



Eagle Ski Club  
Ak-Shirak Expedition  
Kyrgyzstan - 29/4/06-21/5/06

Mount Everest Foundation  
Report

Dave Wynne-Jones

## **Aims of the Expedition.**

To explore the Ak-Shirak mountains in Kyrgyzstan, making the first traverse of this little visited range from South to North, climbing as many unclimbed peaks as possible en route.

## **Acknowledgements**

We acknowledge the generous financial support of the Eagle Ski Club, Mount Everest Foundation and the BMC/Sports Council.

## **Contents**

Page 3	Introduction
Page 4	Tien Shan Map
Page 5	The Team
Page 6	The Area
Page 8	Logistics
Page 10	Expedition Log.
Page 17	Conclusion
Page 18	Appendix 1 – Map of Route
Page 19	Appendix 2 – Medical kit
Page 21	Appendix 3 – Kit list
Page 22	Appendix 4 – Illustrations of Pulk construction
Page 23	Appendix 5 - Finance summary

## **Contact Details**

Dave Wynne-Jones: [dwj@wordpictures.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:dwj@wordpictures.freeserve.co.uk) (omit gap)  
All members of the expedition may be contacted through the Eagle Ski Club: [www.eagleskiclub.org.uk](http://www.eagleskiclub.org.uk)

## **Introduction.**

Until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Kyrgyzstan had been an ill-defined region populated by a number of nomadic tribes, occasionally involved with larger migratory movements that impacted upon China, the Middle East or Europe, the most famous being that led by Genghis Khan. As the Russian empire under the Czars drove east and Britain strove to defend the northern borders of its Indian imperial possessions, the intrigues of the Great Game were played out in Central Asia. One of the consequences of this was that one by one the Kyrgyz tribes turned to Russia to seek protection. In 1863 Kyrgyzstan became an administrative area of the Russian empire that was subsequently secured as a Soviet republic after the Russian revolution and went on to develop a sense of its own nationhood. To the east it borders China, with Kazakhstan to the north, Uzbekistan to the west and Tajikistan to the south.

Kyrgyzstan became more accessible to western mountaineers with the collapse of the Soviet Union. UN studies of economic development, necessary as a result of the withdrawal of Russian investment in the country, advised the encouragement of mountain tourism; "...the average altitude of its territory is 2750m while maximum elevation is 7439m. More than 94% of its territory are (sic) mountains and mountain valleys situated above 1000m."(TopAsia factsheet)

The Tien Shan mountains sweep south-west in an arc from the highest peaks, Khan Tengri 6995m. and Pobedy 7439m, along the border between China and Kyrgyzstan. In part of the Tien Shan lying to the south of Lake Yssyk-kol is the Ak-Shirak range. This was identified as a potential ski-mountaineering area by Chris Watkins, an Eagle Ski Club member who had been working in Kyrgyzstan. As long ago as 1998 she proposed an expedition to the range, but was unable to secure the numbers necessary to make helicopter access financially acceptable.

In 2003 an ESC team led by Steve Wright and including Dave Wynne-Jones and Mike Sharp attempted to access the range from the south via the Kara Say valley. Unfortunately getting to Kara Say by road was prevented by heavy snowfall and avalanches that blocked the 4000m Suek pass. The expedition then turned to explore the western flanks of the range from the north, eventually reaching the Kara Say valley via the Ak-Bel pass but without any hope of penetrating the range further than the snout of the Kara Say glacier. However, the feasibility of using the valley to access the range was confirmed along with the potential for ski-mountaineering. (see MEF report 2003)

In 2006 we proposed to arrive later in the season, at the end of April, to ensure access over the Suek pass.



## The Team

**Leader : Dave Wynne-Jones**, 54, British: 25 year Alpine experience; expeditions to Alaska, Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan, Peru, Pakistan, Nepal, China; 1<sup>st</sup> ascents of Nevado Padrecaca, S. Face of Pokharkan; ascents of Ticlla (2<sup>nd</sup>), Huascaran Norte, Pik Lenin, Denali; Ski expeditions to Mt. Logan, Caucasus, Damavand, Mustagh Ata (solo ascent), Ak-Shirak 2003.

**Mike Sharp**, 54, British, Antarctic Logistics Services: 10 Alpine summers + Alpine ski touring. Traverses of both Elsmere Island (94 days) and Baffin island (180 days). S ridge of Denali. E ridge of St Elias (2<sup>nd</sup> ascent). Lotus Flower Tower. Exum ridge on Grand Teton in winter. Thirteen peaks over 18,000 feet in the Cordillera Real and Cordillera Blanca including Alpayayo, Huandoy, Artisanraju, Illiampu, Huanya Potasi. Mt Cook via middle peak, Aspiring. Guided Vinson Massif 4 times, 20 Antarctic seasons & crossing of Greenland with dogs. Ak-Shirak 2003.

**Derek Buckle**, 61, British, Consultant Research Chemist: 1<sup>st</sup> ascents of Dobzebo, 6,429m (2005), Nganglong Kangri I, 6,720m (2004), Nganglong Kangri II 6,591m (2004), Beu-tse 6,270m (2003), and Machag, 6,020m (1999) in Tibet, and six 1<sup>st</sup> ascents in the Lemon and Lindbergh mountains of Greenland (2002); 1<sup>st</sup> British ascent of Chatyn Tau in the Caucasus (1998). Climbing in the Alps, Ecuador, Kenya, Nepal, Tetons, & American Rockies. Ski tours in the Alps, Pyrenees, Canada, the Caucasus, Greenland and the Tatra Mountains.

**John Goodwin**, 52, British, Social worker: alpine experience in Chamonix in 1988 & 89. 1998 North Face route on Batian, Mount Kenya. Ski mountaineering: 1999; Ruth Glacier, Alaska, climbed Mount Barrill and made unsuccessful attempts on Explorer's Peak and Mount Dickey; 2003, Kalanag, Garhwal Himalaya (6,387m); 2004, Canada, failed on Mount Waddington, but completed 10 day tour; 2005, Ala Daglar, Turkey.

**Lizzy Hawker**, 29, British, Polar oceanographer: Mountaineering and ski mountaineering in the Alps and the Cascades and mountain marathons in the UK and the Alps. Ski mountaineering expeditions include first ski ascent of Kalanag (6387m), Garwhal, a 10 day circuit of the Mount Waddington range, Canada, and a traverse of the Kackar range in Turkey.

**Alastair Cairns**, 30, British, Doctor: Winter climbing to grade IV; Alpine ascents include Eiger (Mitellegi ridge), Barre des Ecrins, Weissmeiss, Lagginhorn, Allalinhorn (Hohlaubgrat); Nepal - Paldor 5,800m and a traverse of Fang 5,500. Ski tours include the Haute route and a tour around the head of the Tasman glacier in New Zealand.

**Anna Seale**, 36, British, Doctor: ski mountaineering; traverse Bugaboo Lodge to Roger's Pass, Canada, Mammoth lake to Yosemite traverse, USA, Haute Route x 2, Alps, Mount Logan, Canada, traverse Kackar range, Turkey; Jotenheim & Narvik/Ricksgransen area, Norway. Alpinism: Mount McKinley; Alpine 4000m peaks inc. Gran Paradiso, Weissmies traverse.

## The Area

Kyrgyzstan has a number of independent tourist agencies that can provide trekking and climbing holidays with a set itinerary or “tailor-made” packages of transport and accommodation to support exploratory expeditions. Costs are reasonable because of the intense competition between the agencies for the relatively small numbers of visitors. The expected “goldrush” of mountain tourists has never materialised. One reason is the high cost of flights to Bishkek: the Kyrgyz range might be higher than the Pyrenees or the Alps but can never compete with them while BA flights to Bishkek cost £750 and Easyjet flights to Barcelona or Geneva cost £50. A second reason is the deteriorating infrastructure within the country. For example, the shells of bus stations still exist but there are no public toilets to be found in them since the plumbing was torn out to be sold as scrap after the Soviet withdrawal and bus timetables are non-existent. A third reason is the difficulty of communicating where Russian is the lingua franca of the region (even the Cyrillic alphabet is different!) and few local people speak English.

“From Rimma, our interpreter, we were able to learn so much about the country we had come to. A beautiful nation, but one still fraught with difficulties. Life was, in some respects, easier under the Russian regime – but while the population was considerably richer, there was little choice or opportunity to buy goods. Now most people were much poorer, excepting those entrepreneurial spirits who managed to carve a niche for themselves. The best option for most was to have their own small plot of land so that they could be more or less self-sufficient and sell surplus in the markets. However, those employed by the government, the teachers, doctors, nurses providing essential services for the population, were paid a mere pittance, unbelievable by western standards.” – Lizzy Hawker.

The Ak-Shirak range is found between Lake Issy-kul and the southern border with China. It forms part of the Tien Shan or “Celestial Mountains” but is unique in that it has an opencast gold mine on its northern flank. The Kumtor mine is served by a good road that takes heavy trucks bound for the mine and is kept open all year round as far as possible. This means that access to the range is exceptionally good in winter when other mountain roads are buried beneath metres of snow.

The 2003 expedition confirmed that the 600+ square kilometres of the Ak-Shirak range are alpine in character with glaciation producing pyramidal peaks of varying “sharpness.” Many are over 4000m with the highest over 5000m. Glacial approaches to high cols and the more gently angled faces and ridges offer considerable scope for ski-mountaineering. The competitiveness of Soviet mountaineering meant that many of the “easier” mountains and lines were left untouched whilst ski-mountaineering was of little interest. The 2003 report details the 3

occasions that visits were made to the fringes of the range prior to that expedition and agencies and local people reported that no one had penetrated the range since then. Kyrgyz Travel, the company that provided accommodation in Tamga near Barskoon, is run by 2 former masters of sport in mountaineering with ascents of the country's 7000m peaks to their credit. They informed us that to their knowledge no one had climbed in the range and all the major peaks remained unclimbed.

The Kyrgyz tourist industry is diversifying into spring trips "horse-trekking" or snow leopard spotting in this area. The development of ski-mountaineering may well lead to more visitors during this period: having "bought in" to the western package the Kyrgyz people deserve some support.

## Logistics

### Travel

#### 1. Flights

BA flies direct to Bishkek, Aeroflot via Moscow. It is possible to fly to Almaty and take a shuttle bus overland to Bishkek, but would need checking with local agencies & the airline used.

#### 2. Road travel.

There are local buses but it saves hassle to arrange transport in advance with an agency.

### Permits.

A visa obtainable from the Kyrgyz embassy is necessary to enter the country:

Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic  
to the United Kingdom

**Ascot House,  
119 Crawford Street  
London, W1U 6BJ**

Telephone: **020 7935 1462**

Fax: **020 7935 7449**

e-mail: **mail@kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk**

To enter the border zone, which is controlled by the military, we needed a permit obtainable from the agency at a cost of \$20 per person.

### Communications.

We took a satellite phone. Standard mobile phones were not reliable in Kyrgyzstan: some worked, others didn't.

TopAsia gave us contact numbers to use in an emergency.

### Food.

It is difficult to obtain lightweight dehydrated food in Kyrgyzstan so we brought our own supplied by [www.expeditionfoods.com](http://www.expeditionfoods.com)

Hard cheese, smoked sausage and various chocolate bars can be obtained at shops en route to the mountains.

### Medical arrangements.

Though we had 2 doctors in the team it was Alastair who organised the medical supplies (See Appendix 1). Since helicopter rescue was available it was essentially a sophisticated first aid package. Little was used other than basic antibiotics, and low dosage painkillers to deal with stomach upsets and aches and pains en route.

### Specialist equipment

Pulks were necessary to transport the weight of supplies for a planned 18 days in the mountains. For cheapness and lightness we adapted standard "kiddies sledges" supplied by:

Mailbox International ltd  
Bayley St  
Stalybridge  
Cheshire  
SK15 1QQ  
Tel 0161 330 5577

See Appendix 4 for design. It is notable that the only pulk poles to survive intact were built with heavier gauge plastic plumbing pipes and associated plastic compression joints that were tough enough to withstand the considerable stresses involved in skiing with a pulk.

#### Insurance

Medical and rescue insurance was provided by the BMC, Ault Insurance brokers ( [www.ault.co.uk](http://www.ault.co.uk) ), the Austrian Alpine Club & [www.ihl.com](http://www.ihl.com) of Denmark.

#### Maps

Digital maps of the area are available from East View Cartographic – [www.cartographic.com](http://www.cartographic.com) - sheet K-44-73 (1:100,000 scale)

## Expedition Log.

29-30/4

The team met at Heathrow and flew to **Bishkek** via Moscow with Aeroflot.

Aeroflot had a baggage allowance of only 20kg including hand luggage, but would carry an additional ski bag for only 3kg of assessed excess baggage providing the weight of the ski bag did not exceed 15kg. The cost per kilo to Bishkek was a very reasonable £4, so for £12 we carried 35kg each. However the weight of pulks, camping equipment and lightweight expedition rations meant that we still paid for an average of 10kg (£40) per person over that. For comparison BA had a free allowance of 25kg but were quoting £29 per kilo for excess baggage & showed no interest in negotiating over that and their basic cost was about £200 more per flight ticket.

TopAsia representatives met us at Bishkek with 4WD transport. We travelled via Balykchy to **Tamga**, 1500m., near Barskoon, where we stayed the night. The spacious guest house had room for us to assemble our pulks and repack for the trail.

1/5

Leaving Tamga at 9.15 we drove up the Barskoon gorge and over the 4000m Suek pass. It was still quite snowed up but passable, just. Further down the other side the driver managed to get the truck stuck in a thawing river ice. He and his co-driver made a few desultory attempts to free the vehicle but were unwilling to act upon suggestions from the team conveyed via our female interpreter, Rimma. Finally a crowd of locals got to work jacking the truck up and piling stones under the wheels (just what we had suggested hours earlier), enabling it to drive on to hard ice and out of the river bed. 5 hours delay.

At Kara Suy village the permit for the border zone was required, but the army camp where it had to be verified involved some complicated river crossings, quite inaccessible! More time lost.

Where the road crossed the Kara Suy river by a timber bridge, we had expected to turn off and be transported along a dirt track, seen on the 2003 reconnaissance expedition, as far up the valley as possible. Unfortunately we reached that point at 9pm in pitch darkness and were assured by the drivers that there was no track in that valley. We had no choice but to make **Camp 1** (N 41° 37.828' E 78° 04.067') by the road at 3531m.



2/5

We stashed half our equipment out of sight and carried the rest up valley on the dirt track (!) until it was blocked by a raging tributary torrent, where we cached our loads & went back for the second lot.

The Kara Suy River flowed over & through ice flats but either we had no



confidence that they would support our weight or the river barred us from accessing them. We camped (**Camp 2** - 3567m. N.41° 39.923' E78° 04.647') at the tributary torrent hoping that an overnight freeze would reduce the flow by morning.

3/5

It did. Each of us waded through the icy water 3 times with bare feet to bring both loads over. We continued following the vehicle tracks over the wide flood plain of the river, towing or carrying pulks and making double-carries. We saw several large birds of prey in the distance, but were uncertain whether they were golden eagles or griffon vultures.



Passing a derelict building below the Ak-Bel pass, we were in territory Mike recognised from 2003 and about a km further on we could finally get down to the river ice. We made **Camp 3** (3608m N.41° 41.117' E. 78° 06.675') on a level raised bank by the river.

Unfortunately we discovered that the pulks had not stood up well to being dragged over gravel & we had to make repairs to splits in the runners.

4/5

Overnight snow revealed small rodent tracks but none of our bags had been damaged. It was good to get skis on and hitch up to our pulks, which slid so much more easily on the snow-dusted river ice.



The ice was at least a metre thick in some places but in others gravel banks had reduced its depth to nothing at all. The river could filter and drain through this gravel so there were places where fingers of ice reached into gravel shallows, then disappeared. Depending upon the size of these obstructions, we either carried skis and rucksacks over them, then came back in pairs to carry loaded pulks, or repacked

for a double-carry. This was hard work but we covered about 10km before camping (**Camp 4** – 3729m. N.41° 43.647' E.78°12.349') on a fine gravel bar.

5/5

Using the same load-carrying tactics, we reached the confluence of 2 glacial valleys and took the left fork up the main Kara Say valley. We climbed over a substantial terminal moraine ridge, from which the glacier had retreated, via a crumbling saddle, manhandling the pulks to a point where we could slide down the other side onto a frozen lake. Frozen outwash lakes interspersed with moraine and linked by meltwater/ice channels led all the way to the snout of the glacier where we camped (**Camp 5** – 3770m. N.41° 46.375' E.78° 12.855'), high and dry on another gravel bank.

6/5

To this point the weather had been a mixture of sunshine, cloud and snow showers that had not held us up at all. The previous evening more serious snowfall began & lasted all this day except for a break in the afternoon in which we were able to sort out gear for the glacier ahead.



7/5

Uncertain weather delayed our departure until 10am when we set off up the glacier with half our food & fuel to cache. The glacier appeared to be complex and we had decided to recce the route before breaking camp and bringing up the pulks.

Poor visibility meant that we ran the risk of skiing off unseen edges of ice cliffs in the flat light. There were several false trails and it was a slow business finding a way through. Finally we reached nearly 4200m and cached our loads, skiing back to camp in improving visibility, straightening out our route & placing wands at waypoints. Attempts at correlating map & GPS data revealed that the glacier had retreated 2 km since 1972 and spot heights and contours were dubious owing to volume shrinkage.

8/5

We broke camp and followed our marked track up through the glacier to the cache. We sited our **climbing camp (Camp 6** – 4193m. N.41° 48.560´ E.78° 13.815´) at the foot of a nearby ridge running south-west from Kyrgyzia, at



4946m the highest mountain in the northern half of the range. The main glacier continued deeply convoluted, a dunescape of snow, but from the campsite we could reach higher, less broken glacier shelves giving access to the peaks to the north-west. The weather had been fine and so we'd made better time on our second ascent, just 3 hours. For the first time we were camping on the glacier, relying on snowmelt for water.

9/5

There was cloud wreathing the summits and sudden flurries of snow or longer showers but it was no worse by lunchtime so we headed up into the glacier bay to the north for a recce. A very skiable peak was standing sentinel over a pass north-east of Kyrgyzia: we decided to climb it.

The route climbed easily to a glacier shelf then into a basin and up the north flank of the east ridge of the mountain. Deteriorating weather meant that we left skis & climbed the last 100m of the ridge with axes and crampons. There was absolutely no view from the summit of **Pik Chasovoi** (Sentinel) 4764m. (N.41°49.941´ E.78° 13.304´), our first first-ascent. Climbing down, we skied

out carefully, following our GPS waypoints and wands. At 5.30pm, as we reached the tents, the full force of the storm hit us and it put down 8-10 inches of snow overnight.

10/5

Not wishing to be avalanched, we decided to scout the glacier to **Kyrgyzia Pass**, SW of the mountain, to try to pick out a route on the SW face that I had seen as a likely approach from a distant summit on the 2003 expedition. A good ramp led above the icefall onto a largely crevasse-free glacier rising to the pass under clearing skies. A bitter headwind that was tearing huge streamers of spindrift off the summit ridges of Kyrgyzia blew straight into our faces so we spent little time exposed on the pass: just enough to get a look over the pass and to confirm that the south-west face looked as if it would go. The ski back to camp was so good that Alistair and Dave skinned back up to ski a steep line between the rocks of the ridge and an ice cliff on the edge of the glacier.



11/5

After a night in which temperatures dropped to  $-18^{\circ}$  in the tents, we climbed back up towards the pass in crystal clear conditions next morning. We skinned up into a snow bay between the west ridge and the south spur of **Kyrgyzia**, then left our skis as high as we could before taking a direct line up the spur to the summit. Though the angle of the slope had appeared skinnable, unstable snow meant we were safer on foot than zig-zagging on ski.

GPS readings gave the height as 4954m. (N.  $41^{\circ} 49.208'$  E.  $78^{\circ} 12.449'$ ) and there were panoramic views of the rest of the range. Taking care with the initial, potentially avalanche-prone slopes, we had another lovely ski back to celebrate with Alistair's precious drams of whiskey.



12/5

We woke to a morning of fine snow crystals precipitating out of the high thin clouds around the summits. Following the route we'd taken to Pik Chasovoi, we continued north towards its further neighbour, climbing up onto a broad ridge that became a glacier shelf dropping from the east face of our chosen peak and a col at the base of the corniced north-east ridge. It was a broad col but fell precipitously away to the north.

Between the north-east and the north-north-east ridge a narrow face offered steep skinning, using harscheisen, until the 2 ridges drew together and there was no longer space to zig-zag. Most of the party had left skis at the col choosing to follow the N.E. ridge on foot, keeping to the right of the cornice break line, but the whole team was reunited at the point where the ridges

narrowed. We were forced on to the steep and exposed north face on foot, to reach an airy summit: **Pik Karga**, 4831m (N.41° 50.183´ E.78°13.369´), named after the ravens that shadowed its ascent.

Having skied down the broad ridge and with time in hand, we were tempted by a handsome summit to the east that we christened **Point Anna** after one of the team members. Following a straightforward climb up snowslopes to the bergschrund, where we left our skis, a short ice slope led to a pointed rocky top, at 4658m. (N.41° 49.898´ E.78°14.197´) It provided a superb viewpoint high above the main glacier.

We retraced the line of ascent back to camp, enjoying some better skiing this time at the end of a fine day.



13/5

The uninspiring weather conditions meant that it didn't look like a summit day, so we broke camp next morning and moved to the head of our exit pass at 4500m. Contrary to expectations, the skies cleared by midday so that the latter part of the journey was so baking hot we had little appetite for doing more than getting the tents up when we arrived. The view beyond the pass was stunning enough to suggest the name of **Prospect Pass, Camp 7 4506m**. (N.41°50.698´ E.78°14.815´) .

Evidence of crevasses prompted some thorough probing before finalising tent sites and, since it was a more exposed position than our previous camp, we dug in more thoroughly.

14/5

The glacier bay to the west of the pass gave access to two more peaks.



Skirting the steep north face of "Pt.4865.9," with its tottering seracs, we gained the col between the two peaks and Derek found a good line up its steep north ridge. On the way up we were surprised to find tracks that could only have been those of a hare. It seemed to have traversed from one ridge to the other without quite taking in the 4876m summit! It had to be Hare Peak or **Pik Koyon** (N.41° 50.465´ E.78°13.949´) in Kyrgyz. The

ridge was corniced to the east and split by large but mostly hidden crevasses so once again we were forced onto an exposed north face to gain the corniced summit. There were fine views of Kyrgyzia and Pik Karga to the South.

Returning to the col, Dave led off up the south ridge of the peak that rose in a series of ice bowls to a fine narrow summit ridge. Hunched brooding above the opencast goldmine far below and given that we were ESC members, it was named **Eagles Peak** (4822m. N.41° 50.857´ E.78° 13.828´).

We had a pleasant ski back to camp in spring snow just losing its lightness.

15/5

At 6am next day the sky was completely overcast and by 7am it was snowing but soon cleared up enough for a team of 4 to ski down the pass far enough to wand a line that would give a good descent if we were forced to “cut & run” in bad weather. Then we all headed east into another glacier bay that we hoped would give us good views of a pass and connecting glacier system beyond. From the head of that glacier bay the drop-off from the other pass was as daunting as that beneath us but some fine peaks surrounded the glacier basin beyond.

The weather deteriorated as we climbed an easy snow peak to the north buffeted by snow flurries. Following Alistair onto the snowy summit, Derek reckoned a rocky point at the end of a short rock ridge looked higher. He led the way, scrambling along jumbled granite blocks strongly reminiscent of Chamonix, to a kind of turret with “twin cannons” pointing at the sky. We took turns bridging up this airy chimney to a precarious summit. As to which was the



higher point of this twin peak, perhaps only seasonal variations in snowfall will decide. I decided on the conciliatory name of **Snow Cannon** 4720m. (N.41° 50.501´ E. 78°16.222´) for this double headed peak as we skied back to camp through increasing snowfall.

16/5

The weather was good enough for us to break camp and ski easily down the other side of the pass, evading the odd crevasse, onto the gently rolling glacier beneath. The pulks still equipped with poles all seemed to run well ahead of those managing with rope alone, but perhaps it was just a question of patient management. Encountering isothermic snow, we roped up, stepping and poling out of trouble to a lunch stop on a medial moraine



We continued on crusty ice running with meltwater streamlets to the steepening snout of the Petrov Glacier. There we were fortunate to find just a 2-3 metre near-vertical step down to the snowy banks of a glacial stream. Passing down rucksacks and lowering pulks from an ice screw, the team working like a well-oiled

machine, we climbed down in crampons to gain the moraine. The streambed led to a beach of fine outwash on the shores of Lake Petrov where we camped – **Camp - 8 3739m.** (N.41°53.833´ E.78°14.690´).

We could see the lights of the pumping station, associated with the gold mine, on the opposite shore of the Lake. From there a road would take us to our rendezvous at the derelict meteorological station in the valley beyond the mine.

We reckoned to be able to reach this a day early so called in our transport by satellite phone.

17/5

Unfortunately the Lake ice would not bear our weight, so there was no alternative to traversing the moraine shores of the lake. After the beaches ran out in a confusion of moraine rubble banks it was a nightmarish effort to get the loads through this terrain. Reaching the roadhead we were greeted with hot sweet tea by the pumping station workers who had watched out progress along the lakeshore.



Dragging the pulks along gravel roads through the mine complex soon removed what was left of the runners and became increasingly difficult as the pulks filled up with stones. Fortunately Mike was offered a lift by a passing truck. He managed to contact the mine's head of security and persuaded him to escort us off-site by minibus to our rendezvous. Our wasted appearance must have led to the donation of meat rolls leftover from packed lunches. It was the first bread we had tasted in 17 days. These days the mine seems to have a more relaxed attitude to visitors, even running tourist trips in the summer. A change from being quizzed by armed men when we camped near the road in 2003!

We camped (**Camp 9** – 3646m N.41°50.487' E.78° 7.731') on level grass



behind the ruined Met. Station and during the snowy evening were visited by a curious fox. In the morning we were treated to a panoramic view of the north-west faces of the peaks we had climbed.

18/5

The 4WD truck arrived at 9.30 to take us back to Tamga. Rimma was delighted to see us safe and well.

While we waited for mine traffic at the top of the Barskoon pass a Lamergeier flew low overhead.

At the guest house in Tamga, Sasha, formerly a Soviet master of sport in mountaineering, was keen to hear of our journey and confirmed that as far as he knew (and he is very familiar with this area) the peaks we had climbed had not received previous ascents. That afternoon some of us dared to take a very chilly dip in Lake Issy-Kul.

19/5

Arrangements for travel to Bishkek were jeopardised by a clutch breakdown but the resourceful Rimma hired a local minibus and we were soon on our way again. TopAsia also turned up trumps with the Eldorado Hotel: the swimming pool was a delight in temperatures of over 30°.

20/5

We now had a spare day but like true monomaniacs we all went for a day trip to Ala Archa gorge to explore some of the Kyrgyz range. The evening included a whistle-stop tour of the sights of central Bishkek before we ate.

21/5

Flying out at 6am, we found that the Aeroflot check-in would not recognise the arrangement with the skibags so we ended up paying \$10 per kilo over the 20kg free allowance. In some cases this was over \$100. I have taken the matter up with customer services who are pursuing it. Bishkek does have something of a reputation in this respect.

## **Conclusion**

The expedition proved the worth of skis and pulks in exploring this area in winter. The team travelled 50km through the range on foot and on ski in making the first South-North traverse. We made 7 ascents at about PD of previously unclimbed peaks between 4600 & 4954m and confirmed the potential for ski-mountaineering in the Ak-Shirak range.



*The Eagles landed ... on our way home.  
From left to right: Alastair Cairns, Anna Seale,  
Dave Wynne Jones, Mike Sharp, Lizzy Hawker,  
John Goodwin, Rimma (our interpreter) and Derek Buckle.*

## Appendix 1 : Map of route

## Appendix 2

### Medical Kit List

#### Injectables

1 x diclofenac 75mg  
1 x domperidone 10mg  
1 x ceftazimide 1g  
1 x chlorpheniramine 10mg  
2 x adrenaline 1mg (1ml of 1:1000)  
1 x hydrocortisone 100mg  
2 x tramadol 100mg

#### Antibiotics

1 x 20 erythromycin 500mg  
2x 24 flucloxacillin 250mg  
3 x 18 amoxicillin 500mg  
4 x 10 ciprofloxacin 250mg  
5x 21 metronidazole 400mg

#### Analgesics

10 x 500mg paracetamol  
20 x ibuprofen 400mg  
10 x diclofenac 50mg  
5 x tramadol 50mg

#### Other tabs:

24 x domperidone 10mg (antiemetic)  
10 x loratidine 10mg/ranitidine 300mg  
10 x buscopan 10mg (antispasmodic)  
8 x loperamide (immodium) 2mg  
1 x Levonell-2 packet (morning-after pill)  
20 x 5mg prednisolone  
10 x Chlorpheniramine (Piriton) 4mg

#### Ears & Eyes:

2 x cotton buds  
1 x chloramphenicol 1% ointment  
2 x amethocaine drops  
2 eye pads  
1 otosporin ear drops

#### Suture equipment

1 x vicryl suture (various size)  
1 x 4.0 non-absorbable polyfilament (ethilon or prolene)  
1 x 5.0 or 6.0 non-absorbable polyfilament (ethilon or prolene)  
3 packets steristrips  
1 x scissors  
1 x needle holder  
1 x scalpel  
1 x forceps  
4 x 5ml 2% lignocaine

#### Dressings

5 non-adhesive dressings (eg melolin)  
2 x zinc oxide tape  
2 jelonet dressings  
5 packets x 5 gauze swabs  
2 crepe bandages (medium and large)  
1 x triangular bandage  
assorted plasters  
2 latex gloves  
2 sterile gloves  
5 x alcowipes  
iodine tincture

#### Creams

1 x 1% hydrocortisone cream  
1 x flomazine cream  
2 x clotrimazole (canestan) 1% cream  
1 x antifungal foot powder  
1 x emolient (moisturiser) cream

#### Miscellaneous

1 x salbutamol inhaler  
safety pins  
1 thermometer  
1 x iodine tincture  
10 oral rehydration sachets  
micropore tape  
zinc oxide tape  
glucose tablets

## Appendix 3

### **AK-SHIRAK KIT LIST.**

As much an aide memoir as anything else, we will all have our personal favourites to substitute in places but it's a common starting point.

#### **Personal.**

#### **Clothing:**

- ( ) Expedition ski mountaineering boots with closed cell foam inner boot.
- ( ) 2 pr. thick wool socks (toesters) & thermal liner socks.
- ( ) Vapour barrier socks. (Optional)
- ( ) 1pr. Thermal longjohns & 1pr powerstretch microfleece tights.
- ( ) Fleece salopettes.
  - ( ) 1 or 2 Thermal T-shirts/tops (pale colours reflect the sun if stripped down to these.)

- ( ) 1 or 2 Microfleece zip-polo tops
- ( ) Windshirt.
- ( ) Fleece jacket.
- ( ) Breathable waterproof jacket with good hood.
- ( ) “ “ overtrousers or salopettes.
- ( ) Expedition down jacket (should fit over other layers).
- ( ) Hat, balaclava, neck gaiter &/or face mask.
- ( ) 1 pr. Thermal gloves
- ( ) 1pr. ski/climbing gloves.
- ( ) 1 pr Expedition overmitts with fleece inners.
- ( ) Lightweight gaiters.
- ( ) Sunhat or baseball cap & bandanna.
- ( ) Glacier glasses with side shields. Prescription spares if you wear contacts.
- ( ) Double lens goggles.
- ( ) Synthetic or down boots. (optional).

#### **Camping gear:**

- ( ) Thermarest (¾ length?) & Karrimat (4 season).
- ( ) Expedition sleeping bag (optional compression sack to minimize bulk & vapour barrier inner.)
- ( ) Lightweight bivvi bag or sleeping bag cover.
- ( ) Spoon & large mug (steel or titanium can be heated).
- ( ) Swiss army knife & 2 lighters.
- ( ) 1ltr. widemouth waterbottle with insulated cover.
- ( ) 1ltr. widemouth pee bottle (leak-proof & marked!) & funnel for ladies.
- ( ) toilet paper in ziplock bags.
- ( ) Toothbrush & small tube of paste.
- ( ) Small pack of baby wipes.
- ( ) Suncream (Uvistat factor 20, from Boots I think, doesn't freeze, or liquefy in heat).
- ( ) 2 Lip protection sticks.
- ( ) Small tube of moisturizer for sunburn & cracked hands.
- ( ) Earplugs. (& spares?)
- ( ) Thick expendable paperback (eg War & Peace from a secondhand bookshop!), journal & Walkman (optional) for stormbound days.
- ( ) Compact camera, spare batteries & film.
- ( ) lightweight stuff sacks for organizing kit in the...

- ( ) Large holdall/duffle bag that goes on the pulk.
- ( ) Pulk, harness arrangement to tow it & bungees or similar to hold load on.
- ( ) Large light rucksack (70ltr min. eg Berghaus expedition sack.)
- ( ) headlamp.

**Climbing gear.**

- ( ) Touring skis, skins & harschiesen.
- ( ) Ski poles ( Telescopic. Those that screw together to make an avalanche probe are doubly useful.)
- ( ) Ice axe with leash. (Lightweight)
- ( ) Crampons. Flexible, lightweight, 12 point & fitted to boots.
- ( ) Avalanche transceiver & lightweight shovel.
- ( ) Sit harness, locking krab (HMS or add belay device).
- ( ) 2 long slings with locking krabs.
- ( ) Crevasse rescue pulley.
- ( ) Titanium ice screw & lightweight krab
- ( ) Wild country ropeman.
- ( ) tibloc &/or 2 prussik loops (emergency slings) on krab.

**Personal first aid kit.**

- ( ) Paracetamol
- ( ) Plasters & blister kit
- ( ) Immodium
- ( ) gut antibiotic (ciproxin).
- ( ) chest antibiotic
- ( ) throat lozenges
- ( ) 10 of diamox, dexamethasone & nifedipine.
- ( ) 1 wound dressing.

**Personal repair kit.**

- ( ) Duct tape.
- ( ) needle & thread.
- ( ) spares for own crampons etc.

**EQUIPMENT PER TENT PAIR OR TRIO.**

- ( ) 4 season 2 or 3 person tent.
- ( ) Gas stove, preferably with a hanging arrangement so that it can be used safely inside the tent.
- ( ) 2ltr pan with lid.
- ( ) Sponge for spills, small brush to clean snow off boots etc.
- ( ) 25-30m. 7-9mm rope for security during glacier travel.
- ( ) Gas. 1 canister per pair per day (booked in country)
- ( ) 1 avalanche probe.
- ( ) 10-12 wands & tape.
- ( ) Spare skin.
- ( ) Spare ski pole.
- ( ) Map, compass & altimeter.

**GROUP EQUIPMENT.**

- First aid kit.
- Repair kit (tools & materials inc. mole wrench, screwdriver, pliers, wire, etc.)
- 2 x GPS units.
- Satellite 'phone.

Appendix 4

Illustrations of pulk construction



## Appendix 5

### Finance summary

#### Costs

Flights: £4200

Kyrgyzstan transport & accommodation package: £1400

Expenses (research, admin., etc.): £900

Total: £6500

Less ESC Grant: £2000

MEF & BMC/Sports Council Grant: £1000

Balance made up by members of the team: £3500