

Navlikin 2014 Expedition, Official Report



Report written by Emily Ward, expedition leader.

Navlikin 2014 Expedition – Official Report

MEF reference: 14-24

Summary

A group of 9 young British alpinists went to the Western Kok-Shal Too range of Kyrgyzstan to attempt new routes and hoped to summit-unclimbed peaks. The expedition intended to get into the head of the Navlikin basin by crossing a col at the top of the Kotur glacier to the west. At the southern end of the Navlikin glacier there are several unclimbed 5000m peaks, including one that is incorrectly marked on the map as 5611m. Unfortunately, the very unsettled weather and waist deep snow on the Kotur glacier meant that only four of the team made it over the col. These four were then pinned down by a storm and failed to summit anything. The members of the expedition, however, did manage to climb every single peak around the lower 8km of the Kotur glacier. This included two peaks that don't appear to be on the map. We were climbing in a lightweight, self-sufficient Alpine style and aimed to leave as little impact on the mountains as possible.

Kyrgyzstan and the Western Kok-Shal Too

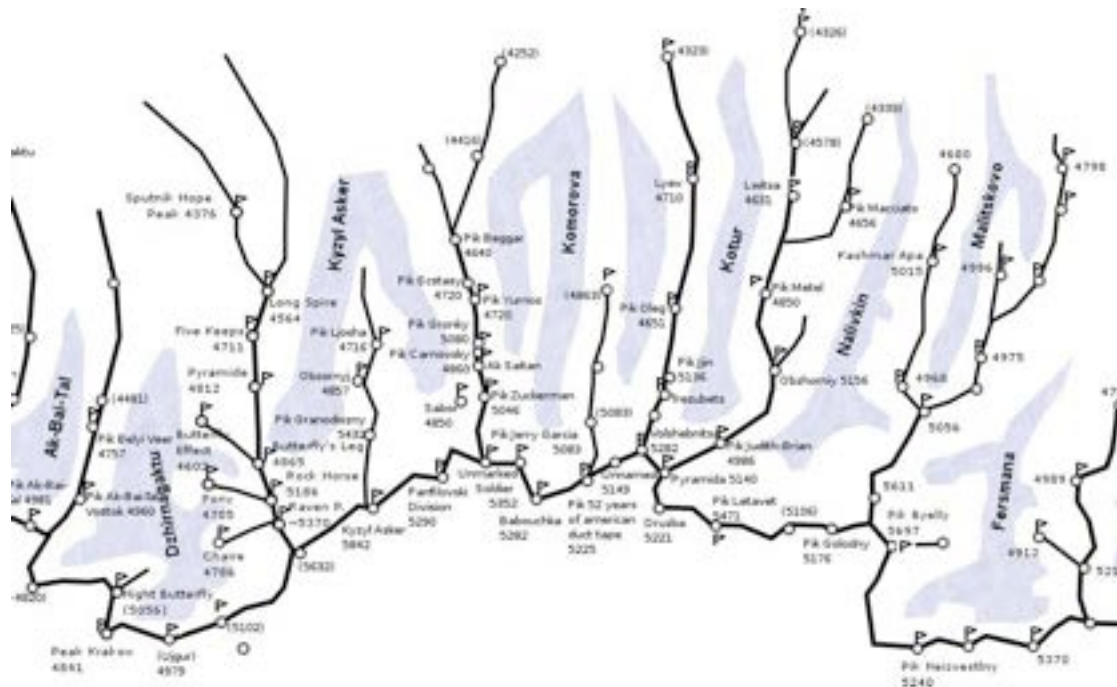
Kyrgyzstan is an incredible place to go for new routing expeditions. As it traditionally formed the boundary of the USSR and China, many of the mountainous areas along the border have only recently been opened to western mountaineers. The soviets seemed to focus on the few highest peaks so there are still unexplored basins as well as many unclimbed peaks. Although the Tien Shan does have peaks up to 7000m, most of the unclimbed ones are in the 4000-6000m range. As the unclimbed peaks are at a fairly low altitude, expeditions can be done in a fairly short time frame as acclimatization can be done much more easily.

Climbing in Kyrgyzstan also involves very little bureaucratic faff! British citizens (amongst other nationalities) don't need visas to visit and climbing permits on the 'lower' peaks are not required. If you are heading to the slightly disputed border areas, military permits are required. These are a formality really but should be arranged 6 weeks before they are needed. ITMC will organize them for you if you are using their other services too. As the country has yet to become swamped with international tourists, Kyrgyzstan is still quite cheap and uncrowded.

As I have already done a lot of research into the Western Kok-Shal Too (for the 2013 expedition), I decided that it would be a shame to waste this knowledge! Visiting an area is a really good way to notice unclimbed mountains and get inspiration for future trips. I also now have a pretty good idea of what to expect logistically – both financially as well as practical problems. The Western Kok-Shal Too remains a relatively unexplored region of Kyrgyzstan, having only been 'opened' for Western expeditions in the late 1990s. It is a beautifully remote region with very few indigenous people living in the area. We had our lowest base camp at one of the most popular expedition drop off points and didn't see a single other person throughout the trip. We didn't even see any other vehicles beyond the military checkpoint. It's hard to describe the isolation felt when visiting the Kok Shal Too but ITMC had a 'busy' year to this area with four or five expeditions in total to the entire mountain range.

Navlikin area

The first thing to know about this basin, is that its name seems to be quite variable! The western interpretation of Cyrillic means that it is sometimes written as Navlikin and sometimes Nalivkin. Most of the sources contacted during research used 'Navlikin' so I have done likewise. To further muddy the waters, the glacier also seems to be referred to as the Aytali/Ajtali glacier in a couple of cases... The Navlikin not only has multiple 5000+m unclimbed peaks forming its southern wall but also has the opportunity to access to one of the biggest peaks in the range (Byeliy/Grand Poobah 5697m).



My own updated version of the area map from www.summitpost.org

From my initial research, the Navlikin basin appears to have one of the greatest concentrations of unclimbed peaks in the Western Kok-Shal Too, with surprisingly few expeditions exploring the basin. It was first visited by ISM in 2006, Adrian Nelhams provided me with some very good information, as well as topos of the basin. 2007 was a busy year in the Navlikin/Malitskovo basins, with a South African expedition and a small British expedition both climbing in the area. Since then, an ISM has visited the Kotur basin, as well as Sally Browns group in 2009. Peter Bajec has led two Slovenian expeditions to the area with the 2011 trip seeing the impressive first ascent of Byeliy from the Fersmana side. Although Bajec's groups didn't climb anything from the Navlikin side, they did many routes (including ski descents) on the ridge between the Navlikin and Kotur glaciers. Bajec went above and beyond and helped us greatly by providing topos for every route that his team climbed in the Kotur basin.

Comparing Nelhams 2006 images with Bajecs from 2011, it was hard to believe that we were looking at the same glacier. According to Bajecs images the crevasses on the glacier had opened up so much as to make them nigh on impassable. However on both sets of images, the peaks around the glacier looked like they would feature some pretty amazing climbing!

Sometimes, it's best to go and look at things yourself, so we decided to go ahead with the Navlikin trip, but be aware of nearby alternatives. As it happened, the glacier was a lot more open than it appears to be in 2006 but nowhere as bad as in 2011! Obviously glacial retreat is having quite a big effect on this glacier!



Left – photo from 2011 by Peter Bajec. Right – photo from 2014 trip.

Initially, I had looked at climbing in the Malitskovo basin too (east of Navlikin), as it would be easily accessible from the same base camp. It also appeared to have the possibility for some steep ski descents, and a few of the team members were keen to bring ski mountaineering equipment. However, as planning progressed, we decided to access the Navlikin from the Kotur glacier and not to bring skis. This meant that the Malitskovo glacier was a bit too far out of the way to be a viable second glacier.

Final Team:

There was some last minute chopping and changing amongst expedition members, but here is the final team. All nine members are British with four of the team living in the UK full time. The other five mountaineers spend summer and winter seasons in Chamonix.

Emily (Roo) Ward, 27

I have a good range of climbing experience, from rock climbing to alpinism and Scottish mixed routes. I have climbed in most areas of the UK, western Alps and Norway. Bigger days out include the Cassin on the Piz Badile. I've done a lot of classic alpine routes including the Kuffner Ridge and traverse of Mont Blanc in a day catching first lift up and intentionally walking back to town after. In 2013 I led my first expedition (all female) to the Western Kok-Shal Too. In spite of many setbacks the expedition was a success and we climbed 5 new routes. The most significant was the East ridge of Night Butterfly (5056m) which had been previously attempted by a Polish expedition in 2010.

Dave Searle, 26

Dave has climbed most of the big faces in the Alps as well as a lot of classic alpine mountaineering routes. Highlights include the 1938 route on the Eiger North face, the Colton /Macintyre on the Grandes Jorasses and the Schmidt route on the North face of the Matterhorn. He has made solo ascents of the Frendo Spur on the Midi, the Swiss route on the Courtes and the Messner on the Droites. He went on an expedition in 2012 to the Kanchenjunga region of Nepal to attempt to climb the North face of Talung (7349m). Unfortunately they were unable to make an attempt on the peak due to high winds but made an acclimatisation climb up to 6300m on the west flank.

Libby Southgate, 22

Libby has multipitch Trad experience across the UK, leading up to E1 as well as four Scottish Winter climbing seasons leading up to grade V and winter mountaineering. She has also had four summer trips to the Alps including experience of D Alpine Rock. Notable ascents include the North Ridge of the Piz Badile, complete with abseil descent. Libby was also part of the successful 2013 expedition to the Western Kokshal Too.

Emma Crome, 30

Experience includes Alpine mixed and rock on many classics around Chamonix (Chere couloir, Cosmiques arête, L'Index etc) Emma has also done a lot of summer rock in England/Wales/Scotland including the summer traverse of Cuillin Ridge as well as Welsh winter climbing. She has been hiking/wild camping for 9 weeks in Alaska (Chugach mountains, Kenai peninsula and Denali National Park.)

Cora Moffat, 26

Cora had a standard Scottish Mountaineering apprenticeship through the Glasgow University Mountaineering Club. She has therefore spent a lot of time in the Scottish Highlands doing routes such as Centurion in summer and Tower Ridge in winter. After spending a winter season in Zermatt she became interested in ski mountaineering and has completed the Silvretta route in Austria. Cora has also had two summer mountaineering trips, one to the French Alps and one to Bolivia. In Bolivia she successfully summited 6000m peak Huayna Potosi, officially the highest summit of the team! She has climbed routes up to Alpine D including the classic Traverse of Sialouze.

Sam Simpson, 28

Sam has Alpine climbed in the French Alps, Scotland and the High Atlas Mountains. Significant Mountaineering Experiences include the North Face of Piz Badille Via the Cassin Route, Grand Capucin via the Swiss Route and the Aiguille du Moine Integrale. He also got most of the way up the North Face of the Droites via the Tornier Spur (North east Spur), but had to retreat off the mountain from near the summit as the top slopes were not in condition.

James Matthews, 21

James started rock climbing in the UK when he was about 13, and leads traditional routes up to E2. After training for the ML award he moved to the French Alps. He has climbed ice routes up to WI4 and made ascents up to alpine D, including the Arete du Rochefort, Aiguille de la République, Tournier Spur and Grepon Mer de Glace.

Joel Evans, 25

Joel moved to the French Alps 3 years ago and has become a keen skier and mountaineer, picking up both sports remarkably fast. He has done many classic routes up to Difficile in the Mont Blanc range. These include the Traverse of Mont Blanc, North Face of the Tour Ronde and Eugster Diagonal. He has also climbed the Contamine-Mazeaud on the Tacul and Fleche Rouse on the Aiguille d'Argentiere with skis on his back.

Simon Tracey, 25

Simon has a wide range of experience in the hills as a walker, fell runner and climber. Raised in the Scottish Highlands (and more recently spending time in North Wales) he is passionate

about spending time in the mountains in both summer and winter. He has also visited the French alps and climbed route up to Alpine D including the classic travers of Sialouze.



Left to Right: Libby, Simon, James, Cora, Joel, Dave, Sam, Emily, Emma

Logistics

Everyone, bar Sam, was available for the same dates so everyone travelled from various locations in the UK and Chamonix on the same days. ITMC once again arranged our border permits and all the Kyrgyz transport, including transfers from the airport and an upgrade to a massive URAL truck.

Talking to ITMC prior to the expedition, we tweaked our original plan of how to access the Navlikin basin. Google earth and the old soviet maps are inaccurate; a section of the old soviet road has been swept away, meaning that the Kotur glacier is actually furthest point vehicles can drive to for climbers to access the area further east (including Dankova and the other side of Byeliy). As we would be dropped off underneath the Kotur glacier whatever, we decide to go up the flat, much easier looking Kotur glacier to cross into the Navlikin. There seemed to be a fairly easy looking col between Pik Judith Brian and Pyramida that would allow us access the unclimbed peaks at the southern end of the Navlikin glacier.

In order to ensure that no one got HAPE and to avoid taking diamox, I included an acclimatization trip to the Ala-Archa national park. This allowed us to go up quite high, sleep for a night but then return to Bishkek at c. 800m. Whilst it would have also been beneficial to spend a night at about 3400m, we drove from Naryn to the Kotur in one day. However we gained a lot of time in doing this so had two very easy/rest days to get used to the altitude.

Here is the proposed itinerary:

2nd – 3rd September: Travel from UK/Chamonix to Bishkek

4th September: Food shopping

5th – 6th September: Trip to the Racek hut in the Ala-Archa park

7th September: Drive to Naryn

8th September: Drive up to mountains

9th – 27th September: Time in the mountains

28th September: Drive back to Naryn

29th September: Drive back to Bishkek

30th September – 1st October: Time in Bishkek/spare time if something goes wrong.

2nd October: Fly back to Europe.

The trip followed this plan exactly, and other than poor snow conditions preventing most of the group from getting into the Navlikin, the logistics worked almost perfectly. We did spend one slightly concerned Monday morning in Naryn on the way out as the entire town had run out of diesel over the weekend. But eventually the delivery came and because the mudflats

were so dry this year, we easily made up on lost time and got to the drop off point 6.5 hours after leaving the petrol station.



Sergei managed to drop us off (and pick us up) much closer to the glacier than we had hoped for which saved us an awful lot of time and load-carrying energy. Other than the diesel shortage and a standard 'argument about sporting equipment bags' at Bishkek airport (the disadvantage of

travelling with Turkish), the logistics of the trip went incredibly smoothly!

Equipment

Once again, Mountain Hardwear kindly lent us tents for the trip – this time a ten man Stronghold. Though it weighed 30kg and had no groundsheet, it proved to be indispensable! With 9 of us, it was important to have a space where we could all chill out and cook. The tent got really warm when we were all in it and was so bombproof that storm days were nearly pleasant! It would get so warm in the evenings that four or five of us gave up on our personal tents and took to sleeping in the Stronghold.

Rab also kindly lent a selection of single skin tents, both base camp tents and smaller bivvy tents. Emma also managed to arrange a pro deal with Rab so most of us were kitted out with Rab sleeping bags and jackets too!

Everyone brought fairly standard alpine equipment: crampons, two axes, helmet, harness, crevasse-rescue kit and B3 boots. Interestingly everyone coming from Chamonix had boots with built in gaiters whereas those coming from the UK didn't, guess that's just fashion for you! We had 6 half ropes between the group and 3 fairly comprehensive climbing racks; including pegs and 20 ice screws. We took about 50m of 6mm tat and used quite a bit of it. Sadly we realized that it is actually a bit too thick to use in abalokovs easily. As we were aware that the group might split into climbing teams, we brought plenty of stoves with us: an omnifuel, two pocket rockets and two jet boils.

Food

Whilst shopping for food in Bishkek, Libby and I noticed that the food on offer was quite different to the previous year. Prior to the shopping trip, we both lamented the lack of jelly sweets, super-noodles and cheap snickers only to (embarrassingly) find them in abundance! Instead items that we found easily in 2013 were missing from shops in 2014. Essentially you can't expect food to be consistently on sale in Kyrgyzstan.

With such a large group and several very hungry alpinists, judging how much food we would need was quite a task! We did bring far too much stodge onto the glacier with us (20kg too much) as well too much unpalatable Kyrgyz sausage. We did bring a good supply of dried veg out from the UK, which we more or less got through, but we did bring a few too many jars of peanut butter. Being concerned about the lack of fibre in our diet we bought 27kg of dried fruit and nuts. Surprisingly we got through a large amount of this except for 3kg of a mix dubbed 'pot pourrie' because of its uncannily similar taste and texture. As everyone eats such a varied amount with different opinions on sweet versus savoury, we decided it would be fairest to 'top up' hill food with personal supplies. Whilst some member were concerned about the lack of calories, we did have plenty with us just not quite the right/easily edible types!

Gas

ITMC did give me a calculation for working out gas required, but as this came to a fairly hefty amount I did my own calculation based on our usage in 2013. This came to 30 gas canisters, with a litre of petrol as an emergency supply. The calculation did depend on my gamble that there would be running water on the glaciers... Based on google earth and previous experience I was confident that there were glacial meltwater streams on the surface. Fortunately this gamble paid off; we definitely wouldn't have had enough gas to melt snow for the entire trip. Although we had to have a few frugal days towards the end as we realised that gas supplies were running low (fuel rationing had gone out the window: daal, bread and hot water bottle make life better but use a lot of gas), we actually sold 3 unused canisters back to ITMC. As Dave later pointed out, we had so much extra pasta that we didn't have enough gas to actually cook it!

Environmental impact.

The expedition featured many debates on our environmental responsibility, it was obviously an issue we all felt passionately about one way or another! We traveled together as much as possible and often took the Bishkek tram buses rather than taking multiple taxis. When buying food and group equipment, we managed to source most things from Osh Bazaar; buying in bulk like this cut down on supermarket style packaging significantly. It also meant that we had to carry less unnecessary weight in and out!

Sadly Kyrgyzstan doesn't seem to have recycling facilities or seem to have the 'leave no trace' ethos of mountaineering. On entry to the Ala-Archa park; visitors are threatened with a large fine if caught littering, this is obviously a hollow threat! There was a distressingly large amount of rubbish left around the trails in the park, particularly batteries and plastic bottles, fortunately the area around the Ratsek hut itself has been kept in slightly better condition. Having seen just how bad littering in the hills can be, we endeavored to remove all of our

rubbish, including food and organic waste (after a lengthy debate about dumping biodegradable stuff into a crevasse...). We donated all of our extra food to other guests at the Nomad hostel and the Kyrgyz Alpine Club. Rather than throw out our extra pieces of group kit, we donated it to ITMC to pass on to other groups.

Toilet facilities: Off the glacier, we didn't dig a latrine as we were only planning to camp there for a few nights. Instead everyone walked downstream of the camp for about 5-10 minutes and then made sure that waste was well buried. On the glacier, we discovered that digging into the ice was nigh on impossible. Sadly the nearby stream crevasses had sloping/slippery lips so weren't suitable either! Instead we each chose a spot and then made sure it was completely buried with rocks from the moraine, when we moved off the glacier. Attempts to burn toilet paper had varying degrees of success; maybe better quality stuff would burn better?

Weather and Snow Conditions

Kyrgyzstan seemed to have an unusual weather pattern this summer/early autumn! Compared to normal, there had been very little precipitation throughout August. This made our drive up to the area extremely easy! The mud flats north of the mountain range were dry enough for there to be absolutely no danger of the Ural getting stuck at any point. The road was so solid that it only took us 6.5 hours to drive from Naryn to the drop off point. This journey normally takes two days, so getting there so fast was pretty incredible!

The weather definitely seemed much more changeable than in 2013. There were several substantial storms, with most of the team being stormbound in the Stronghold for 3 days out of the 13 possible climbing days. We did have some good weather of course – bluebird days with little wind, but they always seemed to be the day immediately after a big storm. On the whole, a storm would build on an afternoon and last the entire following night and day. The first day after a storm, the weather would be perfect as would the second morning, but then the cycle would repeat itself. During the storms a lot of snow would fall before being deposited elsewhere by the strong winds. Even after the snow stopped falling, our tracks on the glacier would be filled in within about an hour, by windblown snow. This made avalanche conditions far from ideal and meant that good weather days were not necessarily good climbing days!



On the whole, weather was noticeably worse to the south of the glaciers along the Chinese border. The top half of the Kotur glacier always had a great deal more snowfall than the snout, in spite of being only slightly higher. Kyzyl Asker always seemed to catch the worst of the weather and sheltered our basin somewhat. At the start of our time in the mountains, the temperatures were fairly pleasant with nighttime temperatures hovering between freezing and -5C, however

by the end of the trip -15C at night was much more common! This was quite a significant temperature difference. The sun seemed to lose its power too as the snow was not melting very much at the end of the trip – meaning there was very little consolidation.

Routes Completed



Traverse of Metel (4850m) over to Obzhorny (5156m) 15/09/2014. (J. Evans, J. Matthews, D. Searle, S. Simpson) Ascent to ridge included snow slopes up to 50 degrees, Dave took a steeper, slightly crevassed slope further south to the other three; the ridge itself was fairly easy although there were quite a few hidden crevasses on the last section up to Obzhorny. Descent by a different snow couloir from the col between the two peaks.



Rocky north ridge of Pik Oleg (4651m), 15/09/2014. (E. Crome, C. Moffat, S. Tracey) The ridge was followed southwards, using line of least resistance they continued until the rock ridge became a snow arête. Easy angled snow turned into rocky scrambling. There were two main sections of difficulty at about Mod/grade III scrambling. The first section of difficulty requires an abseil descent from a good boulder at the top of a tower. The abseil isn't very steep but is quite awkward as it's diagonal and a bit loose. The route was reversed in descent and the abseil provided an interesting pitch of climbing

at about VDiff. A detail of the route (with abseil section) is shown below.



Pik Alpini (4578m) 17/09/2014. Loose easy scrambling up the south ridge! A team also walked up the broad north ridge. Fun scree run down central couloir in both ascents. No topo.



Judith Brian col (c4850m) 18/09/2014. (J. Matthews, D. Searle, S. Simpson) Two different routes reached this col. The original route took the snow-ice face to the Judith Brian side of the col giving 150m of nice 70 degree ice climbing. The second trip (to establish camp) took the obvious crevassed section of glacier covered in waist deep unconsolidated powder. The second route was used as a descent on both occasions. Topo (left) shows steeper route in red, descent in blue.

Pik Oleg, north ridge (5631m) 20/09/2014. (E. Crome, S. Tracey) Having repeated their route along the rock ridge the previous day and camped just before the snow; Emma and Simon follow a fine snow arête to the summit of Oleg. They wish to continue their traverse but turnaround at the following col as the slope looks avalanche prone. No topo.

Pik Lyev, North Ridge (4710m) 22/09/2014. (C. Moffat, L. Southgate, E. Ward) An easy mountaineering summit, our route followed the wide and snowy north ridge. Though not steep (maybe 35-30 degrees at most) there were curious patches of water ice where a slip and ice axe arrest would have been pretty serious! The cornice onto the East face is massive so the objective danger of this peak was quite high in this years conditions. No topo.



Pinnacles on the Judith Brian-Pyramida ridge (c5050m) 24/09/2014. (D. Searle, S. Simpson) Good granite pillars provided sections of AD mixed climbing along the snow arête towards Pyramida. The climbers turned around before the summit however. No topo.

Direct West Route, Pik Metel (4850m) 24/09/2014. (L. Southgate, E. Ward) The route took a snow ice slope on the western flank going directly to the summit, mostly about 40 degrees with 100m at 60-65 degrees. The steep pitch was in terrible condition – a layer of aerated snow ice covered a much harder water/glacial ice. Once committed down climbing wasn't an option! Abseiling was even less of an option as we were having a fast and light solo day...



Pik Niknaz (c4960m) 24/09.2014. (J. Evans, J. Matthews.) An apparently unmapped subsidiary peak, north of Pik Jjin. On the last section of rock before the glaciated face of Pik Niknaz there is a faint ridge and scree slope. This takes you onto the snow arête that leads directly to the summit. There are some small crevasses on the following snow slopes, but most can be stepped over. Bizarrely the climbers found 45-degree water ice on the section immediately below the summit (turns out that this seems to be a common phenomenon in Kyrgyzstan this year, caused by the

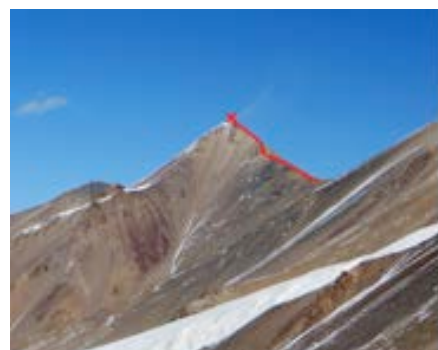
unusually warm summer!) There are occasional mixed steps as the route steepens. The route then stays on snow ice to the left of the rocky-mixed rib until funnelled onto the rib higher up. Hardest mixed sections were about Scottish III. To descend the sub peak, you can either down climb the water ice or jump a bergschrund to the right. James and Joel took the jumping approach and traversed the entire horizontal snow arête back to the point at which everyone else had bivvied.



Pik Greta (4725m) 26/09/2014. (C. Moffat, S. Tracey) The western glaciated flank brings you onto the ridge north of the summit. Easy mountaineering up this mini glacier, but with some large, partially covered crevasses (see topo left). The ridge was then traversed to the summit, Cora and Simon wished to continue to Metel but found a massive, impassable bergschrund blocking the way. They traversed the ridge northwards instead, including Lvitsa (see below.)

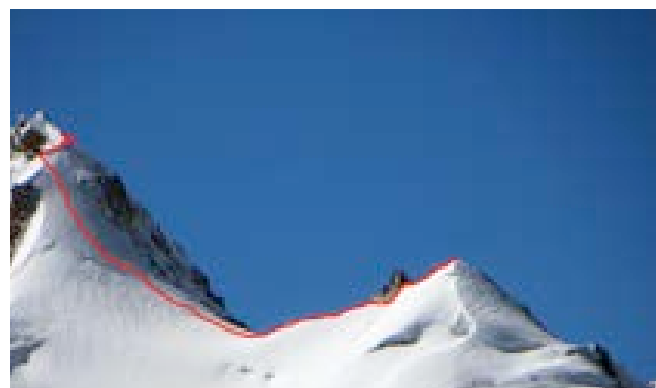
Photo C. Moffat

Pik Macciato and Pik Lencka (4656m) 26/09/2014. (E. Ward) Northwest flank, fairly constant 45-degree snow slopes. Staying south avoids the crevasses. Traversed northwards along flat summit ridge watching out for the large corniced sections. No topo.



Lvitsa (4631m) 26/09/2014. (C. Moffat, S. Tracey. Direct variation soloed – E. Ward) South to ridge north ridge traverse climbed by two variation routes. The direct variation took the rocky, loose rib direct at about Diff/VDiff and then followed the knife-edge summit ridge in its entirety. The second route avoided the rib by traversing scree on the east face and joined the summit knife-edge near its highest point.

‘Pik Tonnik’ (c5040m) 26/09/2014. (J. Matthews, L. Southgate) This is an unmapped, significant peak north of Pik Jjin, the expedition dubbed the peak ‘Pik Tonnik’. James and Libby went up a steep, chossy slope to the point where the rock peters out and the ridge becomes a snow arête. They stayed right of the arête where possible. Easy snow arête walking with short mixed steps to base of snow slopes, where the climb joins James and Joel’s ascent. After this peak, obvious 50-degree snow slopes lead to Pik Tonnik. Once on snowy summit of Pik Niknaz, descend to the col beyond, to the left of a rocky section via a narrow snowy ramp (possible cornice). An obvious snow slope leads towards summit of Tonnik – snow ice up to 50 degrees with poor snow conditions near the top. The final couple of metres up to the true summit were sadly impassable as a very large unstable cornice blocked the way. This could have been bypassed to the left via a much more technical steep mixed section, but without a full rack this wasn’t an option! Descent from Tonnik – either down climb the dodgy snow ice on final slopes or abseil off an abolokov thread. Route reversed back to base camp.



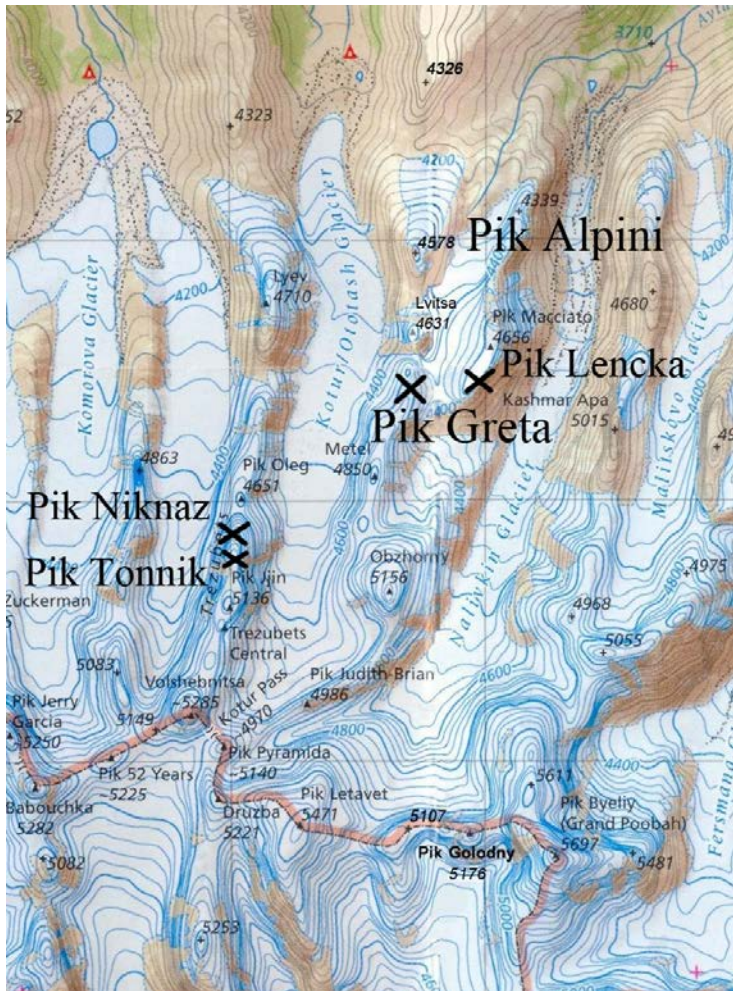


Although we didn't know this at the time, post expedition research showed that all of the summits we did have been climbed before at least once before. Both routes up Metel, however, appear to be completely new routes. I haven't found a record of Lvitsa ever being climbed by its southern ridge so the two variations on that may well be first ascents too. The same is so of Obzhorny from the north, but I wouldn't be surprised if this has been done already. Again, I haven't found a record of Pik Greta being climbed from the Kotur basin so this is quite possibly a new route too. My route up Macciato/Lencka is probably a slight variation on previous routes, as no doubt are both the routes up to the Judith-Brian col. Our 'new' peak Tonnik was climbed in 2009 starting from the Eastern side but joined Libby and James' ridge traverse at the col after Oleg.

Map Discrepancies

We noticed several issues with all of the maps for both the Kotur and Navlikin basins. It would appear that the AAC map has relied on the soviet maps a little too much and that some of the heights may have been misread. The obvious one is peak 5611m, which is significantly lower than Byeliy. Indeed, when reading the map contours it actually measures c5411m. Pik Oleg is another one that is also perhaps incorrect. The height taken from the summit is about

4650m, as indicated on the map, yet the contours on the map actually give Oleg a height of about 4850m! Looking between Pik Metel at Lyev, it is hard to believe that Metel is nearly 150m higher, as stated on the map. We didn't get a height reading from Metel but according to an altimeter, Lyev is about the right height so perhaps Metel is actually a bit lower than recorded.



By far and away the largest thing missing off the map is a 5000m peak north of Pik Jjin. For a long time we all believed it was Pik Jjin but actually there appears to be two mountains too many when compared to the map! When seen from the east and north-west, this summit definitely stands proud of the peaks further south and isn't just another point on the ridge. It does also have a subsidiary snowy peak that is also unmapped and has an altimeter height of c. 4960m. Alternatively, of course, the map has incorrectly recorded the positions and heights of Pik Oleg and Pik Jjin. Climbers

on the British 2009 expedition seem to have claimed the first ascent of this peak from the Komorova side, but didn't name the mountain so we stuck with our nickname of 'Pik Tonnik'.

The map above shows the two basins with the extra missing peak names marked on.

Finances

In

Mount Everest Foundation	£1650.00
Alison Chadwick Memorial Grant	£500.00
British Mountaineering Council	£800.00
Mountaineering Council of Scotland	£500.00

TOTAL £3450.00

Personal contributions £7016.62

Out

Flights	£3421.69	£3421.69
Extra 'sporting equipment' bags	€216.00	£170.08
Military border permits	€225.00	£177.16
Truck hire	€3000.00	£2361.63
Transfers and minibus	€175.00	£137.76
Ratzek hut	€64.00	£50.39
Entrance to Ala Archa National Park	€9.15	£7.20
Other accommodation	€763.00	£600.71
First Aid kit	£0.00	£0.00
Sat Phone, hire and credit	£304.16	£304.16
Insurance	£1479.93	£1479.93
Food for glacier	€975.45	£768.07
Eating elsewhere	€893.00	£703.15
Gas (30 canisters)	€180.00	£141.72
Group supplies (i.e. chlorine tablets)	£43.00	£43.00
Contribution to flights for Emily's MEF interview	£100.00	£100.00
TOTAL		£10466.62

All conversions have been done using www.xe.com

Notes on 'Food for glacier'; £168.04 was spent on food whilst still in Europe, £600.03 in Kyrgyzstan. Although some hill food and snacks were bought with the group food money, everyone had a personal supply too. The price of this additional food has not been included in the food budget above.

First aid, medicine

Allergy:

Piriton 4 mg x 28

Altitude:

Diamox 250mg tablets x 112

Dexamethasone 500 micrograms tablets x 60

Pain Killers:

Ibuprofen Tablets 400mg x 84

Paracetamol Tablets 500mg x 20

Naproxen 500mg x 112

Codeine phosphate 30mg tabs x 56

Tramadol caps 50mg x 60

Antibiotics:

Co-amoxiclav tabs 500/125 x 63

Flucloxacillin 500mg caps x 56

Clarithromycin 500mg tabs x 56

Ciprofloxacin 500mg x 54

Metronidazole 400mg x 42

Creams etc:

Clotrimazole pessary x 2

Fluconazole 150mg tab x 2

Chloramphenicol eye ointment x 2

Amethocaine eye minims drops x 2

Otrivine bottle x 1

Diclofenac epolamine cream x 1

Gastrointestinal:

Buccastem 3 mg x 40

Loperamide 2mg x 70

Ranitidine 150mg tabs x 40

Senna 7.5mg tabs x 90

Notes on drugs:

Team members also brought their own supplies of paracetamol, ibuprofen and loperamide. Only one team member (Libby) has a drug allergy (to penicillin) so we brought extra courses of non-penicillin based antibiotics. There weren't any current major medical conditions in the group, so we didn't have to take additional drugs. Once again though, the girls were advised to avoid taking hormone contraceptive pills during the trip and I stopped taking my hormone therapy (Tamoxifen). Although there doesn't seem to be any definite evidence of hormone pills causing blood clots at altitude, it is a theoretical risk.

A bacterial stomach bug went through the entire group in the first week of the trip. The severity of this illness varied greatly from person to person and resulted in half of the team on a course of Ciprofloxacin. Joel fell through a small bergschrund and punctured his shin on a rock. The hole did go down to the bone but fortunately didn't bleed much. After a couple of cleaning sessions including a saltwater flush, we were happy that it wasn't going

to get infected! After a few days rest he was able to climb again. I got dehydrated load carrying and developed a pretty severe urinary tract infection. As it affected my kidneys, I spent the second half of the trip on a course of strong antibiotics.

Although there were a few cases of mild AMS in the group, these were all very minor and the symptoms usually subsided within 12 hours. Headaches were easily treated with paracetamol and plenty of fluids. The lack of appetite in the group was the most significant symptom, yet most people managed to force down enough calories to keep climbing.

DIARY

2nd September 2014 – Emily, Dave, Joel and James fly from Geneva. Emma, Cora and Simon fly from London. Libby flies from Glasgow

3rd September 2014 – Everyone arrives in Bishkek at various times, but we all get a mini bus to the hostel together. Having travelled all night we pass out for a few hours at the

hostel, then go to ITMC in the afternoon to see Lilia and discuss plans. We take advantage of ITMC's big garden to practice pitching the Stronghold. As we have been upgraded to the six wheel Ural and its just parked outside, we arrange to leave a lot of our camping stuff in it for now. Saves ferrying the 30kg Stronghold about! First experience of the tram buses, with mixed success!

4th September 2014 – Morning spent planning exactly what food we need to buy for the month, the list is pretty horrific! We split into three teams and hit Osh market. All the time spent planning food paid off as we bought pretty much everything in a couple of hours! Even found a tarp, plastic sheet, large pan and Kyrgyz sim card. Leave it all in the van at ITMC and then finish off the shopping at Beta stores (which took Libby and I a while to remember exactly what the shop was called!) Interestingly quite a different selection of food on offer compared to last year.

5th September 2014 – Picked up by mini bus to go into Ala-Archa National Park. A few hours walk up to the Racek hut at about 3300m. The afternoon is spent scrambling above the hut or walking down onto the Ak-Sai glacier moraine. Sam flies from Geneva.

6th September 2014 – Simon, Libby, James and Cora head up scree slopes to a 4500m peak to the north east of the hut. They all turn back before summit, probably reaching 4000m though. Emma, Joel and Emily walk up the moraine towards

Korona and get to about 3800m. Dave is sick so stays in hut. Back to Bishkek and united with Sam. Go through hill food and decide how much more personal food we need to get. Dinner is very Kyrgyz and has a starter in the form of a shots of unknown dairy product!



7th September 2014 – Last minute shopping, including 5 litre water bottles and plenty of lighters. Load up the van at the hostel and are on the road by 10.30am. Libby is sick in hostel, I feel pretty unwell too and Emma and Cora both get sick as the journey progresses. Dave seems to be improving slightly. Sergei is unimpressed with all the toilet stops! Gulria meets us in Naryn after the predictable confusion over accommodation.

8th September 2014 – Get up early to leave, the soviet road is much safer to be on early in the morning. However Naryn is completely diesel dry! We are told that a delivery will come at 9am, it doesn't. We visit all the other petrol stations multiple times but they don't have their deliveries on time either. Eventually we fill up and get going after midday... Alpine start! Most of the team are still sick; those worst affected have a dose of Ciprofloxacin (Dave, Cora, Emma). The roads are incredibly dry so the journey is quick. We only pass one military checkpoint and it's surprisingly efficient! The soviet road is totally dry this season, there's very little water in the rivers too. We have no danger of sinking! A snow shower comes in as



we pass Kyzyl Asker; it's pretty heavy and concerns us slightly. Sergei keeps going though, even though the visibility is pretty bad. He drives us up the river bed and drops us off a few kilometres from the Kotur glacier snout. It has stopped snowing and we manage to get establish camp off the flood plain just before dark.

9th September 2014 – beautiful day, Sergei leaves us in the morning. Simon joins the sick group sadly. We have a total rest day as we have jumped from 2500m to around 4000m and want to minimize further chances of AMS. Suss out good clear, water spots and split the food up into personal hill food allowances and weekly breakfast/dinner meals for the whole group. Pitch more tents too. Boys explore boulders to the north. James and Sam go up 4300m hill to west of camp.

10th September 2014 – first wander up to the glacier! Take up a tent and all of the climbing kit. Sam was really sick in the night so stays behind with James and Libby (also really unwell and on antibiotics). The moraine is a bit of a pain, takes a while picking a way through the many strangely blue lakes. The glacier itself is very mellow, easy to get on and no crevasses to be seen. We are walking on the glacial ice, it's been eroded in a strange way by the sun, breaking through the egg shell crust can be hard work! Leave kit by a large stream about 4km up the glacier.

11th September 2014 – Now Joel has developed the sickness that's going through the group so has a day off. Emma is feeling the altitude quite a bit so was going to take it a rest day but feels better by lunchtime. Everyone else takes a full c.20kg load up to the glacier, mainly food for weeks two and three as well as extra clothes. Fortunately we don't need crampons, ropes etc for the glacier so can leave it all in top camp. Dave and Simon are feeling better now so do two heavy loads up.

12th September – Cora, Sam, James, Libby do another load up to the glacier. Everyone else takes a rest day – there isn't anything else to go up except for the camping gear and the rest of us are feeling pretty ropey, altitude, fatigue and sickness aren't a particularly good combination! The load-carrying group find a better place to move base camp too, whilst the group at the bottom go bouldering and cook a feast for the porters when they get back.

13th September – pack up camp, hide spare food and move up to the glacier. The new spot is much better; it's slightly further up and on some lateral moraine. This means we can build walls around the tents, secure them properly with rocks and, most importantly, don't have to sleep on the glacial ice! We make a floor surface out of rubble for the stronghold so can use the tarp to protect the groundsheets of the single skin tents. We also have plenty of running water so don't have to melt snow.

14th September – Everyone goes for a recce up the glacier. Cora, Simon, Emma and James walk into the crevassed section under Jjin and practice crevasse rescue. Libby and I decide to go up a snow slope onto Pik Metel, sadly the slope is pretty soft on the surface by the afternoon so we turn around at about 4600m. But we get a good view up the glacier, the crevasses further up might be time consuming.

15th September – Early start. Dave, Sam, James, Joel climb Obzhorny via Metel. Emma, Simon, Cora climb the rocky ridge north of Oleg. Emily and Libby go up scree to the col by Lyeve, pack to move up to the Kotur pass for a few days, but forecast for the 16th comes through and storms are predicted.

16th September – The forecast was right! Stormed all night and all day, everyone is tent-bound.

17th September – Forecast better than expected. Sam and Simon go down off the glacier to the stashed kit and then go up the north ridge of Alpini. Dave, Libby and I head up the south ridge of Alpinista but only Dave continues the whole way to the summit. My kidney pains get dramatically worse on way back to camp. Emma, Cora, James go swimming in a lake under Lvitsa. Meanwhile Joel goes up a snow slope but falls into a small bergschrund and punctures his shin to the bone. Luckily it cleans up fairly well!

18th September – Good weather, Dave, James and Sam walk up to the back of the glacier, going up a more interesting route to get to the col near Judith Brian. Last section of glacier is quite crevassed so they have to probe most of the way. It's an 8-9 hour round trip and they make it back just before the weather deteriorates again. Emma, Cora, Libby, Simon try to find a more direct way up Pik Tonnik but the first section of glacier is extremely crevassed and undercut where it meets the scree. Joel and I sit in base camp feeling sorry for ourselves; I speak to Simons parents and start a course of antibiotics but Joel's leg is healing up nicely.

19th September – Morning weather is much better than forecasted so Cora, Simon, Emma and Libby head up to bivvy on the ridge north of Pik Tonnik. Cora cuts out the rocky ridge and goes up a scree slope to the col whereas the others repeat the original route. The weather comes in whilst they are climbing and becomes quite Scottish! All of the Chamonix crew stay in base camp and have a rest day.

20th September – Simon and Emma cross the horizontal snow arête towards Pik Tonnik but turnaround when they feel the snow slopes 'woomphing'. Cora and Libby turn back sooner due to the storm force winds. Rest day for everyone else, we heard a lot of avalanche activity in the night. Dave and I walk a long way up the glacier.

21st September – Unforecasted storm. Snow is continuous all day, though not as windy. Nearly two foot of snow falls at base camp. We realize that we haven't rationed gas well and now have a borderline amount left. As we also have too much pasta with us (about 15kg too much!), Simon, Sam and James bravely offer to go down through the storm and swap pasta for our remaining gas. The rest of us sit out the storm and are very economical with the gas. This frugal day means that we have saved enough gas for the remaining week.

22nd September – Dave, Sam, James and Joel pack for a few days and head up the glacier to the col into the Navlikin. They drop over to the Navlikin side and set up camp. Libby, Cora and I walk down the glacier and cross the moraine to go up the broad north ridge of Lyeve. Simon and Emma have a rest day.

23rd September – Emma, Cora and Simon get up early and climb up a glaciated slope to the ridge between Lvitsa and Metel. They turnaround at the col as the winds become stronger and a total whiteout develops. Again the bad weather is un-forecasted. Libby and I wake up a few times to check the weather but stay in camp as we don't like the look of it! We walk an hour up the glacier in the afternoon though. James and Joel return from their camp on the col, they don't have enough food to sit out the bad weather and couldn't climb today. Sam and Dave sit out the storm.

24th September – stunning morning! Libby and I climb up Metel. James and Joel climb Pik Niknaz, the subsidiary peak north of Tonnik. Sam and Dave get up to try the mixed buttress on Pik Letavet. The temperature is bitterly cold in the shade so they decide to save their extremities and climb something in the sun! They climb the gendarmes on the ridge towards Pik Pyramida but Sam is pretty unwell (Altitude Sickness possibly?) so decide to turn back to their camp. Sam is still not feeling good after a rest and food so they return back to base camp. Fortunately he is feeling better at a lower altitude with plenty of fluids and food. Simon climbs Lyev by the same way the girls took and Emma has a rest day.

25th September – Another un-forecasted disturbance comes in overnight, though the storm isn't as bad as the previous ones fortunately! It isn't as windy and the snowfall is much lighter. Still the visibility is pretty bad and we can't get much done so spend another day tent-bound. By the evening the weather improves dramatically.



Photo by Dave Searle.

26th September – Simon and Cora get up early to attempt a big ridge traverse to Obzhorny. Sadly they get stopped by a large bergschrund just underneath Pik Metel, so traverse the ridge northwards and come down the scree slopes near Alpini. Libby and James climb Pik Tonnik, turning around a couple of metres underneath the true summit though. I climb across the rocky ridge near Alpini and climb Macciato/Pik Lencka on the far side of the hanging glacier, and then come back over

Lvitsa via a very direct rock ridge. Dave, Sam, Joel and Emma take a load down off the glacier to the pick up point.

27th September – Pack up the rest of camp and walk down to our lower camping spot. We manage to make it with one very heavy load carry and Daves improvised polythene sledge. As we are putting up the tent for one final night, we wonder when Sergei will appear. At which point he promptly does! Sergei (and the extra driver) want to leave then and there, but Libby has gone back to the edge of the glacier to retrieve her camera. After waiting for her, we don't have time to reach Naryn in one go; but the drivers are keen to get down part way, at least off the dangerous section of soviet road. We agree, as another storm is forecasted and the clouds are rapidly building. We stop just before dark by a sheep farm at 3400m, the first sign of other people! This would be a good spot to spend a night at on the way up.

28th September – It snowed quite a lot in the night so a good job we left early! The road is fairly covered even at this lower altitude. The drive back to Naryn is pretty uneventful; we get through the single, border checkpoint quickly and have a picnic by a river after the last

pass. Sergei does some fishing and Emma shows the lads how to play football. In Naryn we celebrate but realize that alcohol and the card game 'scum' probably shouldn't mix!

29th September – Drive back to Bishkek where the feasting begins!

30th September and 1st October – The team spend two days sightseeing, visit ITMC, go souvenir shopping and catch up on calories.

2nd October – Transfer to airport at 2.30am to fly home to the UK and Chamonix.

Acknowledgements

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Personal blog accounts can be found here:

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Looking across to Byeliy, photo by Dave Searle.