

BRITISH CAUCASUS  
EXPEDITION  
1986



acl 23972

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: Mick Fowler

Very few British mountaineers have climbed in the Soviet Union and the reasons behind us choosing to visit the Caucasus range in 1986 require some explanation.

In common with many climbers we found ourselves restricted by work commitments which would not allow regular long holidays and thus necessitated filling in the years between Himalayan-type expeditions with shorter but (hopefully) equally challenging trips.

Early enthusiasm for the West European Alps began to decline with increasing familiarity, the attainment of objectives and the ever present (and increasing) crowds. The need for new pastures gradually increased and with the following requirements in mind the search for suitable alternatives began:

1. Mountains not exceeding 6000m and accessible in a 3-4 week round trip from London.
2. Steep impressive peaks with difficult high quality rock and ice routes and preferably some worthwhile unclimbed objectives.
3. An area rarely visited by British people thus allowing our visit to have an exploratory feel.
4. A diverse and interesting local culture.
5. Good value for money.

Previously similar considerations had resulted in trips to Kilimanjaro and Peru, but the USSR had never featured as a realistic alternative as, in common with most British climbers, we had regarded Russian bureaucracy as too restrictive to allow full enjoyment of the climbing. Rumours of regimented mountaineering camps, compulsory regular radio contact and continuous supervision combined to dissuade any in-depth enquiries, and the cloak of mystery and misunderstanding remained intact.

It was Paul Nunn (who had climbed in the Caucasus with Hamish McInnes in 1970) who first awakened interest by emphasising the fine and unfrequented climbing available. He suggested contact with Des Rubens and Dave Broadhead, who had attended the 1984 Caucasus Camp and were the only British climbers to have managed technical climbs in the area since the mountaineering camp system started in 1974. Through them it was ascertained that the bureaucracy and restrictions were not as stringent and unhelpful as had been presumed. Also it seemed that the area was remote, exciting, rarely visited by the British and very much in line with what we were searching for.

Briefly, it was ascertained that there are three ways in which to climb in the Caucasus:

1. As the personal guest of a Russian citizen.
2. As the guest of a Trade Union body.
3. As a guest of the Russian Sportcommittee

1 and 2 are impractical for most people but 3 is easily arranged, although it is only for a fixed three and a half week stay. Each year the Sportscommittee sends details of the International Camps to the BMC who distribute copies to anyone interested. Alternatively, individuals can obtain the same literature direct from the Sportscommittee in Moscow. The information sheet is in the form of an impersonal invitation and is copied in full at Appendix 2.

Having advised the Sportscommittee of one's intention to attend a Mountaineering Camp a telegram is received confirming acceptance, and after the transfer of the necessary funds, visas can be arranged.

From the climbing point of view, we understood that after one training climb we would be free to climb whatever we wished on the understanding that a radio was carried and contact made with the camp three times per day.

All this did not sound too onerous, and with enthusiasm fired, a team of 4 was got together. Obviously the team members will be repeatedly referred to throughout this report so some background information may be of interest.

There were no changes in the team after the conception of the trip and those involved were:

**Michael Fowler (30) (Leader): Civil Servant**

First ascentionist of numerous rock and ice climbs throughout Britain and a regular Alpine climber since 1969. Notable ascents include the North faces of the Eiger and Matterhorn, the Dru Couloir and a new route on the Eckpfeiler Buttress of Mt Blanc (1977).

Activities further afield include:

- 1982: Leader and summit climber on the successful British Taulliraju South Face Expedition - (Peru);
- 1983: Kilimanjaro (5865m) Tanzania - new route to Uhuru Peak over 2 days;
- 1984: Bojohagur Duonasir (7329m) - Pakistan Himalaya - failure 500m below the summit of this unclimbed peak.

**Victor Saunders (36): Architect**

First ascentionist of many fine new routes on rock and ice throughout Britain as well as a regular visitor to the West European Alps for over 10 years. Significant ascents include the Eiger North Face in Winter, the Cecchinell/Nomine route on the Eckpfeiler and many more.

Outside Europe his experience includes:

- 1981: Conways Ogre (6530m) - Pakistan Himalaya. First ascent of this difficult and spectacular peak. During the course of the Expedition he also played a major part in the successful rescue of a Japanese party from nearby Latok 4. (It was the Japanese climbers who, grateful at being rescued, presented Victor with the Mountain Photography book out of which our Caucasian objective was chosen.)
- 1984: Bojohagur Duonasir (7329m) - Leader of this Expedition which failed 300m below the summit.
- 1985: Rimo 1 (7300m) - Indian Himalaya. The potential first ascent of this important peak was foiled by the dropping of a rucksack at 7000m when the main difficulties appeared to be over.

**Margaret Urmston (37): Lecturer**

Although only introduced to climbing 3 years ago, she has achieved ascents of revered British ice routes such as Orion Face Direct (Ben Nevis) and, abroad, has climbed impressive routes such as the North Face of the Ebenfluh in the Bernese Oberland.

Further afield she visited the Indian Himalaya in 1984 (before having climbed in the European Alps!) and succeeded in making an ascent of Mulkelä (6000m).

**William Simmonds (37): Sales Manager**

A keen rock climber and mountaineer for the past 6 years with numerous notable achievements throughout Britain.

Four seasons in the European Alps have seen Ascents of such major classics as the Peutery Integral on Mt Blanc and in 1984 he visited the Indian Himalaya and succeeded in climbing a new route on Mulkelä 7 (6000m) in the Lahoul region.

With the team complete we set about looking for suitable objectives. Right from the start information was difficult to come by and we relied very much on the Alpine Club's substantial collection of late 19th and early 20th century books written by

the Victorian pioneers. These were of limited use and with the most recent publication being "The Red Snows" (1960) by John Hunt/Chris Brasher, information on modern routes was not forthcoming.

Eventually we decided on Ushba (4710m) as a promising peak and from a Japanese mountain photography book we chose a line on the West Face of the North Peak as a suitable objective. In the absence of evidence to the contrary we assumed this to be unclimbed.

As a reaction to the lack of information available in Britain, a further important aim of the Expedition was to explore the area as thoroughly as possible and publicise our findings via magazine articles, lectures and the Expedition report.

## 2. HISTORY

### Political History: Victor Saunders

For his book "Across the Caucasus", Michael Pereira states that there is much uncertainty, both ancient and modern, about the Caucasus which is attributable to its "sheer physical inaccessibility". The area has retained its remoteness and mystery to this day, in spite of the building of the Georgian Highway and the activities of a few rugged mountaineers.

This strategically placed region which divides Europe from Asia has had a place in history out of all proportion to its size. Long since a battleground for warring tribes, empires and emergent nations, this old trade route and border territory has now become a stable group of small independent republics united by the Soviet Union. Georgia - the oldest - dates from the 3rd century BC and had its golden age in the 12th century AD under the illustrious Queen Tamara. A retreat for besieged Christians, a place of banishment for dissenting poets (Lermontov), a source of inspiration for writers (Tolstoy), a hideout for roving bandits - the Caucasus has a rich and varied history. Once referred to as an "ethnological museum" it harbours over 50 different races and languages.

The area is steeped in legend, including the Greek myths of Prometheus and the Golden Fleece, and the story of the Rock in the Arabian Nights. Local fairy tales surround each mountain and village. The villages boast archeological remains - Christian churches (some carved in solid walls of rock) and Moslem temples provide clear evidence of the blend of European and Asian culture.

The rivers descend from the inaccessible "shimmering peaks" through dark high gorges into lower plains that vary in climate from sub-tropical in the west to desert in the east. Russian modernisation of towns, industry and agriculture has increased traffic in the area but the high valleys and mountainous zones of the Caucasus remain remote and largely unfamiliar - except to the select band of scholars, travellers and mountaineers who have been curious or privileged enough to explore them.

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## British Climbing History: Victor Saunders

If Prometheus was the first person to take a close interest in the mountains of the Caucasus, then he was certainly closely followed by the British Alpine Club. For it was the early members of the club who forced the pace of exploration in this exquisite range.

It was Freshfield's Expedition of 1868 that marked the start of the so-called "Silver Age of Mountaineering" - the first venturings into the greater ranges. It also marked a period of intense British activity in the range. During the decade 1886 to 1896 almost all the great peaks of the Caucasus were conquered, and without exception, none survived beyond 1903. Of the 10 highest peaks, no less than 9 were first climbed by British parties. The names of the first ascentionists are familiar: H Walker, A W Moore, T G Longstaff, A F Mummery, Vittorio Sella (all members of the Alpine Club) and their guides: P Knubel, F Devouassoud, H Zurfluh. Harold Raeburn's expedition of 1914 was the last before the Revolution of 1917 effectively brought this period of exploration to a close.

During the interbellum the Soviet style of mountaineering started to become established. It began officially with the mass ascent of Kasbek by 25 Georgians in 1923. Long traverses at consistently high altitude began to be done, and in 1938 E Beletsky led an 18 day traverse in the Bezingi area from Shkara to Lyalvan. Later, in 1956, Ivan Galustov's team completed a traverse of 15 summits, spending 31 days above 4000m.

Soviet climbers also started climbing routes for their individual appeal as opposed to being part of a long traverse. V Abalakov (who died in 1986) was the pre-eminent mountaineer in this vein and virtually every classic Caucasian face has a high quality Abalakov route. Khirgiani (a local climber from Georgia) was also active in this period recording first ascents of numerous notable ice climbs.

Prior to the formation of the International Mountaineering Camps in 1974, any climbing visit to the Soviet Union was fraught with bureaucratic problems. The result was that many classic difficult routes fell solely to East European climbers. Nevertheless, in the 1917-1974 period 3 British teams did manage to climb technical routes in the area.

Jenkins, Taylor, Beaumont and Hodgkin visited in 1937 and, in a remarkably successful trip, managed to climb new routes on 4 major peaks - Jailik (4533m), Adyrsu Bashi (4370m), Ushba South (4710m) and Telnud (4852m). The other two visits were the work of Hamish McInnes (in 1962 and 1970) who managed the long and difficult traverse of Shkelda and a hard route on the north face of the Pic Shurovski.



Since 1974 restrictions have eased and several British mountaineers have visited the area. However, only Des Rubens and Dave Broadhead (in 1984) succeeded in doing any technical climbing.

It goes without saying that the area is ripe with classics which await British ascents.

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### 3 PREPARATION: by Mick Fowler

With regard to climbing preparation no significant departure from the norm was necessary. All four of us had climbed together for some years, and regular weekends away guaranteed a satisfactory level of fitness. Some equipment needed to be purchased but this was merely supplementing that which we already owned.

Financially, matters were simplified by the early opening of an Expedition bank account and financial support was received from both the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. We knew that the \$800 per person payment covered absolutely everything once we were in the Soviet Union, but to be safe we each took approximately £200 contingency money. However, there is very little to spend roubles on, particularly as the main tourist shops or "Beriozkas" accept only dollars or sterling. Consequently nearly all of the money we changed into roubles had to be changed back when we left the country. The commission rates charged were similar to those involved in changing money between Western currencies.

Bureaucratically, our path was not quite as simple as we had anticipated although with prior knowledge of what to expect (and when) there is no need to fear Russian paperwork. The timetable of events listed below should give an idea of the time scales and avoid any unnecessary worries:

- 24. 9.86                    Written request to Sportscommittee for a copy of 1986 Information Sheet.
- 15.11.86                   Information Sheet (Appendix 2) received from the Soviet Union.
- 10.12.86                   Sportscommittee advised in writing of our intention to visit the Caucasus. (The deadline for receipt in Moscow being 31 December).
- 10. 4.86                   Letter sent to Sportscommittee requesting instructions on how and when to make payment.
- 10. 5.86                   Letter received from the Sportscommittee requesting that we arrange to transfer \$800 per person from the Expedition account to the Sportscommittee's account with the Bank for Foreign Trade in Moscow.
- 23. 5.86                   Payment in full transferred.
- 16. 6.86                   Telegram received confirming receipt of the money transferred.
- 25. 6.86                   Letter sent to Sportscommittee advising them of our travel arrangements and date/time of arrival in Moscow.

It is worth bearing in mind that one should arrange to arrive/depart on the dates quoted in the Information Sheet. We made the mistake of safeguarding ourselves against the internal flight to the Caucasus departing on the 23rd July and ended up paying \$50 each for what was seen as an extra night in Moscow - the same happened on the return journey, thus resulting in a needless expense of \$100 per person.

Each trip includes one day in Moscow (with an official tour available) so there is nothing to be gained by spending more time there.

Our timetable of events having arrived in Moscow was as follows:

- 22.7.86            5 pm - arrive in Moscow.
- 23.7.86            All those attending the Caucasus Camp met in Moscow.
- 24.7.86            5 am - one and a half hour internal flight to Mineralni Vodi, followed by 4 hour bus ride to the Azau International Mountaineering Camp in the Baksan Valley
- 25.7.86            Briefing in the camp.  
Medical examination by Camp doctor.  
Radios distributed and their use explained.  
Afternoon free - chairlift taken to Cheget where a good view of Donguz Orun (4454m) and Nakra Tau (4277m) was obtained.
- 26.7-12.8        Time available for climbing/exploration.
- 13.8.86            Bus to Mineralni Vodi - flight to Moscow.
- 14.8.86            Official tour of Moscow available.
- 15.8.86            Free time in Moscow.
- 16.8.86            Flight to London

With hindsight, we would have arrived in Moscow on the 23rd July and left on 15th August.

As far as flights to Moscow are concerned, at the time of writing the cheapest way is with Yugoslavian Airlines via Belgrade. British Airways fly daily direct from Heathrow, and Aeroflot also have regular direct flights. Despite the frequency of flights it is advisable to book early as it is a surprisingly busy route.

Unfortunately, Yugoslavian Airlines did not fly on the dates that we required and we therefore went with British Airways (£242 return).

Visas were essential but could only be obtained from the Soviet Embassy in London after the Sportscommittee had confirmed that our party had been "invited" to attend the Camp. Although they took only a couple of weeks to obtain, it is worthwhile contacting the Embassy in advance and finding out the latest procedures.

Prior to leaving all members made rather half-hearted attempts at learning the Russian language. In the event, our linguistic talents were very limited, but the fact that we had made the effort to learn the Cyrillic alphabet proved useful in reading signs etc. while travelling on our own in Moscow. Using the few words we had managed to master seemed to go down well with the Russians.

As an interpreter is allocated to each party and English is fairly widely spoken even this basic knowledge of the Russian language was not essential.

No additional insurance cover was arranged as any rescue expenses are covered by the Russians: the premium being incorporated in the \$800 fee.

With our preparations complete we finally arrived in Moscow in the evening of 22nd July. As it was outside office hours we had decided to postpone attempts to contact the Sportscommittee until the following day. However, we had under-estimated the assistance that would be available to us and our interpreter, Tanya, was at the airport to meet us and 3 Spaniards who arrived at virtually the same time on a different flight. A 40-seater coach had been laid on to transport the 8 of us to the Hotel Sport - a large modern building some 6-7 miles from the centre of Moscow, where we were to await the arrival of other climbers on the 23rd July.

Mountaineering is regarded as a "sport" in the Soviet Union and enjoys a status comparable with Rugby, athletics etc in Britain. The Hotel Sport is used by all International sports people, with the result that we were rubbing shoulders with huge Argentinian Rugby players and 7' tall members of the Canadian Women's Basketball team. Doubtless these superfit athletes wondered what sport the 10 stone English weaklings could be representing their country in.

Accommodation in the hotel was comfortable and, as one of the highest buildings in the area (22 storeys), gave us a fine view of our surroundings. For all of us it was our first visit to the Soviet Union and we were keen to identify and explain visible differences in East/West life-styles. In this we were fortunate in having been allocated an interpreter who was only too pleased to enthusiastically discuss any topic we wished.

It was fascinating for example to see that the shortage of such items as replacement windscreen wiper blades meant that to avoid

"light fingers" 95% of Moscow drivers keep their blades inside and pull over to put them on when it starts raining.

Something that concerned us more directly was the discovery that the Caucasus had recently been declared an "area for sport" and is therefore alcohol free. It is beyond the scope of this report to go deeply into the variations in East/West life-styles - suffice to say that the sights freely visible in Moscow are sufficient to provoke much discussion and made us conclude that travelling to the Caucasus via Moscow had distinct compensations.

Our first morning in Moscow soon emphasised the variation in English/Soviet eating habits. Although the food eaten is much the same as in Britain, instead of starting off with a small breakfast and building up through the day to a substantial evening meal, the Soviets start off with the main meal of the day - all of which was rather a shock when faced with pasta, burgers, omelette, salad, bread, cheese and coffee served in several courses for breakfast. However, it was only a matter of time until we settled into this routine.

The spare day resulting from our early arrival was spent exploring the impressive buildings and backstreets of central Moscow and familiarising ourselves with the imposingly ornate Metro system. The rest of the people attending the Camp arrived and our companions for the next three weeks turned out to vary from a teenage American exchange group to experienced Polish and Hungarian climbers.

Early in the morning of the 24th July an internal flight took us to the Spa town of Mineralni Vodi in South Russia from where a 4 hour coach ride through farming land (complete with frequent large posterboard pictures of Lenin) took us to the Azau Mountaineering Camp, at an altitude of 2400m, at the head of the Baksan Valley. First impressions of this establishment were not good. A six storey prefabricated hotel complete with Camp Commander and climbing guides allocated to each party. Only a limited view of the mountains and the usual poster of Lenin outside made us wonder what was in store.

As it turned out we need not have feared. Our time in the Caucasus could be directly equated to climbing in the Swiss/French Alps but having full board hotel accommodation in the valley instead of the usual tent.

The morning of our first day at Azau was spent being introduced to Leo, the Camp Commander, Valentine Ivanov, the climbing leader (and leader/summitteer of the 1979 Soviet Everest Expedition) and Uri, our own guide. Although these titles imply formality, in practise, all three were keen and very competent climbers who were there simply to give advice and assistance. Leo and Valentine held a meeting of all the group leaders at which our planned ascents were put forward. It turned out that most people

were interested in trekking up Mount Elbruz and, apart from ourselves, only the Swiss, Hungarians and Poles intended to attempt any serious climbing.

The afternoon was taken up by a chairlift ride up the slopes of nearby Cheget (3800m) followed by a walk up to a forepeak at approximately 3500m from where excellent views of Donguz Orun (4454m), Nakra (4200m) and Elbruz (5631m) could be had.

After much reference to blurred photographs (see Chapter 5 - Climbing, Literature/Maps) objectives were duly chosen; Victor and myself were to try the north face of Nakra Tau, while Maggie and Burt opted for 4 days away from Camp on Jantugan and Ullu Kara.

Preparation for the first route varied considerably from what we were used to. Firstly, a medical examination was necessary when our pulse rates and blood pressure was checked before and after doing 10 squat thrusts. This was followed by a form requesting next of kin details and, finally, a further form detailing the proposed itinerary which had to be signed by Uri, the doctor, and the guide in charge of rescue services. The route form caused considerable confusion as Burt and Maggie were required to draw a diagram showing the lines of their intended routes which were both on mountains, which they had not even seen photographs or diagrams of!

At this point it is worth mentioning that the guides are not full time climbers and are in the Caucasus as part of their annual holiday. For their assistance they get all their accommodation and travel paid and receive a small salary. They often have to stay in camp for long periods and one way to escape into the mountains is to persuade a party to undertake a trek and try and tag along. With this in mind, it is wise to make it very clear from the start that you have come to climb on your own. If at all possible it is a good idea to arrive having already planned your first objective (see 5 - Climbing Literature/Maps). Once our first climbs were behind us we were left very much to our own devices.

For each day that we were away from the camp we were allowed 12 roubles per day credit with which to buy food from the camp store. By British standards, this equates to about £25 per person per day. The Caucasus became "dry" in 1985 but prior to this time guests did their utmost to spend this on alcohol and the camps acquired a rather drunken reputation. The allowance still remains the same at 12 roubles but it is frankly impossible to spend all of this. On our first foray out of the camp we took the advice of Uri and Victor (our new interpreter) who nearly managed to account for the full amount. The result ranged from 1 kg glass jars of peas to 10 kg of raw potatoes. The total weight was in excess of 40 kg, 35 kg of which was left behind in the hotel as we cut down on weight by utilising our freeze dried

foods. (This sort of lightweight climbing food is not available in Russia and must be brought from home).

As a result of the very limited rescue facilities available (no helicopters) inclusion of a two-way radio in one's sack is not as oppressive as it at first sounds. They weigh about 1 kg and their use is compulsory. Progress etc must be reported to base three times a day and by using pre-arranged times it is possible to converse with other climbing teams (this is much more interesting than talking to base!).

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#### 4. RUSSIAN GRADING SYSTEM

A numerical grading system is in use which corresponds roughly to that in Western Europe:

<u>Russian</u>	<u>Western Europe</u>
1A	Facile (F)
1B	Facile + (F Sup)
2A	Peu Difficile (PD)
2B	Peu Difficile + (PD Sup)
3A	Assez Difficile (AD)
3B	Assez Difficile + (AD Sup)
4A	Difficile (D)
4B	Difficile + (D Sup)
5A	Tres Difficile (TD)
5B	Tres Difficile + (TD Sup)
6	Extremement Difficile (ED)

These are direct technical comparisons and it should be borne in mind that the approaches and descents from the Caucasian climbs are usually longer and more serious than in the Western Alps.

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## 5. CLIMBING LITERATURE/MAPS

A comprehensive set of Russian guide books (by Naimov) covers the range in 3 volumes. However, these are difficult to get hold of, rather confusing and available only in Russian. The Alpine Club library in London has 2 volumes but the third volume covering the Ushba region seems not to be available here as yet. Perhaps more useful is the German guide published in Dresden ("Deutscher Verband Fur Wandern, Bergsteign, Orientierungslave" by Frederick Bender and Rudor Schmieder) which contains good clear diagrams and, being in German, allows one to avoid battling with the Cyrillic alphabet. Unfortunately, we have been unable to trace any copies of this guide in England and can only suggest writing to the German Alpine Club.

Russian guide books are usually available in the Caucasus but at present they are all owned privately by Russian guides and are not for sale. Initially, we found that the only information made available to us was a series of photographs which had some routes/grades marked on them but were often of poor quality and were of very limited assistance in choosing potentially interesting peaks. It is worth bearing in mind the existence of the guide books when faced with this confusing array of material.

Maps of the area seem to be in short supply and unreliable. We were given a Russian map by the camp organisers but it was of passing interest only and useless for route planning/navigational purposes. An excellent relief map on the wall of a small cinema at Azau camp allows one to get a good impression of the relative positions of the mountains and the camp at Shkelda has some excellent informative wall photographs. However, for getting an idea of the general layout of the area the map at Appendix 1 of this report is as good as any.

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## 6. SOVIET ATTITUDES TO MOUNTAINEERING: by Victor Saunders

### General

As previously stated, the Soviet attitude to mountaineering is analagous to Western attitudes to competition sports. Chess is perhaps the best comparator. It is possible to play chess to a high standard without entering the British competition system, but once entered into the player must accept the full paraphernalia of gradings and assessment. In chess, the grades culminate in the titles of Master, International Master and International Grand Master. Climbing is not an internationally accepted competition, and so attracts a maximum Russian grade of Master.

Like the chess player the Soviet climber is not forced to enter the sport. However, not doing so would put him at a considerable disadvantage. Not only would he be strongly discouraged from undertaking serious climbs, but he would also be penalised financially in that he would not be eligible to use the very cheap mountaineering camp facilities. (These camps are subsidised by trade unions and the "official" climber pays only about 30% of the cost price - which amounts to a personal contribution of about £30 for a 3-week full board stay). As a result most of the serious Soviet climbers we met were "official". The above bureaucracy applies only to serious mountaineering; in the Caucasus there are no restrictions on trekking or bivouacing, although it is as well to remember that the Soviets tend to call sleeping under canvas "bivouacing".

### East European Mountaineers

The "sport" system applies differently to East Europeans in that they may join international camps as guests with the same degree of freedom as Western climbers. There is, for instance, no regulation controlling the grade of climbs to be attempted, though the Soviets, with their natural caution, will strongly advise teams against attempting over-ambitious projects. There were Polish and Hungarian teams at Azau, as well as one Czechoslovakian. The Polish Alpine Club sponsors four places each year at Azau Camp, and six in the Pamirs. The cost to the Polish Club for a six-week session in the Caucasus is about £1,700 per person, and this is probably typical for the other East Europeans. The personal contribution from each Polish climber is about £250.

For those East Europeans not selected for sponsorship, the alternative is to visit the region as a "tourist" at about one-third of the cost of the Mountaineering Camp. As a "tourist" the climber will not have access to normal rescue facilities, radios etc. and any serious mountaineering would be of dubious legality.

## The Grading System for Mountaineers

As mentioned previously, the ultimate grade in Soviet mountaineering is "Master" or, more fully, "Master of Sport". To gain the first rung of the ladder, the novice must successfully complete a three-week course which culminates in route(s) up to Grade "1B". The course includes basic skills in mountaineering, river crossing etc. At this stage the apprentice is awarded a badge and is known as a "Badgist". The badge bears the insignia "USSR Alpinist". Successive grades thereafter are 4th, 3rd, 2nd, 1st grade Alpinist, Candidate and Master.

Progress through the grades is made via theory examinations, mountaineering and competitions. We did not see theory being tested but did meet a "candidate" leading a group of "Masters". They were to try the Abalakov Route (4A) on Ulla Tau and, if all went well, the candidate would gain some points towards the Master category.

Each Soviet mountaineer keeps a personal log book, recording the results of exams, competitions and climbs. In this way, climbers are categorised according to their ability and are authorised to climb routes of the appropriate grade. This gives a secure foundation of mountaineering, and explains some of the anxiety shown when we announced that we would like to start on a route of 5A standard.

## Rescue Facilities

Rescue facilities are minimal compared to those available in the Western Alps. It is of course possible to use the radio to summon assistance but helicopter support is very unreliable and any evacuation is likely to be on foot - which may take several days.

Russian guides form the rescue team and the extreme inconvenience a rescue causes them must go some way towards explaining their caution when unproven climbers opt for difficult routes.

Basically the area is fairly remote and an accident has implications somewhere between Himalayan and Western European levels of seriousness.

## Climbing Competitions

There are three types of competition in the USSR - rock, ice and mountain climbing - all based on the principle of speed.

The most serious event is undoubtedly the mountaineering competition in which teams compete on mountains such as Ushba. Routes of similar grade and length are attempted by several parties. While we were in Azau teams from Leningrad and Ukraine were to attempt several different lines of 5B grade on Ushba South. These routes are in excess of 1500m and it seems an

unlikely scene for such a competition. It is one of the most serious Alpine faces in Europe (comparable with the Grande Jorasses, but bigger and badder) where poor weather invariably means serious climbing. On the day of the competition the cloud was down to the valley and a storm was brewing. We don't know how things went - we can barely imagine!

Ice climbing competitions in which the competitors use the uniquely Russian ice-fifis and ice screwdrivers for superfast placements of the ubiquitous titanium ice screws are currently losing popularity in favour of the rock limbing competitions.

We were lucky enough to watch a rock climbing competition in the spectacular Baksan Gorge. This gorge provides superb granite climbing and was the scene of Alan McHardy's explorations in 1970, yet the greater part of the available rock is still unclimbed. The competition system came as a complete surprise to us. We had expected to find individuals top roping selected pitches against the clock. In fact it was a team sport. The three participating teams, in turn, tackled a climb (and abseil descent) of about four pitches (approx 600 ft). Each team consisted of three ropes of two climbers. The course was marked out with tape and made a vertical track about 30 feet wide. The time recorded by each team was the total elapsed between the starting pistol and the descent of the last man of the last rope. The team must climb the route as three separate ropes, and stay within the tapes, but no restrictions on the use of gear was apparent. Pegs, Nuts, Friends and Etriers were freely used. Several competitors had fifi hooks attached to their knees!

It is obvious that the Soviet competitions we saw are not intended to fulfil the same purpose as those we are now seeing the West. Their aim is not to select, by competition, the finest individual rock athlete. Instead, the emphasis is on team sports and categorisation of individuals.

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## 7. CLIMBING/EXPLORATION UNDERTAKEN

For the purposes of climbing and exploration we split into two teams - Mick/Victor and Maggie/Bert, and our activities were as follows:

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## The Adyr Su Valley: Victor Saunders

From the village of Old Baksan (which is reminiscent of a solitary tower block in Hackney) the Adyr Su runs almost due south east for 15 kilometers to the Ullu Tau ice walls. It contains an unsurfaced road with a few koshes\*, and the sporting camps of Jailik and Ullu Tau. In section it is a typical glacial valley, the steep sides hiding the lateral peaks but displaying the head walls of Ullu Tau to great effect. Adyr Su is a hanging valley, with a short steep cliff giving access to the long, level valley floor. The cliff is ascended by a rickety steel stairway and a car elevator. We were told that this unusual feature was the choice of local farmers in preference to a conventional road link: the idea being to restrict tourist access. The immediate consequence for the climber is that unless steps are taken to guarantee motorised transport up the valley there is, inevitably, a tedious and blistering 12 kilometer road walk.

From the road head at the very organised Ullu Tau Camp, a two hour walk leads to excellent bivouac sites under the Ullu Tau wall. For routes on this massif, it is worth taking a tent as these sites are on a descent route. We paid the price for not taking this precaution as it rained heavily during our bivouac and by dawn we were feeling cold, soaked and aged. Fortunately we were revived by great quantities of tea, cheese and raw garlic "forced" upon us by Soviet climbers, but we were unable to raise the enthusiasm to explore further in the dubious weather. The ever friendly Russians were sympathetic but could not understand why we were bivouacing without tent or stove.

The North face of Ulla Tau Chana (4360m) forms the most eye-catching face in the valley and sports several 5B routes of which the Abalakov Route to the central summit looks the best. Some relatively minor couloir climbs below the West summit still await ascents but look dangerous and difficult.

Jailik (4533m) is the highest peak in the area - it sports several high standard rock climbs, although due to indifferent weather we are unable to be more specific.

Aydr-Su Bashi (4370m) and Cheget Tau Chana (4109m) are also reached from the upper reaches of the Adyr Su and provide important medium grade mixed routes with reputedly fine views.

With the exception of Ulla Tau Chana, all of the above peaks seem to be infrequently visited.

Visitors to this valley should bear in mind that it lacks the remote feel of the Caucasus as it is possible to drive deep into the mountains up a good road which terminates at the two camps which are best described as noisy thriving holiday centres.

\*Caucasian shepherds' huts

## The Adyl Su Valley: Margaret Urmston

The Adyl Su Valley offers access to a large number of peaks with routes at all grades. It is an excellent place to go for a training climb as well as to visit with a view to attempting some of the classic Grade 5 routes on the better known peaks such as Cheget Tau (4109m) and Ullu Kara (4300m). The base camp for all climbs is a magnificent meadow amphitheatre known as Green Bivouac, a two-hour walk from the main valley along a river bank strewn with flowers, grazing cattle and Russian hikers in long, even crocodiles.

Back on the roadside, where one is dropped off by the bus, it is possible to strike rightwards, cross the river and walk through a pine forest and up onto a rhododendron slope to reach the Kashkatash glacier and a range of five peaks - Cheget Kara (3900m) Germagenov (3900m), Ullu Kara (4302m), on the left-hand side of the glacier (routes on the north faces of these peaks can be done from the Green Bivouac) and Free Spain Peak (4000m) and Bzeduk (4272m) on the right-hand side.

For our first trip away from base camp at Azau, Bert and I had chosen to attempt Cheget Kara, up the Kashkatash Glacier and then Jantugan, from the Green Bivouac. In the event - and it is an amusing and salutary story (for those who have route-finding difficulties) - we failed altogether to climb Cheget Kara, learning only on our return to Azau that we had been on Germagenov in stead. When we got to Jantugan we failed to locate the route which had been recommended to us by the Hungarian team (in broken English with a German guide book) and in the end we failed to get to either summit in spite of a total of some 48 hours of climbing over a four-day period.

The lesson to be learnt from this is that route-finding can be a problem, particularly when your Russian guide, who insists on accompanying you to the start of your climb, in fact leads you past the turning for your peak.

The description of Cheget Kara given by Ivanov, the climbing leader, was that it was his favourite training peak each time he returned to the area. The estimated time of ascent was given at about 8 hours. When, after five hours, Bert and I were still struggling through a morass of crevasses on a steep and awkward glacier, we felt sure something must have gone wrong. I can only pass on Ivanov's recommendation second-hand and say to anyone who chooses to climb Cheget Kara, for God's sake, turn left at the big boulder with the red painted arrow. Do not continue up the hill unless you are going for Ullu Kara, Bzeduk or Free Spain Peak. (We did in fact later climb Bzeduk but by another route from the Bzeduk glacier.)

Having spent an unrewarding 18 hours on our first route, we then had to make a steep descent to the road, walk up this for a few minutes then proceed up the Adyl Su valley path to the Green Bivouac. This took about 6 hours in all (it could be about an hour less but I found the steep descent brutal on the knees). We arrived about six in the evening to the most dazzling sight - tents and people everywhere, gleaming in the evening sun. We had booked out for 4 days, which meant that we would have needed to climb Cheget Kara, descend to the road and walk to the Green Bivouac all on day 2, climb Jantugan on day 3, and return to the roadside to be met by the bus at Jantugan Camp on day 4. This plan was probably a little ambitious even if everything had gone smoothly. I would recommend that the Green Bivouac be visited first as this is the easier walk in, and Kashkatash Glacier be saved for another trip.

Although the Russians were very keen that we should climb in good socialist style, with forethought and planning, not to mention success, they were quite cheerfully able to adapt to the exigencies of error and incompetence - British style - and some Russian too - as it happened. Our penchant for the amateur approach was in marked contrast to their emphasis on professionalism. We simply had to report on our radio that we were running behind time and we would be back a day late as a result of our having been mis-routed onto the wrong mountain. What we did not know at the time was that our guide, having descended to the relevant boulder, realised his mistake, and climbed all the way back up the hill to tell us, but we had decided to cross a large moraine in order to be closer to the start of the route and had disappeared from his view.

On arrival at Green Bivouac we no longer felt up to doing the route on Jantugan which had been suggested to us - NW Ridge (3a). It involved a long approach crossing right around the mountain from where the camp site was situated and, instead, opted for the descent route - or so we thought. On the approach we veered rightwards too soon and climbed the NE ridge. Though not steep, the rock was loose and petrifying. After an arduous haul, with stuff breaking off and nerves wearing thin, we reached the snowslope just below the summit. A noisy flashing thunderstorm overhead deterred us from going to the summit and we made our way down to the descent route and onto the glacier, thereby realising the error of our way earlier in the day. We had also been led to believe that the approach to the start of the descent route (2a) was only one hour. This is a lie. This was partly what made us think we had reached the start of the route - after an hour's walking there was indeed some sort of rock rib. I would not advise anyone to ascend Jantugan via this route. It is a slimy brown mass of slithering muddy boulders - lethal if you are under descending climbers, and disgusting whichever direction you are travelling in.

I gather from conversations with other parties that they too had found the rock on the lower grade routes loose and unstable. If



you are not used to moving over this sort of ground it might be as well to choose an ice route or, at least, add a bit of extra time to complete the route. The irritating thing is that even where it is not so steep one has to rope up because of the friable nature of the rock and then, because there are so many loose stones, one's rope is liable to be cut - as mine was.

When we descended to Jantugan at about seven in the evening, the mist was hovering around the camp site, which was lit by wood fires and streaks of silver from rows of identical Russian tents, and Russian climbers wearing silver caps to match. It looked haunting, mellow and faintly exotic. Very different in atmosphere and appearance from the brash technicoloured plastics of modern gear. We were offered tea from large black pots by a group of climbers from Siberia. They were going to leave at 2 am to do the 4-hour walk across to Cheget Kara. Thus we learnt that this peak too can be climbed from Green Bivouac. A torrential storm during the night did not deter them from leaving, but it brought them back in the early hours of the morning.

On the fifth day we concurred with the Hungarian team, and together arranged on our little black radios for the bus to come and pick us up at 11.30 am. We were back at our hotel for lunch at 3 pm and a day or two to reflect on our all too typical British-style epic.

Having only recently taken up climbing, I realised that I was bitterly disappointed not to have reached a summit. Bert was quite unmoved by such ambitions. Nevertheless, thanks to his dogged perseverance, we did manage two in one on our next trip to make up for our initial fiasco. However, I should mention we did it by accident. We were on the wrong route - again! How? - you may well ask. Bert gives the details on page ....

To summarise, the Adyl Su is an excellent valley to visit for a first foray from Azau. Germagenov (3900m) and Cheget Kara (3900m) both offer mixed medium grade climbing, while further up the valley, Ullu Kara (4302m) offers several fine medium grade routes with undoubtedly excellent panoramic views. Nearby, the Free Spain Peak gives reputedly fine grade 5 routes. Beside this is Bzeduk with classic grades 3 and 4 face and ridge routes.

From the Green Bivouac Cheget Kara offers grade 4 climbs while the North face of Ullu Kara has high quality grade 5 routes. Bashkara (4241m) has some fine looking routes in the harder grades (although with some objective dangers), and Jantugan (3901m) is an elegant pyramid boasting rock, ice and mixed routes from grades 2 to 4.

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## Ushba West Face: Mick Fowler

Our descent route from Nakra Tau had given Victor and myself a view of the West Face of Ushba and, although at least 10 miles distant, it was clear that the "Matterhorn of the Caucasus" presented the most impressive chunk of snow and ice in the area.

First ascended by a German party in 1903, both summits can be reached at about 4A standard although the complete traverse is Russian 5B and the classic of the range. Prior to our ascent of the West Face of Ushba North no British party had climbed a face route on the mountain and, even now, we have only been able to trace two post-revolution British ascents of the mountain - Hargreaves in 1937 (Ushba South) and Rubens/Broadhead in 1984 (Ushba North).

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This lack of activity clearly demonstrates the low level of interest shown by the British in the 12 years that the mountains have been politically accessible. The West Face is 1800m high and the biggest mixed face in the area. As such, we were initially concerned that our plans to attempt a new route may not go down well with the Soviets. However, we need not have feared as our earlier ascent of Nakra had obviously put us in good stead and our plans were received with interest and enthusiasm.

Ushba is on the other side of the range from the Baksan Valley, and the effort necessary to reach the base of the face can be compared to reaching the base of the Freney Pillar on foot from Chamonix. Two distinct options are available: both start from Shkelda Mountaineering Camp and take two days. One involves following the Shkelda Glacier for 3 hours before branching off up a subsidiary glacier to reach a pass, traversing over a minor peak to another pass and then descending to a junction with the Ushba Glacier below the face. The other is more straightforward but more dangerous and involves following the Shkelda Glacier via the Ushba plateau which is crossed at an altitude of 4000m to reach the upper reaches of the Ushba Glacier which can be descended to the foot of the face (see map at Appendix 1).

Discussion over the pros and cons of the two approaches proved ridiculously time-consuming and lacked tangible result as our advisors were evenly divided as to which way was the best. Our final decision to take the Ushba icefall route was forced on us primarily because the other way sounded so complicated that failure to even see Ushba seemed a distinct possibility.

During our two rest days between Nakra and Ushba we visited Shkelda Camp (which has a very impressive and informative array of wall photographs) and were shown fantastically detailed descriptions of existing routes on the mountain. These were nothing at all like the guide book descriptions that we are accustomed to in Western Europe and resembled expedition reports

complete with pitch by pitch descriptions, details of the numbers of pegs/screws used on each pitch together with several climbing photographs, all supported by a detailed Russian narrative. (This depth of detail is available about most major faces but it is not on display and has to be asked for - an interpreter may be useful here.)

Perusal of the information on Ushba revealed that the extreme left side of the West face of Ushba North had its first ascent in 1956 and a line just left of centre was climbed over two days in 1982. Considering the paucity of information available in Britain we were hardly surprised at these discoveries, and the fact that an obvious steep ice couloir leading directly to the summit remained unclimbed ensured that our enthusiasm remained high.

Preparations followed the usual routine, but as we were now aware of the procedures the paper work seemed less irksome and was quickly dealt with. Medicals were not required, food was not ordered (due to the vast quantities remaining from our initial order), petrol was siphoned from the Sportskommittee coach, and by 10 am we had been dropped off at Shkelda Camp and were ready to start walking from about 2100m.

A dreary, misty day dampened our spirits somewhat but having been assured that this was normal Caucasian weather (and being reluctant to waste any more time in the valley) we decided to start anyway. For the first hour natural pine forest, a rushing glacial torrent and numerous cattle with heavy-sounding bell collars provided a scene reminiscent of the Western Alps. Pic Kavkaz and Bzheduk (later ascended by Bert and Maggie) were prominent on our left, while the North face of Shkelda provided a most impressive backdrop at the head of the valley.

Our approach soon led to below the snout of the Shkelda Glacier and after a steep, unpleasant trackless struggle, an hour of monotonous walking on the boulder-strewn glacier surface took us to the point of divergence of the two possible approaches where a party of Russians were camped. Here we enjoyed our first taste of the real warmth and hospitality of these people. Cold fat and raw garlic smothered in home made tomato sauce was forced into our hands, quickly followed by an unrecognisable substance reminiscent of warm gelatine. Language barriers defeated attempts at conversation but there was a degree of friendship and respect for fellow mountaineers which I have never come across in Western Europe. The walk so far had been hot and exhausting and the somewhat unusual food on offer was gratefully accepted and instantly devoured - tasting nowhere near as bad as it must sound.

Our route now continued directly under the impressive North Face of Shkelda and three further hours of moraine-covered glacier brought us to a good camping place on the true right bank of the

glacier. This is known as the "Deutsch Bivouac" after the early 20th century German explorers who first camped here. It is really only a series of tent platforms cleared out of the moraine at the side of the glacier, but there are limitless quantities of easily accessible drinking water and, perched on a rock 300m further up the glacier, two wooden structures one of which would give a fine dry bivouac for two. We had brought a tent as an insurance policy against the dubious weather and, as we were the only people in the area, this was duly pitched on the most palatial platform. The lack of other climbers and safe interim bases offered by West European mountain huts combined to give our situation a remote flavour and a sense of seriousness somewhere between the Western Alps and the Himalaya. Radio reception was very poor in the confines of the valley, thus accentuating the feeling of isolation.

A cloudy night with strong winds delayed our start the following morning but by 7 am we were crossing the dry glacier to the foot of the Ushba icefall. Soviet mountaineers often speak lightly of this icefall, but there are deaths here every year and caution is necessary. The sun does not strike the slopes very early, although after our late start, we were pleased to see a thin mist layer keeping the temperature below freezing. The lower two-thirds of the rise to the Ushba platform is easy crevassed ground but the top one-third is bona fide icefall material with occasional very large serac falls, one of which had completely changed the terrain in the four days between our ascent and descent.

Four hours after leaving the Deutsch Bivouac a surprisingly sudden exit was made onto the Ushba plateau. This vast sloping plateau has several huge crevasses and a bad reputation in poor visibility. With this in mind, we classed ourselves as fortunate in being able to enjoy glimpses of the surrounding mountains as we skirted the lower edge of the plateau to reach the head of the Ushba glacier. The upper reaches of Ushba's west face were now visible but a rock rib appeared to prevent direct access to the small glacier flowing down from its foot. Despite lengthy discussions with the guides at Azau we had not been able to get any reliable advice on how best to get to the base of our chosen route. We knew from the detailed description seen at Shkelda camp that the 1982 ascensionists had reached the bergschrund by climbing directly up the glacier beneath the face, but we were also aware that the German guide book (see Chapter 5 - Climbing/Literature/Maps) showed a possible way across the retaining rock rib to join the glacier a few hundred feet below the bergschrund.

A set of old tracks on the Ushba glacier persuaded us to try and descend about 700m and skirt round the base of the rock rib to reach the glacier leading to the foot of the face. Much delicate crevasse work resulted until, having descended over 300m, it became clear that our intended route was virtually suicidal. The glacier itself could be seen to be in the form of a continuous

icefall and, to make matters worse, huge falls from seracs on the face regularly swept down encouraging further falls in the icefall itself and leaving no chance of a justifiable approach route. We were both becoming increasingly tired, and the prospect of returning up the Ushba Glacier was not appealing - especially as no viable way of crossing the retaining rib and descending to the foot of the face could be seen.

However, ambitions bite hard and we painstakingly retraced our steps up towards the Ushba plateau. There seemed to be only one option - not far below the plateau a prominent knoll on the rib could be easily gained from our glacier and while the terrain on the far side was not visible it offered the only ray of hope in an otherwise rather gloomy situation. Ironically, two hours previously we had carried out radio contact duties from a point level with the knoll but had decided against crossing the 150m of very crevassed glacier "just for a look" as we were so certain that our flanking manoeuvre would be successful. Needless to say, the knoll proved to be the key to our problem and four hours after leaving the plateau we settled down on an excellent bivouac platform which we should have reached directly down an easy snow slope in 30 minutes!

Although the day had been generally misty and uninspiring, the clouds lifted in the evening and we were treated to a superb view of the face towering above us. It was difficult to gauge the exact angle but a 100m rock band at two-thirds height seemed likely to provide an extremely difficult crux section leading to a 400m ice couloir and the summit. The immediate vicinity was dominated by Ushba but elsewhere the traverses of Shkelda and Mazeri could be seen to be very fine, challenging excursions, while Donguz Orun and the ethereal Elbrus loomed in the distance.

Despite an encouraging evening the night was wet and windy; a heavy hailstorm coinciding with our 1.30 am alarm persuaded us to stay put and keep our fingers crossed for the next day. By 9 am the weather was perfect and we were kicking ourselves for not having started.

The day was passed gazing at the face, checking the approach, drying our equipment and fashioning a "pricker" for the M.S.R stove out of a strand from Victor's head torch wire. We were very proud of this improvisation which we hoped would solve the problem of the stove's increasing unreliability.

1.30 am on 3rd August proved to be as windy as the day before but the temperature was much lower, the sky clear and our minds more at ease with this apparently regular weather pattern.

An easy snow slope followed by a single abseil made a mockery of Soviet suggestions that the direct approach up the glacier was easiest and placed us in a position 500 feet below the bergschrund only 30 minutes after leaving our bivouac site.

Nevertheless, even this far up the glacier we were exposed to serac falls and we were pleased to be across the bergschrund by 5 am and making good time on 50 degree ice towards the first rock outcrops. The climbing was in a superb position but no great technical difficulties were encountered and, after a few sections of Scottish grade 4, the crux section was reached at 11 am. The 1982 route moves well to the left here around the left end of the steep band guarding access to the prominent couloir cleaving the upper one-third of the face. From the detailed report at the Shkelda camp, it seemed that bad weather had prevented the Soviets from attempting the direct line and forced them to finish up a faint rib leading to the north ridge 100m to the north of the summit. Our luck was holding. A superb clear day had developed with perfect views of the entire western part of the range.

The section above had looked to be the crux from a distance and closer acquaintance confirmed this. However, we were blessed with magnificent conditions; the thin ice smears adorning the obvious line of weakness had thawed the previous day but were now ice and offered very hard spectacular grade 5 mixed climbing for two pitches until we were able to gain the base of the couloir. Exhaustion and altitude were now taking their toll as progress slowed to a crawl. Although the difficulties of the couloir nowhere exceeded grade 4, it was 8 pm before we reached the summit.

Uri had told us that a good bivouac site could be found here, so knowing the Soviet's appreciation of comfort, we were somewhat surprised to find a true knife edge of ice forming the highest point, with the crest of a rock ridge 30m down having been hacked away to form the only vaguely habitable spot.

With the temperature dropping rapidly to considerably below western Alpine summer levels we struggled vainly with the stove before abandoning our efforts and succumbing to the need for sleep. We were content with the day - our main objective was behind us.

A perfect morning almost tempted us to traverse across to Ushba South but exhaustion and continuing stove problems saw us starting very late and descending the knife edge ice arete forming the north ridge. Six hours later, after Victor had climbed 50m to free the rope on the very last abseil, we were back on the Ushba plateau.

A solitary party of four Soviets were camped here and showed us the same degree of hospitality and friendship that we had experienced on the way up to the Deutsch bivouac. The food lacked the ethnic of the "fat and gelatine", but soup and tea were gratefully received after our stove had enforced a period of dehydration.

The climbing equipment and sheer willpower of these climbers deserves mention. Apart from the obligatory bunch of titanium ice screws and rock pegs, they could have been climbing in western Europe in the 1930s. Sailing rope, absorbent bendy leather boots, home made flimsy gloves and ice daggers are hardly the sort of gear one would expect to see in use on a major TD route in France or Switzerland. Nevertheless, these climbers were quite happy with their equipment and, in particular, forcefully stressed the superiority of their sailing rope. We were full of respect for their willpower and the meeting brought home to us the additional difficulties suffered by the early ascentionists. It is all too easy to denigrate first ascentionists' efforts when using equipment designed 50 years later. We were almost embarrassed by our comparatively posh and expensive gear as we bid our farewells and headed off towards the top of the Ushba icefall.

Here we were somewhat shocked to find that the entire upper quarter of the fall had collapsed since our ascent. Our descent was accomplished by struggling as fast as possible over freshly broken ice blocks and wondering at the Soviets apparent lack of respect of this infamous, and clearly dangerous, icefall.

In marked contrast to four days beforehand, the Deutsch bivouac was festooned with tents - all pitched on inferior sites to ours which, as the only unoccupied one, sat perched in the best place. Again, we were invited to share various interesting foods while our hosts demonstrated the effectiveness of titanium ice screws, giving their sales patter on the surface of the dry glacier. It was a surprise to see that one Russian had a series of home made "friends" - his early efforts were clearly home made with peculiarly misshapen components but his latest products were virtually indistinguishable from the real thing. Also the curious but popular "ice fifis" were displayed and their superiority over chacals explained. This we failed to understand as the technique for their use involves making a chacal or ice axe placement first and hooking the fifi into this exactly as a rock fifi would be hooked into a caribiner. Admittedly, the fifi is normally used as an aid tool (complete with foot sling threaded through waist and chest harness) but, nevertheless, we failed to grasp the advantage they apparently gave and resisted any temptation to purchase these unique pieces of equipment.

The next day saw us struggling down the moraine covered Shkelda glacier drinking our fill at superb clear springs and wandering through the lush undergrowth of the valley forests back to Shkelda camp. It was six days since we had left and just one long day had been spent on the face - we felt every minute of the six days to have been worthwhile.

#### Other mountains in the Shkelda Glacier/Ushba Plateau Area

The walk up from Shkelda camp to the Deutsch Bivouac is dominated by the impressive north face of Shkelda which offers many 5B

routes of reputedly high quality. Most of these seem to be chiefly rock climbing and several of the prominent spurs look well worth doing. The classic traverse (which has received one British ascent - by Hamish McInnes in the late 1960s) looks long, complicated and very fine. Unfortunately no notable new lines are evident.

The Deutsch Bivouac is ideal as a hard climbing centre. It gives easy access to the north faces of Shkelda, Pic Shurovski and Chatyn, as well as (via the Ushba icefall) Ushba and little Ushba.

The Pic Shurovski has an impressive north face which offers very good looking 5A and 5B routes on either mixed terrain or rock. Again, it has received only one British ascent - by Hamish McInnes and Paul Nunn in 1970.

Chatyn has an extremely steep lower section to its rocky north face (which is not visible from the Deutsch Bivouac) but has a reputation for being very hard and awaits a British ascent.

From the Ushba plateau, Ushba is easily accessible and offers steep routes on all sides. The mirror wall (east face) presents a very steep Yosemite-style shield of rock as well as obviously difficult mixed climbing, whereas the west face is icier with extremely long (up to 1800m) mixed routes of which the 1962 spur leading to the south summit looks the best. Much effort has been directed towards Ushba and the potential for new lines on the west face now seems limited, although the spur right of the upper couloir of our route provides a hard unclimbed objective. The traverse of both summits is undoubtedly as superb as it is reputed to be and considerably more serious than any popular traverse in the Western Alps.

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## Bzheduk (4272m)/Pic Kavkaz (4000m): by Bert Simmonds

For our second trip away from Azau, Maggie and I had decided on a 4A route on the NW face of Bzheduk combined with a traverse from the mountain onto neighbouring Pic Kavkaz and a descent by the easy west ridge.

Our Russian advisors had tried to discourage us from this plan by saying that it was much better to do Bzheduk from the Kashkatash side (east) - a more classic line. However, we were having none of it and stuck to our choice, rightly or wrongly.

Our approach lay by way of Shkelda Camp to the Skhelda glacier and then up to the Bzheduk glacier to our bivouac site (see map at Appendix 1). Taking the bus to Shkelda Camp, we were then led for the first half mile by Valentine Ivanov. Leaving Ivanov in the trees, we moved onwards to the moraine of the Shkelda glacier, reached after about one and half hours walk. Walking directly along it we soon reached the ice, made our way onto the surface moraine and began crossing to the east side to gain the grass slopes leading to the Bzheduk glacier which lay some way above the Shkelda glacier.

With our rucksacks beginning to feel very heavy, we toiled our way up the never-ending slopes to gain the terminal moraine of the Bzheduk Glacier. Here we found an excellent spot with running water and a tent space beautifully levelled and all the stones removed. These Russians like every comfort they can get!

During our walk we had not been able to get a view of the route owing to low cloud obscuring the mountains. We did walk further up the glacier to try and get some idea of the way but this proved fruitless.

Arising at about 2.30 am and leaving camp about 3.30 am we made what we thought was reasonable progress. As it turned out, we began the climbing proper much too early, due mainly to not being able to see what to aim for. The slopes steepened and we were moving up the face of a mountain - Bzheduk we thought - over good snow at an angle of about 35-40 degrees.

As we paused in a crevasse to report in on the radio, the now rising cloud cleared to reveal our true position - much further up the glacier we could see the NW face of Bzheduk with our proposed route clearly visible. Too late to go back! We were clearly on the NW face of Pic Kavkaz, which lies to the west of Bzheduk. Nevertheless it was pleasant climbing and we duly reached the summit ridge.

So far it was snow all the way. A couple of rock islands gave us nice resting places before finally reaching the summit at about midday. Below us on the west ridge the two pinnacles that are

well seen from the Shkelda glacier stood out sharply in the bright sunshine, all the cloud having long since disappeared. To the east the ridge led away to Bzheduk making its way in a succession of curving sweeps and then a final 50 degree slope about 200m long.

It was apparent by now that we would not complete the route that day but we didn't worry as we had our sleeping bags and some food. Water would be a problem though.

Setting off in the midday heat, we moved slowly over the crenallated ridge pausing now and then to rest from the glare. Luckily we found running water, but only filled one bottle - a mistake.

The snow was becoming slushy now as the sun reached its full intensity. By the time we reached the Col between Kavkas and Bzheduk it was already about 6 pm. This was no place to bivouac and, in the hastening night, we gained the rocks of the Bzheduk ridge and made ourselves as comfortable as possible. Tomorrow we would finish the route.

The second day dawned cold and clear, the main Caucasus ridge laid out before us - Ushba Skhelda, Pik Shurovski, Donguz Orun. All these peaks pierced the deep blue of the morning sky. Not a breath of wind disturbed the air. On the morning radio call I reported that it would take us an hour or so to reach the summit - I have been regretting that statement ever since! (Unfortunately it was heard by Mick and Victor on Ushba.)

Starting along the ridge at 8 am we made good speed past the first pinnacle, then a level stretch - all on rock. Now a large tower loomed ahead. We had no route description - to which side to take it? First the left - no go; now the right - this seemed better, and we pitched it.

Three pitches saw Maggie lead onto the top of the tower. From here adjacent towers barred the way to an easy looking snow arete. I made my way across the first tower but, just as I stepped onto an unstable edge, it gave way beneath me and several hundredweight of rock descended to the slopes below. I could not see how to pass the remaining towers so we returned to our starting point - yet again!

Now we tried the north side again, with me taking a closer look and not liking what I saw. Back to the south side. All this had taken about three hours and we were still nowhere near the summit - so much for my "one hour to the summit" radio call!

Ascending in a rising traverse around the south side we reached a wide shelf below the towers. From here I proposed an abseil onto the scree slopes below - from there a rising traverse might be

made up to the east ridge coming up from Pic Free Spain and, thence, to the summit.

Slowly but surely this was accomplished - one abseil and then a climb up and across a loose colloid saw us back on the East ridge. By now though it was early afternoon and our hopes of making camp that night looked in severe jeopardy - "one hour to the top" I had said...

A pitch or so up the ridge brought Maggie onto the summit - at last a "top" was reached - through our weariness we felt the satisfaction: this was a summit well won!

A short stay was enjoyed then Maggie led off. Unfortunately, moving together downwards was difficult and worrying so progress was slow. We duly reached the top of the shoulder on the NE ridge (well seen from the Shkelda glacier below). A short way further we had to begin abseiling. Only one pitch was down climbed - the steepest part - much to Maggie's disgust - as she came second. About five further abseils took us to the Col and relative safety.

It was now 9 pm and darkness descended. One more bivouac was clearly in store. We knew that there was a good site close by in some rocks but could not find it. However, we did spend a reasonable night among boulders on the Col.

The morning of the third day saw us with no water - I had finished mine some 14 hours before - and no food. The glacier however beckoned us down - it only took three or four abseils to see us to safety and a late breakfast at the camp.

The traverse had given fine mixed climbing with superb views of the range. We felt well-satisfied with our efforts.

.....O.....O.....

### Nakra Tau (4277m): Victor Saunders

The western wing of the Central Caucasus massif is terminated by the vast mass of Donguz Orun (4454m), and its outlier - Nakra Tau (4277m).

The two peaks typify something special about the climbing here. The north face of Donguz Orun is a 1500m wall of seracs and ice runnels. In common with most of the big Caucasian ice faces, it has a route by the great Svenetian ice climber Khergiani (died 1957). Nakra's 1200m north face, by contrast, has two prominent rock lines, and the inevitable Abalakov routes. The best line on Nakra is undoubtedly the "islands" route, so-called after the three rock islands the route follows. Vitali Abalakov (died 1986) first climbed it in 1947 after a 13 year absence from the sport caused by frostbite amputations (cf. Mountain Magazine, June 1986). In character, the islands route is similar to the Frendo Spur in the Mt Blanc range but 600m longer, and with a rather sporting descent. The best descent in fact is back to the Cheget valley over the false Donguz Orun Pass, but this is serious and can be difficult to find. In poor conditions a descent of the South Nakra Glacier to Svenetia following by a lengthy detour to the easy Azau Pass may be unavoidable.

It was decided that Mick Fowler and I should attempt the Islands route (4B) as our first Caucasian venture. The chairlift on Cheget can be used to save an hour on the approach, and in this respect Nakra and Donguz Orun north faces are unique among the great walls of the region and seemed an ideal choice for our first effort.

After a good bivouac near a crashed helicopter below the face we made an early start in dubious weather. The climbing became considerably less elegant than the line. There was much loose rock (to the delight of Mick) bad ice and, later, poor weather. The lower approaches are, in addition, threatened by seracs. Indeed, it was the materialisation of that threat that defeated an attempt by Hamish McInnes in 1972.

In spite of the unpleasant conditions, we made reasonable progress to reach a bivouac below the summit slabs in 15 hours. An acclimatised team should move considerably faster. The weather cleared during the evening and radio reception was excellent, enabling us to listen in on "Priut's" one-sided conversation with the Spanish team: "We hear you Madrid, we hear you". "Please speak English - slowly - slowly". We knew the Spaniards spoke no English at any speed and derived much amusement from the resultant efforts at communication which proved only that the Spanish were bivouaced under a boulder somewhere in the Caucasus.

As far as our descent was concerned, we were fortunate in that the morning dawned crystal clear and we were able to plan the

route down from the summit. Had this luxury been denied, we would certainly not have returned to Azau the same day.

Of the routes on Nakra Tau the "islands" route looked to offer the best climbing and we felt the climb to be very worthwhile if somewhat loose on the rock sections.

The North Face of Donguz Orun is clearly visible from the road near Azau and looks to give interesting Russian grade 5 climbing with considerable objective danger. However, we felt that the complete traverse of Donguz Orun and Nakra Tau would give one of the best outings at this end of the range, although at an altitude of 4454m Donguz Orun is perhaps rather high for a first route.

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## Elbruz (5642m): Margaret Urnston

Elbruz is the highest mountain in Europe (west of the Urals) and like an upturned pair of white sculptured breasts\*. It protrudes above everything around it. As an old volcano its slopes are relatively easy angled and on a good day it looks deceptively harmless. However, it is the lack of features and frequent extreme cold, combined with the usual gale force winds, which produce conditions in which many parties have come to grief and lives have been lost.

Some of the aura of this double-breasted peak has diminished since it was first climbed over 100 years ago. Now there are two cable cars, a chairlift and, after an hour's walk, a substantial hut. The hut is always crowded and rather like a queen termite about to let forth her myriad of offspring. A large metal container with rounded edges it looks incongruous and unearthly perched above mounds of solidified lava.

I was astonished to learn that people come from all over the world just to make the six hour pilgrimage to the summit. Most amazing were a party of Japanese who, with their guide, had flown at great expense from Japan to climb Elbruz and return home, all within one week!

Because of the lack of technical difficulty, excess of people and high altitude, we decided to leave Elbruz to the end of our programme. The Russian guides normally allow six days to cajole an unclimatised person to the summit (the training programme involves descending to Azau at one point) but for a fit, acclimatised person, two days from Azau is ample time. Our times from the Priut Hut to the summit varied from six hours for Victor and myself to eight and a half hours for Mick Fowler, who had ingested some rather unsavoury germs by falling into a cesspit at the hut.

Although the ascent is a simple snow walk, crampons are necessary as the 30 degree slopes can be icy. However, no other specialised equipment is necessary, and even our ropes were left behind. Warm, windproof clothing is however absolutely essential.

The route from the Priut Hut follows a gradually ascending line (marked by wooden poles) beneath the east summit to gain the wide saddle between the summits. An old weather station here has been blasted apart by the fearsome winds. From here a further 300m of 35 degree slopes interspersed with rocks leads to the summit of the highest peak in Europe at 5642m.

The whole Caucasian range stretches out below one and for the view alone it is well worth making the ascent.

\*This is what the locals will tell you the name means.



### The West Face of Ushba

Our route climbed directly to the left-hand (North) Summit

#### 8. CONCLUSION

Although not cheap, all members of the expedition felt that the trip had been worthwhile. In fact, plans are already afoot to return to the Soviet mountains in 1988.

We hope that this report gives adequate information to anybody contemplating a visit but if further information is required please contact us:

Mick Fowler  
16 Chiltern Gardens  
London NW2  
(Tel: (01) 455 9797

or

Victor Saunders  
71 Ferntower Road  
London NW5  
(Tel: (01) 354 0451

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## 9 EQUIPMENT by Bert Simmonds

Our equipment choice was based on the sketchy information we had so far gathered. We knew the Caucasus was a little higher than the Alps and prone to slightly worse weather but, basically, it seemed that equipment as for a normal summer Alpine trip would be adequate.

There did seem to be a feeling that the nights might be colder, given that the summits were in the upper 4000m level. Any bivouac at these altitudes would definitely be chilly.

We all anticipated doing multi-day routes and had included all necessary gear appropriate to such endeavours.

Next to the skin we all had thermal underwear with no real preference being shown for any particular make. The next layer was usually a heavy shirt or light jersey. Once again, this varied greatly.

The outer layers did display certain trends. Mick wore Helly Hansen polar trousers on his lower half and a Helly jersey on the upper - as did Maggie.

Victor had with him a Javlin one-piece modified to his requirements, along with a fibre pile top.

For myself I chose Rohan Super Salopettes with a Helly jersey on the upper part. In addition we all carried extra jerseys etc.

Down jackets were not taken by myself or Mick, though Victor and Maggie both brought theirs. Victor used his to supplement his inadequate sleeping bag but the temperature was not low enough to necessitate climbing in duvets.

Other outer clothing was Gortex trousers and jackets.

Gloves and mitts were also varied and included Helly mitts, Dachstein mitts and gloves, mountain equipment Gortex mitts, Caravan inner gloves and wild country inner gloves. All proved satisfactory.

Boots were the ubiquitous Kotlach Ultras. Need I say more! Much sought after by the Russians at approximately 20 ice screws per pair.

Now to sleeping gear. Most of us took a winter-weight bag, with high bivvys in mind. I took my light-weight down one believing that weight in the Sac was more of a factor in my performance. I considered that I might be slightly cold at night but was prepared to put up with this. In the event, I was perfectly happy, though I only bivouaced up to 4000m.



Victor and Mick also spent several nights out - one of these being very cold (-15 degrees centigrade). Victor only had a mountain equipment lightline bag and found himself trying to get in with Mick - ugh! He afterwards took a duvet with him for a bivouac on the top of Ushba (4700m) and survived more reasonably.

Conclusion: if you want to be warm take a heavier bag then you are covered for all eventualities.

We took two tents with us to the Soviet Union, both Gortex, both by Wintergear (as it was then); both light-weight single skin two-man models. Maggie and I used ours on several occasions and found it fine. They are light and easy to put up.

We were dubious as to the advantages of a tent but, in retrospect, we are all agreed that taking a tent to the level of West European huts is very worthwhile. All Russian mountaineers do this and have cleared tent platforms in the most unlikely places.

Hardware was kept to a bare minimum. Axes and hammers where appropriate, and about 3 ice screws per team. A very small selection of nuts was also carried. The length of the actual climbing was similar to that in the W. Alps and therefore we tended to take equipment typical for such routes.

A problem area was stoves and fuel. This was due to lack of information about what fuel was available in Russia. Now most people know that you are forbidden to carry inflammable liquids on planes unless arranged in advance. Because of this, Victor and Mick decided on MSR stoves plus a Trangia stove in case meths was available. Maggie and I risked taking gas on the plane and took an MSR in case the gas was confiscated. In the event, we were able to use gas, while the others used the MSR with Russian petrol - siphoned from the fuel tanks of the local buses!

Maggie and I had no problems with the gas, but Mick and Victor had difficulty with their MSR in that the jets continually became blocked. This may have been due to impurities in the fuel, but some of the blame is probably attributable to the stove itself which was very old and well-used.

Methylated spirit was not available, nor was paraffin. The choice of a gas stove backed up by a petrol stove is recommended.

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## 10. MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All members were fit and healthy prior to the Expedition and had not recently suffered any serious illness. Acting on the advice of local GPs, none of the team had vaccinations beforehand.

First Aid kits were taken, but as there is a doctor in every camp, there is no need to be over-cautious. (Our first aid kits were restricted to bandages, headache tablets etc).

Diarrhoea and associated gut rot problems seem not to be too common, although both Victor Saunders and Mick Fowler suffered slightly. It is worth taking care at the Priut Hut where hygiene levels leave a lot to be desired and the well used nick name "Typhoid Towers" is fairly apt.

We were fortunate enough not to have any climbing accidents - the most serious injury being a twisted knee suffered by Mick Fowler.

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## 11. EXPEDITION ACCOUNTS

		£
<u>Income:</u>	Mount Everest Foundation:	300
	Sports Council/British Mountaineering Council:	100
	Members contribution:	2,998
		<hr/>
		£ 3,398
		<hr/>
<u>Expenditure:</u>	Air travel	968
	\$800 per person (standard payment to USSR Sports Committee)	2,140
	\$100 per person (two addi- tional nights in Moscow - see text):	265
	Hill food	25
		<hr/>
		£3,398
		<hr/>

The standard payment of \$800 per person covers all food, internal transport etc. and thus greatly simplifies accounting.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

- 1914 H Raeburn : AJ 29, pp142-158  
1937 J R Jenkins : AJ 50, pp 12 et seq  
1956 E Bdetsky : AJ 61, pp 310 et seq  
1957 J Dunsheath : "Guest of the Soviets  
(Constable 1959)  
1958 C Brasher/J Hunt : "The Red Snows"  
(Hutchinson 1060)  
1970 H McInnes : "Look Behind the Ranges"  
(Hodder & Stoughton 1979)  
1979 J Town : AJ 86, pp 126 et seq  
1984 D Rubens: : SMCJ 1985, pp 226-229

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## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Our thanks must go to all the following organisations, firms and individuals who gave invaluable assistance:

### Finance

Mount Everest Foundation  
British Mountaineering Council

### Food and Equipment

Berghaus Ltd  
Alpine Sports  
Northern Feather Leisure

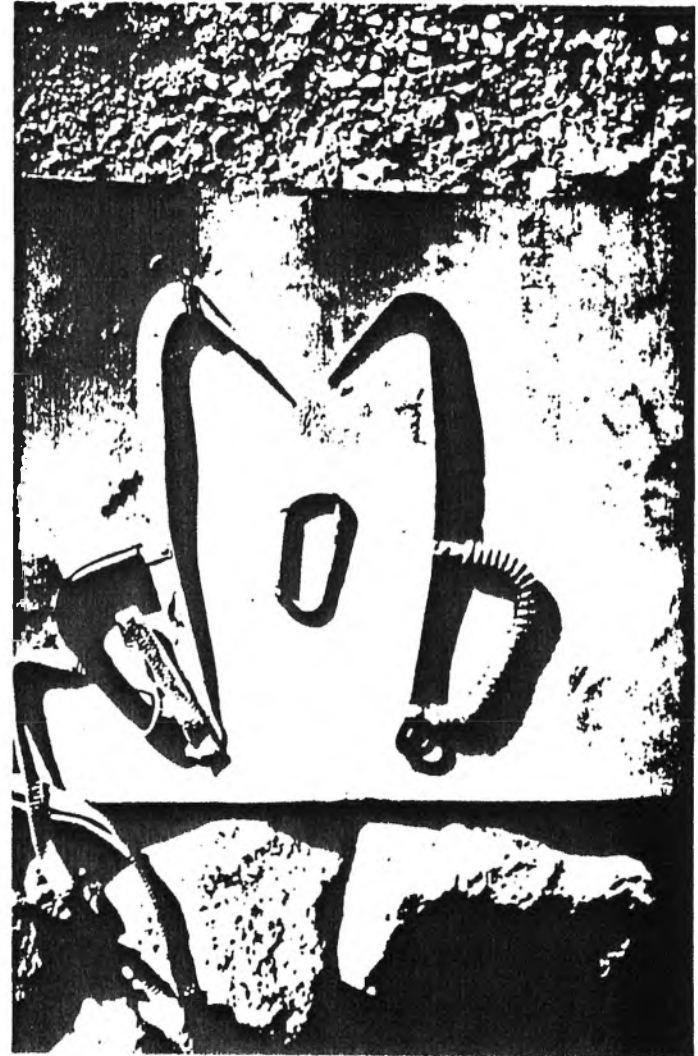
### General advice and assistance

Alan Rouse  
John Town  
Des Rubens  
Paul Nunn  
Dr Charles Clarke  
Simon Richardson  
Lorraine Smyth

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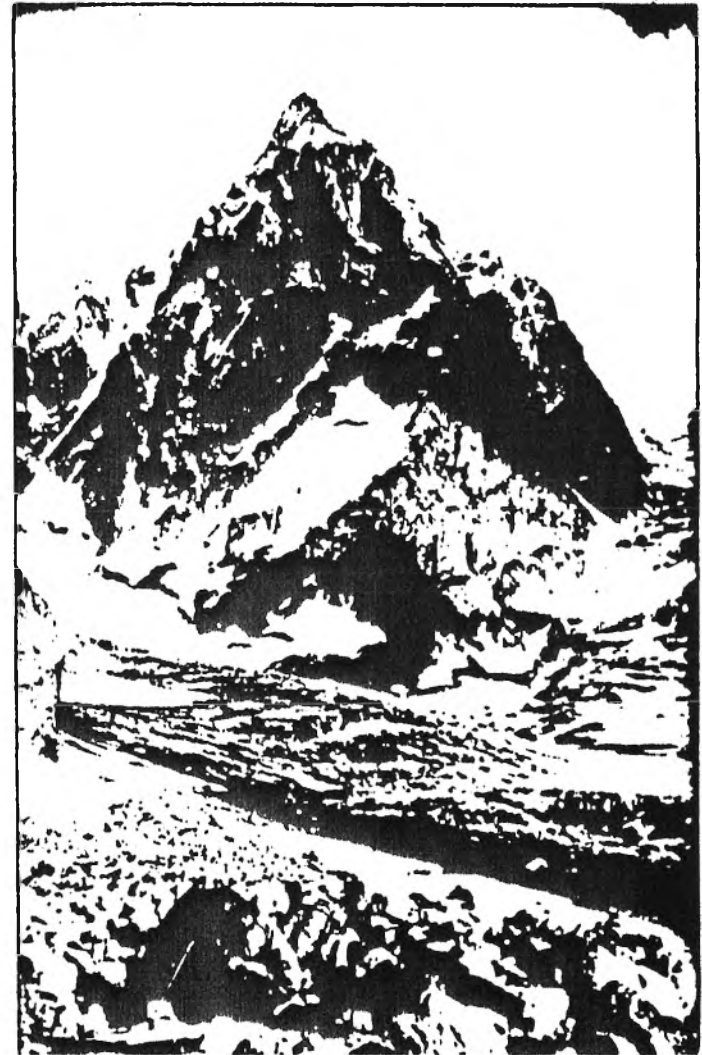
Ushba-West Face  
The easy upper couloir.



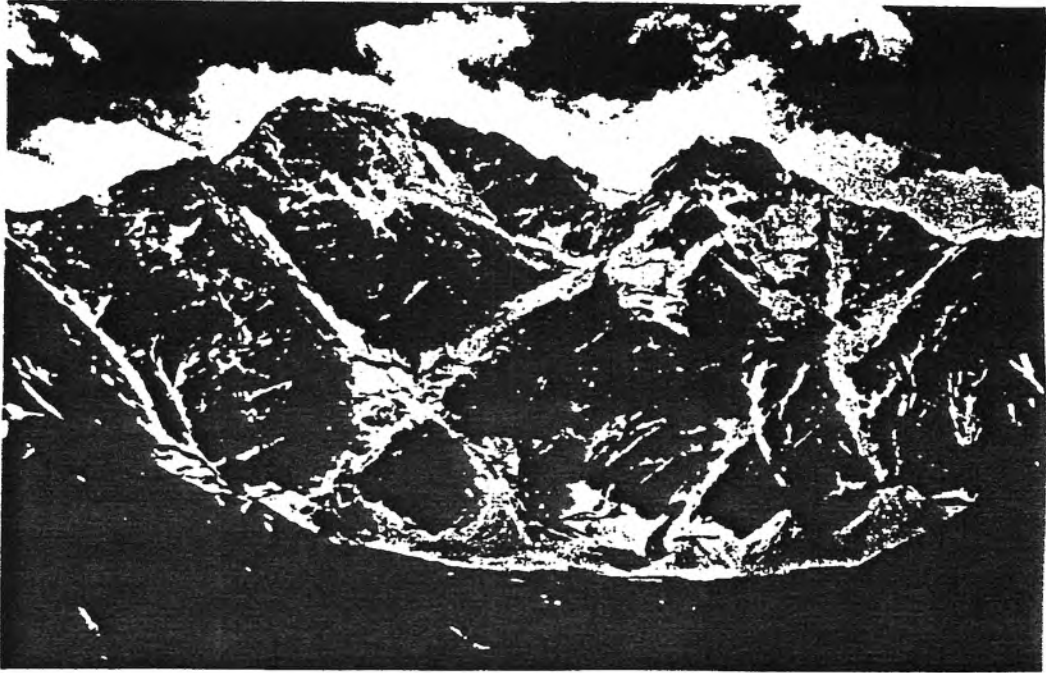
Soviet "Ice Fifis"



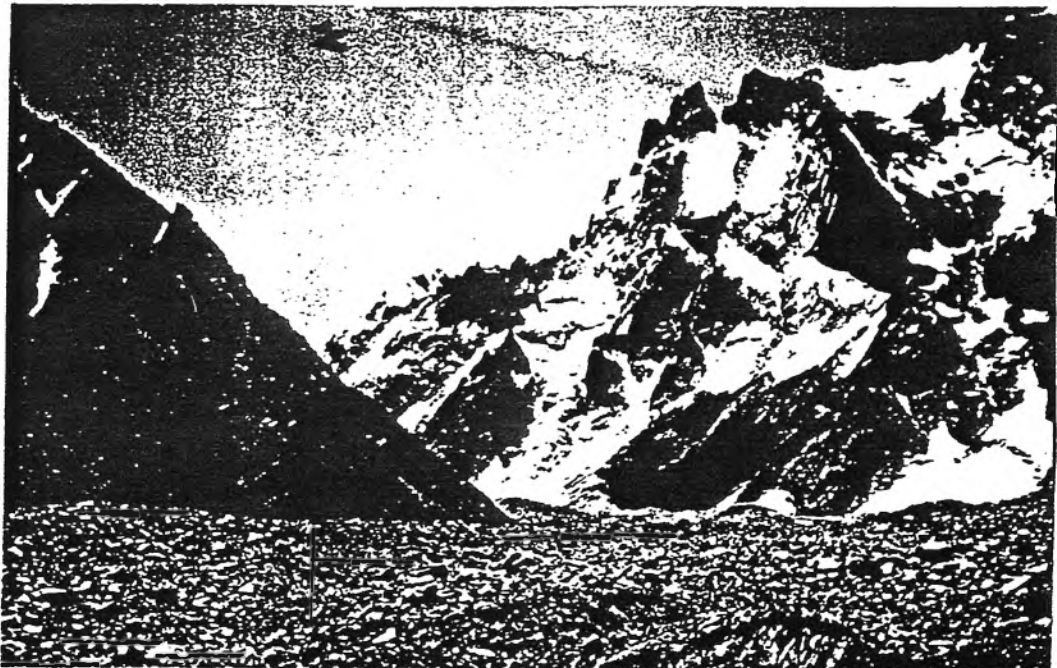
Ushba North from  
the Ushba Plateau.



Pic Shurovski from Deutsch Bivouac  
The Ushba Icefall is on the right.



Donguz Orun - North Face



Shkelda - North Face

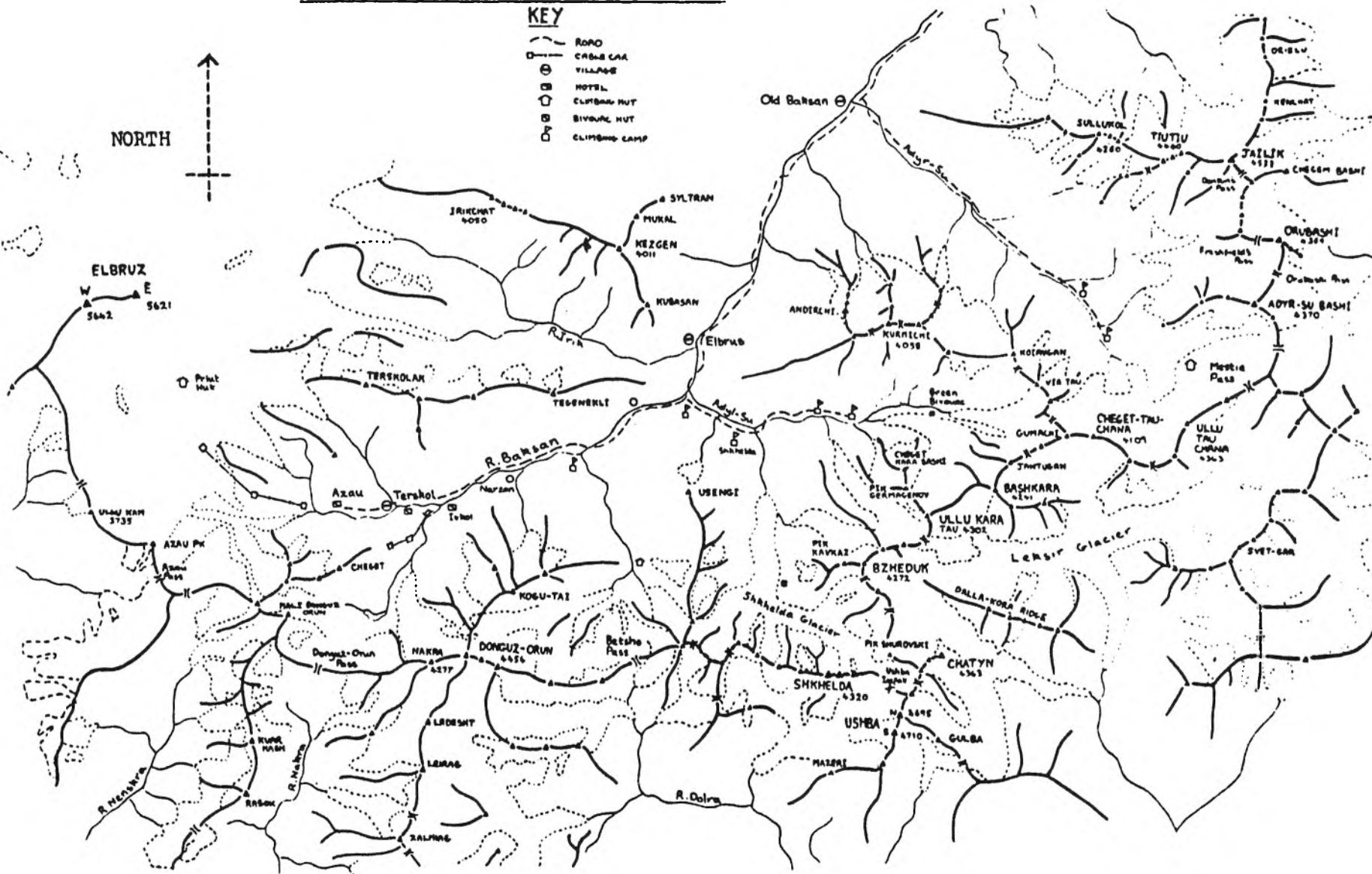


APPENDIX 1 - THE CENTRAL CAUCASUS

KEY

- ROAD
- CABLE CAR
- VILLAGE
- HOTEL
- CLIMBING HUT
- BIVOUAC HUT
- CLIMBING CAMP

NORTH



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СПОРТКОМИТЕТ СССР  
USSR SPORTSCOMMITTEE

**ДИРЕКЦИЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ АЛЬПИНИСТСКИХ ЛАГЕРЕЙ**  
**DIRECTORATE OF THE INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAINEERING CAMPS**

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**I N F O R M A T I O N   S H E E T**

on operation of the USSR International Mountaineering Camps  
"Pamir", "Caucasus", "Chimbulak", "Altai" in 1986.

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We invite you to visit International Mountaineering Camps of the USSR Sportscommittee opening their 13th season in 1986. Over past years they were attended by more than 5000 mountaineers from 28 countries of the world.

Himalayan expeditions of Great Britain, Austria, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the USSR accomplished in international mountaineering camps their preliminary trainings which were highly appreciated by all Himalayan members.

Sufficient merits of international mountaineering camps of the USSR Sportscommittee in the developing of international mountaineering have been twice mentioned at the UIAA General Assembly. Reinhold Messner, one of the most famous mountaineers of the world, while visiting the IMC "Caucasus-83" appreciated highly its activity. During the summer season 1984 the UIAA President Mr. Pierre Bessus attended international mountaineering camp "Altai". He admired the unique nature of this region and spoke very positively of the camp's operation.

The International Mountaineering Camps offer the foreign climbers the opportunity to visit most picturesque mountain regions of the Soviet Union and to climb the highest peaks in the Pamirs, the Caucasus, the Altai.

In 1986 four international mountaineering camps operating on several itineraries will be available: "Pamir-86", "Caucasus-86", "Altai-86", "Chimbulak-86".

The camp "PAMIR-86" operates in accordance with two programs. On the way to the Pamirs and back the participants will spend 2-3 days in Moscow to sightsee and visit the city's museums, circus and theatres.

From Moscow participants will be transported by a comfortable aircraft to the town Osh and from there by bus to the base camp in the valley Achik-Tash at the feet of Lenin Peak.

### Itinerary I (operating in two shifts)

From the base camp "Achik-Tash" (3700 m) mountaineers can ascend Lenin Peak (7143 m), Peak of the XIX CPSU Congress and other summits of the Zaalai Ridge (5000-6000 m high). Mountaineers, who do not have sufficient experience in high altitude climbing will be granted an opportunity to receive training under instruction of experienced guides.

Arrival in Moscow is set for July 7 and 28. Departure for home country - on July 31 and August 21. The whole itinerary lasts 25 days.

Cost of the program - 1200 US dollars.

### Itinerary 2.

From the base camp "Achik-Tash" climbers will be transported by helicopter to one of the two climbing camps on their choice, depending on their climbing plans and the summits they desire to ascend. Both camps are situated in the area of the Fortambek glacier

From the first camp it is more convenient to attain Communism Peak (7495 m) by a simple route, the Peak of E. Abalakov, Suleev Peak and other summits of the Peter the Great Ridge.

The second camp is located at the junction of the Meskvin and the Valter glaciers. From this camp mountaineers may climb up to Communism Peak and E. Kerzhenevskaya Peak (7105 m) along the more difficult routes. Note: choice of the camp should be coordinated during the correspondence with the Directorate of IMC well in advance.

Arrival in Moscow is set for July 10, 12 and 14. Departure for homeland will be on August 8, 10 and 12. The whole itinerary lasts 30 days.

Cost of the program - 1400 US dollars.

All ascents in the Pamirs and especially those of itinerary 2 require excellent physical training and sufficient mountaineering experience.

According to the second itinerary the more advanced groups of climbers with at least 8 participants can make a climb along the route to the Beljaev glacier region from the south side of Communism Peak. The program of these groups should be also coor-

dinated well in advance.

The total number of participants of the Beljaev glacier tour should be at least 16 persons. Cost of the tour - 100 US dollars.

For additional fee the Central-Asia tour through Samarkand, Bukhara and Tashkent might be arranged for participants interested. The tour lasts 5 days.

Participants of itinerary 1 depart for the tour in question on July 29, departure from Moscow will be on August 4. The period of stay in the USSR extends for 5 days.

Participants of itinerary 2 leave for the tour on August 4, departure from Moscow - on August 10 (no extension of period of stay in the USSR).

Cost of the tour for participants of itinerary 1 - 450 US dollars, for the participants of itinerary 2 - 300 US dollars.

The Pamir camp also welcomes hiking groups with the program of back-packing in the camp operating area, trips of various stretches and grades of difficulty.

The camp "CAUCASUS-SUMMER-86" operates with one program in the Prielbrus region, for a total of 24 days. The camp operates in two sessions. Climbers can cover routes of various categories of difficulty including routes up to such famous summits as Uzhba, Shkhelda, Chatyn, Ullu-Tau-Chana, Donguz-Orun etc. One of the most interesting ascents is that to the highest top of Europe - Mt. Elbrus (5642 m).

For hiking and back-packing groups we are offering trips along the passes of the Main Caucasian Ridge to the fascinating mountain area Svanetia, Adyr-Su, Adyl-Su valley and other Prielbrus picturesque areas.

Arrival in Moscow for the first session is set for July 3, departure for homeland will be on July 26. Arrival in Moscow for the second session is set for July 23, departure for homeland will be on August 15. Cost of the program - 800 US dollars.

For additional fee (200 US dollars) after stay in the camp the tour through Donguz-Orun pass to the Abkhazia with three day-stay on the coast of the Black Sea near Sukhumi might be available. The participants will trek for two days with the minimum of gear (including tents and sleeping bags) through the pass. Upon the descent from the pass participants will be transported by bus to the sea coast. The luggage left at the camp will be transported to Moscow from the Prielbrus area. The whole itinerary extends for

3 days. After stay on the Black Sea coast participants of the first session depart from Moscow to homeland on July 29, those of the second - on August 18.

For advanced mountaineers wishing to extend their stay at the camp for making technically difficult climbs after session 2 6-9 extra days might be available. Additional fee - 30 \$ per day.

The camp "CAUCASUS-86-WINTER" operates in the Prielbrus area and offers the opportunity for making ascents in the complicated winter conditions. Aside from technically simple routes to Mt. Elbrus, Gumachi, some other routes to Nakra-Tau, Donguz-Orun, Uzhba and face climbings might be available. Severe winter conditions require from mountaineers adequate outfit and physical training. For winter climbing open are routes only from Baksan valley. The definite snow conditions in the area might limit the choice of climbing routes, therefore the whole mountaineering program should be coordinated with the Directorate of IMC well in advance. Alpine skiers can ski down the slopes of Mt. Elbrus and Cheget.

The whole itinerary lasts 17 days. Included is a three-day stay in Moscow.

Arrival in Moscow for the first session is set for February 18, departure for homeland will be on March 6. The stay in the mountains lasts from February 19 to March 4.

Arrival in Moscow for the second session is set for March 3, departure for homeland will be on March 19. The stay in the mountains lasts from March 4 to March 17.

Cost of the program - 600 US dollars.

The camp "CAUCASUS-86-SPRING"

Spring is the best time of the year for skiing down from the highest point in Europe - Mt. Elbrus. In this period the camp for alpine skiers will be available in the Prielbrus region. Aside from Mt. Elbrus climbing to other summits and alpine skiing will be available. The program lasts 17 days in the USSR including 3-day stay in Moscow.

Arrival in Moscow is fixed for May 10, departure for homeland - May 26. The stay in the mountains lasts from May 11 to May 24.

Cost of the program - 600 US dollars.

The camp "CAUCASUS-86-AUTUMN"

Autumn in the Caucasus is characterized usually by the weather stability, which makes possible mountain ascents and trekking through

the passes. Bright autumn colors, abundance of berries and mushrooms make the Prielbrus area particularly attractive at this time of the season. Actually, ascents along any route might be possible.

The whole itinerary lasts 17 days in the USSR including the 3-day stay in Moscow.

Arrival in Moscow is set for September 8, departure for homeland - for September 24. The stay in the mountains lasts from September 9 to September 22.

Cost of the program - 600 US dollars.

Within the stay in the Caucasus for participants of the camps "Caucasus-spring", "Caucasus-summer" and "Caucasus-autumn" the tour to the Kazbegi village for climbing Mt. Kazbek (5043 m) might be available for extra fee. The Kazbek climbers will have the opportunity to stay for 1,5 days in the capital of Georgia - Tbilisi. Accordingly, the stay in Moscow will be shortened by one day. The tour lasts 5 days. Cost - 150 US dollars.

The camp "ALTAI-86" operates with one itinerary, 24 days long.

From Moscow the participants will be transported by aircraft to the town Barnaul, then by a local plane to Ust-Koksa and further by helicopter to the base camp located in the valley of the Akkem-river running down from the northern slopes of Mt. Belukha (4506 m) - the Altai's highest summit. Aside from climbing Mt. Belukha along the routes of various categories of difficulty the participants of the camp may choose some other tops in the region for ascents or make interesting back-packing tours through taiga passes to the neighbouring valleys. The unique Siberian taiga, plenty of picturesque lakes and rivers, amazingly rich flora and fauna make this trip an unforgettable experience for guests visiting this mountain region of the Soviet Union.

Within the same period of stay the trip to one of the most interesting alpine regions of the Altai - Shavla with the main summits Skazka (3500 m) and Krasavitsa (3700 m) might be arranged for extra fee. Among the routes leading to these summits there are very interesting rock - and mixed routes. Participants will be transported to the region by helicopter.

Cost of the trip - 1000 US dollars.

Arrival in Moscow is set for August 3. Departure from Moscow to homeland is set for August 26. Cost of the whole program - 1300 US dollars.

The camp "CHIMBULAK-86-WINTER"

The Chimbulak valley is located 25 km far from the capital of

Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic - Alma-Ata - in the spurs of the Zailij Ala-Tau (Tien-Shan).

The hotel is situated at the lower station of the lift in the valley of the river Malaja Almaatinka at the altitude of 2200 m.

Such summits as Peak Molodjezhnaja, Pogrebetsky Peak, Igly-Tyuk-su, Abaj Peak, 4000-4300 m high and of I-3 category of difficulty, are located in the region. Some routes might be covered on skis. Besides, back-packing trips on skis to the neighbouring valleys might be available.

The Chimbulak camp provides an opportunity for pleasant skiing: tow- and chair lifts will be at the disposal of the camp participants. Amazing nature, mild climatic conditions make an unforgettable impression on people coming for vacation to the Zailij Ala-Tau.

The whole itinerary in the USSR lasts 17 days, included are 3 days in Moscow. Cost of the program - 750 US dollars.

Arrival in Moscow is set for March 17, departure for homeland will be on April 2. The stay in the mountains lasts from March 19 to April 1.

#### The camp "CHIMBULAK-86-SUMMER"

During the summer season the region of Zailij Ala-Tau will accept guests of the international mountaineering camp.

Nice stable weather late in August and early in September is one of the features of the region. Participants of the camp will have a splendid opportunity to ascend many summits located in the valley of Malaja Almaatinka river. Rock- as well as mixed routes of various categories of difficulty lead to the summits 4000-4300 m high.

The whole itinerary within the USSR lasts 17 days. Arrival in Moscow is set for August 27, departure for homeland will be on September 12. The stay in the mountains lasts from August 29 to September 11.

Cost of the program - 750 US dollars.

The program's cost of all four mountaineering camps includes hotels, meals, transportation (including luggage, which should not exceed ~~40~~ kg per person within the USSR), medical assistance if needed, consultation on routes of climbing, rescue operations, lift usage, entertaining program and other services.

Note: the weight of ~~one~~ piece of luggage should not exceed ~~30~~ kg and must be convenient for transportation.

The Directorate of IMC does not pay for transportation of the

luggage to and from the USSR. The air- or train ticket back to your country as well as the luggage excess should be prepaid.

Participants of the camps should bring along their own mountaineering and skiing outfit: warm clothing, sleeping bags, ice axes, tents special footwear, skis, pitons, crampons and etc. As fuel for stoves ~~petrol~~ only might be available in the camps. For connection with the camp the participants will be supplied with walkie-talkies.

The participants of the IMC should arrange entering visas to the USSR in accordance with our invitation. The route of transfer within the USSR should be mentioned in the entering visa. Applications should be mailed prior to December 31, 1985 and include the following information:

1. Name of your tourist bureau or mountaineering organization.
2. Program No. \_\_\_\_\_ and name of the camp according to the program.
3. Probable objectives for climbing.
4. Total number of participants.
5. Name and address of the group leader.

Our address: USSR, Moscow 119270, Luzhnezkaia Quay, 8, Directorate of International Mountaineering Camps.

Cable: USSR, Moscow, USSR Sportscommittee, "Pamir".

Telex: 411287 Priz SU

Phone: ~~139-37-61~~

While visiting the International mountaineering camps of the USSR Sportscommittee you will get an excellent opportunity to widen your knowledge of life of the Soviet people, to meet the representatives of various nationalities, to see the most picturesque areas and, certainly, to climb in the mountains of our country.

You are welcomed to the International Mountaineering Camps of the USSR Sportscommittee.

DIRECTORATE OF INTERNATIONAL  
MOUNTAINEERING CAMPS OF USSR  
SPORTSCOMMITTEE.