

**ANGLO-WELSH
TIEN SHAN EXPEDITION
1995**

**Team Members: Tim Sparrow, Geoff Thomas,
David Fields, Ed. Walker**

**Attempts on peaks from the North and South Inylchek
Glaciers in Kazakhstan and Khirgizia**



ORIGINS AND PLANNING

The original idea for the expedition came from a chance communication between Ed Walker and Tim Sparrow's brother, who was working in tele-sales at the time. The idea was strengthened after a visit to the Alpine club Symposium in 1994 at Plas y Brenin.

The usual way to visit the area is by an invitation to join the well established Base Camps very close to the most popular mountains. Several avenues were explored to gain an invitation, including contacting IMC Khan Tengri, run by Kazbek Valiev. These all proved fruitless, so resort was taken to use an intermediate company in Britain; Peak International run by John Kilbey. John was able to organise our invitations and visas which duly arrived, signed by Kazbek Valiev!

The team gradually evolved into three from Wales (Tim Sparrow, Geoff Thomas and David Fields) and one from England (Ed Walker). Tim and Geoff knew each other well, having climbed together for many years and Dave was met in early 1995. Ed Walker was not known to the others but professed to a wide Alpine and Scottish experience.

This would be the first real expedition to the Greater Ranges for all, though Tim had been to Island Peak in Nepal.

The Journey

We flew from London Gatwick at 2 p.m. on 23rd June. The flight was with Transaero, the first of the private companies to split off from Aeroflot. The plane was a modern Boeing 757 and the service as modern and efficient as any other. Even the food was acceptable. After a brief stopover and crew change at Riga (Latvia) the plane departed for Moscow. A hint of things to come came with the more surly crew, but little could prepare us for the arrival at Sheremetyevo I in Moscow. Four planes of passengers arrived in the dilapidated passport hall simultaneously, with only 4 passport cubicles open, no luggage to be seen, and half an hour before our next connection.

We did make it, despite being charged for excess baggage, despite not knowing where to go, despite being directed to the wrong terminal, despite the total lack of trolleys, (except the two controlled by the airport mafia at 5\$ each) and, thankfully because they delayed the plane 1 hour for us and another British expedition in the same boat, (or is that plane?)

Our arrival in Almaty at 8 a.m. was far more pleasant despite the loss of a bottle of prime Welsh whisky to some light fingered baggage handlers. We were met by representatives of IMC Khan Tengri and ushered to an unexpectedly

plush Ford minibus, and driven around Almaty in a 1 and a half hour search for fuel. This achieved, we left for Karkara, the intermediate Base Camp in the foothills at 2250m, 5 hours away. Two nights were spent here, due to very bad weather in the mountains. Local walks in the alpine meadows were enjoyed especially by those of a botanical bent. On these, it became obvious that Ed Walker was not at his fittest, and nor was he well. He elected to remain in Karkara to regain some fitness. It transpired that he was suffering from a heart complaint, aggravated by failing to take his medication for his condition. Sadly, he had not informed the remainder of the team of his problem, a stunning omission. Ed was not able to take part in any mountaineering during the trip, though he did enjoy plenty of walking when he did arrive in the mountains. A lesson had been learnt on both sides.

The final stage of the journey to the mountains was by helicopter. The 40 minute flight was exhilarating. First over the foothills, empty except for eagles, lammergeiers and occasional signs of nomadic shepherds. Then into the mountains, Khan Tengri and Pobeda dominating all, a birds-eye view of Merzbacher Lake and everything a pristine white due to the heavy snowfall of the previous days.

The Mountains

The mountain we hoped to attempt was Shipilov (6201m), from the IMC Base Camp on the S.Inylchek. We also hoped to attempt Khan Tengri from this base, but Kazbek Valiev advised strongly against this due to the dangerous nature of the southern approach. Following his advice we flew to the N Inylchek Glacier to attempt Khan Tengri by a much safer though harder approach. This has now become the standard route, though the severely threatened Southern approach is still inexplicably popular. We were then to fly to the S.Inylchek to complete our programme.

The Base Camp is at an altitude of 4000m, and is well appointed. Accommodation is provided in "Summer" frame tents, meals being served in a large mess tent at regular intervals. The food provided was varied, though based mostly on mutton. Fresh fruit, bread, vegetables and meat were regularly flown in by helicopter. The sauna was well appointed and regularly used. Standing naked in a blizzard at 4000m, pouring ice cold water over oneself is an invigorating experience never to be forgotten. The birch twigs brandished by some however are best laid to rest!

Our first day was spent with the expected headaches walking up the glacier to view the area's potential, which is huge, though limited by the majority of ridges being hideously corniced

David Fields suffered more than most during the initial acclimatization, and did not accompany TS and GT on their trip to Camp 1 (4700m) on Khan Tengri the following day. This being the first good day after heavy snow, the lower slopes of the mountain were very busy, up to 15 people were counted in one 100m stretch.

The next day DF was feeling worse, and was later evacuated back to Karkara, with the diagnosis of pulmonary oedema. GT and TS changed plans in an attempt to accommodate DF when he returned, so made an attempt on Byankol (5810m) on the North side of the glacier.

During the first afternoon we followed the snow covered Odinnadzaty Glacier, until heavy snowfall prevented further progress after 3 hours.

The following morning, we continued up the glacier until beneath the slope leading to a col. This appeared unstable so a retreat was made back to the tent, past a disturbing section of ominously creaking and settling snow bridges.

Unsettled weather followed, so we returned to Base Camp to await DF's return. When he appeared he was in much better health but, an attempt on Khan Tengri seemed unlikely for him. Another attempt on Byankol was made by all three, a retreat being made from the first camp after heavy snow and electrical storm.

All three then transferred by helicopter to the IMC Base Camp on the S, Inylchek. This was very much a second rate affair compared with the Northern camp, with most of IMC's resources being diverted there. This camp now appears to be mainly intended for people wishing to climb Pobeda.

Our research into the unclimbed Shipilov (6201m) highlighted two possible approaches, either following the S. Inylchek to its end and approaching from the East, or by following the Zvedchenko Glacier, underneath Pobeda and approaching from the West, both likely to take two days.

Ed Walker had been for day walks in both directions, and discounted the Eastern approach due to a large and complicated icefall. The Western approach looked feasible but, the only route onwards was a long and typically corniced dangerous ridge.

We therefore put our attention to another of our potential objectives, Edelweiss, (6000m) approached by Otkrytii (5664m). Otkrytii had been attempted by British teams before, though without success.

From a camp on the S.Inylchek, we attempted to reach the S.W. spur of the mountain by moving direct up the glacier. A late start caused by bad weather ended in a minefield of hidden crevasses, covered by a good thickness of crusted and collapsing snow, and intense heat.

The next day's attempt skirted the glacier and followed the lowest flanks of the mountain to an unclimbed spur, just North of that climbed by a previous Russian/Polish party. Good progress was made up this to a height of 5400m in the early afternoon, up loose rock and ice up to 60 degrees, though averaging 45 degrees. It became apparent that DF was again suffering and had become disorientated, fatigued, dystaxic and suffering from altitude headaches. An escape lay on the spur to the South, 300m away over a snow slope facing the sun. The decision was made to remain put and descend the following morning on safer snow. DF and GT slept in a hard won ice cave, TS bivouaced outside.

The ensuing traverse and descent was worrying with DF still unstable though more in control as height was lost. His condition was such that he needed belaying down most of the way. The tent camp on the S.Inylchek was reached after 12 hours.

DF decided that he should return home as his expedition was effectively over, so he flew out shortly afterwards, accompanied by EW.

GT and TS then rediscovered some morale and sought consolation in Diki Peak (4853m) from the East, approaching across the Zvedchenko Glacier. A broad ridge of unstable scree and tottering buttresses was followed "up the down escalator" to the summit ridge, which was followed relatively easily on snow to the inevitable tapering cornice section guarding the summit. A halt was called at the last safe spot, approximately 20m below and 75m distant from the true summit.

The unstable nature of the ascent encouraged us to find a safer descent. 3 hours were spent descending the ridge to a spot where steep snow slopes led to steep loose rock and finally the scree slopes. The lower 2/3 of the mountain were dispensed with in 20 minutes!

Poor weather and digestive disorders prevented further attempts, the mountains being left on 19 August.

The flight out deserves special mention as the most frightening part of the trip. The helicopter would have been overloaded at 2000m, with just the 26 people aboard. We were at 4000m and also had baggage to double the weight.

Take off was achieved after some 3 minutes of hovering to and fro, and a lurch down a gully in the glacier to achieve some air speed. The craft limped into the air, straining heavily. 2 attempts were needed to cross the 5000m ridge and we unashamedly applauded the pilot on landing at Karkara. A replacement helicopter appeared after this flight.

The remaining time in Karkara was spent walking in the unspoilt local hills, pony trekking and a few needlessly wild parties with other inmates of the camp.

Two overladen travellers finally boarded a plane bound for Moscow on the 24th August and found themselves doomed to a 24 hour wait at the dreaded Sheremetyevo I terminal. GT being fined 10,000 roubles for not having a ticket on what we assumed was a courtesy airport bus relieved the boredom.

As it was our fifth ride we considered £1.50 to be good value!

Summary

Unsuccessful attempts were made on Byankol (5841) from the North Inylchek Glacier, and Otkrytii (5664m) from the South Inylchek Glacier. A successful ascent was made of Diki Peak (4832m). The team did not encounter good fortune in terms of health with two of the four members incapacitated, one through heart problems and one through A.M.S.

APPENDICES

1 Contacts

John Kilbey
Peak International
15 Moor Park
Wendover
Aylesbury
HP22 6AX

Tel: 01296 624225
Fax: 01296 624225

Kazbek Valiev
Khan Tengri Mountain Service
48 Abai Avenue
480072 Almaty
Kazakhstan

Tel: 00713272 677866 / 677024
FAX:007 3272 677024 / 631207

Another contact worth considering is Ian McNeill, living and working in Almaty, and keen to organize trips in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia for skiing, mountain biking (could be wild!) and mountaineering.

Ian McNeill
APS Samal 1
Block 32
480099 Almaty
Kazakhstan

Tel 007 3272 541293 / 694118 (Home)
FAX:007 3272 541294 / 694218 (Home)

2 Food

We were led to believe that all mountain food would have to be flown in. We therefore took a substantial amount of precooked foil packed food generously provided by H.M.Forces. In the event, we were able to obtain food from Base Camp stores (Cheese, sausage, porridge, sugar, bread, etc.) Items such as chocolate, powdered soups, muesli bars, pasta and beverages had to be brought from home.

3 Clothing and Equipment

Extremes of weather were not experienced due to the modest altitude achieved. However, we were prepared for the worst, using the usual layered system with down duvets, and 4-season down sleeping bags.

Boots were usually expedition standard, though many Russians used standard plastic boots, or even flimsy leather ones protected by a "Yeti" style smooth soled galosh! We also used vapour barrier liners which were effective, especially at reducing the number of sock washes. Gaitors were standard Yetis.

Cooking fuel was gas. IMC is able to provide camping gaz type butane/propane stoves which many people used effectively. They also provide an interesting service of refilling Epi-gas canisters with an unknown gas, you simply take empty cylinders. They neglect to inform you that you have to perform this dodgy task yourself! Committed to this, we performed this once in a lifetime task, with apologies to Coleman!

Technical climbing equipment was not needed other than a few slings and ice screws. Only single axes were needed and ski poles were very useful for glacier travel. If, like most, you are attempting the standard routes on Khan Tengri and Pobeda, a jumar is useful as the fixed rope is plentiful. Routes where a technical rack would be useful do exist, but the rock, where exposed is unreliable at best with few exceptions.

The tents we used were Wild Country Mountain Quasars. On the standard routes they could be used, but there were also pre-dug snow caves. If climbing on peaks other than Tengri and Pobeda, tents were essential, though snow holes were also used.

4 Budget

Expenses		Income	
Costs for all Russian Services		4x£1800	
ex. Almaty for 4 people	£5440.00	individual cont.	£7200.00
Flights to Almaty	£2102.00	Sports Council	
		for Wales Grant	£1000.00
Visas x 4	40.00	BMC Grant	£500.00
Insurance (BMC)	616.00	MEF Grant	£500.00
Equipment	528.00		
First Aid	150.00		
Film	186.00		
Misc. & Admin.	138.00		
	<u>£9200.00</u>		<u>£9200.00</u>

5 Medical

We were amply endowed with a first rate medical kit, acquired through a medical contact. In essence, it contained:-

Plasters	Dioralyte powder for rehydration
Dressings (various sizes)	Immodium for diarrhoea
Tape	Ciproxin for severe diarrhoea (antibiotic)
Mediwipes	Metronidazole for <u>really</u> severe diarrhoea
Bandages (assorted)	Cimetidine for indigestion
Scissors	Diamox for acclimatization and AMS
Scalpel	Audicort for ear infections
Tweezers	Chloramphenicol for eye infections
Multi vitamins	Amethocacine for snow blindness
Paracetamol	Painkillers, including Codeine tablets
Asprin	

The Base Camps did provide a medical service, of variable quality. The main problems we encountered were altitude headaches, treated with aspirin and paracetamol, and dietary disorders, treated with immodium and ciproxin backed up with dioralyte. Diamox was used in the case of AMS. The case of pulmonary oedema was dealt with by camp staff who administered oxygen and antibiotics before and after descent.

6 Weather

The Central Tien Shan is renowned for its fickle weather. No pattern emerged whatsoever and remained completely unpredictable. The day when Pobeda wore a Mont Blanc style humpty back cloud turned out to be perfect. Snowfall was common in the afternoon and night and was sometimes heavy. Wind was not a problem at the moderate altitudes attained though it was known to be so at higher altitude.

Daytime temperatures could be very high, especially on the glaciers, but dipped sharply at night, or in cloudy weather.

7 Potential

The greater majority of climbers in the Central Tien Shan are active solely on Khan Tengri and Pobeda, and usually on the standard routes. These are equipped with snow caves and liberal quantities of fixed rope.

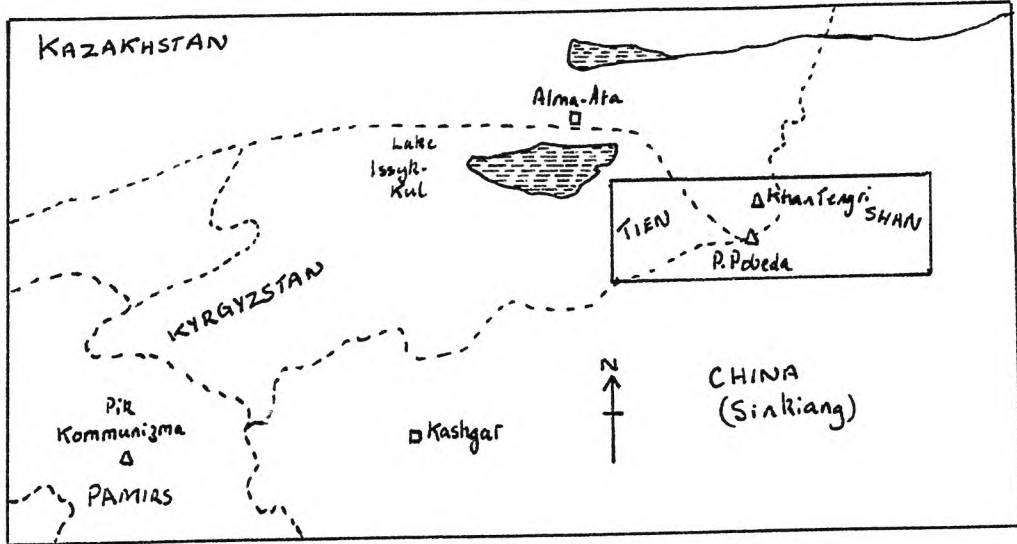
During our stay, we knew of very few parties venturing onto the other mountains. You could certainly guarantee solitude and enjoy a wonderful feeling of isolation by moving off the beaten track. These mountains demand a great

Diary of Events

23. 7.95 Fly to Moscow via Riga
24. 7.95 Fly to Almaty. Met by IMC Reps and drive to Karkara.
25. 7.95 Local walks
26. 7. 95 Helicopter to Case Camp, N. Inylchek Glacier E.W. remains in Karkara
27. 7.95 Acclimatization walk up glacier. D Fields ill.
28. 7.95 T Sparrow and G Thomas to Camp 1, Khan Tengri and return.
29. 7.95 D Fields evacuated to Karkara with pulmonary oedema. TS and GT up to camp on Odinnadzaty Glacier
30. 7.95 TS and GT retreat from below Col due to dangerous snow.
Return to base.
31. 7.95 Rest day. Ed Walker flown to S.Inylchek, for trekking.
1. 8.95 TS ill with stomach cramp. DF return to N.Inylchek.
2. 8.95 TS, GT and DF up to camp on Odinnadzaty Glacier. Storms.
3. 8.95 Return to base in deep snow.
4. 8.95 Rest day.
- 5.8.95 Fly to S.Inylchek. TS hurts back.
6. 8.95 GT and DF up S.Inylchek to dump food beneath Otkrytii.
7. 8.95 GT, TS and DF up to camp beneath Otkrytii
8. 8.95 Bad weather, on clearing followed dead end route up glacier.
Return to camp.
9. 8.95 W.Spur of Okrytii climbed to 5300m. DF severely ill with severe A.M.S.
10. 8.95 Evacuation of DF from mountain to camp.
11. 8.95 Return to Base Camp. Vodka Party!
12. 8.95 Rest. EW to Karkara.
13. 8.95 Remain in base. Bad weather.
14. 8.95 DF to Karkara. TS and GT ascend Diki Peak and return.
15. 9.95 Rest.
- 16/18.8.95 Poor weather, decision to return to Karkara effected on 19th.
- 19/22.8.95 Pony trekking and walking at Karkara, in between stomach illness.
- 23.89.95 Karkara to Almaty
24. 8.95 Almaty to Moscow
25. 8.95 Moscow to London

LOCATION MAPS

1 General Location

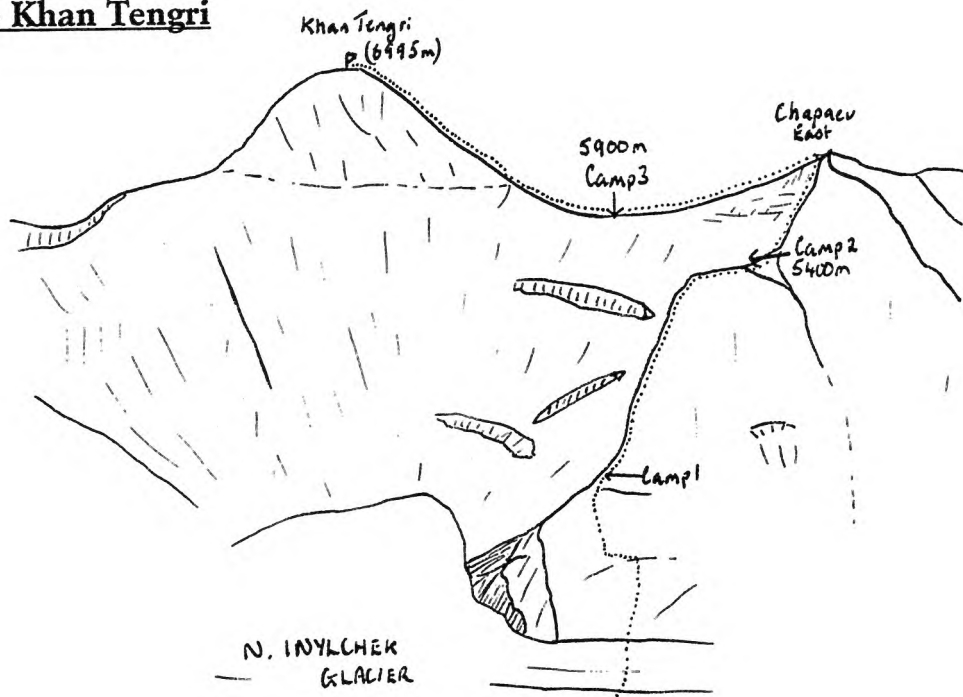


2 Central Tien Shan Detail 1:50000



ROUTE DIAGRAMS

Northern Route - Khan Tengri



ROUTE FOLLOWED ON OTKRYTII TO 5400M

