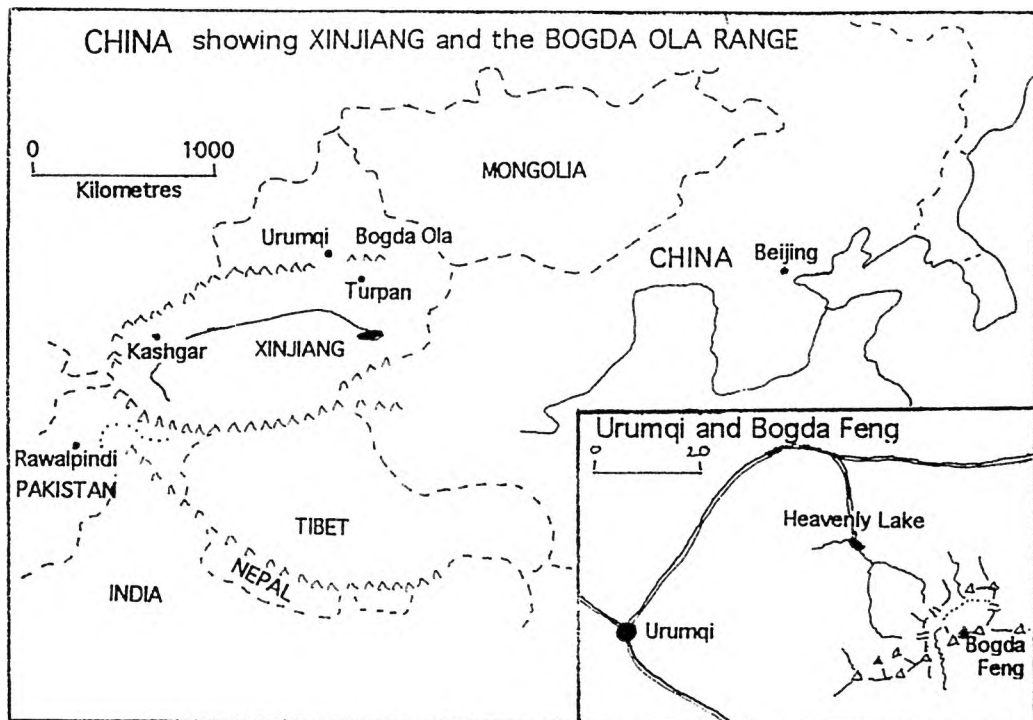


The Saga Magazine
TIEN SHAN
EXPEDITION
1995

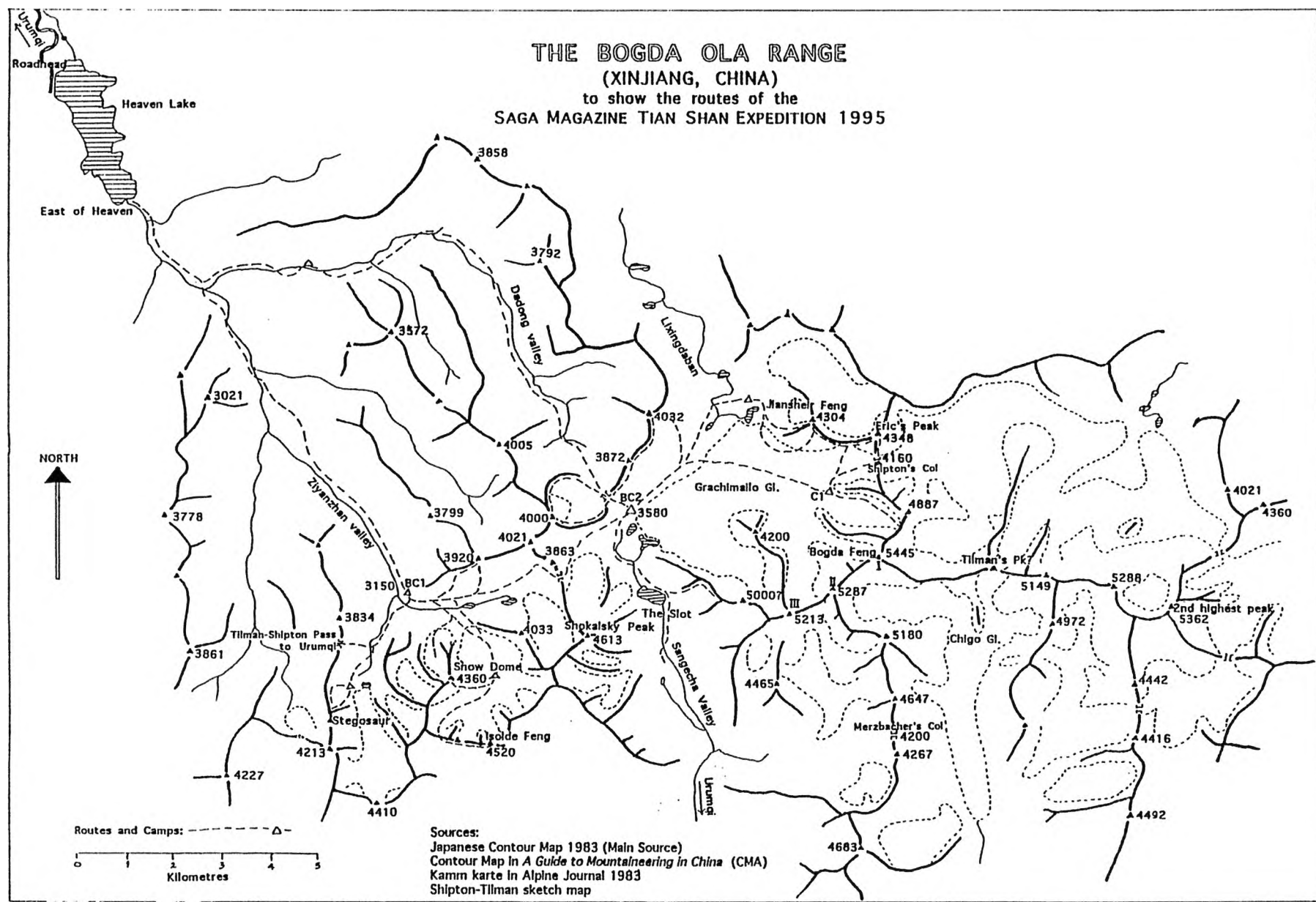
to the
Bogda Ola Range
Xinjiang

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THE BOGDA OLA RANGE
(XINJIANG, CHINA)
 to show the routes of the
SAGA MAGAZINE TIAN SHAN EXPEDITION 1995



Members

United Kingdom

Mike Banks
Phil Gribbon
Barrie Page

Ireland

Joss Lynam
Paddy O'Leary

China

Li Chuen Yuan	Liaison Officer 1 - 13 August
Mai Ti	Liaison Officer 14 August - 2 September
Leung Hua Sing	Interpreter
He Fen Gian	Cook

Drive Out

Geoff Axbey

Expedition Narrative

Mike Banks

Background

The Bogda Range of the Chinese Tian Shan (usually translated as the Celestial or Heavenly Mountains) is situated some 80 miles from Urumqi, the capital city of the desert province of Xinjiang. They are known to English speaking mountaineers chiefly through the writings of those redoubtable exploratory mountaineers, Tilman and Shipton. With only slender resources, they made a spirited reconnaissance of the range in 1947 in the course of which they identified the climbing potential of the massif and climbed a couple of peaks over 4000m.

The Maoist revolution quickly followed and the so-called "bamboo curtain" made virtually all of the mountain ranges of China inaccessible to Western mountaineers. However, this policy was relaxed in 1980. Mike Banks was fortunate in being the first Westerner granted permission to visit the Bogda Range. His brief visit was made on behalf of a British travel company with the specific aim of assessing the suitability of the area for Nepal style trekking. He climbed to a couple of high points and was struck by the very attractive possibilities of the range for alpine style climbing. The highest tops rose to 5445m but there was a host of courtier peaks of 4000+m. Clearly a return visit with some fellow mountaineers would be a most attractive proposition.

Fifteen years were to pass before his opportunity arose. He suggested the Bogda Range as the objective for the fourth in a series of biennial mountaineering expeditions he had initiated under the kindly sponsorship of Saga Magazine. The first two expeditions had been to the Garhwal in the Indian Himalayas and the third to Greenland. All the expeditions had two features in common: they were composed of veteran, or "Golden Oldie", climbers and they were of an Anglo-Irish composition. Following a meeting at Saga HQ in Folkestone in May 1994 between Mike Banks, Paul Bach, Editor of Saga Magazine, and Geoff Axbey, Art Editor, sponsorship was confirmed. The green light was given for the Saga Magazine Chinese Tian Shan Expedition, 1995. Serious planning started.

Preparations

When China first opened up its interior ranges to foreigners in 1980, the monolithic structure of the Communist regime was in place and all decisions emanated from Beijing. Since then central control has been greatly relaxed and the provinces now exercise considerable autonomy. It was therefore possible to make all arrangements direct with the China Xinjiang Mountaineering Association (CXMA), a governmental body. In practice this meant that for a (considerable!) lump sum they provided hotel accommodation, road transport, ferries across a lake, pack animals to and from base camp, base camp food and a mess tent. They also provided a staff of a Liaison Officer, an interpreter and a cook. A huge administrative burden was lifted by just one cheque!

The team was then chosen following an established practice whereby Mike Banks invited the British members and Joss Lynam the Irish. Both Mike and Joss were highly experienced exploratory mountaineers with many expeditions to the Greater ranges. A party of six was decided upon. All were over 60 with two septuagenarians, Mike Banks (72) from Bath and Joss Lynam (71) from Dublin. The other members included the eminent Irish climber, Paddy O'Leary (60), veteran of two previous Saga Himalayan expeditions. Northern Ireland was for the first time represented in the person of Phil Gribbon (66), a specialist in Arctic mountaineering and recently retired professional physicist at St Andrews University. Nottingham mountaineer Barrie Page

(61) was by profession a surveying geologist whose footloose and adventurous profession has taken him into many a remote region from South America to South-East Asia. Finally Hugh Banner (62), a much respected British rock climber and alpine mountaineer who now manufactures climbing equipment. Very unfortunately he had to pull out at the last moment for urgent business reasons. Fuller details are given in the section "Biographical Notes on Members". It is noteworthy that all the members had previously led one or more of their own expeditions.

On conclusion of the mountaineering phase an "add-on" to the expedition was to be undertaken by all except Barrie Page who could not spare the extra time. The party would fly from Urumqi a thousand miles across the Taklamakan Desert to Kashgar. From there they would drive along the ancient Silk Road through the Pamir Mountains branching south down the recently completed and very spectacular Karakoram Highway, over the Khunjerab Pass into Pakistan, to fly home from Islamabad. It would involve 800 miles of driving. It was arranged that the party would be met at the Pakistan frontier by Geoff Axbey, from *Saga Magazine*, complete with a Pakistani vehicle.

The expedition flew to Beijing on July 30th in the comfort of an Austrian Airlines flight. It was then necessary to backtrack west for 1500 miles, flying over the Gobi Desert to Urumqi. They were met by a staff member of the CXMA and from there to base camp all arrangements were in their capable hands.

The Bogda Range is only 80 miles out of Urumqi. The road climbed to 6,000ft and ended at a lake endearingly called Heaven Lake. A boat carried them across the lake where they met up with the local Kazak hillmen who would provide pack animals. That night they slept in a cosy Kazak yurt at a place called "East of Heaven"!

Next day they saw Kazak horses in action. Wiry and sure-footed, they splashed through mountain torrents and stepped daintily across rough boulder scree. They toiled up the Ziyanzhan Valley for about 4,000ft through fragrant conifer forests and then more open grasslands. Three members hired riding horses. One member who did not add extra padding to his saddle ended up with two huge, raw blisters.

A pleasant meadow was found for the base camp. The happy young Chinese cook, He Fen Gian, worked wonders with a hatchet, a chopping board and a wok. The interpreter, Leung Hua Sing, was a friendly and charming man who was to prove an immense asset. For the first two weeks the Liaison Officer was an experienced and very likeable Han Chinese, Li Tuen Yuan. He was succeeded by a less experienced Uighur, Mai Ti.

The Mountaineering Phase

The next day an easy scree mountain of 3810m was climbed to take a good look round. There was little background information beyond the Tilman and Shipton books and an article by a Japanese party in the 1983 *Alpine Journal*. Scots mountaineer, Sandy Allan, had led a trek to the area in 1987 and, with a client, had successfully stormed the main Peak, Bogda Feng (5445m). Most of the other visiting mountaineers had been Japanese and little information on their activities had been published in English. The party was, in effect, in exploratory territory.

They first attempted a gleaming white mountain christened Snow Dome (4360m), to receive a nasty surprise when they found the snow was wafer-thin with hard ice underneath. This meant front pointing, pitched climbing and banging in lots of ice pitons; all very time consuming. O'Leary and Banks pressed on but they had climbed only about 500ft by 4pm with lots more to go. They climbed gingerly down.

They therefore decided to look for a rock route to the summit on the far side of the peak. After a rainy night in a bivouac they found a long rock gully which took them to a snow ridge high up the peak. As O'Leary hacked his way through a snow cornice he called down "We're there!" The summit was only a few yards away. They had claimed their first Heavenly summit.

The other three explored a valley to the west of Snow Dome and saw an entertaining rock rib which Gribbon, Page, O'Leary and Banks returned to climb. Things started off too easily and ended up too hard. Rock forays to the left and straight up could not be pushed so a difficult snow exit was made which led only to a subsidiary summit. (The same day Lynam climbed to the col by which Shipton and Tilman had returned to Urumqi). O'Leary and Banks made amends when, in a near-blizzard, they climbed a snow mountain east of Snow Dome which O'Leary christened Isolde Feng (4520m), his daughter's name. The day before the other three members had climbed Snow Dome by the rock route.

To enjoy a change of scene base camp was moved a few miles east to the Grachimailo Glacier, where the highest peaks were situated, and this was done in a snowstorm. The new campsite was shared with Japanese climbing and trekking groups.

From the new base camp Gribbon and Banks set off up a glacier to carry a load up to a high camp. Gribbon suddenly stopped having seen an ice axe protruding from under a couple of inches of snow. They were puzzled to find a camera attached to the ice axe. Next a radio transmitter and then some more climbing equipment and clothing was seen. Clearly it was the scene of a mishap. They looked around and found a much decomposed body, almost certainly that of a Japanese woman climber who had died in a crevasse accident 15 years previously. No satisfactory explanation was ever found for the fact that the body was on the surface. They walked on up the glacier for a further half an hour to where they knew a large Japanese expedition was camped. The Japanese carried the body down and buried it at base camp.

On the same day, 15th August, O'Leary and Page had also carried a load up to the site of the camp but they chose a different route to that used by Gribbon and Banks. Having deposed their loads they made a strong reconnaissance towards the col, aided by the fixed rope of the Japanese expedition. Two days later the camp was occupied by all four. The following day a tentative start was made to place a camp on the col as a prelude to climbing the main peak but Banks and Gribbon realised that the route was overambitious for them. Also, the Japanese, who were young and very fit, were withdrawing from the mountain and, very properly, were to remove the fixed rope. It was decided to go for less ambitious objectives.

The next day Gribbon and Banks therefore climbed a pleasant 4348m peak north of the main massif which they called Eric's Peak because it was above a col visited by Shipton and Timan. The route involved an entertaining succession of rock steps with connecting snow passages. On the same day O'Leary soloed up to the col of Bogda Feng just as the Japanese were dismantling the fixed rope. In the course of the day, particularly on the descent, he was involved in the hardest climbing of the whole trip.

On 24th August O'Leary and Gribbon attempted a formidable rock peak of some 5000m at the western extremity of the main massif. Their attempt was defeated by the baffling complication of the rock architecture of the upper mountain and also by some unexpected and rock-hard ice.

Page, Banks and Lynam then climbed a 4304m peak called Jianshier Feng. The ascent involved climbing steep and massive scree followed by a rambling ridge. The descent was down seemingly interminable scree. In all many splendid scree runs were made down fine-grained scree not yet eroded by the feet of countless climbers.

In between times Gribbon and Lynam had separately soloed two 4000m peaks close to base camp at the head of the Da Dong valley. On the very last day O'Leary, the strongest climber, shot out of Base and soloed Eric's Peak and Jianshier Feng in a final, flamboyant gesture. Six peaks over 4000m had been climbed, members attaining summits on 17 occasions in total - a fair score for OAPs! No peaks above 5000m were climbed where considerable scope remains for some challenging first British ascents.

March-out and Drive-out

The march-out commenced on 28th August and, to enjoy a change of scenery, was routed down the Da Dong valley, involving one camp. On arrival in Urumqi Page flew home, heavily overburdened with all the communal equipment. The other four members first spent two days in the nearby Turpan Depression (-154m), a remarkable oasis on the fringe of the Taklamakan Desert which is particularly rich in archaeological sites. They then flew to Kashgar where they located Chini Bagh, the old British Consulate where Shipton had been the last Consul General. The teeming Sunday market was also a sight not to be missed.

The CXMA arranged a vehicle for the drive-out along the Silk Road through the Pamirs, past Kongur and Muztagh Ata. The Karakoram Highway was then followed south and Pakistan was entered via the Khunjerab Pass. Although any communication had been impossible, Geoff Axbey was waiting at the RV at the frontier post at Sust with a comfortable minibus for the Pakistan section of the drive. He had had an eventful time getting there. His Islamabad/Gilgit flight had been cancelled so he was obliged to travel by an overcrowded bus in one long 18-hour bash. It was a pleasure he would be very happy not to repeat!

Expedition Diary

Sun 30 July	Depart London for Beijing.
Mon 31 July	Arrived Beijing. Flight to Urumqi.
Tue 1 August	At Urumqi.
Wed 2 August	To Tien Chi (Heaven Lake). Slept in yurt.
Thu 3 August	To Base Camp I via Ziyanzhan Valley.
Fri 4 August	Ascent of 3810m ridge for recce.
Sat 5 August	Attempt on Snow Dome (4360m) from North.
Sun 6 August	O'Leary, Banks bivouacked near Snow Dome.
Mon 7 August	O'Leary, Banks, climbed Snow Dome from SE. Gibbon, Lynam, Page recce Stegosaur Peak.
Tue 8 August	At Base Camp. Rain.
Wed 9 August	Banks, Gibbon, O'Leary, Page camped at foot of Stegosaur Peak.
Thu 10 August	Ascent of rock rib on Stegosaur Peak. Lynam climbed to Shipton-Tilman exit col towards Urumqi (W of Stegosaur)
Fri 11 August	At Base Camp. Rain
Sat 12 August	Gibbon, Lynam, Page climbed Snow Dome from SE. Banks, O'Leary camped on glacier E of Snow Dome.
Sun 13 August	O'Leary, Banks climbed Isolde Feng (4520m).
Mon 14 August	Moved to Base Camp II near Grachimailo Glacier.
Tue 15 August	Load carry to camp at foot of Bogda Feng. Gibbon and Banks found body of Japanese woman climber. O'Leary recce towards col NE of Bogda Feng.
Wed 16 August	All load carry to Bogda Camp 1.
Thu 17 August	Banks, Gibbon, O'Leary, Page occupied Bogda camp.
Fri 18 August	O'Leary, Gibbon, Banks started and abandoned climb to NE col of Bogda Feng Lynam climbed to Pt3872m N of Base Camp.
Sat 19 August	Gibbon, Banks climbed Eric's Peak (4348m). O'Leary climbed to Bogda Feng col.
Sun 20 August	Started evacuation of Bogda camp. Lynam recce through The Slot.

Mon 21 August	Completed evacuation of Bogda camp.
Tue 22 August	O'Leary, Gribbon, Banks recce 5000m rock peak west of Bogda Feng III. Lynam climbed Pt4000m W of Base Camp
Wed 23 August	O'Leary, Gribbon recce rock peak.
Thu 24 August	O'Leary, Gribbon bivouacked on rock peak. Banks, Lynam, Page to camp for Jianshier Feng
Fri 25 August	O'Leary, Gribbon attempted rock peak. Page, Banks, Lynam climbed Jianshier Feng(4304m) from E.
Sat 26 August	Gribbon circuited horseshoe ridge (4000m) W of Base Camp. Page, Banks, Lynam returned to Base Camp.
Sun 27 August	O'Leary climbed Eric's Peak and Jianshier Feng. Gribbon traversed ridge (4032m) W of Base Camp. Preparation for march-out.
Mon 28 August	Started march-out via Dadong Valley. Camp.
Tue 29 August	To south end of Tien Chi. Slept in yurt.
Wed 30 August	Returned to Urumqi.
Thu 31 August	Page flew to London via Beijing. Remainder visited Turpan for two nights.
Sat 2 September	Flight to Kashgar
Mon 4 September	Started the drive-out along the Silk Road, over the Khunjerab Pass (4730m) into Pakistan and down the Karakoram Highway .
Tue 5 September	RV at Pakistan frontier post of Sust with Geoff Axbey, Art Director of Saga Magazine. Changed vehicles.
Sat 9 September	Arrived Rawalpindi.
Tue 12 September	Flight from Islamabad to London.

Mountaineering in Xinjiang

General

Joss Lynam

Since very few people have climbed in Xinjiang, it seems worth going into some detail about the situation there. Mountaineering (and other adventure activities) are organised in Xinjiang by the China Xinjiang Mountaineering Association (CXMA) at No 1 Renmin Road, PO Box 830002, Urumqi, Xinjiang, China, Tel: +86 -991 2823923, Fax: +86-991-2818365.

They offer a complete service, including hotel in Urumqi, minibus to Heaven Lake, boat across the lake, ponies to Base Camp, change of Base Camp, return to Urumqi, plus BaseCamp tent, all food except altitude food, and a cook; also of course the mandatory Liason Officer and Interpreter. These services are based on the assumption that an expedition will want to climb one of a limited choice of objectives - Bogda Feng, Khan Tengri, Kongur , Muztagh Ata, K2 or half-a-dozen others.

Since none of us knew anything about the resources of Urumqi (only Mike had been there in the early '80s and that on an official tourism promotion visit) we were happy enough to accept this kind of arrangement. However we said we didn't want to climb Bogda Feng, and requested (and received) permission to climb four (unspecified) smaller peaks. In term of peak fees we settled for 24 man-peaks at the going rate of US\$30 per man peak. We were then quoted a per-person all-in-cost. Once agreed, and a deposit paid, everything happened according to plan and there were no extras!!

There were drawbacks, firstly as can be seen in the Narrative, the ponies, the heavy camping system and heavy food could not have been moved beyond the Bogda Feng Base Camp, and our vague plans for exploring the eastern end of the Bogda Ola range were thus impractical. Secondly, the rations (which included wine and beer) were not all well-suited to climbing. This was as much our fault as CXMA's; we should have co-ordinated rations with them in advance.

What impressed us most was the efficiency and friendliness of the CXMA staff (with one exception!). Our rather complicated arrangements for some people flying home direct and others going back over the Kararkoram, a change in arrival date, a late cancellation by one team member - all this was handled efficiently and without recrimination. CXMA also arranged a visit to Turpan, our flights to Kashgar, and a minibus over the Khunjerab Pass to the Pakistan frontier. Judging by figures in the Lonely Planet Guide, this wasn't cheap, but it was efficient.

At the Urumqi head office we dealt with Jin Ying Jie, Deputy General Manager and Du Xiao Fan, Sales and Marketing Department Manager. Both were friendly and helpful and not office - bound. Du was accompanying a party to Muztagh Ata when we arrived;. Jin was accompanying a party to K2 as we left. On arrival Jin told us, slightly sheepishly, that we would have a trainee LO, but that we would also have an experienced LO (Li Tuen Yuan) for the first two weeks. Li had climbed in the Bogdas and was helpful. Unfortunately the trainee (Mai ti) was useless, and an unfair burden was placed on the excellent interpreter (Leung Hua Sing) in dealing with problems on the return journey. Mai Li was a Uighur, the others were Han Chinese, but this wasn't the problem, the Japanese party had an Uighur LO who was excellent. The staff was completed by the young cook He Fen Gian. Extracted from an Urumqi restaurant where he was a helper, not a cook, he fed us well, and was always keen to try new dishes. The only criticism anyone (Mike!) had was that as each meal was composed of half-a-dozen different dishes cooked on two gas rings, most of the dishes were cold. Both He and Leung were efficient and friendly, and added to the social

scene even though He's english was almost non-existent and Leung's pronunciation sometimes had us guessing.

CXMA have a travel brochure which includes not only mountaineering but trekking, rafting on Yarkand river, crossing the Taklamakan desert by camel, horse-riding and mountain biking. From our experience, providing the requirements are made clear in advance, CXMA are ready to tailor their system to suit. Our problem was that we didn't know enough about the area to be at all precise about what we wanted to do.

Information about climbing in the Bogda Ola is not easy to find; Japanese and Korean mountaineers have been the main users and we knew very little about any peaks except Bogda Feng itself. Such information as we had came from Shipton and Tilman's visit nearly 50 years ago, an article in *Alpine Journal* 1983 by a Japanese team, and a topo of Bogda Feng from Sandy Allen. There is a good contoured Japanese map (1:70,000 approx) - the Japanese team gave us a photocopy - but language difficulties meant we couldn't find out the publisher. There is also a 1:150,000 contour map and rough topos for Bogda Feng I and III in the book *A Guide to Mountaineering in China* published by CMA. The sketch map in this report is mainly based on the Japanese map, but the names are derived from the CMA map and from a variety of Kamm-karte maps.

Technical

Paddy O'Leary

Apart from Schokalsky Peak all the really interesting climbing in the Bogda Ola lies east of The Slot (Sangechagou). While there are almost no accounts in English of ascents and exploration by various Japanese parties it seems likely that there are a number of opportunities for worthwhile and difficult first ascents to summits between Bogda Feng and The Slot.

But it is to the east of Bogda Feng that most of the really exciting opportunities exist. From Shipton's Col an array of fine peaks can be seen stretching to the second highest summit of the range at 5362m. It was not possible to ascertain whether or not any of these have been climbed but it seems certain that their distance from the base camps usually used by expeditions has militated against frequent visits.

It would therefore be prudent in planning an expedition to this area to ensure that these eastern peaks can easily be reached. If the base camp beside the tarn fed by the Grachimailo Glacier is to be used it should be approached by the Dadong valley. Sufficient lightweight rations should be brought to enable a team to back-pack supplies to an advanced base beyond Shipton's Col.

Better still, efforts should be made to have CXMA site the main base camp in the eastern sector. As horses cannot cross Shipton's Col and porters seem to be unavailable, the siting of such a base would entail an entirely different approach up one of the many valleys from north or south. It might also be possible to use horses to carry through The Slot from the Grachimailo and then turn east across Merzbacher's Col which does not appear to be glaciated. This allows access to the Chogo Glacier from which attempts can be made on the southern flanks of some of the peaks in the eastern sector.

Environment Issues

Phil Gribbon

"Since 1980 when Bogda Peak was opened to foreigners there have been many expeditions coming to climb in an endless stream" - this is a telling quote from the CXMA brochure designed to encourage international sports travel in Xinjiang.

This puts to the forefront a need to consider environmental protection to the main mountainous areas of China and how to leave as little trace as possible of our passage through the mountains. Without some thought to deal with this issue the campsites of the Bogda range will suffer eventually from the familiar garbage and human waste that marks out the "toilet paper treks" that the popular greater ranges of the Himalaya and Karakoram have experienced in the last few decades.

To-day the overwhelming consequences of the massive pressure of tourism stops at the end of the road by the shores of the Heaven Lake, the "jewel lake of the West Queen Mother" in a Chinese legend. Here amidst the randomly parked vehicles, the souvenir stalls, the pleasure cruise boats, the horses for hire, and the wondering tourist hordes, what once must have been an alpine meadow have been turned into a barren brown earthen slope devoid of any trace of vegetation.

Fortunately the waters of the lake halt most of the tourists who cannot go further towards "the silver glaciers and the snowcapped mountains glimmering in the distance". The Chinese authorities must provide soon the necessary environmental protection to save their natural asset of Heaven Lake before it is ruined by the increasing number of tourists.

One rewarding , if somewhat commercial, aspect of conservation was the way their forest resource was being maintained. While there has been limited clear tree felling there was no wholesale forest exploitation and some attempt has been made to allow natural regeneration in previously cleared areas. The best sign of an appreciation of this natural heritage was the extensive coniferous tree nursery under the care of local Kazak families at the far southeast end of Heaven Lake. These trees will be used to establish new woodlands in the Tian Shan foothills.

We were aware, that there are certain situations over which there can be little radical change in attitude towards the environment. For example for centuries the Kazak population have lived in the mountains during the summer to graze their sheep and goats on the high grasslands above the tree line in the mountains. This has led to over-grazing and has resulted in a marked deterioration in the natural vegetational cover with a decrease in the useful species numbers available to the grazing animals. Inedible plants thrive at the expense of the overgrazed edible species. Thus although there were 45 species of vascular plants growing around our first base camp there was never anything other than the closely cropped plants across the meadows. This was due to the herds of horses that lived on these high pastures, even climbing high on the gravel moraines to browse on the isolated plants growing in this inhospitable terrain. Consequently there was a paucity of insect life and of its dependent bird population - we saw 17 species, including birds of prey, ravens and choughs, but never in any numbers. Mammals were virtually absent, but we saw small rodent tracks in the fresh snow that fell on our second base camp, and big cat tracks on the high hills.

However as a climbing expedition we were concerned to see that we treated our own immediate environment with respect. After two weeks we had to dispose of an appreciable pile of rubbish, so Joss Lynam, currently Chairman of the UIAA

Expeditions Commission, insisted we set the best example to our Chinese staff and with the help of an ice axe as an entrenching tool he dug a pit and when full he covered it with sods of turf so that no visible trace of our stay could be seen by later expeditions and trekkers as they passed by this camp.

The situation was very different at our second base camp. This site on the flat gravel of the outermost moraine of the Grachimailo glacier has been used consistently by many expeditions. Visible traces of their visits remain in broken glass, rusting cans, spent batteries, plastic wrappings and pink paper offerings. Although some effort has been made to keep recent rubbish curtailed within a stone enclosure the true answer lies in the burial of all non-flammable material. We were please to see that our Chinese staff had learnt from Joss' earlier efforts and that they burned and dug and disposed with efficiency. Perhaps Barrie Page's tent site will no longer be in "Plague City" in later years.

Let's hope so

Biographical Notes on Members

MIKE BANKS (72) from Bath

Twice decorated by the Queen for his exploratory achievements. Seven Himalayan expeditions including the first ascent of Rakaposhi (25,550ft) in 1958 (Awarded MBE). Other mountaineering expeditions to the Andes, Alaska (Mt McKinley), Mt Kenya and Kilimanjaro in Africa, the Logan Mountains and north Ellesmere Island in north Canada. Exploratory journeys to the Tian Shan and Qinghai (Anyemaqen) in China. Arctic expeditions to Greenland including an epic 2-year 800 miles crossing of the ice cap (awarded the Polar Medal). Joint leader of the three Anglo-Irish expeditions sponsored by Saga Magazine: two to the Himalayas and one to Greenland. In 1990 he became the oldest man to climb the spectacular 450ft sea stack, the Old Man of Hoy. He repeated this feat in 1994 at the age of 71 to raise funds for a charity. He has even been the castaway on the BBC's "Desert Island Discs".

JOSS LYNAM (71) from Dublin

Ireland's best known mountaineer, he has very wide Himalayan experience including expeditions to the Karakoram (Rakaposhi), Kashmir (Kolahoi), Kistwar (Eiger and Cathedral Peaks), Zanskar (Peak Z8), Lahul Himalaya (twice) including Shigri Parbat, Everest region (Zhangji). Three mountaineering expeditions to Greenland and one to the Cordillera Blanca in the Andes. Many years of Alpine climbing. He was the joint leader of the three expeditions sponsored by Saga Magazine, two of which were to Jaonli (21,760ft) in the Garhwal Himalayas of India and the third to SW Greenland where twelve peaks were climbed, seven of them first ascents. He is Chairman of the Expeditions Commission of the International Union of Alpinist Associations.

PHIL GRIBBON (66) from St Andrews, Fife

An Irishman from the North, by profession a physicist but one who has long been dedicated to mountaineering. He has combined his twin interests in science and climbing by leading many far flung expeditions, mostly in the Arctic. He started by pioneering many climbs and writing the first guidebook to his native Mountains of Mourne. Emigrating to Canada, he developed his mountaineering prowess in the Rockies and many other ranges. His first expedition was to Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic. Moving to St Andrews University and specialising in glaciology, he ran a whole series of university expeditions to different areas of Greenland where he combined glaciological research with climbing. In the course of these ventures over 100 first ascents of mountains were made. Now long resident in Scotland he has climbed widely in the Highlands in both winter and summer. His ascent of the formidable Prow route in the Cuillins of Skye was featured in the classic mountaineering coffee table book *Hard Rock*.

PADDY O'LEARY (60) from Redcross, Co Wicklow

One of Ireland's most experienced mountaineers. He was for many years Director of Tiglin National Adventure Centre, Ireland's premier outdoor pursuits establishment situated at Ashford in the Wicklow Hills. His Himalayan experience includes Rakaposhi in the Karakoram; Ramdung and Parchamo in the Rolwaling. Other mountaineering expeditions to the Cordillera Urubamba and Chainapuerto in the Andes; Mt Kenya and Ruwenzori in Africa. Many Alpine seasons. Professional qualifications include degrees in Outdoor Education and Anthropology. He was a member and lead climber of the two Saga Magazine Himalayan Expeditions to Jaonli.

BARRIE PAGE (61) from Nottingham.

An eminent geologist whose field survey work has involved him in almost continuous and often adventurous travel to some of the remotest regions of South America and South East Asia. He graduated in geology at Bristol University where he climbed with Hugh Banner and with him pioneered a number of very demanding new routes in Avon Gorge. Mountaneering in the Alps broadened his experience. He carried out his National Service as an instructor in the Royal Marine Commandos. In 1961 he took part in a reconnaissance expedition to the formidable Towers of Paine in Patagonia. In 1963 he led the successful expedition which climbed the Central Tower of Paine. A rugby enthusiast, he is a member of the Nottingham Rugby Club coaching team and still plays threequarter in the over-35s Nottinghamians Veterans side.

Sponsorship

This was the fourth biennial Anglo-Irish mountaineering expedition to be sponsored by Saga Magazine. The magazine is an important component of the Saga group of companies which provides a comprehensive range of services for the over-50s of which the core activity is Saga Holidays.

With good reason the climbers have come to regard the staff of Saga Magazine not only as benefactors but also as very good and supportive friends. The expedition members would particularly like to thank most warmly the Editor, Paul Bach, for the encouragement he gave us and for the very considerable material help he afforded the venture.

The magazine Art Director, Geoff Axbey, has played an active and indispensable part in all the Saga Magazine Expeditions. On this occasion he played a vital role in the memorable drive out along the Karakoram Highway. He flew out to Pakistan where he procured a vehicle and drove up through the secluded kingdom of Hunza (famous for longevity and apricots) to meet the expedition at the frontier post with China below the Khunjerab Pass. When they arrived at this remote frontier crossing, were they pleased to see him! They cannot thank him too much.

Urgent problems seem to crop up almost daily during the final planning stage of any expedition. On sundry occasions these minor crises were cut down to size and unravelled with alacrity and good humour by the magazine editorial staff, in particular by Carol Bellamy, Patricia Smith, Sue Prossor and Gloria Fletcher.

Acknowledgements

The expedition members would like to express their most sincere thanks to the following who gave most generous financial support:-

The Mount Everest Foundation
The British Mountaineering Council
The Foundation for Sport and the Arts
The Mountaineering Council of Ireland
Mr Don Roberts of Dublin

Most sincere thanks are proffered to the following companies which provided the expedition with their products or services:-

Austrian Airlines: They provided impeccable, punctual and superbly organised flights to and from Beijing including a most enjoyable visit to the comfortable Business Lounge in Vienna Airport.

Brasher Jackets: Totally waterproof, skillfully designed parkas which gave full protection against the roughest mountain weather.

Cairngorm Climbing Ropes: Supple, safe, lightweight climbing ropes and easy to handle static rope.

Casio Watches: Not only accurate, handsome wrist watches but variously incorporating altimeter, compass and thermometer, invaluable features for the mountaineer.

Lowe Alpine gauntlets and fleece jackets: The gauntlets were warm, waterproof and ideal for snow and ice climbing. The soft fleece jackets were lighter, warmer and more windproof than a thick pullover. Both garments were finely crafted.

Outdoor Pantry meals: These lightweight but ample meals were simple and quick to cook and tasted really good. They are equally suitable for a high altitude camp or a quick but sustaining meal at home.

Paramo shirts: Beautifully soft, warm shirts made from high-tec Parameta S 'water movement' fabric that wicks away perspiration..

Pentax Espio 140 cameras: An amazingly compact and lightweight camera that does everything! It comes with 38-140mm zoom lens, flash and a host of useful features.

Rohan 'Bags': These lightweight, windproof, comfortable, very quick-drying trousers were ideal expedition garments. Lots of useful, securely zipped pockets.

Scotch colour film: "Scotch Chrome 100" transparency film was used. The expedition photographs faithfully reproduced the vivid colours of Central Asia. They are now being widely used for lectures and articles.

Wainwright Boots: A huge success! These sturdy, light, waterproof boots met every challenge and reflected the 150 years of skill and experience of the Lakeland makers, K Shoes.

Irish Himalayan Trust: We are most grateful for the loan of two excellent high altitude tents.

Lowe Alpine gauntlets and fleece jackets: The gauntlets were warm, waterproof and ideal for snow and ice climbing. The soft fleece jackets were lighter, warmer and more windproof than a thick pullover. Both garments were finely crafted.

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Financial Report

Barrie Page

Income

All amounts in £stg

Grants and Donations :		
Mount Everest Foundation	700.00	
British Mountaineering Council	500.00	
Mountaineering Council of Ireland	300.00	
Foundation for Sport and the Arts	375.00	
Mr Don Roberts	50.00	
	<u> </u>	1,925.00
Members contributions(1)		8,411.50
Bank interest		28.00
		<u> </u>
		10,364.50

Expenditure

BMC Insurance	1386.00	
China Xinjiang Mountaineering Association(2)	7911.37	
Medical Supplies	130.00	
Food, etc	189.95	
Equipment (including gas) (3)	275.55	
Expedition gifts	35.21	
Miscellaneous travel expenses(4)	215.15	
Administration	146.27	
Expedition Report	75.00	
	<u> </u>	10,364.50
		<u> </u>
Balance		00.00

Notes:

- (1) This includes £154 from H. Banner who had to withdraw from the expedition
- (2) Payment to CXMA was for all costs at Urumqi and during the expedition including accomodation, food at and below base camp, transport, staff and peak fees.
- (3) Most of the equipment was supplied by the expedition members
- (4) All air travel, including excess baggage etc to, from and within China was paid by our sponsor, SAGA MAGAZINE.

These accounts do not include income and expenditure of Banks, Gribbon, Lynam and O'Leary in overland travel to Rawalpindi on the return journey.

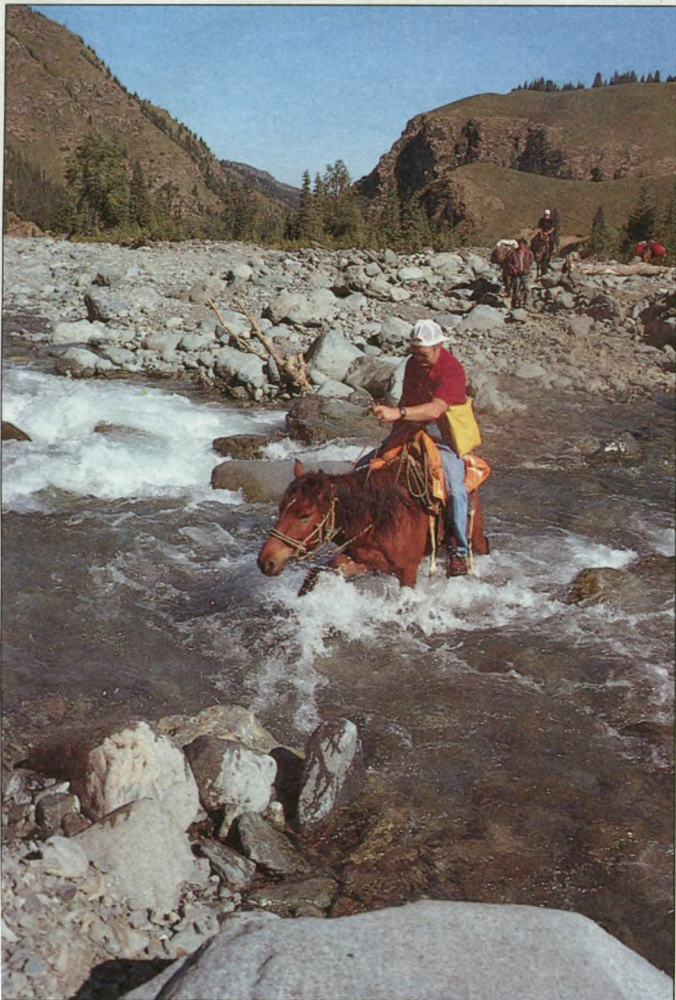
The night had passed swiftly. We were flying towards the rising sun, lulled by the deep throb of the jet engines. The impeccable Austrian Airlines flight touched down at Beijing just as dawn broke. Even at that early hour the airport was teeming with people.

We were a party of five, all "golden oldie" mountaineers of ages varying from the youngest at 60 to myself at 72. Our destination in Sinkiang Province in the far west of China was the Tian Shan range, often called the Celestial or Heavenly Mountains. We were again an Anglo-Irish team, two from Britain, two from the Republic and one, holding the balance, from Northern Ireland.

Having several hours to wait for our connecting flight to Urumchi, the capital city of

*The remote
Celestial Mountains
in the far west of
China surely had
never been attacked
by so venerable a
team of climbers*

Sinkiang, I sought to refresh myself with cup of Oolong tea in the airport restaurant: I had visions of the smoky flavour and delicate Chinese porcelain cups. What arrived was a Coke-like can which had been dunked in hot water to warm it. The tea inside was predictably stale and quite awful. This lit-



Paddy O'Leary, a relative youngster at the age of 60, beats a straight path towards the summit of Snow Dome. Inset, the full team. Back row, l to r: Phil Gribbon (66), Mai Ti (liaison officer), He Fen Gian (cook), Barrie Page (61), Joss Lynham (71). Front row: Paddy O'Leary, Leung Hua Sing (interpreter), Mike Banks (72). One more river: Barrie Page leads the way (left) on a Kazak horse. No place like home: base camp (below) after a snowfall

tle incident was a pointer to the future. Modern China, where communism is struggling to come to terms with capitalism, was to provide a baffling procession of surprises, disappointments and occasional delights.

That evening we arrived in the dry heat of Urumchi, situated between two great deserts, the Gobi and the Takla Makan. Before we set off for the mountains I popped into a big department store to buy a spare shirt. I counted 17 sales

assistants on the shirt counter alone – and I was the only customer! But what else can a country do except create "jobs for the boys" when it has a population of 1.2 billion?

Now for a spot of good news. Our expedition arrangements were in the capable hands of a local governmental body called The Sinkiang Mountaineering Association, staffed by experienced mountaineers. They delivered an excellent service and ensured that our intricate programme

Heaven's Gate

Writer and Photographer
Mike Banks



went without a hitch – no mean achievement.

We would be climbing in the snowy Bogda Range which rises to over 17,000ft and is about 80 miles out of Urumchi. The road climbed to 6,000ft and ended at a mountain lake endearingly called the Heavenly Pond. A boat carried us across the lake where we met up with the local Kazak hill farmers who would provide pack animals to carry our stores up to our base camp. The Kazaks were born horse-

men, one of the several major ethnic groups who inhabit the huge Central Asian region known as “Turkestan” which spans the Chinese-Russian borderlands. That night we slept in a cosy Kazak yurt.

Next day we saw Kazak horses in action. Wiry and sure-footed, they splash through mountain torrents and stepped daintily across round boulder scree. We toiled upwards for about 4,000ft through fragrant coniferous forests and then reached the

more open grasslands where herds of horses, sheep and cattle had been driven up for summer grazing. Three of us hired horses for the day. Joss Lynam (71) had not ridden for nearly 50 years and ended up with two huge, raw blisters on his stern. Thereafter he walked!

We found a pleasant meadow for our base camp. Our Chinese staff consisted of a happy young Chinese cook who squatted in the cramped mess tent and worked wonders with a hatchet, a chopping board and a wok. Our interpreter, the friendly and charming Leung, was an English teacher who rapidly became our friend. Finally there was a liaison officer, or official government "minder", whose job was to make sure that all the arrangements worked. They did.

The next day we climbed an easy scree mountain to over 12,000 ft to take a good look round and work out the mountaineering possibilities. We had little background information. Those two redoubtable

British mountain explorers, Tilman and Shipton, had briefly visited the range just after the war and climbed a couple of peaks. Since then most of the visiting mountaineers had been Japanese. Scant information on their activities had been published in English. So, as far as we were concerned, we were in exploratory territory. We would have to use our own judgement.

We first opted to attempt a gleaming white mountain we christened Snow Dome. We got a nasty surprise when we reached the snow. It was wafer thin with hard ice underneath. Ice is bad news. It slows you right down. I was climbing with my old friend, Paddy O'Leary (60), one of Ireland's most experienced expedition climbers. We safeguarded ourselves by driving ice pitons into the ice but our progress was slow. By 4 pm we had climbed some 500 ft of ice with lots



more to go. We had run out of time so we climbed gingerly down.

We therefore decided to look for a rock route to the summit. We spent the next night bivouacked on the far side of the peak. Of course it chose to rain but we had waterproof covers for our sleeping bags and spent a dry if uncomfortable night. The following day we found a long rock gully which took us to a snow ridge

high up the peak. As Paddy hacked his way through a snow cornice he called down "We're there!". The summit was only a few yards away. We had claimed our first Heavenly summit.

Paddy and I then joined forces with Barrie Page (61) from Nottingham and Ulsterman Phil Gribbon (66) to climb an entertaining rock rib with a difficult snow exit at the top. It had been a slow job and we did

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Holy water? Quaintly named Heavenly Pond (top left) with the Tian Shan snow peaks beyond. No place like home, 2: a Kazak yurt kept the lads snug on their first night. Heavenly flavours: Paddy O'Leary cooks a dehydrated meal (above). Chinese meal: chopsticks brought into play in the mess tent (below) by, l to r, Joss Lynham, Paddy O'Leary, Barrie Page and Phil Gribbon



not have time to go the whole way to the summit. Paddy and I made amends when we climbed a snow peak in atrocious weather. Visibility was often down to a few yards and horizontal drifting snow was driven into our faces. We were rewarded with a summit which Paddy christened Isolde Peak, his daughter's name.

We now moved base camp a few miles to sample the other end of the range and this we did in a snowstorm. We found the new campsite well populated by Japanese climbing and trekking groups.

From the new base camp Phil Gribbon and I set off up a glacier to carry a load up to a high camp. Trudging along behind Phil I heard him call out "Hey, I've found an ice axe!". Sure enough, there it was protruding from under a couple of inches of snow. "Finders keepers" he chortled. We were puzzled to find a rope and a camera attached to the ice axe. Next, a few yards away we spotted a radio transmitter and then some more climbing equipment and clothing. "This looks like an accident", I said to Phil. "There might be a body".

"I think it's over there" Phil replied, pointing to a bundle lying in the snow. Full of unease, we walked across. Two legs, clad in boots and gaiters quickly confirmed our sad find.

The rest of the body had decomposed over the years and the head had disappeared, possibly taken by a snow leopard. We knew that a Japanese girl climber had perished in a crevasse in this area 15 years ago. We walked on up the glacier for a further half an hour to where we knew a large Japanese expedition was camped. They carried the body down and buried it at base camp. Later one of the girl's relatives flew out and I was able to tell him how we found the body, lying peacefully among the tranquil peaks.

We climbed two more peaks, one above a col visited by Eric Shipton, so we called it Eric's Peak. The second had a Chinese name, Jianshier Feng, both about 14,000ft and worthy summits. At that juncture I was leading the score with four summits. Paddy, our strongest climber, had only two. He levelled the score, and salvaged Irish pride, by storming our last two peaks, polishing them both off in a single day! Members reached summits on 14 occasions in total - a very respectable performance for OAPs!

And so it ended. We marched out down a different valley, passing a herd of yaks while eagles wheeled above us. We had been greatly privileged to climb and explore among these little known mountains in the very cradle of Central Asia. New friendships had been forged, old ones cemented. And our adventure was only half over. We would now journey to far-off Kashgar and from there we would travel along the ancient Silk Road. We would pass through the lofty Pamir Mountains and then descend the precipitous Karokoram Highway, which claws its way through some of the world's most dramatic mountain landscape. We would visit the secluded kingdom of Hunza, renowned for apricots and longevity, and continue down to the plains of the Punjab in Pakistan. From there we would fly home.

Mike Banks will conclude his expedition narrative in the next issue of *Saga* magazine. **E**