# Tien Shan 2026

*Exploring novel summits and routes in the Southwest Akshyyrak region of the Tien Shan*




**MEF Reference** 26-12 **BMC Reference** 26/21

**Expedition start and end date** Saturday 18th July 2026 to Thursday 27th August 2026

**Team members and nationalities**
Joanne Miles, British [leader]
Paul Barnes, British
Hugh Frazer, British
Fergus McMullan, British
Alex Nicholson, British
Charlotte Whitmore, British
Lesley Shipway, British [liaison in the UK]

**Supported by**
Mount Everest Foundation British Mountaineering Council Expedition Foods

**Location - Country and province and GPS coordinates of Basecamp (BC)**
Kyrgyzstan, Issyk-Kul Region, The south west part of the Akshyyrak range of mountains
Basecamp 41.711449 N, 78.178867 E (3690 m)

**Logo**
Tom Barwick, @thomas_barwick_illustrator (instagram)

**Report by**
Joanne Miles

**Summary**

This exploratory expedition in July and August 2026 aimed for first ascents on previously un-summitted peaks in the Akshyyrak region of Kyrgyzstan. Our team consisted of four experienced women mountaineers (all members of the Pinnacle Club, one of whom was our liaison in the UK) and three young, early-career mountaineers (each with ADHD and one who is diagnosed autistic). We summited a total of 21 peaks between 4057 m and 4739 m of which we believe 14 were first ascents.

We spent a total of 38 days in the country. Basecamp was at an altitude of 3690 m on a wide, flat river plain with no opportunity for descent to lower altitudes less than 3000 m for well over 80 km, therefore to ensure we were well acclimatised before arrival, we spent the first week of the expedition in the Ala-Archa national park south of the capital city Bishkek. There we stayed in the Ala-Archa hotel at 2200 m for a couple of nights then the Ratsek mountain hut at 3300 m for five nights. All of us climbed the non-technical Uchitel Peak Grade F (4535 m).

In the Akshyyrak range, the river levels on arrival were too high even for the GAZ66 4WD truck to safely cross and therefore basecamp was 5 km from where we had originally planned and on the west rather than the east side of the river. We concentrated most of our exploration therefore to the west and just one of the four primary peaks of the 23 we had identified at the planning stage was attempted, however two team members did cross the river early one morning and traversed the ridge line visible from basecamp over three days climbing a total of five summits, two of which we believe were first ascents.

**Location**

The idea for the Tien Shan initially came from Margaret Clennet, a very experienced member of the Pinnacle Club and club archivist, when initially planning an expedition to celebrate the Pinnacle Club's centenary anniversary in 2021. The Covid pandemic meant that that expedition was cancelled but the planning Lesley and Joanne had done in the lead up did not go to waste and informed this expedition.

We made personal contact with as many people as practical who had firsthand experience of the Tien Shan mountains for advice and information. These included Pat Littlejohn, Nadine Fecht of the Pinnacle Club, Caroline Koenig of the RHM (Rendez Vous Haute Montagne), John Burgess, Bob Reynolds (at an Austrian Club talk on their expedition to the Kuiluu Oroy Glacier in 2018), Elizabeth Porter (expedition leader of the Kyrgyzstan Ak-Shyyrak Expedition 2024), Greg Parsons and Vladimir Komissarov, author of 'Mountaineering regions of Kyrgyzstan' and president of the Kyrgyz Alpine Club, and Director of ITMC.

Eventually we identified the Akshyyrak region of Kyrgyzstan. This area had the advantages of several unclimbed peaks in a valley that had been accessed in 2024 thus confirming an approach to these mountains. The following previous expeditions to the area were identified.

1. Mount Everest Foundation/Eagle Ski Club 2003
2. Eagle Ski Club 2006
3. Alpine Club Ski Expedition 2007
4. Eagle Ski Club 2008
5. Kirgski 2016
6. Ski Expedition 2017
7. Salomon 2018
8. Lithuanian Expedition 2023
9. Kyrgyzstan Ak-Shyyrak Expedition 2024

Note that the 2024 expedition encountered a medical emergency, and using safety protocols that we would have emulated if necessary, they safely evacuated one of their team members. This situation (having vehicular access to Basecamp and a hospital less than a day's travel away) confirmed the ability to retreat in an emergency and was a good safety feature that heavily influenced our choice of location. Lesley's vast experience of mountaineering in the Himalaya was invaluable in guiding our eventual expedition itinerary which included a week's acclimatisation in the Ala-Archa National Park (close to the capital city Bishkek).

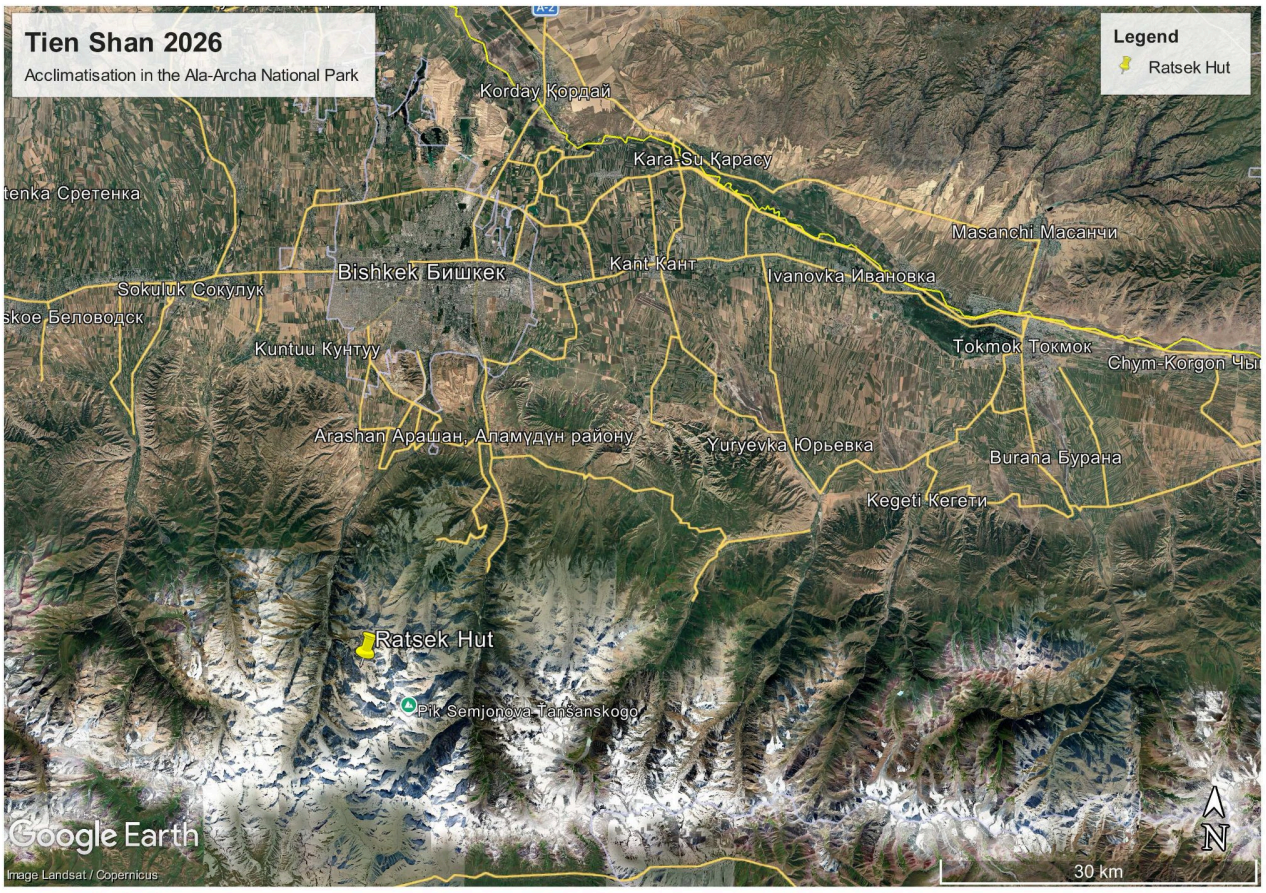



*Figure 1. Image showing the location of the Ratsek hut in the Ala-Archa National Park where the expedition team members acclimatised - Google Earth*

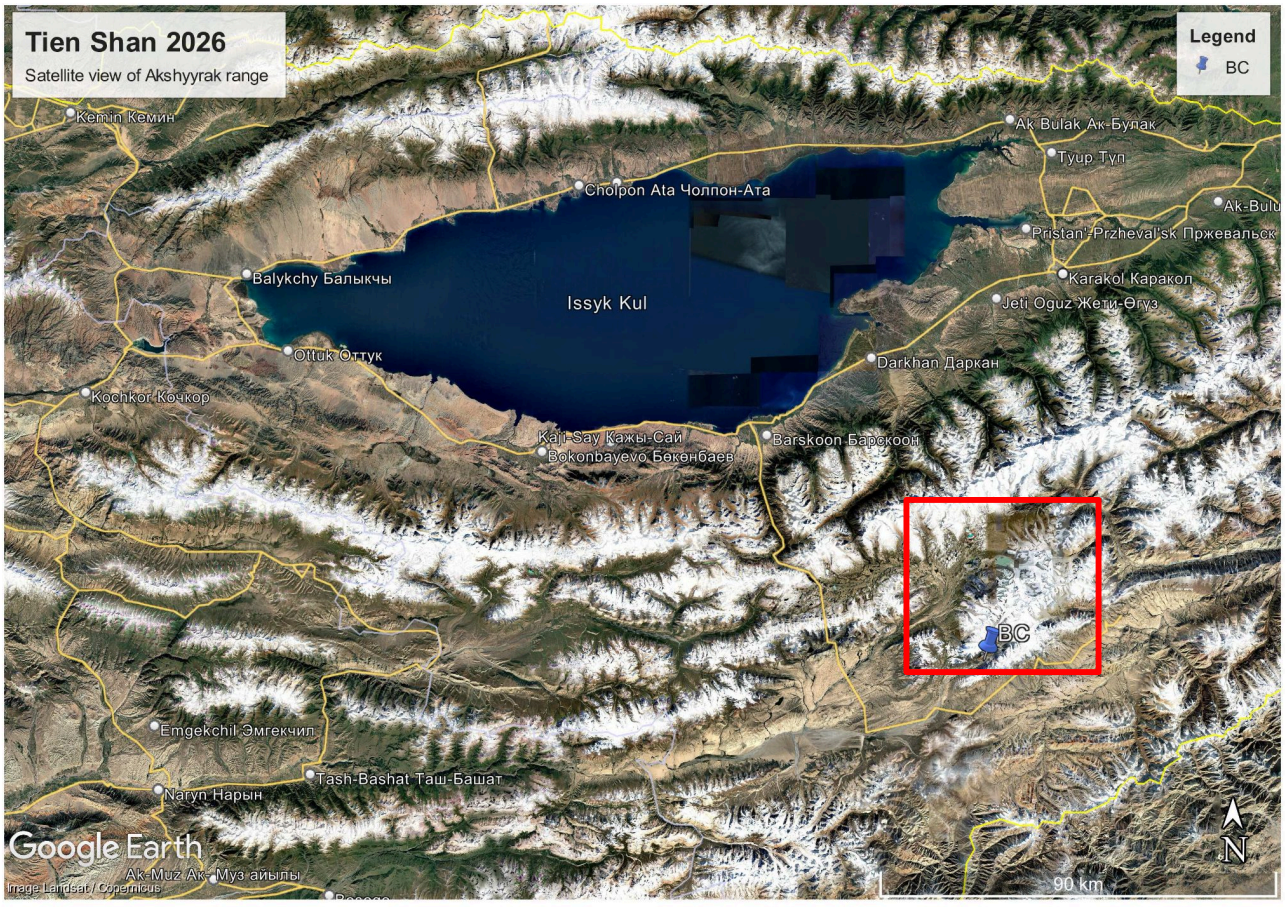



*Figure 2. Image showing the location of the Akshyyrak region - Google Earth*

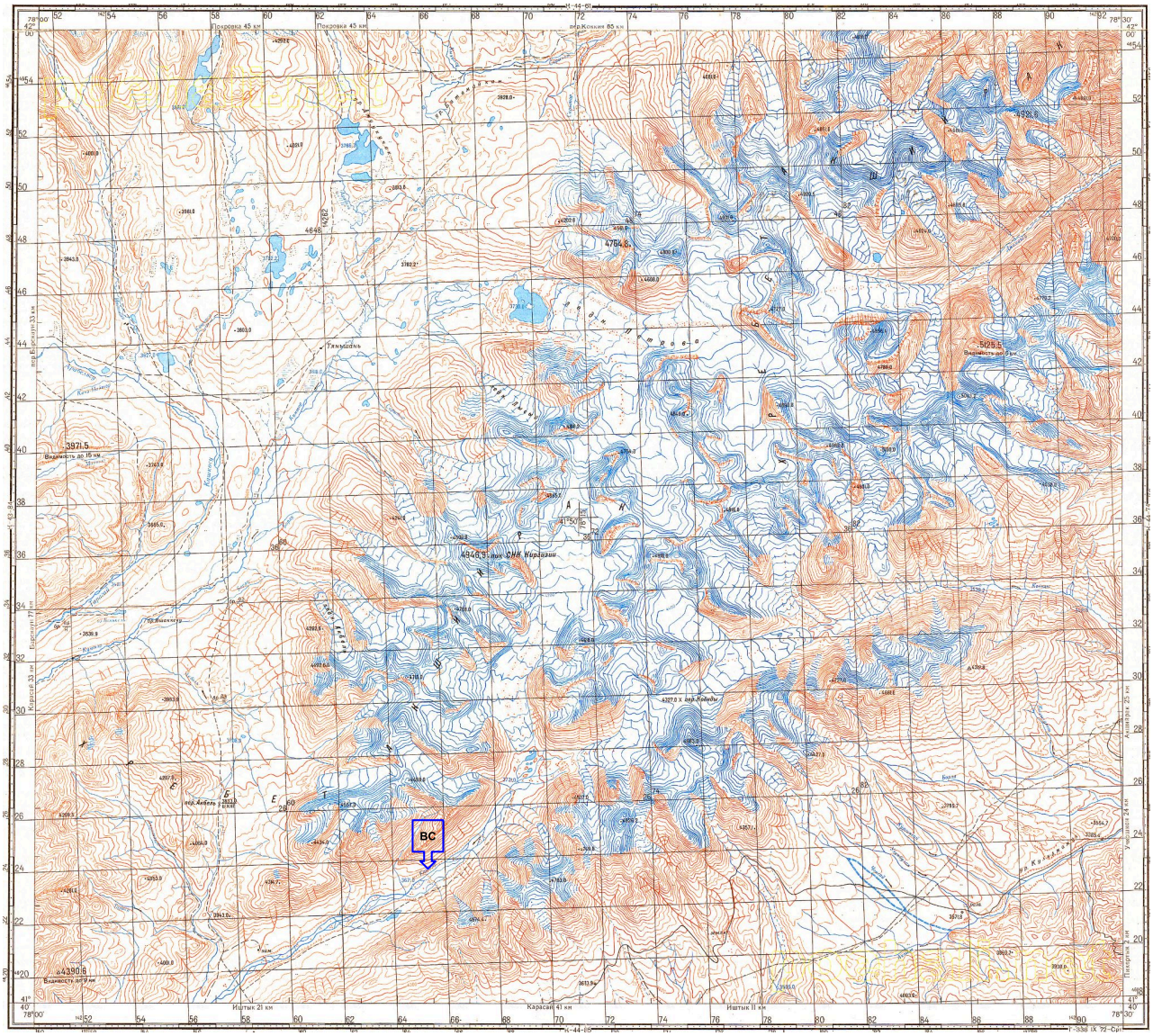



*Figure 3. Map of the Akshyyrak region with the location of basecamp - https://maps.vlasenko.net/*

**Team**

The team consisted of Joanne Miles [leader], Paul Barnes, Hugh Frazer, Fergus McMullan, Alex Nicholson, Charlotte Whitmore and Lesley Shipway [liaison in the UK].

We were four experienced women mountaineers and three young, early-career mountaineers who had progressed through multi-year training and mountaineering development. This expedition represented a progression of mentored young mountaineers participating as equals and as emerging expedition leaders, highlighted by the unique mother-son relationship between Paul Barnes and Joanne Miles participating as equals. The expedition was designed to provide the transitional experience required for future greater-range objectives for the early career mountaineers and exciting potential for virgin summits and extended expeditioning for those with more experience.

The most innovative feature of this expedition and one of its strengths was its diverse nature of its participants and the opportunities it provided for its members. There were four experienced female members of this party all of whom know each other well as members of the Pinnacle Club. The younger members are all extremely enthusiastic males, without experience of the Greater Ranges and extended expeditioning. All three have ADHD, and Hugh is diagnosed autistic, they have all experienced how these difficulties intersect with accessing outdoor adventure and currently focus their enthusiasm and energy on mountaineering as an environment for growth and personal development. Having matured in an environment of modern information technology, they brought that expertise to the expedition, which some of the older members lacked. The combining of the experience of the older members of the party together with the youth and technical experiences of

the young provided opportunities for all to safely take part in this exploratory expedition and to learn from each other.

Unfortunately prior to the expedition, Lesley, our most experienced and oldest member, had a medical complication and was advised not to go to altitude. This was disappointing for all of the team, most of all Lesley but she still remained in high spirits and was crucial in the lead up to the expedition. She provided UK support, her home was close to Gatwick airport and we were able to all gather at her home before and after the expedition.




*Figure 4. Participants left to right: Lesley Shipway, Charlotte Whitmore, Hugh Frazer, Paul Barnes, Joanne Miles, Alex Nicholson, Fergus McMullan - Mia Barwick*

**Support**

We would like to thank The Mount Everest Foundation and The British Mountaineering Council for the grant money they gave towards the expedition's costs. Their generosity is very much appreciated, as are our referees who were willing to donate their time supporting our applications: Mandy Glanvill, Penny Clay, Ray Delaney, Ed Swindley and Alan Gardner. We would also like to thank Expedition Foods for their 15% discount on freeze dried food. Finally, and most importantly we give thanks to friends and family for their support.

**Original Objective**

Our mountaineering expedition objective was to explore novel summits and routes in the Southwest Akshyyrak region of the Tien Shan, and we originally identified a total of 23 previously unclimbed peaks. See map and table below. The four principal objectives were peaks 3, 6, 8 and 9.

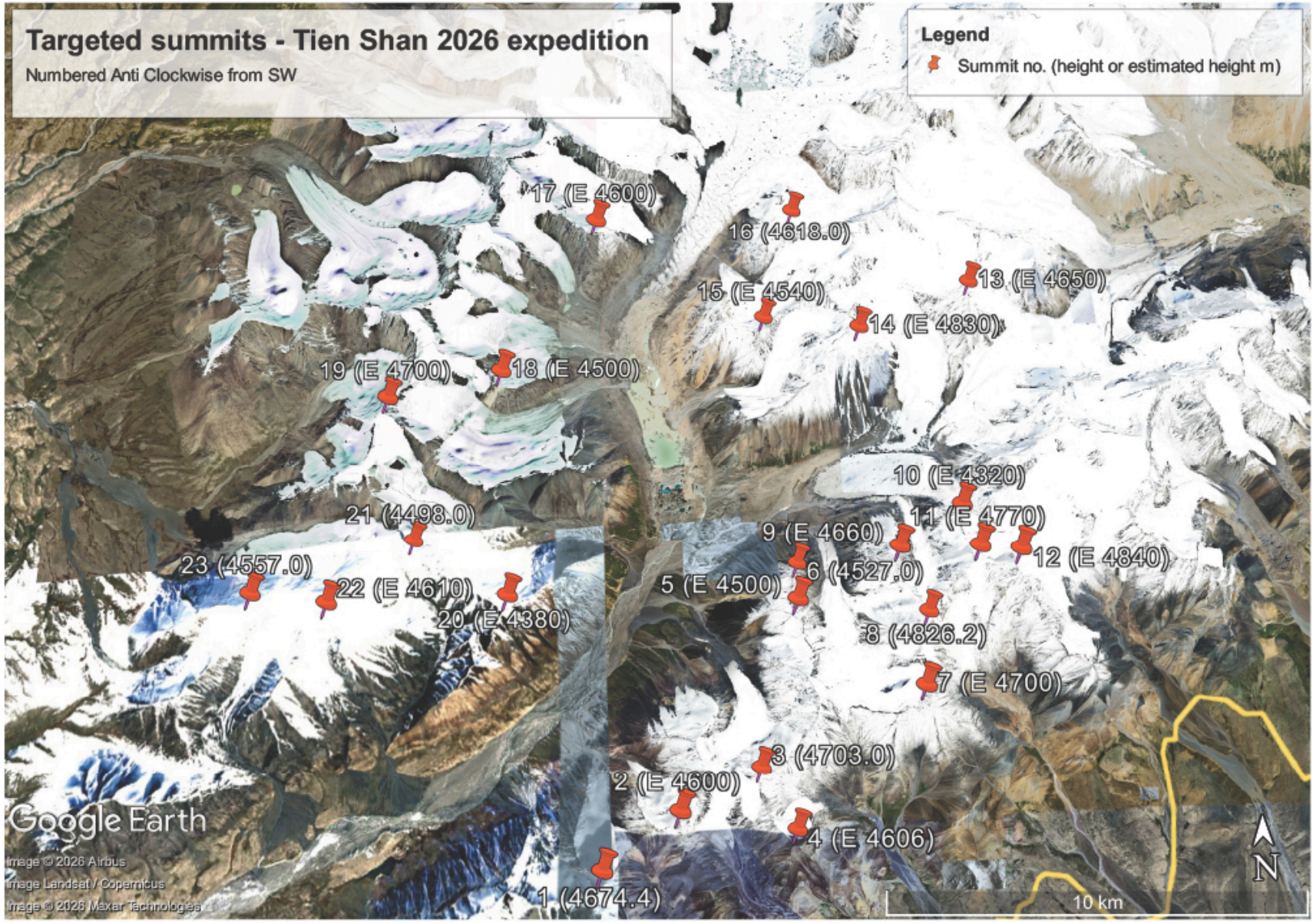



*Figure 5. Google Earth image showing a total of 23 previously unclimbed peaks the team had identified*

*Table 1. List of targeted summits identified at the planning stage with their heights and GPS coordinates - the four principal objectives are highlighted in bold*

| Targeted summit | Height as per k-44-073 1:100,000 map or estimated height (in m) | GPS Coordinates |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 4674.4 | 41.69521512418206 N, 78.20805122433954 E |
| 2 | 4600 | 41.70459772977932 N, 78.22598038068861 E |
| **3** | **4703.0** | **41.71625832552615 N, 78.23691575785162 E** |
| 4 | 4606 | 41.70001639656181 N, 78.24153095259692 E |
| 5 | 4500 | 41.73046078629282 N, 78.24520329205156 E |
| **6** | **4527.0** | **41.73949716149082 N, 78.23857867761411 E** |
| 7 | 4700 | 41.7181653889132 N, 78.26765529684378 E |
| **8** | **4826.2** | **41.72178746263639 N, 78.26393687199975 E** |
| **9** | **4660** | **41.7383690248254 N, 78.25525351101531 E** |
| 10 | 4320 | 41.74297234287098 N, 78.28713270180646 E |
| 11 | 4770 | 41.73783211476581 N, 78.28060267922443 E |
| 12 | 4840 | 41.73734086980546 N, 78.28763446158192 E |
| 13 | 4650 | 41.74214807841088 N, 78.22106580355728 E |
| 14 | 4830 | 41.77012464400183 N, 78.26015526029116 E |
| 15 | 4540 | 41.77311550575232 N, 78.24122034825193 E |
| 16 | 4618.0 | 41.78898815195983 N, 78.2542349226278 E |
| 17 | 4600 | 41.7383690248254 N, 78.25525351101531 E |
| 18 | 4500 | 41.7383690248254 N, 78.25525351101531 E |
| 19 | 4700 | 41.7383690248254 N, 78.25525351101531 E |
| 20 | 4380 | 41.7383690248254 N, 78.25525351101531 E |
| 21 | 4498.0 | 41.74198207482574 N, 78.16543108232356 E |
| 22 | 4610 | 41.7383690248254 N, 78.25525351101531 E |
| 23 | 4557.0 | 41.73501269426206 N, 78.15567271400936 E |

**Expedition account**

The team flew from Gatwick to Manas Airport in Kyrgyzstan, close to the capital Bishkek, on Turkish Airlines (via Istanbul). The day after arrival on Tuesday 21 July 2026 we walked 12 km from the entrance of the Ala-Archa National Park (located less than an hour's journey south of Bishkek) to the Ala-Archa hotel where we stayed for two nights at 2200 m to begin our acclimatisation. An attempt was made on Komsomolets Peak (4134 m) but was unsuccessful but four of the team did reach the Violet Pass.

With the aid of the gondola we walked up to the Ratsek hut at 3300 m carrying sleeping, walking and climbing kit. It was a large, well run hut with a bar and separate dining shack. There were two big dormitories with alpine bunks with covered foam mattresses. The team definitely needed the acclimatisation as simply walking the short uphill distance to the toilet shed on the moraine resulted in breathlessness. Over the five nights we climbed Uchitel Peak (4527 m), went rock climbing and explored further up towards the Ak-Say glacier.



*Figure 6. View from the summit of Uchitel Peak (4527 m) looking down on the Ak-Say glacier - Alex Nicholson*

Paul, Hugh and Joanne climbed Practice Slab (Trad, 36 m, 5.3) and Alex and Charlotte climbed 5.6 Crack (Trad, 55 m, 2 pitches, 5.6). Both routes on Formation A (Pika) accessed directly above the memorial plaques near the Ratsek hut. Alex and Charlotte later did some sport climbing immediately by the hut. Both Alex and Charlotte separately descended early and went sport climbing in the Chunkurchak Gorge.

At the ITMC offices prior to departure for the Akshyyrak region, tents were erected to check all in good order, as were the gas cylinders, stove and solar panels. The following day supplies for the expedition were bought from the Osh Bazaar with help from Aisha, the van packed and the team plus our cook, Galina, set off to a guest house run by Lubba in Tamga. The GAZ66 4WD truck arrived in the morning and all of our kit was loaded. Following more grocery shopping in the local village we then departed up the Barskoon gorge for basecamp. We arrived an hour or so before sunset and rushed to pitch the tents. River levels were high and it was not safe to cross the main Kara Say river to where we'd originally planned. The truck departed and Galina cooked up eggs and tomatoes for dinner.

The most obvious climb from basecamp was the ridgeline above us. After reconnoitring the route the afternoon before, the whole team were successful in making it to the top at 4189 m (suggested name Whitmore Peak). The ridgeline consisted of fine pristine slate culminating in a series of short, fractured, unstable rocky outcrops. We continued the line which turned north then back north eastward to reach a summit at 4408 m. There we found a plastic bottle with what on first inspection looked like a blank sheet of paper, but was in fact a message giving the names of a previous British team. Paul and Fergus continued along the straightforward ridgeline going north west over several prominent sub-peaks (suggested names Flora Peak and Fauna Peak) before

reaching a height of 4498 m (suggested name Alice Peak). No snow was encountered. The rest of the team descended via a gully from the col between 4408m and Whitmore peaks.



*Figure 7. Paul and Alex near the top of WHitmore Peak - Fergus McMullan*

After a rest day Paul, Fergus and Hugh climbed the non-technical ridge found well to the west of basecamp with the aim of reaching the high point of 4557.0 m. Fergus however hadn't recovered so stopped and rested while Paul and Hugh continued to the summit of 4434.0 m (suggested name Dora Peak). Ice shortly before 4557.0 m prevented further progress and the team re-traced their steps. Meanwhile Charlotte, Alex and Joanne climbed the nearby peak 4314.7 m and found a metal and wooden structure with a plaque written in Russian. The weather was perfect. After they'd returned to basecamp the weather deteriorated into a lightning storm and Paul, Hugh and Fergus rushed back to basecamp.

Joanne, Charlotte and Alex set off to establish an advanced basecamp to the north east and Paul, Hugh and Fergus went for a fast and light approach and repeated the ridge to the Alice Peak from the descent gully and continued west on the snow capped mountains, pitching the climbing and moving together when possible. A mega day (suggested names Wonderland, Moon and Galina Peaks at 4617 m, 4648 m and 4573 m respectively).



*Figure 8. Fergus ascending Wonderland Peak (4617 m) - Paul Barnes*



*Figure 9. The view towards Moon Peak (4648 m) - Hugh Frazer*

Charlotte rested at the advanced basecamp which they were unable to establish as far up the north Kara Say glacier as they'd hoped. The ground conditions on the moraine made progress slow and it was clear the original target of exploring the route to 4768.0 m was unrealistic and

instead Alex and Joanne ascended Pic Moutard (4417 m). All three returned to basecamp the next day.

Due to Charlotte's declining health, both she and Alex left basecamp a few days later and walked out to get medical advice.

The weather deteriorated but Paul was getting cabin (or tent) fever after too many rest days and so a mother and son team left, despite the rather damp conditions, to successfully climb peak 4580 m (suggested name Brynn Peak), just 4.6 km away from basecamp.

Next, Hugh and Joanne used Alex's idea to approach the mountains from a different side and made the one day's walk to go around the range and set up an advanced basecamp. This was located three or four kilometres north west of basecamp as the crow flies.

At the same time Paul and Fergus had left around 4 am to make the river crossing to reach the ridgeline they'd had their eye on since the initial day's climbing in the area. Not liking the steeper face of the ridgeline they walked westwards to gain it on sounder looking terrain before going back east along the ridge. This felt much safer. Surprisingly they found two man made structures on the first day. These appeared to be trig-like, similar to the one shown in the photo showing the route taken up 4314.7 m (see figure 21). Camp was made south of the ridge after summiting 4442 m, 4451 m (suggested name Eagle Peak) and 4674.4 m. More progress was made the following day but it was slow. A mixture of snow and ice, and of broken rock. They were successful in reaching peak 4629 m (suggested name Elation Peak). They followed the tracks of what was possibly a snow leopard in the pristine snow leading towards 4660 Peak.



*Figure 10. A photo looking back to Elation Peak (4629 m) showing three sets of tracks, one of which is believed to be that of a snow leopard - Fergus McMullan*

By the end of the day the rock quality was deteriorating and the decision was made to head partially off the ridge going north to sleep for the night. The next day an alternative route successfully led them to the summit they had previously deemed too dangerous (4660 Peak or Tsunami according to a message left in a bottle found hidden in a crack). They then headed back

down to their tent, packed up everything and descended with the final hurdle being a thigh deep river crossing in the afternoon.

Meanwhile Hugh and Joanne had made an attempt on 4592 m but Hugh's nausea that had developed that morning slowed progress and by the time they were within 30 m of the top, snow conditions were such that it was judged too risky to continue. They descended and climbed a lower rocky peak instead located to the south west, 4270 m (suggested name Rexjacken Peak) and returned to basecamp the next day.



*Figure 11. A photo of Anniversary Peak (4592 m) as seen from the SW, with the bigger Marley Peak (4739 m) visible behind - Hugh Frazer*

The final days of the expedition were spent by Paul and Joanne setting up an advanced basecamp below peak Flora Peak at an altitude of 4355 m. Then a very long day beginning at 3 am resulted in successful ascents of two peaks. First the one Joanne had previously attempted with Hugh (suggested name Anniversary Peak), but approached from the SE rather than the SW, then that of the highest at 4739 m (suggested name Marley Peak) and the most technical peak of the expedition. The grade was judged to be PD+ due to a steep and intimidating piece of ice on the final climb to the summit, led by Paul. Rather than reversing that pitch the pair climbed down the southern side to gain the rocky ridge that eventually leads to Pic Moutarde. A difficult downwards traverse on scree and boulders to the glacier was made, and after a short nap, they walked across the dry glacier, made a short ascent back up to gain the ridge, down to the col below Alice Peak, then back up Alice and down to advanced basecamp. Paul ran back to basecamp as they had promised Galina that they'd be back that day (and was rewarded with fried potatoes for dinner). Joanne rested and stayed at advanced basecamp and descended the next morning.



*Figure 12. A photo of Paul leading the crux pitch on Marley Peak (4739 m)*

Hugh and Fergus at the same time had a pleasant back packing experience exploring the range Hugh and Joanne had seen some days previously when they made their attempt on Anniversary Peak (4592 m). They successfully climbed the peak 4057 m.

Overall the weather was mostly settled but with a few days of heavy and prolonged rain. A couple of times there was light snow. Winds built during the day and changed direction 180 degrees from morning to afternoon. Cloud cover increased too, culminating at times in short lived thunder and lightning storms. Most nights were clear and basecamp was frozen first thing in the morning before quickly warming to around 11 degrees celcius as soon as the sun rose.

The steep terrain opposite basecamp and below peak 4674.4 suffered rock fall that was clearly audible from our tents on most days, including at night. Rarely, despite the loudness, was it possible to spot the exact location. The rock fall, dry glaciers, high river levels and lakes seen at the foot of the north Kara-Say glacier point to a general warming.



*Figure 13. A photo catching the puff of dust from a rock fall on the mountains opposite basecamp - Galina*

Marmot holes were numerous at lower altitudes and best avoided for the sake of your ankles and in order to minimise disturbance of these amazing creatures.



*Figure 14. A marmot close to basecamp. We noticed during the expedition that they became more and more accustomed to our presence. - Galina*

Ibex, with their long, distinctive horns occupied the higher ground, and their tracks across the mountain sides were useful paths across unstable ground.

The precise date and time of pick-up from basecamp had been confirmed with the truck drivers before they had left us. They duly arrived exactly on time on Saturday 22nd August 2026. We returned to Tamga and the team re-united.

Charlotte had visited a local doctor and been prescribed antibiotics for a chest infection so was feeling a lot better than she had. She and Alex had spent time sightseeing and participating in a three day long horse trek near Son-Kul. The highlights were staying in nomad yurts and witnessing a traditional game played on horseback called Kok-Boru.

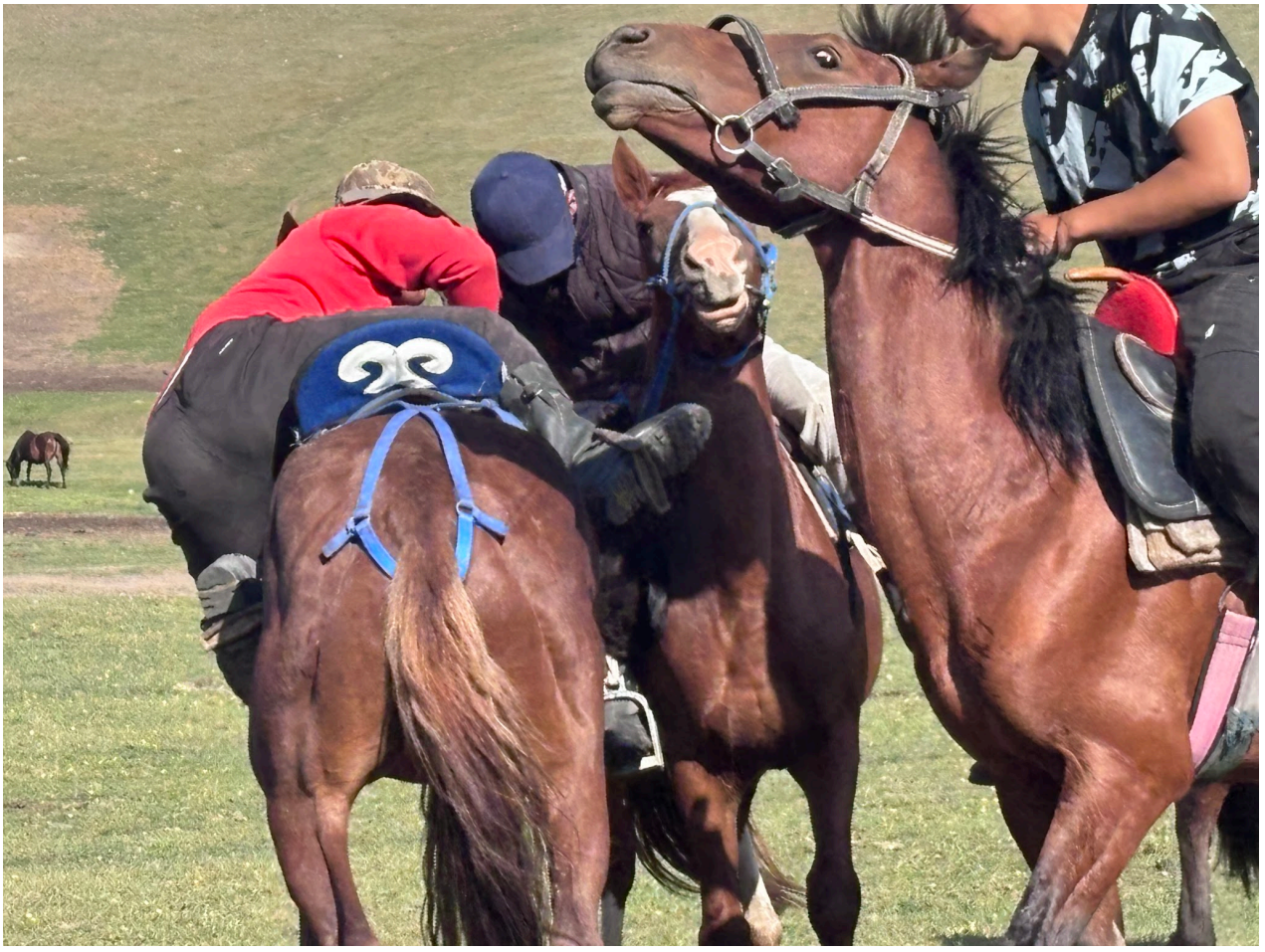


*Figure 15. An action photo from the game Kok-Boru watched by Charlotte and Alex - Charlotte Whitmore*

With no unforeseen delays or revisions to our plans required, the additional two days buffer we had added to the end of our itinerary was spent de-briefing with Vladimir Komissarov of ITMC, sport climbing and sightseeing in Bishkek. We departed Manas Airport very early on Wednesday 26th August 2026 and arrived back at Gatwick Airport the same day around lunchtime. Lesley and Hugh's girlfriend met us at arrivals and guided us to the train platform complete with luggage trollies that Lesley had negotiated use of with train station staff. Once back at Lesley's home we celebrated before Alex and Charlotte had to leave - Alex had appointments relating to her house sale later that week. The rest of the team parted ways the next day.



*Figure 16. The expedition team returned to Bishkek.  From left to right Hugh Frazer, Fergus McMullan, Paul Barnes, Galina, our driver, Alex Nicholson, Charlotte Whitmore and Joanne Miles - a member of staff from the Rich Hotel, Bishkek*

*Table 2. Details of each of the peaks attempted and whether successful or not*

| **Name of mountain if known, or suggested name**<br><br>**GPS Coordinates**<br><br>**Altitude (as per k-44-073 1:100,000 map or, if no spot height given, as taken from GPS device tracking information)**<br><br>**Estimated route length**<br>**NB: BC was at 41.711449 N, 78.178867 E (3690 m)** | **Dates**<br><br>**Grade**<br><br>**Style** | **Whether first ascent**<br><br>**Successful or not**<br><br>**High point reached**<br><br>**Reason for retreat (if applicable)**<br><br>**Weather conditions** | **Names of climbers** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suggested name: Whitmore Peak<br><br>41.722637 N, 78.180223 E<br><br>4189 m<br><br>A roughly 2.2 km approach up the SW ridge - 3.5 km in total from BC. | 2nd August 2026<br><br>Grade 1 due to very loose, fractured rock near the top<br><br>Scramble | First ascent<br><br>Successfully climbed by all six expedition team members<br><br>Dry and sunny weather. | Barnes P., McMullan F., Nicholson A., Whitmore C., Frazer H., Miles J. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 41.732840 N, 78.189188 E<br><br>4408 m<br><br>A further 1.2 km on from Whitmore Peak heading first in a northerly direction for 0.5 km then SW again for another 0.7 km. A total of 4.7 km from BC. | 2nd August 2026<br><br>Grade 1 due to very loose, fractured rock near the top of Whitmore Peak.<br><br>Scramble | Second ascent: found cairn and plastic bottle containing names of a previous British team[1].<br><br>Successfully climbed by all six expedition team members.<br><br>Dry and sunny weather.<br><br>Note: This was targeted summit number 20 (see table 1 above) | Barnes P., McMullan F., Miles J., Whitmore C., Nicholson A., Frazer H. |

[1] Transcription of the message in the bottle (all ink had disappeared and was only readable from the indentations that were left):
Team K2K. 30/07/2000
FROM: UK: The three Sisters. 08:15 AM
Julia Willshire
Lee Gill
Tom Stanway-Meyers
Andy Robinson
Stewart Milne
Jenni Taylor
William Evans
Daniel Philip Butler
Matthew Provost
Sarge Durson
UKMansk. R

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suggested name: Flora Peak<br><br>41.735096 N, 78.185280 E<br><br>4393 m<br><br>A total of 5.2 km from BC if approached via Whitmore Peak.<br><br>Subsequent ascents approached the ridgeline on which this summit lies from the SE up the middle of three gullies hitting a col between Whitmore Peak and 4408 m. A total of 3.8 km from BC. | 2nd August 2026<br>7th August 2026<br>19th August 2026<br><br>2nd August 2026<br>7th August 2026<br>19th August 2026<br><br>Grade 1 due to very loose, fractured rock if approached from Whitmore Peak.<br><br>Scramble (or hard hill walk if approached from the SE). | First ascent.<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members on 2nd August 2026, three on 7th August 2026 and two on 19th August 2026.<br><br>Dry and sunny weather (cold, damp and windy on 19th August 2026 first thing, turning brighter with cloud building later). | Barnes P., McMullan F. (2nd August 2026)<br><br>Barnes P., McMullan F., Frazer H. (7th August 2026)<br><br>Barnes P., Miles J. (19th August 2026) |
| Suggested name: Fauna Peak<br><br>41.736831 N, 78.181773 E<br><br>4390 m<br><br>A total of 5.6 km if approached via Whitmore Peak or 4.2 km from the SE. | 2nd August 2026<br>7th August 2026<br>19th August 2026<br><br>Grade 1 due to very loose, fractured rock if approached from Whitmore Peak.<br><br>Scramble (or hard hill walk if approached from the SE). | First ascent.<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members on 2nd August 2026, three on 7th August 2026 and two on 19th August 2026.<br><br>Dry and sunny weather (cold, damp and windy on 19th August 2026 first thing, turning brighter with cloud building later). | Barnes P., McMullan F. (2nd August 2026)<br><br>Barnes P., McMullan F., Frazer H. (7th August 2026)<br><br>Barnes P., Miles J. (19th August 2026) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suggested name: Alice Peak<br><br>41.742880 N, 78.170603 E<br><br>4498 m<br><br>A total of 6.8 km if approached via Whitmore Peak or 5.4 km from the SE. | 2nd August 2026<br>7th August 2026<br>19th August 2026<br><br>Grade 1 due to very loose, fractured rock if approached from Whitmore Peak.<br><br>Scramble (or hard hill walk if approached from the SE). | First ascent.<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members on 2nd August 2026, three on 7th August 2026 and two on 19th August 2026.<br><br>Dry and sunny weather (cold, damp and windy on 19th August 2026 first thing, turning brighter with cloud building later). | Barnes P., McMullan F. (2nd August 2026)<br><br>Barnes P., McMullan F., Frazer H. (7th August 2026)<br><br>Barnes P., Miles J. (19th August 2026) |
| 41.708057 N, 78.112190 E<br><br>4314.7 m<br><br>6.5 km from BC | 5th August 2026<br><br>Steep but relatively straightforward hill walk with care needed crossing several glacial meltwater rivers. | Clearly not a first ascent. The summit is marked by a prominent metal post and plaque written in Russian.<br><br>Summit successfully reached by three team members.<br><br>Dry and sunny weather. | Nicholson A., Whitmore C., Miles J. |
| Suggested name: Dora Peak<br><br>41.722651 N, 78.127105 E<br><br>4434.0 m<br><br>4.5 km from BC | 5th August 2026<br><br>Steep but relatively straightforward hill walk with care needed crossing several glacial meltwater rivers. | First ascent<br><br>Summit successfully reached by two team members.<br><br>Dry and sunny weather. | Barnes P., Frazer H. |

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| 41.7350127 N, 78.155673 E<br><br>4557.0 m<br><br>6.3 km from BC | 5th August 2026<br><br>Grade F<br><br>Alpine<br><br>Care needed crossing several glacial meltwater rivers | Attempted first ascent<br><br>Two team members attempted the summit but were unsuccessful.<br><br>The high point reached was 4498 m.<br><br>Ice on an otherwise straightforward, rocky ridgeline was encountered less than 200 m from the summit.<br><br>Dry and sunny weather.<br><br>Note: This was targeted summit number 23 (see table 1 above) | Barnes P., Frazer H. |
| Suggested name: Wonderland Peak<br><br>41.737403 N, 78.159485 E<br><br>4617 m<br><br>1 km to the SW of Alice Peak, 6.4 km from BC | 7th August 2026<br><br>Grade PD<br><br>Alpine | First ascent<br><br>Summit successfully reached by three team members.<br><br>The weather was bright and dry. | Barnes P., McMullan F., Frazer H. |

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| Suggested name: Moon Peak<br><br>41.733316 N, 78.154978 E<br><br>4648 m<br><br>1.7 km to the SW of Alice Peak, 7.1 km from BC | 7th August 2026<br><br>Grade PD<br><br>Alpine | First recorded ascent - found either a very poorly built cairn or what was just a natural rock formation, so unclear if this was truly a first ascent or not.<br><br>Summit successfully reached by three team members.<br><br>The weather was bright and dry.<br><br>Note: This was targeted summit number 22 (see table 1 above) | Barnes P., McMullan F., Frazer H. |
| Suggested name: Galina Peak<br><br>41.731245 N, 78.157318 E<br><br>4573 m<br><br>About 0.5 km to the SE of Moon Peak, 7.6 km from BC | 7th August 2026<br><br>Grade PD<br><br>Alpine | First ascent<br><br>Summit successfully reached by three team members.<br><br>The weather was bright and dry. | Barnes P., McMullan F., Frazer H. |
| Pic Moutarde<br><br>41.754161 N, 78.201863 E<br><br>4417 m<br><br>5 km from an ABC established at 41.740966 N, 78.213343 E at an altitude of 3777 m and roughly 5 km NE of basecamp | 8th August 2026<br><br>A hard hill walk with a potentially dangerous glacial river crossing, depending on the water level. | Climbed previously by a French team ‘Kirg Ski’ in March 2016 who found a small cairn indicating it had possibly already been climbed.<br><br>Summit successfully reached by two team members.<br><br>The weather was bright and dry. | Nicholson A., Miles J. |

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| Suggested name: Brynn Peak<br><br>41.725001 N, 78.148263 E<br><br>4580 m<br><br>4.6 km from BC | 12th August 2026<br><br>Grade F<br><br>Alpine | First ascent<br><br>Summit successfully reached by two team members.<br><br>The weather was misty and damp feeling, but mainly dry. | Miles J., Barnes P. |
| 41.692181 N, 78.185276 E<br><br>4442 m<br><br>Approached along a ridge from the SW. 8.4 km from BC | 14th August 2026<br><br>A hard hill walk.<br><br>Low water levels required in order to safely cross the Kara Say river from BC. | Fallen over wooden structure found<br><br>Summit successfully reached by two team members.<br><br>The weather was bright and dry. | Barnes P., McMullan F. |
| Suggested name: Eagle Peak<br><br>41.692889 N, 78.195159 E<br><br>4451 m<br><br>Approached along a ridge from the SW. 9.4 km from BC | 14th August 2026<br><br>Grade F<br><br>Alpine<br><br>Low water levels required in order to safely cross the Kara Say river from BC. | First ascent<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members<br><br>The weather was bright and dry. | Barnes P., McMullan F. |

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| 41.695526 N, 78.207340 E<br><br>4674.4 m<br><br>Approached along a ridge from the SW. 10.6 km from BC | 14th August 2026<br><br>Grade PD<br><br>Alpine<br><br>Low water levels required in order to safely cross the Kara Say river from BC. | Metal and wooden structure found<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members<br><br>The weather was bright and dry.<br><br>Note: This was targeted summit number 1 (see table 1 above) | Barnes P., McMullan F. |
| Suggested name: Elation Peak<br><br>41.702763 N, 78.221805 E<br><br>4629 m<br><br>Approached along a ridge from the SW, 1.7 km from ABC (established at 41.702793 N, 78.221798 E at an altitude of 4595 m) | 15th August 2026<br><br>Grade PD<br><br>Alpine<br><br>Low water levels required in order to safely cross the Kara Say river from BC. | First ascent<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members<br><br>The weather was bright and dry. | Barnes P., McMullan F. |
| Suggested name: Rexjacken Peak<br><br>41.750771 N, 78.144569 E<br><br>4270 m<br><br>2.75 km from an ABC (established at 41.7457300 N, 78.120431 E at an altitude of 3818 m). | 15th August 2026<br><br>A moderate to hard hill walk. | First ascent<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members<br><br>The weather was sunny and dry. | Frazer H., Miles J. |

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| Peak 4660 or Tsunami<br><br>41.710065 N, 78.227877 E<br><br>4660 m<br><br>The approach along the ridge from the SW was too loose and dangerous, so the team descended to 4286 m to camp overnight then the next day approached the summit from NW instead - 2 km from their ABC (41.710830 N, 78.217497 E). | 16th August 2026<br><br>Grade PD<br><br>Alpine<br><br>Low water levels required in order to safely cross the Kara Say river from BC. | Third ascent: Known to be climbed in 2024 by a British women's expedition. Paul and Fergus found a plastic bottle wedged in a crack containing the names of team members from another British summit party, but no date (this looked to be the same team who'd left a plastic bottle on Peak 41.732840 N, 78.189188 E, 4408 m and in this note, also well faded, they suggested the name Tsunami for this summit).<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members.<br><br>The weather was bright and dry. | Barnes P., McMullan F. |

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| Suggested name: Anniversary Peak<br><br>41.754720 N, 78.161395 E<br><br>4592 m<br><br>3.0 km along the ridge from an ABC established below Flora Peak at 41.736105 N, 78.183925 E at an altitude of 4355 m.<br><br>A previous unsuccessful attempt by two team members from the SW on 15th August 2026 had an estimated route length of 4.3 km from an ABC established at 41.7457300 N, 78.120431 E at an altitude of 3818 m. | 19th August 2026 (successful summit)<br><br>15th August 2026 (unsuccessful attempt)<br><br>Grade PD<br><br>Alpine | First ascent<br><br>Successfully climbed by two team members on the 19th August 2026 from Alice Peak to the SE.<br><br>A previous attempt by two team members from the SW on 15th August 2026 was unsuccessful. The high point reached was 4562 m. Poor snow conditions in combination with a crevasse near the summit made it too risky to continue so a retreat was made less than 100 m from the top.<br><br>The weather was cold, damp and windy on 19th August 2026 first thing, turning brighter with cloud building later on. The weather was sunny and dry on 15th August 2026. | Miles J., Barnes P. (19th August 2026)<br><br>Miles J., Frazer H. (unsuccessful attempt on 15th August 2026) |
| Suggested name: Marley Peak<br><br>41.762563 N, 78.166910 E<br><br>4739 m<br><br>1.0 km NNE of Anniversary Peak - a total of 4.0 km from an ABC established below Flora Peak at 41.736105 N, 78.183925 E at an altitude of 4355 m (about 4 km from BC). | 19th August 2026<br><br>Grade PD+<br><br>Alpine | First ascent<br><br>Two expedition team members successfully made the ascent<br>The weather was cold, damp and windy first thing, turning brighter with cloud building later on. | Barnes P., Miles J. |

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| 41.721889 N, 78.069952 E<br><br>4057 m<br><br>5 km from an ABC (41.692233 N, 78.094247 E at an altitude of 3673 m) established 8 km W of BC . | 19th August 2026<br><br>A moderate to hard hill walk. | Unlikely to be a first ascent as this peak was relatively low, to the NW of the region and closer to nomads herding sheep with evidence of a track, 4WD and horse trekking in the vicinity.<br><br>Two expedition team members successfully made the ascent.<br><br>The weather was bright and dry. | Frazer H., McMullan F. |

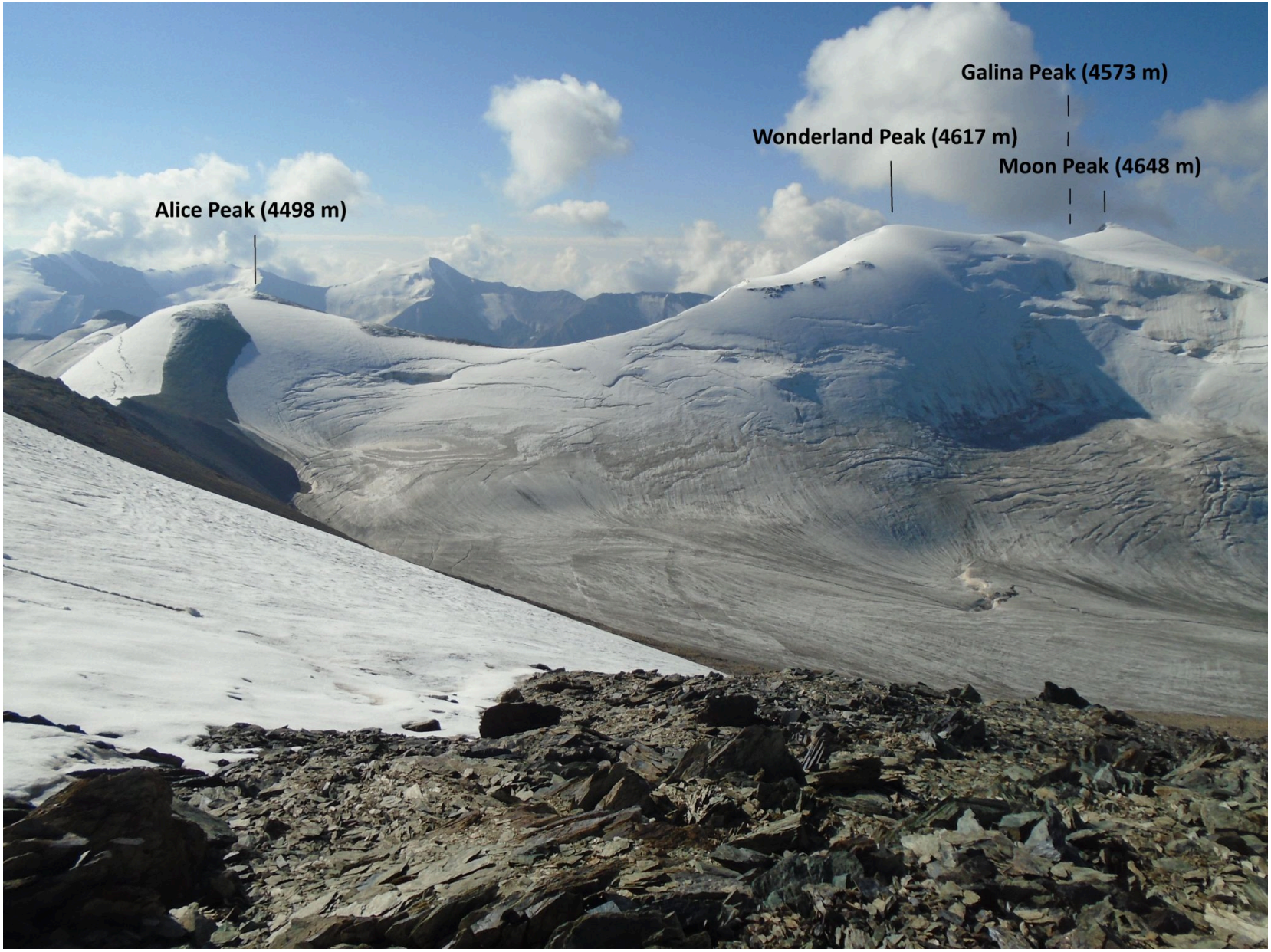



*Figure 17. View of Alice (4498 m), Wonderland (4617 m) and Moon (4648 m) peaks as seen from near Anniversary Peak to the NW of BC*

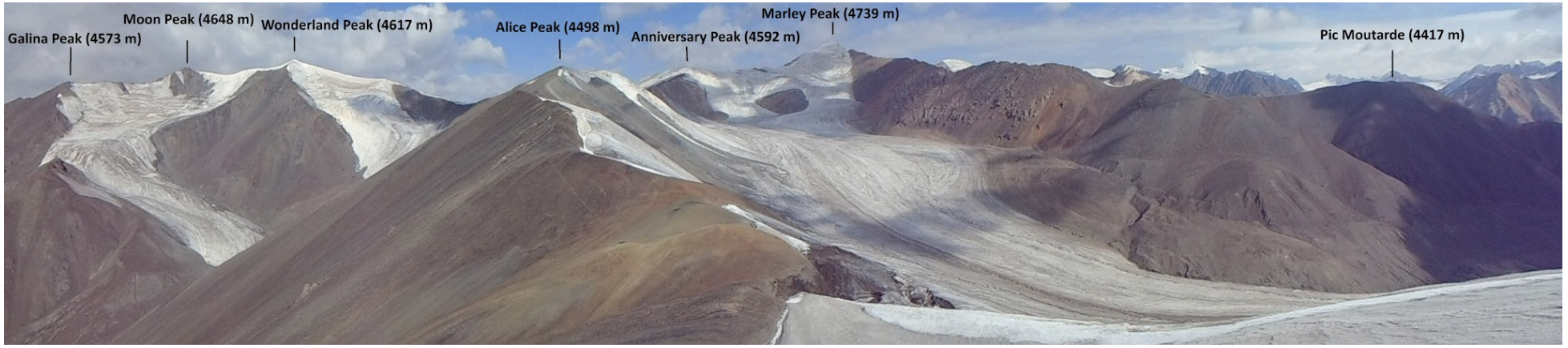



*Figure 18. Panoramic view of peaks taken from near the summit of Flora Peak - Joanne Miles*

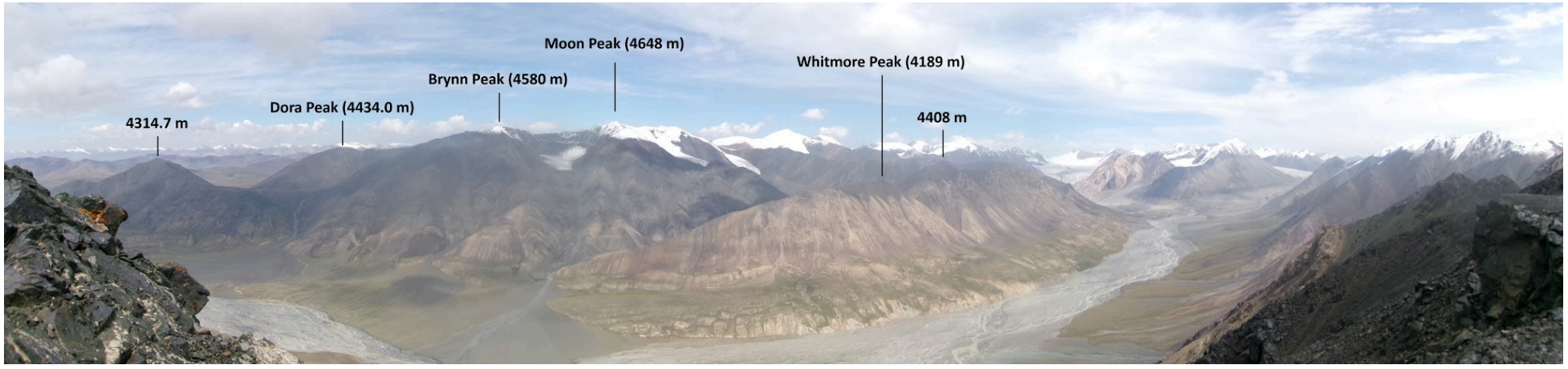



*Figure 19. Panoramic view of peaks above basecamp, taken from between 4442 m and Eagle Peak - Fergus McMullan*

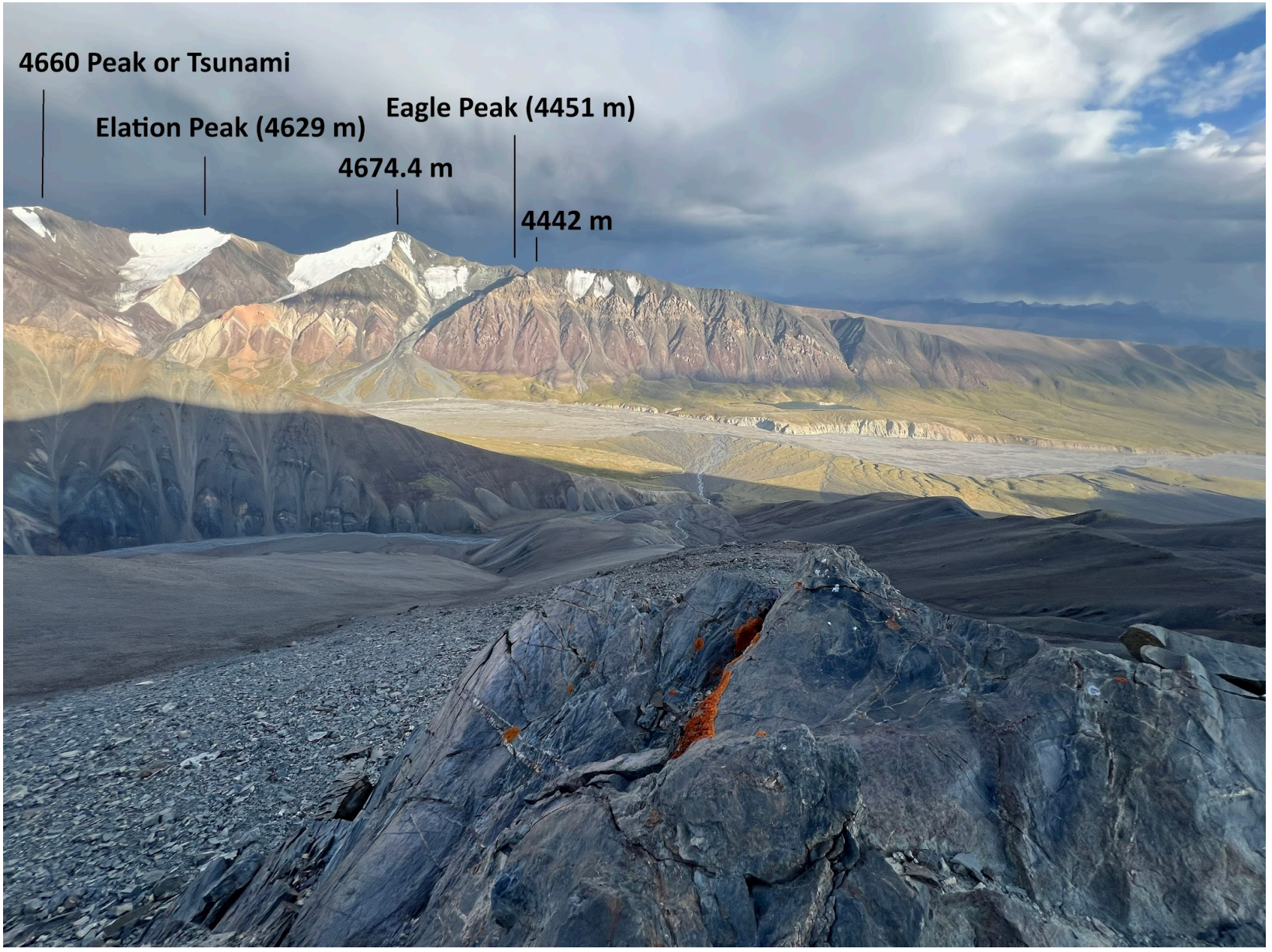



*Figure 20. Photo of peaks climbed across the river from basecamp, taken on descent from Galina Peak - Paul Barnes*

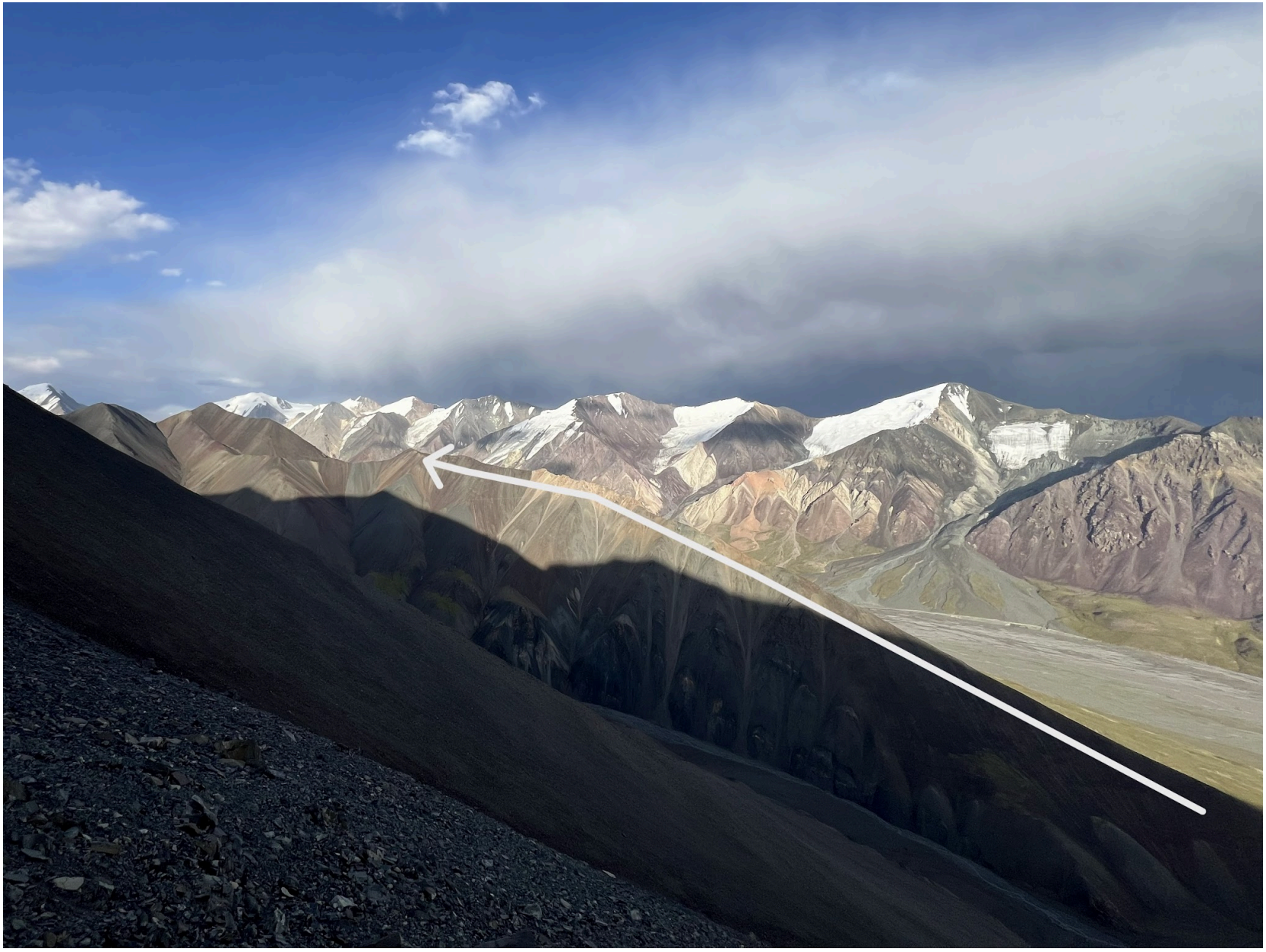


*Figure 21. Photo showing the route taken up Whitmore Peak (4189 m) as seen on the descent from Galina Peak (4573 m) - Paul Barnes*

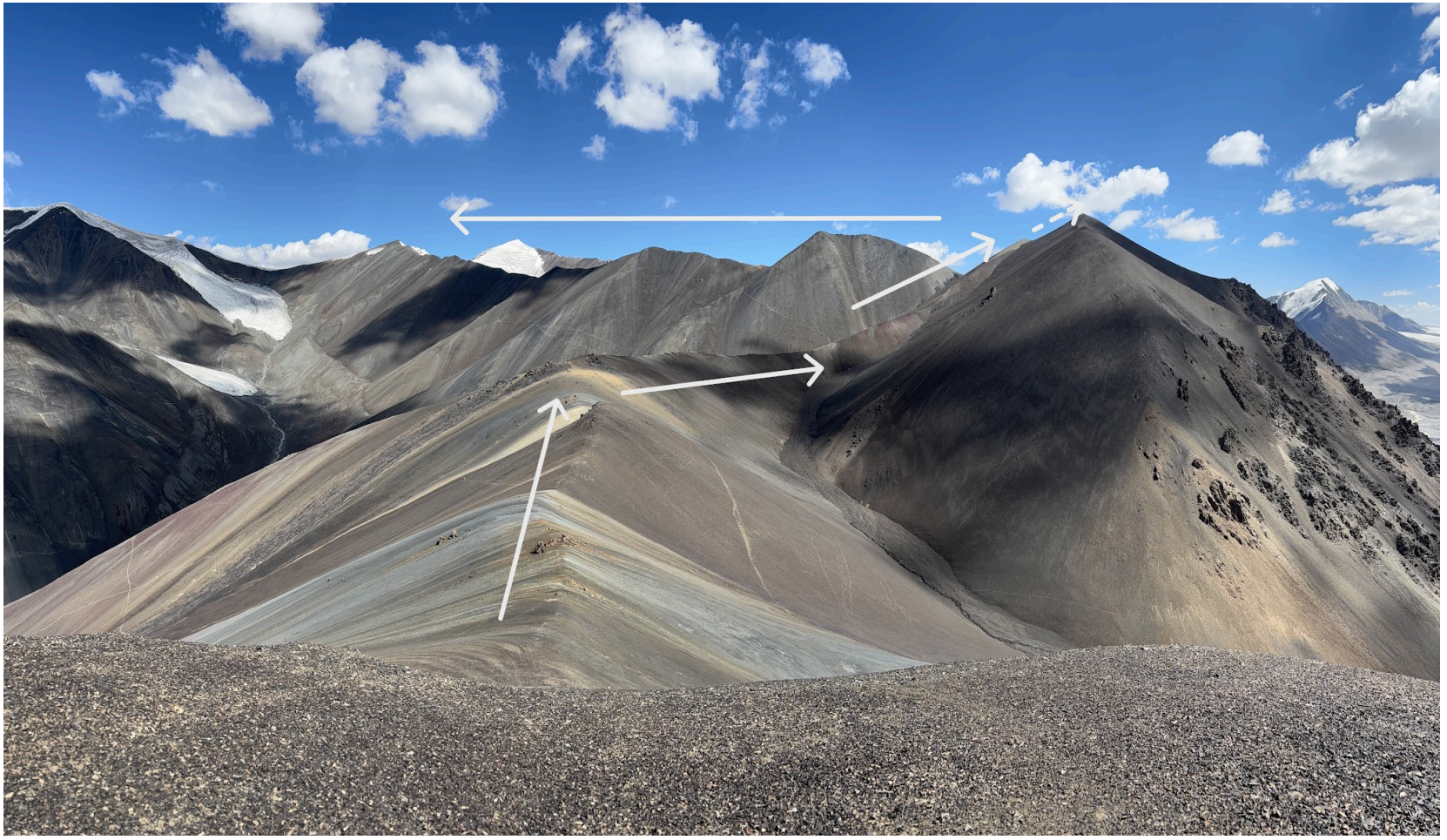


*Figure 22. Photo showing the route taken up 4408 m, Flora (4393 m), Fauna (4390 m) and Alice (4498 m) Peaks (taken on descent from Whitmore Peak) - Charlotte Whitmore*

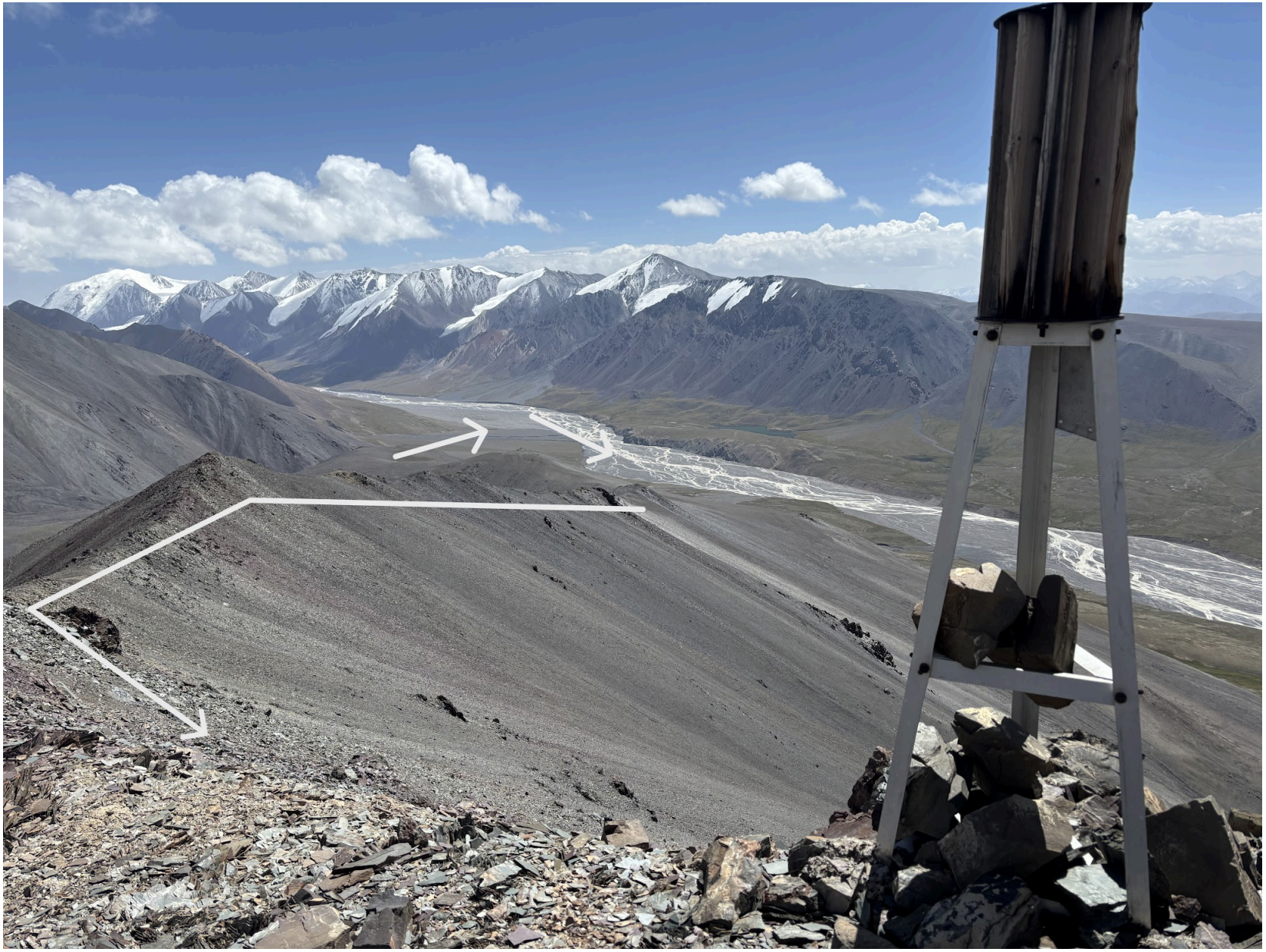


*Figure 23. Photo showing the route taken up 4314.7 m - Charlotte Whitmore*



*Figure 24. Photo showing the route taken up Dora Peak (4434.0 m) - Charlotte Whitmore*

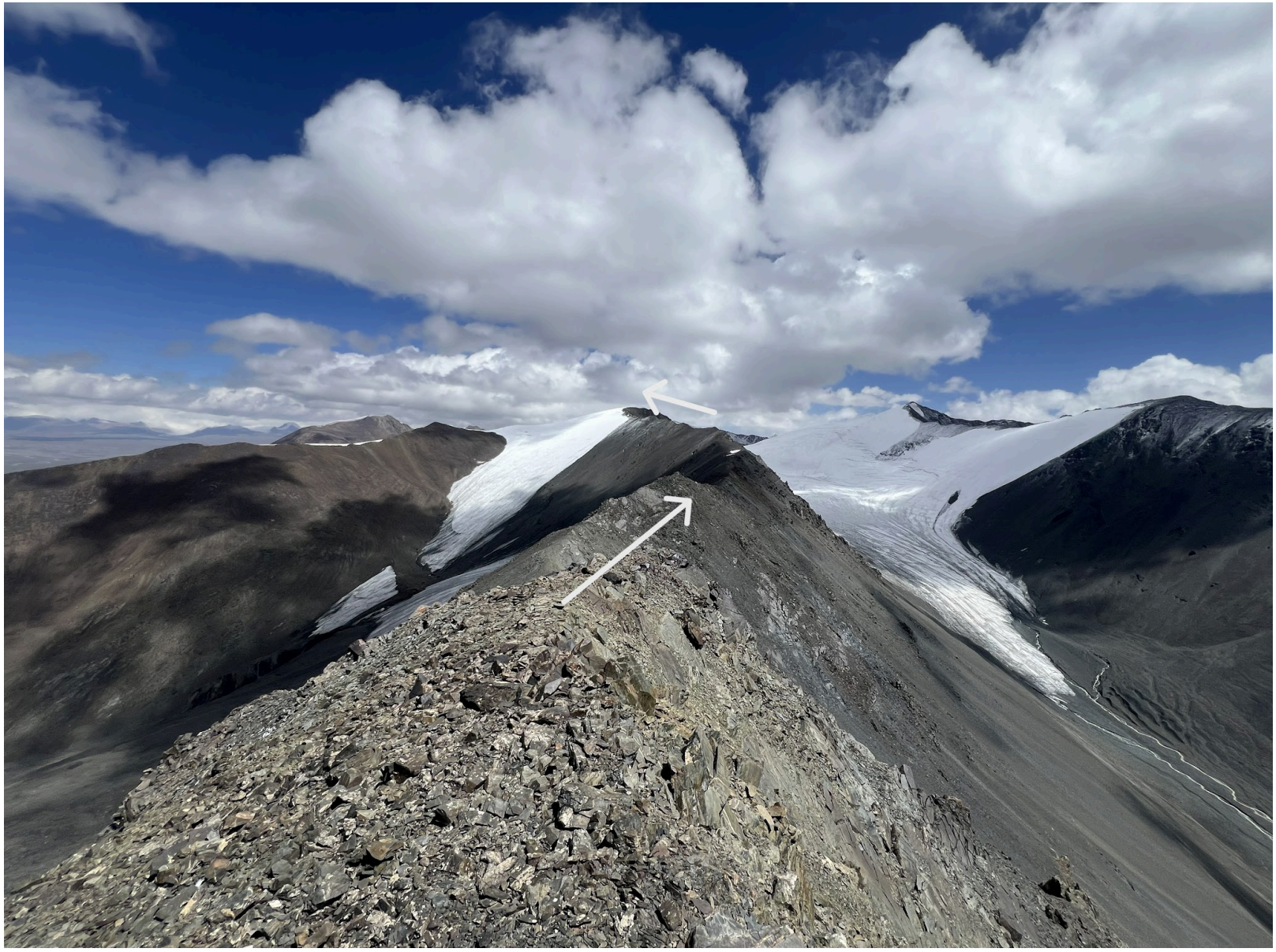


*Figure 25. Photo, taken from Dora Peak (4434.0 m), showing the route taken up 4557.0 m - the high point reached was 4498 m - Paul Barnes*

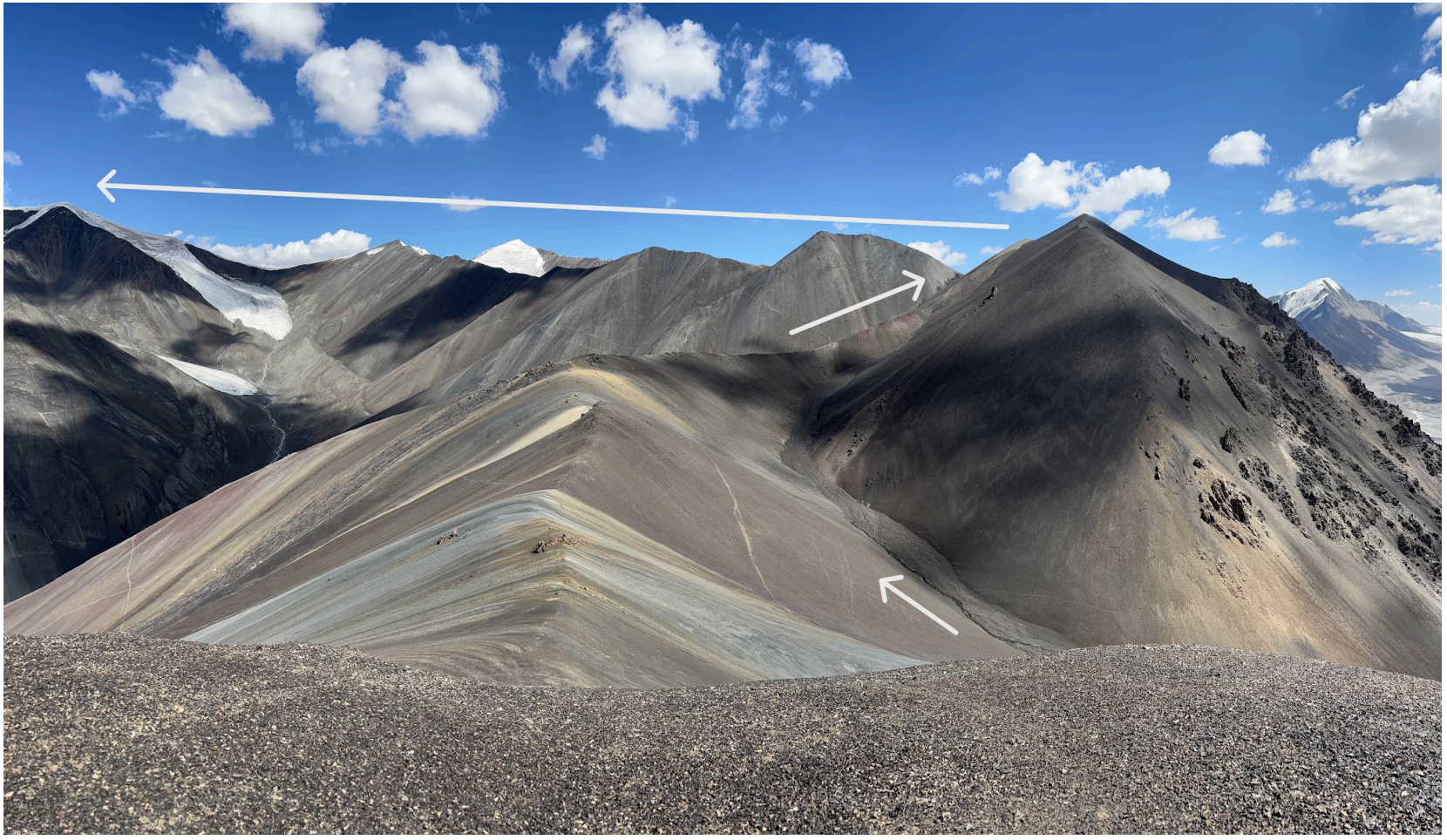


*Figure 26. Photo, taken on the descent from Whitmore Peak, showing the route taken up Wonderland Peak (4617 m) via Flora (4393 m), Fauna (4390 m) and Alice (4498 m) Peaks - Charlotte Whitmore*

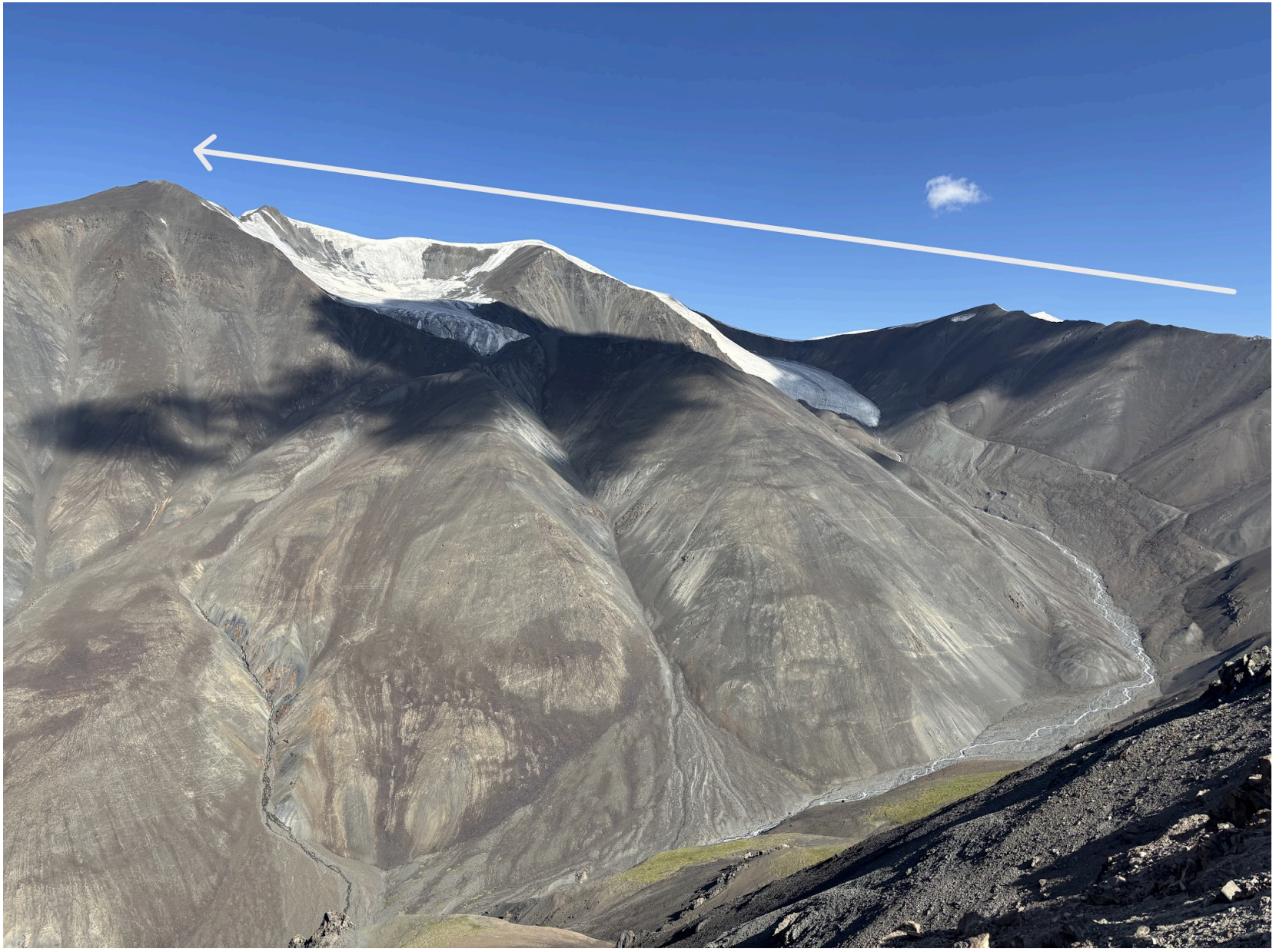


*Figure 27. Photo showing the route taken up Wonderland (4617 m), Moon (4648 m) and Galina (4573 m) Peaks via Alice (4498 m) Peak - Charlotte Whitmore*




*Figure 28. Image showing the route taken up Pic Moutarde (4417 m) (anti-clockwise) - taken from Suunto app*

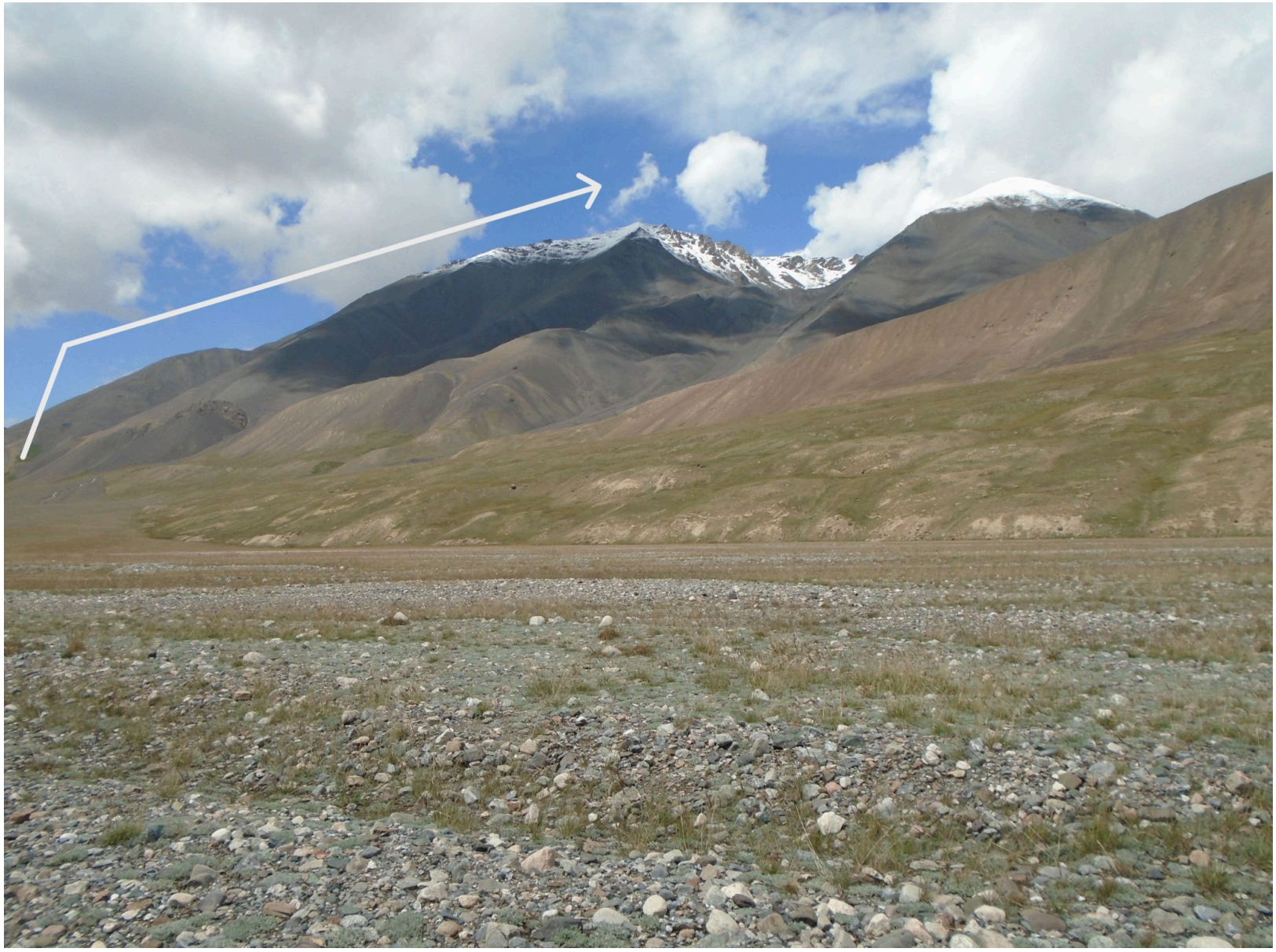


*Figure 29. Photo showing the route taken up Brynn Peak (4580 m) - Joanne Miles*

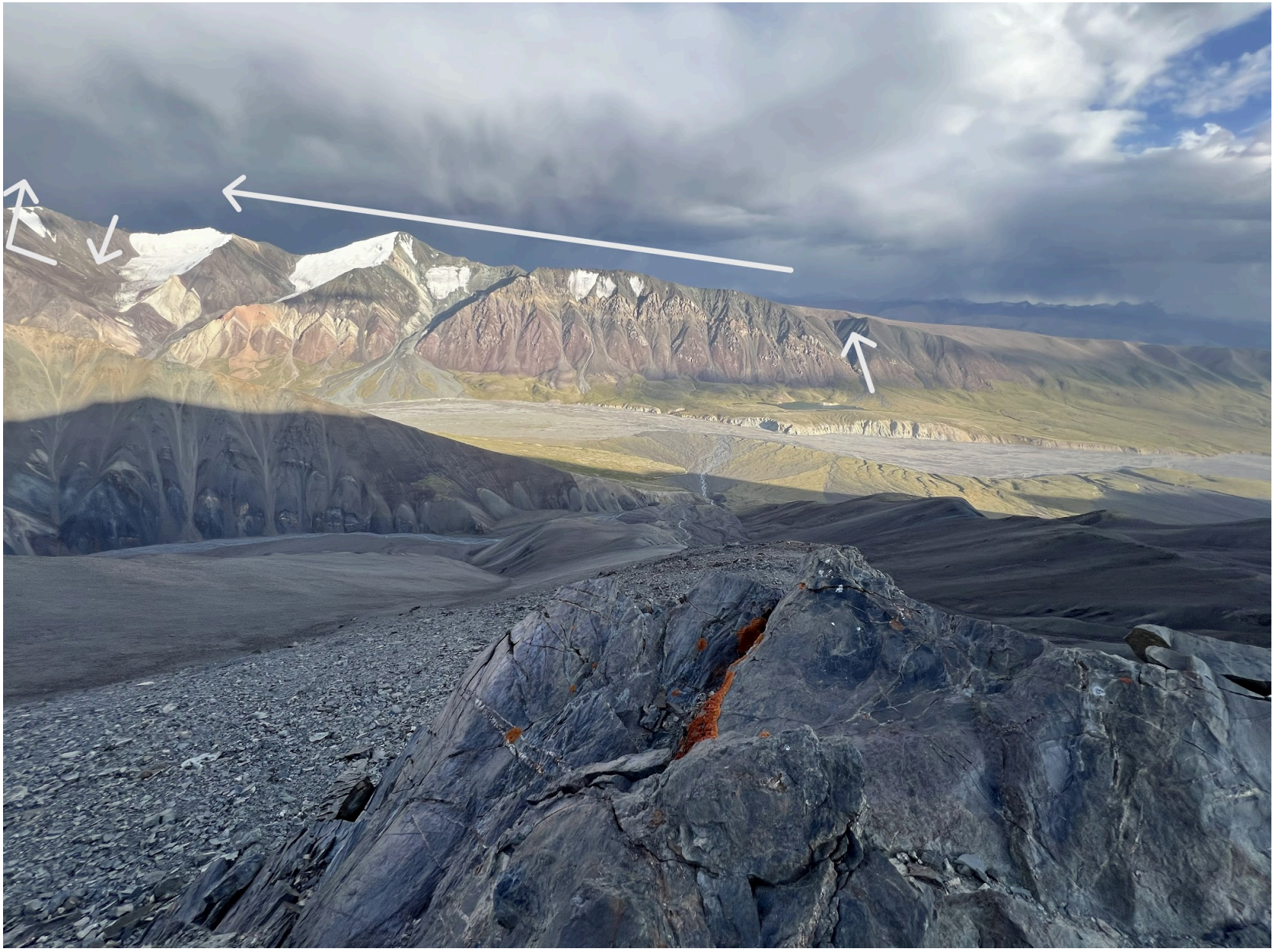


*Figure 30. Photo showing the route taken up 4442 m, Eagle Peak (4451 m), 4674.4 m, Elation Peak (4629 m), Peak 4660 or Tsunami - Paul Barnes*

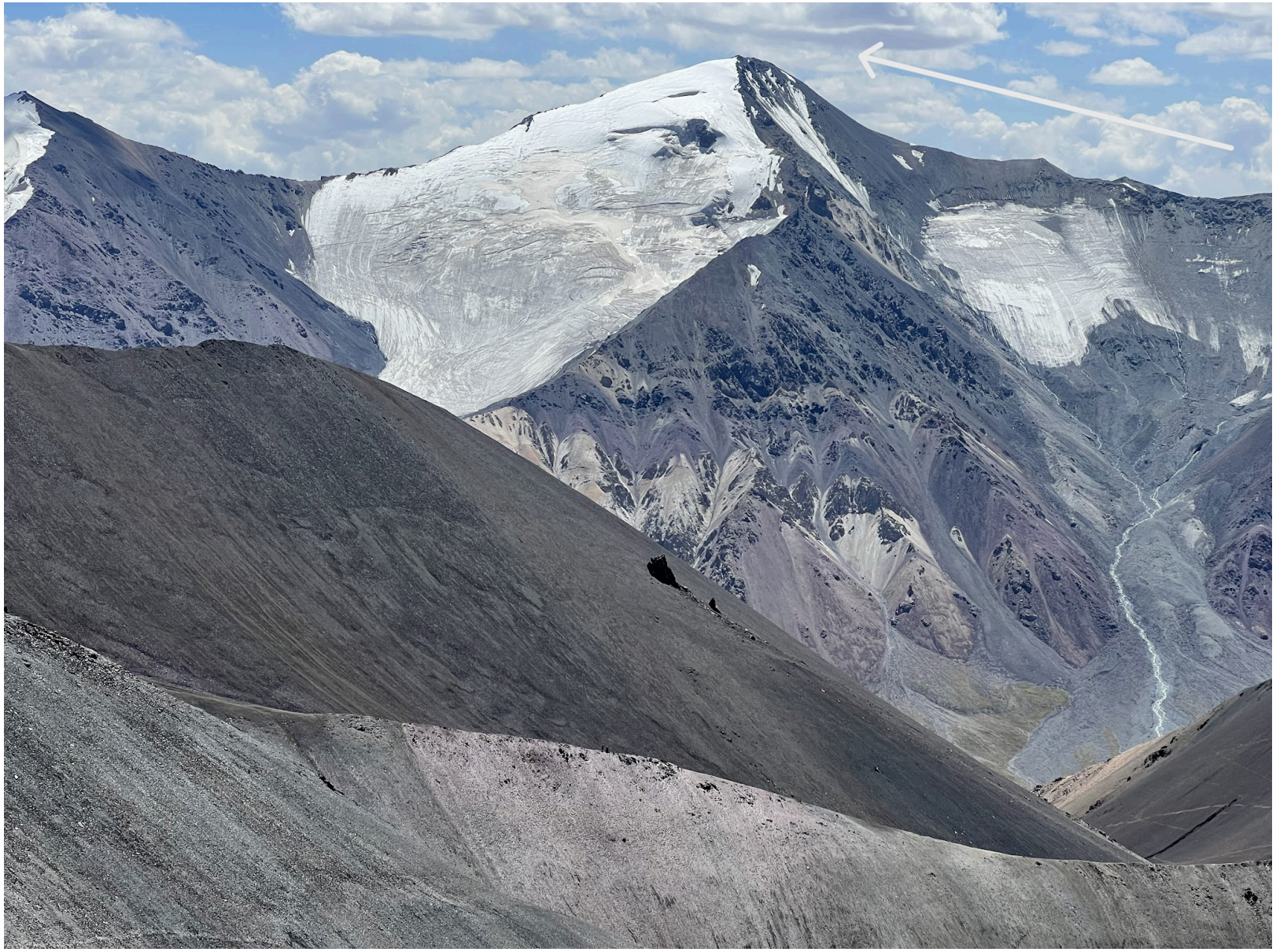


*Figure 31. Photo showing a close up of the route taken up 4674.4 m - Paul Barnes*

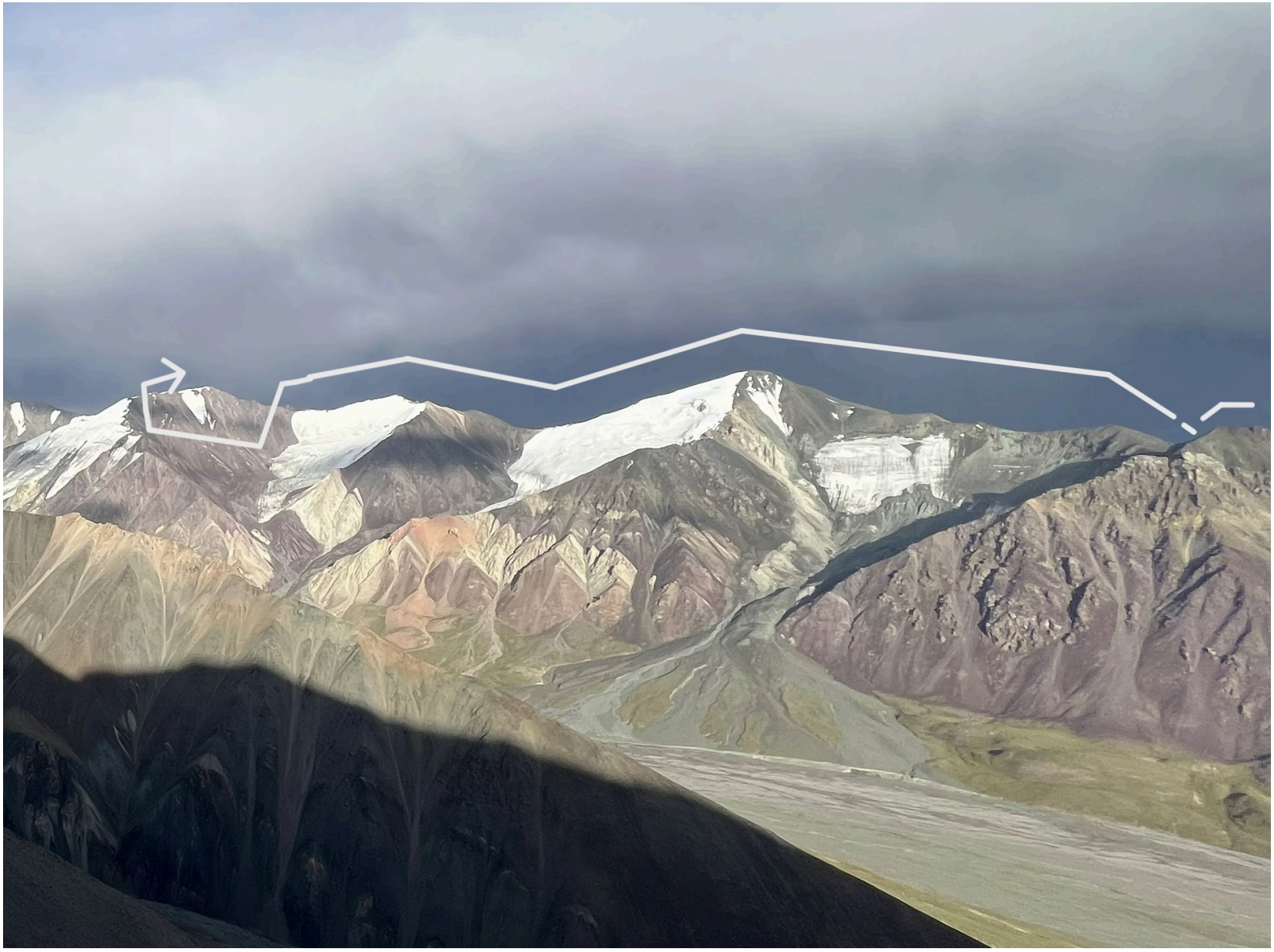


*Figure 32. Photo showing a view of the route taken up Eagle Peak (4451 m), 4674.4 m, Elation Peak (4629 m) and Peak 4660 or Tsunami - Paul Barnes*



*Figure 33. Photo showing the route taken up Rexjacken Peak (4270 m) - Joanne Miles*



*Figure 34. Photo showing the route taken up Anniversary (4592 m) and Marley (4739 m) Peaks via Flora (4393 m), Fauna (4390 m) and Alice (4498 m) Peaks - Charlotte Whitmore*



*Figure 35. Photo showing the route taken up Anniversary Peak (4592 m) from the SW (high point reached was 4562 m) - Joanne Miles*

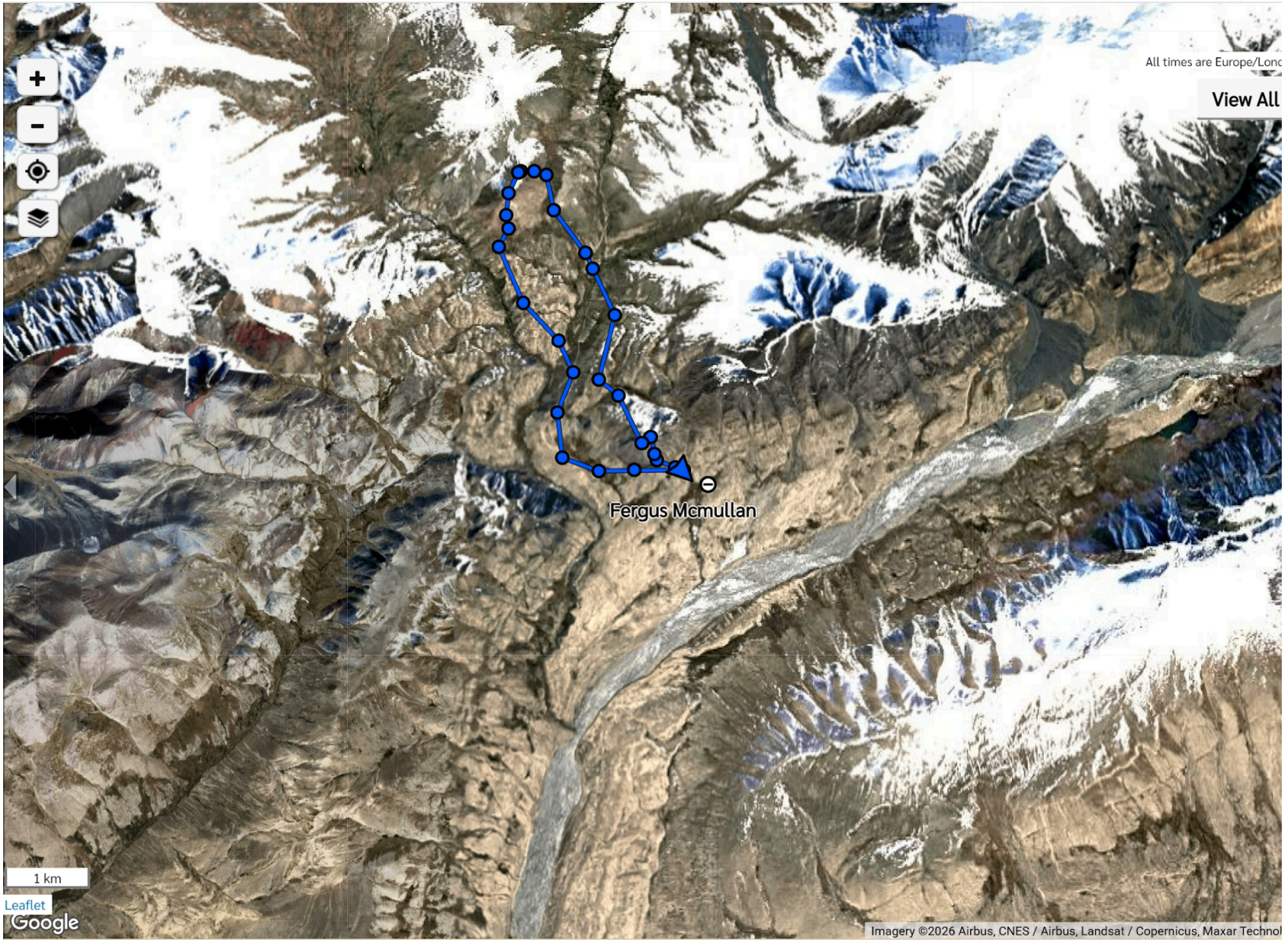



*Figure 36. Image showing the route taken up 4057 m (anti-clockwise) - taken from Garmin web page*

**Chunkurchak Gorge**

As described by various sources including UK Climbing.com it's the closest sport climbing crag to Bishkek. It's about an hour's taxi ride (970-1200som) from Bishkek (45km) out to the village of Tatyr, before the road starts to zig zag up to the ski area.



*Figure 37. Unpaved gravel road – turn off to Tatyr - Charlotte Whitmore*

There is a small road to the village opposite a local shop. Follow this to the yurt holiday village/pool, turn left onto a cobbled drive and follow to a gated area on the far side of a general parking area, beside the river where horses are sometimes kept.



*Figure 38. View into the gorge - Charlotte Whitmore*

The side gate is not locked generally. The crag is approximately 2 minutes walk and can be found on the right hand side. From the road it takes less than 10 minutes.

The crag is in sun in the morning and partially in the afternoon (lefthand end) before going into the shade. The rock can feel very warm to touch when the sun has been on it. The rock is a smooth texture and the crag is a mix of slightly slabby / vertical off vertical with a variety of cracks and ledges. Alex and Charlotte made two visits.

<u>28 July 2026</u>

*4c - Silence on Tourne with top section on Renfougne*

Crux is between 2 and 3 bolt slightly technical. Slightly slabby but some holds are not where/how you would like them together with the smooth rock texture can make it feel tricky. This route and the adjacent one are close together and veer slightly leftwards with height, which may have contributed to completing the top section of Renfougne. The crux section did not align to the given grade and would be considered one or two grades higher as a result

*5c - Rotoplaquette*

This route was fairly straightward and in comparison to Silence on Tourne is much easier – the grades could almost be swapped around. More readily 4c than 5c definitely

*6a - Les Hommes en noir*

A more technical off vertical route that traversed slightly right before coming back left as it moved upwards around the rocky shallow gully and rib/arete.

All three routes had separate belay lower off points comprising two anchors with separate karabiners. We climbed late afternoon / early evening when the crag was in the shade.



*Figure 39. L-R: Rotoplaquette, Les Hommes en noir, Silence on Tourne, Renfougne - Charlotte Whitmore*



*Figure 40. Alex leading up the lower section of Silence on Tourne - Charlotte Whitmore*




*Figure 41. End of the first climbing session - Charlotte Whitmore*

24 August 2026

We took a taxi from Bishkek. Climbed late morning / early afternoon with the crag in full sun for part of the time. The right hand half goes into shade early in the afternoon. This time we explored some routes on the right hand part of the crag:

*5c Marisa Fille Sure*

*6a Doc et Tibloc*
*6b+Pinnochio*



*Figure 42. L-R : Pinnochio, Doc et Tibloc, Marisa Fille Sure - Charlotte Whitmore*



*Figure 43. Alex leading Doc et Tibloc - Charlotte Whitmore*

**Summarised expedition diary**

In total, five days were spent on travel to and from Kyrgyzstan, 7 nights acclimatising in the Ala-Archa National Park, a day sorting logistics, four days total travelling time from Bishkek to basecamp and back, and 22 nights in all spent at basecamp. A further buffer of two days incorporated into the plan in case of delays was spent sightseeing and rock climbing once back in Bishkek.

*Table 3. Summarised Expedition Diary*

| Day | Date | Activity |
|---|---|---|
| Day -1 | Saturday 18 July 2026 | Joanne, Paul, Hugh and Fergus arrive at Lesley's home the day before so spend the Saturday finishing off packing and making final checks. Charlotte has an emergency dental appointment and arrives with Alex in the afternoon. |
| Day 0 | Sunday 19 July 2026 | Depart from Gatwick at 17:35 for Bishkek via Istanbul |
| Day 1 | Monday 20 July 2026 | Arrive in Bishkek 800 m at 08:45 |
| Day 2 | Tuesday 21 July 2026 | Visit to ITMC offices then travel to Ala-Archa National Park – walk from entrance at 1,500m to Ala-Archa hotel 2,200m - 12 km along a road. Heavy rain showers en route. |
| Day 3 | Wednesday 22 July 2026 | Acclimatisation walks from the Ala-Archa hotel. Successful ascent up to the Violet Pass (3670 m) by Alex, Charlotte, Paul and Joanne. Unsuccessful attempt on Komsomolets Peak (4134 m) by Paul and Joanne - the high point reached was 4007 m (rapid descent due to thunder). |
| Day 4 | Thursday 23 July 2026 | Walk to the Ratsek Hut, 3300m. |
| Day 5 | Friday 24 July 2026 | Rest day. Fergus suffers an upset stomach. A very noisy dorm drives Alex outside to bivvy. |
| Day 6 | Saturday 25 July 2026 | Fergus recovers. Paul, Hugh and Joanne climb Practice Slab (Trad, 36 m, 5.3) and Alex and Charlotte climb 5.6 Crack (Trad, 55 m, 2 pitches, 5.6). Both routes on Formation A (Pika) accessed directly above the memorial plaques near the Ratsek hut. Alex sleeps in a tent provided by the hut guardian. |
| Day 7 | Sunday 26 July 2026 | Uchitel Peak (4527 m) was successfully climbed by all six team members. Alex descends. |
| Day 8 | Monday 27 July 2026 | Charlotte descends due to poor appetite and cough. Joanne accompanies her part way before returning. Paul, Hugh and Fergus walk up towards the Ak-Say glacier for more acclimatisation. |
| Day 9 | Tuesday 28 July 2026 | Charlotte and Alex go rock climbing in Chongkurchak. Joanne, Fergus, Paul and Hugh walk down to the Ala-Archa hotel then take the bus to Alplager. Pick up and drive to Bishkek. Team re-unite. |
| Day 10 | Wednesday 29 July 2026 | Preparation for the expedition in the ITMC office: equipment check, border zone permits. |
| Day 11 | Thursday 30 July 2026 | Buy provisions with Aisha. Meet our cook Galina. Drive to Tamga. |
| Day 12 | Friday 31 July 2026 | Drive to Akshiyrak base camp at 41.711449 N, 78.178867 E (3690 m). |

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| Day 13 | Saturday<br>01 August 2026 | Acclimatisation and general orientation. Organise base camp kitchen, mess tent and food stores. Dig latrine. Hang the gravity water filter. |
| Day 14 | Sunday<br>02 August 2026 | Successful summit ascent of Whitmore Peak (4189 m) and 4408 m by all six expedition team members. Flora (4393 m), Fauna (4390 m) and Alice (4498 m) Peaks successfully climbed by Paul and Fergus. |
| Day 15 | Monday<br>03 August 2026 | Rest day. Alex walks to the road head and hitches a ride to Kara Say to get a Wifi signal to check on her house sale. |
| Day 16 | Tuesday<br>04 August 2026 | Rest day. Alex returns to BC. Charlotte's birthday celebrations. |
| Day 17 | Wednesday<br>05 August 2026 | Successful summit ascent of Dora Peak (4434.0 m) by Paul and Hugh, and of 4314.7 m by Alex, Charlotte and Joanne. Unsuccessful attempt on 4557.0 m by Paul and Hugh - the high point reached was 4498 m. |
| Day 18 | Thursday<br>06 August 2026 | Rest day. |
| Day 19 | Friday<br>07 August 2026 | Successful summit ascents of Wonderland (4617 m), Moon (4648 m) and Galina (4573 m) Peaks by Paul, Fergus and Hugh. Alex, Charlotte and Joanne establish an ABC at 41.740966 N, 78.213343 E at an altitude of 3777 m and roughly 5 km NE of basecamp. |
| Day 20 | Saturday<br>08 August 2026 | Pic Moutarde summit successfully climbed by Alex and Joanne. Charlotte rests at ABC. Fergus walks to the road head and hitchhikes to Kara Say to get cigarettes for Galina. |
| Day 21 | Sunday<br>09 August 2026 | Alex, Charlotte and Joanne return from ABC to BC. Fergus arrives back from Kara Say. |
| Day 22 | Monday<br>10 August 2026 | Rest day due to increasingly rainy weather. |
| Day 23 | Tuesday<br>11 August 2026 | Heavy rain at times. Charlotte is still suffering from a lack of appetite and a persistent cough and she and Alex walk to the road head and hitchhike to Tamga. Paul, Hugh, Fergus and Joanne play cards. |
| Day 24 | Wednesday<br>12 August 2026 | Misty and damp feeling. Successful ascent of Brynn Peak (4580 m) by Paul and Joanne. Charlotte visits a local doctor and is prescribed antibiotics for a chest infection. |
| Day 25 | Thursday<br>13 August 2026 | Sunny weather. Drying out and packing ready for setting off the next day to ABCs. |
| Day 26 | Friday<br>14 August 2026 | Dry and bright. Hugh and Joanne establish an ABC at 41.7457300 N, 78.120431 E (3818 m). Paul and Fergus successfully summit 4442 m, Eagle Peak (4451 m) and 4674.4 m and camp just below the ridge line at 41.702793 N, 78.221798 E at an altitude of 4595 m. |
| Day 27 | Saturday<br>15 August 2026 | Successful summit ascent of Elation Peak (4629 m) by Paul and Fergus who then attempt Peak 4660 or Tsunami along the ridge from the SW to find the terrain too loose and dangerous and instead descend to 4286 m to camp overnight (41.710830 N, 78.217497 E). Hugh and Joanne make an unsuccessful attempt on Anniversary Peak (4592 m) reaching a high point of 4562 m, then successfully climb Rexjacken Peak (4270 m). |
| Day 28 | Sunday | Hugh and Joanne return to BC. Paul and Fergus successfully climb Peak 4660 or Tsunami and then return to |

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| | 16 August 2026 | BC, crossing the Kara Say river in waters that were at least thigh deep. |
| Day 29 | Monday<br>17 August 2026 | Rest day. |
| Day 30 | Tuesday<br>18 August 2026 | Hugh and Fergus establish an ABC at 41.692233 N, 78.094247 E at an altitude of 3673 m, 8 km W of BC. Paul and Joanne establish an ABC below Flora Peak (4393 m) at 41.736105 N, 78.183925 E at an altitude of 4355 m (about 4 km from BC). |
| Day 31 | Wednesday<br>19 August 2026 | Hugh and Fergus successfully make an ascent of 4057 m. Successful summit ascent of Anniversary (4592 m) and Marley (4739 m) Peaks made by Paul and Joanne. Paul returns to BC while Joanne rests at ABC. |
| Day 32 | Thursday<br>20 August 2026 | Joanne returns to BC as does Hugh and Fergus. |
| Day 33 | Friday<br>21 August 2026 | Prepare for departure the next day. |
| Day 34 | Saturday<br>22 August 2026 | Travel from BC to Tamga. The team re-unites. |
| Day 35 | Sunday<br>23 August 2026 | Return to Bishkek from Tamga. |
| Day 36 | Monday<br>24 August 2026 | All except Hugh walk to the ITMC offices and collect stashed equipment. Fergus then departs to find an outside gear shop. Alex and Charlotte take a taxi and go rock climbing in Chongkurchak. Joanne and Paul remain and have a thorough expedition debrief with Vladimir Komissarov of ITMC. |
| Day 37 | Tuesday<br>25 August 2026 | Sight seeing and packing ready for a very early pick-up in the morning. |
| Day 38 | Wednesday<br>26 August 2026 | Depart from Manas airport, Bishkek at 05:50 and arrive back at Gatwick in the UK via Istanbul the same day at 13:10 Met by Lesley and Hugh's girlfriend. Travel by train back to Lesley's house. The team celebrated. Alex and Charlotte leave to drive home. |
| Day 39 | Thursday<br>27 August 2026 | All expedition team members back in their respective homes. |

**Imagery and mapping**

The Google Earth images of the Akshyyrak range were a patchwork of photographs taken at different times with varying amounts of snow cover. It was difficult to directly gauge the terrain other than very broadly. The photographs from previous expeditions were more useful. Google Earth however was used extensively during the research stage of the expedition to plot climbed and unclimbed peaks, altitudes and so on, and to determine where particular photos from previous expedition reports must have been taken from.

For mapping we found old Russian maps online at https://maps.vlasenko.net/ To make sense of them and to understand the numbering system in order to identify the maps we needed we found a U.S. 1958 manual on Soviet Topographic Map Symbols https://archive.org/details/TM30-548.

It was possible to add an image overlay in Google Earth and create a custom map for loading onto a Garmin GPSMAP 66s (a GPS handheld navigation device). See https://support.garmin.com/en-US/?faq=cVuMqGHWaM7wTFWMkPNLN9 for instructions. Note that the jpeg of the k-44-073 1:100,000 map of the area is too large for a custom map so needed to be cropped to make it less than 3MB. The process was fiddly and took a few attempts but successful in the end and very useful in-field.

To understand the current situation and likely snow cover we used the Copernicus Data Space Ecosystem (https://browser.dataspace.copernicus.eu/). Imagery goes back many years and, providing the cloud cover is roughly 30% or less, we were able to compare conditions at various times between different years to see what changes if any had occurred. Copernicus also has the added advantage of different layers. The moisture index in particular was good for judging glacial cover.

A close eye on the temperature was kept in the lead up to the expedition using https://zoom.earth/maps/temperature/

Laminated photocopies of maps were carried by all team members, including in the Ala-Archa National Park. Print outs of the relevant sections of Vladimir Komissarov's excellent guidebook to climbing in Kyrgyzstan (https://archive.org/details/mountaineering-regions-of-kyrgyzstan-by-komissarov-leveque) were brought from the UK, and of the rock climbing close to the Ratsek hut from Mountainproject https://www.mountainproject.com/area/108296088/ala-archa-national-park and UKC https://www.ukclimbing.com/logbook/crags/ala_archa_national_park-16529/ The Ala-Archa specific print outs were left with a couple of climbers on departure from the Ratsek hut, one being Pete Dronkers (https://www.petedronkers.com/) of the American Alpine Club, who themselves had just returned from an expedition further south in Kyrgyzstan using ITMC's logistics.



*Figure 44. Looking back from the Kara-Say river towards basecamp (3690 m) - Hugh Weaver*

**Suggestions for new routes**

The south Kara Say glacier and surrounding summits remain largely unexplored. A team willing to travel to the region either earlier or later in the season may experience better snow and ice conditions together with lower river levels enabling better access (our team was limited to travelling in the school summer holidays).

**Access**

The road along the south side of the Issyk-Kul Lake and up the Barskoon gorge was undergoing major re-construction. The dusty, dirt track roads were being widened, re-routed in places and tarmac'd. The scale of operations was immense.

Once off-road, the route taken by our GAZ66 4WD truck into the Akshyyrak region was along a rough track to the north and west of the Kara Say river (not along the other river bank as indicated

on the k-44-073 1:100,000 map[2]), then directly along the slightly elevated plain. There were numerous rivers to cross with steep, loose banks and extensive boulder filled sections. The truck drivers (working as a pair) were experienced and skilled in navigating the terrain, often stopping to reassess the route.

Nevertheless the river levels were such that crossing the tributaries of the Kara Say river to our planned basecamp location on the other side was impossible. We therefore turned around and retreated a kilometre or so to an area where it was clear, from the vegetation and numerous marmot holes, that it rarely floods, at least not in the summertime. We were roughly five kilometres from where we had intended to be and on the west rather than east bank of the Kara Say.

To safely access the mountains on foot to the north and west of basecamp required avoiding the part of the river which sweeps right in under the cliff-like side of the grassy plateau that lies well above the flood plain. This meant climbing a steep bank to gain the higher ground which itself was at times scree filled and riven by deep gullies making progress north slow.

**Basecamp food**

We used the services of a cook and were very happy with the decision we'd made as it meant there was always someone at camp and none of us had to concern ourselves with cooking and clearing up. The cook came with the kitchen utensils needed for cooking (pots and pans and the like) but nothing else, so we rented the stove, two gas bottles, kitchen tent, expedition boxes, staff tent and so on.

Our original cook that ITMC had booked for our expedition failed to turn up on the Wednesday when it was originally planned we'd visit the market to buy supplies. Instead Aisha was employed by ITMC to help us purchase everything early the following morning. Meanwhile our cook Galina, recruited just the evening before, went through the kitchen equipment she'd need (which was stored at the ITMC offices) ready for packing into the van.

Aisha, a trained expedition cook herself, was perfect, navigating us around the enormous market and guiding us with our purchases and negotiating discounts with the store holders. Without her it would have been very difficult. We used the services of someone with a large trolley to wheel the supplies back to the van. The sacks of flour, numerous water melons, kilograms of carrots, potatoes and onions, hundreds of eggs, dozens of loaves of bread, bags and bags of coffee, tea, dried fruits, nuts, pasta, rice, sweets, biscuits, oil, dried milk and so on felt like huge amounts of food to us, plus all of the toilet rolls, washing up cloths, matches etc. Later however Galina, once in Tamga, inspected the hand-written receipts and was extremely concerned we didn't have enough and we spent another hour or more in two supermarkets purchasing yet more on the morning of our departure to basecamp. Even once at basecamp she still stressed over whether we had enough food to last, and Hugh spent hours with her going through the bags and boxes checking what we had so she could plan in detail all of the meals.

[2] On return from their traverse of the ridge opposite basecamp, Fergus and Paul reported finding no trace of a track on the other side of the Kara Say.



*Figure 45. A typical meal of soup - Charlotte Whitmore*

At basecamp most meals were liquid based. Galina is a chef by trade and has vast experience cooking for very large numbers of climbers for many months on end on Peak Lenin. The amount of soup we consumed was vast. Getting enough clean, filtered water was a chore and serving soup was a way of conserving water and keeping us as hydrated as possible with limited resources. It did however become monotonous and for Fergus who doesn't like soup a form of purgatory. In contrast, the leavened bread she made and cooked in oil was something we looked forward to, as well as the fried eggs, pasta dishes, salads, aubergine delicacies and the perushki (fried yeast-dough pasties stuffed with mashed potato and onion).



*Figure 46. Galina and Paul with a tray full of perushki - Hugh Frazer*

**Advanced basecamp food**

It was hard to judge how much freeze dried food and lunch bars to bring from the UK. Of the 15 dinners and a selection of 14 breakfasts/desserts that the expedition leader brought, six 1,000 calorie dinners, six 450 calorie breakfasts and two 450 calorie desserts were consumed in total at the three ABCs. Fergus, Paul and Hugh ate a lot more than that at ABCs and even then felt calorie deficient. Charlotte in comparison struggled to consume even half an 800 calorie dinner in an evening because of a loss of appetite at altitude. Similarly, it was difficult to judge how many gas canisters to order from ITMC. In the end we used of the order of six or seven of the 28 we had as the majority of our ABCs did not rely on melting snow for water which had been a big concern for us.

**Water**

One of our group purchases was of an MSR Guardian Gravity Purifier and 10 litre dromedary bag. Initially, because of the high water levels the river was full of silt. This caused issues even after leaving it to settle. The filter had to be back flushed with precious clean water (the purge hose alone failed to clear it). Fortunately we had brought 20 litres of water with us in two large screw top plastic bottles.

The situation of water supply was resolved once a small pond was found roughly 1.5 km walk from basecamp. Our cook needed at least 15 litres a day and there was a constant call for more clean water. Once the source of clear water was found we could filter 10 litres in less than two hours, but the fetching and carrying obviously made the chore take a lot longer. We used the large plastic bottles and had three 15 litre plastic water fountain type containers (marked with electrical tape so we knew which were for ‘dirty’ water) plus numerous lemonade bottles and the like. Galina supplied a long handled saucepan for scooping the water up.

Later the river levels dropped and it was possible to find a small section that ran clear half a kilometre or so towards the opposite bank. Cairns were used to mark the way.

For advanced basecamp, purification tablets, a soft flask filter or a hand held pump was used.
Note that the gravity of the situation until we found a source of clear water was concerning, and something for future expeditions to consider.



*Figure 47. Ten litres of water at a time were filtered using a gravity purifier - Joanne Miles*

**Latrine**

A latrine was dug about three hundred yards downstream of basecamp and consisted of a trench and two planks, a plastic bag weighted down with some rocks for used loo paper, some soap and a bottle of river water for hand washing. ITMC had provided a toilet (an open-bottomed plastic loo with lift up seat) but in practice it was only used occasionally by a couple of the team. The toilet/shower tent was not strong enough to withstand the afternoon winds but fortunately the latrine was far enough away to provide sufficient privacy.

**Solar panels**

The expedition rented from ITMC a solar panel, leisure battery and inverter for charging electricals. The equipment was stored in a wooden box and we were given training on setting it up and using it. The plugs in Kyrgyzstan are standard European round pin ones. In bright sunlight it was only a matter of a few hours to fully charge the battery. On cloudy days it took a lot longer. The system dealt easily with all essential charging requirements for items such as the InReach satellite communication devices, headtorches and emergency power banks. In retrospect however it would have been useful for the team to have had extra capacity for the plethora of mobile phones, cameras, re-chargeable batteries, handheld gaming devices and other powerbanks that we had. A solar powered lantern for use in a tent gave more diffused light and saved headtorch power, but a few more personal solar panels is recommended on such a long expedition as back-up, and particularly if energy use is high.



*Figure 48. The solar panel with leisure battery catching the early morning sunshine - Hugh Frazer*

**Gas cylinders**

The stove was brand new but the two 28 litre gas cylinders had been previously well used. A second gas regulator, length of hose and jubilee clips was purchased in a hardware store found in Bishkek as a failure might have been critical. In the end the regulator was not a problem. The issue we did encounter was with the pin located on one of the cylinders. Each night the regulator

was turned off but in the morning, when Galina turned it on again, gas failed to flow. It took a bit of troubleshooting initially by Paul, and then a particular technique to get the pin unstuck that Paul and Hugh perfected.



*Figure 49. Paul testing the gas stove and both cylinders with Vladimir Komissarov - Joanne Miles*

**Injuries and illness**

Alex went down with a bad cold at the Ala-Archa hotel which she treated with painkillers. The illness was relatively short-lived but debilitating nevertheless.

Fergus had an upset stomach at the Ratsek hut but recovered with rest over the course of a day or so.

Joanne took a tumble on the unstable scree descending from Uchitel Peak in the Ala-Archa National Park during the acclimatisation stage of the expedition. A small, painless but deep cut was found on the left shin once back at the Ratsek hut. The sock was blood filled but had kept grit and dust out of the wound. It was rinsed in clean water, an antiseptic cream applied and then covered with a large self adhesive dressing. The Neo G Opti-Heal Silicone Foam Wound Dressing 10x8cm (obtained from Boots the Chemists back in the UK) was showerproof and designed to be unpeeled for wound inspection then re-stuck down. The wound was kept covered the rest of the trip and the dressing changed every four or five days. It was fully healed a couple of weeks after the expedition ended.

Charlotte suffered poor appetite at altitude, and at the Ratsek hut developed a cough. Despite an early descent to lower altitudes, and visiting a local pharmacy in Bishkek for medicine it failed to improve. The cough persisted and after 11 days at basecamp she descended to Tamga and went to a local doctor who prescribed antibiotics for a chest infection. She and Alex, who accompanied her, were then able to enjoy sightseeing around the Issyk-Kul Lake and take a three day long horse trekking trip near Son Kul. Charlotte fully recovered once back home.

Sunburn was an issue at altitude. Cat 4 sunglasses, sun cream and lip salve was essential. It was easy to get caught out. Despite applying sun cream to exposed skin Joanne suffered sunburn after climbing Uchitel Peak from forgetting to use lip salve, and mild itchy eyes from failing to put on sun glasses early enough on the ascent of Whitmore Peak. Paul used a nose guard as he was particularly sensitive.

Fergus has a walnut allergy. Antihistamines are normally sufficient to control the allergic reaction however, an epi-pen is also currently prescribed. At one point when climbing he felt unwell and, fearing there had been some trace of walnuts in something he had eaten, rapidly descended in case things worsened but recovered and there was no lasting effect. Note that antihistamines were carried by the expedition team members as back-up in case Fergus had misplaced his, and two of us, including the expedition leader, carried a spare epi-pen. We had set InReach messages in case of a severe allergic reaction to facilitate quick and easy communication. Thanks go to Will Legon of will4adventure.com (a skilled outdoor first aid trainer) who provided guidance to the expedition leader on the use of epi-pens on expeditions.

For future expeditions be aware that none of us are medics but all were outdoor first aid trained and in the lead-up to the expedition had had dental check-ups and visits to the doctor. The lack of an expedition doctor influenced our choice of destination and objective. At basecamp we had a comprehensive expedition first aid kit (but no items requiring prescription), were fully vaccinated as per the recommendations found under travelhealthpro.org.uk (including for rabies), and each had our own personal first aid kits. Some of the team also had their own GP prescribed medicines. In a couple of cases this included antibiotics. Our details were provided to the local mountain rescue services two weeks prior to departure from the UK https://rescue.travelasia.kg/en/rescue-service/ We witnessed evidence of their work whilst at the Ratsek hut where an injured Russian climber was stretchered off from a high mountain route.

**Waste disposal**

Toilet paper was burned. Human waste was buried in the latrine (a simple trench dug into the ground that was filled in on departure). All other waste was collected and transported out and disposed of in Tamga with normal household waste. This included pieces of foam insulation, cigarette packets and other rubbish found by Charlotte, Alex and Joanne in what looked like a previous expedition's bivvy spot. And plastic bottles from a previous expedition left on two summits, found by Paul and Fergus. We walked the BC to ensure no signs of our stay remained, picking up stray tent pegs and so on before leaving. Leftover food from the expedition (tea bags, tins of meat and the like) was transported out and given to the cook.

**Carbon footprint**

The expedition's flight carbon footprint was 14,347 kg CO2, carbon offsetting this would cost 432 Euros, according to Atmosfair. Following the MEF website rule of thumb, where the flight is 90% emissions, we estimated a total of 15,941 kg CO2, 480 Euros, or £409. Donation made to Moors for the Future.

**Contributions and interactions with locals**

To support the local economy, ITMC of Bishkek was employed to support the expedition. They helped inform the expedition team in knowledge and understanding of local cultural nuances that were not available through online research.

The cook and van driver came from Bishkek and the truck drivers local to Tamga and Karakol.

Galina, our cook was ill prepared for the cold in the evenings and at night time. She had borrowed extra clothing from one of the drivers but we supplemented that with a large warm down jacket and hot water bottles at night. She didn't have a headtorch or any way of recharging her mobile phone so we made sure she had light and power. At one point her tent became wet after prolonged rain so we rigged a lightweight tarpaulin over her tent for extra protection.

Hugh gave Galina the down jacket as a thank you at the end of the expedition and we tipped her, and all of the drivers. We brought welsh whiskey and an expedition tee-shirt from the UK as gifts for Vladimir and Elza respectively[3].

Alex was invited to stay overnight in a yurt roughly 8 km from basecamp on her return from walking to Kara Say (where she'd used the WiFi to check for emails from her solicitors dealing with her house sale). She was able to share information with the grandfather through his two grandsons. Whether there had been any sightings of wolves was of particular interest to him (we hadn't, only a solitary fox spotted at night near basecamp, and footprints of what may have been a snow leopard high up on the mountains). Later, near the end of the expedition, Hugh and Fergus also talked with the same nomads on meeting them high on the hillside.

The truck driver on the return journey to Tamga brought his three sons for the ride (it was a Saturday). The eldest sat in the front cabin and the two younger ones in the back with us. We shared food, discussed football and the expedition leader showed postcards of her local towns in Wales. Galina and Fergus got a lift half a mile or so back from the Kara Say military checkpoint to a small roadside shop for snacks and cigarettes, while the rest of us waited. Galina was chatting with someone local and we gave that person a lift from Kara Say to the main road at the foot of the Barskoon gorge, shortly before Tamga.

Fergus, Alex and Charlotte all hitched lifts between the road head and Kara Say, and Alex and Charlotte had a lift in a truck all the way to Tamga. They used local Marshrutkas for sightseeing around lake Issyk-Kul. Marshrutkas form a sort of bus transport with set routes but no timetable with the vehicles leaving only once they're full.

We met Lyubov Danichkina who is the owner of the guest house we stayed at in Tamga. She herself is a mountaineer and author of a series of books on the history of mountaineering in Kyrgyzstan. Charlotte, Hugh and Paul bought one or more copies of her books.

Walking up to the Ratsek hut we got talking to a small group of young lads from Bishkek around the age of 17 including Han who would have only been learning English ~6 months. He was the chattier one of the group. Han had a bit of a leg cramp and behind his group. Paul lent him one of his poles until we reached the hut and gave him some electrolytes to help with the cramping.

[3] Thanks goes to Elizabeth Porter, the expedition leader of the Kyrgyzstan Ak-Shyyrak Expedition 2024, who was able to reply to a question we had had about tipping (and also for her time previously whilst she was in the alps (!) talking the expedition leader through the many questions we'd had in the run up to flying out).

## Expedition accounts

*Table 4. Expedition accounts (Exchange rate used: 1 Euro = £0.854)*

| Expedition Costs | | Expedition Income | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Flights | £9,672 | Mount Everest Foundation | £2,000 |
| Transport in country | £2,327 | British Mountaineering Council | £1,698 |
| Border permits | £188 | Personal contributions | £21,515 |
| Accommodation (Bishkek, Ala-Archa and Tamga) | £2,803 | | |
| Gas and hire of gas stove and cylinders | £174 | | |
| 28 x 230g gas canisters | £250 | | |
| Equipment hire | £1,574 | | |
| Cook | £1,349 | | |
| Food (base camp) | £935 | | |
| Ala-Archa National Park fees | £10 | | |
| Insurance | £3,240 | | |
| Visas | £347 | | |
| Group equipment purchases | £420 | | |
| Garmin InReach fees | £693 | | |
| Wise bank transfer fees | £48 | | |
| Tips for cook and drivers | £376 | | |
| Group meals in Bishkek | £336 | | |
| Correspondent bank fees | £52 | | |
| Visa card fees | £10 | | |
| Carbon offsetting (https://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/ ) | £409 | | |
| **TOTAL** | £25,213 | **TOTAL** | £25,213 |

*Flights and excess baggage were purchased for all 7 of the team but one member was later unable to join the expedition out in Kyrgyzstan under medical advice.*

*Accommodation was for 15 nights for six persons. Two nights were board only, six nights bed and breakfast, two nights included dinner and breakfast and the five spent at the Ratsek hut were full board and included lunch/packed lunch.*

*Expedition Foods gave team members a 15% discount on all freeze dried food purchased directly from them.*

*Food brought by team members for ABCs is not included in the figure for food (example costs for 15 Expedition Foods dinners, mostly 1000 calories, and four breakfasts or desserts at 450 calories, with a 15% discount plus delivery, amounted to £192.72).*

## Visas

The 38 day expedition exceeded the visa-free regime limit for UK passport holders of 30 days. Each of us travelling to Kyrgyzstan therefore needed a visa. Individual visa applications were made online by the expedition leader for each team member: applications could not be made once in the country. Up until the end of 2025 the visa-free regime had been 60 days. Our logistics partner ITMC worked closely with the government authorities in Kyrgyzstan on our behalf to determine which type of visa to apply for. ITMC provided the individual letters of invitation, ITMC's constituent documents and their certificate of registration issued by the Ministry of Justice, and helped double-check the information before we submitted it. Critically, ITMC forwarded to us the Kyrgyz official e-Visa emails that we needed in order to verify, track, progress and update if necessary the applications and print the final visa - we found that messages to a non-Kyrgyzstan email address for business visa applications failed to be delivered. We needed to give the inviting organisation's Kyrgyzstan email address at the first step (even if on further steps the individual's UK email address was also provided).

Note.

1. For future expeditions it would be prudent to sign up for UK government travel advice emails - we were unaware such things existed. It was only when double-checking arrangements at the end of May 2026 that the expedition leader discovered the change to Kyrgyzstan's visa-free regime.
2. The time and effort dealing with visa applications is not to be under-estimated - the workload for the expedition leader in this case was immense and extremely stressful (and we had only six visa applications to make): it took time for ITMC to determine what visa to apply for and what requirements were necessary; the authorities had temporarily changed the government department dealing with visa applications; and a number of power outages in the capital Bishkek were also causing communication delays.
3. To successfully upload an applicant's digital photograph we had to crop it so it was roughly square and for their head and top of their shoulders to virtually fill the whole photograph.
4. We double and triple checked all of the information typed in because any mismatches would have meant reapplying and paying a second time.
5. Fortunately, when the authorities initially rejected ITMC's invitation letters and the digital photograph for one of us, the expedition leader could use a security code and visa application reference number to upload corrected documents, without charge.
6. Each iteration takes a full five working days after verification (which itself can take a day or more depending on the time it was submitted) before being considered, and remember the UK is 5 hours behind Kyrgyzstan which can easily add an extra day, or more if it clashes with a weekend, depending on what time you submit or upload something.
7. For one of us this meant arriving in Kyrgyzstan without the corrected business visa application having been reconsidered and granted (it had not been possible to speed up the time for it to be re-considered by paying more money at this point - the e-Visa system wouldn't allow it). A member of visa staff at Manas airport (in an office located *before* passport control) was able to view online electronic records of the visa application that had been made and advised them to enter under the 30 day visa-free regime. The business visa was issued shortly after.
8. Our contingency plan otherwise was to exit Kyrgyzstan to acclimatise in Kazakhstan for a full 8 days before re-entering Kyrgyzstan.

**Permits**

The Akshyyrak range of mountains is close to the border between Kyrgyzstan and China. Each expedition member (as well as our drivers and cook) therefore required a permit. These were obtained on our behalf by ITMC. A valid visa was required before the permits could be applied for. There was a military checkpoint at Kara Say on the route to basecamp where these were inspected against our passports and recorded in a ledger. On departure our permits and passports were inspected once more and cross-referenced against the recorded information.

**Logistics partner**

The expedition used the services of ITMC for permits, accommodation, all transport, equipment rental and employing the cook. Communication was via email and WhatsApp. Elza, the person dealing with the administration side of things at ITMC, was very helpful, prompt, and efficient. Her English was perfect. The itinerary discussions began in earnest in September once the 2025 season in Kyrgyzstan had nearly finished. Flights were bought in October. We were concerned about acclimatisation in the Akshyyrak region and ITMC's director Vladimir Komissarov was able to suggest several options. Charges were in Euros. There is a state tax of 4.2% and a bank charge of 0.5% that ITMC added to the bill. Payment was made using Wise. To secure ITMC's services we paid a 30% deposit six months in advance. A test transfer of 100 Euros was made first to ensure the details entered were correct. Wise charges were of the order of 0.4 or 0.5%. Wise uses intermediary banks to transfer money from the UK to Kyrgyzstan. There is no control over which intermediary bank is used and different banks charged very different amounts (Unicredit S.P.A charged 35 euros for a transfer of 3,020 euros whereas Landesbank Baden-Wuerttemberg charged 17.50 euros on 8,445.32 euros). The full balance was paid before the expedition started. We are very grateful to Vladimir Komissarov for his generosity, expertise and experience and to his

hard working team who we dealt with when out in Bishkek, Elza on administration and Valera, one of our drivers.

**Media/Social Media Coverage**

We created a social media page on Instagram with the aim of detailing the preparation in the months leading up to and during the expedition. It was useful for keeping a wider group of friends up to date with the first week or so when WiFi was accessible. We also had a WhatsApp group chat for relatives and a separate chat for a small team in the UK to coordinate support in case there was some sort of emergency.

A mid-September presentation was made to non-climbing friends in Joanne's local village on the expedition. Charlotte made one on the expedition to her workplace team.

A short Vlog is planned, it is to both document the experiences of the team and to provide a further level of depth which can run alongside the expedition report, making the information easier to understand, informing future expeditions, and aiming to support the accessibility of mountaineering. This will be uploaded on YouTube - we found supplemental videos helpful for planning for this expedition and wish to continue this forward.

Hugh borrowed a 360 degree camera from the special needs school that he works at and took several long immersive reels which students at the school may find helpful for experiencing the great outdoors but from the safety of a classroom.

Joanne has been asked by the Pinnacle Club president to make a presentation online to club members during a proposed winter lecture series. Charlotte will be giving a lecture to the Cave and Crag club in January 2027.

A brief post has been added to the Climbers Shop's blog page. Paul is a staff member there and the post celebrates the virgin summits he climbed and includes some of his equipment recommendations. See https://theclimbersshopjoebrownblog.co.uk/blog/