

of military about. We eventually understood that we were to wait by the landing strip. At this point we were starting to get quite concerned as none of us had any idea what was going on, but everyone seemed to be being quite friendly so hopefully that boded well.

After a while some other climbers and trekkers turned up; one team was a group of Czechs who could speak English and they explained that the road was shut. That didn't seem surprising, though we thought it must be major if the all-terrain Soviet vehicle could not cope with it. After some more chatting they started mentioning the 'exclusion zone' which at first we thought might just be a mistranslation – but it turned out to be a bubonic plague exclusion zone.

In fact this helicopter was the last one flying out, which was why we had no confirmation of the change to the date of our helicopter. Tien Shan Travel (who facilitated our trip) had been busy organising the evacuation of all the teams and their staff in the area. Eventually we flew out to Karkara on the Kazak boarder where we were seamlessly met by a mini-bus that took us back to Bishkek.

### Summary

An account of the first ascent of the south ridge of the Djanghorn (5274m), (ED, HVS A2, Scottish IV, 750m) and the traverse of Pk 5207 (FA), Pk Buddyness and Pk Betelgeuse (2.5km), Djangart region, Tien Shan; 31 July to 27 August 2013.

Team members: Tom Bell, Hugh Thomas, Neil Thomas, Max Folkett, Richard 'Reg' Measures and Timothy Elson.

Routes and peaks: Frima face (D-, 45-70°, Scottish III, 900m), Peak Macmillan (5051m FA) – Reg Measures, Max Folkett and Timothy Elson 14/08/13).

*Open Misère* (TD, 90°, Scottish V, 500m) on Pk Vinton-Boot (5162m FA) – Reg Measures, Max Folkett and Timothy Elson 16 Aug 2013.

South ridge and traverse (ED, HVS, A2, Scottish IV 750m + 2.5km of ridge) Djanghorn (5274m, FA), and Pk 5207m (FA), Pk Buddyness (5172m, 2nd ascent), and Pk Betelgeuse (5100m, 2nd ascent) – Reg Measures, Max Folkett and Timothy Elson, 27 Aug 2013.

East Ridge (AD, 400m, FA) of Pk Fotheringham (4871m), – Tom Bell, Hugh Thomas and Neil Thomas 15 Aug 2013.

Pk Kinmundy (4950m), (PD, 400m FA) – Tom Bell, Hugh Thomas and Neil Thomas 18 Aug 2013.

Point Andrea (4566m), (F 200m, FA) – Tom Bell, Hugh Thomas and Neil Thomas 16 Aug 2013).

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ADRIAN DYE

## In The Tracks of The Snow Leopard



The author walking in to the Little Poobah (5481m). (Rob Middleton)

The 2012 Alpine Club symposium on the states of the former Soviet Union provided many inspiring areas and objectives in the space of a few hours, rather than the usual weeks of research. One country clearly stood out as having inspiration combined with simple logistics and bureaucracy: Kyrgyzstan. The capital, Bishkek, is a fairly nondescript former Soviet city, with few cultural highlights to alleviate the challenges of amassing supplies in the stifling heat of August 2014. Finishing our shopping in Osh's bazaar and the city's more modern supermarkets, we loaded our supplies onto the mighty six-wheel-drive KAMAZ truck, glad to be heading south into the cooler climes of the Tien Shan.

As we rolled onwards and upwards the temperatures became more comfortable, tarmac became rarer and the yurts and horses of the nomadic



Pik Donstanski (4780m) with the Western Couloir (D, 600m) rising up to the summit. (Adrian Dye)

people increasingly dominated the landscape. After a pleasant night in a homestay in Naryn, the remoteness of our surroundings increased until the border posts seemed to mark the edge of civilisation. Beyond them the nomadic population became even more sparse, and old Soviet-constructed dirt roads disintegrated and reminded me of the Russian quote: 'We built poor quality roads to test our trucks on.'

Thankfully the truck and driver Sergei, who provided rolling maintenance, were more than up to the challenge, negotiating us through glacial meltwater rivers and periglacial block fields to our ideal drop-off point at 4100m. Crucially, this meant that our approach to base camp was greatly assisted by gravity, so walking fully laden downhill to our base camp at about 3400m (near the Sarychat river), followed by an unladen return journey to 4100m, proved to be good acclimatisation over the three days of load carrying.

Base camp was established in a pleasant meadow full of marmots and was next to the only reliable non-glacial stream in the valley for drinking water. We settled in just in time for the first day of bad weather and a much appreciated rest day. The approach had afforded us excellent views of a wide range of peaks up to 5982m, consisting of varieties of rock from the finest granite through to material that doesn't really deserve to be

called rock. The team enthusiastically began eyeing up objectives in the surrounding mountains of the Sarychat and Fersmana glaciers. The ever eager team of Ian and Rob were quick off the mark with the first ascent of *A Grand Tour of Africa* (HVS 4c, 20m) on a granite crag near base camp, whilst Hannah patiently assisted Scott (the quartermaster) in organising the food we had carried in for the duration of the trip.

Looking around, it seemed that accessing our objectives through recently de-glaciated terrain could well prove the crux for the whole expedition. The snout of the Fersmana glacier proved to be a formidable challenge, with its bungalow sized granite boulders delicately perched on loose, hummocky moraine that seemed to go on forever. 'Moraine camp' was established at the north edge of this moraine, once we had made our way up the valley and navigated the unstable scree slopes of the glacial meltwater rivers. Rob, Hannah and Ian pressed through this boulder maze early on the morning of 14 August and were then able to make a swift ascent of the first unclimbed summit of the expedition: Peak 4645. Whilst they were enjoying the virgin summit experience, I had negotiated the maze and pressed on up to the Sarychat glacier snout to recce a route up to our next objective before depositing some gear and returning to the moraine camp. Scott returned from his recce of the Fersmana glacier with good news of a terrace that provided easy going along the west margin, before terminating in unstable, steep moraine slopes above a chaotic and crevassed glacier; that would have to wait until later in the trip.

The morning of 15 August dawned bright and clear, by which time Rob, Scott and I were several kilometres up the Sarychat glacier and nearing the base of our objective. Peak 4780 had an enticing gully line between ribs of rotten rock leading directly up to the summit. Despite cloud increasingly looming up from the Chinese side, a hard frost had left the delicate snow bridges strong enough for us to safely cross three bergschrunds guarding the gully above. Early progress was good as we moved together despite dinner plating ice, and it seemed as though I was living the childhood dream of reaching an unclimbed summit via an attractive snow line.

Rob had taken the lead and the gradually rising temperatures took their toll on the ribs of dark material either side of the gully. Early skirmishes of pebble sized rocks developed into an onslaught of microwave sized blocks that saw us rapidly veering to the shelter of the right hand side of the gully. This was steeper and the ice was harder and more brittle, and I became increasingly aware of having to hang from my axes as a steepening (75°) led us into the relative safety of the upper gully. On reaching the summit at 12:30pm, we were greeted with thunder and the dream of reaching my first unclimbed summit had been replaced by the stark reality of being in a serious situation. Scott and I agreed to name it Pik Donstanski (4780m) after my cousin Donald and his father Stanley, who both lost battles with cancer.

Both Rob and I realised that our initial plan of descending snow slopes to the south would put us into further danger of rockfall and deeper into



Huw looking towards peak 4849m. (Ian Peachey)

the bad weather. Instead, it seemed far more appealing to traverse the ridge to the north and take in two more unclimbed summits that would lead us to Peak 4645, which we knew would provide a suitable descent route even if it was over five miles away. We radioed base camp and informed Hannah of our plan, in which we then became engrossed and totally forgot about the rest of the team. The weather seemed to swallow us up as wet snow began to fall and cloud reduced visibility of the unknown ground we still had to cover. This proved to consist of rock that was best dealt with in crampons as the spikes seemed to hold it together better. There were sections of gendarmes made of coherent rock, and one of those provided the fine summit of The Castle (4601m) at around 3pm. By this time my thoughts had turned to finding a suitable descent route despite the thick cloud; benignment in the wet snow on an exposed ridge did not seem particularly appealing, regardless of how many unclimbed summits we had reached.

Thankfully, as darkness approached the cloud retreated and enabled Rob to find an excellent descent route with thoroughly enjoyable scree running, leading us down to our camp below the Sarychat glacier. A pot full of Yorkshire tea seemed to be a suitable celebration for reaching the tent just before darkness and further snowfall. It continued to snow through the



The summits on the ridge in the foreground are around 5000m and most likely unclimbed. (Ian Peachey)

night and into the next day, so Rob quit his damp bivvy bag and descended to moraine camp to discover that Hannah had valiantly carried our spare sleeping bags and supplies up in case we reached it the night before. We all safely reached a now-snowy base camp that afternoon and were pleased to leave the rumble of avalanches behind.

Despite the inclement weather, Ian and Huw were keen to make the most of a drier interlude with a reconnaissance of the unexplored glacier and unclimbed peaks to the east of our base camp. The rest of the team admired their efforts from the comfort of their tents, which I am sure Ian and Huw would have fully appreciated during the ensuing 'character building' bivouac high on the mountain. They returned the next day with valuable photos of yet more excellent, unclimbed objectives just under 5000m, and with a lot of wet gear. As the weather seemed intent on continuing with the wet theme, we remained in tents and I began to worry about tent fever setting in.

Thankfully the next day dawned cold with fresh snow down to below base camp, and not a cloud in the sky. Rob and Hannah climbed an impressive route of 350m at HVS 4b on the limestone buttress 'El Naranjo' behind base camp, made more exciting by the melting snow and ice that had to be crossed in rock shoes at the top of the climb. Meanwhile, the rest of the team continued to dry out gear, enjoy the sunshine and negotiate with violently protesting digestive systems that seemed intent on disrupting any further mountaineering plans.

Internal workings seemed to settle down the next day and the weather continued its settled form so Hannah, Huw and Ian made the cold, early morning crossing of the Sarychat river to the previously unexplored glacier affectionately known as 'Alf'; Rob and I returned to the debris covered maze of the Fersmana. Spurred on by clear skies, increased nutritional intake and good early progress along the western terrace of Scott's reconnaissance, our spirits were high. Progressing onto the Fersmana proved 'challenging', and moving out into the jumbled mess was spurned in favour of running frantically along the lateral moraine slopes as they moved underneath us. Progress became much slower and almost came to a halt as we saw two sets of footprints going up the glacier in the fresh snow. Were other people already on our unclimbed mountain? Could we overtake them? Perhaps it was just border guards patrolling the area.

Eventually we made it on to the knee-deep, fresh snow on the glacier, which confirmed my fears about the quality of the snow pack and disproved our various human footprint theories; they were actually hoof prints (possibly ibex) that went up to at least 4000m. High spirits returned and we made our way to below our unclimbed objective, the Little Poobah (5481m), where we established the single skin tent before going any deeper into the snow pack. The unconsolidated snow at least provided a plentiful supply for melting water. That night on the Fersmana we had a hard frost: our boots froze despite having been between our sleeping bags, the gas refused to work and the inside of the tent had a generous decoration of ice crystals. Unfortunately, the previous day's temperatures had not risen sufficiently to melt the snow pack so that it could solidify overnight, and first steps from the tent went through the windslab crust up to our knees in poorly consolidated graupel and powder, lying over wet glacier ice. This was our moment, our chance to climb an impressive virgin summit in great weather and atrocious snow pack conditions... Valiantly Rob did most of the trail breaking up to the bottom of our intended route, but progress was slow and the snowpack showed no signs of encouraging us up a south-west facing couloir of questionable stability. The Dye digestive system had regained some functionality and my gut instinct suggested that a painful retreat to the single skin tent was in order; so too did my seriously cold feet. The snowpack showed no signs of settling down that day and time was running short before we had to complete the carry out to our pick-up point, so we regretfully turned our backs on the mountain and returned to base camp.

In the meantime Hannah, Huw and Ian were having much more success on the Alf glacier, with the first ascent of Peak 4753 in snow conditions that did little to assist progress across crevasses. After successfully getting themselves (and eventually all their belongings) off the glacier by midday, an attractive looking peak to the south caught their eye. Again snow conditions were less than ideal, but the team made a successful ascent of Peak 4849 via the west face to give 700m of climbing around AD. Once again a relatively early descent paid dividends, and even then snow conditions



El Naranjo. Left: More Cheese Vicar? (HVS 4c) 460m, (Middleton, Dye 23.8.14), right: Where Vultures Dare (HVS 4b) 350m, (Middleton, Moulton 19.8.14) (Adrian Dye)



Ranimal Point. 1. *Ranimal Point* (HVS 4c) 370m, (Middleton, Moulton 24.8.14), 2. *The Garlic Fische* (E1 5a) 360m, (Goodall, Peachey 24.8.14), 3. *Love and Marriage* (VS 4b) 240m, (Dye, Gillespie 24.8.14). (Adrian Dye)

were deteriorating and team members began to disappear ever deeper into crevasses.

With the team all safely back in base camp, time was running short for further mountaineering in the surrounding area. El Naranjo was an obvious cragging objective and Rob was psyched for a more direct line than the previous route. The lower sections provided some delightful, sparsely protected technical slab climbing over good limestone. The quality of rock gradually deteriorated and reliable protection became even more sparse. Getting halfway up a pitch that was memorable for all the wrong reasons had left me feeling unusually uninspired. Rob ignored me and pressed on to discover more good pitches above, on improving rock, to top out of 460m of HVS 4c climbing. The following day was filled with more quality trad climbing on the buttress to the north of base camp, with the whole team operating as three pairs to climb routes around 300m long and ranging between VS 4b and E1 5a. We all topped out at similar times and made our way northwards to deposit the climbing gear near our mid-way camp for the carry out, and even saw some other people for the first time in 18 days.

The carry out proved to be fairly character building as we had to carry everything from 3400m, over a 4300m hill in low visibility with wet snow. Thankfully Sergei had arrived early to collect a tired and happy team from a very successful expedition of exploratory mountaineering in the Western Kokshaal Too.

### **Summary**

An account of an expedition to the Sarychat and Fersmana glaciers in the Western Kokshaal Too region of Kyrgyzstan, 3-30 August 2014. The team was: Alpine Club members Adrian Dye (leader), Rob Middleton and Hannah Moulton; and non Alpine Club members Ian Peachey, Scott Gillespie and Huw Goodall. First ascents of: Pk Donstanski (4780m) via the western couloir (600m, D, 70°); Pk 4545, Pk 4606 (both PD); Pk 4645 (F); Pk 4753 (PD-) and Pk 4849 via the west face (AD). Three of the team explored the glacier basin descending from unclimbed peak 4849. The team also climbed five new alpine rock routes up to 460m long and up to HVS 5a.

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