

# Expedition Report: Kokshaal Too, Kyrgyzstan 2023

*Nick Whimster, Clement Attwood, Thomas Walker, Calum Wesencraft*

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## Expedition overview

Between 27 August and the 22 September 2023 a team of four (Clement Attwood, Thomas Walker, Calum Wesencraft and Nick Whimster) travelled to the Western Kokshaal Too with the aim of establishing new routes in the area, either alpine rock routes or mixed climbs.

The expedition engaged ITMC for logistics support, facilitating transportation, tents, cooking gear, permits, and communication. Despite language barriers, successful coordination was achieved, although some delays occurred due to maintenance issues with the Gaz 66 truck.

On arrival in the area the team found snow on the ground, which combined with limited knowledge of the terrain by the drivers meant delivery at a basecamp eight kilometres short of the intended position. After acclimatisation and several days of effort hiking gear an advanced base camp (ABC) was established on the Kyzyl Asker glacier a few kilometres from the steep faces of Pik Zabor and Pik Vernyi, the intended objectives. Initial reccies of the Pik Zabor, and a previously unconsidered face (Pik Gronky), the team were excited to see lots potential.

With the prevailing weather conditions being dominated by almost daily snow storms of varying intensity it was clear with the time remaining that big wall rock climbing was a more challenging prospect. After a resupply, some rest and poor weather conditions at base camp the team returned to ABC for a week, with mostly good weather.

The first climbing outing was to attempt an obvious chimney system on the northernmost part of Pik Zabor. Unfortunately after several pitches the team was shut-down by a deep chimney with thin ice and limited protection preventing straight-forward advancement. After finding an adjacent crack that could be aided the team was able to bypass the step, but only to find deep snow. With much of the day gone the team decided to cut its losses.

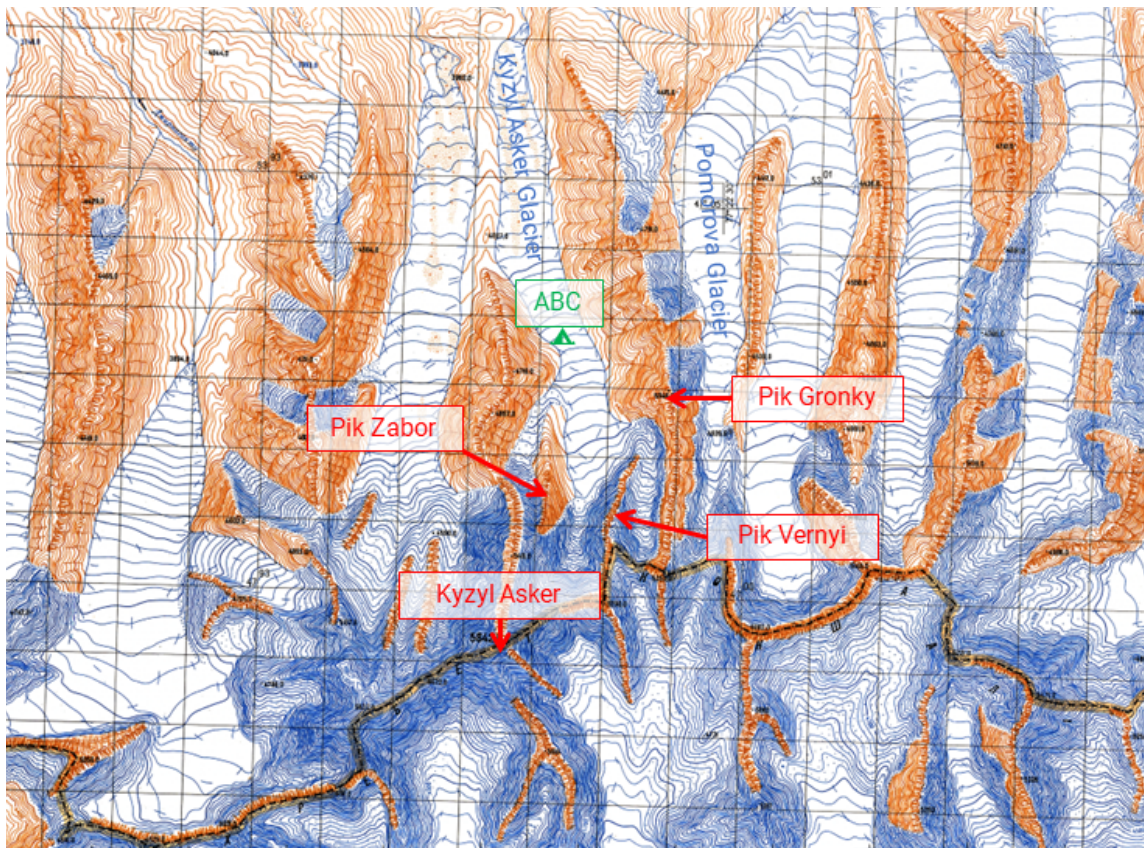
After a rest day the team attempted a more amenable looking route on the West Ridge of Pik Gronky. The objective takes a snow gully that runs behind the west face before reaching a notch on the ridge. From here it takes the crest of the ridge over mixed ground before gaining the summit ridge. After an early start and overcoming a pitch of ice protecting the gully, the team found themselves at the notch. The climbing from here was more convoluted and more technically challenging than expected. After a burly mixed pitch and a pure rock pitch, the terrain eased off a little, but still required some weaving before ending up on a larger ledge system beneath the last steep rock band. Climbing this and gaining the summit ridge the team moved together until unfortunately darkness forced a retreat a hundred or so meters beneath the summit. The team named the 700m route 'If you like pina coladas' and grading it TD+ VII.

With strong winds for the remaining days the team climbed some lower level objectives on and close to Pik Gronky. On the slabs of the West Face of Pik Gronky Nick and Clement climbed three pitches of VS to HVS slabs and cracks and Calum and Tom climbed an icefall below the central gully of Take a walk on the wild side.

Despite the challenging conditions and some logistics issues the team was very happy to have climbed what they think are some new routes on Pik Gronky and attempted others

elsewhere. The area still has a lot of remaining potential and is an inspiring range on a par with the bigger alpine faces. The team are very happy to pass on any useful information to any other parties looking to visit the region.

The team would also like to thank the Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council and BananaFingers, friends and family for their support without whom it would not have been possible.



*Image 1: Map showing the position of advanced basecamp and our objectives*

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## Expedition members

### Nicholas Whimster

Age:44, British, Database Developer and photographer specialising in outdoor and drone photography

Climbed up to E4 in the uk and grade V in Scotland, numerous trips to the French and Italian alps climbing up to D and VII on rock in the Dolomites. 3.5 months climbing in South America remote cragging, Alpine and big walling, climbing 6 alpine peaks over 5000m in Bolivia and Peru. Highlights included Copa (6188m), Penqueno Alpamayo (5370), Cabeza De Condor (5648m) La Esfinge (The Sphinx 5325m) Original route 5.10 A1 750m. In 2016 he and Clement Attwood travelled to Yosemite for a big walling trip climbing The Nose on El Cap and Southern Man on Washington Column, as well as multiple other shorter big walls and free climbs up to 5.12a



### Clement Attwood

Age 39 British, Developer and Data Scientist working on energy and environment

Clem has climbed extensively across the UK, climbing up to E4 trad, 7b sport, Scottish VI. He has extensive Alpine mountaineering experience having made multiple trips in his 20 years of climbing and having lived there for four of those years. This includes climbing 4000 metre peaks in the Swiss Valais (Ober Gabelhorn) and Mont Blanc Region (Aiguille Verte, Dent de Geant, Mont Blanc from Les Houches in a day, Mont Blanc du Tacul). His alpine experience includes more technical climbing on rock e.g. on the Grand Capucin, Grand Charmoz, Aiguille Argentiere, Tre Cime and mixed routes up to AI5+ on the Mont Blanc du Tacul satellites. In 2016 he and Nicholas Whimster travelled to Yosemite for a big walling trip climbing The Nose on El Cap and Southern Man on Washington Column, as well as multiple other shorter big walls and free climbs up to 5.12a. As well as an opportunity to hone some aid skills this was invaluable experience in managing big wall logistics for multiple days.



## Tom Walker

Age 33, British, Data Scientist

Tom's experience includes a trip to Peru where we climbed Ishinca and almost Chopicalqui, lots of ski mountaineering around the Alps including Aig Verte and skiing Mont Blanc, Mont Blanc from the valley floor and back in a day with Clem. Rock climb about E1, 7a, including climbing high alpine rock routes in the French Alps. Tom is also a very keen long distance runner, having completed the Marathon des Sables, unofficial UTMB and 4 day GR20 across Corsica.



## Calum Wesencraft

Age 26, British, Aspirant Mountain Guide

Calum has a wealth of experience climbing in the UK and further afield. He climbs E2 and Scottish VI on a regular basis and has extensive Alpine experience both in summer and winter.

Calum is a freelance outdoor instructor from Scotland. He is in the process of working towards Becoming a British mountain guide. He has been climbing since university and currently splits his time between living in Chamonix and Scotland. In his most recent season he enjoyed successful ascents of Peuterey Integral, Aiguille de la Republique, and the Matterhorn. In previous years he accomplished ascents of Super couloir on Tacul, Aiguille Verte in a single push from the valley and Aiguille de Chardonnay via the Migo spur. He is also an avid skier and has had the pleasure of skiing in some incredible environments all over the world.



**NB:** Jordan Frier was to be the fourth member of the team but unfortunately was injured by a rock fall in Chamonix shortly before the trip. The team wishes him a speedy recovery and looks forward to seeing him back climbing again soon. Also thanks to Jordan for sourcing our replacement, the rope gun Calum Wesencraft.

## Logistics

For logistics support we used a company called [ITMC](#), who arranged the following services:

- Transport from Bishkek to our basecamp and back
- Provided tents for basecamp, including mess tent, cooks tent and two three man tents
- Provided cooking gear, tables and chairs
- A cook to join us for the expedition
- Border permits
- Accommodation

Communication and finaling of arrangements before the trip was a little challenging due to language and time difference, but we were ultimately successful in getting everything we needed. They also helped us with shopping for food in Bishkek for the expedition.

## Getting to the area

ITMC arranged a 17 seater mini bus to take us to meet the overland truck (Gaz 66) at a point just past Lake Issyk Kul. At the side of the road we transferred all of our kit into the Gaz 66. The truck was driven by a Russian driver and his friend. The cook (Bakit) ITMC had hired for us was also with them. The cab in the front of the Gaz 66 had no working form of communication with the back so any stops were decided by the driver.

Stops were mostly down to issues with the Gaz 66. The driver and his colleague spent a few hours over the two day trip changing various belts on the engine. We came to the conclusion afterwards that rather than it breaking down they were probably just doing this as maintenance before getting into the remote, off road section of the journey. This was a little annoying as if they had done this before the trip then we might have got to base camp earlier in the day.

We spent one night in Naryn at a hostel and set off at 9am, the drivers stopping to buy more belts for the engine, which they stopped to put on just outside the town. We passed through a village on the way which had a small shop, this was the last opportunity to buy anything.

There are actually two army border checkpoints to cross, a main one at a high pass, which is the most official one. A last checkpoint by an army barracks was a bit more informal, where the cook (Bakit) and the driver chatted and shared cigarettes with the soldier at the barrier.

On the second day of the journey, the drivers stopped to ask us where we were going, which was a surprise to us as we had sent ITMC a Pin of the location we wanted to be dropped. If we hadn't downloaded maps on Fatmaps to our phones and were able to show them where we wanted to go and which track to take, it could have taken a long time to work out where we were going.

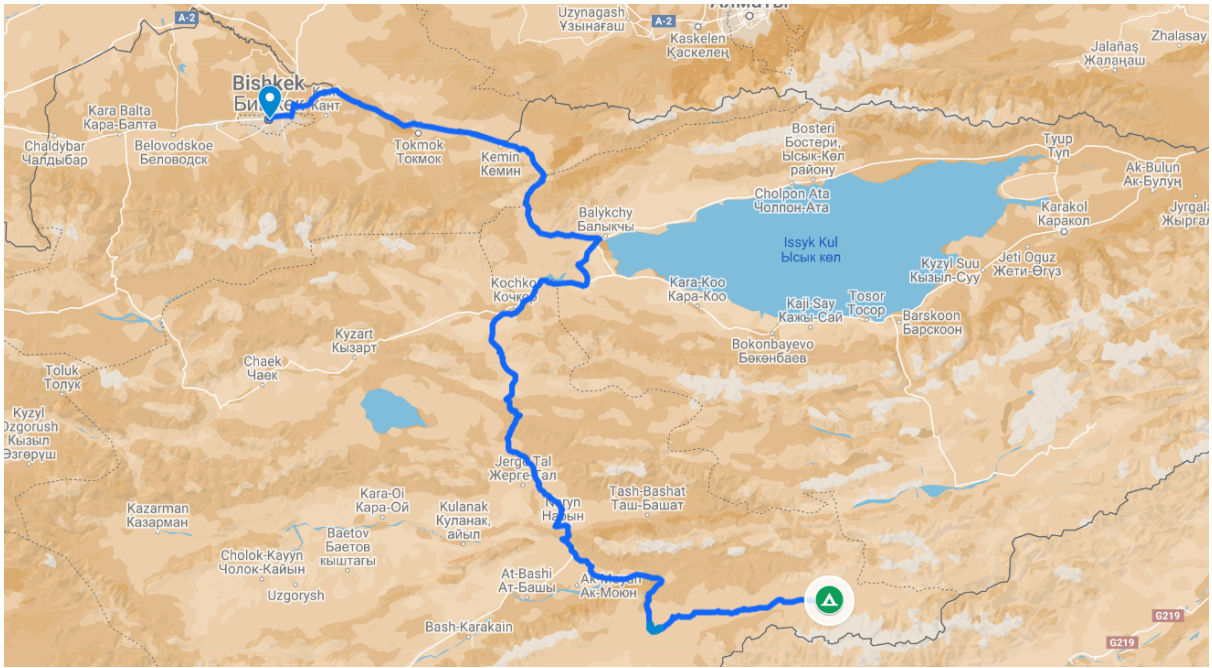


Image 2: Journey from Bishkek to basecamp

## Basecamp setup



Image 3: Life at base camp



When we drove into the valley there was a lot of snow on the ground, and having crossed the river in the Gaz 66 (to some excitement) the driver didn't want to go any further citing the snow as an obstacle, although the lateness of the day may have been weighing on his mind. Had we realised how far we were still from the glacier we might have put up more resistance to being dropped here. When the snow melted a day or so later we could see tracks from another truck which had obviously driven much closer to the glacier.

## Advanced basecamp (ABC)

ABC was set up where the glacier started to level off, just on the edge of the horseshoe of the Kyzyl Asker mountains. We probably could have gone a bit further in to be closer to the mountains, but it was snowing quite hard and we were fairly exhausted from carrying kit up the glacier and our ability to judge distance took a bit of calibrating. The benefit of being slightly further out on the glacier meant that we received more sun and avoided worse weather than had we set up further up the glacier.

The walk into ABC was across the plain where you have to cross the river, which can be done at multiple points in big boots without getting wet. Then following the glacial river bed up to the moraine. We took a path in between the two glacial lakes and up onto the Kyzyl Asker glacier. The actual glacial travel was always without incident and the crevasse's (mostly low down) were easily avoidable or covered in solid bridges.

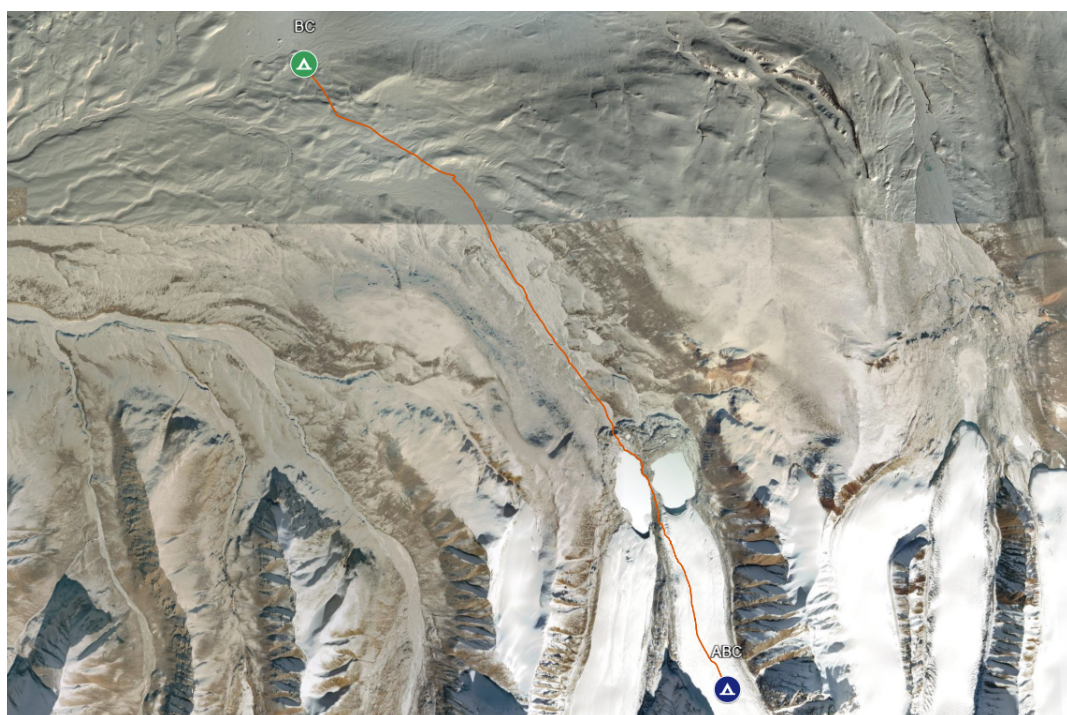


Image 4: Satellite image showing trace of the route from basecamp to advanced base camp.



*Image 5-7: Scenes from advanced basecamp*

## Food

ITMC took us to a supermarket near the hostel we stayed at in Bishkek. This is where we bought most of the food; Pasta, rice, noodles, tea, coffee etc. We also went to Osh Bazaar in Bishkek, where we bought; fresh vegetables, a disc shaped nougat type Krygy sweet, which in hindsight should have brought more of than the trail mix, and what we originally thought of as white balls of sugar but turned out to be a very dry cheese ball, akin to eating a salty ball of chalky cheese. Very popular with the locals but met with mixed reviews from the team.

Bakit the cook purchased the meat and some other items such as bread, before joining us on the truck. The meat was mostly chicken, with a little beef or horse in the first few days. As the trip went on, Bakit started to deep fry the bread as it was going stale. To start with this was delicious as well as calorific (with mayonnaise), but it did start to affect people's bowel movements.

We found that we bought far too much trail mix and became sick of it relatively quickly, and were disappointed to have to carry lots back down from ABC. The box each of snickers and twix were what we mostly ate while out on the hill.

Meals at ABC were a mixture of packet noodles with sauce, supplemented with cured sausage and cheese. We also cooked up a load of pasta at base camp which we took up so that we could just reheat it. Bakit had also bought some tins of horse meat which we added to some of the meals. We used two MSR reactor stoves (a small and a large) to cook with and melt snow. For the 7 days we spent at ABC we took 12 gas canisters and used about 9.

## Weather

The weather was very changeable. When we arrived there was a lot more snow on the plain than we expected. In our experience the storms would often be fairly short lived, so you could often wait for them to pass over then carry on. We used the garmin in reach to obtain weather forecasts for both base camp and ABC, as they could be quite different.

There seemed to be two distinct weather formations; one in the plain and one over the mountains. Storms would travel Eastwards up the plain and you could be on the glacier or higher and watch them pass by without reaching up the hill. Other times they would get blown up into the mountains. There was also a localised weather pattern coming over the mountains, again usually slightly west to east.

While the storms could be relatively short lived, it did mean that the rock faces would be continuously covered with snow. This made it quite hard for rock climbing as crack systems would be either filled with snow or melt water.

Looking at images of previous expeditions it seems that there was relatively little ice formed and much more snow, see for example '[Take a walk on the wild side](#)' climbed in 2015. The Kyzyl Asker Glacier was wet for the entire trip, whereas on previous expeditions you can see that it is dry. Any tracks we made were invariably filled in the next day. The boulder perched on an ice pinnacle behind ABC also fell over whilst we were resting at basecamp. Perhaps another indication that it was warmer than normal.

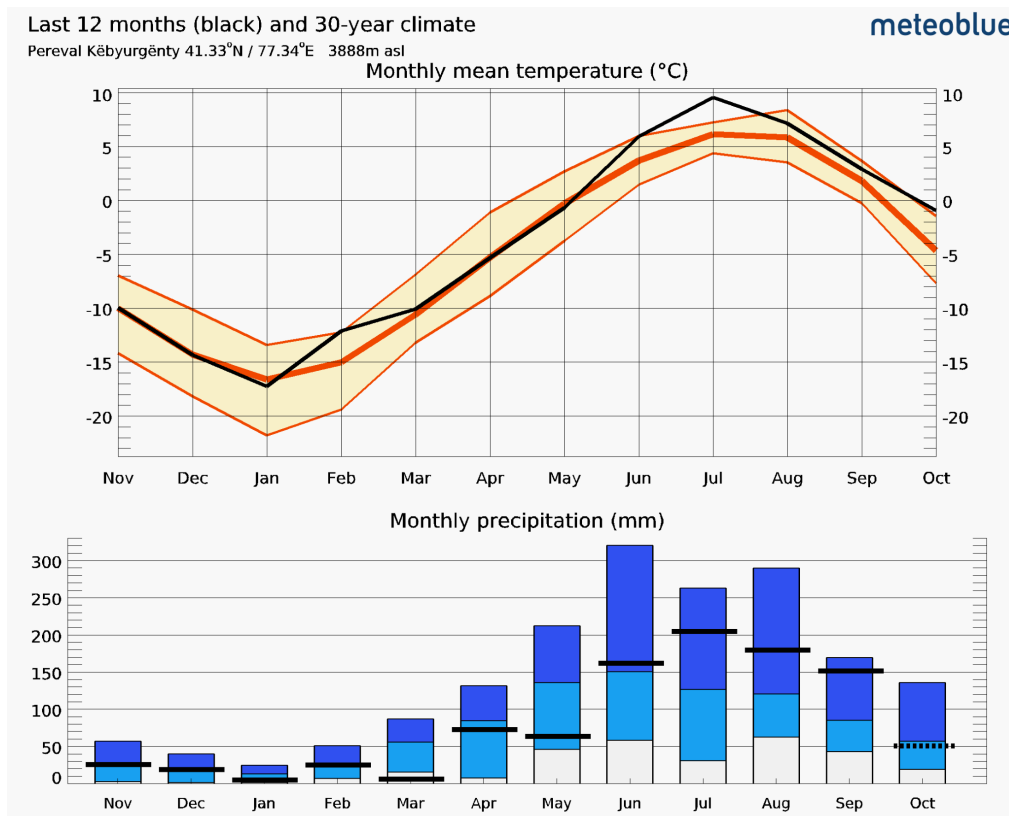


Image 8: Climate data for [Pereval Käbyurgenty](#) 10km to the NW of basecamp

## The climbing and future potential

After having established an advanced basecamp with the effort required to establish and running out of food this only gave time to walk higher up the glacier and scope out options for our return. After returning basecamp, resting and gathering more food we had a week before we would need to start shuttling gear back.

The first proper look at the faces on Pik Zabor and Pik Vernyi inspired us all. The faces are very impressive, characterised by impressive slabs of granite largely featureless except some tafoni weathering intersected by some larger gully and chimney systems. A giant northern corries with the biggest walk in ever! Generally we found that there weren't any obvious continuous crack systems that made obvious rock climbing objectives. There was one crack system that led to about a third of the way up the face, but otherwise more limited.

We spent more time inspecting some options on Pik Zabor as the climbing looked more amenable. Of the possibilities a large chimney system leading to slabs on the northerly summit seemed a good first objective.

### Pik Zabor - Attempted unnamed route

On the 10th of September we had our first climbing day. The objective was a wide chimney system on Pik Zabor. After an alpine start we made it to the bottom of the route just after day break. Climbing in two teams of four we set off after gearing up after the short snow slope. The glacier in the valley is fairly flat and there is not that much in the way of glacier, bergschrund or snow slopes before reaching the face.

The first two pitches were fairly straightforward on snow with some short sections to move between grooves. Tom and Calum were ahead and reached the first steep step in the route. Unfortunately this turned out to be a deep chimney that was capped with a small amount of ice on the bounding slab. After a couple of attempts at this pitch it was clear that the climbing was too thin and lacking in protection to get up safely (see inset image). Meanwhile Clem and Nick invested a crack to the left that looked like it might be aidable. After much scratching and sweating Clem was able to aid the pitch, bypassing the difficult step. However on arrival there was lots of deep snow and with much time wasted it was decided that making any decent progress on the route that day wasn't likely. With more ice and less snow this difficult step and subsequent chimney system would be more amenable.





Image 9: Topo of Pik Zabor showing attempted line and the top half of Dry Ice Queen.

## Pik Gronky 'If you like piña coladas' 700m TD+ VII

After a rest day and a trip up the glacier to scope out the options on Pik Gronky we decided to attempt a route gaining the West ridge via a gully system behind the main face. After an early start and a couple of hundred metres of snow slopes we arrived at the ice fall (WI3) protecting the main gully. Tom climbed this by head torch and by the time both teams were up it was daylight. After a couple of hundred metres in the gully we reached the notch above the lower face.

From here the route finding and climbing was not so straightforward. Taking a burly corner right at the crest of the ridge we found ourselves needing to put on rock boots for a crack and groove pitch (E2). This brought us to some lower angle ground, and in a couple more pitches we were beneath that last steep pitch before we could gain the summit ridge.

Route finding was not obvious and with some awkward linking pitches we were getting to late afternoon. After some thrutching on the last steep pitch to get everyone up we took a short break and decided we'd continue up towards the summit with the aim of heading down the North ridge to a col then back down a gully to the glacier. After moving together on broken ground, then 60 degree snow covered ice we arrived at a rock outcrop a hundred or so metres below the summit. By now it was almost dark and with the next section of ridge looking exposed we decided it best to descend and spend the night as best we could on a ledge a few pitches down. We arranged the bivvy as best we could, putting gear on the ground and wrapping our legs in whatever we could (bags, coats, foil blankets) and spent an uncomfortable night trying to avoid the worst of the cold.

Eventually light came and we abseiled a gully adjacent to the route putting in peg and nut belays to reach the gully.

### Route description

- **200m snow slope Scottish grade I**
- **P1:** WI3 40m - dirty, but generally solid ice with a snow patch blocking the exit to the left
- **200m snow slope Scottish grade I** leads to the top of the gully.
- **P2:** M7 25m - From top of the notch follows the corner furthest back. Nice corner layback.
- **P3:** E2 30m - From the ledge climb into the hole then take the crack on the right which leads into an awkward groove that steepens at the top with some marginal protection. Sharp scrattly granite.
- **P4:** S 15m - Follow the ledge along and over a short bulge to reach the next ledge
- **P5:** HS 25m - Follow the ledge system right, across a notch and around a corner and follow the slabs up the a ledge beneath a narrow snow gully
- **P6:** M4 45m - Follow the narrow snow gully to an awkward move around a rounded boulder and into the next crack to gain the open gully above.
- **P7:** M6 25m - From the left hand end of the gully take the obvious crack in the top of the face above. Gain a ledge via a corner crack then follow another steeper crack to a hole then a steeper exit via a chock stone.
- **150m of mixed ground then 60 degree snow covered glacier** takes you to an outcrop where the ridge flattens off a little.



Image 10: Topo of Pik Gronly showing the line of 'If you like piña coladas' and gully system taken by 'Take a walk on the wild side'



## **Pik Gronky other routes**

The face of Pik Gronky has a series of crack systems running up the initial slabs and into the steeper higher section. On our last day of climbing Clem and Nick climbed three pitches at about VS/HVS before the weather turned again. The crack system continues up the face and so the route could likely be taken to its logical conclusion. The rock quality was not so great on this upper part of the face with more 'scrattly' rounded rock.

Calum and Tom meanwhile went to look at an ice fall to the right of the gully of 'If you like Pina Coladas'. They climbed a single pitch of ice before rappelling. We subsequently discovered that this is likely the start of 'Take a walk on the wild side' climbed by a Slovenian team in 2015. The ice fall that appears to be the crux for entering the upper gully system was very thin, much more so than when the first ascent was made.



*Image 11: Topo of the rock route 'Bakit' on West Face of Pik Gronky*



*Image 12: Shot of the ice fall climbed by Tom and Calum leading to ice fall of 'Take a walk on the wild side'*



*Image 13: A close up of the same route with Calum on lead*

## Future potential

There still remains a lot of highly aspirational lines on the faces of the Kyzyl Asker Glacier. As previously noted there weren't extensive crack systems on the main faces of Pik Zabor or Pik Vernyi, so rock climbing on these faces would potentially require some fixed gear in places to make progress. There are numerous deeper corners and gullies though that can be climbed mixed. There are a number of these on Pik Zabor, although the most obvious is taken by the line of Dry Ice queen. Even with these gulley systems they are often not continuous in spanning the whole face, so likely require some harder linking pitches.

The West Face of Pik Gronky has more potential for rock climbing without fixed gear with a few more crack systems in the upper half. There are also plenty of interesting mixed routes further round onto the South West face, one notably to the right of 'Take a walk on the wild side' that would gain access to the upper face.

During our trip we took a collective of photographs of the faces in the valley, which people can view [here](#). Please feel free to get in touch with us for more info if useful.

## **Learnings and useful information about the area**

The main issue we had on the trip was the fact that we were dropped off by the truck so far from the glacier. We measured the distance between BC and ABC as about 14km. This had a major impact on our expedition as we spent about 8 days in total ferrying kit and food up to ABC. While we were able to acclimatise while doing this, it wasn't optimal as we could have used this acclimatisation time to explore and scope out potential lines and descent routes.

As we all booked our flights separately and were setting off from different areas of the UK, we all ended up on 3 different flights coming into Bishkek and back to London. This cost us extra in airport transfers and caused unnecessary delays. All getting the same flight next time.

Would recommend not to assume that the logistics company has detailed knowledge of the area you are going to. Make sure to talk through in detail access to basecamp location and directions.

We used a Garmin inReach which we used to get weather reports and information from people in the UK. Also was our only method of calling for emergency assistance if there were any issues.

Bringing skis for glacier travel would have made things a lot easier as well as saving time.

We brought over 300 metres of static rope as well intended for fix lines but the short amount of time the weather allowed once we had established ABC meant we just attempted the routes alpine style. This was a waste of time and effort bringing the ropes and jumar kit up to ABC and back down. Not to mention the 5000 odd round trip from the uk and back.

## Flora and fauna

At first glance the plain seemed muddy, boggy and pretty desolate. But after a day or so you become accustomed to the depth of the wildlife there. There was an abundance of plant life, mostly very small and low to the ground due to the harsh weather conditions.

Mice, ground nesting birds, large birds of prey, many footprints including some sort of fox and larger, perhaps wolves or Eurasian lynx. We even saw small mammal footprints high on the mountain on our attempted route on Pik Zabor which we suspect was a mountain weasel.

A troop of wild horses passed through the valley towards the end of the trip and while we were at ABC, Bakit (and prints in the mud) reported that yak had also passed by base camp.

There was a good diversity of plants, including abundant edelweiss with some interesting species growing out of the muddy steppe and in the braided glacial river. On a hike to collect gear Bakit dug up a thistle (like that shown in image 19) and cut out and washed the root for us to eat (delicious!).



*Image 14: Blue flowers growing out of the muddy Tian Shan montane steppe*



Image 15: A bird of prey resident near our basecamp ([Upland buzzard?](#))





*Image 16-17: Plants growing in the braided glacial river bed on the hike from BC to ABC*



*Image 18-19: Other plants prevalent on the montane steppe where our base camp was located.*



*Image 20 mammal footprints in the mud.*

## **Finances**

We slightly underestimated the cost of the trip. Possibly because we did initial costs back in 2019 when we first applied for funding for this trip but it was cancelled due to covid and inflation has increased the cost of everything, which we didn't adjust enough for. We also decided to employ the services of a cook and rent tents which we hadn't originally budgeted for. We were unable to get insurance via the BMC so went with global rescue, which was a higher cost than expected.

We all spent differing amounts on personal kit and a few items of group kit which aren't included below. Everyone bought new mountain boots. We received a 10% discount from Banana Fingers for the kit we bought from them, which was appreciated.

## Projected costs

Expedition Costs		Expedition Income	
International travel	£3,088	Number of Members	4
Domestic flights and transport	£3,895	Amount of Personal Contributions	£1,625 x 4
Permits and peak fees	NA	Details of grants already approved	none yet will be applying for BMC grant
Liaison Officer or Sirdar	£500	Other sources including sponsors	
Expedition members' insurance	£1,503		
Porter / staff Insurance	NA		
Food and fuel (base camp and above)	£900		
Agency fees if applicable	£626		
Porters and pack animals	£301		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£10,790</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£6,500</b>

## Actual costs

Expedition Costs				Expedition Income	
Flights	600	4	2400	personal contributions	9116
Extra Baggage	150	4	600	MEF grant	3500
Insurance with Gobal rescue	750	4	3000	BMC grant	350
Travel insurance	120	4	480		
Food in supermarket	320	1	320		
Food Osh Bazaar	50	1	50		
extra day in Bishkek	100	1	100		
ITMC total costs (break down below)	5566	1	5566		
Mountain Medical Training	150	3	450		
<b>Total</b>			<b>12966</b>		<b>12966</b>

Below is the breakdown of costs from ITMC, In dollars. Note exchange rate at the time was roughly \$0.79 to £1

Date	Description	Number of days	Amount, USD
	<b>TRANSPORT</b>		
August 28	Arriving, transfer from the airport to Bishkek		120
August 29	minibus Bishkek-Balykchy		170
	Lunch on the way		32.5
	GAZ 66 Balykchy - Naryn - BC		1450
September 19	GAZ 66 BC - Naryn - Balykchy		1450
September 20	minibus Balykchy - Bishkek		170
	Lunch on the way		32.5
September 21	transfer from the Bishkek to the airport		80
	<b>Total transport</b>		<b>3,505</b>
	<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>		
August 28-29	Freelander hostel		135
August 29-30	Hotel "Char" Naryn - for one person (including breakfast) 22 \$\p.person		132
	dinner at the hotel "Char" 7 \$\p.person		42
September 19-20	Hotel "Char" Naryn - for one person (including breakfast) 22 \$\p.person		132
	dinner at the hotel "Char" 7 \$\p.person		42
September 20-21	Freelander hostel		135
	<b>Total accommodation</b>		<b>618</b>
	<b>EQUIPMENT</b>		
	Mess-kitchen-tent – (22 \$ \p.day)	20	440
	BC tent Marmot 3 per (6,5 \$\p.day)	20	260
	Cook tent – (4,5 \$\p.day)	20	90
	cook for the expedition (include food for the cook)	20	1000
	Kitchen and Dining utensils (1 set 3,5\$\p.day)	20	70
	Gas cylinder 28 litres x 2		40
	small camping gas cylinders, 230 gr (8 \$)		160
	gas stove for kitchen for two pots (3,5\$\p.day)	20	70
	5 chairs, 2 tables (12 \$/day)	20	240
	expedition box for inventory	20	138
	<b>Total equipment</b>		<b>2,508</b>
	Border permit 30 \$\p.person		150
	<b>Total</b>		<b>6,781</b>

## Expedition log

This is an edited version of the personal log of Clem Attwood.

- **Wednesday 30th August - Arrived at basecamp (BC)**  
Snow on the ground
- **Thursday 31st August - hiked gear to moraine.**  
Mostly dry but overcast in places.
- **Friday 1st September - rest day.**  
Storms passing through the valley. Got a bit of it in the afternoon.
- **Saturday 2nd September - Moving to advanced basecamp (ABC)**  
Clear start to the day. Made fairly quick progress to a camp just below the moraine.  
Watched storm crossing the valley below and eventually it hit us about 2pm. Trekked our climbing gear from the Boulder to the river connecting the glacial lakes before heading back to our camp early evening.
- **Sunday 3rd September - 2nd day of moving gear to ABC**  
Some storm and rain/snow overnight. Weather was generally clear on approach up to moraine and then glacier. Some Sun and cloud. Clear whilst setting up ABC then heavy storm with some snow in the late afternoon before clearing up before dusk.
- **Monday 4th September - Bringing climbing gear to ABC**  
Snowed heavily overnight, about 20 cm. Woke to the sound of Nick banging snow off the top of their tent to stop the ingress - mistook for serac collapse at first. Had planned to get up before dawn to make the most of the frozen snow on the glacier, but decided to cancel as there was no point with fresh snow. Got up at 8 and ate noodles. Waited for fog to clear before heading down to get climbing bags from moraine. Was sunny with a little cloud on the way down, but as we got closer to ABC it started to snow heavily, so we took to tents.  
  
Was v hard work hiking gear up the glacier. Callum set a vicious pace. It was quite demoralising to have both the previous afternoon and now the mornings tracks buried. Making our life much harder work. Callum seems somewhat immune to the cold and will happily continue digging and melting water 💪. Prospect of climbing anything seems a long way off with such challenging conditions. Miss the home comforts, although a tent seems a surprisingly good sanctuary even in the poorest conditions.
- **Tuesday 5th September - Climbing reccy up the glacier**  
Day started overcast, with light snow, but cleared up and only some passing squalls in the valley nr basecamp. We walked up to recon Pik Zabor and other faces. Snow was more forgiving so got further than expected. Good morale boost seeing lots of potential with exciting lines. Got back to ABC at midday and packed and hiked back down to BC arriving at 17:00. Had very welcome food after finishing most of ours at ABC. Bakit made chicken stew with beans and vegetables and we ate a tonne of cookies. Played many rounds of shit-head before heading to bed. Amazing Milky Way over head.
- **Wednesday 6th September - Rest day**  
Overnight it was clear and the coldest we have had it. The river next to BC was partly frozen

in the morning. I woke in the middle of the night and spent several hours thinking about the routes, work and a 40th birthday party complete with dosa, soul/swing band, disco and all me mates 😊. Today was a rest day. Read my book (chapter on cancer was fascinating). Did some tent repairs and had a wash in the stream. Very cold northerly wind for the start of the day, warming as it turned SW. Mountains were mostly clear although a patch of cloud passed over in the afternoon.

- **Thursday 7th September - Rest day**

Weather was cold. Snow overnight so we spent much of the day in the mess tent. Built the start of a snowman. Got cabin fever and started to get irritable. We decided to wait another day given a poor forecast for the following day. Went to bed early.

- **Friday 8th September - Rest day and prep**

Slept well despite having a slightly dodgy stomach. Suspect it might be deep fried egg bread after our minimal ABC diet. Woke to nicer weather. Had a fun day learning new knots (re-threaded alpine butterfly), packing food and going bouldering. Bakit fell off and grazed his hand quite badly. Tom and Callum swam in the lake. Played shit-head and drank the rest of the vodka.

- **Saturday 9th September - BC to ABC**

Weather was nice most of the day, but some snow came in at about 5/6 just as we were having pasta. Walk up was not too bad. Snow on the glacier wasn't as bad as previously. Prepped for climbing the next day, drank sweet tea and chatted about climbing.

- **Sunday 10th September - attempt on chimney on Pik Zabor**

Got up 3:45 and left 4:30 (on time!). Walk in was a bit slower than anticipated due to deeper snow and further than anticipated. Snow slopes at the base were not that long and started up the route just after it got light. First pitch was fairly steady with one slightly tricky move to get into a secondary groove. Next pitch linked to 'cleft' pitch. Callum and Tom were in front and Callum had a bash at pitch. Turned out to be a very awkward chimney with an unprotectable exit on thin ice. Callum handed the lead to Tom, so I climbed back down and started looking for other options. Found a dry crack to the left which looked aidable so got Nick to join and started up that. Aid was easy enough C2, but hard work with crampons and bag. Slipped and landed on gear. Exit was exciting and followed by a fairly unprotectable wollow in snow. Nick jumared up and poked his head over the next step to get a look at the remainder of the route. Tom and Callum bailed meanwhile and we followed shortly, realising we would struggle to make any meaningful progress that day. \*before launching into the aid pitch I noticed some small (2cm) paw prints running along the snow towards the cave of the cleft pitch. Reckon it's a small mammal e.g. ferret living nearby. For the rest of the day we had a look at some of the other aspects of Pik Zabor before heading back to ABC. Weather was good all day.

- **Monday 11th September - rest day**

We were all feeling pretty tired after two days of activity so decided on balance to take day off. Another very hot day with oppressive heat. Me and Nick walked up the glacier to check out the intended route for the following day on Pik Gronky/Belshaya White for the next day. Drone footage proved useful, showing lack of ice on the intended route, but another gully with an icefall step that was more complete leading to the notch in the ridge. Lay down in tent to escape the sun for a while then finished prep for the next day - a pleasingly much lighter bag this time!

- **Tuesday 12th September - climbing day**

Got up at 02:30 and left just after three. Callum and Tom headed out just before us and Nick forgot his helmet so we bust a gut to catch up with them on the approach, finally reaching them as Tom was about to lead the ice pitch leading to the upper gully. Tom looked a bit sketchy on the pitch and me, Nick and Callum watched on nervously as Tom beat his way through the bank of snow covering the ice in the exit groove. Nice one Tom! The ice was more solid than first appeared, but the exit was a little narrow and awkward. Topped out to see Tom disappearing up the gulley above. Stunning views of the Kyzyl Asker range from here! We slogged up the gulley and found the other searching a way up from the notch. After refreshments I checked out a corner crack just up from where the others had looked. Looked very climbable, so descended sorted gear before going for another look. After a go in just big boots and wondering whether to switch to rock boots, Callum came for a look. He got up it first go! We all puffed and panted our way up on second with lots of swearing....

As it got dark we reached an outcrop of rock above the 60 degree snow slopes and decided we would have to ab and find shelter for a bivvy. Everyone was pretty exhausted and continuing on exposed unfamiliar terrain in the dark did not seem a good idea in our condition. After a few abseils we got back to a larger ledge just before the last technical pitch of climbing. We de-racked and chucked all our soft gear on the snow for insulation and sat on our rucksacks - we hadn't packed bivvy gear.

Weather was generally clear with a brief snow shower giving way to some very atmospheric Mountain View's. Sunshine and cloud otherwise.

- **Wednesday 13th September - retreat**

Spent the night desperately trying to keep my legs warm. Thank god for Caleb's belay jacket. I set an alarm for every two hours so we could check in on people. Amazingly we all managed to be OK on the bivy ledge till dawn. We paused as it got light mustering the energy to start our descent. I lead the abseils down the gully below our ledge creating peg and nut abseils (a first for me) and an exciting spike abseil for the last short step. Reaching the glacier we all took a moment. The descent felt fairly surreal given the lack of sleep, but all passed without issue. We got back to ABC, ate a bit of food and slept for the afternoon. Weather was fairly overcast all day with some snow showers as per usual.

- **Thursday 14th September - rest day**

Still recovering from somewhat epic previous days. Very windy overnight and forecast to be ~40km/hr gusting to 60 in the afternoon, so spent some of the morning rebuilding the ABC SW walls. Of course it didn't turn out to be that windy. Discussed climbing and return to BC plans. Decided to keep to a day and not go too crazy due to forecast high winds. Did another drone flight to check out the ice smears on the end of Pik Zabor.

- **Friday 15th - final climbing day**

Me and Nick planned to do a rock route on Pik Grinky/Belashaya White SW buttress and Tom and Callum intended to do an ice route just to the right of the ice pitch on the previous route on Belashaya White. Woke at 7 to a cold very overcast day. Had minor stomach cramps. Had porridge and headed up the glacier about 9:45. When we arrived at the buttress it was still cold so we headed up the glacier to get a better view of Zabor and Vernyi in the hope it would warm up. En route we could see Callum leading their ice route,



and Tom on our return. Morale was not high due to feeling a bit rough and tired and the cold making climbing seem unlikely. Nevertheless we got back to our climbing gear and with a faint increase in temperature we grabbed the kit and made the short snow slope approach. The temps didn't feel too bad even though it had briefly started snowing 😞. As we were just finishing gearing up Tom and Callum came stomping down the slope from their route, beaming and seemingly very happy with their route. In contrast, I didn't have much hope for rock climbing despite being about to start up the first pitch. It felt like going through the motions, but as soon as I started I found myself really enjoying the climbing, padding up easy granite slabs linking together large flakes and cracks. The sun even shone and I was immediately so happy to be there and to have given it a go. I belayed Nick up and with a bit of persuasion he took on the second pitch, another very enjoyable slab pitch leading to the corner. The half height ledge on the face seems to separate two distinct geologies. The lower half has fairly classic granite features of quite high quality and the top half rounded granite features with more tofani style weathering. Pitch 3 was the corner pitch - nice climbing with mostly hands width jamming all the way. A bit dirty and scrattly in places but enjoyable climbing nonetheless. I finished the pitch after turning the corner where the large flake crack bears right across the face. I bought Nick up and we decided we had probably pushed our luck enough with the weather so got the pegs out and built ourselves two peg belays to get us back to our boots. My toes were pretty numb by this point as the weather had turned. Just as we arrived back to the glacier the weather got even worse with strong winds and snow squalls coming up the valley. We stomped back to ABC quickly to find Callum had just finished making food 😊. Everyone was in good spirits and keen to hear about each other's climbing. Nice way to end the exped. Just to get our gear to BC now!

- **Saturday 16th September - ABC to BC**

Woke at 7 and left at 9. Did a gear run to the moraine. Cold morning with some light snow showers and gusts. Quick progress down, but felt hard work going back to ABC for the camping gear in the softening snow. Packed our gear in hot sun with some sharp gusts. Took ages to chip the front of our tent out of the now ice. Felt slightly strange leaving ABC - not wanting to stay longer in such a hostile place, but also somewhat reticent to leave behind such inspiring mountains that I may never see again. Last trip down the glacier went quickly as did the moraine. Cool on the way down, got back at 18:30, just in time for dinner (Bakit asked why we were late - apparently he had been expecting us!). Had a very welcome dinner of soup and played shit-head in Bakits tent and had a sip of Callum's whiskey. The mess tent had unsurprisingly been blown over and the cooks tent was ragged. Went to bed content at having made it back to BC in a day. 23km day.

- **Sunday 17th September - Gear collection**

I messaged Lilo to see if the truck could come a day earlier first thing. Had a chilled start after a nice warm sleep, ate watermelon and Bakit made us fried bread on request. Mixed weather with some snow showers so we ate in Bakits tent. We asked Bakit if he wanted to come for the walk to the moraine, and he seemed keen and even offered to carry some gear 😊. So we left just before midday. The walk went quickly with lots of chat, mostly about top 5 films/series. Bakit only had lightweight walking boots, so bought sliders for the river section and ended up walking in them most of the way - what a leg. Bakit dug up a kind of thistle that we had photographed and chopped out the root with his knife for use to try - pretty tasty! We arrived at the gear stash in good spirits after some brief snow

showers.

On arrival Nick told us he was feeling very spaced out and struggling with his speech - seemed worried, but thought it was maybe the coffee so we mostly dismissed it and continued sorting gear. Before leaving Nick said he was really worried and paranoid about stroke, so concerned we left and kept an eye on him. With some food he seemed to improve and eventually he seemed back to normal so we relaxed and plodded the last leg of the epic bag haul. As we left the river bed and started the final rolling hills it started heavily sleeting or snowing and visibility reduced to a couple of hundred meters. We continued on hopeful it was a characteristically short shower. Unfortunately it continued and we started getting quite wet. Guided partly by Toms trace we arrived back at camp with a couple of inches of snow on the ground. Glad to find Bakit and Callum had managed to navigate their way back also, we joined them in the cooks tents, which proceeded to get very steamy as we drank tea, chatted and watched Bakit cook us lentil soup (so good!). It felt like we were just surviving having been thrown another challenging spell of weather. I've never experienced such a prolonged period of constantly being bartered by conditions. Quite an experience. After eating and having dried off a bit we moved to Bakits tent, played cards and ate the last of the chocolate Katie had given me. What a day. No news from Lilo, so we resigned ourselves to another day at BC.

\*by this point my own smell was making me feel a bit nauseous, so I slept with my head out of the bag.

- **Monday the 17th September - last day in the Kokshaal Too**

Woke up before seven after a slightly weird nights sleep, hearing a largish mammal (fox?) outside the tent. Lay in till 8 then very sleepy joined Bakit in the cooks tent who was keeping warm making our breakfast - his cold feet had kept him awake. Drank tea with him and Nick then ate more watermelon before the others woke and we ate breakfast of veg stew with bread in it. We slowly started drying and packing our stuff. Luckily it turned out to be drier and sunnier than forecast and we relaxed not rushing to gather our stuff.

Just before midday, a messages started arriving from Katie. Only partially delivered I could see the truck would arrive today, but no indication of time. As if by magic a few moments later Callum shouted that the truck was in the river bed. I've not often seen a man as happy as Bakit in that moment - clearly the solitude and conditions had been tough on him too. The drivers handed mugs of schnapps and for a few minutes we celebrated our transport home.

I was last to get on the truck after digging in the latrine, food waste and sweeping the site. Callum put on 'If you like pina coladas' and everyone sang along as we started the long journey to Naryn.