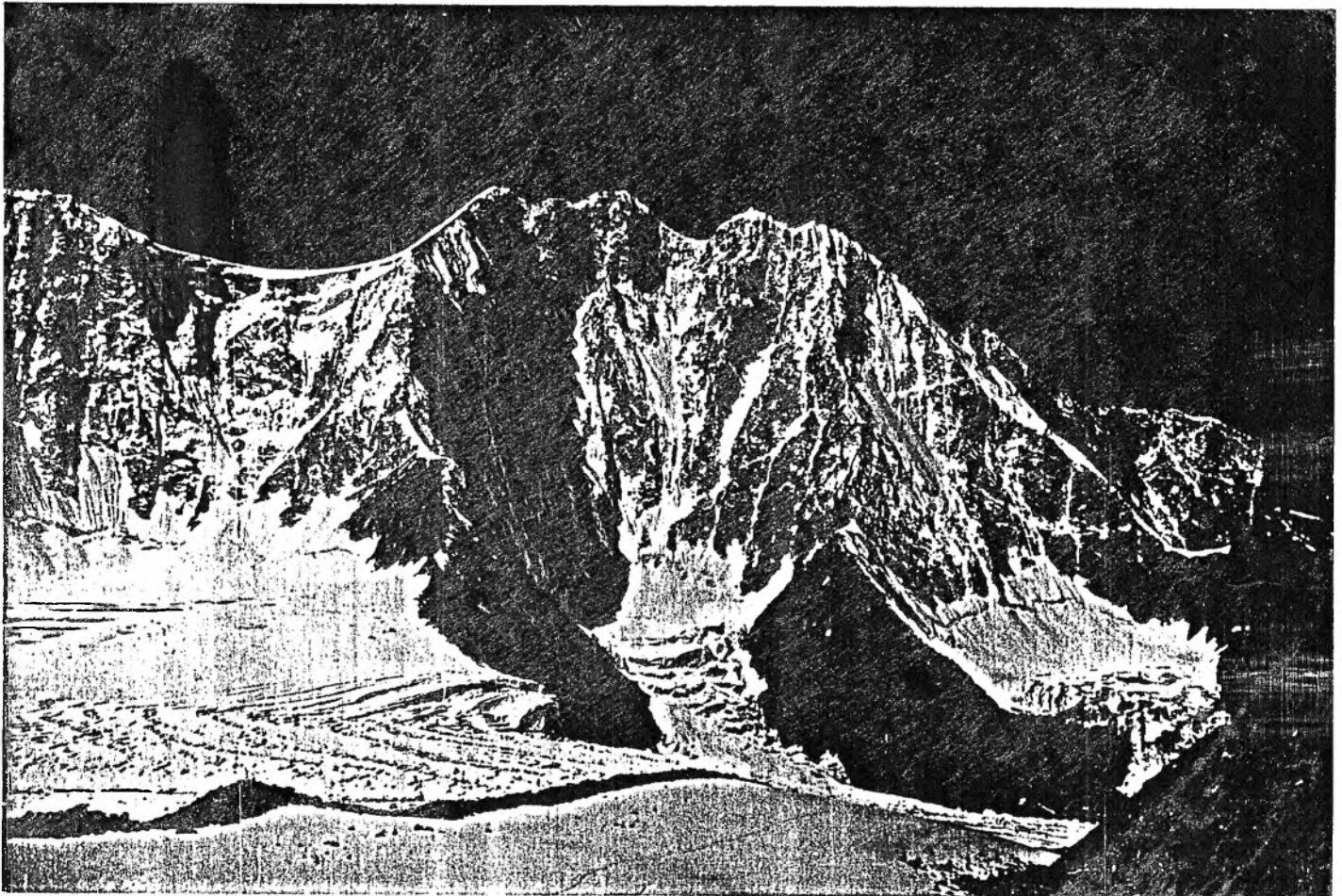


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# ALTAI



# 1988

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Very few British mountaineers have climbed in the Soviet Union and our decision to visit the Altai range in 1988 requires some explanation.

In common with many climbers we found ourselves restricted by work commitments which precluded regular long holidays and thus necessitated filling in the years between Himalayan style expeditions with shorter, but hopefully equally challenging trips.

The idea of a visit to the Altai range in Siberia first arose when Mick Fowler and Victor Saunders visited the Caucasus range in 1986. They were shown a photograph of the N.E. Face of 20th October Peak (4167m) and, after inquiring more about the area, concluded that it was most definitely worth a visit in a 'short holiday' year with the N.E. Face of 20th October peak as a fine objective.

In the intervening 2 years, Victor managed to find ways of increasing the time he could spend away from work (and involved himself in Himalayan commitments) whilst Mick retained his interest in the Altai project and organised the following team of 4 to visit the Altai Mountaineering Camp at Ak-Kem lake between 25th July and 17th August.

Mick Fowler (32), 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 line on the Eckpfieler Buttress on Mont Blanc.

Activities further afield include:-

- 1982 - Leader and summit climber on the successful British Taullirajn South Face Expedition (5830m).
- 1983 - Kilimanjaro (Tanzania) - new route to Vhurn Peak over 2 days.
- 1984 - Bojohagur Duonarir (7329m) - Pakistan Himalaya - Deputy leader of a British expedition which failed 500m below the summit of this (then) unclimbed peak.
- 1986 - Leader of a successful British Caucasus expedition which achieved the 1st ascent of a major new route on the W. face of Ushba (4710m) - the highest snow/ice face in Europe.
- 1987 - Deputy leader and summit climber on the successful Spantik (7027m) N.W. Pillar expedition (Pakistan Himalaya). A particularly bold Alpine style ascent

**Philip Thomas (37)**, Outdoor Pursuits Instructor and B.M.C. Guide. Prolific first ascensionist of summer and winter routes in Britain and an experienced Alpine climber. Notable ascents include the N. Faces of Les Droites and the Matterhorn as well as a new route on the Eckpfieler Buttress of Mount Blanc.

Activities further afield include:-

- 1981 - Nose of El Capitan.
- 1982 - Numerous ascents in the Rocky Mountains whilst resident in Canada.
- 1986 - Solo traverse of Mt. Kenya - East Africa.
- 1987 - Member of the mainly Irish expedition to the 7600m peak of Changtse (Tibet). Failed 400m below the summit due to bad weather and poor snow conditions.

**Duncan Tunstall (25)**, Accounts Manager. Relatively recent devotee to mountaineering who completed 3 European Alpine seasons before moving on to more distant ranges.

- 1980 - New Zealand Alpine season.
- 1987 - Exploratory trip to the Karakorum Range (Pakistan) culminating in the 1st ascent of an un-named 6000m peak.

Prior to moving into mountaineering circles, he was an experienced caver achieving descents such as the Goufre Berger (France) in 1983.

**Paul Allison (22)**, Post Graduate Student. Although only 22 years of age he has built up an impressive list of European Alpine achievements in 4 seasons.

In 1985 he became one of the youngest British mountaineers to succeed on an important Himalayan objective when he made the first ascent of the Shimshal Weissshorn (6400m) in the Pakistan Karakoram.

## 2. HISTORY.

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The Altai Mountains were explored during the early part of this century lagging somewhat behind other more accessible ranges in grabbing the attention during the Golden Age. This lack of attention from both Russian and European climbers meant that notable ascents were few and far between. The Russians were, not surprisingly, in the forefront of their exploration and the Trimov Brothers made the first ascent of Bieluka on 26 June 1914. Their ascent was made from the Katun Glacier.

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution prevented continued exploration and it was not until 1933 that Abalakov made the second ascent of Bielukka via the impressive Delone Ridge. The Pre War period saw ascents of most major peaks including the impressive, and typically Russian named, 'The 20 Anniversary of the Glorious October Revolution' Peak in 1937.

Western Mountaineers who have visited the area have been less than numerous and until the opening of the International Mountaineering Camps few documented their travels. The eccentric British traveller Samuel Turner visited the range in 1907, ascending Ak-Ayuk in 1903 and attempting Bielukka without success. The British have been reluctant to follow his example and the region was forgotten by our Mountaineers until, inevitably, rediscovered by John and Shiela Towne in 1984. They attended the International Camp of that year and climbed Ak-Ayuk and Bielukka by the normal route from the Katun side. Alec Earskine lead a small Cambridge university trip to the 1987 camp and despite reservations from the Russian Trainers completed the ascent of Bielukka via the impressive North face. (Russian 5b)

Although visited regularly by Russian, East European and some Western Climbers it still awaits the modern developments seen in the Western Alps and Caucasus. It remains in a state not dissimilar to the Alps in 1950 with all summits climbed but several important lines and traverses still to be completed. With winter temperatures reported at below -40 climbing during this period in the range presents a considerable challenge for any one so inclined.

### 3. PREPARATION

Experience in 1986 had shown that by far the easiest way to arrange a climb in the Soviet Union is by attending one of the International Mountaineering Camps organised by the Soviet Sports Committee in Moscow.

It seemed a waste of time asking Soviet representatives in Britain about these camps as both Intourist and the Russian Embassy have previously denied any knowledge of them and emphatically stated that it is not possible for Westerners to visit the Altai range. The key to the problem was to approach the Sports Committee direct. (Their address is given at Appendix II). As the result of a straightforward request, a programme of available camps was received which was worded in the form of an invitation. International camps exist in the Tien Shan, Pamirs, Caucasus, Chimbulak and Altai, but the key word in the communication was 'invitation'. Effectively this meant that, as invited guests of the Sports Committee, we were given considerably more latitude than an 'intourist' tourist and were not pursued by a courier and forced to keep to a rigid itinerary. It also meant that we could look forward to being looked after whilst down in the valley. A rare mountaineering luxury.

Bureaucratically there was nothing to fear and preparation proceeded with no real problems. Admittedly, this was partially due to Mick's knowledge of the system; having organized the Caucasus trip two years previously, and with this in mind, the following time scale of events may prove useful and prevent undue concern:-

- 3.10.87 Written request to Sports Committee for a copy of the 1988 information sheet. (These can be obtained from the B.M.C. and the Alpine Club).
- 6.11.87 Information sheet (Appendix II) received from the Sports Committee.
- 12.12.87 Sports Committee advised in writing of our intention to visit the Altai range. (The deadline for receipt in Moscow was 31st December, but it seems that applications are often accepted after the closing date).
- 1.2.88 Telegram received from the Sports Committee requesting that we arrange to transfer 920 roubles per person to their account in Moscow by 1.6.88.
- 5.5.88 Payment in full transferred.
- 23.5.88 Telegram received, confirming receipt of the money transferred and instructing us to apply for visas.

15.6.88 Visas organised with the Soviet Embassy in London.

25.7.88 Departure date.

It is worth emphasising that the start and finish dates shown in the itinerary are the dates that you should arrange to arrive in and leave Moscow. Any time spent in Moscow outside these dates costs 50 roubles per night (1988 rates).

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:-

25.7.88 Arrive in Moscow.

26.7.88 Guided tour of Moscow. Flight to Barnaul.

27.7.88 Flight from Barnaul to Ust Koksa. Helicopter from Ust. Koksa to Ak-Kem Lake (base camp).

28.7.88) Time available for climbing/exploration.  
14.8.88)

15.8.88 Helicopter to Ust Koksa. Flight from Ust Koksa to Barnaul.

16.8.88 Flight from Barnaul to Moscow.

17.8.88 Flight from Moscow to London.

As far as flights to Moscow are concerned it is as well to bear in mind the importance of arriving and leaving on the correct day. Taking a cheaper flight which necessitates additional nights in Moscow can quickly turn out to be a false economy. In 1988 only British Airways flew on the correct days and as it is an increasingly popular route it is advisable to book early.

Visas were essential but could only be obtained from the Soviet Embassy in London after the Sports Committee 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 to find out the latest procedures and obtaining them promptly when places on the camp are confirmed.

Prior to leaving, some very half-hearted attempts to learn the Russian language were made. In the event our linguistic talents were very limited but the fact that we had made the

effort to learn the cyrillic alphabet did prove useful in reading signs etc. whilst travelling on our own in Moscow.

However, 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 or medical expenses are covered by the Russians, the premium being incorporated in the 920 roubles camp fee. We chose to risk loss of equipment rather than arrange additional cover.

With our British preparations complete, we arrived in Moscow on 28th July and were met at the airport by one of the Sports Committee helpers before being whisked away to the Hotel Sport.

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, and, as one of the highest buildings in the area (22 storeys), it gave us a fine view of our surroundings. It also meant that we were rubbing shoulders with huge weight lifters and 7' tall basketball players. Doubtless these athletes wondered in which sport the 10 stone British weaklings could possibly be representing their country at.

Regarding Moscow in general, it is well beyond the scope of this report to go deeply into the variations in Eastern/Western lifestyles but suffice to say that there are enough thought-provoking sights to convince even the most enthusiastic and time conscious mountaineer that a day in the Russian capital is not a day wasted.

The difference which will most acutely affect most British mountaineers is that alcohol is not at all freely available. The bar at the Hotel Sport is permanently closed and only the airport duty free shop and the "beriozkas" (hard currency tourist shops) provide easily purchasable alcohol.

From Moscow, a large modern jet took us, in three and a half hours, to the modern Siberian town of Barnaul, where we changed to a smaller jet to travel the final 500 miles or so to the nearest village Ust Koksa. This was virtually the end of the road for motor transport but was still 60 km from Ak-Kem Lake base camp, in the heart of the High Altai.

A 30 minute helicopter ride completed the journey and at 6pm on 27th July, we were ensconced in the tents which were to form our base camp for the next two and a half weeks. These had been pitched before our arrival and consisted of 2 man sleeping tents, a mess tent and two store tents. The only



permanent building was a wooden sauna on the edge of the picturesque Ak-Kem glacial lake. Bielhuka, the highest mountain in the area glistened at the head of the valley.

After a camp opening ceremony and a champagne and vodka dinner to celebrate the first night, it was time for us to start thinking about the climbing. Radios were distributed but the whole atmosphere was more relaxed here than in the Caucasus and no mention was made of the medical tests that we had to undergo there.

It was immediately clear that Slava, the camp director, had a tremendous personality and with the aid of his advice, a book of photos he produced, and our own information, we chose the N. Face of Ak-Ayuk as our training climb.

Unlimited hill food was chosen from the store tents (to supplement our freeze dried food brought out from England) and we were ready to go.

#### 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)
6	Extremement Difficile (ED)

These are direct technical comparisons and it should be borne in mind that the approaches and descents from the Al-tai climbs can be much longer and more serious than in the Western Alps.

5. CLIMBING LITERATURE/MAPS.

There is no Russian guide book to the Altai and the area is far less developed than some other ranges which are open to Western mountaineers. (eg the Caucasus).

Some information on existing routes is held at the camp, but this consists chiefly of a random selection of photographs with route lines pencilled in.

The bibliography (listed at the end of this report) is extensive but only John Towns pieces are of any real use in choosing worthwhile objectives.

The map at Appendix I (drawn by John Town) is the best that we came across for the Ak-kem area, although Russian trekkers definitely had a better map which we were unable to lay our hands on.

## 6. SOVIET ATTITUDES TO MOUNTAINEERING

### General

As previously stated, the Soviet attitude to mountaineering is analogous 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 are "official".

### The Grading System for Mountaineers

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.

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 attempt unclimbed routes which would probably fall in the 5B category.

### 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 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 beyond 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. Routes of similar grade and length are attempted by several parties. While we were in the Altai, preparations were being made for a mountaineering competition on the Bielukha Wall.

Ice climbing competitions in which the competitors use the uniquely Russian ice-fifis and ice screw drivers for super-fast placements of the ubiquitous titanium ice screws are currently losing popularity in favour of the rock climbing competitions.

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

## 7. CLIMBING UNDERTAKEN.

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Our main objective of the Expedition was to ascend the North Face of the 20th October Peak and then Traverse both the East and West summit of Bieluka descending via the Delone Ridge. Our first view of the range confirmed the attraction of this objective. The face offering a choice of buttress climbs comparable to the Walker/Croz Spurs on the Jorasses followed by a long High level (4000m+) traverse including the crossing of 3 Summits over 4000m. Bieluka West - 4560m, Bielukka East-4600m and Delone peak- 4200m.

We knew from Mick's previous experiences that our first task would be to show the Russians that we were competent to attempt the climb and would thus be required to tackle a 'Training Peak.' Needing to acclimatise we were more than happy to comply.

Ak-Ayuk at 3600m and located just 2 hours from the camp was the obvious (and only?) choice. So on the second day we found ourselves, along with the rest of the camp's inhabitants (8 German, 7 Swiss, 1 Austrian and 4 other British climbers) camped at the delightful meadow below the peak. Fortunately for us, everyone else with the exception of Andy Bond and Steve Gould opted for the East Ridge ( Russian 2b or Alpine Ad) leaving us to tackle the N face (Russian 3b or Alpine D-). Surprisingly Steve and Andy chose an indirect approach via a slightly easier but serac threatened couloir on the left of the face, leaving the self christened 'A team' to face the full challenge alone.

The route was an easy angled glacier climb and we were able to make rapid progress up the face. A large crevasse at half height proved to be the only obstacle which slowed us down. Being sensible chaps we chose this point to bring out the ropes and then moved together on the slightly steeper upper section. We joined the east ridge a few metres from the summit well ahead of the ensuing throng, which fortunately, gave us the pleasure of the summit to ourselves. Even greater pleasure was gained on the descent as we passed the Germans struggling through soft knee deep snow in the heat of the morning sun. What ever happened to Alpine Starts?

Our return to camp was accompanied by a deterioration in the weather and for the next 10 days we had to survice with wonderful Russian hospitality as each bright morning was quickly spoilt by the approach of yet another depression and associated rain and snow. Our first attempt on the route was abruptly halted at the end of day one when "Wild Country's" latest designed tent did nothing to keep out light

Siberian rain. We were thus forced to beat a rather soggy retreat down the Glacier back to camp. We were, however, so enthused by the project that we left most of our climbing gear at the site of our camp hoping to return at the earliest opportunity.

This initial sortie although unsuccessful gave us our first view of the face proper and filled us with considerable apprehension. Of particular concern were the frequent avalanches that swept down the central couloir which would form the only approach to either of the two central Buttresses.

The trip also gave a couple of moments of human interest. The first on the approach, when Mick, in his usual enthusiasm for walking, sprinted off at such a pace that he completely missed the bridge over the glacial stream. He and Phil then provided hours of endless amusement as they struggled over 5b boulder problems with massive sacks as myself and Paul sauntered along the track on the easier left side. The second was more distressing as insomnia attacked 3 members of the party, a problem which would recur throughout the trip, and was made doubly worse by Paul's ability to sleep continuously for at least 15 hours a night constantly emitting a fine impression of a fog horn. The cure for which was sadly not discovered until the last night.

Our return to camp was greeted by further deterioration in the weather and we settled into the not unpleasant routine of camp life. Our lack of mountaineering activity caused some concern to our Russian hosts who were beginning to doubt our claims to be Climbers. Their derisory comments were inevitably made during the bright sunny periods of the day when Camp Leader Slava, ignoring the threatening clouds above, would promise perfect weather for the coming days. His almost total lack of understanding of the English language prevented a true grasp of these conversations and we were left in some doubt as to whether the climate was normal for the time of year. We felt vindicated for our decision not to venture out when the others returned after 3 days without having made a dent on their less serious objectives.

The ten days spent in the camp went surprisingly quickly and proved in fact to be immensely enjoyable. This can largely be put down to the hospitality of our Siberian Hosts. Of particular note were Slava, Tanya, our cook, Pasha, her son and helper and Victor our jovial and somewhat rotund translator. We idled away many hours reading, eating, drinking, discussing ideology with our communist brothers and inventing a variety of camp games. Above all the centre of attraction was the lake side wood burning sauna. This

four man assault on the central pillar.

The next morning saw the intrepid four awake to cloudless skies and depart with some enthusiasm. This was quickly destroyed by the inevitable arrival of heavy clagg and our approach to the face slowed to a dawdle. As we plodded despondently through the gently falling snow, visibility reduced to zero, we were left with no option but to sit and wait. Alas no improvement occurred and shortly after dawn a full electrical storm developed. We retreated back to advance Base.

Our re-emergence from the claustrophobic warmth of the tents was to the stark realisation that we had failed without setting foot on our mountain. We moped about the boulders of advanced base for a few hours contemplating our options. We had four days left and the weather showed no signs of improvement. The concensus was that we should use up our remaining days with an ascent of Bieluka via the 'voie normale', a route hopefully achievable in almost any conditions.

Our ascent was remarkable only by it's lack of incident. We departed the Tomske Bivouac at dawn the next day and crossed the Delone Saddle to reach the Men-Su Glacier. For the first time on the trip we enjoyed the true pleasures of a clear mountain sunrise. The darkness lifted to reveal the familiar blue haze over distant and exotic peaks far to the South. The tracks of the other Brits who were camped on the Glacier made for easy work as we climbed up to the Borelski Saddle. Inevitably the good conditions did not last and the skies clouded over leaving us to finish the ascent in light snowfall. The summit was not kind enough to allow us to appreciate the 'Tempting panarama of distant chinese, Siberian and Mongolian Landscapes' so delightfully described by John Towne. Instead we had to be content with Glimpses of West Bieluka Peak and steal hurried summit shots of our companions cowering around Lennin's Bust.

That night we joined the others on the Men-Su Glacier and were astonished to wake to find our first perfect morning. We were even more surprised not to find the all too familiar warnings of more bad weather to come. Our return to the Tomske Bivouac caused a mixture of emotions. The enjoyment of the situation which was countered by the frustration of seeing the elegant buttresses of the 20th in perfect condition. Our conversation at the Bivouac inevitably turned to climbing. Paul, Mick and I all keen to grab another route in our last two days. Phil, unfortunately, had trouble with his boots and opted out. The question was which route.

To the unconcealed delight of Boris, the senior Russian



contraption was housed in a traditional wood cabin and formed the only permanent building on the camp. It's design had obviously been perfected over centuries of painful experiment and provided endless amusement to all concerned. Whether we were collecting, chopping or sawing wood for it's insatiable boiler, sunbathing on it's roof or subjecting our pink forms to it's pleasures, everyone steamed in with spectacular results.

Unfortunately the full fury (for summer anyway) of the Siberian climate was unleashed on the 7th July when 48mm of rain fell in one night. The result was an impressive landslide which dissected the camp, frightening the sheep and only just missing the sauna. Fortunately no one was hurt although all suffered from flooded tents and sodden equipment.

Eventually we dried out and began to tire of camp life. Our listlessness was accentuated by the realisation that our time was running out. Thus within two days of the storm we departed once more. Our decision was based, not on any marked improvement in conditions, but on the simple fact that we could leave a serious attempt no longer. This time all were forced to follow the right bank as the flood had removed all bridges. Five hours of considerable sweat and cursing later saw the team back at advanced base where we were greeted with the shock that uninvited guests had been to our gear dump. A quick stock check showed we were missing a complete set of climbing gear; An axe, hammer, crampons harness and rope. The thief obviously knew his equipment as only the best and newest item of each type was removed and the "Wild Country" tent had been overlooked.

Our initial anger was shortlived and our surprise was lessened by the remembrance of the many Russian mountaineers we had seen dressed in equipment which would not have looked out of place in the thirties, dressed in army cast-offs and sleeping under plastic. In particular we could easily imagine their feelings towards the decadent capitalists who were able to avoid the sixty km walk in, were cooked for in the comforts of a luxury camp and equipped with the latest Hi-Tech western gear. We all realised that Mick's Pink and Yellow crampons, a temptation which many of our compatriots in the peak would not have been able to refuse, was understandably too much for our comrades.

However this sympathetic approach would not solve our problems. We were now ill equipped to climb the objective as two teams of two, one on each of the Central pillars which had been our plan. We were incredibly lucky when a quick sortie to the Tomske biv-ouac resulted in a spare pair of crampons, the one essential piece of missing hardware, was found. Thus adequately kitted out we felt we could make a

glacier. Our only thought was to reach the boulders before dark. Needless to say we failed and all took falls that could have had disastrous consequences. Mick, so it appears was lucky to escape drowning as after one fall he found himself, inverted, supported only by his rucksack with his head a few feet above a raging whirlpool. Listening to his Houdini type efforts to extract himself from this predicament caused great amusement to all.

On reaching camp our efforts were made more than worthwhile as we were greeted like returning heroes. No effort was spared and we celebrated in true Siberian style.

Our only advice is to heed your guides warnings and take a sauna prior to a heavy meal and not after!

trainer, we rejected an attempt on the 20th as too risky in the time available and chose instead the fine Tomske Ridge on Delone Peak. The route, 1200m of Russian 4b seemed an ideal choice. Of particular merit was it's start only 30 mins flat walk from our camp. It followed a prominent ridge to half height where it merged with the North face proper, from where an icy ramp, we hoped, would lead to the summit.

We decided on the modern Ultra Lightweight approach and left at first light carrying no more than a head torch, water proofs, a few nuts/ice screws and a rope between us. The first 400m was a straight forward 50 degree ice field which was quickly dealt with. This led to the main ridge which provided easy ground for another 150m. We were now approaching the main difficulties, the central rock buttress.

Fowler reached this first and appeared to be having some difficulty. Realising from experience that "what Mick struggles on I can't do" and mindful of the 500m drop pulling at my feet, I selflessly suggested to Paul that we Rope up. This we did, only to find our few nuts disappearing around the corner with Fowler's sack. Resorting to traditional technique we dispensed with this pitch with surprising ease and moving together as quickly as possible managed get close enough to Mick to persuade him to leave the gear.

The pattern was thus set for the rest of the day; Mick Soloing ahead, revelling in his favourite conditions, with the "B team" moving together a short and ever growing distance behind. The climbing was a delight. Sustained Scottish II and III mixed ground with a couple of sections of IV to heighten the experience. We topped out at 2.00pm and our satisfaction was only slightly marred by Fowler's sarcastic jibes at our slow progress. We thoughtfully reminded him of our enforced sleep the day before caused by his snail like pace on Bieluka.

After the traditional summit shots we began the long and not insignificant descent down the Delone Ridge. The snow had been reduced to slush and tired by our exertions, the ridge required considerable concentration. Our return to the Tomske Bivouac, to be greeted by Boris's hot coup and cigarettes was more than welcome. We had undoubtedly completed an Alpine classic a dead cert for the forthcoming Soviet edition Gaston's bumper fun book.

Once again common sense deserted us and choosing to ignore the pleasures of an early night we decided on the long arduous descent to Ak-kem. The next three hours are best forgotten as we embarked on a head long dash down the

## 8. CONCLUSION

Perhaps most revealing is the fact that although the trip was relatively expensive and the weather poor, all members felt the experience was thoroughly worthwhile and have no regrets about visiting the area.

The climbing itself was very similar to the Pennine Alps of Switzerland with mixed and pure ice faces being more appealing than the rock climbs. We were rather surprised by the number of trekkers around but most of these were content to stick to the valleys or cross relatively easy passes. Very few climbers were apparent and the most difficult ascent that we heard of during our stay was of the 4B category.

The area is nowhere near as developed as the Caucasus and major routes still await first ascents. In Western Alpine terms the Walker Spurs of the area are still unclimbed.

The Altai should become even more appealing in 1989 as plans are afoot to arrange transport to the Sharla region about 150km from Ak-Kem. The itinerary sheet (Appendix II) states that this option may have been available in 1988 but in fact those organising the Altai end had never intended to include the possibility of spending part of the time available in the Sharla region, until 1989. We saw photographs of the peaks there and the possibilities certainly look interesting with mixed routes already climbed up to 5B standard.

It seems that we were particularly unlucky with the weather and all 4 team members are considering a further visit.

## 9. EQUIPMENT

The temperatures experienced were very similar to those in the Swiss and French Alps so no 'expedition' style equipment was necessary.

For climbing purposes a goretex jacket and trousers (covering polar trousers on the bottom half and a couple of layers of capilene on the top) proved ideal. In retrospect a warm duvet style jacket would also have been worth taking for use in base camp during bad weather. (At one stage it did snow at base camp).

In equipment terms we were fortunate enough to be sponsored by Stubai/Moac (crampons) and W-Gore Associates (goretex fabric). The Stubai crampons were used by Mick Fowler, Phill Thomas and Duncan Tunstall with no problems whatsoever. The goretex fabric (made into Gemini tents by Wild Country) stood up extremely well to the adverse weather.

We are particularly grateful to both companies.

## 10. MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Injuries

There were no major injuries but minor injuries were very common, the more notable ones being listed below.

The first injury occurred as the result of a short fall taken by Mick during an ascent of the upward escalator linking the Bakerloo line and the Picadilly line in Green Park station on the way to Heathrow airport. The cut finger was ignored by the other members of the party, despite Mick's child-like whinging.

In Moscow, Mick developed a septic toe which was to bother him for the rest of the trip. However, as this was a result of him picking at a loose flap of skin, little sympathy was given. For his finale, Michael pulled out all the stops and did some quite original damage to his body. During a late night sauna, Michael leaned against the end of the hot water pipe of the sauna stove. A sound, not unlike 2lb of black pudding being dropped into boiling lard, was produced. Luckily, due to his anaesthetised condition, Michael felt little pain. He now sports a fetching hexagonal scar in the lower abdominal region. The injury was rapidly treated with copious amounts of scorn and laughter.

Several foot injuries were sustained. Duncan and Phil cut their feet by cunningly avoiding the path cleared of sharp rocks between the sauna and the glacial lake. Paul managed to slice open his toe during a game of cricket in Ak-Kem camp. The sympathy elicited from Tania, the camp cook, by this injury made cut toes seem very pleasant things to have.

Possibly the most serious injury was Phil's badly twisted ankle. The last night in Ak-Kem involved Vodka drinking, singing Russian love songs and, in Phil's case, falling over and smacking his foot on the ground. Alcohol was immediately applied which gave temporary relief from the pain. The camp doctor examined Phil's damaged ankle the following morning and prescribed a couple of aspirins. Initially a break was suspected but a recovery has been made.

### Illness

Only one member of the expedition was ill during the trip. However, this was made up for by the style in which the one incident occurred. Duncan outperformed all others in his triumphant vomit into the Ak-Kem lake. This was achieved by subjecting his body to extremes to which few could stand up. Initially the alcohol levels in the bloodstream were increased to dangerous levels. The surface of the body was then exposed to high temperatures and humidity in the sauna.

This was followed by a complete immersion of the body in the glacial lake (1-2 C). On standing up the sympathetic nervous system took over and he was promptly sick.

#### Facilities in the Altai

There is a doctor in the Ak-Kem camp with a large medical kit. He will supply extra materials for foreign climbers' first-aid kits. He gave us some strong pain-killers and some heart attack pills. Although there were few medical problems, he kept in practice by giving thorough examinations to several of the women on the camp. As well as being the doctor, his main function was to slaughter the sheep which ended up on the dinner table.

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11. EXPEDITION ACCOUNTS

Income

	£
Mount Everest Foundation	500
Sports Council/British Mountaineering Council	400
Members' contributions	3,720
	-----
	£4,620
	-----

Expenditure

Air travel	1,140
920 roubles per person (standard payment to USSR Sports Committee)	3,455
Hill food/gas etc.	25
	-----
	£4,620
	-----

The standard payment of 920 roubles per person covers all food, internal transport etc. and thus greatly simplifies accounting.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

### Finance

Mount Everest Foundation  
British Mountaineering Council

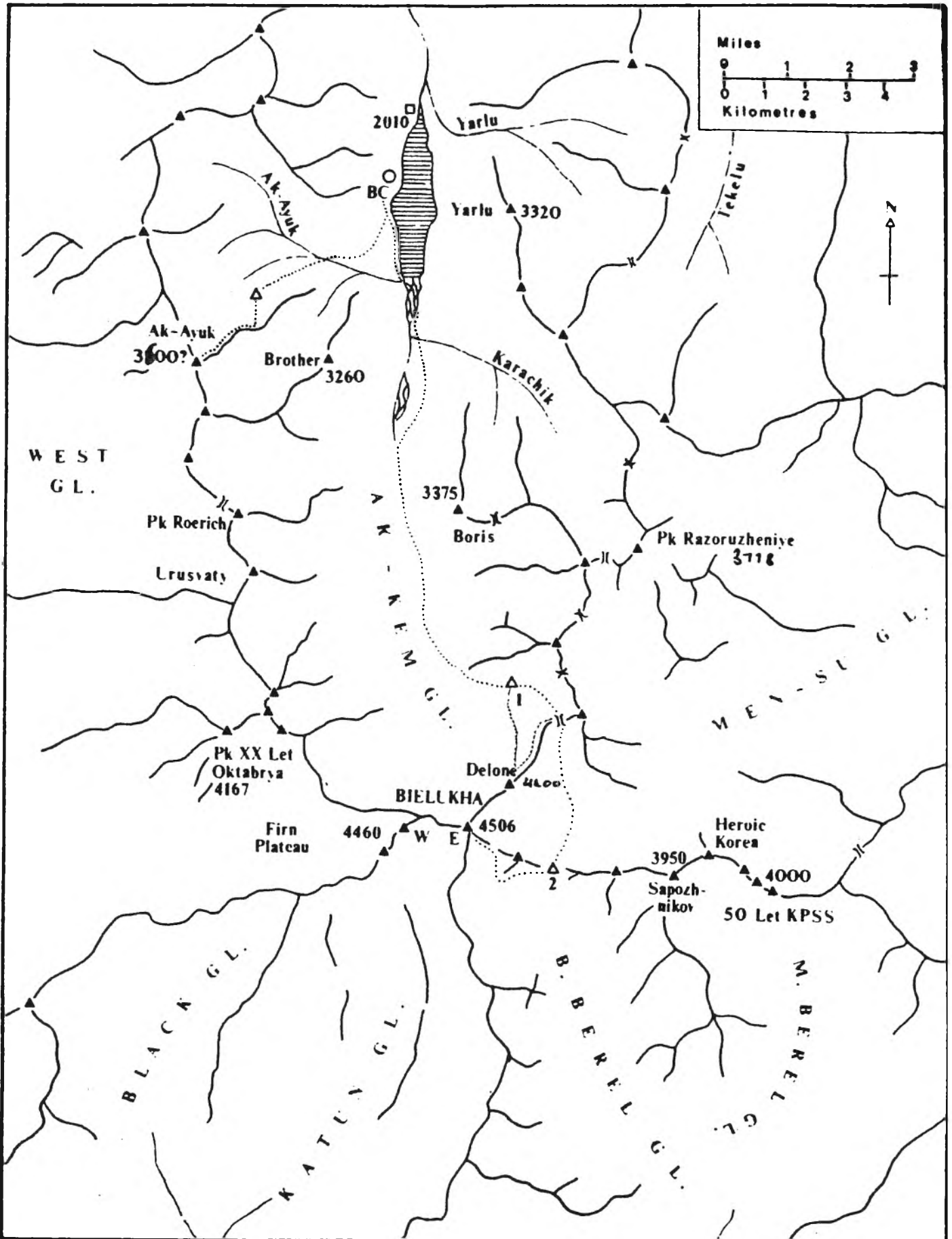
### Food and Equipment

W.L. Gore Associates (UK) Ltd  
Berghaus Ltd  
Wild Country Ltd  
Stubai  
Moac

### General Advice and Assistance

John Town  
Alec Erskine  
Ken Wilson  
Simon Richardson

# Altai : Bielukha



## USSR STATE SPORTSCOMMITTEE

## V/O "SOVINTERSPORT"

## INFORMATION SHEET

on operation of the USSR International  
Mountaineering Camps "Pamir", "Caucasus",  
"Chimbulak" and "Altai" in 1989.

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The USSR International Mountaineering Camps invite climbers from different countries to visit the most picturesque mountain regions of the Soviet Union and climb the highest peaks in the Pamirs, the Caucasus and the Altai.

During the visits to the mountaineering camps you will get the opportunity to acquaint yourself with the Soviet people way of life, to meet Soviet people of different nationalities, visit the most beautiful places and climb the mountain peaks in the USSR.

The camp "Pamir"

On the way to the Pamirs and back the participants will spend 2-3 days in Moscow. From Moscow the climbers will be transported by a comfortable aircraft to the town of Osh and from there by bus to the basecamp in the valley Achik-Tash at the bottom of Lenin Peak.

The camp will operate in three itineraries.

Itinerary 1 (operating in two shifts) - camp "Achik-Tash"

From the basecamp "Achik-Tash" (3700m) mountaineers can ascend Lenin Peak (7143m), Peak of the XIX CPSU Congress and other summits of the Zaalai Region 5000-6000m high.

Arrival in Moscow is set for July 4 and 29. Departure for homeland - July 28 and August 22. The whole itinerary lasts 25 days.

The list price of the program - 890 roubles.

Itinerary 2 - camp "Fortambek"

From this camp mountaineers can climb Communism Peak (7495m) by a simple route, the Peak of E.Abalakov, Sulojev Peak and other summits of the Peter the Great Ridge.

Arrival in Moscow is set for July 10, 12. Departure for homeland - August 8, 10. The whole itinerary lasts 30 days.

The list price of the program - 1125 roubles.

#### Itinerary 3 - camp "Moskvin"

From this camp mountaineers can climb Communism and Korzhenevskaja Peaks by complicated routes.

Arrival in Moscow is set for July 6, 8. Departure for homeland - August 4, 6. The whole itinerary lasts 30 days.

The list price of the program - 1250 roubles.

All ascents in the Pamirs and especially those of Itinerary 2 and 3 require excellent physical training and sufficient mountaineering experience.

#### The camp "CAUCASUS-SUMMER"

It operates in one program in Prielbrus region for a total of 24 days. The camp operates in two sessions. Climbers can cover routes of various categories of difficulty including the 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 (5642m).

For hiking and back-packing groups we offer the trips along the passes of the Main Caucasus Ridge to the fascinating mountain area of Georgia - Svanetia, Adyr-Su, Adyl-Su valleys and other Prielbrus picturesque areas.

Arrival in Moscow for the first session is set for June 30, departure for homeland - July 23, stay in the camp - July 2-22. Arrival in Moscow for the second session is set for July 21, departure for homeland - August 13, stay in the camp - July 23-August 12.

The list price of the program - 1108 roubles.

#### The camp "CAUCASUS-WINTER"

Aside from technically simple routes to Mt. Elbrus, Gumachi, some other routes to Nakra-Tau, Donguz-Orun, Shkhelda, Shurovski Peak, climbings might be available. For winter climbing the routes from Baksan valley are open only. Alpine skiers can ski down the slopes of Mt. Elbrus and Cheget using the lifts.

Arrival in Moscow for the first session is set for February 24, departure for homeland - March 12, stay in the camp - February 26-March 11.

The camp "CHIMBULAK-WINTER"

Such summits as Peak Molodjozhnaja, Pogrebetsky Peak, Igly-Tyuk-su, Abaj Peak 4000-4300m high and of 1-3 category of difficulty, are located in the region. Some routes might be covered in skis. Besides, back-packing trips on skis to the neighbouring valleys are possible.

The Chimbulak valley is located 25 km far from the capital of Kazahskaja 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 2200m. The Chimbulak camp provides the opportunity for pleasant skiing: tow- and chair lifts will be at the disposal of the participants.

Arrival in Moscow - March 11, departure for homeland - March 26, stay in the camp - March 13-25.

The list price of the program - 945 roubles.

The camp "CHIMBULAK-AUTUMN"

Participants of the camp will have a splendid opportunity to ascend summits of Maloalmaatinskoje valley. Rock- as well as mixed routes of various categories of difficulty lead to the summits 4000-4300m high.

Arrival in Moscow - September 2, departure for homeland - September 17, stay in the camp - September 4-16.

The list price of the program - 945 roubles.

THE TERMS OF RECEPTION

V/O "Sovintersport" does not recommend to use different flying machines, parachutes, deltaplanes and other appliances for descending mountain peaks.

The participants should arrange entry visas to the USSR in accordance with our invitation. The route of transfer within the USSR should be indicated in the entry visa. Please strictly stick to arrival and departure dates of our information sheet.

Applications should include the following information:

1. The name of the camp and its dates.
2. All participants' names, sex, date of birth, address, occupation, passport number and citizenship.

Arrival in Moscow for the second session is set for March 10, departure for homeland March 26, stay in the camp - March 12-25.

Arrival in Moscow for the third session is set for March 31, departure for homeland April 16, stay in the camp - April 2-15.

The list price of the program - 725 roubles.

#### The camp "CAUCASUS-SPRING"

Spring is the best time of the year for skiing from the highest point of Europe - Mt.Elbrus. In this season the camp for alpine skiers will be available in Prielbrus region. Alongside with skiing mountaineers can climb Mt.Elbrus, Gumachi, Nakra-Tau, Donguz-Orun, Shkhelda, Shurovski Peak.

Arrival in Moscow - April 14, departure for homeland - April 30, stay in the camp - April 16-29.

Arrival in Moscow - May 12, departure for homeland - May 28, stay in the camp - May 14-27. Within the same period of stay the trip Tbilisi-Kazbegi can be arranged for extra fee.

The list price of the program - 825 roubles.

The list price of the trip Tbilisi-Kazbegi - 137 roubles.

#### The camp "CAUCASUS-AUTUMN"

Autumn in the Caucasus is characterized usually by the stable weather, which makes possible mountain ascents and trekking. Actually, ascents by any routes might be available.

Arrival in Moscow - September 1, departure for homeland - September 17, stay in the camp - September 3-16.

The list price of the program - 825 roubles.

#### The camp "ALTAI"

Aside from climbing the Altai's highest summit - Mt.Belukha (4506), the participants of the camp may choose some other tops in the region for ascents or make interesting back-packing trips through taiga passes to the neighbouring valleys.

From Moscow the participants will be transported by the aircraft to the town of Barnaul, then by a local jet to Ust-Koksa and further by helicopter to the basecamp, located in the valley of Akkem river, running down from the northern slopes of Mt.Belukha.

Arrival in Moscow - July 24, departure for homeland August 16.

The list price of the program - 920 roubles.

You should inform V/O "Sovintersport" of arrival and departure dates (flight number or train number and accordingly train station in Moscow) not later than two weeks prior the arrival in the USSR. Having no this information your meeting and seeing off in Moscow ("Sheremetjevo" airport/train station - "Sport" hotel and back "Sport" hotel - "Sheremetjevo" airport/train station) are not guaranteed.

In domestic airlines V/O "Sovintersport" paises only the baggage of 30 kg per person.

Payment for participation in the International mountaineering camps should be remitted not less than two months prior the arrival in the USSR to account N.60801042 of V/O "Sovintersport", firm "Sov-alptour", with USSR Vnesheconombank, Moscow. Payment is accepted in hard currency according to exchange rate of USSR State bank on date of payment.

If cancellation from participation is received less than a month prior the beginning of the camp, a 15% penalty will be taken from the full cost of the program.

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