



Alpine Club 150th
Anniversary
Ak-Shirak on Ski
Expedition

Kyrgyzstan - 7/4/07-29/4/07

Mount Everest Foundation
Report

Aims of the Expedition.

To make a circuit of the unexplored glacier systems of the North-eastern Ak-Shirak range in Kyrgyzstan on ski.

To make first ascents of peaks adjacent to the route on ski and on foot.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the generous financial support of the Alpine Club, and the Mount Everest Foundation.

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Introduction.

Until the mid 19th 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 fact sheet)

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 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 Dave Wynne-Jones led another expedition that arrived later in the season, at the end of April, and secured access over the Suek pass. Details are available in the MEF report on that expedition, but one outcome sufficient reconnaissance to return to explore the north-eastern mountains of the range. These looked to be well suited to ski-mountaineering and they had been only skirted in 2006.

The Team

Dave Wynne-Jones, 54, British, Retired: 26 year Alpine experience including ascents of all but 1 of the 4000m peaks & routes such as the Frendo Spur; expeditions to Alaska, Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan, Peru, Pakistan, Nepal, China; 1st ascents of Nevado Padrecaca, S. Face of Pokharkan; ascents of Denali, Illiniza, Cotopaxi, Cayambe, Pik Lenin, Ticlla, Pisco, Huascarán Norte.; Ski expeditions to Mt. Logan, Caucasus, Damavand, Mustagh Ata (7546m. solo ascent), Ak-Shirak 2003 & 2006 (7 first ascents)

James Stuart Gallagher, 62, Retired teacher, British: Started climbing 1960 & still climbing HVS/E1 and Scottish V; first Alpine season 1963, have climbed about half the 4000s & routes like Dru N face, Frendo Spur, Red Sentinel, Badile N face, inc. classic routes in Dolomites eg. Solleder route E face Saas Moar; started ski mountaineering in 1985 & toured extensively in the Vanoise, Oberland and Valaise.

Greater ranges: first British expedition to Karavshin Valley [Asan] 1990, Sub Polar Urals (ski mt.) 1992, Maydantalsky and Pskemsky ranges of the western Tien Shan/Uzbekistan 1993, Kaingdy Glacier Kyrgyzstan 1995, Cordillera Central Peru 1997, all involving first ascents or first British ascents. Attempt on Mt. Logan 2003.

Gordon Nuttall, 62, British, retired judge: 25 years climbing rock to VS/HVS, Ice to Scottish 1V; Alps – several 4000 metre peaks at PD and above; ski mountaineering - Classic Haute Route Chamonix to Saas Fee & ascents from early 1980's onwards, include some extreme descents eg North Face Mt Blanc, Milieu Glacier, Aig. D'Argentiere; Canadian Rockies, 3000 m peaks inc. Mt Rundle, Cascade Mountain and Mt Edith Cavell traverse.

Greater Ranges: Everest 1984. Cumbrian expedition failed when team member suffered heart attack at 21,000 feet; climbed to 23,000 feet and a 20,000 foot satellite peak from BC. Kashmir 1989. Attempt on unclimbed peak abandoned because of bad weather. Climbed "Corner Peak" – 17500 feet. 2003 – St Elias Range, attempt on Mt Logan abandoned because of bad weather.

Gethin Howells, 26, British, Student: Started rock climbing in 1998, leading routes up to E1 & Scottish IV; 1999- Hot Rock Expedition to Kenya - classic routes on Lukenya, Frog and Hell's Gate & an attempt on Batian. Chamonix – routes eg. Table de Roc, Aiguille du Tour, N. Face, Tete Blanche, S. Ridge, Aiguille du Perseverance. 2002 – Chamonix ski touring, Artesonraju (6025m) Cordillera Blanca, Peru. SE Face. D+. 2003 – Sestriere, Chamonix & Picos du Europa ski-touring. 2004 – Pyrenees, ski touring around Benasque, with ascents of Posets, Pico Rojo & an attempt on Aneto; ski touring in Snowy Mountains, Australia. 2005 –Ski touring in Alberta, inc. a traverse of the Wapta icefields with ascents of Rhondda North and South, Crowfoot mountain, Mt. Gordon and Mt. Olive.; Alaska, reached 5,900m on Denali. 2006 – Ski touring in Colorado inc. 14000ers Mt. Bierstadt and Quandry Peak. Lemosho Route on Kilimanjaro.

Adele Long, 50, British, NHS manager: 10 years of rock-climbing to HVS, French 6a standard; ice climbing to Scottish 3/4; alpine climbing in the Pyrenees, Dolomites & Mont Blanc range; Morocco, Jebel Toubkal; Tanzania, Kilimanjaro; ski-mountaineering in Canada inc. Wapta icefields traverse with ascents of Rhondda South & Mt. Olive, & early season touring in the Ecrins & Vercors.

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.

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 & 2006 expeditions 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.

In 2006 we made some impression upon that by making 7 first ascents of peaks including Kyrgysia, at 4954m the highest in the north-west of the range. However, access had been problematic. The Suek pass had been negotiable but there was precious little snow in the valley of the Kara Say river in early May. This necessitated a 2-day walk before skis could be used on the frozen river and several portages over extensive frozen gravel banks in the next 2 days to the glacier snout. On the way out Lake Petrov was insufficiently frozen to act as a thoroughfare leaving a tough traverse of the unstable moraine shore as the only option.

In planning for 2007 I decided to approach across Lake Petrov when it would be well-frozen at the beginning of April. Hopefully it would remain sufficiently frozen for our return.

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.

Check charges for excess baggage!

Aeroflot had a baggage allowance of 30kg 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 £5, so our ski bags cost £15 excess on the way out. On the way back the cost had gone up to £15 per kilo payable only in cash and we found ourselves embarrassed by a lack of funds. Fortunately Aeroflot staff were very understanding!

BA used to have a punitive charge of £30 per kilo and ignored any attempts at negotiation, but has recently introduced a charge of £70 for an additional bag that could hold up to 30kg.

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

The agency must have negotiated access to Lake Petrov with the Kumtor mining company that controls the area with its own security force.

Communications.

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

ITMC 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

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

Medical arrangements.

Stuart Gallagher, who has taken responsibility for medical supplies on other expeditions, organised the medical supplies (See Appendix 2 for a checklist). 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 2006 report for design. This year the pulk poles were built with heavier gauge plastic plumbing pipes and associated plastic compression joints that were found to be tough enough to withstand the considerable stresses involved in skiing with a pulk on the 2006 expedition.

Insurance

Medical and rescue insurance was provided by the Austrian Alpine Club Weltweit scheme.

Maps

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

Agency:

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Kyrgyzstan
Tel: +996-312-651404,
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www.itmc.centralasia.kg

Expedition Log.

Sat. 7/4 – Sun. 8/4

The team met at Heathrow and flew to Bishkek via Moscow with Aeroflot. Unfortunately a bag containing all the pulks was lost in transit and we had to spend a day in Bishkek waiting for it to arrive

ITMC representatives met us at Bishkek with 4WD transport and arranged for accommodation while we waited for the bag. 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. Unfortunately it was discovered that one of the team had left an inner tent in the hotel room in Bishkek, so hurried phone calls arranged for a taxi to bring it out overnight at the cost of \$100! The agency did a fine job of coping with the crisis.

Mon. 9/4

Leaving Tamga we drove up the Barskoon gorge and on along the good dirt road to the Kumtor mine complex. At the checkpoint we were met by a security pick-up with the head of mine security and were escorted about 4 miles to Lake Petrov pumping station. He told us that a pack of about 16 wolves were enjoying the protection from local hunters that the mine's security arrangements afforded. The wolves were used to scavenging, so we should watch out for them as they associated people with food! At the lake, we unpacked our vehicle, and loaded up the pulks on the solid lake-ice.

It took about 40 minutes to cross the Lake to a campsite under the central glacier snout on the farther shore. This ease of access was a marked contrast to the struggles of 2006!

At about 5pm when we were nicely settled in, we heard the sound of voices and 2 Dutch ski-mountaineers arrived to camp nearby. They had read about the 2006 expedition & were going to explore some of the mountains around our second climbing camp at the watershed pass. Their shared pulk was a bright blue plastic baby bath bought in Karakol!



Tues 10/4

We bid goodbye to our Dutch friends who headed southeast while, to acclimatise and manage the loads better, we decided to carry half-loads in the process of finding a route up through the lower glacier to a point approaching the system to the north-east of us. The route took us through a maze of crevasses and ice canyons really too difficult for pulks, but having committed ourselves to this zone we just had to find a way through. We cached our supplies at a junction with a tributary glacier and on the way back explored some alternative lines.



At one point Stuart triggered a small slide on the flanks of a large ice ridge that nonetheless swept him off his skis. Despite that it was very pleasant to be able to ski the lower slopes back to camp in the sunshine.

Weds. 11/4

We woke to heavy snowfall and, with both Gordon & Adele feeling the effects of altitude, decided to take a rest day. After all we had come up about 2000m from Tamga by road and the previous day had been hard work.

By afternoon it had brightened up enough for a much-recovered Gordon and Gethin to suggest a reconnaissance of the glacier to try to find an easier route. Three glacier streams join to make the Petrov glacier that flows into Lake Petrov. The central stream had proved more chaotic, presumably because of the pressure exerted by the flows on either side, yet those flows themselves seemed to offer larger expanses of unbroken ice from what we had seen on our return journeys the previous day.

Dave thought the left-hand flow, viewed from below, looked promising, so we climbed to the crest of a medial moraine ridge that ran all the way up to the “dark tower,” a distinctive moraine summit about halfway to our cache. The ridge fell away into an ice canyon but beyond that an unbroken ice slope seemed to run up from the lakeshore to access the upper glacier more easily. We found the easiest line to drop into the canyon on ski and skied back to the lakeshore to see if there were any barriers to accessing the glacier from the lake. We had seen some prominent ice cliffs on our crossing of the lake.

We were enjoying the ski down the shallowing canyon towards the shore when Gordon, in the lead, came to a sudden stop and Gethin & Dave realised he was on the brink of an ice cliff about 10-15metres above the lake surface. More cautiously we skirted the edge to a boulder beach at the side of the glacier where there was an easy step-down of a couple of metres to the lake ice.

We roped up & skinned along the lake parallel with the impressive line of ice cliffs, around a moraine headland and back into the ice bay where we were camped on the gravel shore. We had a new way up the glacier.



Thurs. 12/4

We broke camp & retraced our route of yesterday, keeping a respectful distance from the shattering ice cliffs and pinnacles that clearly periodically collapsed onto the lake surface. Pressure ridges were thrown up as the weight of the glacial ice bore down upon the lake ice and it all felt very Arctic until we gained the further glacial shore.

Easy skinning up the glacier, dry but for a little recent snowfall, took us well north of the “dark tower” away in the centre of a maze of crevasses. We were well out of it. The shallow remnant of the “canyon” proved no obstacle and we were soon at our cache reorganising the loads.



Heading up the tributary glacier around a spur to our left, we began to suffer from the afternoon sun and the weight of the loads. More worrying, despite a careful choice of line, the snow beneath our skis gave out several alarming “whumps” with the trigger person dropping significantly with the snow surface as it did so. Fortunately we were all roped up.

Eventually we reached a suitable campsite in a slight hollow beneath a rocky spur. Probing revealed a nearby crevasse, but also a large safe area. We marked the perimeter with wands and made camp. The intention had been to build

some substantial snow block walls around the tents but at nearly a meter down we broke through into a deep layer of unconsolidated mush. Even heaping it up made no difference to the wet granular ice crystals. Perhaps it was depth hoar that was now providing a channel for meltwater to seep through.

Dave had been aware that there was less snow at the beginning of April than there had been at the end of May in 2006 but the condition of the snow pack was rather more serious. We would have to be extremely cautious.

We dug out new shallow pitches for our tents.

Fri. 13/4

Gordon was feeling the effects of altitude so just 4 of us skirted debris from the collapsing cornice on the col to the northwest of camp and climbed steeply up the snow slope falling from the ridge beyond the col using “islands of safety.” Finally we could traverse across even steeper ground to gain the col above the cornice. A short but very pleasant ski down to the glacier beyond the saddle and we could skin up under the southwest face of the mountain to a marked saddle at the base of its west ridge.

From there we climbed on ski until our harscheisen were scraping and skidding on hard ice, so we cached the skis and climbed on up the steepening ridge with crampons and axes. We crossed a couple of narrow crevasses and were aware of the southwest face dropping precipitously away as we neared the summit. We gained it together, the map giving a height of 4800m although the GPS made it 4836m.

On the descent Stuart managed to put a foot into a narrow hidden crevasse, splitting his knee open as it smashed into the opposite edge. He held it closed while Adele found steri-strips



in the first aid kit and closed the wound: first aid in a very precarious situation! Stuart was able to limp back down the ridge to the cached skis unaided and quickly set off, hoping to make camp before the knee stiffened up.

A fine ski descent on good “corn” snow took us back to the base of the slope to the col. As we climbed back up it every one of us experienced an unmannerly whump and that sinking feeling yet the slope did not avalanche. This had to be due in part to the good line taken by Stuart in anxious ascent.

The final ski down into camp proved rather testing on breakable crust, but Gordon

was delighted to hear that we had succeeded on our first ascent. We decided to name the peak in honour of the occasion and in the fine tradition of Soviet mountain names, “Pik 150th anniversary of the British Alpine Club.”

Sat. 14/4

Stuart decided to rest his split knee but Gordon was keen to have a go at the mountain to the northeast of camp. Gethin led the team up through the crevassed glacier to the left of a prominent icefall, & across the glacier above to the foot of a spur enclosing a small cirque to the south-west of the mountain. Skirting avalanche debris, we climbed up to a saddle on the south-west ridge and there found fresh snow leopard tracks, probably made that morning.

We continued a short way on skis on the flank of the south west ridge before the avalanche danger made us depot our skis below an ice boss and climb up that pitch and the mixed ridge beyond – classic alpine mountaineering. The ridge gave out onto a snow slope leading to the west summit ridge. Gethin and Dave took turns to break trail in deep soft snow, finding belays where it was clear that the snow lay over ice and could easily slide.

The ridge dropped to a slight snow saddle then the crest reared up again with steep ice to the south-west and a big cornice overhanging the north face. Gethin led out a rope's length to where it was possible to unrope and scramble on to the summit proper, just a short way beyond. This was given 4901m on the map but only indicated 4887m by the GPS: a hard won summit but the views were worth it. It had to be named Snow Leopard Peak or Pik Ak Illbirs.



Fortunately the sun had softened the ice, making the descent easier as we reversed the route. The ski down proved testing with heavy snow alternating with breakable crust and a liberal measure of collapsing, isothermic, snow, but a good long schuss back to camp made up for it.

Under these conditions the climbing was much more technical than in 2006.

Sun. 15/4

An ominous cloud build-up quickly led to snow and the decision to take a day of rest. We thoroughly debated our options in the light of the conditions and decided to go for a couple of peaks at the head of the pass to the north-east of camp, recce the route down the glacier beyond, then review our position.

It fined up enough by the afternoon for Gordon to go out yo-yoing the slopes to the north of camp, while Gethin and Stuart climbed up to the knoll on the spur above camp.

Mon. 16/4

We set out for the pass to the east and reached it in under 2 hours, passing tracks where yesterday's snow leopard had crossed the main glacier after skirting the opposite flank of the icefall, perhaps to avoid our camp. There were also fresh fox tracks higher up. At the glacier pass there was a low ridge of exposed and very broken rock. A few rusting cans bore witness to the probable passage of hunters.



The peak to the south of the pass presented a slope of hard steep ice. Gordon didn't fancy it so skied back to camp while the rest of us took turns to run out rope lengths & belay or at least offer the others the security of a hand line.

Gethin reached the narrow summit ridge & while he belayed Dave found a way along the rather technical flank to a very airy summit – no sign of any previous ascent! The fantastic views included Khan Tengri and Pobeda hazily looming in the far distance. I was too absorbed with the climbing to take a GPS reading but the map indicates a height of 4720m and we opted

for the name of Pik Plavnik (Fin).

Again the sun-softened ice was easier in descent yet when I rejoined the team after collecting a stashed ski pole I found all of them had taken off on quickly-arrested slides on their way down!

From the pass the ski down was a fine long schuss with gentle turns on good corn snow turning heavy just above camp.

Tues. 17/4

It had been a warm night in which we had listened to the glacier creaking and cracking beneath us like the movements in sleep of some immense cold beast, but another promising day saw us heading back up to the eastern pass with a view to climbing the peak to the north of it this time.

Again we made good time and were impressed by the icy slopes of Pik Plavnik, but this time we headed north with striking views of the spectacular north-east and north faces of Pik Ak Illbirs. We climbed up to the col between our target peak & Ak Illbirs, crossing the bergschrund on ski before stashing them and continuing on foot. The ridge seemed broad but fell away steeply to the north with the threat of insecure snow over ice whilst the cornice break line to the south left us with only a narrow corridor of safe ground between.



Cloud and snow rolled in on the summit, but not before we had good views down the glacier beyond the eastern pass, confirming those of the previous day. It was passable. The summit had cornice break lines in several directions so we stayed close to the rocks emerging on the north side. The GPS reading gave 4815m which seemed to confirm the map, and as it was the only one we had all climbed together we decided on the name Solidarnost (Solidarity).

A “sugar-trench” led back to the skis and we skied easily over the cornice and back down to the pass. From there the long schuss back to camp was completed by 1pm but not without the occasional brush with collapsing snow.

The weather seemed distinctly warm with rain spitting between the scattered flakes of snow. We debated our options and concluded that although the pass & glacier beyond looked passable the snow conditions as we descended the glacier were likely to be increasingly poor if not downright dangerous and the return pass at the head of the Petrov glacier had looked hard from the summit of Plavnik. We decided to descend to the main Petrov glacier and explore the glaciers and mountains to the south. In effect we were missing out the loop of our intended route that descended to the east but hoped to complete the exploration of the latter, western part of that route.

Weds. 18/4



We packed up camp and left about mid-morning, finding poor snow conditions almost immediately and some tricky route-finding through crevasses as we reached the Petrov glacier. In some places we broke through into crystalline snow awash with water.

The dubious snow conditions prompted a campsite on snow patches in the medial moraine where we found water flowing through ice channels in its flanks.

Just as we got the tents up the weather came in again with strong winds & snow.

Thurs. 19/4

A cold night led to a clear dawn that encouraged us to go for the peak across the glacier to the south. However, several loud whumps as huge plates of surface snow subsided suddenly coupled with a massive serac fall of the flank of our target mountain dampened our enthusiasm – after all this was still early morning on the glacier.

Rather than make a commitment to the mountain that could have serious implications we decided to work up the glacier close to the medial moraine and recce the pass at the head of

the glacier that had looked so hard from Plavnik. On the way a better view of our proposed route on the mountain revealed hidden rock bands that would make an ascent doubtful.

The bad snow was putting us all off & after lunch it was only Gethin & Dave that went on to the glacial watershed at the head of the pass, finding it was passable on the left but looked to be a lot lower down on the glacier beyond than the maps suggested.

Reunited with the others on the descent, we all skied back to camp although some of that involved planking along a trench of collapsing snow.

We considered our options and the consensus was that conditions were such that there was little more we could safely or enjoyably do.

Even camped on the medial moraine it was clear from the creaks and groans all night that the glacier was on the move in the high temperatures we were experiencing. At the previous camp we had woken one morning to find a thin crack stretching more than 50m that ran right under one tent. Probing did not indicate a major crevasse but it had been far from encouraging and the glacier above had been increasingly seamed with such cracks. Travelling exclusively at night was an option, but we had been surprised by crevasses in daylight and the idea of picking up speed on a ski descent in darkness, only to find one's reading of the terrain was not accurate was rather daunting.

We decide to take a rest day, then pack up and descend to Lake Petrov next day, skinning across the lake to be picked up the following day.

Fri. 20/4

The rest day saw four of the team attempting the mountain due east of camp. Dave & Adele took a line that stranded them in a vast jumble of boulders before retreating past cairns on the moraine that were probably left by the Russian group mentioned in the 2003 report.

Gethin and Gordon were luckier in finding a shallow snow couloir that led through iced in rocks to the summit snow/icefield. There Gordon doubted the effectiveness of his lightweight crampons so waited while Gethin summited. The map gave a height of 4727m and Gethin proposed the name of Pik Mari after his mum.

All were back at camp enjoying the sunshine by mid afternoon having spent very little time on the glacier.

Sat. 21/4

We packed up camp early enough to ski fairly easily down the glacier until we reached the ice canyon that had deepened and steepened as a result of the warm weather. This meant hauling pulks directly up slopes too steep for skis before skiing on down the increasingly "dry" and icy glacier.

Nearing the lake, we noticed melted margins of blue water that undermined our confidence in using the lake surface as a thoroughfare, so crossed the moraine ridge and scrambled down through more moraine to reach the ice bay of our previous encampment.

Sure enough the ice margins were melted but it was possible to jump across onto still hard ice. We wished we'd gone down to the lake and checked before making the hard double carries over the moraine!

We camped on fine gravel on the beach.

Sun. 22/4

We packed up the dry tents and found that the meltwater margins of the lake ice were frozen to a depth of 2 inches by morning,



so dragging the pulks onto the ice was no problem.

40 minutes later we were unloading the pulks at the pumping station.

The ITMC truck picked us up around midday as arranged and that evening we were back at Tamga for hot showers and meals that were not dehydrated for the first time in 2 weeks.

Mon. 23-26/4

We drove to Bishkek & checked in to our previous hotel.

Having come out 4 days early we tried to change our flights but it was not easy, so we made the best of Bishkek in the Spring, which is far more pleasant than Bishkek in high summer, before flying home.

Conclusion

The expedition encountered difficult snow conditions that increased the technical level of peaks climbed and the risks of glacier travel. ITMC confirmed that it had been an unusually warm winter with much less snowfall. This limited our exploration of the intended objectives, the north-eastern glacier systems of the range.

However, the planned route had been feasible and in better conditions would be a superb trip through spectacular scenery. It was clear that there were many more potential ski peaks in the area as well as some mountains offering challenging lines for alpine ascents in summer conditions. We made 5 ascents of previously unclimbed peaks between 4720 & 4901m despite the conditions and confirmed the value of skis in exploring the Ak-Shirak range in winter, though discussions emphasised pulk design would continue to evolve.



*Tamga: climbing team on the left,
support team on the right*

Appendix 1: Map of route

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 erythromecin 500mg
2x 24 flucloxacillin 250mg
3 x 18 amoxycillin 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 flamazine 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

Peaks climbed in Ak-Shirak Range April 2007

1. 4836m N 41° 55.481' E 78° 17.555' First ascentionists; DWJ, AL, SG, GH. Suggested name: Pik 150th Anniversary of the British Alpine Club. (In our 150th anniversary year!)
Route: SW glacier & West Ridge, grade; PD.
2. 4887m N 41° 56.167' E 78° 19.06' First ascentionists; DWJ, AL, GN, GH. Suggested name: Pik Ak Ilbirs (as we found Snow Leopard tracks on the climb)
Route: SW Ridge & W. Ridge, grade; AD
3. 4720m N 51° 55.7' E 78° 20.1' First ascentionists; DWJ, AL, SG, GH.
Suggested name: Pik Plavnik (because it was a sharp fin of ice & rock)
Route: eastern glacier approach & north spur, grade AD-
4. 4815m N 41° 56.38' E 78° 19.57' First ascentionists; DWJ, AL, SG, GN, GH. Suggested name: Pik Solidarnost (because we all climbed it)
Route: eastern glacier approach & west ridge, grade; PD-
5. 4727m N 41° 54.4' E 78° 20.8' First ascentionist; GH. Suggested name: Pik Mari (after Gethin's Mum).
Route: south face, grade; PD

Appendix 4

Finance summary

Costs

Flights: £2325

Kyrgyzstan transport & accommodation package: £1500

Excess baggage charges: £133

Insurance: £180

Lightweight Food: £500

Specialist equipment (pulks): £180

Additional expenses: £800

Total: £5618

Less: AC Grant: £1200

MEF Grant: £1550

Balance made up by members of the team: £2868