

Anglo-American team successful in Tien Shan

Dan Clark and Matt Traver received grant aid from the BMC, MEF and Welsh Sports Association for a joint Anglo-American expedition to the little visited Djangart Range of Kyrghyzstan. The result was three fine first ascents of alpine peaks up to TD- in standard.

Together with Americans Mike Royer and Chris Parenteau, and Jamie Maddison from the UK, who was investigating the bouldering potential of the area while reporting on the trip for CLIMBER Magazine, Traver first spent time close to the Kyrghystan capital Bishkek, working voluntarily for the *Alpine Fund*. Clark would arrive in the country a little later.

Inaugurated by American Garth Willis, the *Alpine Fund* is a non-profit making organization working in the outdoor environment with the less-privileged youth of the country.

With other regular volunteers, the expedition members spent a short time climbing with Kyrghyz children at the sport climbing venue of Chon-Kurchak, 45 minutes from Bishkek.

After a two-day drive and a further two days trek with horses the team set up base camp in the Djangart Valley, which has seen little previous visitation by climbers and lies west of the popular Inylchek region of the Tien Shan.

Clark, Royer and Traver first climbed the North West Face of Pik 4,766m via an elegant snow and ice couloir. The 700m line following an elegant couloir gave climbing up to 80° and was graded D+.

Once embarked on the climb the three found that nomads had cut 20m off one of their climbing ropes, hence the name of the route; Horseman's Horror. The summit was named *Pik Howard-Bury* after the British explorer who visited the Tien Shan in the early 20th Century.

Royer and Traver then turned to the East Face of unclimbed Pik 5,080m and climbed it via a 700m couloir at TD-.

The named the peak *Sutherland*, after Traver's great uncle, Robbie L Sutherland, a prominent Orcadean sailor and author. The route was aptly christened, *Will Your Anchor Hold?*, which is also the title of one of his books.

In the meantime Clark and Parenteau had made a eventful foray up a different glacier basin, where Clark suddenly collapsed and suffered serious concussion. He collapsed again later the same day and was evacuated to Bishkek, escorted by Maddison.

Back home diagnosis remains inconclusive but might relate to a previously unknown heart arrhythmia.

In the continuing unsettled weather that plagued the climbers throughout their stay, the remaining three headed to the Djangartynbashi Glacier to attempt unclimbed Pik 5,048m.

During the approach Parenteau's feet were soaked in a glacial waterhole, so with sodden boots he elected to sit out the ascent while Royer and Traver climbed the 650m North Ridge and North East Face at AD+.

They proposed the name *Pik Illumination*, as the climb took place on the one day of fair weather during the entire trip. The route name, Postcard for the Chief is a tribute to the soldiers in a nearby military post, who are unable to receive mail.

Lying 95km south of Karakol city, the Djangart region was first explored by Russians in 1932, though little documentation is available on their activities.

The peaks had to wait over 70 years for their next visit by mountaineers. In 2004 British climbers Ingrid Crossland and Graham Sutton made two unsuccessful attempts on the highest summit, Pik 5,318m

In 2008 a team from Moscow climbed Pik 5,291m, the first known ascent of any summit in the range. They also climbed two lower peaks.

This leaves the area offering enormous potential for first ascents and new routes, and there is at least one glacier system still completely unexplored. On some granite ridges and shorter walls the rock quality looked very high.

By Lindsay Griffin