MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION (MEF) EXPEDITION REPORT

Part 1

Expedition Name:
Kyrgyzstan Expedition 2024

MEF Reference:
24-14

Expedition Start and End Date:
30th July 2024 – 26th August 2024

Expedition Leader with Contact Details:
Patrick Hill - hille1ajg@gmail.com - +447802465461

Expedition Members and Nationalities:

- Patrick Hill (British)
- Theo Elmer (British)
- Oliver Hill (British)
- Sam Harvie (British/Cornish)

Location:

- Country: Kyrgyzstan
- Ak-Su Valley and Ashat Valley
- GPS Coordinates:
    - Ak-Su Valley Basecamp: 39°37'22.2"N 70°17'35.7"E
    - Ashat Valley Basecamp: 39°37'55.639"N 69°54'8.464"E

Summary:
The expedition aim was to explore and establish new climbing routes in the Ashat Valley of Kyrgyzstan. In the Ak-Su Valley, we climbed several established routes, including "Perestroika Crack," "La Voie de Droite," and "Reluctant Chief/Missing Mountain". Perestroika Crack (E5 6A) lived up to the hype with 25 pitches of incredible crack-climbing in a variety of styles – a big walling classic. After a five-day trek across 4 mountain passes, we arrived at the Ashat Valley. The group faced unsettled weather in the Ashat Valley with regular afternoon thunderstorms and snowfall above 3000m. Despite this, Oliver and I succeeded in completing one new limestone route named "7 O'Clock Sharp" (9 pitches up to E3). Theo and Sam attempted an obvious looking corner system, however they retreated due to extremely poor rock. Poor weather throughout the duration of the time in the Ashat, meant we explored the valley's incredible bouldering.

Part 2

Expedition Journey and Key Events:

The expedition started in the Ak-Su Valley (1st August -12th August), with a stable weather window that had just established itself. We were told by Russian aid-climbers that during the previous month, it had rained every single day. The Ak-Su Valley had climbers from a large range of countries, including Poland, Russia, Sweden and Slovenia. We shared a basecamp with 6 strong and down-to-earth Slovenians from the Slovenian Alpine Association who kindly extended an invite to us for a potential 'sandbagging' this upcoming winter in the Julian Alps. Notable climbs in the Ak Su Valley included the famous Lynn Hill free route "Perestroika Crack" (E5 6A). The weather was mainly favourable during our time, apart from a few days where heavy afternoon rainstorms turned the 1000 m granite faced into cascading waterfalls.

On the bivvy ledge of Peak Slesova after the first day of climbing Perestroika Crack

The summit of Peak Slesova (4,300m)

Back down in the Ak-Su Valley after climbing Perestroika Crack on Peak Slesova

After nearly two weeks, the team embarked on a 5-day trek to the much more remote and less developed Ashat Valley, accompanied by our two porters Ashim and Zina, 4 donkeys and 1 horse. We walked over 100km westward, parallel to the Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan border. Waking up every day, crossing over high, barren mountain passes and then descending into lush pine valleys, accompanied by 3 of your closest mates, without seeing another climber or trekker for 10 days was the highlight of the trip for all of us.

Diary of the walk from the Ak-Su Valley to the Ashat Valley

- 12th Aug, Day 1: Departed Ak-Su Valley base camp and crossed Kappa-cyy Pass (3600m).
- 13th Aug, Day 2: Continued the trek through Ak Su Valley (different to previous Ak-Su).
- 14thAug, Day 3: Crossed Ak-Thobek Pass (4300m).
- 15thAug, Day 4: Crossed Uryam Pass (3700m).
- 16th Aug, Day 5**:** Crossed Ashat Pass (4140m) and arrived at Ashat Valley base camp.

Walking down Kara-Su Valley on day 1 of the walk to the Ashat Valley

Day 1 of the trek crossing the Kappa-cyy Pass (3600m). Peak Slesova can be viewed in the foreground

End of day 2 before crossing the Ak-Thobek Pass (4300m).

Day 4 crossing the Uryam Pass (3700m)

Upon arrival, we spent the first day (17th August) in the Ashat Valley walking up the lateral moraines, towards the granite walls that Yury Koshelenko had talked about in his American Alpine Club report from 2014. One definite negative of the Ashat granite walls, in comparison to the Ak-Su Valley, is that the bases of most peaks are composed of loose shale. After the first day, the weather for the next 6 days deteriorated, with frequent thunderstorms and snow at higher elevations leaving the granite faces above 3000m coated in fresh snow. However, further down the Ashat Valley the geology turns to limestone. The gorge reaches up to 800 metres resembling the quality and size of Taghia in Morocco.

Oliver, whilst exploring further down the valley, spotted a potential traditional free-climb following an obvious crack/corner system up to a ridge which we then believed we could follow to the top and hopefully descent. Having established in the past a multi-pitch limestone traditional route in Mexico (Hard Very Cactus, E5 5C) I knew first-hand how on-sighting limestone new routes has two major problems. 1) It is hard to judge difficulty from the ground (a general rule of thumb, if it looks moderately tricky it will be hard, if it looks hard it will be totally desperate). 2) Limestone traditional routes generally follow cracks and corners that can be difficult to protect and often are full growing vegetation. However, unlike my route in Mexico, Oliver's route choice turned out to have high quality freeclimbing up to E3 5C, on

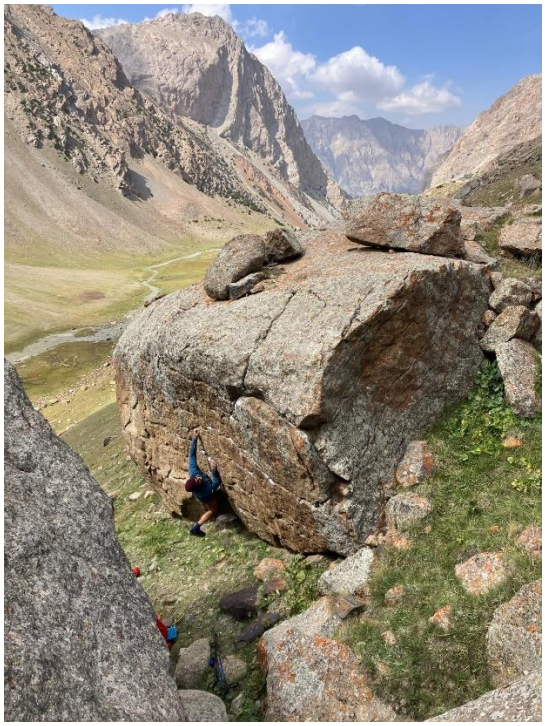
excellent blue limestone, with the benefit of good protection. We did not place a single peg or leave any gear.

The route was named ‘7 O’clock Sharp’ which was our regular dinner time, though 7 O’clock in the Ashat Valley would sometime come at 5, 6 or 8 - very rarely at 7. The same day Theo and Sam tried to establish a new route following an obvious-corner system likely unclimbed peak. However, the rock was extremely loose and unstable resulting in retreat after 4 pitches.

Oliver leading pitch 1 and 7 during the FA of '7 O'clock Sharp'

Sam and Theo before setting off into to the unclimbed choss

On the following rainy days, we focused on the world-class bouldering development in the valley. After 1 week in the Ashat Valley we followed the river down the valley for 2 days arriving the village of Özgörüsh on the 25th August, before transferring to Osh the following day. A massive thank you to Ashim and Zina for their guiding, knowledge of the local area, skill with the horse and donkeys on the high passes and their filling meals. A big thank you is also needed to Maddie Cope who put in hours of work organising a larger trip to the Ak-Su and Kara-Su, who our team transferred to and from the mountains with.



Some of the incredible bouldering in the Ashat Valley

2. Original Objective of Expedition:
The primary goal was to explore the Ak-Su and Ashat Valleys for first ascents of new alpine rock-climbing routes.

- **Location:**
  - Ak-Su Valley: Repeated established routes on granite faces, focusing on multi-pitch crack climbing.
  - Ashat Valley: Exploration of granite and limestone walls for traditional climbs.
- **Notable climbs:**
  - Perestroika Crack (E5 6A, 25 pitches) - Slesova Peak (4,300m)
  - Reluctant Chief / Missing Mountain (E3 5c, 13 pitches) - Pamir Pyramid (3,700m)
  - La voie de droite (E3/4 5C, 7 pitches) – Little Russian Tower (3500m)
  - First ascent of 7 O'Clock Sharp (E3 5c, 9 pitches) – unknown/named peak (3200 m)
  - Numerous boulder FAs in the Ashat Valley

3. Secondary Objectives Achieved:

- Development of bouldering problems in the Ashat Valley during poor weather.
- Exploration of remote areas, particularly during the five-day trek between the valleys.

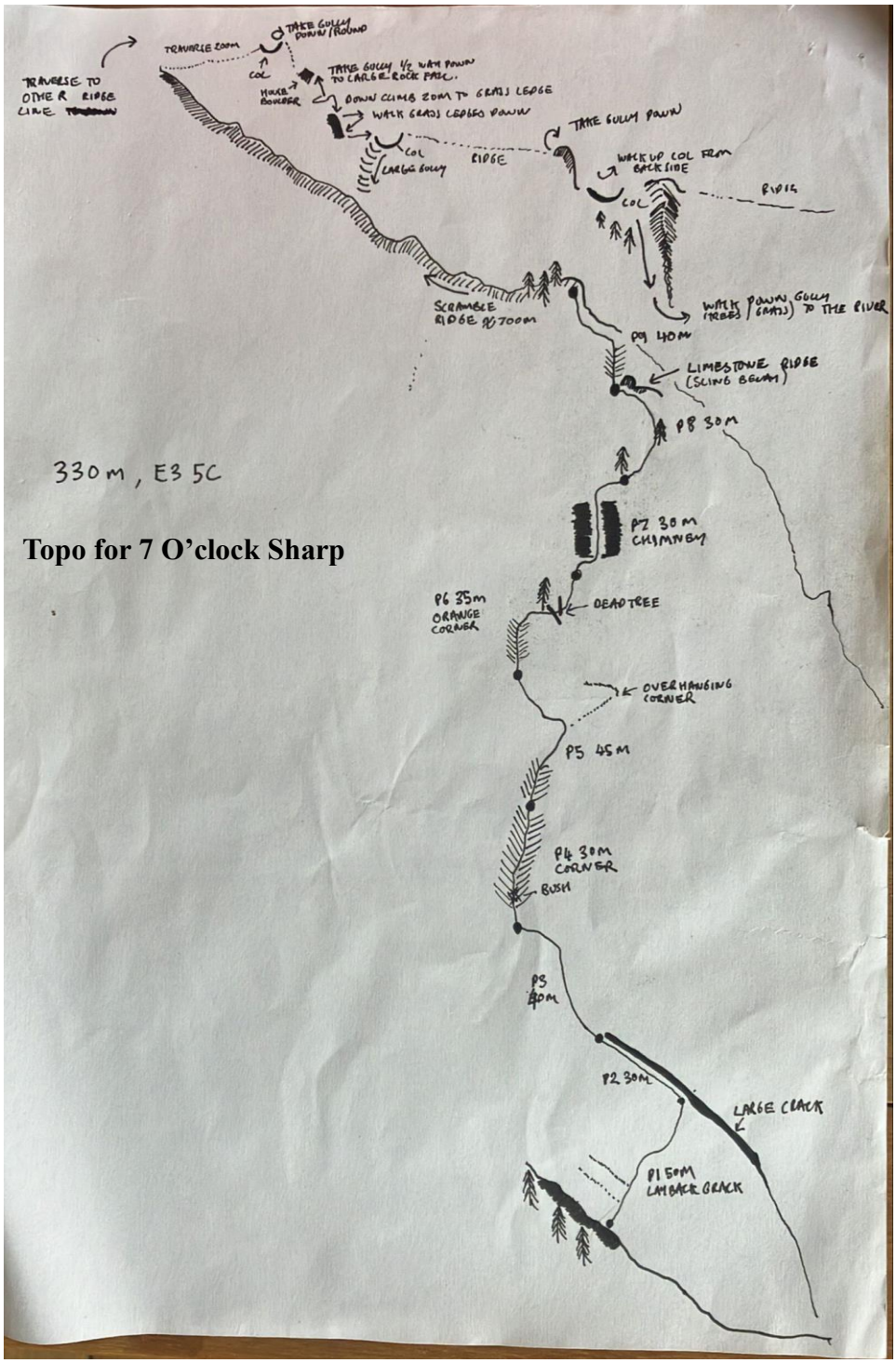
4. Geographical and Geological Observations:

- The Ak-Su Valley is primarily granite with clean, high-quality crack systems.
- The Ashat Valley presented a mix of granite and heavily stratified, loose shale bands. Further down the valley, the limestone walls offered better-quality rock.

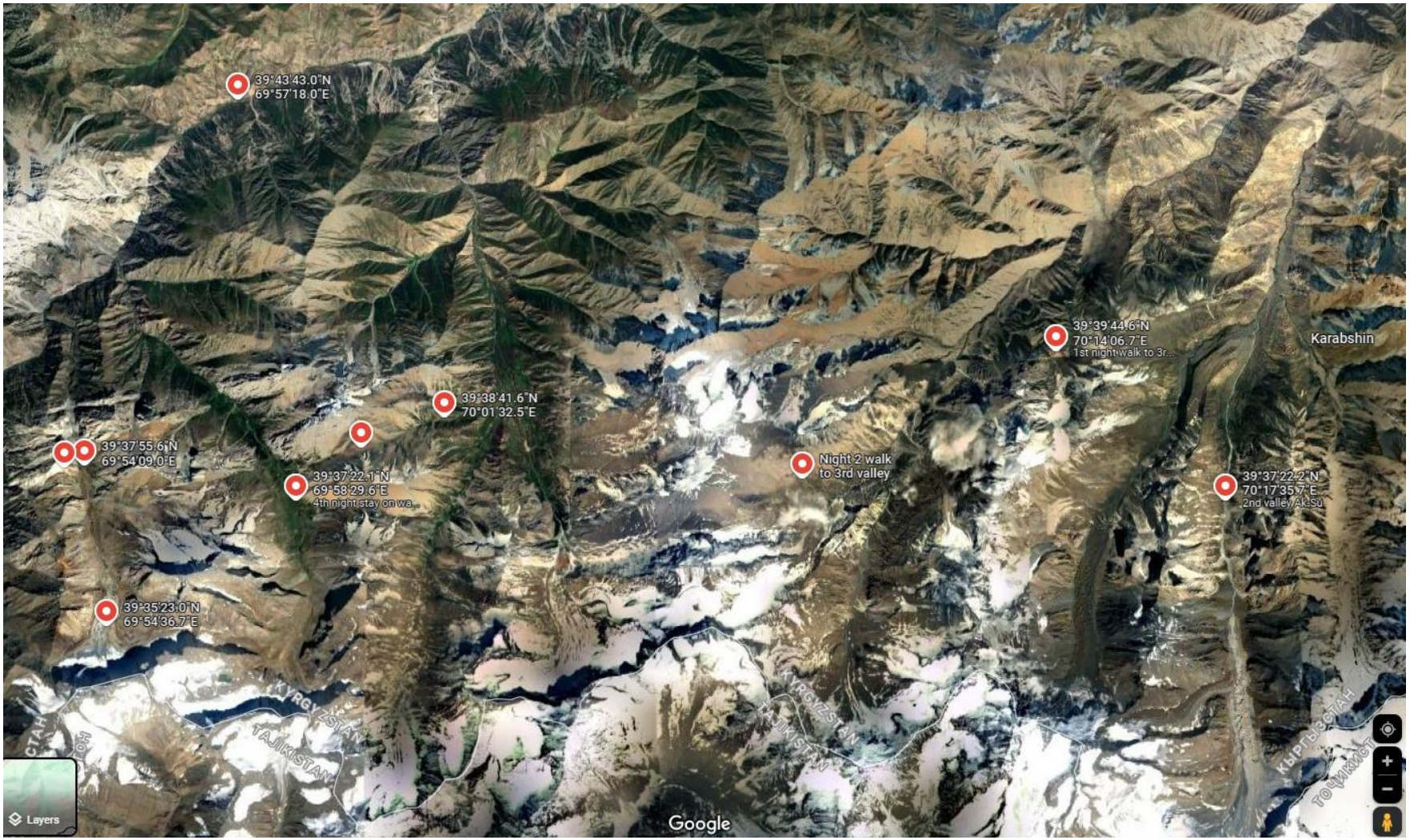
5. Google Earth Accuracy:

Google Earth provided a reasonably accurate representation of the terrain, but the scale of the features, especially in the Ashat Valley, was challenging to assess without being on the ground, especially in terms of rock quality.

6. Maps and topos:



Topo for 7 O'clock Sharp



Map of GPS coordinates during our 5 day (westward) walk from the Ak-Su to Ashat Valley

7. Suggestions for New Routes:

The Ashat Valley has significant potential for new limestone routes. Future climbers could focus on the lower sections of the valley where the limestone walls reach 800 m in the gorge and is of good quality limestone (a drill would be needed). A strong team could develop sport -multi pitches of length and quality of Morocco's Taghia's routes. Further up the valley Sabakh (5300 m) does look like it would offer high quality, hard mixed and ice routes on a wall more than 1000m high.

The Ashat Gorge - limestone walls reaching estimated 800m

8. Access and Logistics:

The 5-day trek between the Ak-Su and Ashat Valleys was one of the most memorable parts of the expedition. No other trekkers were encountered, and the route remained remote and challenging. Future expeditions should account for weather challenges and poor rock quality in certain areas. Porters and donkeys were essential for carrying gear.

9. Injuries and Illnesses:
There were no injuries among the expedition members or porters.

10. Waste Disposal:
All waste was packed out. The team adhered to Leave No Trace principles, ensuring minimal environmental impact.

11. Cultural Impact:
Local porters were employed, contributing to the local economy. The team was mindful of local cultural norms, and their interactions with the porters and villagers were respectful and collaborative.

12. Expedition Accounts and Logistics:

- **Travel and Accommodation:**
    - Accommodation: Basecamp tents provided at both Ak-Su and Ashat Valleys.
    - Porters: Ashim and Shina (with 4 donkeys and 1 horses) assisted with the 5-day trek between valleys.
    - Obtaining permits was straightforward, and the team found local support from Ak-Su Travel
    - Total expenditure per person for the trip was £2500 excluding flights.

13. Future Plans:
We are planning on giving a talk at Outside in Hathersage as well as the Hope Valley Adventure Film Festival about our experiences.

A massive thank you to the MEF for their support!