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THE ANGLO-AMERICAN KOKSHAAL-TOO  
1997 EXPEDITION

SUPPORTED BY:

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CHRISTIAN BECKWITH ON THE SUMMIT OF SERRA GARCIA  
WITH THE 'GREAT WALLS OF CHWA' BEHIND

## Introduction

Unlike many countries of the former Soviet Union where civil disruption is rife, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan is stable though economically poor. In the years after Perestroika and the exodus of a very large proportion of the professional workers to Russia, the great industrial plants closed and the infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan died. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to find some of the remaining professionals, such as doctors, teachers etc, working in the market in order to earn a living. No longer is there government money to maintain roads, buildings, electricity and water supplies and the atmosphere is one of decay. Kyrgyzstan is a highly mountainous country with two main natural resources: Hydro Electricity Power and minerals, especially gold. Currently, there is simply no capital available for their development. However, Perestroika obviously had its positive effects, one of which allowed this remote part of Central Asia to suddenly open its doors wide to the outside world. Tourism now offers a way for private individuals to make money.

While foreign climbers, especially those from former Eastern Block countries, had visited the Inylchek Glacier region of the Eastern Tien Shan for many years under the system of Russian International Camps (and, at the end of the 80s only, to several lesser known areas such as the Ak-Su), by the mid '90s a vast proportion of Kyrgyzstan's mountainous regions were still no more than strange sounding names to alpinists from the West and in certain areas only marginally better known by locals. Some of these regions offer exciting possibilities that have only recently been understood. As Vladimir Kopylov says in his excellent book, *Forbidden Mountains*, '.....unlike the Himalaya or the Andes, the Pamir, Caucasus and Tien Shan are almost virgin territories that have become accessible only thanks to the recent political and economic changes in the Russian Federation. The growing use of helicopters has greatly facilitated and reduced the approach journey and the withdrawal of military restrictions has made it possible to go to exceptionally beautiful and hitherto virtually unknown regions near the Chinese border'.

## The Idea

The team originally hoped to have four British and four American members attempting anything from snow, ice and mixed routes to big granite walls in the virtually unknown range of the Western Kokshaal-Too. In the end, one UK member and the American big wallers were not able to participate and the team was made up of three British, one American and one renegade German climber with an additional American member on the first phase of the trip. Due to time constraints on the part of two of the original British members, the expedition to the remote Kokshaal-Too was necessarily limited to less than a month UK to UK. The other four were therefore able to plan a preliminary phase lasting 10 or so days in the Ala Archa region, eminently accessible from Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, but still little known to British or American climbers.

## The Outcome

Depending on who you were, opinions of the expedition would probably vary from immensely successful right through to disastrous. Three interesting routes were achieved in the Ala Archa in far from perfect conditions and four first ascents with technical ice/mixed difficulty up to Scottish 5 were made in the Kokshaal-Too. In the last named region the expedition was the first to reach the western end of the range since 1985 and the first of any nationality to visit the Komarova Valley from which the four virgin peaks were climbed.

Despite setbacks being many and varied, the expedition was able to climb in, explore, map and make a comprehensive photographic record of a compact yet spectacular range of very little visited peaks; a range that potentially offers every type of climbing from non-technical virgin summits, through classic alpine ridges and ice/mixed faces, to steep ice 'goulottes' and vertical granite walls. Now that most (but not all) of the access problems have been 'ironed-out', team members are keen for a return visit in either 1998 or '99 to capitalise on the reconnaissance work made during the trip.

#### First Phase - The Ala Archa

Christian Beckwith, Matthias Engelein, Lindsay Griffin and Garth Willis

#### The History

The Kyrghyz Alatau Range is a 400km system of mountains running west from close to the shores of Issyk-Kul lake until it peters out south of Dushanbe. The most famous climbing area in this entire range of the Western Tien Shan, not least because of its situation just 45km by road from Bishkek, the capital of Kyrghyzstan, is the Ala Archa National Park.

After paying a small fee at the Park gates, visitors can travel 12km up a surfaced road to a car park at the old and now more or less run-down Alpine Camp (this was not only the first but also the biggest of the Soviet Mountaineering Camps to be established during the communist era). A good path in the main valley now leads south in to the heart of the mountains, finally reaching a chairlift which allows summer glacier skiing from close to 4,000m (a somewhat decaying ski resort also exists on the northern flanks of the range). However, from the Alpine Camp a path heading south east up the flanks of the first side valley on the left gives access to the Ak-Sai Glacier and the highest and finest peaks in the range.

Close to the snout of the glacier the large wooden Ratsek Hut at 3,350m is open to all. There are wooden bunks but no other facilities. Higher, on the true left lateral moraine are small twin metal and wood buildings in a very poor state of repair that form the Korona Huts (c3,800m). The surrounding region has been described as well-developed yet despite the proximity to Bishkek, the main location of Kyrghyz mountaineers, the history of climbing in this region seems incomplete and it is difficult to correctly ascertain what has or has not been done. In the days of the Soviet Union, when there were an estimated 800-1,000 active climbers in the Bishkek region and a thriving government sponsored alpine camp, the Ak-Sai must have been a popular venue. Now the number of

active locals is more like 20 and the Ak-Sai reputedly gets no more than 30 climber visits in a season (though many more from walkers). The area was not formally open to foreign climbers until the late '80s (the first foreign visit in this fashion occurred in 1988) but in 1976 it formed the venue for a one-off international exchange with the USA, resulting in a number of spectacular new routes. Peaks around the Ak-Sai are alpine in character with the highest, Semionova Tienshanskogo, named after the famous explorer, rising to 4,875m. The rock is granite and some of it is very good, though the area is perhaps better compared to the Ecrins than the Mont Blanc Massif. The second highest peak, Korona (4,860m), as the name suggests, is a ring of six rock towers around the head of the Korona Glacier. The north western side of the First Tower (4,810m) drops 750m to the glacier below and offers a number of hard rock and ice routes. Shorter but technically very interesting ice/mixed routes can be found to the right, terminating on the long West North West Ridge and allowing an easy descent back to the Korona Huts on the far side. The South West and West Faces of the Fifth and Sixth Towers fall a similar distance to the upper Ak-Sai glacier and contain several striking rock pillars not dissimilar to the Gervasutti on Mt Blanc du Tacul or the Bonatti on the Dru. Here are four, 800m high routes from 5A to 6A, the last probably put up in 1994 by the Krasnojarsk team of Balezin, Kokhanov, Obednin, Saveliev and Zakharov - a 6A up the centre of the South West Face of the Fifth Tower.

Dvuroghaia, Kosmonavlov, Bailian-Bashi and Simaghina are all high points on the ridge that runs south then west from Korona and offer difficult mixed climbing. However, it is the famous Pic Svobodnaya Korea (Free Korea Peak: 4,740m) that really captures the attention. The North Face is around 850m high and steep. There are a number of very demanding rock, ice and mixed routes and the face was the venue for the first ever winter ascent of a 6B (the hardest grade) in the old Soviet Union. Although the standards of Russian climbing on rock were very high by 1976 and their ability to battle on up very demanding ground in miserable conditions for days on end already legend, their standard of pure ice climbing was not as high as that in the West, most probably due to the unavailability of modern ice tools etc. These circumstances allowed Americans George Lowe and Henry Barber to make two audacious new routes on the face that year, following very obvious classical lines, but solo - a practice not endorsed by their Russian hosts. Lowe climbed a diagonal right to left line on the right side of the face (45-50°), while Barber climbed a similar but steeper diagonal line in the centre to finish just right of the summit. Both have since become classics with the Lowe Route (still graded 5A) the most frequented line on the wall.

The bounding ridge of the Ak-Sai basin continues north west and is seamed with fine ice/mixed lines (steeper goulottes and more pronounced couloirs) passing over the summits of Ak- too (4,620m) and Teketor (4,441m) to the lower but still rather formidable Boks Peak (4,240m) opposite the Ratsek Hut.

Clearly visible to the east of this hut is the fine rocky peak of Baichichi Key, with its dramatic narrow ice couloir falling from the upper hanging glacier (a



sustained section of 80°+) reminiscent of Kenya's Diamond Couloir. Also situated on this face are four fine rock pillars. All have been climbed with the 'classic' giving pitches up to 5.9

### Problems and Setbacks

Beckwith and Engelién arrived in the capital, Bishkek, in good order during the third week of August, expecting to meet up with the first of the UK contingent and head off to the Ala Archa. Beckwith had previously spent several weeks climbing in the Tetons and Bugaboos. Engelién was simply very fit. Griffin had no chance with these two but the proposed attempt to narrow the fitness gap between himself and the somewhat younger late arrivals from the UK was scuppered by KLM. Leaving Manchester airport on the 18th August he was still to be found in Amsterdam two days later. Things looked to be improving when Austrian Airlines were persuaded to take him under their wing and transport him to Almaty via Vienna. Unfortunately, Griffin's triumphant arrival in Kazakhstan was soon deflated by the news that no-one, not least Austrian Airlines, knew the whereabouts of his baggage.

Transferring to Bishkek, where he knew he would find help in the form of an English-speaking capitalist named Vladimir Komissarov, Griffin spent the next four days waiting for his equipment to appear. Komissarov is President of the Mountaineering Federation of Kyrgyzstan and had conceived the original plan with Beckwith and Griffin during an International Meet in the UK the year previously, then subsequently organised visas and permits etc. for the group. Griffin was well looked after and spent two of the four days as a guest at Komissarov's dacha, from where he was able to take a scorchingly hot walk in plastic boots up an arid 3,000m peak above the decaying ski-resort that lies on the northern flanks of the Ala Archa.

When the baggage finally arrived intact, Griffin hurriedly bought food and headed after the three other climbers (who had given him up for dead but, on the off-chance that he wasn't, left a note of their proposed whereabouts prior to departing from Bishkek). His walk up to the Ak-Sai Glacier, following directions memorised from a Komissarov map drawn in the dirt at the road head, coincided with one of the few blizzards to hit the region. Slowed down by weather and an overly large rucksack, the journey took a little over two days. The others seemed amazed to see him but quickly lost interest on finding that he had failed to bring any vodka to top up their dwindling supplies.

Problems continued in the form of further bad weather, which limited the choice of route, and the later disappearance of the Beckwith/Engelién equipment cache (which in turn robbed the team of a further route: see main report) but climbs were achieved and many possibilities noted for a future visit.

### Ala Archa 1997 Report

Despite the minimal number of climbers now visiting the Ala Archa during the season, the Ak-Sai still witnessed two deaths in 1997. The 1996-97 winter in Kyrgyzstan was unusually dry and mild, resulting in very little snow and an

extremely poor skiing season. The summer, equally, turned out to be unusually hot with temperatures in Bishkek soaring to an almost unprecedented 40°C. Early to mid August was particularly fine and hot, with the mountains now completely stripped of snow. The faces were either bare rock or hard grey ice and stonefall was a considerable threat. As temperatures lowered in the second half of the month the ice became brittle and even the Normal Route to Korona up the Korona Glacier had three pitches of bare ice where it steepens above c4,200m. The fatalities involved an experienced climber who died in a crevasse accident on the Ak-Sai Glacier and a female climber who was hit by stonefall and killed outright while attempting the Barber Route on Free Korea Peak. It would currently seem that, in common with the Alps, the best time for climbing the ice/mixed routes in this region is around the month of October when the mountains have a much greater snow covering and the weather can often be clear and cold. Winter climbing is also quite feasible. Despite the cold there are long periods of fine stable weather in between storms and the depth of snow at the roadhead rarely exceeds a few centimetres.

Beckwith, Engelién, Griffin and Willis, all for variable amounts of time during the latter half of August, climbed in the Ak-Sai. Although several walking parties visited the huts during that period, there did not appear to be any other climbers in the region. Starting from the Ratsek hut, Beckwith and Engelién climbed the North Face of Pic Boks by the left-hand of the two prominent couloirs on the right side of the face. The route, normally given only a Russian 4A grading, was in poor condition with the couloir bare ice and the rocks above clear of snow. After a steepening approach the pair climbed the upper couloir in eight pitches (60m ropes) with a maximum angle of 65°. This led to easy but extremely loose rock, which would probably give good climbing in mixed conditions but proved dangerous and difficult to protect. Stonefall was a constant threat. Approximately 350m on this terrain led to the North West Ridge. From here the 4,240m summit was traversed to reach the col between Boks and Teketor, then a broad couloir descended south east (ice then scree and boulders: normally 2B) to the Ak-Sai Glacier. The route was completed in a 17 hours round trip from the hut and under the conditions considered extremely hazardous.

The pair then moved up to the Korona hut where they were joined by Willis and a day of blizzard. When the weather cleared the three set out for the prominent couloir that leads up to a point on the main ridge between Aktoo and Teketor not far from the summit of the latter. After moving unroped initially, the three climbed six pitches (60m ropes) to the ridge. These were between 50-60° on hard brittle ice with the final pitch at 70°. The rocky ridge was then traversed over the 4,441m summit of Teketor, and its normally elegant North Ridge (3B) descended to the col before Boks. This ridge, which is more of an open slope, gave an ugly mixture of snow and bad ice. Again, the route was completed in a round trip of about 18 hours from the hut. The trio arrived back late in the night to find Griffin ensconced in one corner.



The weather now deteriorated slightly and while Engelien and Willis unsuccessfully attempted a rock route on Korona, Beckwith and a rather unacclimatized Griffin climbed up the centre of the North Face of Iziskatel (Researcher Peak: 4,570m). This face was approached from the Ak-Sai glacier via the ice slope left of the South Ridge (c65°) to reach the upper Korona Glacier. Beckwith led a direct entry on to the face involving six to seven metres at 90°. Thereafter the route averaged 50-60° of hard brittle ice similar to that found on bare Alpine faces in winter. The summit was gained in falling snow and the Normal Route via the North East Ridge (normally 2B) descended to the glacier.

With time now running out and Willis departing for Bishkek, the remaining three climbers descended to the Ratsek Hut for an attempt on one of Baichichi Key's fine granite pillars. Close to this hut Beckwith and Engelien had hidden all their rock gear, including shoes, a tent and bivouac sacks, before previously ascending to the Korona hut. Going to collect the gear the night prior to the proposed climb, they discovered it had been stolen. Although it was later 'unearthed' in Bishkek with the help of one of the main local activists, this incident curtailed any further real climbing. A rather subdued Beckwith and Engelien returned to Bishkek to sort out their problem while Griffin remained for an extra day and climbed one of the summits of the easy Uchitel (c4,500m) on the ridge north of the hut. Needless to say, the weather on this day, when they should have been on Baichichi Key, was perfect.

Christian Beckwith gives the following personal account. The details, characteristically, are at total variance with those of his colleagues.

I arrived in Bishkek August 18, waited nearly 30 hours for a notorious expedition member of dubious repute, then hiked into the Ak-Sai area of the Ala-Archa National Park. A sheet-metal coffin sled greeted me: a Russian woman, part of a four-person team, had been killed while climbing the Barber Route on Free Korea Peak the day before. Locals don't climb ice until October. Matthias was already in residence at the Ratsek Hut and we started out two days after I arrived on a 1800-foot ice and 1200-foot choss route that rained down stones the entire time (55° at its steepest.). Matthias proved fearless. His belayer nearly wet himself. The duo reached the hut 16 hours after leaving.

The next day we were joined by Garth. After I had stored a cache of extra rock climbing gear beneath a rock, we all made the three-hour trek from the Ratsek to the Ak-Sai hut in a blizzard. The storm cleared that evening, and the next morning we climbed a 50-55° ice face, roping seven pitches after third-classing the lower-angled bottom quarter of the route. The crux proved to be the down-climb of the north ridge of Teketor, a 3A climb in its own right. Engelien nearly died and swore extensively at Beckwith. When we descended, we encountered Lindsay at the hut, six days late and not a bit sorry.....



CHRISTIAN BECKWITH ON THE NORTH FACE OF BOX PEAK  
ALA ANCHA.

## Second Phase - Western Kokshaal-Too

Christian Beckwith, Brian Davison, Matthias Engelién, Nick Green and Lindsay Griffin.

### Introduction - Kokshaal-Too

This is the long chain of mountains beginning east of the Kyrgyzstan-Chinese frontier then running south west and demarcating these two countries until it peters out at the Turugart Pass. It is the most southern range of the Tien Shan and culminates in Pic Pobeda, the second highest mountain in the former Soviet Union at 7,439m and lying south of the well-known Inylchek Glacier. This eastern end of the Tien Shan was partially explored by the great Petr Semionov in the mid nineteenth century, and again at the turn of the twentieth century by the Italian prince Cesare Borghese and guides Brocherel and Zurbriggen, followed by the German mountaineer and geographer Gottfried Merzbacher. Much later the region was popularised by the setting up of a large international mountaineering camp and every year climbers came to attempt the high peaks, notably the famous marble pyramid of Khan Tengri (6,995m), first climbed in 1931 by Pogrebetskiy and party. This area lies east of the giant Issyk-kul lake and is noted for its unstable weather. In contrast the western end of the Kokshaal-too, north east of the Chinese city of Kashgar and south of the lake is lower and much drier but contains some spectacular alpine peaks.

### Western Kokshaal-too

Culminating in the 5,982m peak of Dankova, the most interesting section of the Western Kokshaal-too is around 50km in length and contains 80 or so summits over 4,000m. Due to its strategic position along the Chinese border and close to a number of easy crossing points, military security had always made access extremely difficult during the Soviet era. After Perestroika these restrictions were to a certain extent withdrawn but most climbers were then unable to finance travel to such remote ranges. Because of this, very few parties have ever climbed in the range and until 1996 the only routes achieved had been by Soviet mountaineers taking part in the elite Russian Competition system. This had resulted in some extremely hard climbs.

The eastern end of this massif, where the Dankova group is to be found, appears to be composed of a type of limestone and some metamorphic rock which is generally of very poor quality. Having somewhat easier access than the western sector and a military post in close proximity, plus offering the highest summit, may be the reasons why this part of the range has received the majority of expeditions (still extremely few). In contrast, the western end, broadly defined by the 5,842m peak of Kizil Asker and largely composed of excellent granite, needs to be approached from an entirely different direction and has received less attention. For mountaineers the news that the well-known Kazakhstan climber, Anatoli Boukreev, now resident in the USA, had briefly visited this end of the range and was trying to persuade the American rock climbing star, Todd Skinner, to take a group to the area, was significant. Special military permission

is needed to go in to this region and to obtain this requires having a reliable agent in Bishkek - not an easy task.

## Dankova Group

### The History

The first ascent of Dankova was probably made in 1969 by N Strikitsa's party via a 5B route up the huge South West Face. At the same time L Alibegashvily's party made the first ascent of the second highest peak in this group, Koroleva (5,816m) via the West Ridge (5B), while lower peaks such as Kaliningrad (4,750m: 2B) and Kibalchichi (5,450m: 3B) were climbed by L Vorobjev and party, the latter peak also getting a hard route up the North Ridge (5B) by A Korsun's team. In 1972 another hard mixed route at 5B was added to Dankova on the even bigger mixed North West Face, rising almost 2,000m above the glacier.

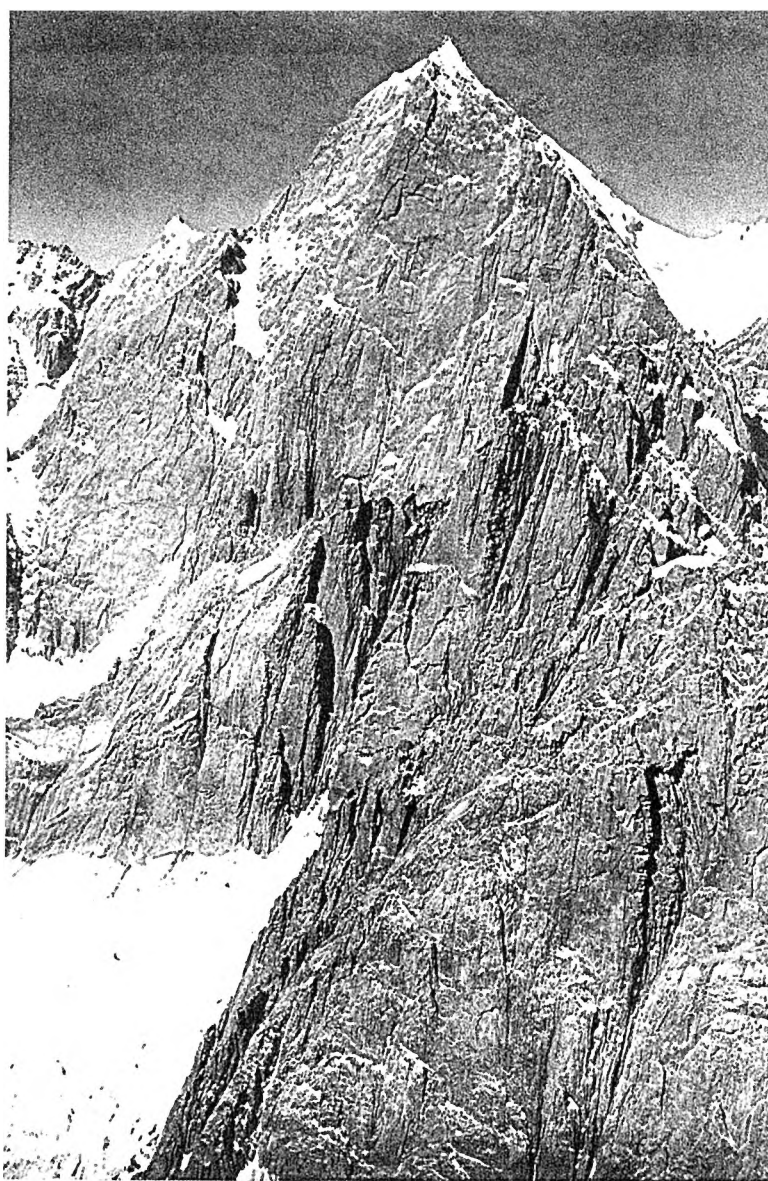
Coming up to date, in 1993 the Moscow climber, Michail Lebedev visited the region and with Igor Shamonov, F Akhmatov and I Korsun managed to make the first ascent of the 'Matterhorn' of the region, Pic Alpinist. This 5,492m summit was climbed via a hard and technical route up the North East Face (6A).

Via a colleague at work who knew some of Lebedev's fellow climbers, Dresden-based mountaineer, Kai Würster, arranged solely by Email an expedition to the region for 1996. Lebedev took around 20 Russian climbers and was joined in August by Frenchmen Alexis Deschamps, Francois Onimus and Oliver Renault plus Germans Juergen Christ, Würster and girlfriend Gesa Weyhen-Meyer. Base Camp at 3,300m was situated at the previously used site in the Chonturasu Valley after a three- day truck journey from Bishkek.

Drama occurred soon after. Although Weyhen-Meyer had performed well at altitudes above 4,000m in the Alps, she has a heart pacemaker that sometimes cannot accommodate tachycard attacks that happen even at low altitude. She was also suffering from a lung infection and quickly succumbed to pulmonary oedema. The Russian doctors had to work hard to keep her alive before a helicopter could be summoned from Bishkek via a radio operator at the nearby military camp. Both Weyhen-Meyer and Würster were evacuated and subsequently returned to Germany.

The group split in to various parties and tackled some of the surrounding peaks. Christ, Deschamps and Onimus made the first ascent of the North Ridge of Alpinist and descended the East Ridge after 55 hours of climbing (crux F5+ and A0) and less than two hours of sleep. In the meantime Renault soloed a possible second ascent of Pic Zenith (c5,150m), first climbed many years ago by a Russian party, via the West Ridge. This gave a fine ascent over snow and ice at 2B. All four climbers then made the first ascent of the slightly more rounded 5,030m snow pyramid in front of Pic Zenith via a route up the right side of the North Face (50° maximum). This peak was christened Pic de l'Entre Aide. A strong group including Lebedev and Shimohin made an attempt on the unclimbed Chonturasu (5,728m), a beautiful high pyramid to the north of





THE 1,100M EAST FACE OF KIZIL ASKER



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: KOROLEVA, CHONTURASU AND DANKOVA

Dankova. Although they completed their new route up a pillar of loose rock on the North Face, a very corniced summit ridge prevented them from going to the top. However, a successful first ascent was made of the impressive rocky Pic Trapez (5,240m) to the north of Chonturasu by the Russians Romanov, Shimohin, Smirnov and Starostin after a hard route of 5B standard on the South East Face.

## Kizil Asker Group

### The History

In contrast to the Dankova group the icy peaks and rocky spires that straddle the border at the western end of this region are composed of mainly excellent granite. Although it is believed that Kizil Asker (The Red Soldier: 5,842m) was first climbed sometime in the mid to late '60s, most probably by the glaciated North Face, the only recorded route to the summit is that put up on the West Face above the Kizil Asker Glacier in 1985 by Kazbek Valiev's Kazakhstan expedition. Valiev's team appear to have sought difficulty rather than the most logical line for a first ascent of this face and used siege tactics to create a 1,500m route of 6A standard that begins with a c21 pitch monolithic 'big wall'. Prior to this, a line on the face had been attempted in 1980 by Popenko and team but they were forced to retreat. Instead they turned their attention to the unclimbed Pic Panfilovski Division (5,250m) immediately to the east of Kizil Asker. The team climbed a direct route up the North West Face, the difficulties apparently compounded by not having enough knifeblade pegs for the thin shallow cracks.

Ascents have also been made of the well-defined West or West South West Rib of Pt 4,850m immediately north of Panfilovski (a steep granite tower) and several fine snowy pyramids to the west of Kizil Asker that rise to 5,100m in altitude.

### Kizil Asker Group 1997 Report

In September the first climbers to reach this western end of the range since Valiev's 1985 expedition arrived near the head of the Komarova Valley. Lying east of Kizil Asker, the three pronged Komarova Glacier (named after a Russian cosmonaut who burned to death in the late '60s) and its surrounding unclimbed and unnamed peaks had not previously been visited by mountaineers of any nationality.

The Anglo-American Expedition plus their excellent but non English-speaking 'liaison officer' and radio operator, Aleksei Klimov, (aka Ljoshka) had met with considerable logistical difficulties before finally reaching the area from Bishkek. At first it was not known whether access to this region by truck was still possible after 12 years. It was; but lengthy delays on the initial part of the journey due to transport problems were subsequently followed by the group being turned back from the last military check post due to a poorly organised permit. When the valley was finally reached after a long drive across typically

flat Siberian steppe, the lorry sank in marshy ground and took several days to extract.

With half the team now ill from food poisoning on the inward journey, equipment was ferried to a suitable base camp at c3,900m. Potential climbing time was now sadly reduced when Beckwith, Engelien and Green set off to explore the Central Glacier leaving Davison and Griffin to follow.

Unfortunately, and with uncanny resemblance to the events in Dankova the previous year, Davison's condition continued to deteriorate and serious pulmonary oedema set in. There followed several tense days with a very inefficient radio set and a Russian dictionary trying to make arrangements for a rescue (it is impossible to loose height easily from this area; the last 60+ km of driving only gains 400m in altitude) but on the 11th a helicopter and medical team arrived and evacuated Davison to Bishkek, where he quickly recovered. Before the 22nd, when winter appeared to arrive in the form of a prolonged and heavy snowfall, the remaining group made four first ascents in generally rather chilly mixed weather. The summit of Pt 4,600m, later christened Pic Lyev, was reached by its easy North Ridge (Griffin). Pic Jerry Garcia (5,250m) on the Chinese border was climbed by two different routes to reach its very icy North Ridge from where the great granite walls on the Chinese side of the range were clearly visible (Beckwith/Engelien/Green/Griffin).

A fine pyramidal peak of 5,225m gave snow/ice climbing via a glacial bowl and ridge crest to a point 100 vertical metres from the top. A steep wall (perfect granite: Scottish 5 mixed) followed by Scottish 2/3 mixed and excellent névé led to the pointed summit (Beckwith/Engelien/Green). In keeping with traditional Soviet peak naming but introducing a western slant, the mountain was given the (very unofficial) 'working' name of Pic 52 years of American Duct Tape. The Unmarked Soldier was the more conventional name given to a fine slender rock and ice pyramid of 5,400m to the east of Panfilovski Division. This was climbed via the steep North Face Couloir which gave sustained Scottish 3 ice climbing to the summit ridge, followed by a quasi-corniced crest to the west (Beckwith/Engelien/Green). This last section and the subsequent rappel descent of the route was carried out in stormy conditions. Due to the very dry weather throughout the region in late July and August, glaciers only had a very moderate snow cover in their upper reaches, and most mountain faces and ridges were bare ice.

A little exploration of other glacial systems was also made but one or two further attempts on peaks were thwarted by bad weather. Indeed the weather, while good by Himalayan standards and very rarely bad enough to prevent climbing once on the hill, was not often of the 'clear blue sky' variety that might be expected of this region during September.

The experiences of the expedition led them to believe that the Western Kokshaal-too holds great potential for the mountaineer but the unreliability of the country's available agents and its current infrastructure means that access can still prove far from straightforward and cannot totally be guaranteed.



Lindsay Griffin adds the following account under the title:

What else can possibly go wrong?

With the arrival of Davison and Green in Bishkek there was a brief interlude where things at last seemed as if they were going to plan. But troubles were far from over. The five climbers were scheduled to leave on or about the 1st September. On the 3rd they were still in Bishkek looking for a third truck after the first two had failed to get much beyond the outskirts of town. The drive would later lead south to Naryn on the road to the Turugart Pass, after which it was cross country on gravel tracks to the first of several military bases. At the penultimate check point the group was turned back. It transpired that the officer in charge had, quite understandably, never had to deal with foreign travellers before and was not up to date with the new regulations that no longer required a KGB stamp on the permit. There was no alternative but for team to return and sort out the problem. It wasn't until the 7th that the expedition was firmly ensconced in Base Camp, having ferried all the equipment a final two kilometres when the lorry sank in marshy ground.

By this stage the demands of the journey, lack of sleep and poor food had caused a variable amount of illness, though notably to Davison and Griffin. The latter was so violently ill that on reaching base camp it was all he could do to struggle in to a sleeping bag where he lay moaning in a pathetic state for the next 24 hours.

8th September: Beckwith, Engelen and Green stormed up the left hand Komarova Glacier for a reconnaissance. Davison followed. Griffin followed even more slowly.

Griffin began to feel better with exercise and suggested an easy unclimbed c4,600m snow dome fairly close to Base. The two invalids progressed with astonishingly slow pace towards the summit which Griffin reached in a snow storm after Davison had turned back feeling decidedly rotten. The summit was christened Pic Lyev or Lion Peak, which give or take a letter honoured the main sponsor.

9th September: The A team sets out for a four or five day trip up the Central Komarova Glacier while the B team decide that another gentle walk is in order before following. Davison only gets a few hundred metres from camp before feeling totally spent. Griffin feels better though very lethargic and continues up moraine and then half way up the broad flat glacier, meeting the other three heavily laden climbers on his return and raving about the many superb objectives on offer. By nightfall Davison has deteriorated and has an ominous hacking cough.

10th September. During the night Davison exhibits some pretty strong signs of Pulmonary Oedema. Diamox is taken but does not appear to have much effect, so at 10am a course of Nifedipine is begun. Losing altitude quickly is the only cure and as these mountains rise out of typical Central Asian 'steppe', overland or air transport is essential. The next two days are spent attempting to make radio contact; a worrying time for Griffin who understands the situation but far less so for expedition 'liaison officer', Ljoshka, who speaks not a word of English



UNCLIMBED PEAK c 5,700 m



KIZILASKER FROM THE NORTH

and is convinced that Davison can easily be cured of his affliction by breathing the steam coming off a pot of boiling potatoes. After much hard work Ljosha performs miracles with the radio and subsequently, when overland transport is ruled out as too unreliable an option, a helicopter is dispatched from Bishkek for the c400km flight.

13th September. With Davison safely (?) in a Bishkek hospital trying to avoid oriental nurses bearing ominously unhygienic-looking needles, and the team re-assembled at Base Camp, Griffin realises that only nine or so available climbing days now remain. The four set off for a two day journey to establish a camp close to the head of the right-hand Komarova Glacier from where they make the first ascent of Pic Jerry Garcia on the 15th in chilly breezy conditions.

16th September. Griffin has a relapse and decides to remain at camp in a foetal position while the others head off for The Unmarked Soldier. By a strange quirk of fate the decision to remain behind turns out to be well-founded. During the afternoon a very blustery storm hits the area. After a highly energetic two hours, the two very sturdy mountain tents are only prevented from flying in to China by collapsing their poles and piling copious amounts of snow on top. Funnily, the three exhausted climbers seem none to pleased at having to resurrect tents on their return sometime after dark. There's no pleasing some folk.

19th and 20th September. Back at Base Camp and feeling rather sorry for himself, Griffin is ill once again, confirming that whatever he picked up on the way in is not going to let go in a hurry. However, spirits rise when a small group of military border police show up and prevent departure for another foray in to unexplored territory by insisting that team members drink copious amounts of vodka and pepper the surrounding hillside with bullets from Kalashnikovs and other high-velocity rifles. This is the East and it would be considered highly rude to refuse their hospitality.

21st September. While the three thrusty A-team members leave for a final attempt on the very attractive peak at the head of the Central Glacier, Griffin crosses the Lawrence of Arabia Pass for an exploration of an unnamed glacier basin (Vyotas?) to the east. The weather is poor and he is unable to climb anything but as compensation discovers the 'find of the expedition' - an old wooden arrow. Ljosha, a history graduate, gets excited and talks about 1,000 year-old nomadic hunters. The rest of the team are rather more conservative (no more than 20 years old maximum). The truth will shortly be revealed by the Institute of Archaeology.

22nd September. With little left that can possibly go wrong, winter suddenly arrives in the form of a inconsiderately heavy snow fall. When it finally clears the temperatures plummet and the hills look plastered with climbing out of the question for a number of days. Vague concerns of being abandoned till early spring are dispelled by the surprising arrival of the truck, a day early. The magnificently scenic drive back, down hill and hassle free, is completed in an astonishing 15 hours - an improvement of seven days on the approach time.

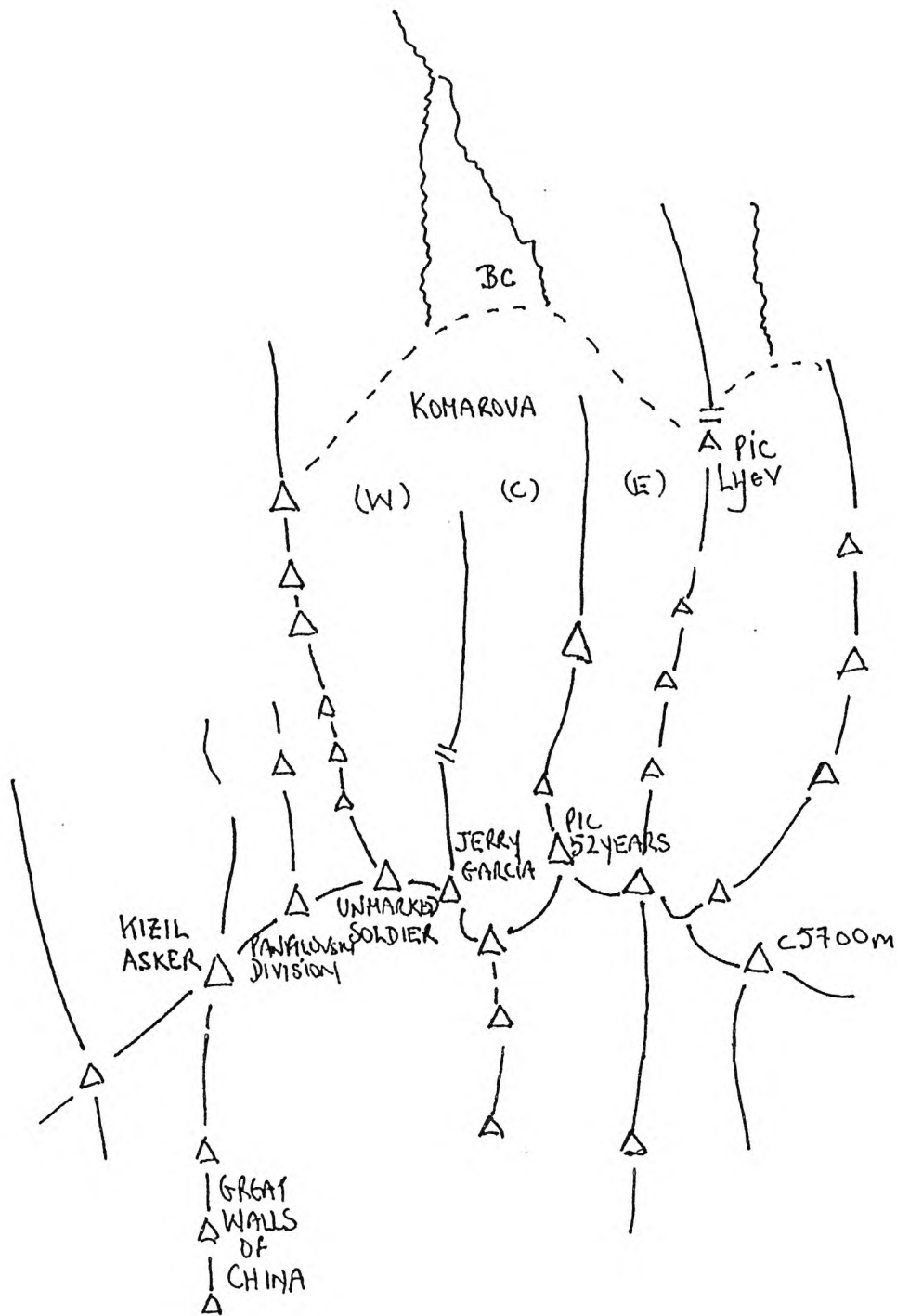
Christian Beckwith writes with typical fluency:

September 7: Christian Beckwith, Matthias Engeliien and Nick Green made an Advanced Base at 4200 meters on the Central Komarova Glacier. The next day, they made a neo alpine-style (i.e., 11 a.m. departure) attempt on a peak that subsequently came to be called Pic Jerry Garcia, reaching a ca. 5085 meters shoulder on the mountain via the Window Col/West Face. The following day the trio climbed Pic 52 Years of American Duct Tape via the North Ridge, a reasonably angled glacier bowl and crest, to the 100m high summit ice and granite pyramid. This was cracked by Green in excellent form. The rack of four ice screws went unused. Beckwith was forced to prussik the pitch. 60° ice and mixed ground was then climbed unroped to the summit.

16th September: Beckwith, Engeliien and Green climbed the Stormfree Couloir on the north face of The Unmarked Soldier, roping up for five pitches of hard ice that roared back to a ferocious 65°. In increasingly dubious weather, Beckwith backed off the final lead which Green sent with one ice screw. The trio unroped for the summit, which was reached via 100m of rotten snow and ice climbing on the East Face, followed by another 50m of traversing on the summit ridge/West Face in a full storm. Beckwith was heard to remark, "I'm scared shitless!" whilst being buffeted around on the summit ridge. By the time they got back to the tents it had been a 12-hour day.

19th-20th September: Beckwith, Engeliien and Green set out from Base Camp for one last attempt on the triangular peak at the head of the Central Komarova Glacier, taking only a two man tent. Engeliien, per usual, was late. After a blustery night that Green endured in his bivy sack, the trio soloed the South West Face of Pic Jerry Garcia, a 300m ice field up to 50°, then continued ca 500m along the North ridge to the convergence with their earlier route up the mountain. Storm engulfed the triangular peak, which the trio had hoped to climb via its North West ridge. They descended.

Back down in Base Camp they found Griffin and Ljosha being forced to share vodka with the military and shoot glass bottles with Kalashnikovs and other automatic weapons. The remaining three prayed for salvation, which came in the form of an early lorry arrival two days later.





THE UNMARKED SOLDIER. THE ROUTE OF ASCENT TOOK THE  
CENTRAL COLUMN WAVING RIGHT TO THE SUMMIT RIDGE

## Fuel

Base Camp cooking was carried out on a large double-burner gas stove. Petrol stoves were used on the hill. As one might expect with Russian fuel the stoves needed constant attention and were often the source of headaches and nausea at high camps. Only Green seemed more or less unaffected and put this down to his lifestyle in the UK of habitually driving a car with a very faulty exhaust. Empty Colman Epi-Gaz cylinders were taken out from the UK to be filled from the large Base Camp gaz bottles via a special adapter. Although a trial run in Bishkek was successful, the team struggled in Base Camp with poor adapters and was not successful in getting the system to work until late in the trip.

## Environmental Policy

The whole expedition was carried out in lightweight style. Nothing was left on the hill except rappel anchors and the usual human waste. With Base Camp more or less accessible by vehicle everything could be brought back to Bishkek for disposal. A toilet pit could not be dug but a convenient site was discovered in boulders. This was burnt and left uncovered on departure, the team deciding to leave it marked to influence any future parties to use the same site.

## Equipment

The team used the sort of conventional clothing and equipment that is normally taken to Greater Range mountains of medium altitude. Particular thanks are due to Lyon Equipment who provided ropes and Goretex shell garments, and also generously loaned a sturdy Marmot mountain tent for the duration. Many thanks are also due to Terra Nova for the loan of a further mountain/base camp tent, to Wild Country for a generous sales reduction on hardware, and to North Cape for a selection of underwear and gloves. John Burgess of Coleman/Taymar LP Gas Appliances kindly supplied Epi Gaz cylinders.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their financial support without which the expedition would not have been possible, the climbers would like to thank the following:

Lyon Equipment

The Foundation for Sport and the Arts

The Mount Everest Foundation

The British Mountaineering Council

For generous support with equipment:

Lyon Equipment

Wild Country

North Cape

Terra Nova

Coleman/Taymar

For arranging air travel and excess baggage including Gaz Cylinders:

Delta Travel, Peter Cornwall and Julia Read of KLM (UK Sales Market and Support Services) plus Bob Green of Airport Security.

For help with medical supplies:

Dr Charles Hornsby

For help in gleening what little information we could on the area:

Vladimir Komissarov, Pat Littlejohn and Kai Würster

And in Kyrghyzstan

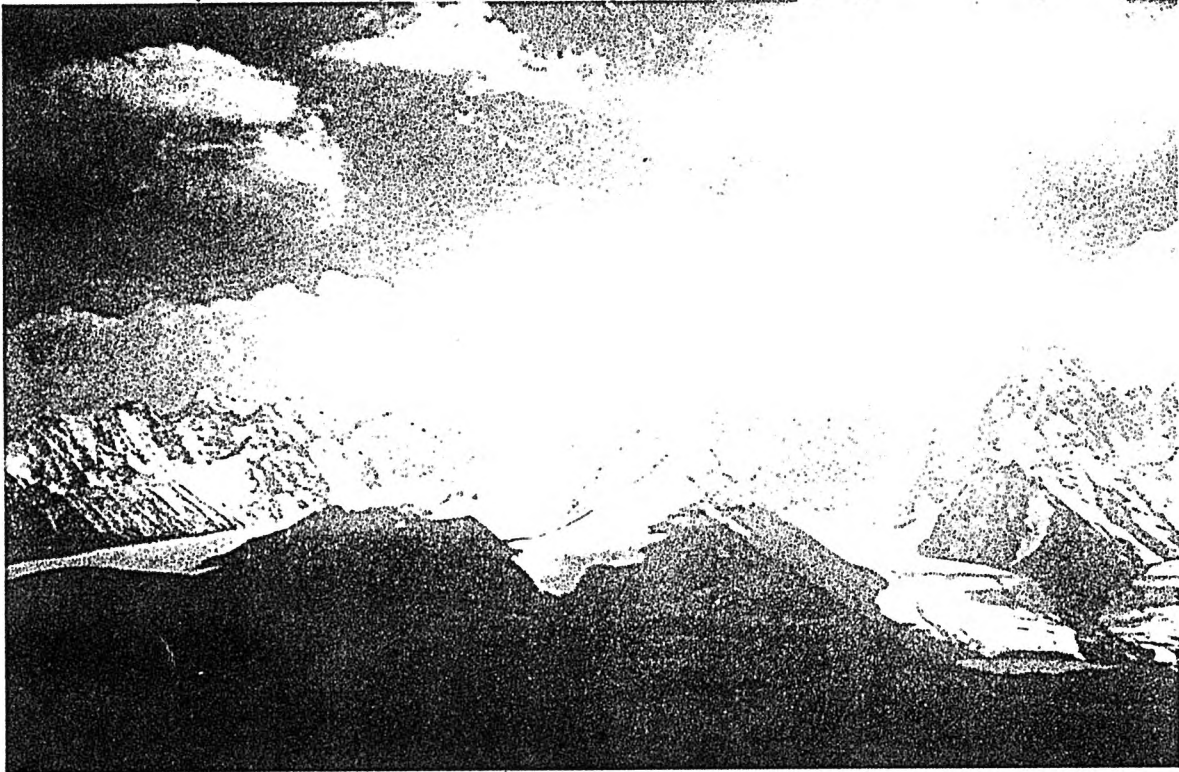
Aleksei Klimov, Vladimir Komissarov, ITMC Tien-Shan and Tien-Shan RTM, Ltd for the helicopter rescue.



Kokshaal-Too Budget  
For the three British members:

All UK transport:	£193
Air fares:	£1580
Visas	£170
Food UK:	£125
Insurance:	£615
Medical UK	£120
Total UK Admin expenses	£145
Equipment	£750
Kyrghyzstan:	
Transport to Base	
Permits	
Visa Support	
Base Camp Equipment	
Radio	
Gas	
Food	
Base Attendant/Radio	
Total:	£1115
Other in-country expenses	
Food/Accommodation/Travel:	
Total:	£390
Reports/Slide and Print Film Commitments	
Misc UK expenses	£255
Total:	£5488
Income	
Lyon Expedition Award	£1250
Foundation for Sport and the Arts	£850
Mount Everest Foundation	£900
British Mountaineering Council	£850
Personal Contributions	£1638
Total	£5488

PIC 5700m PIC 52 YEARS JERRY GARCIA UNMARKED SOLDIER PANALOV KIZIL ASKER  
4850  
m



↑  
CENTRAL AND WEST  
KOMARVA



MARMOT TENT AT BASE CAMP IN THE KOMARVA VALLEY