

# DJENGGHI-DJER, KYRGYZSTAN EXPEDITION 2017



**SUPPORTED BY:**



## Overview

The aim of our expedition was to make first ascents of unclimbed peaks in the Djengi-Djer mountain range of Kyrgyzstan. The mountain range had only been visited once before by a team in 2016, who approached the range from the east. We therefore decided to approach from the west in the hope of discovering further potential in the area.

The 2016 expedition had both exploratory and mountaineering aims, and travelling on horseback allowed them to travel almost the full length of the range. They were, however, limited in mountaineering since many days were spent travelling or waiting for weather windows at base camp.

We decided instead, to select one valley where we would set up a base camp and this would allow us to thoroughly explore the surrounding area. During September 2017 we established a base camp and in the following two and a half weeks explored the area and made a number of first ascents of peaks up to 4716m and also rock routes lower down in the valley.

The aims of our expedition were:

- To make first ascents of unclimbed peaks over 4000m in the Djenghi-Djer mountain range.
- Investigate the north face of P4662 (identified by 'An Exploration on Horseback of the Djenghi-Djer Mountain Range') for potential routes.
- Further explore the faces of the other mountains surrounding base camp and establish more technical routes.
- Investigate and document the flora found in a variety of alpine environments.
- Photograph and document our approach from the west of the mountain range, and identify possible objectives for future expeditions.

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# 1 Planning

## 1.1 Team

The team was made up of six individuals with a variety of skills and experience which would be suitable for a mountaineering expedition to a remote area. Half the team work as outdoor instructors with training up to MIA, the other half work as rope access technicians, and all are trained in first aid. All team members are experienced in Scottish summer and winter climbing, and further collective experience includes: seasons in the Alps and Norway, first ascents of winter routes in Morocco, trekking in Nepal, Morocco and Mongolia, first ascents in Scottish winter and Canadian winter climbing.

The team consisted of:

- Sally Hudson
- Will Rowland
- Simon Tietjen
- James Cooper
- Mark Chambers
- Connor Holdsworth

## 1.2 Objectives

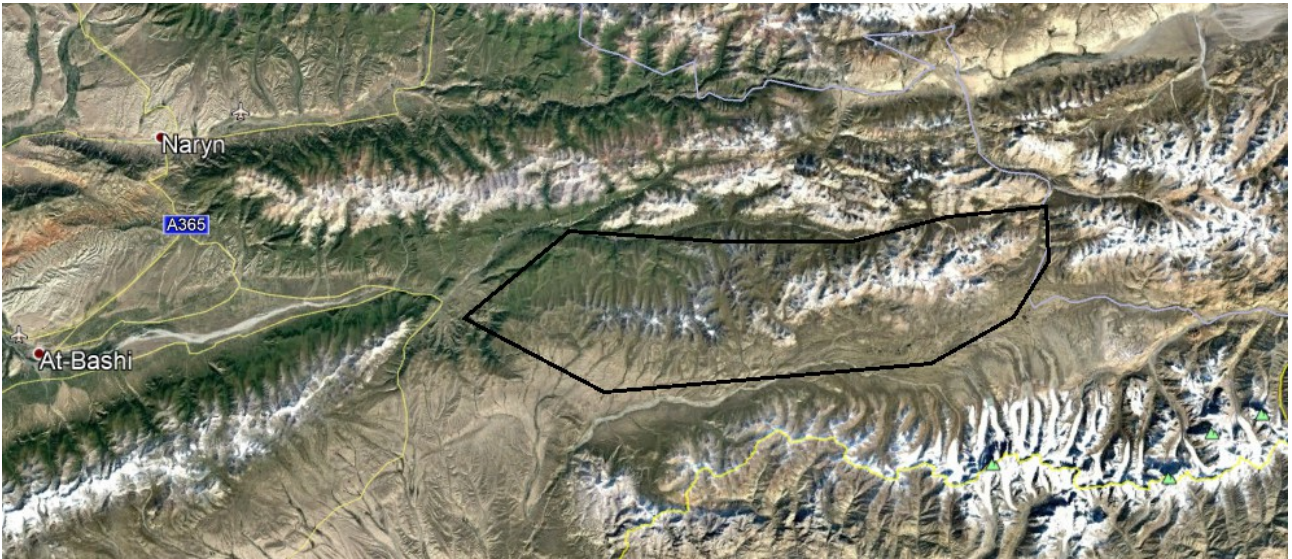
Kyrgyzstan was decided upon as a destination as it still holds vast prospects in terms of mountaineering first ascents, and logistically it is relatively easy to travel to and around. After looking at Google Earth and numerous trip reports the Djenghi-Djer range was eventually decided on. Information on the range was limited to the 'Djenghi-Djer Expedition Kyrgyzstan 2016' trip report and a short entry in Vladimir Komissarov's 'Mountaineering regions of Kyrgyzstan':

*“The best climbing is in the eastern part. The range is barely explored. The first climbs were done in the extreme eastern part of the range in the Mustyr canyon (Appendix 1, figures 17) by Pat Littlejohn expedition in 2003. There are about 50 unclimbed peaks over 4,000m in the ridge. The access is quite easy from Naryn town via Akmuz village and Kindy pass to the river Myrdrym valley.”*

The majority of our information came from the 2016 trip report and since they approached

from the east, we decided to approach from the west via Naryn and Ak Muz. More glaciers were marked on the northern valleys and if we stayed to the north we would not enter a border area, so permits would not be required. Border permits are required for the southern side of the range as the approach passes through a checkpoint.

The 2016 report identified a number of prospects in a three pronged valley on the western end of the range and with possible further prospects identified on the map, this is where we proposed to place our base camp.



*Illustration 1.1: Djenghi-Djer mountain range outlined*



*Illustration 1.2: Yellow pin marks proposed base camp. Red pin marks actual base camp.*

### **1.3 Ethics**

We wanted our expedition to have minimum effect on the environment and to leave as little trace as possible. We could have used a GAZ-66 to reach base camp but such a large vehicle would have caused a lot of damage to the ground it passed over. Instead we opted for the smaller vehicles to take us to the road end, then swap them for horses. These smaller vehicles are what the local people of the area use to travel the long distances back to the villages so there would be very little extra damage to the environment.

Horses are used widely in Kyrgyzstan and they proved invaluable in transporting our kit into the mountains. Using horses was quick and efficient, gave employment to locals, and they probably managed much better than attempting the journey with a large 4x4.

## **2 Logistics**

### **2.1 Flights**

Our flights were booked well in advance in January for a very reasonable £430.96 return per person. We flew with Turkish Airlines from Edinburgh to Bishkek, via Istanbul. Turkish Airlines have different baggage allowances for different airports, and flying out of Edinburgh meant we had a checked baggage allowance of 40kg per person, plus 8kg each for our carry on. With such a large baggage allowance we did not need to pay for any extra baggage.

### **2.2 In-country logistics**

Our in-country logistics were all arranged through Tien Shan Travel, who took care of everything from airport pick-up on arrival to returning us back to Bishkek. Since it was the first time to Kyrgyzstan for all of the team we felt better having everything organised and in place rather than trying to organise everything when we arrived. Having now visited we know it would not be a problem to arrange logistics on arrival in the country, which would reduce costs significantly.

Travel was in a variety of transports. The first leg of our journey was to Ak Muz in a Mercedes Sprinter minibus, since the majority was on good roads. From there we transferred into three small 4WD's – an UAZ 452 pick-up for our luggage and two Audi cars for ourselves. These vehicles took us to the road end where we swapped them for six horses to carry our luggage the remaining 40km to base camp. The return journey was the same but without the need for the UAZ for our luggage.

We took three Jetboils and three multifuel stoves and TST were able to provide us with fuel for both – screw-on gas canisters and petrol.

### **2.3 Accommodation**

Accommodation in Bishkek was at Friends Guest House, which we can be highly recommend to future expeditions. A large outdoor area makes sorting of kit easy, the staff speak excellent English and they would be able to assist in the arrangement of any logistics. On our journey to and from the mountains we stayed at the home of our Ak Muz contact, at his yurt 10km from the road end on the way there and in his home in Ak Muz on the way back.

### **2.4 Food**

We knew from friends who had visited the country that it would be possible to buy everything we would need when we arrived. All we took with us was seven days of ration pack dinners and desserts per person provided by Summit to Eat, snacks provided by Wild Trail and The Raw Chocolate Company, and any personal food items to make life at base camp more comfortable. This included granola, dark chocolate, custard powder and hot sauce.

Food during the expedition was basic but we were able to source fresh fruit and vegetables in Bishkek which lasted well – oranges, pears, potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, chillis, ginger, beetroot. The root veg was combined with either rice, pasta or lentils to make stews. Porridge was a staple for breakfast and lunches were a mixture of snacks from Wild Trail and The Raw Chocolate Company, nuts, biscuits, chocolate, chapatis, bread and cured meat.

We took chlorine tablets for water purification but drank water from the stream next to base camp without boiling or purifying. There was only one bout of sickness in the team during the whole trip and this came the day before leaving base camp, so is unlikely to have come from the water.

We never had any problems with animals during the expedition. Despite base camp being surrounded by mouse holes, and hearing them every night, they didn't show any interest in our food. Two bears were spotted about 1km from the camp on the first night at base camp but after shouting they quickly disappeared. We designated an area about 100m from camp as a rubbish area as a precaution but the bears were never spotted again, or any evidence of them.

## ***2.5 Communications***

To maintain contact with people in the UK and in case of any emergencies we took an Iridium 9555 sat phone and a SPOT device. A check-in was sent with the SPOT at least every other day and we received weather reports through the sat phone roughly every three days.

We also took six small radios to maintain contact with each other while out climbing. With no way to charge the radios we saved the batteries by carrying one radio switched off per team and maintaining a 5pm check-in policy.

## ***2.6 Weather/climate***

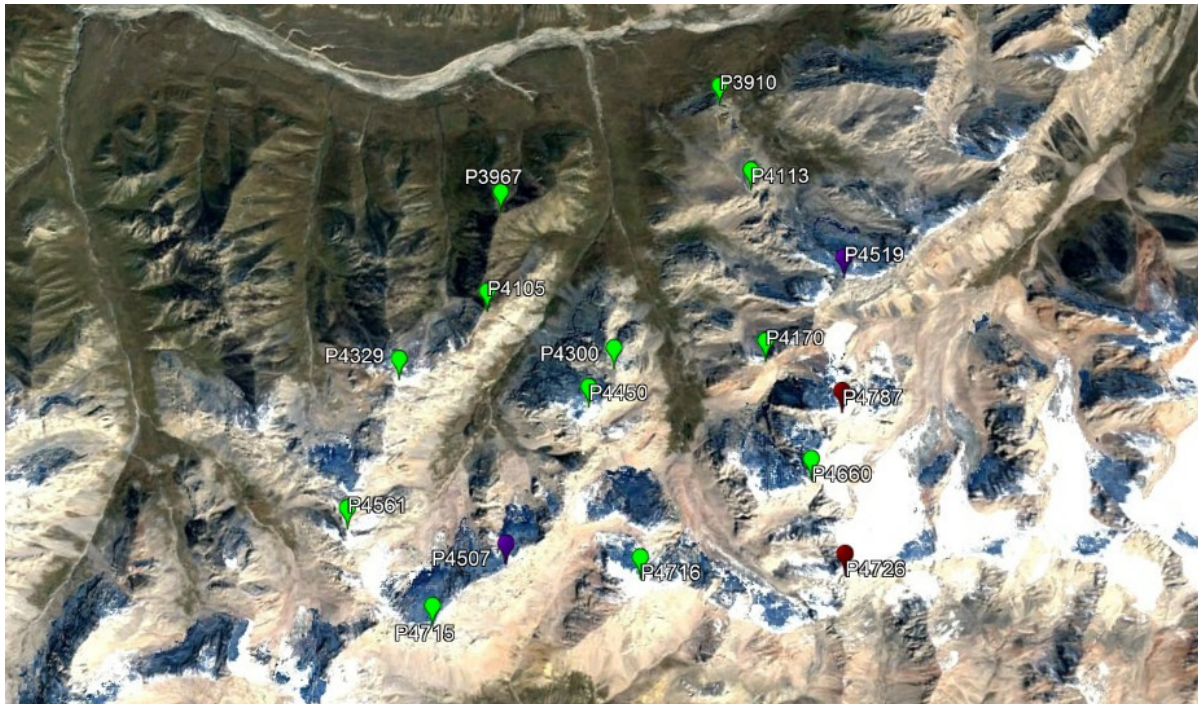
The weather we experienced was that of extremes. In the day time if the sun was out it got up to about 20 degrees C but felt hotter. On clear nights it got down to about to -15 degrees C and we woke up to frozen tents most mornings. Most of the team had brand new PhD sleeping bags comfortable down to at least -15 degrees C. We were told on the way in that the yurts would be packed up and taken down to the villages on the 15<sup>th</sup> September and this is when the weather began to turn. Up until this point the weather was generally calm and settled, so it may be better to climb at the end of August into the beginning of September.

## ***2.7 Terrain***

The terrain in the valleys was wide grassy plains which made for a comfortable base camp and easy approaches to mountains. The glaciers have receded a lot from those shown on the maps so glacial moraine and scree slopes were extensive, slowing progress greatly. The base of the glaciers sat at about 3700 – 4000m. Above the scree slopes most of the rock was very broken and loose, but some areas of solid limestone slabs could be found and here the climbing was excellent.



### 3 Mountains/routes



The above images shows all peaks climbed (green), attempted (red) and future prospects (purple).

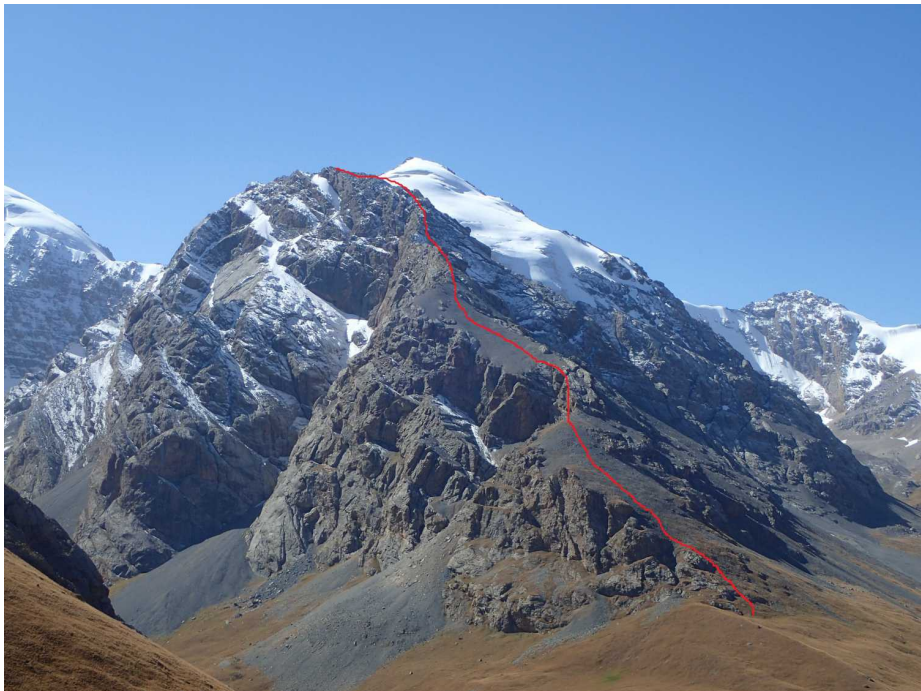
#### 3.1 *Blizzard Peak (4105m) & Thunder Point (3967m), F*



**3.2 Cypress Hill (4113m), F**



**3.3 Ibex Peak (4370m) via Ibex Ridge, AD-**



**3.4 Two cameras are better than none, VS 4c (300m)**



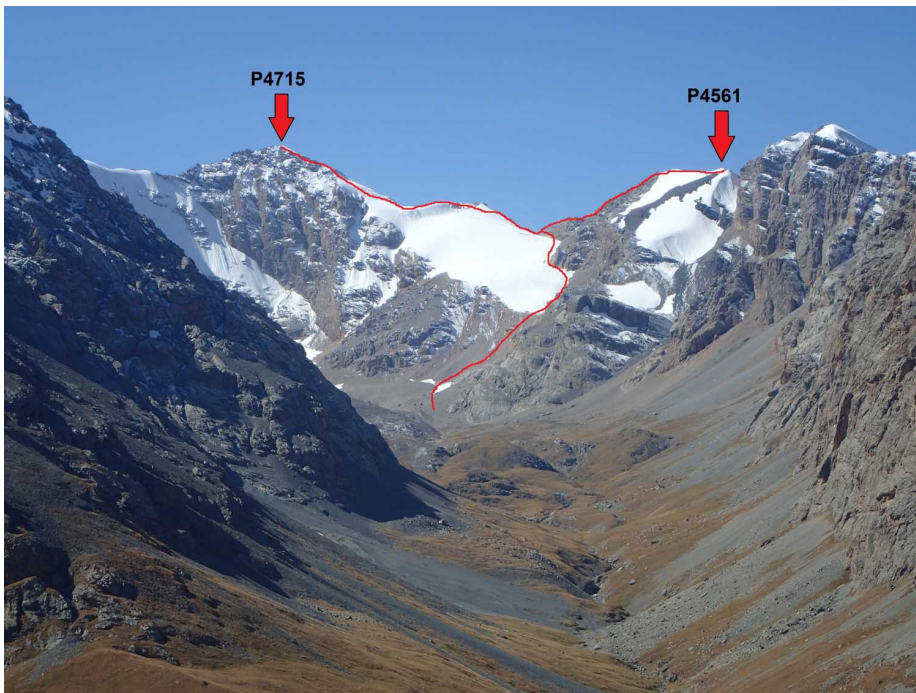
**3.5 Peak Loosey Goosey (4170m) via Rocky horror show, PD (400m)**



### **3.6 Take me to the bongo, VS 4c (180m)**



### **3.7 Daisy's Peak (4715m) via North-West Ridge, AD & Pill Box Peak (4561m) via South Ridge, AD**



### **3.8 Hans Solo Peak (4329m) via The Hoth Ridge, F+**

No image of route.

**3.9 Jam Knot Peak (4450m) via Slippy slabby big boots, D (800m)**



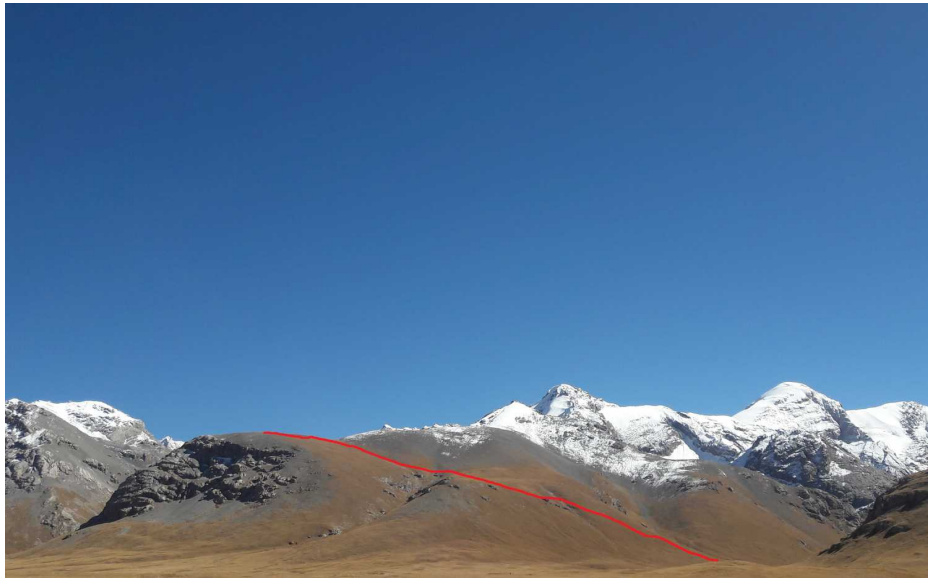
**3.10 Crescent Moon Peak (4716m) via Suffertime Ridge, D+ (2500m)**



**3.11 Falcon and swallow, VS 4c (2220m) on Base Camp Buttress**



**3.12 Beths Point (3910m)**



### **3.13 Peak Brocklebank (4660m) via Swan Lake, AD (900m)**



## **4 Further prospects**

Further prospects for large peaks in the side valley are now quite limited but there are still a couple shown below that we did not have chance to attempt, along with the two we failed our attempts on.

Much of the ground higher up on the mountains was very broken and loose. However, lower down in the valley we found a number of areas of good solid limestone which made for some excellent climbing. One band of rock in particular, which stretched for at least one kilometer under P4105 and P4329, looked to hold plenty potential for four to five pitch rock routes. Most of this rock looked solid and excellent for climbing, but unfortunately we did not have chance to explore it.

**4.1 P4519**



**4.2 P4507**





## 5 Flora and fauna

### 5.1 Flora

During the planning phase of the expedition we were very interested to know if there would be any similarity between the flora in Kyrgyzstan and the range of plants we are familiar with at home in Scotland. We observed a surprising variety of flora in such a small range of altitudes and terrains, but unfortunately, other than Reindeer Lichen (*Cladonia* Spec. Lichen) and buttercups (*Ranunculus komarovii*) we didn't see anything else familiar. The following specimens were observed between approximately 3500m and 4500m.



*Cerastium lithospermifolium*



*Oxyria digyna*



*Waldheimia tridactylites*



*Saxifraga hirculus*



*Pyrethrum karelinii*



*Rhodiola litvinovii*



*Saxifraga oppositifolia*



*Lychnis brachypetala*



*Aster coriacea*



*Gentiana kaufmanniana*



*Ranunculus komarovii*



*Erigeron allochrous*



Gentiana falcata



Callianthemum alatavicum



Cladonia Spec. Lichen



Dracocephalum stamineum

## 5.2 Fauna

The fauna we observed while in the mountains was fairly limited, but certainly more than expected. The highlight was two Himalayan brown bears on our first night at base camp, and other sightings included: a stoat, mice, hummingbird hawk moths, bumble bees and on the ride out, a herd of Marco Polo sheep. We never saw any ibex but there was a lot of evidence of them from their tracks which criss-crossed the hills, and a number of skulls in the valleys. The valleys were also littered with marmot holes, a few of which had been excavated by bears, and on one col we even spotted the tracks from a snow leopard which was a very exciting discovery.



## 6 Timeline

**31<sup>st</sup> August** – The team meets at Edinburgh airport for lots of repacking to get all our check-in bags under 40kg.

**1<sup>st</sup> September** – Arrive in Bishkek early in the morning. Relax at the guest house then head to the shops to buy our food for the next three weeks. Repack the bags to get all the food in.

**2<sup>nd</sup> September** – 9am pick up for the drive to Ak Muz. Transfer the luggage into the UAZ then continue down the valley toward the Djenghi-Djer. Stop at a local yurt for the night, freshly slaughtered goat for dinner, we discover the delights of kymyz, and Si realises he's forgotten his sleeping bag.

**3<sup>rd</sup> September** – Continue in the vehicles to the road end and Si acquires an old Soviet era sleeping bag for 500 SOM. Transfer luggage onto horses and walk the rest of the day towards BC. SH rides with the horsemen to look after the kit.

**4<sup>th</sup> September** – Approach to base camp continues. Last minute decision to change the location of BC to a two pronged valley further east of the proposed valley. SH arrives with the horses at 11am and the rest of the team arrives at 1pm. The rest of the day is spent organising BC.

**5<sup>th</sup> September** – Acclimatisation day. SH and MC complete a horseshoe to the west of BC taking in two new tops: Blizzard Peak (4105m) and Thunder Point (3967m) Grade F. JC and CH ascend a ridge to the east of BC reaching a new top, Cypress Hill (4113m) Grade F. WR and ST explore the eastern valley going as far as ~200m below the col between Crescent Moon Peak and P4726

**6<sup>th</sup> September** – WR and ST climb the ridge directly south above BC: Ibex Ridge (AD-) to Ibex Peak (4300m). JC and CH explore the eastern valley reaching the col to the west of P4716. MC and SH explore the western valley going as far ~100m below the col between Daisy's Peak and Pill Box Peak.

**7<sup>th</sup> September** – Rest day. Lots of eating.

**8<sup>th</sup> September** – WR and ST climb a ridge in the coire south of Cypress Hill: *Two cameras are better than none*, VS 4c (300m). SH, JC, MC and CH climb a point in the eastern valley: *Rocky horror show*, Vdiff (400m) to Peak Loosey Goosey (4170m).

**9<sup>th</sup> September** – MC and SH climb a route on the eastern flank of Ibex Ridge: *Take me to the bongo*, VS 4c (180m). WR, JC, ST and CH reach the col MC and SH aimed for on the

6<sup>th</sup> and climb Daisy's Peak (4715m) by its north-west ridge (AD) and Pillbox Peak (4561m) by its south ridge (AD).

**10<sup>th</sup> September** – Rest day for ST, WR, JC, CH and SH. MC climbs Hans Solo Peak (4329m) via *The Hoth Ridge* (F+).

**11<sup>th</sup> September** – WR, SH and MC climb Jam Knot Peak (4450m) via *Slippy Slabby Big Boots*, D (800m). JC, ST and CH attempt Jam Knot Peak via Ibex Ridge, reaching a highpoint of 4300m. Descend due to slow progress.

**12<sup>th</sup> September** – Rest day. Hunter passes the camp looking for wolves, and leaves us with an enormous flat bread. He's the only person we see during the whole expedition.

**13<sup>th</sup> September** – ST and WR climb Crescent Moon Peak (4716m) via Suffertime Ridge, D+ (2500m). SH, JC, CH and MC attempt P4726, reaching a high point of 4620m. Descend due to slow progress and very loose terrain.

**14<sup>th</sup> September** – Rest day, and a lot of snow fall!

**15<sup>th</sup> September** – Another rest day for ST, JC, WR and SH as we wait for the snow to melt. CH and MC climb *Falcon and Swallow*, VS 4c (200m) on Base Camp Buttress.

**16<sup>th</sup> September** – WR, MC, JC and CH climb Peak Brocklebank (4660m) via *Swan Lake*, .... (1000m). Also attempt P4787 but descend due to dangerous snow conditions. SH climbs Beths Point (3910m) (easy walk) and Cypress Hill (2<sup>nd</sup> ascent).

**17<sup>th</sup> September** – Rest day. Forecast received suggests a lot of snow for tomorrow.

**18<sup>th</sup> September** – Take another rest day with expected snow, but it doesn't arrive until about 6pm.

**19<sup>th</sup> September** – Wake up to a lot of snow. New forecast says good tomorrow then snow for the rest of the week. Decide to leave early. Poor sat phone connection so we're not sure if our contact has understood. WR and JC head off with minimal kit to make sure the horses are sent in early.

**20<sup>th</sup> September** – ST, CH, MC and SH move base camp to the main valley to make it easier for the horses to find us. WR and JC make it to the road end and pass the horses on their way in. Hitch a lift out to Naryn.

**21<sup>st</sup> September** – Horses arrive early in the morning. Seven hour ride out to the road end followed by rain clouds the whole way. Good decision to leave! Stay the night in Ak Muz. WR and JC still in Naryn.

**22<sup>nd</sup> September** – Minibus arrives to take us back to Bishkek. Pick JC and WR up in Naryn and the team is reunited.

**23<sup>rd</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> September** – Leisure time in Bishkek and Karakol.

**27<sup>th</sup> September** – Fly back to the UK.

## 7 Finances

### 7.1 Income

Item	Amount £
John Muir Trust	750
BMC	500
Mount Everest Foundation	1650
<b>Total</b>	<b>2900</b>

### 7.2 Outgoings

Item	Amount £
Flights (6 x £430.96)	2585.76
In-country logistics (inc. fuel)	2580
Accommodation in Bishkek	144
Taxi to Bishkek airport	10
Food	390.33
Travel to/from Edinburgh	60
Sat phone	100
Sim card	101
AAC Insurance (6 x £35)	210
Sleeping bags (x5)	2044.70
Tips for horsemen	134.88
<b>Total</b>	<b>8360.67</b>

## **8 Sponsors**

Many thanks to everyone to everyone who sponsored or supported the expedition in any way. We are very proud to be associated with you all and the expedition would not have been possible without your fantastic support.

### **8.1 Financial**

- British Mountaineering Council
- John Muir Trust
- Mount Everest Foundation

### **8.2 Kit & food**

- Alpkit
- DMM
- Jottnar
- PH Designs
- Summit to Eat
- Wild Trail
- Raw Chocolate Company
- West Highland College UHI

### **8.3 Other**

- Mike Pescod (weather forecast updates and emergency contact)
- Brian Kabbes (flora identification)