

2016 Expedition to Kindyk valley, Kyrgyzstan



Andrew Vine and Miles Gould
13th August – 3rd September 2016

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Introduction

“So, Elbrus next year?” said Andy, as we drove across the Somme valley on our way back from two very damp weeks in Chamonix.

“Yeah, sure,” Miles replied.

Further investigation revealed that Elbrus was better known for the appalling state of its toilets than the quality of its mountaineering, but the idea of a trip to the former Soviet Union had taken root. Kyrgyzstan, with its relatively easy access, minimal bureaucracy and wealth of unclimbed Alpine-scale peaks, seemed the obvious choice: friends who’d visited the country, whether for climbing or work, all strongly recommended it. Andy had previous experience of expedition mountaineering from the successful Tagne 2001 trip to the Indian Himalaya; Miles was keen to put the skills he’d learned in Scotland and the Alps to the test in a more remote environment.



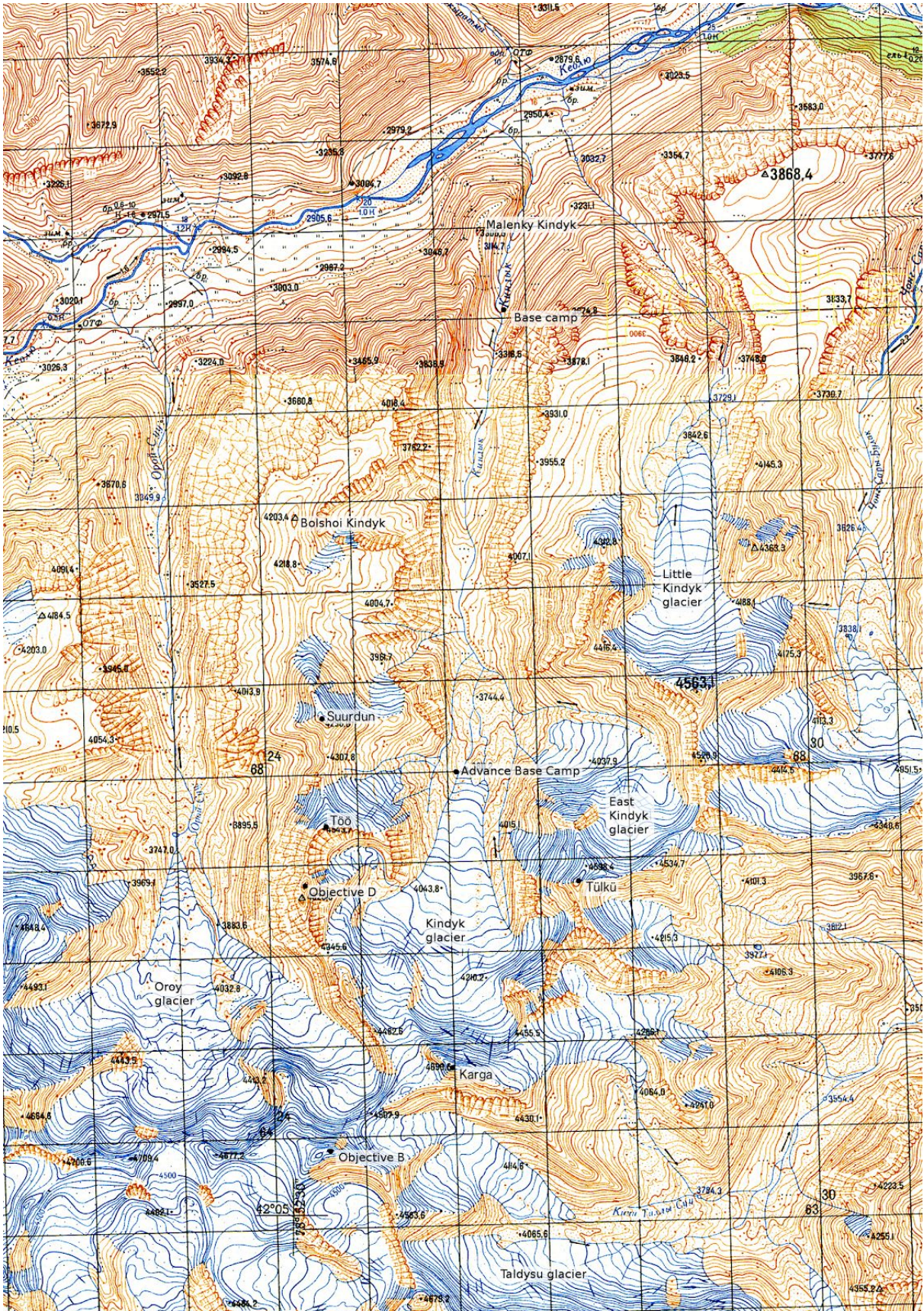
Map data ©2017 Google - Showing the location of the Kindyk Valley in Kyrgyzstan.

Initial inquiries to ITMC (a logistics firm sharing premises and personnel with the Kyrgyz Alpine Club) threw up a number of suitable areas, but we were drawn by the Kuluu range in the north-east, near to Enylchek and (crucially) far enough from the Chinese border that it didn’t require special permits. Kuluu is similar in size and height to the Mont Blanc massif (the highest peak, Peak Constitution, is 5300m), and offers plenty of snow and mixed lines at moderate grades. Andy had planned to visit the Kuluu range in 2002, but had to abandon the trip when his climbing partner was injured: to our delight, there were still unclimbed peaks there. We settled on the Kindyk (Kyrgyz for “navel”) valley in the North-East of the range, which had no recorded visits by climbers and was surrounded by three 4000m

mountains, which formed our main objectives. A further mountain (Objective B) at the head of the nearby Taldysu glacier was our stretch goal.



Andy and Miles on a previous trip to Scotland



Map of the Kindyk valley and surroundings, taken from the 1980 1:50,000 Soviet map series. May-Saz is 5km east and 1km north of the top-right corner. Our suggested names are shown for the peaks we climbed.

Expedition members

Andrew Vine



Andy Vine (British, 38, mechanical engineer, climbing leader) has been climbing in the Alps since 1998, and has spent 8 summer trips climbing routes like Dent du Géant normal route, Barre des Ecrins, traverse of Pelvoux (Coolidge couloir). Andy has also completed the ski tour from Verbier to Zermatt. In 2001 Andy led the MEF-supported “Tagne 2001” Expedition to the Himachal Pradesh, climbing the previously unclimbed Mount Tagne (6111m, <http://elvum.net/tagne>) and supporting the first ascent of Sagar (6030m) from Camp 1. Andy now lives in the Peak District, and enjoys climbing on rock, and making summer and winter trips to Scotland and North Wales at every opportunity.

Miles Gould



Miles Gould (British, 37, computer programmer, expedition leader) has been an outdoor enthusiast since 1995. He climbs up to VS on rock and IV for Scottish winter. He has made two trips to the French Alps climbing routes to PD+. He holds the Far From Help certificate for wilderness medicine. This was his first trip to the Greater Ranges. On the expedition, he was responsible for medical matters and speaking Russian.

Two other team members were forced to drop out before we departed the UK:

Richard Fergie

Richard Fergie (British, 30, marketing data consultant, climber) developed a taste for high(ish) altitude mountaineering on a long trip to the Cordillera Blanca (Peru) with successful ascents to 5500m and up to PD+ (Urus Este, Ishinca, Yanapaccha, Vallunaraju) and failed attempts on Shaqsha and Artesonraju.

Alia Sheikh

Alia Sheikh (British, 37, senior development producer and research engineer for the BBC) has some trad climbing experience but no mountaineering/expedition experience. Alia was to have been base camp manager, managing equipment and supplies and coordinating climbing activities. She was also to have been in charge of filming. After dropping out of the trip, Alia took on the job of sourcing medical supplies and climbing equipment.

Planning and preparation

Our planning started with an email to ITMC, saying that we were looking for unclimbed peaks of moderate difficulty and altitude, and asking about transport and equipment hire. They responded with a price list and an overview of the major mountaineering areas of Kyrgyzstan, indicating several with unclimbed peaks. From this list, we were drawn to the Kuiluu range, with its mixed lines at Alpine altitudes, and in particular to its underexplored north-east corner.

From there, our next task was to learn as much as we could about previous trips to the range, a task complicated by the bewildering variety of spellings (in both English and Russian) used for the name. The expedition reports from the two ISM expeditions (in 2000 and 2009) were extremely useful, but the most useful resource we found was a trip report (with comprehensive photos and GPS traces) from the Moscow State University Mountaineering Club. We were excited to learn of the existence of the book *Классификатор Маршрутов На Горные Вершины (Classification of Routes on High Mountains)*, which lists first ascents of peaks in the former USSR, but when we managed to borrow a copy (from the polar guide Phil Wickens, with whom Andy had originally planned to visit Kyrgyzstan) we were disappointed to learn that it only gave altitudes, not coordinates - and the altitudes didn't often match the spot-heights shown on maps. Eventually, based on our research and ITMC's records, we concluded that the peaks surrounding the Kindyk valley were unclimbed, and started looking for potential routes on Google Earth.

The 4700m peak at the head of the valley was the obvious main objective, and it looked climbable by either its west or east ridge; the peaks on either side of the Kindyk glacier also made obvious objectives, and appeared on Google Earth to be accessible via moderate ridges. A fourth peak overlooking the Taldysu glacier (Peak Taldysu?) was our final objective, but we considered it a stretch goal as it was probably not doable in a day from our planned ABC location and would involve moving to a higher camp.

We havered over our approach plans. The obvious place to camp was at 3800m at the tongue of the glacier (shown in the map above), but we would probably want a lower base camp. Previous expeditions to Kuiluu had established base camps in the main Kuiluu valley, at around 3000m, and had approached base camp using four-wheel drive vehicles. However, they had been visiting the western end of the range and had driven along the track on the north side of the Kuiluu river. ITMC said they could provide a driver as far as Kuiluu; we asked about hiring horses, but they said that this would depend on there being shepherds in the valley, and they couldn't guarantee this. We peered intently at some odd dots on the satellite photos - could those be huts? We weren't sure, until Google updated their imagery to reveal regular walls, indicating human activity.

Having identified a valley and some feasible looking objectives, we decided to go ahead. We asked ITMC to organise us transport to and from Kuiluu (a minibus from Bishkek to Karakol, and a 4WD from Karakol to the roadhead), and accommodation in Bishkek and

Karakol on the way. We also hired a satellite phone and Base Camp stove from them, and a set of three canvas horse-panniers in the hope that we would be able to hire horses. To our dismay, their bill (denominated in US dollars) arrived the morning after the Brexit referendum wiped 10% off the value of the pound.

Both planning and training were made more difficult by our geographical dispersal - Miles in Edinburgh, Richard in Northumberland, and Andy and Alia in Manchester. Nonetheless, we managed some training weekends in Wales, Scotland and the Lake District, in which we knocked off some classic scrambles and easy rock climbs and refined our camping and catering systems. Miles took night classes in Russian, and lost around 15kg through a combination of dieting and gym-based exercise, based loosely on the programme suggested in Mark Twight's book *Extreme Alpinism*. Altitude medication and pre-trip vaccinations (for rabies and hepatitis B) were obtained from our local travel clinics.

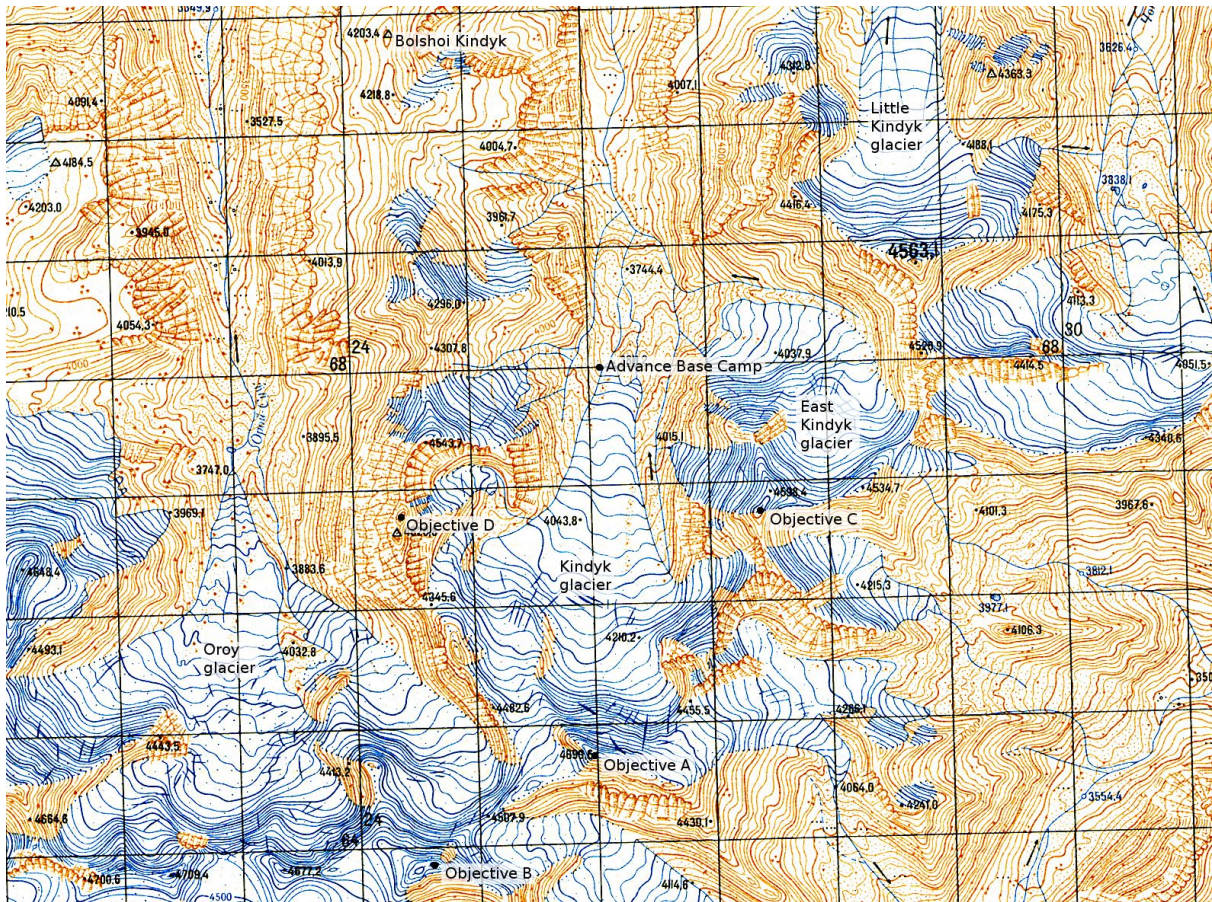
We were nearly derailed by two last-minute disasters. First, the holiday cover Richard had arranged for his clients fell through. As a self-employed contractor, he couldn't afford the loss of business that would result, and reluctantly dropped out of the trip. Then, we were almost unable to obtain adequate insurance. Since helicopter rescue has to come from Bishkek, ITMC insist that insurance covers a high helicopter call-out fee, and the only provider we could find who would provide this was the BMC - but though we'd sent in an application form requesting their High And Remote Areas policy, we'd heard nothing back from them. A series of panicked phone calls to Jim Krawiecki at the BMC eventually diagnosed the problem - the name of one of our medicines was being caught in their spam filter. Once we replaced the brand name of the drug with the generic name our application was received and swiftly processed.

Eventually, the day of our departure arrived. Anything we hadn't managed to prepare, we'd just have to do without. The trip was really, finally happening.

Objectives

Our aim was to make the first ascents of peaks surrounding the Kindyk valley, Kuiluu massif, in particular

- Objective A: 42° 5'54.00"N 78°53'47.83"E, Google Earth height 4660m, via W face or NW ridge
- Objective B: 42° 5'23.92"N 78°52'44.85"E, Google Earth height 4790m, via NE ridge
- Objective C: 42° 7'2.34"N 78°54'47.21"E, Google Earth height 4560m, via E ridge or NE face
- Objective D: 42° 6'58.28"N 78°52'37.21"E, Google Earth height 4550m, via north ridge.



The upper Kindyk valley, showing our four original objectives and our planned location for Advance Base Camp

Logbook

Summary of events

- 13 August: depart from UK, layover in Istanbul.
- 14 August: arrive in Bishkek, buy bulk food supplies.
- 15 August: meet with ITMC, bus to Karakol.
- 16 August: 4WD vehicle to Kuiluu valley. Sleep in shepherds' hut at May-Saz.
- 17 August: hike to Kindyk valley. Establish base camp at 3200m. Recce E side to 3400m.
- 18 August: recce to snout of Kindyk glacier at 3800m. Cache gear there for Advance Base Camp.
- 19 August: load-carry to ABC. Sleep at ABC.
- 20 August: recce East Kindyk glacier to 4070m, minor jobs around camp.
- 21 August: climb Tülkü Chokusu (Objective C) via East Kindyk glacier and East Ridge.
- 22 August: descend to BC.
- 23 August: rest day at BC.
- 24 August: load-carry to ABC.
- 25 August: unsuccessful attempt on Karga Chokusu (Objective A) via the W ridge.
- 26 August: rest day at ABC.

- 27 August: climb Karga Chokusu (Objective A) via E ridge.
- 28 August: climb Töö Chokusu and Suurdun Chokusu (Objectives E and F).
- 29 August: strike ABC, descend to BC.
- 30 August: rest day and packing at BC.
- 31 August: walk-out to May-Saz, 4WD to Karakol.
- 1 September: driven to Bishkek, debrief with ITMC, souvenir shopping.
- 2 September: depart Bishkek.
- 3 September: arrive back in Edinburgh.

13 August - depart from UK

Despite our best intentions, the final packing went on late. We woke after far too little sleep, threw the last few things into bags over breakfast, and then loaded ourselves and our kit onto a taxi to Edinburgh airport.

Our first flight took us to Istanbul, where we spent our 7½ hour layover trying to decode the scan of the Kuiluu page of *Classification of Routes on High Mountains* that we had obtained shortly before departure. With no grid references and no list of the abbreviations used, this was not easy, and we worried that some of our objectives might, in fact, already have been climbed. We also noticed a dot-in-triangle symbol on the summit of Objective D that we somehow hadn't spotted before - surely it couldn't be a trig point? Lists of Soviet map symbols that we found online were ambiguous, with some saying the symbol meant "trig point" and others saying it meant "viewpoint".

Then we got on another plane, caught up on some more movies, and mostly failed to sleep.



14 August - arrive in Bishkek

We arrived at Bishkek airport and were met by Andrei, the driver from ITMC. He drove us in a minibus to the Hotel Alpinist, where we arrived at about 10am. We had a short nap, then took a taxi to the Osh Bazaar in search of bulk food supplies. Unfortunately the confusing market layout, our rudimentary Russian, our lack of Kyrgyz money and our extreme sleep deprivation meant we only managed to buy a naan and a couple of samosas (both common Kyrgyz snacks, though not exactly like the Indian versions we were familiar with - the legacy of the Silk Road), so we walked to the Beta Stores department store (*pictured left*) instead. There we bought pasta, rice, chocolate and nuts, but couldn't find any sausage. We also changed some money - though we later discovered that we got a better rate withdrawing money from ATMs.

We walked back to the hotel, then ordered a taxi to a cafe for dinner. Ignoring our guidebook's warnings, we

didn't take a note of the cafe's address before setting out; our taxi driver drove for ten minutes and then admitted that he didn't know where it was. Instead we went to Slim Jim's, a health-food café where the menu listed the calorific content of every dish. We left the cafe at about 2230, avoided potholes in the dark until we were back on the main road, then caught a taxi back to the hotel.

Apart from the potholes and lack of street lights, Bishkek felt modern and relatively affluent. Although the communist aesthetic was apparent, there were also statues of Kyrgyz figures and banners for the World Nomad Games.

15 August - minibus to Karakol

After breakfast at the hotel, we were collected by Andrei and driven to ITMC's offices. There we met their Programme Manager Lilia Saisheva, who had been our main point of contact. We collected the panniers we had arranged in the hope of being able to hire horses in Kuiluu, and asked about the ascents listed in *Классификатор Маршрутов На Горные Вершины*. She didn't know, so we met with Vladimir Komissarov, the head of ITMC/KAC. He didn't know either, but he did find that the 1956 expedition approached the range from the south, so probably didn't climb any of our objectives. He also confirmed that the dot-in-triangle symbol on Objective D could mean a geodetic triangulation point. Andrei took us to a meat stall and then a Narodnij Supermarket in search of sausages - initially kielbasa, but we managed to explain that we wanted the dried kind.

We set off for Karakol in the minibus. Bishkek had felt like an outpost of Eastern Europe, but it quickly became more obvious that we were in Central Asia. We stopped for lunch at a roadside café called Food Stop, where we held up the queue with our struggle to order; we had plov and a very thin piece of meat (almost like a pancake) covered in ketchup. Both were extremely tasty. The road was smooth and well-paved for the first half of the trip, and somewhat dilapidated for the second half.

We arrived in Karakol at about 5pm, and eventually found our homestay. Gulnara's B&B was hidden down a side-street on a road whose name had changed - Andrei only knew the road's Soviet-era name, Stakhanova, but it's now called Ubukeeva. We unpacked and discovered that Miles's Platypus had sprung a leak and had leaked all over our folder of documents and maps. Andrei handed over the satellite phone we'd hired from ITMC and bade us farewell.

We walked into town, where we bought bread, a plug (into which Andy wired our various USB chargers), a SIM card for the Beeline network (which offered up to 1.5GB of 4G Internet for the astonishingly low price of 50 som (about £1) per week), and 3L of bottled water to replace Miles' Platypus. Dinner was more plov at the hostel: still tasty. The other guests were all trekkers, who were impressed by the ambition of our plans but were loudly disdainful of our maps. Miles tried and failed to set up tweet-via-SMS on the satellite phone; eventually he gave up and arranged to send SMS messages to Ciorstaidh, back in the UK, who'd post them to Twitter on our behalf. Karakol has a good 4G network, local SIM cards are cheap and wifi is common.

The large wheeled duffel-bag that held most of Andy's kit was not suitable for the remainder of our journey, and its contents had to be transferred into the panniers. We arranged for Gulnara to store the bag until we returned, did some repacking, and went to bed.

16 August - 4 x 4 to Kuiluu

We woke before seven. Andy made a phone call, while Miles had his last shower for a fortnight. We ate cereal, bread and jam for breakfast, and wished one of our fellow guests a happy birthday. Our driver Nikolai and translator Sergei arrived at about 0805 in a Russian jeep. We loaded our gear into the jeep and set off. The roads were potholed, and Nikolai frequently drove on the verges rather than the road itself. Andy was amazed at Miles' ability to sleep while being thrown around by the off-road driving. A particularly big bump jolted him awake to find that we were nearly in Kuiluu. After nearly two years of looking at it through satellite photos, this was an emotional moment.

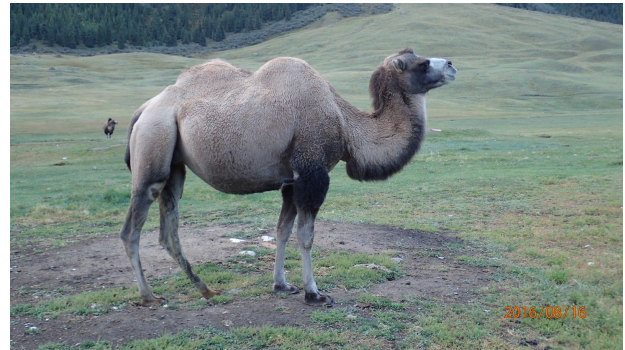
We drove up the south side of the valley until we met some herdsmen, who we asked about hiring horses. An older herdsman arrived in a Mercedes pickup truck and took the lead in negotiations (which were conducted in Russian, via Sergei). Nobody knew how much portering should cost, or what an average day's wage was; eventually we offered 5000 som each way (about \$75, or £56), which was deemed acceptable. We asked if any other alpinists had visited this part of the range, and were told that they hadn't seen any.



Sergei (right) explains our plans to the head herdsman.

One of the younger locals got in the jeep with us and directed Nikolai to a two-room hut. We were told that it was too late to set off that day, but we were welcome to either pitch our tent or sleep in the hut. We opted to sleep in the hut. We unpacked the jeep into the porch of the hut, and then slept in the back room of the hut (on a pile of mats and quilts) until about 6pm - our first proper rest in days.

The young man who'd accompanied us in the jeep turned out to be Beck, 23, the owner of the hut, which had been built 56 years earlier by his grandfather. Also present was his friend Talai, 53. Beck and Talai gave us dinner of lamb stew and bread, and we showed them photos of France and Scotland, and talked about our partners. Beck was recently married to Samara, who was expecting their first child; Talai was not married, and from his gestures it was clear that he had no wish for that kind of hassle.



We were surprised to see camels.

After dinner, Beck and Talai herded their sheep into the pen for the night. Their flock was 502 sheep in total, of which 100 were Beck's and the remainder were his sister's, mother's or friend's. The shepherds also had a few horses, and surprisingly camels. They told us that in the winter the snow in Kuiluu is up to 1m deep and the temperature drops to -35C; Beck lives in the hut in Kuiluu in the summer with his sheep and spends the winter with his wife in Ak-Bulak. Shortly after 8pm we laid out quilts on the floor in the front room for us and Beck (Talai got the one bed), and slept.



Left - Talai. Right - Beck counting the sheep into the enclosure.

17 August - establish Base Camp

Talai got up just before six and made tea, to which he encouraged us to add jam and raw garlic. Beck went off to fetch the horses while we ate breakfast. We loaded the horses (called Tedia, Sirka, and Patro) then at about 8am we set off on the walk up the Kuiluu valley towards Kindyk, with Beck riding Tedia and leading the other two horses. Beck told us that "Kindyk" means "belly button".



Setting off for Base Camp.

We passed several other shepherds' huts on the way, and said hello to the inhabitants (mostly men, with a few boys). When we reached the mouth of the Kindyk valley, Beck dismounted and we led a horse each up the east side of the valley, as it was rough ground. Miles had some difficulty establishing a rapport with Sirka, who mainly wanted to eat the undergrowth, but eventually they came to an understanding.



At 11:30 and 3200m we reached a large boulder on a flat area of grass. Beck said that the horses would go no further and suggested we establish base camp there. We unloaded the horses, paid Beck the first installment, arranged for him to pick us up at 10am on the 31st August, waved him goodbye, and pitched base camp.



Base Camp

We did various small jobs around camp (unpacking, establishing a hanging food store to protect against marmots, whose burrows were much in evidence), then set off to recce the east side of the valley at 14:00. The going was hard, with lots of scree and boulder fields, and we were not yet acclimatised: after 200m of ascent, 1km on the flat and about 2 hours, we were stopped by a rock wall. The other side of the river looked OK, but we couldn't cross so we went back to base camp.

Planning to try the west side the next day, we found a way across the river near base camp. The slope above the river bank was steep scree. It rained from about 18:00. We tried to send a satphone message home, but had no signal - our camp was surrounded by steep slopes on two sides, and had a narrow view of the sky.

20 August - recce East Kindyk glacier

This was mostly a rest day at ABC, in which we did various repairs and jobs around camp, such as digging a toilet pit. We also worked out our calorie intake, based on an assumed five days at ABC and the food we had with us. This worked out to a rather inadequate 1900kcal/day. We also reconnoitred the East Kindyk glacier (the approach to Objective C) up to 4070m. A week into the expedition, it felt good to be putting on crampons for the first time. Snow conditions felt good, so we thought we could attempt Objective C without the snowshoes that we had not yet brought up from Base Camp.

Unfortunately there were too many bumps and ridges on the glacier for us to see to the end of the corrie. The approach to the glacier from ABC was lumpy scree, and the lower part of the glacier was thin scree on steep ice. We sent a final text message home indicating that we would only be using the satellite phone for emergencies (we'd planned to send a text home every couple of days, to reassure our families), then went to bed by 20:30.



21 August - Tülkü Chokusu (Objective C)

Our alarm went off at 0400, but we were not yet in full efficiency mode and didn't leave the tent until 0530. Crossing the moraine to the glacier in the dark took much longer than expected, and we didn't reach the glacier and gear up until 0740, roping up shortly after.

Just above our high point from the previous day the snow became soft and Andy started postholing. There was a weakly bonded layer 15cm down, which collapsed with little pressure when we dug a pit. We considered retreating, but instead decided to turn around if we didn't reach the ridge by 10:30. We pressed on up the 40° snow slope at the back of the

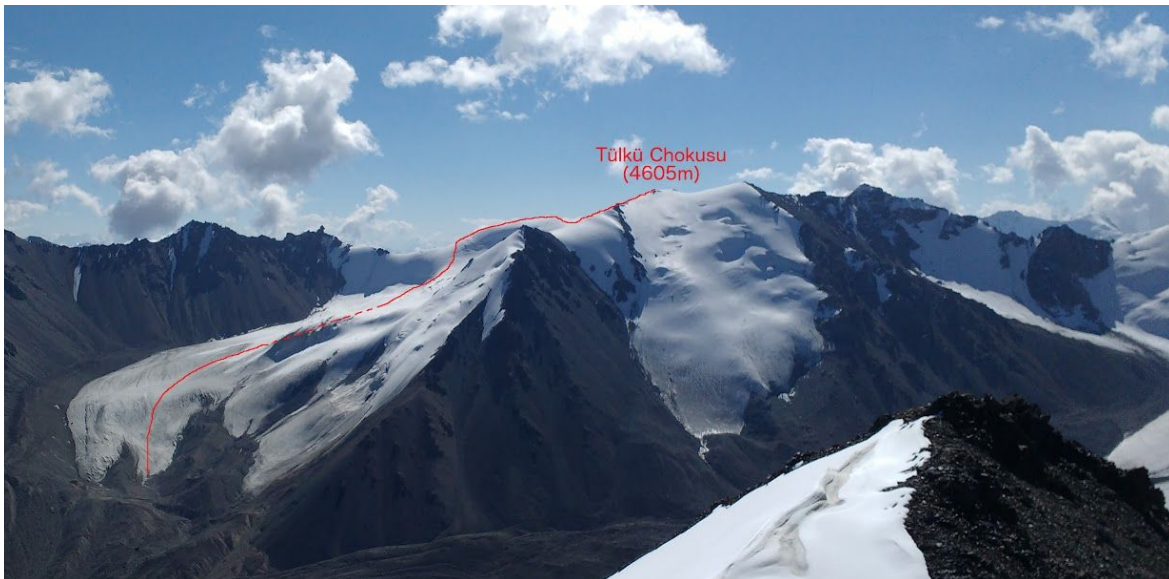
corrie, with Miles leading. Snow conditions felt very Scottish (*Left - Miles in soft snow*).

We reached the rim of the corrie at exactly 10:30, and decided to continue up to a rocky summit with Andy leading. We reached it at 11:00, but saw there was another summit 40m higher a little further on via an easy snow slope. We walked to the true summit (4605m) and took photos and bearings. From this perspective, it was clear that Objective D was a steep pinnacled ridge rather than the gentle rounded ridge we'd expected from satellite photos, so we reluctantly abandoned our plan to attempt it.

We have suggested the name Түлкү Чокусу (Tülkü Chokusu, Fox Peak) for this mountain, after the tracks we saw on the glacier.

We left the summit at 11:48 and descended via our ascent route. The snow was now very soft and we both kept postholing, sometimes up to our thighs. At times we were reduced to crawling along the surface. The glacial bowl was crevassed and we had to pick the route carefully. Andy fell in up to his armpits once on the way up and once on the way down, but got out easily.

We reached our gearing-up point at the edge of the glacier at 14:10, took a long break and some energy gels, and headed back over the moraine hills to ABC, arriving at 15:30. Andy was coughing green/yellow phlegm; we decided he probably had a bacterial chest infection, and he started on amoxicillin. Bed by around 18:00.



Our route up Objective C via the East Kindyk glacier

22 August - descend to BC

We got up, ate the remains of the previous night's dinner for breakfast, put all our gear in drybags to be cached, and struck ABC. We left ABC at 14:30 and descended to BC. Miles felt very tired and hungry and had to stop a lot.

We reached BC at about 1800. Miles demolished a pack of Kazakh biscuits while Andy investigated the stove we'd hired from ITMC, a huge three-burner Chinese model that was clearly intended for a much larger camp, or possibly to be fitted to a large motorhome. Of the three burners, only one was in full working order: one couldn't be turned on, and the other couldn't be turned off.



Andy was bemused by the ITMC stove.

We ate Russian tinned-meat-and-chips with rice and listened to a podcast about the US electoral system. Miles reflected that he had completely forgotten the existence of Donald Trump for a blessed week, and looked forward to forgetting him again more permanently once he slid back into obscurity.

23 August - rest day

We ate, made some improvements to our home-made tent loft, and charged those electronics for which we had the right connectors. Miles was reading a book about the lives of the ultra-wealthy in New York, which made for a very strange contrast with our surroundings. At night we had a wonderful star field, with a very clear view of the Milky Way.

24 August - load-carry to ABC

Once again we packed up food and supplies for a five-day rotation at ABC, including the snow-shoes that would have made a huge difference on Objective C. This time our rations were a much more reasonable (though still sub-replacement) 3000kcal/day. We left BC at 13:20, and arrived at ABC at 17:45. Miles was suffering mild diarrhoea and moving slowly, with lots of breaks. Weather was blue skies in the morning, sunny with some clouds in the afternoon, and very clear at night.

25 August - attempt Objective A

Our alarm went off at 03:30, and this time we were away by 04:20. Our plan was to attempt Objective A via the ice boss right of the rognon, followed by the rocky west ridge - it was unclear from ABC which was the real summit, but we thought the rocky west summit looked slightly higher. We gained the ridge by 09:00, and saw clouds gathering on Objective B. The snow was powdery and not too deep until we reached the first pinnacle. Then it was sugary snow over shattered rock.

We climbed three pitches of poorly-protected Scottish grade III mixed ground with lots of cleaning and hooking. The third pitch ended at a rocky summit at 4690m; from there, it was obvious that the snowy east summit was higher, but further progress would have involved a committing abseil off the rocky summit.

With the clouds coming in, we downclimbed the top two pitches and abseiled from the top of pitch 1. Gentle wind and snow started, and visibility dropped to around 300m. This was the closest thing to bad weather we encountered on the trip. We descended the glacier, reached ABC at about 13:00, and collapsed into our sleeping bags, only emerging five hours later to make dinner. We resolved to have a rest day as we had a few big days.



Our first attempt on Objective A.

26 August - rest day

We spent the morning reading and drinking tea, then at about 12 we walked up the South Kindyk glacier to inspect the approach to the east ridge of Objective A. We also inspected Objective D through binoculars, looking for a triangulation point; we couldn't see one, and the prospect seemed highly unlikely. Objective B looked unpromising, with the ridge facing Kindyk looking hard. Once again we packed for an 03:30 start and another attempt on Objective A, this time via the east ridge.

27 August - Karga Chokusu (Objective A)

Our alarm went off at 03:30, and we were away within about 40 minutes, reaching the glacier soon afterwards. At about 05:15 we heard a scary cracking noise from the ice under our feet, which was repeated as we moved over a particular section of the ice. We hurried on away from that area, and the cracking sound did not recur. Miles led up a snow slope (Scottish grade I) at the left-hand edge of the face near the rocks. We emerged onto the ridge into glorious sunshine and spectacular views. We exchanged leads, with Andy leading along the gentle whaleback ridge to the summit.



Summit of Karga (4714m) - Success!

We passed a subsidiary summit at 4690m, and eventually reached the true summit (covered in bird footprints) at 4714m. We descended via our ascent route, reaching the glacier at 10:25 and ABC at 10:40.

We have suggested the name Kapra Чokycy (Karga Chokusu, Crow Peak) for this mountain, in honour of the birds who had reached the summit before us.

We spent the rest of the day reading and drinking tea. We calculated that we had time for one more climbing day, and decided to attempt the two minor summits due West from ABC, further north along the ridge from Objective D. Bed at about 19:30.



Our second, successful, attempt on Objective A.

28 August - Töö and Suurdun

For the last time, we woke at 03:30 and left the tent by 04:15, heading west up mounds of scree to the West Kindyk glacier. Miles was suffering from stomach pains, and had to make an emergency toilet stop on the moraine. The ice on the (dry) glacier was hard and steep (about 45°); climbing it felt precarious and was hard work. We had planned to go straight up the face to near the summit, but it was steep and threatened by cornices, so instead we went right to the ridge, over moraine and up a snow tongue.

Andy cut through the cornice, then we crossed over to the far (Oroy-su) side of the mountain; this was steep, but still in shadow, and the snow was firm névé. We headed up to the point of the cornice and then along a short snowy ridge to our objective, a rocky top at 4554m, reaching it at 08:03. Immediately south of the top was a long drop, then a rocky, heavily gendarmed ridge leading to our original Objective D; we think this would be possible in future for a stronger party, but it was too hard for this trip.



The ridge between Objectives E and F had bands of different coloured scree.

We again looked for a triangulation point, but didn't see one. We descended to the point where we'd cut through the cornice; since it was only 09:00 when we reached it, we decided to carry on along the rounded rocky ridge to the next top.

“I was initially surprised that after making the first ascent of a mountain in the Tien Shan, Miles still felt he needed to do something with his day”

– Andy's diary

We were unable to climb over the first gendarme, but found an easy, though loose route around its base on the east side. From there we scrambled and walked down the ridge, reaching the col at 09:35. We stashed most of our gear, then carried on up past rainbow-coloured scree and two more gendarmes - one white quartz, and the second black gneiss - reaching a gneiss summit (4444m) at 10:15. The ridge involved a few sections of easy scrambling, but was mostly a walk. The conditions were warm and sunny, and the views into the Oroy and Kuiluu valleys were spectacular. We descended to the glacier via the col and scree slopes, then picked up our ascent route and headed down, reaching ABC at 12:30.

We have suggested the names Төө Чокусу and Суурдун Чокусу (Töö Chokusu and Suurdun Chokusu, Camel Peak and Marmot Peak) for these summits, after the camels that surprised us at May-Saz and the marmots whose burrows were everywhere in Kindyk, but which we never saw.



The route of our final day's climbing.

We discussed cooking one of our remaining main meals for lunch, but didn't have enough water and the stream was very muddy - it ran clear in the morning and evening, but was high and muddy in the middle of the day. Our attempts to make a centrifuge out of a water bottle and some paracord passed the time but were otherwise completely unsuccessful. Eventually the stream ran clear enough to cook, so we ate dinner and went to bed.



Karga, Pik Konstitutii, Töö, Objective D, and the Oroy valley from Suurdun (Objective F).

29 August - strike ABC

We spent the morning packing, and left ABC at 13:35, carrying an estimated 30kg of gear each. This cleared the camp completely and avoided a return trip. Miles was still suffering from diarrhoea and moving slowly. We descended the valley slowly with plenty of breaks. At the lowest moraine bank, Miles slipped while descending a scree slope, sustaining various grazes to his hands, arms and legs. When we reached BC, the river was high and it was

raining; it took us around 45 minutes to find a way across. We ate more Russian tinned beef-and-chips with rice, and listened to podcasts until around 10pm.

30 August - rest day

We mostly packed and worked our way through the remaining canned meals, but also washed for the first time in a week, in the (very cold) river. Rain threatened all day, but held off until 18:00.

31 August - walk-out

We finished packing and aired out the tent, wondering if Beck would remember his appointment. In the end, he was almost perfectly on time, appearing over the horizon with his horses, his dogs, and his wife Samara at 10:10. We loaded the horses (persuading Beck with some difficulty that we really did want to pack our rubbish out), took some photos of everyone, and departed by 10:35.



Beck (L) and Samara (R)

Samara rode and the rest of us walked until we reached the Kuiluu valley floor; then Beck moved two bags onto the third horse and rode the rest of the way. We arrived at Beck's hut at May-Saz at 1300, to be greeted by Talai and Nikolai. We were invited in for tea, bread and salad. After an hour or so, it was time to leave; we loaded our kit into the jeep, paid Beck for the horses, and headed back to Karakol, where we were staying in the same homestay as before. There we ate tea, jam, and strange curly fried carbohydrates, had a shower, did laundry, and headed out for a Kyrgyz meal in town. Since we'd been self-catering for most of the trip, and had ended up at the health-food café on our night in Bishkek, we hadn't had much chance to try Kyrgyz food, and we were keen to put this right. This proved to be an excellent plan.



1 September - travel to Bishkek

We ate breakfast in our homestay with a fellow-guest from Australia, who'd been travelling around the country with a personal guide. Andrei arrived shortly before 8am, to our delight - we hadn't been expecting to see him again. In place of the cavernous minibus he had a moderate-sized SUV, which was still plenty large enough for us and our gear (and much more comfortable). We stopped for lunch in the same roadside café as before. Andy ordered a steak, which turned out to be the same ketchup-covered, pancake-thin meat dish Miles had had on the way out.

We reached Bishkek at about 1430, dropped our bags at the Hotel Alpinist, then headed to ITMC's offices for a debrief with Lilia. She confirmed that Vladimir had investigated the Soviet expeditions to Kuiluu, and none of them had climbed our objectives. We asked her where the best place was to buy souvenirs, especially Russian cameras (which Andy had been requested to bring back); Lilia deferred to Andrei, who with a long-suffering expression told us that the best place to buy cameras was back in Karakol. She suggested we try the top floor of the TsUM department store, where there are a number of antiques/bric-a-brac stalls.

Andrei drove us first to the Turkish Airlines office, where we were told that our layover was not long enough to qualify for a free hotel stay, and then on to TsUM, where we bought souvenirs. Andy didn't find the particular camera he was looking for, but he did find some interesting lenses, and finally purchased a Zenit-E with a stepless aperture. We tried to buy a copy of *Классификатор Маршрутов На Горные Вершины*, but couldn't find one - but we did find an English-language 1:100,000-scale map showing (most of) the Kuiluu range! We'd looked extensively for such a thing, but eventually gave up and stitched together our own 1:50,000 map of Kindyk (with Cyrillic labels) out of two Red Army maps. It was satisfying and yet galling to finally find one after it was no longer any use.

We returned to the Hotel Alpinist, packed, and ordered a taxi to take us out to dinner. This time we took a note of the address of our intended destination - the Café Astana, an outdoor courtyard restaurant with live music - but the driver laughed and told us it was closed, and he'd take us to a much better place. He took us to a different outdoor courtyard restaurant (sadly, without live music) whose speciality dish was an enormous plate of different meats under a pastry yurt. We went to bed painfully full, vowing never again to eat anything that resembled a dwelling.

2 September - depart Bishkek

Andrei picked us up from the hotel and drove us to the airport, where we discovered that we were still somehow over our baggage allowance - and worse, Andy's duffel bag was over the limit for a single bag. We unpacked and repacked and re-weighed our bags until the lady at the check-in desk checked our bags with no additional fees just to get rid of us.

Our first flight took us to Istanbul, where we had an 18-hour layover. This was enough to qualify us for the free Turkish Airlines tour, so we did that. Our group was issued bright blue headscarves and bussed in to the city, where we saw the Grand Bazaar and the Blue Mosque and the outside of Hagia Sophia (sadly, we only had time to see the inside of one mosque), and were treated to a very tasty local meal at Turkish Airlines' expense. On the way back, we got to experience the famous Istanbul traffic jams.

We had asked at an airport information desk about places to sleep in the airport, and were (somewhat to our surprise) told about a gate that wasn't going to be used until the next morning, so on returning from the tour we went there and stretched out our sleeping bags on the seats.

3 September - arrive home

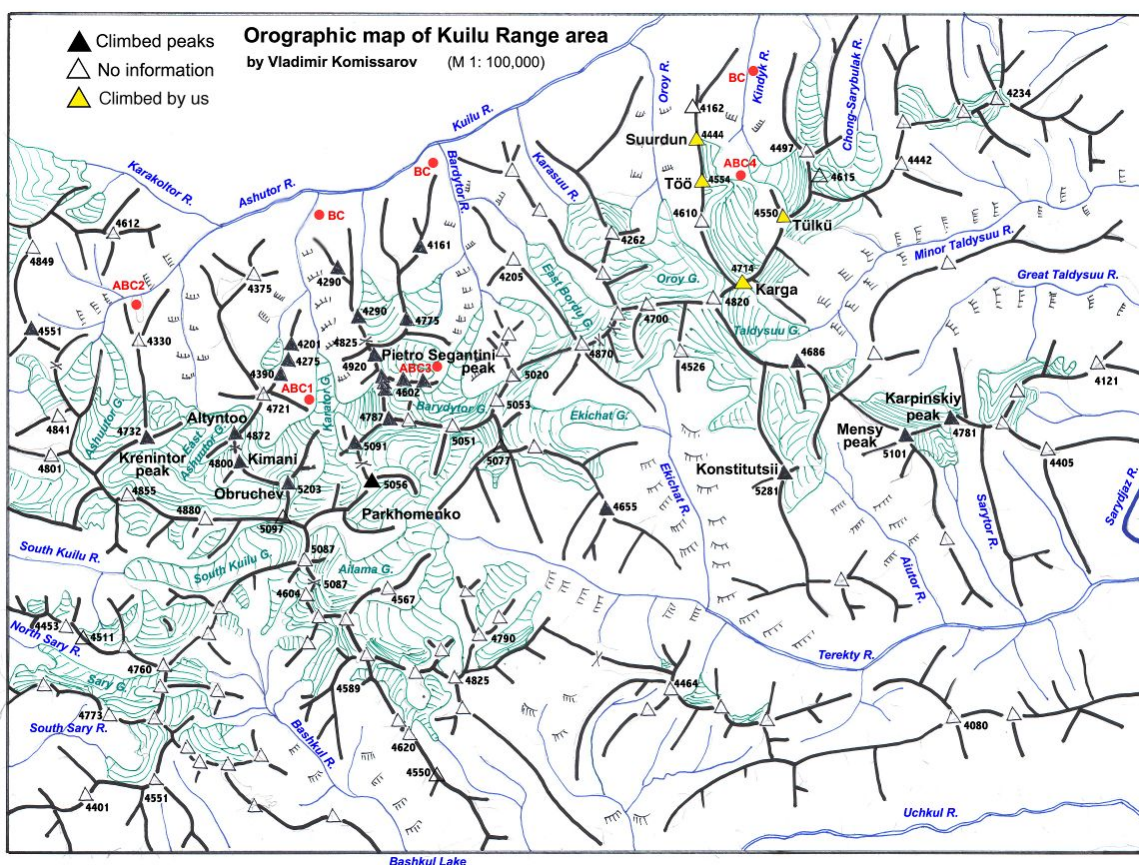
We awoke far too early after a disturbed night's sleep. We were confused by the groups of people walking around in rough white robes, until we worked out that they must be on their way home from the hajj.

Finally, it was time for our flight back to the UK. Three movies later, we landed back in Edinburgh airport, where we were met by Miles' girlfriend Ciorstaidh. We got a taxi back to Miles' flat, where we watched *The Asgard Project* and did one final unpack/repack for Andy's train journey back to Manchester. Then Andy departed, and it was all over bar the post-trip gastroenteritis.

Mountaineering Report

Previous expeditions

The Kuiluu range (variously spelled Kuilu, Kujlu, Kuylu, Keolyu, Kuylyu, etc, and in Cyrillic Куйлю, Кеолу, Кёолуу or Куэлю) was first explored in 1936 by a Soviet expedition under A.A. Letaeva, and the highest peak in the range was climbed by a party led by I. Cherepov in the following year. Further Soviet expeditions followed in 1956, 1973 and 1977, concentrating on the southern part of the range. ISM expeditions led by Pat Littlejohn visited the Karator valley in the western end of the range in 2000 and the adjacent Bardytor valley in 2009. An American party visited the Karator valley in 2003, and a Spanish/Mexican/Dutch party visited Karator in 2005. The most useful photos we found were taken by a Moscow State University Mountaineering Club party, who traversed the Ekichat and Taldysu passes in 2009.



Orographic map courtesy of ITMC.

Approaches and camp sites

We entered the Kuiluu valley from the north-east (Sarydjaz end), and drove along a 4x4 track along the South side until the shepherds' hut at May-Saz (42.208012N 79.014811E). From there we took horses along the south bank of the river to the Kindyk valley. We led the horses uphill on the east side of the Kindyk river to a flat spot marked by a large boulder at

3202m, where we made our base camp (42.173562N 78.902421E). This was the highest the horses would go, and was obviously used as a rest spot by local shepherds - we found several empty plastic bottles there, which we removed when we left. From there, we crossed the river to the west side, and made our way up via grassy patches and granite boulder fields to the glacier's terminal moraine. We pitched Advance Base Camp at a relatively flat area of moraine at 3830m, 42.127427N 78.897484E. From there, all our routes were reached by crossing the moraine.

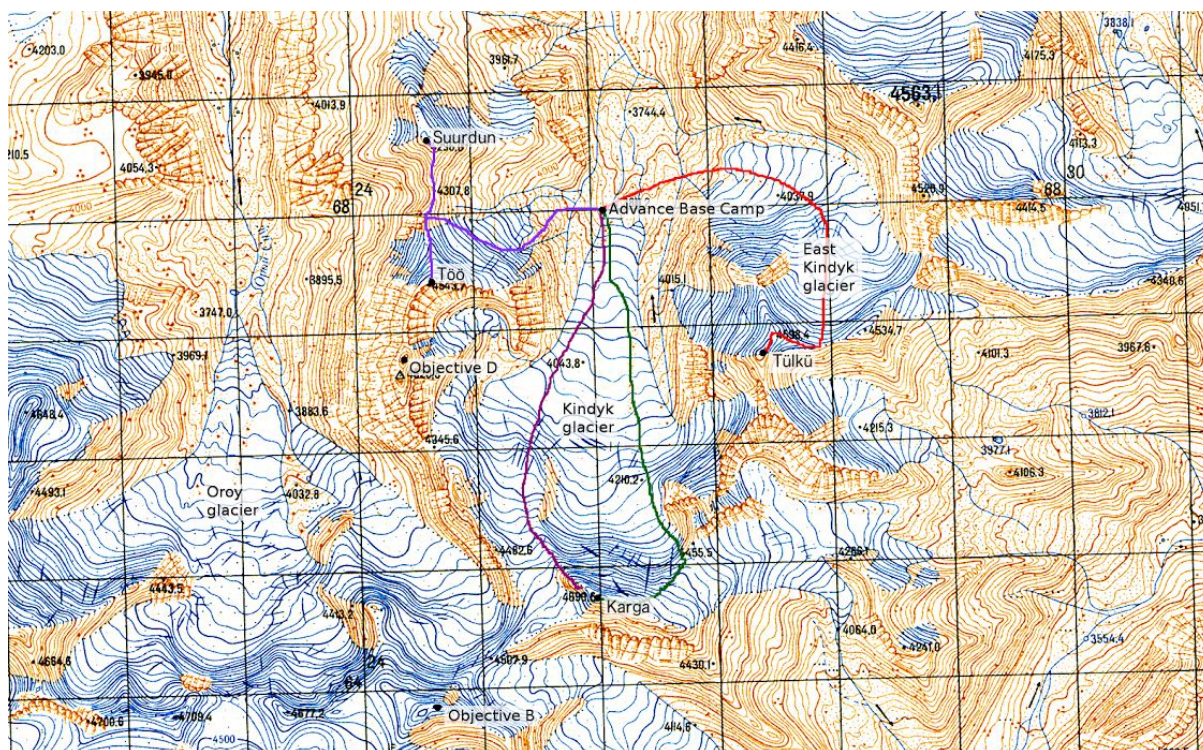
Both camp sites had access to water from the Kinkyk river, which runs clear in the morning and evening but gets very muddy during the day. We had good satellite-phone reception at ABC, but not much at BC - our view of the sky was obstructed by the steep valley walls on either side. The ground at BC was very stony, making it difficult to dig toilet pits. At ABC we dug a permanent toilet in an area of small pebbles and sand.

Geology

Lower down, the rock was mostly (we think) granite; higher up, it tended to shale, with occasional patches of quartz (we encountered a quartz gendarme on the Suurdun ridge).

Routes attempted

- 21 August, Tülkü Chokusu (Fox Peak) via East Kinkyk glacier and E ridge. 3.5 hours, PD. Reached the summit at 4605m. Weather sunny with some clouds, warm in the sun. Snow soft, deep and unstable, with poor bonding and evidence of recent avalanches on steeper slopes. The glacial bowl is crevassed and the crevasses are difficult to avoid completely. 800m ascent and 10 hours tent-to-tent from ABC. This mountain had the worst snow conditions of the trip. The snow was similar to summer alpine conditions, freezing at night and melting during the day. The glaciers were mostly dry.
- 25 August, Karga Chokusu (Crow Peak) via the W ridge. 3.5 hours, AD. A straightforward glacier hike on decent snow/ice until the ridge proper, and then mixed climbing on sugary snow and shattered rock. Reached a rocky false summit at 4691m; retreated because further progress would have involved a committing abseil and the weather was coming in. Weather slightly below freezing and clear until our high point; thereafter it was snowy, with visibility around 300m. 700m ascent, 8.5 hours tent-to-tent from ABC.
- 27 August, Karga Chokusu via the E ridge. 2.5 hours, PD. A steep snow climb to the ridge, easy thereafter. Reached the summit at 4714m. Weather and snow conditions excellent. 700m ascent, 6.5 hours tent-to-tent from ABC.
- 28 August, Töö Chokusu (Camel Peak, a subsidiary summit of Objective D) via the West Kinkyk glacier and the north ridge. 3 hours, PD. Reached the summit at 4554m, then descended back down the north ridge and continued onwards via an easy rocky ridge to Suurdun Chokusu (Marmot Peak), another minor summit, at 4444m. Weather excellent, snow conditions good in the shade, but quickly softened in the sun. About 850m total ascent, 8 hours tent-to-tent from ABC, 2 hours between summits. Although the rock is mostly granite, it is extremely broken and loose.



Our routes shown on the map. Colours match those used on the photo-topos.

Maps

Most topographic maps of the region are based on Soviet military maps: a 1:100,000-scale series was produced in 1970, and a 1:50,000-scale series was produced in 1980. These maps are now in the public domain, and scans can be freely downloaded from <http://maps.vlasenko.net>, or for a small fee from <http://mapstor.net>. Kuiluu is covered by sheet k-44-062 in the 1:100,000 series; the relevant 1:50,000 sheets for Kindyk are k-44-062-2 and k-44-062-4 (which cover the top-right and bottom-right quarters of k-44-062). Unfortunately, the SK-42 datum and the coordinate system used for Soviet maps are not well-supported by Western mapping software or GPS units. We found various instructions online for integrating Soviet map scans with Google Earth, but were unable to get them to work. The Android app “Soviet Military Maps Pro” provides display of maps (unfortunately only to 1:100,000 scale) integrated with a smartphone’s GPS sensors; we mostly used this in conjunction with printouts of the 1:50,000-scale maps.

An alternative approach, used by the 2016 Jiptik valley expedition, is to draw lines of WGS-84 latitude and longitude (as used by GPS units) onto Soviet maps: instructions for doing this can be found at <https://jiptik.wordpress.com/2016/09/02/the-power-of-the-matrix-not-the-film/>

The Trekking Union of Kyrgyzstan’s map “Around Karakol/Enylchek Glacier” covers the northern half of the Kuiluu range, including Kindyk; this is based on the 1970 1:100,000 Soviet maps, but with English captions. It’s available from the TUK for (at the time of writing) 250 som: see <http://www.tuk.kg/index.php?Itemid=37&lang=english>. We also found a copy for sale in the book-market on the top floor of TsUM in Bishkek (unfortunately on the last day

of the expedition). The American Alpine Club's "Kyrgyzstan: A Climber's Map & Guide" does not cover Kuiluu.

Future objectives

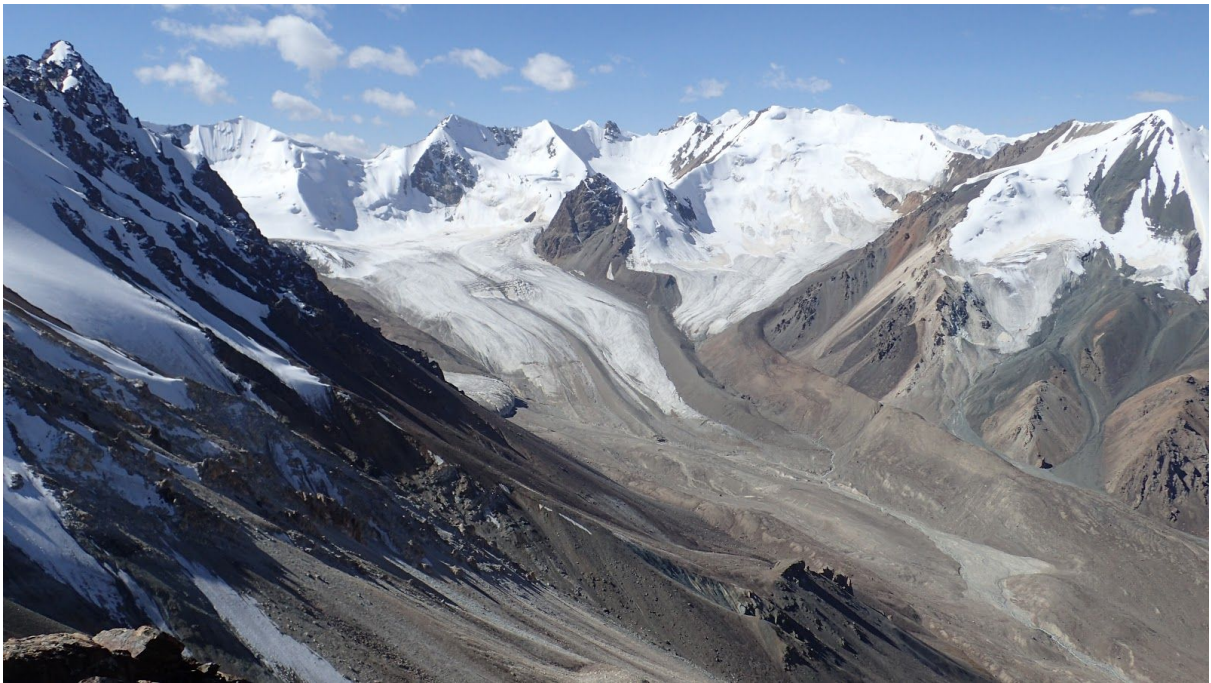
In Kindyk itself, our Objective D remains unclimbed. One possible approach would be via a long ridge that rises from the upper South Kindyk glacier. The traverse of the long gendarmed summit ridge would be a good objective for a stronger party.



Objective D seen from the South Kindyk glacier. The ridge leading to the summit is visible going up and left towards the middle of the picture.

Likewise, the traverse of Objective A would be a good day out, requiring a retrievable abseil if traversed east to west. The traverse in the opposite direction is not recommended. We believe Objective B would not be best climbed from Kindyk, as the north-east ridge looks loose. Instead it could be approached from the Oroy valley to the west, or from the easier angled slopes to the south which we did not see.

To the east, Pt 4563 at the head of the Little Kindyk glacier is unclimbed; this could perhaps be combined with a traverse of the ridge ringing the East Kindyk corrie. The sharp pyramidal peak (42.1061N, 78.9065E) between Objective C and Objective A is probably very loose. The Oroy valley, immediately to the west of Kindyk, is ringed by an aesthetic line of unclimbed mountains with relatively steep, snowy north faces, culminating in our Objective B. Pt 4648 on the west ridge of the Oroy valley also looks like a good objective of similar difficulty to ours.



The head of the Oroy valley, taken from the summit of Suurdun Chokusu. Pt 4648 is the rightmost peak.

Our Base Camp location was surrounded on both east and west by gently-angled rocky ridges that begged to be scrambled up, but we lacked the time and energy to try. We also failed to investigate the bouldering possibilities in the valley (no rock shoes!), though there were plenty of large interesting-looking boulders.



Mt Bolo, from the W

Along the north side of the Kuiluu valley was a range of sub-4000m mountains in beautiful orange granite which reminded us of Chamonix's Aiguilles Rouges. There are plenty of obvious lines in this range, varying from easy scrambles to (we'd guess) about E3. From

valley floor to summit would be about 500m of climbing. We were particularly impressed with Mt Bolo (42.2126N 78.9495E).

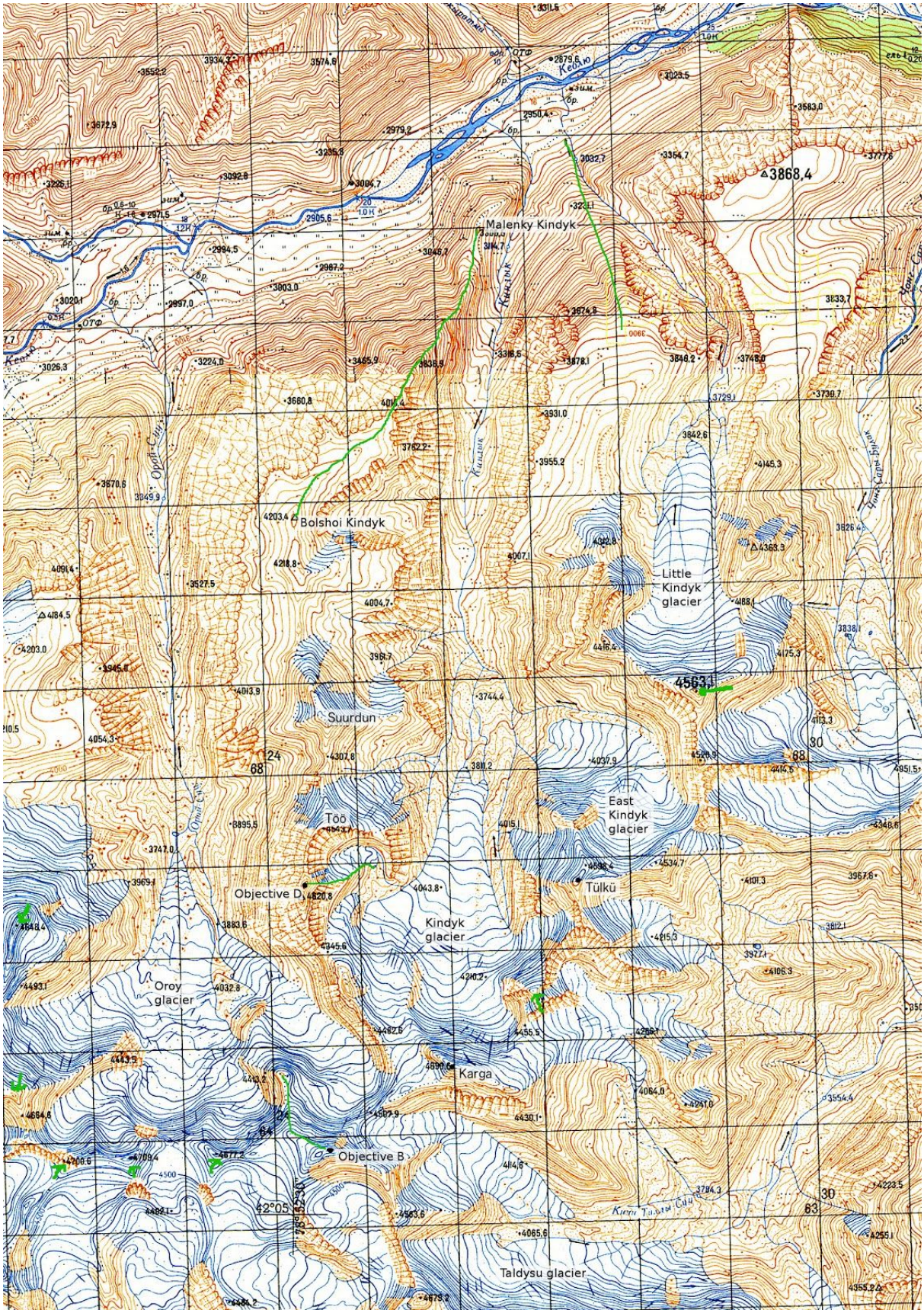


Mt Bolo, from the SW

The large mountain visible when looking north down the Kindyk valley is *beautiful*. We believe it to be Pt 4572.9 on the Russian maps (ref 248 866; 42.3003N, 78.8867E).



Pt 4572.9 from ABC



The routes and peaks marked in green have been left as exercises for the reader.

Environmental notes

Apart from 7m of abseil tat and a couple of dropped walking-pole caps, we packed out all our litter and disposed of it in Bishkek (somewhat to the surprise of our porters, who expected us to bury it *in situ*). Human waste was buried; toilet paper (of which we used very little) was burned and the ashes buried. In total, we used about 50mL of Ecover biodegradable washing-up liquid for cleaning dishes.

Financial report

Item	Price/item	Days/items	Total
Airport transfer (August 14, September 2), by car	\$30	2	\$60
Return transfer Bishkek - Karakol - Bishkek (August 15, September 1)	\$260	2	\$520
Return transfer Karakol - Kuilu - Karakol (August 16, August 31)	\$250	2	\$500
<i>Accommodation</i>			
Triple room in guest house in Bishkek (August 14, September 1)	\$62	2	\$124
Triple room in CBT home stay in Karakol (August 15, August 31)	\$45	2	\$90
<i>Camping equipment</i>			
Renting Thuraya satellite phone	\$10	18	\$180
Safety deposit for satellite phone	\$350		\$350
Gas canister, 230 g, new	\$8	12	\$96
Renting stove	\$30	1	\$30
Renting barrel	\$25	1	\$25
gas canister, 10L	\$15	1	\$15
Total ITMC bill			\$1,640
Insurance (BMC HARA)	£363.20	2	£726.40
Snowshoes - 2 pairs	£423.60		£423.60
Pitons	£10.00		£10.00
First-aid supplies	£100.00		£100.00
Diamox	£11.00		£11.00
Ciprofloxacin	£11.00		£11.00
Dexamethasone/Nifedipine	£48.00		£48.00
Flights	£471.91	2	£943.82

Excess baggage fees	£75.00		£75.00
Food	£75.00		£75.00
Total GBP			£2,423.82
<i>Turkish Lira</i>			
Dinner	₺90		
Lunch	₺50		
Total TRY	₺140		
<i>Kyrgyz Som</i>			
Shopping	1361		
Shopping	7900		
Slim Fit Dinner	850		
Juice & Coffee	238		
Tea	150		
Taxi	200		
Porters	11000		
Total KGS	22709		

Currency	Total	Exchange rate	GBP equivalent
USD	\$1,640	0.76	£1246.40
GBP	£2,423.82	1	£2,423.82
TRY	₺140	0.26	£36.40
KGS	22709	0.011	£249.80
Total			£3956.42

The cost of the expedition was covered by a £1650 grant from the Mount Everest Foundation (ref 16-27) and personal contributions from the expedition members.

Medical report

Andy had a chest infection, with symptoms that only really became obvious after the first climbing day. This was treated with amoxicillin and a descent to Base Camp, and appeared to clear up after the first 48 hours of a five-day course. However, two days after finishing the first course his symptoms recurred, so he took a second course, and this time he recovered. Both expedition members suffered from mild diarrhoea during the second week in Kindyk. At the time we thought this was probably due to our high-fat diet, but it might also have been

caused by drinking unfiltered glacial meltwater. Miles experienced a three-day bout of gastroenteritis on his return to the UK.

Equipment report

Kit list

Personal kit (each)

Waterproof jacket
Waterproof trousers
Fleece/jumper x2
45L rucksack (for climbing)
70L rucksack (for load-carries)
60L duffel-bag (for vehicular travel)
Compass
Head torch (Black Diamond Icon)
Penknife/multitool
Wallet
Money
Mobile phone
USB battery and cable
Plug and adapter (type F)
Hand sanitiser
Hydration bladder
Trainers/lightweight boots
Survival bag
Dry socks
Camera
Change(s) of clothes
Toothbrush and toothpaste
Towel
Sun cream
Insect repellent

Personal climbing kit (each)

Helmet
Harness
Belay device
B3 mountaineering boots
Crampons
Ice axes x2
Belay jacket
Crevasse rescue kit
Snowshoes

Group climbing kit

Maps (see mountaineering report)
Map case
2x dry-treated 60m half-ropes
6x nuts (DMM)
6x slings
4x ice-screws (various lengths and manufacturers)
6x pitons (small angles and knife-blades)
5x snow-stakes (2x MSR, 1x Mountain Equipment, 2x Raju)
8m abseil tat

Group camping kit

Base camp tent (Alpkit Zhota three-man geodesic)
ABC tent (Terra Nova Quasar two-man geodesic)
Gas stoves (Alpkit Koro)
Backup gas stove (Primus Eta Spider)
10x 450g gas canisters (bought from ITMC)
Base camp stove (hired from ITMC)
10L gas bottle for base camp stove (hired from ITMC)
4x lighters
Large knife (Opinel)
Frying pan (bought in Beta Stores)
1.8L cooking pot (Primus EtaPower)
1L cooking pot
Handgrip for pots
Wooden spoon (Muji)
Solar panel (Anker)
Sponge
100mL washing-up liquid (Ecover)
Rubbish bags
Trowel
Filter bottle
10L water carrier (Ortlieb)
Drybags
Mesh stuffsacks

Personal camping kit

Sleeping bag (Rab 600 or 700-fill down bags)
Self-inflating sleeping mat (Thermarest)
Sleeping bag liner (silk)
Mug (plastic, 1pt)
Plate (plastic)
Knife, fork, spoon

Repair kit

Small sewing kit (needles, scissors, various threads, etc)

Polymorph thermoplastic

Cord-stoppers

30m paracord

Duct tape

Spinnaker tape

Superglue (also usable for wound closure)

Medical

Personal medicines

Group medicines:

- Acetazolamide (for altitude sickness)
- Dexamethasone (for HACE/HAPE)
- Nifedipine (for HAPE)
- Ciprofloxacin (antibiotic)
- Amoxicillin (antibiotic)
- Painkillers - Ibuprofen, Paracetamol, Paracetamol & Codeine
- Loperamide (anti-diarrhoea)
- Rehydration salts
- Chloramphenicol eye cream
- Cetirizine tablets (slow acting, non-drowsy antihistamine for hayfever and general allergy)
- Chlorpheniramine tablets (swift acting antihistamine for emergency allergies)
- Chlorpheniramine cream for insect bites/allergies
- Hydrocortisone cream for insect bites/allergies
- Chlorhexidine gluconate cream for cuts/burns

Pulse oximeter

Standard first aid kit (plasters, micropore tape, bandages, alcohol wipes etc)

Thuraya SO-2510 satellite phone (hired from ITMC)

Sterile injection kit in case of admittance to local hospital

Books

Kindle

Paper/notebook

First aid book - WMT

Central Asia phrasebook - Lonely Planet

Kyrgyzstan guidebook - Bradt

Equipment Performance

- We took an Anker solar panel, which was able to charge our electronics even on cloudy days. Charging a Kindle or camera took a couple of hours; smartphones took a bit longer.
- We hired a Thuraya satellite phone from ITMC. Unfortunately, the battery ran out very quickly (possibly because we turned it on in the cold), and the charging socket was not compatible with our solar panel (we think a 2mm Nokia charger would be compatible, but could only output microUSB). We also had difficulty connecting to the satellite, particularly at base camp where we only had a narrow view of the sky. In future, we would buy a satellite phone in the UK, familiarise ourselves with it thoroughly at home, and then sell it on after the expedition.
- We only took one rope above base camp.
- We took a pared-down climbing rack, including pitons, but the rock was so loose that only slings and snow-stakes were of any use. We brought five snow-stakes with us, but only took one each on climbs to save weight; fortunately, this was enough.
- We used almost all our abseil tat on a single abseil - the rock was so loose that we had to sling a large boulder to get any security. More abseil tat would have been a good idea.
- The ITMC stove was bulky and clearly designed for much larger camps; for a lightweight expedition another canister stove would have been a better choice. We were extremely impressed with the Alpkit Koro stove we took to ABC. Of the ten gas canisters we hired, we used less than three - though we didn't have to melt snow for water.
- ITMC rented us three sets of panniers for transporting our equipment on horses. These were extremely successful.
- We hired a blue barrel for storing food, but were unable to transport it beyond May-Saz. Instead, we stored our food in a pannier suspended from a boulder. This kept it safe from ravaging marmots.
- Both our tents - an Alpkit Zhota at Base Camp, and a Terra Nova Quasar at ABC - performed very well. We added home-made tent lofts to both tents, which greatly helped with organisation.
- Having heard reports of especially deep snow, we took a pair of snow-shoes each; unfortunately, these would have only been useful on our first climb, at which point they were still down at Base Camp. We carried them but did not use them on our first attempt on Objective A; after that, we left them at ABC.
- One of the thermarests, a hydration bladder, and our Ortlieb water-carrier developed leaks. We were able to improvise a repair of the Ortlieb in the field using low-temperature thermoplastic, but could not successfully repair the thermarest or hydration bladder without seamgrip.
- A plastic document-case would have been more durable and would have provided better protection than the cardboard folder we actually used for holding maps, plane tickets, printouts of emails, etc. This got wet, fell apart, and spent most of the trip being patched up with tape.

- The parts of our first-aid kit we actually used on the trip were paracetamol (acetaminophen) and ibuprofen for altitude headaches; loperamide (imodium) for diarrhoea; plasters, micropore tape and [finger bandage](#) for minor cuts and grazes; [burn cream](#) for burns; antiseptic wipes for cleaning wounds; amoxicillin for what appeared to be a bacterial chest infection; and isopropyl alcohol spray for cleaning encrusted sun-cream off our sunglasses. Miles used up all our oral rehydration salts on returning home to treat post-expedition gastroenteritis.
- A surprising number of useful camping items came from the Japanese homewares store Muji, which specialises in well-designed and compact items and storage systems.
- Useful smartphone apps: [Soviet Military Maps Pro](#), [Russian Dictionary](#), [Citymaps](#). All these allow caching of data for offline use.
- We had trouble with almost all our lighters. Next time we'd bring more, or buy some in-country.
- Conditions were colder than Alpine summer, but warmer than Scottish winter. Our down jackets were only worn for sitting around and reading on rest days, and could have been left behind.
- For the routes we wore B3 summer Alpine mountaineering boots. We wore either trainers or lightweight boots around base camp and for the first load-carry. For subsequent load-carries we wore our mountaineering boots.
- We had no problems at all with biting insects; the insect repellent we brought was unused.
- Our Black Diamond Icon head-torches were staggeringly, ridiculously bright, and one set of lithium AA batteries lasted us the entire trip.

Food

We tried to buy most of our bulk food supplies in Bishkek, supplemented with smaller stocks of high-value items imported from the UK. Osh Bazaar on less than four hours' sleep was too ambitious a challenge for our shopping skills, so we bought most of our food supplies in the supermarket in the basement of Beta Stores, with a few other things bought in a Narodniy Supermarket or in Karakol. Our meals were roughly as follows:

Breakfast

- Bread rusks
- Cashew butter
- Green tea

Daytime

- Energy bars (High5, Clif, Crobar)
- Peperami meat snacks
- Carazza mini pizzas
- Energy gels (High5)
- Nuts (bought loose in Beta Stores)

Dinner

In base-camp, we ate various tinned Russian meat-and-potato stews, supplemented with rice. At ABC, we had tea and packet soup, followed by spaghetti, dried mushrooms, dried salami, and either pesto or Thai curry paste and coconut cream.



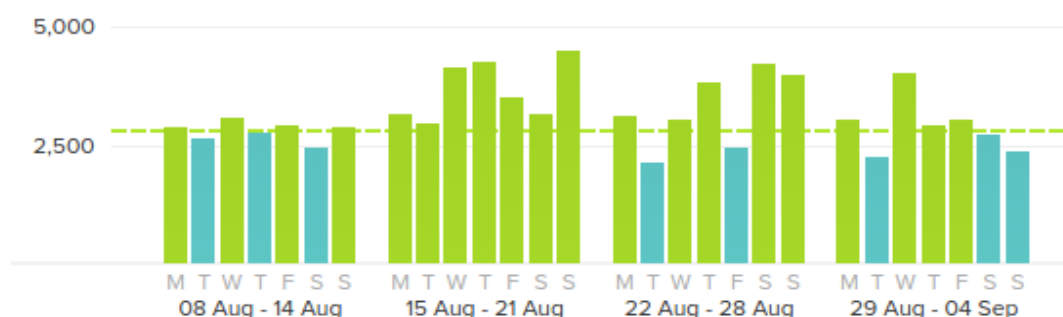
The tinned meat and potatoes were really good basecamp food.

The best salami we found was made by GOST (ГОСТ). The fast-cooking spaghetti became a gloopy mess unless we were very careful: the spiral pasta took a few minutes longer to cook, but was much more palatable.

Crobar cricket-flour bars were good for a quick snack, fitting in at the “high-protein” end rather than the “high-energy” end. The 40g bars are a better size than the 30g ones for mountain use. Note that eating insects is *haram* (forbidden) in Islam, and Kyrgyzstan is 75% Muslim: we were careful not to offer Crobars to the locals. The nuts were a last-minute purchase in Bishkek; buying them was one of the best decisions we made on the trip.

More variety in our high-altitude evening meals would have been a good thing, as would more dried vegetables.

High5 Zero hydration tablets were intended to replace electrolytes and made us feel a lot better when tired and dehydrated, as well as being very effective at masking the taste of chlorine-treated water. The High5 caffeinated energy gels were less tasty, but undeniably effective.



Daily calorie consumption, as measured by Miles' fitness tracker. Rest days are easy to tell apart from climbing and load-carrying days!

Conclusion

The three goals of every climbing trip are as follows, in descending order of priority:

1. Come home
2. Still friends
3. Having climbed something.

By that measure, the expedition was a success on all counts. We climbed two of our four objectives, but also two additional tops; all four of our climbing days (even the one which didn't result in a summit) were among the most enjoyable days we've spent in the mountains. In pure climbing terms, we've had less successful trips to the Alps, or to Scotland. We were lucky with the weather - by contrast, friends who'd attempted Pik Lenin only a couple of weeks earlier spent a week tent-bound at 6000m by constant snowstorms - but we'd also chosen realistic objectives and adapted to what we found.

Climbing new routes on-sight was a great experience - rather than following a line of polish, or a guidebook description written by a would-be crossword-setter, we just had to use our experience and judgement, push things out as far as we dared, and ensure that we either succeeded or were able to back off in good order. It was the test of our mountain skills that we'd been looking for.

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