skalistiy, Peak Boets***

Peak Skalistiy has been climbed a number of times. We didn't investigate in detail ascents of this peak or the neighbouring Peak Boets as they are both a bit too far away from the Schurovsky pass to be accessible from the Schurovsky glacier. An expedition to these peaks would probably be better off taking its chances passing through Vorukh and approaching the Kshemysh glacier directly.

- ***Peak Peter the mapmaker***

4980m according to the Классификационная таблица. Subsidiary summit just south of Muzhketova. Routes: SE ridge from Zerafshan glacier. Possible confusion with peak Citadel.

- ***Schurovsky pass***

Appears to offer reasonably straightforward access to objectives in the upper part of Kshemysh glacier basin, from Jiptik. Russian 1B (F-PD-). Most likely all snow. 4390m on google.

- ***Peaks Taji-Tash, Yar-Tash, Table, Solar***

Minor subsidiary peaks between Muzhketova and Andreeva, listed in [14]. Taji-Tash and Yar-Tash certainly climbed during ascent of Andreeva.

Solar – climbed via south ridge. Also a route has been climbed onwards from Solar to peak Taji-Tash and onwards to Andreeva (according to the Классификационная таблица).

Table has been climbed from the west and south according to the Классификационная таблица.

- ***Unclimbed "acclimatization" objective 1***
 Minor peak, 4500-4600m, listed as unknown in [14]. Should allow acclimatization with good views, probable first ascent.
- ***Peak Andreeva***
 5127m on Soviet map and Классификационная таблица. Climbed by 4 routes:
 West ridge
 South ridge
 East ridge
 Another route from west.
 North face + ridge are there to climb, but look hard.
- ***Peak Kara-Eet***
 4900m on Soviet map. Almost certainly the "Pic 4900m" climbed by Hersey et al. in 1996. Listed as 1969 in [14] but not clear if this is first ascent or survey. Probably new routes to do. Spot height suggests it is the peak described in the Классификационная таблица as Peak Novosibirsk. Has been climbed via the north ridge and from the south.
- ***Kiroksan***
 4762m (Soviet map). Also referred to as Peak Novosibirsk in [14], but am unsure if this is correct. Listed as 1981 (am unsure if this is discovery or first ascent) and also climbed from south by Paul Hersey et al. in 1996.

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