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BRITISH ADMIRAL PEAK EXPEDITION 1994

AK CY VALLEY, TURKESTAN

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1. INTRODUCTION

Our interest in the Ak Cy valley of the Turkestan Range in Kyrgyzstan was initially sparked by Mick Fowler's slides and information from his visit in 1990 when he climbed a new route on Ak Cy itself with Chris Watts. One of Mick's slides showed a fine steep pillar of granite on Admiral which immediately caught our attention as a primary objective for the expedition.

2. TEAM MEMBERS

Neil McAdie (31) Leader. Sales Manager. 11 visits to the Alps have been interrupted by expeditions to Gangotri (India), Cordillera Real (Bolivia), Chong Kumdan (India) and the Biafo Spires (Pakistan). Has also climbed extensively in the U.S.A.

Jerry Hadwin (33) Petroleum Engineer currently resident in Oman. 4 Alpine seasons and expeditions to Peru, Gangotri (India) and Pumori (Nepal). Has also climbed on Mt. Kenya, in Yosemite, Jordan and Oman.

Clive Davis (30) Sales Manager. 5 visits to the Alps have been supplemented by ascents of the Troll Wall in Norway, some Yosemite walls and the North Tower of Paine and Shark Fin in Patagonia.

Andy Lewington (34) Outdoor Pursuits Instructor. Has climbed in the Alps on 6 occasions and since visited Patagonia with C.D. (above) with success on the same two routes.

Note: Andy Perkins was also to have been a member of the expedition but withdrew at a late stage of the planning due to an ankle injury picked up during an unexpected and uncontrolled descent of a Scottish mountain.

3. GETTING THERE

The Ak Cy Valley lies in the Turkestan range of mountains in "Central Asia". It is an extremely complicated area from geographical, political and cultural perspectives. To visit the area is now far easier than at any time in recent history. Soviet climbers began to explore the valley in 1982 and the first foreign climbers were allowed to visit in 1990. The valley lies in Kyrgyzstan but is very close to both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. As we now understand it there are two methods of access to the Ak Cy valley.

- i) By road from Khodzhen (formally Leninabad) to Isfana in the Fergana valley. A 4 hour drive from Isfana leads to the road head at 2800m and a 14km walk with pack animals leads to base camp at 3000m.
- ii) By helicopter direct to base camp from Tashkent in Uzbekistan. This was the method used by our expedition and took approx 90 minutes. Helicopter access can also be arranged from other cities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

It is no longer necessary to travel to these central Asian countries via Moscow. In 1993 Uzbekistan Airways established a direct flight from London to Tashkent which takes 7 hours, and has 3 departures per week. With this new service and the convenience of helicopter access we found that we were established in our base camp in the "remote" Ak Cy valley only 15 hours after leaving London! This obviously opens up fine possibilities for those with limited leisure time.

Although these transport facilities are now extremely efficient they would be difficult to arrange independently from Britain. It is normal to climb in the C.I.S. on the invitation of a climbing club, usually from Russia. Once the invitation has been gained, the club will make all internal transport arrangements and can also provide the base camp set up in advance of your arrival. It is usual for some representatives of the club to be sharing your base camp to act as hosts, either to climb independently or to join you on your objective. In our case the invitation came from the Alpine Club of the Moscow Engineering Physics Institute, and our contact there was Sergay Dudakov. This group quoted a price for and subsequently organised our helicopter access to the Ak Cy valley. When we arrived in Tashkent we found that the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was to close the following morning forcing us to proceed immediately and causing some considerable organisational difficulties for our hosts. In future it would be wise to keep in close contact with your host in the weeks before departure and to fly to the regional airport most suited to the frequently changing situation in these central Asian countries. Our hosts also organised our complete base camp set-up, i.e. food, kitchen/dining tent, stoves, fuel and cook. To our surprise this was fully set up awaiting our arrival. This was a rare expedition luxury.

Visas seem an area of confusion and the situation is sure to be in a state of change. In our case we simply flew to Tashkent "sans visas" and purchased 48 hour Uzbekistani transit visas for U.S.\$20 in the arrival hall. We then helicoptered into Kyrgyzstan and heard nothing more about it.

Gaining visas from the Russian Embassy in London (which currently handles visa requests for the central Asian countries) would seem to involve showing an invite from the country involved and also the ability to endure a long time queueing!

4. CLIMBING LITERATURE AND MAPS

The Russians do not have a guide book for the Turkestan range. However they do have detailed topos for the established routes and your host club should be able to provide these if you wish. The map we used was 1:100,000 made in 1992 by 'Tourist Sporting Club' in Taschkent, Matya region - Pamir-Alai - central part. Maps surveyed by military.

5. CLIMBING

Our arrival at base camp was on 18th July. On the 19th, 20th and 21st July all four members of the expedition made 3 separate day trips up to the site of our high camp on the lateral moraine of the AkCy glacier opposite our proposed objective on Admiral Peak. These 3 days were used to get fit and acclimatised and to transport our climbing gear and food to the site of this "A.B.C." which was situated at approximately 3830m. It was during these three days that we learnt that the pillar in question had in fact already been climbed by the Russians and given a grade of 6A (about ED1/ED2). To add insult to injury a Russian lady arrived at our high camp and with the aid of her telescope showed us her husband who was 3 days up the pillar making the first solo ascent! The route followed a discontinuous series of steep grooves on the front and then left of the pillar. After carefully considering a possible line further right we had to conclude that this alternative would be a full "Big wall" experience involving very many days of difficult artificial climbing and the use of multiple portaledge bivouacs. As we were not prepared for this category of big wall climbing we decided to repeat the Russian route which itself would be a "big wall" type route taking 5 or 6 days to complete, only this time with less

reliance on artificial climbing and with 3 or 4 possibilities for natural bivouac sites. After the pillar is a 1½km snow and rock ridge which would have to be traversed to the summit of Admiral.

After 3 days shuttling loads to A.B.C. we all spent a rest day at B.C. It was during this day that Andy Lewington developed an eye infection which was unfortunately severe enough to prevent him joining in on the ascent of Admiral.

N.E. PILLAR OF ADMIRAL (5090m)

On 23rd July Jerry, Clive and myself moved back up to A.B.C. and settled down there to an afternoon of intermittent drizzle and sleet, but with a clearing in the weather by nightfall. We had decided to tackle this route in capsule style to combat our lack of "portaledge" and the fact that there was only one water supply on the whole pillar. We were to use 2 x 9mm leading ropes and 2 x 11mm statics for fixing, and these were each 100m long. Using this system our climb went as follows.

24th July Jerry led and Clive and I followed carrying some gear and the two statics. After crossing the large bergschrund the first day's climbing was to follow a diagonal ramp up leftwards onto the front of the pillar. This gave 6 pitches up ice slopes and easy angled but very loose mixed ground to the first ice field. To continue the route we were forced to make a diagonal abseil from an ice screw and ice bollard to reach the bottom left-hand corner of the icefield from where we could reach a small ledge and good corner crack in solid rock. We all hoped this would mark the end of the poor rock and the beginning of good solid granite. From here we fixed directly down the front of the buttress and over the bergschrund which used up our 200m of static, and enabled us to sleep at A.B.C.

25th July In order to give Andy an extra day to turn up at A.B.C. if his eye injury allowed we decided to take loads of food, gas and snow up to the top of the ropes and return to A.B.C. to sleep. This was achieved relatively smoothly even though 200m of jumaring with a load soon showed up the differences in technique between those with extensive caving experience and those of us without! The altitude of 4000m mercilessly punished poor technique.

26th July Andy had not turned up so we set out on the pillar as a 3, soon realising that we had taken 4 people's food to the high point and that some prodigious eating feats would have to be achieved in the first few days to reduce this food mountain. Today was Clive's turn to lead. The climbing was on 70° slabs of good rock but the route finding was complex and time consuming and it took the remainder of the day to climb 4 pitches of about E1 standard with a short section of tricky aid, and to slide back down the fixed line, collect the bags and jumar back to our bivi ledge. At this stage the bags were still very heavy with 4 people's food for 7 days and a haul bag full of snow which we hoped would provide 3 days water. As our sponsor for this trip was Nintendo U.K. Jerry had not been bored waiting while we climbed but rather had spent the afternoon playing SuperMario on a Gameboy while we toiled above. This was to become a familiar pattern and the intricacies of the game often dominated our conversation on bivouacs.

Our ledges at the end of the day's climbing were particularly poor, small enough to be uncomfortable and separated by 4m steps to make passing brews to and fro very awkward. Being our first night we were at our most unorganised stage and hundreds of feet of rope were soon tangled up over every ledge and in every anchor. It was not a good night.

27th July Being a N.E. pillar luckily the sun arrived early to help us sort out the mess of our bivouac. I had had a particularly poor night slumped in my harness and the other two had fared little better. We hoped that this night was not to be typical. It was my day to lead.

A steep, clean 5b corner led straight off the ledge and was followed by two more pitches of fine aid climbed up thin cracks and a fourth, easier pitch to a bivi ledge. It was enjoyable climbing despite my tiredness. We fixed the static and jumared our bags to the new home, which thankfully was a much better one. There was still enough time for Clive and Jerry to climb 3 pitches above the ledge and leave the static down these ready for the morning. Now we really felt progress was being made.

28th July We jumared the static line with our bags to the central ice field and only water source. Clive and Jerry led two excellent hard pitches up a 90m diedre to a third bivi ledge while I spent the day melting ice to fill all the water bottles and also filling a haul sack with ice ready for the next two nights. We moved the bags up to the new ledge which provided just enough room for 3 people to lie down. The climbing on the pillar was now becoming much steeper and cleaner, and involved a mixture of aid and free. In the late afternoon and evening Clive and Jerry fixed 3 more pitches above the bivi ledge. The evening saw a deterioration in the weather with storm clouds gathering round Ak Su, and the night brought intermittant rain and hail.

29th July We started late (9.30am) due to the poor weather. As there appeared to be no more ledges or water supply between our bivi ledge and the top we set out to fix as many pitches as possible and return to the same ledge. After jumaring the fixed rope it took Clive and me until dark to climb 5 hard pitches involving quite a lot of aid, and to fix these with static ready for the morning. This was fine climbing based on a huge diedre easily seen from the glacier. The weather cleared during the day.

30th July All 3 of us jumared to the high point which left only one wet pitch to climb to the top of the pillar. It had thus taken just over 5 days to climb the route. We were met with impressive views of Blok and Ak Su and panoramic views over ranges of mountains stretching away to the south.

We had expected to have to traverse an exposed rock and ice ridge to the summit but were surprised to find that 2 abseils off the back of the ridge led to a flat glacial plateau which could be followed along under the ridge. This made the traverse of the ridge rather an artificial challenge and not one to be accepted for the sake of it after 6 days of "big wall" climbing. We descended into the glacial basin on the south of the ridge and moved along beneath the ridge in the heat of the afternoon. An early bivi was voted for in the face of a long complicated climb back up to the summit and the provision of a perfect flat bivi site where we could randomly scatter our gear and sleep without being tied on. As they say, "When the going gets tough the tough take the afternoon off".

31st July We started early for the 300m scree climb to a small col on the south ridge of Admiral. From here we set off to climb the 400m S. Ridge to the summit. This turned out to be a very time consuming and extremely loose series of tottering pitches which gave absolutely no climbing pleasure! Approximately one third of the way up we decided to descend, as to continue would have entailed a very full day of climbing and descending loose dangerous ground and then suffering a waterless bivi, and we were all a little weary after the last 6 days. It took little discussion to realise that the S. Ridge was a completely different route to the N.E. pillar and that we had reached our summit and should now descend. This was easier said than done! The slopes down westwards from

the col on the S. ridge were composed of shale cliffs and decaying ice slopes, and we half abseiled and downclimbed from dubious anchors for at least 1000ft until easier angled scree led to the glacier and eventually to the Karasu valley. We were glad to have turned back from the S. ridge! It became dark half way down the valley but we resolved to continue walking by head torch past a number of Kyrgyz camps to arrive at B.C. at 11.00pm.

N. E. PILLAR ADMIRAL ROUTE INFORMATION

29 pitches. We climbed at E2 and A2 although this could be varied.

GEAR

2 sets R.F.s: 2 sets "rocks" to size 9: Friends size ½ - 4 (and some duplicates): 2 small T.C.U.s: Selection pegs (20): 2 ice screws.

HOUSE PEAK - by ANDY LEWINGTON

1. House Peak has 5 routes from Russian 3a to 5a about 600m in length. Situated about 40 minutes walk from the base camp it offers 1 day routes finishing on the summit at 3929m. The rock is a type of limestone of variable quality, with the steeper pitches towards the base. I climbed Russian 4b with our hosts, Andre and Pasha - 4 pitches to the S.W. ridge which is followed by scrambling to the summit. Descent is scree with one 25m abseil.

2. The next day I climbed with Valira, just returned from soloing the Admiral, up a right to left diagonal crack line at Russian 5a. We set off in the rain, with no waterbottles, no waterproofs, and carrying a meagre lunch. After 6 pitches we moved together to the summit where Valira pointed out his numerous exploits. The next day he set off to solo in Karavshin as part of a Russian climbing competition.

MALY ISKANDER - EAST BUTTRESS. By ANDY LEWINGTON

After 3 hours and a tedious scree approach, Andre Pasha and myself bivvied at the foot of the buttress by a small patch of melting ice. This was the last water supply until reaching the stream on the descent. We climbed the left hand of two routes (both R.5a) which followed a crack system on good granite for 10/11 pitches to another ledge where we bivvied at 3.30 in the afternoon with little food or water. The top wall has a 10m section of R.6a (aided) followed by a R.5a crack - or by trending right the steep wall is avoided and the ridge below the summit is soon reached. An abseil descent leads to scree and the Karasu valley.

This route was also climbed by Neil McAdie and Jerry Hadwin on 7th August in deteriorating weather, and was considered to be a worthwhile 12 pitch H.V.S., ideal for starting or ending a trip.

6. WEATHER

Judging by local comment and the views of the Russian climbers we were blessed with unusually dry, warm weather. Daytime temperatures were quite high at B.C. and pleasant on the hill, allowing difficult free climbing even in the shade. Nights were warm at B.C. and seldom below freezing even on the mountain. Winds were light. We understand that the area is often much cooler and wetter than we experienced. We suffered light precipitation on only 3 occasions in 3 weeks.

7. GEAR

Our experience was that summer Alpine clothing combined with a warmer sleeping bag was adequate. We took 1000gm down bags expecting cold nights and could very

easily and more comfortably have used 600gm down bags instead and combined them with a light down sweater. We used bivi bags as the nature of the routes is that they offer very few places to erect a bivi tent. Portaledges or hammocks would be needed on the more ambitious objectives. Single leather boots may have been more adaptable than our plastics. We took epigas cylinders for cooking which were convenient but expensive to freight. If you take empty cylinders the Russians will refill these from large B.C. gas reserves. Take bouldering gear to exploit the tremendous B.C. bouldering potential!

8. CLIMBING POTENTIAL

Development in the Ak Cy valley has been quite intensive until very recently. The biggest objectives have now been climbed. The direct finish up the summit prow of the N. Face of Ak Cy was achieved by a 5 man Russian team this summer with 12 days on the wall.

The Ak Cy valley is dominated by Alexandre Blok Peak, Ak Cy, Admiral and Iskander. All offer tremendous walls and pillars with impressive routes established by the Russians. Blok is a particularly attractive mountain, and Ak Cy highly dramatic. The Iskander peaks offer less ambitious one and two day routes on mainly good rock. Admiral sports only one good line - the N.E. Pillar.

Two valleys to the East lies the Karavshin valley which was the venue for this year's climbing competition and is said to offer very many impressive walls, pillars and summits.

Two valleys to the West lies the Achat valley in which lies the major peak Sabac with its huge mixed N. Face, which now sports 3 competition routes.

Development continues at a rapid pace in these "Turkestan Alps".

9. BUDGET

<u>Income</u>	£	p
Sports Council/British Mountaineering Council	700.00	
Mount Everest Foundation	700.00	
Nintendo U. K.	1,500.00	
Members Contributions	<u>3,530.90</u>	
	TOTAL	<u>£6,430.90</u>

<u>Expenditure</u>	
Air Travel (4 x £610.00)	2,440.00
Return helicopter flight (USD 3000)	1,990.00
Base Camp food/fuel/cook (4 x USD 200)	530.00
Entrance to Ak Cy "National Park" (4 x USD 50)	132.50
Transit visas (4 x USD 20)	53.00
Insurance	580.00
Return travel to Heathrow	70.00
200m x 11mm static rope	184.00
Freight of Gas	100.00
Purchase of Gas	59.40
Hill food	75.00
Organisational expenditure in UK	84.00
Hotel/food expenses in Tashkent	<u>133.00</u>
	TOTAL <u>£6,430.90</u>

Note

The base camp payment of USD 200 each was made to the host club. This was thought to be too low but was compensated for by the helicopter charge which was too high, and made to the same club.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SKETCH MAP OF AK CY VALLEY.

