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Hadfield Altai Expedition Хадфилд Алтайская Экспедиция

JOHN TOWN SHIONA DAWSON

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INITIAL REPORT TO THE MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION

In order to provide the Foundation with an initial report of the outcome of the Expedition at the earliest opportunity, I include below the text of an initial press release:

'A NW husband and wife have made the first British ascent of Mount Bielukha, 14,810 feet, the highest peak in the the Altai mountains of Western Siberia, on the borders of China, Outer Mongolia and the Soviet Union.

Shiona Dawson (30), an Interactive Computer Graphics Programmer at ICI, Alderley Edge, and her husband, John Town (31), an administrator working in the Registrar's Department at the University of Manchester are the first British climbers to visit the range since the Revolution.

The summit was reached at 1.30 pm on the 5th of August, 1984, in the company of 2 West German and 7 Russian climbers, after 4 days of climbing. Both ascent and descent were hampered by poor visibility and snowfalls. Because of the remoteness of the area, helicopters were used to transport equipment and personnel to the base camp. The couple also made an ascent of mount Ak-Ayuk (also known as Bronya), the first Britons to do so since 1903, reaching the summit during a thunderstorm.

The Altai are a 1200 mile long range of mountains dividing the vast forests of the Siberian Taiga from the arid wastes of Mongolia and Sinkiang. The Bielukha area was found to hold a stunning array of alpine flowers but there was little direct evidence of the abundant wild game reported by 19th Century explorers.

Bielukha is a spectacular double headed peak whose Northern flank is composed of a 3,000ft wall, which stretches unbroken for 3 miles across the head of the Ak-kem Glacier. This remained unclimbed until last year and offers considerable potential for high standard routes. The couple's climb was made by the normal route from the North (Russian 3b, about AD), which takes a devious approach round the Eastern end of the wall, eventually reaching the summit via the SE Ridge - a distance of about 15 miles, involving 8000ft of climbing and 2 camps.

contd over

The Expedition was sponsored was the Stalybridge firm of WCB Mailbox and financial support was also received from local firms, Rhone-Poulenc (UK) Ltd and the Mount Everest Foundation.'

The Expedition cost approximately £3,500 which was financed as follows

	£
Members contributions	2500
Mount Everest Foundation	300)
Mailbox	500) 1000
Rhone Poulenc	200)
Small local firms	100)

More detailed accounts will be included in the Expedition's final Report.

The Expedition had considerable success in collecting information on the geography and recent mountaineering history of the area, and will be submitting photographs, map and an account to the Alpine Journal. An article has also been commissioned by Climber and Rambler magazine and the BBC is currently assessing a taped log of events for possible use in a radio documentary. We are appearing as guests in Woman's Hour on the afternoon of ~~October~~ 28th. The Expedition received considerable local and national coverage before its departure and, as the earliest supporter of our venture, the Foundation received frequent mention.

September

We would like to thank the Foundation for their support, which gave the Expedition a valuable shot in the arm at the earliest stage of fund raising, and gave us the confidence to go out and seek further sponsors.

John Town

John Town

Shiona Dawson

Shiona Dawson

19th September 1984

Hadfield Altai Expedition

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EXPEDITION SUMMARY

Destination: ALTAI MOUNTAINS,
WESTERN SIBERIA / OUTER MONGOLIAN BORDER,
USSR.

Objectives: First British ascent of Mt BIELUKHA, 14810ft, highest
peak in the Altai

Period: July 26th - August 17th, 1984

General background:

The Altai are the most northerly of the great mountain ranges of Central Asia. They stretch for 1200 miles along the southern borders of Siberia and Outer Mongolia, dividing the vast forests of the Siberian taiga from the arid wastes of Mongolia and Sinkiang. At the NW end of the chain, at the centre of a complex of ridges and glaciers, stands its highest mountain - the double headed peak of Bielukha. At 14,810 feet it is slightly higher than the Matterhorn and holds 27 square miles of permanent snow.

Since the 1917 Revolution the High Altai have been closed to foreign climbers. Exploration of the area was still in progress at that time, the first ascent of Bielukha having been made just three years earlier, in August 1914. No accounts of the ascent were ever published outside the Russian language and, because of the ban, the peak has never had a British ascent. In 1983 the Soviet Directorate of International Mountaineering Camps opened the area to Western climbers and the Expedition will be taking advantage of this to make the first visit from this country since 1903. As well as attempting the first British ascent of Bielukha, the members will aim to document what changes, if any, have taken place in this remote and beautiful area over the past eighty years.

There have been very few British expeditions to the Soviet Union over the past 20 years. At a time of deteriorating political relations between Russia and the West, such contacts assume a particular significance in reducing mutual tension and mistrust.

Wildlife

Numerous authorities have attested to the richness and beauty of the Altai's alpine flowers, said to be finer than that of either the Alps or the Caucasus. It is hoped to bring back the first colour photographs of the flora. The mountains are also the only home of the Altai Snowcock, a very large and colourful member of the grouse family. The most spectacular animals of the region are the Maral or Altai Stag, famed for its velvet, and the Marco Polo Sheep (Ovis Ammon), owners of the largest coiled horns in the world. Yaks and camels are used as pack animals.

Archaeology and Anthropology

The foothills are scattered with Neolithic barrows and, high in the NW area, are the famous 'Frozen Graves of the Altai', in which a nomad chieftain, his wife, horses and treasure lay preserved in ice for 24 centuries, until their discovery in the fifties. The indigenous inhabitants of the area, the Altaitsi, were still pursuing much the same way of life at the start of the century, including the practise of their shamanistic religion with its offerings of young ponies and wayside symbols, though their current situation is difficult to assess.

Current Status

The Expedition is receiving support from the Mount Everest Foundation and is currently approaching local firms and organisations for further financial backing. A permit for the Expedition was granted by the Russians in mid-February. Expedition has received coverage in the Daily Telegraph, Manchester Evening News, Yorkshire Post and Glossop Chronicle and an interview broadcast on Radio Manchester. Further articles are likely to appear in the Daily Mail and High Peak Courier.

Research

There are virtually no reliable descriptions or photographs. In 1903 Samuel Turner got within striking distance of Bielukha, but his visit was in mid-winter and the few photographs are notable mainly for the amount of fresh snow. Atkinson, his predecessor in 1859, was a much more reliable observer, but his etchings, however pleasing, are no substitute for photographs. The only other available accounts are in pre-Revolutionary Russian geographical journals. Translating these has so far been laborious but rewarding. The best book on the subject was published in Tomsk in 1905 but, predictably, is unobtainable in this country.

There are no reliable large scale maps available. The delineation of glaciers and ridge lines is extremely vague on the only available map, which is at 15 miles to the inch.

Membership

John Town (31) is an administrator working in the Registrar's Department at the University of Manchester. Shiona Dawson (29) works as a Interactive Computer Graphics Programmer at ICI, Alderley Edge. They have climbed in the Alps, Himalayas, Pyrenees, Atlas, Caucasus, Eastern Turkey and US West Coast ranges. Over recent years they have had photographs and articles published in club journals, Climber and Rambler magazine and the Alpine Journal. Both members have a elementary knowledge of Russian.

Budget

The expedition budget is shown on a separate sheet.



Itinerary

Scheduled flights

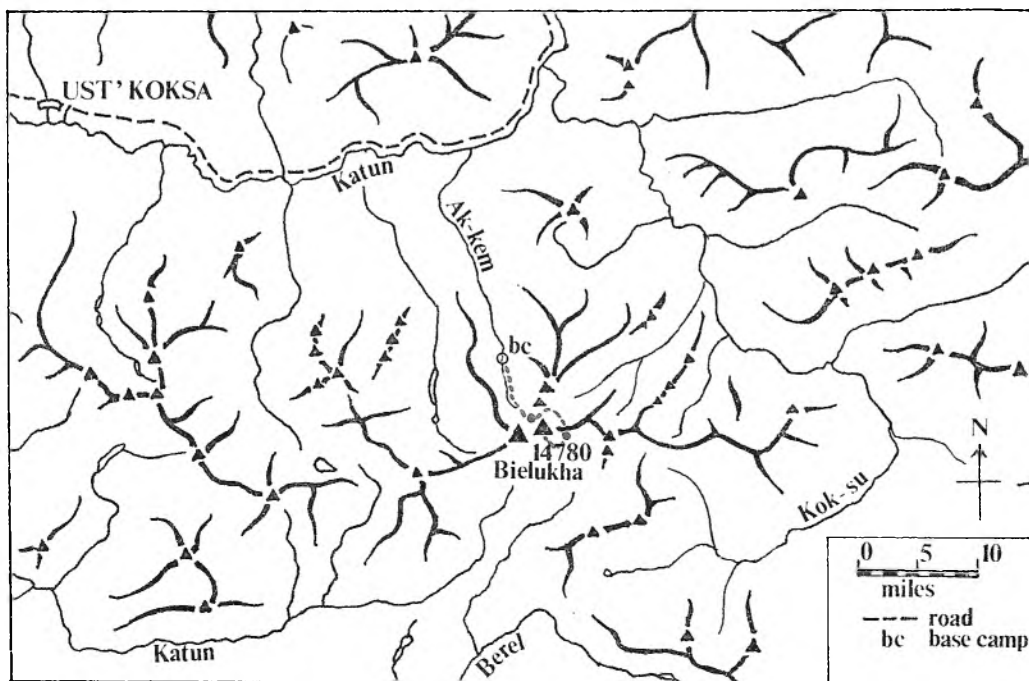
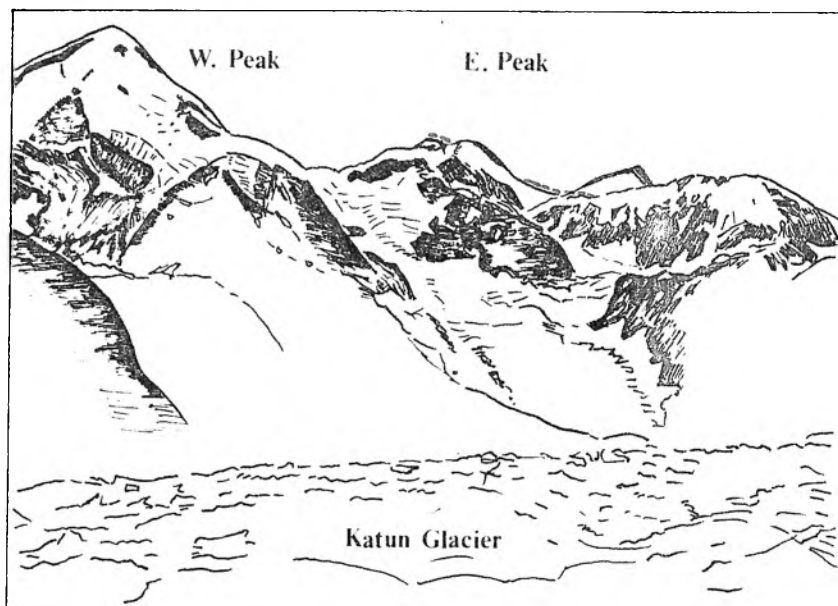
LONDON - MOSCOW
MOSCOW - BARNAUL

Light aircraft

BARNAUL - UST KOKSA

Helicopter

UST KOKSA -
AK-KEM BASE CAMP



Above:
S. side of
Bielukha.
Sketch after
a plate by
Sobolev
Zemlevedeniye
1896.

Left:
Shaded area
on map above.

Into the unknown

A HUSBAND and wife climbing team from Yorkshire hopes to become the first British climbers to scale the highest peak in the Soviet Union's Altai mountains, this summer.

John Town, 31, and his wife Shiona Dawson, 29, will be the first British climbers to visit the mountain range, on the borders of China, Outer Mongolia and the Soviet Union, since

the Revolution, and they have little information about the 14,810 ft. Mount Bielukha.

"It is quite a challenge to be going on a mountain you know nothing about. The reason we are able to go is we get information direct from the Russians about what areas are open and on what terms they will allow people in. We have been before so they know us. But this area was closed to climbers from the end of the First World War until last year when the mountains were opened to Westerners."

They have little idea about the difficulty of their task except the south route has been climbed and is easier than the north route, which they believe may not have been tackled. "Part of the attraction of this area is it is supposed to be very beautiful, the flowers in particular are supposed to be like nowhere else."

"What little current information I have comes from sporting newspapers and is in Russian, said John, who does have an elementary knowledge of the language."

They now live in Glossop, John working at Manchester University, and Shiona for ICI at Alderley Edge, but both their families still live in Yorkshire. John is from Harrogate, where his parents and brothers live, and his wife, who is a former pupil of Bradford Girls' Grammar School, comes from Ilkley.

YORKSHIRE POST May 24th 1984

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS

Wednesday, May 30, 1984

Mr Manchester's DIARY

Couple aim to conquer Russian peak

THE husband - and - wife team of John and Shiona Town will visit a remote Russian mountain range this summer where no Britons have climbed for over 80 years.

John, aged 31, and 30-year-old Shiona, of Church Street, Hadfield, near Hyde, hope to make the first British ascent of the 14,810ft Bielukha peak in the High Altai range which was re-opened to foreign climbers last year for the first time since the 1917 Revolution.

Despite a British Mountaineering Council boycott on official contacts with the Russians, brought about by the 1981 invasion of Afghanistan, BMC members John and Shiona will fly on July 28 to their base camp near the Mongolian and Chinese borders.

"It's not an official trip — and we would not try to dissuade them from going," said a BMC spokesman.

John, an administrator at Manchester University, and Shiona, a computer graphics programmer, plan to bring back photographs of the region's rare flora and fauna, including the Altai snowcock (a sort of large grouse), the Altai stag and the Marco Polo sheep.

They also hope to visit the Frozen Graves of the Altai, in which a nomad chieftain, his wife, horses and treasure lay preserved in the ice for 24 centuries.

Assault on Bielukha

HADFIELD mountaineers John Town and Shiona Dawson are to attempt the first British ascent of Bielukha — the highest mountain in the Siberian Altai range.

The expedition received permission from the Russians in February and, with the support of the Mount Everest Foundation it will take place in July and August.

The Altai are the most northerly of the great mountain ranges of Central Asia. They stretch for 1,200 miles along the southern borders of Siberia and Outer Mongolia, dividing the vast forests of the Siberian taiga from the arid wastes of Mongolia and Sinkiang.

At the north-west end of the chain, at the centre of a

complex of ridges and glaciers, stands its highest mountain — Bielukha. At 14,810 feet it is slightly higher than the Swiss Matterhorn and holds 27 square miles of permanent snow.

The expedition promises to be all the more exciting because the area has only recently been opened to Westerners and the last British visit was in 1903.

Since the 1917 Revolution the High Altai have been closed to foreign climbers. Exploration of the area was still in progress at that

time, the first ascent of Bielukha having been made just three years earlier.

No accounts of the ascent were ever published outside the Russian language and, because of the ban, the peak has never had a British ascent.

But John and Shiona of Church Street, Hadfield, hope to change all that when they set off on the Hadfield Altai Expedition. John, 31, is an administrator working in the Registrar's Office. **★ Continued on Page 8**

DAILY TELEGRAPH May 22nd 1984

FIRST BRITISH ATTEMPT AT SOVIET RANGE

Mr John Town, 31, and his wife Shiona, 29, plan to be the first British climbers to visit a remote Soviet mountain range since the Russian Revolution.

The couple, from Hadfield, near Glossop, Derbyshire, aim to make the first British ascent of Mt Bielukha, 14,810 feet, in the Altai Mountains which straddle the borders of the Soviet Union, Outer Mongolia and China.

The area was closed to climbers from the West until last year, but has recently been reopened. The Mount Everest Foundation has granted the couple £300, to help pay some of the estimated £1,200 costs of the expedition, which leaves for the Soviet Union in late July.

GLOSSOP CHRONICLE May 18th 1984

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY MAG May 28 1984

SIBERIA OR BUST

Hadfield-based mountaineer John Town, of the Registrar's Department, is to make history this summer as he climbs the Altai range on the border of Siberia and Outer Mongolia. John and his wife Shiona Dawson hope to be the first Britons to climb the Altai's 14,810 feet Mount Bielukha and the first into the range since the Russian Revolution of 1917. First climbed only in August 1914, Bielukha is one of the USSR's most remote peaks, and the Soviets have been very careful about allowing foreign climbers onto it.