

We chose the mountains of the East Zaalay primarily because of your knowledge of the area and information you were able to provide us, including details of climbed and unclimbed peaks and photographs, as well as the transport, equipment and cook for base camp.

In summary, we had a really successful trip! The input from ITMC in particular was excellent, the BC and ABC camping equipment just what we required. But one of the highlights of our trip was how good Svetlana was. This was our first time to hire a cook and did not expect it work anything like as well as it did. Her cooking was excellent, and her flexibility and good humour all of the time was just brilliant. It was a new experience to have our food prepared for us, and it was a real treat to look forward to our meal times with very good reason every day. Please pass on again our thanks to her for making our time at BC so good!

I must also say Sasha was brilliant too. When we got a bit lost heading into base camp for the first time and I began to think we might end up being dropped off well short of our base camp. I shouldn't have worried! Sasha was a real character and did a wonderful job getting us into base camp, and then re-supplying us a couple of times then with gas afterwards. Whilst he doesn't speak a single word of English, we had great fun with him too, playing cards and talking to him about his UAZ, and a more than exciting experience on the drives to and from base camp.

So to our climbing – whilst we did not summit 6243m or Pogranichnicov, we are more than pleased with what we got done. We were rather daunted after our first few days walking, finding the walk-ins to possible advanced base camps much harder than we expected. We had expected the terrain in the bases of the valleys to be easier travelled. In particular we did not consider how much glacial melting has occurred in the years since the Soviet military maps were drawn in the 1970s, meaning the walk-ins to our advanced base camp over the glacial moraine was a lot slower than we expected. Whilst very kind to us, we also suspect the weather was warmer than usual, meaning the glaciers were more crevassed than we had previously experienced in the Alps, and we also learnt very quickly that the time of day had a huge influence on the rivers, proving a lot more difficult and dangerous to cross in the afternoons than we had expected.

A breakdown of our climbing:

17/08/16; Day 1:

Arrive at BC, 3580m. Our BC location was not on the Kichkesuu as you suggested and used previously, but about 2km immediately west of that in the next river bed, on its west side. Our BC was about 30mins west of yours, and importantly left us with a difficult river-crossing if we left it until the afternoon to cross make each time we travelled to ABC.

After setting up the BC tents we crossed our river then ascended to 4050m on the north ridge of Pogranichnikov, then returning to BC.

18/08/16; Day 2:

We ascended the small subsidiary summit immediately behind (and west of) BC and then continued south on this ridge summiting Pk 4367m (marked as unclimbed?) If it is unclimbed, can we name it Peak Jenga Jenga? We attempted to continue east along a descending ridge to complete a horseshoe but found the gendarmes on the ridge proved too loose and dangerous to cross or traverse below, and therefore descended our ascent route.

19/08/16; Day 3:

With Pk 6243 one of our main objectives towards the end of our trip, we walked about 9km over very tiring, loose moraine into the Kichkesuu right valley, getting to a height of about 4100m. We took a good look at the north side of Pk 6243m trying to work out a safe line up it, but were dismayed to see how heavily the huge snowfield was crevassed, and littered with serac debris. With a 1600m face between our proposed ABC and the coll on the ridge meaning two days on a very dangerous face, we decided this was not a safe option and therefore scrapped thoughts of ascending Pk 6243m from this valley, and any plans therefore of putting our ABC in here.

20/08/16; Day 4:

A rest day at BC.

21/08/16; Day 5:

We walked into the head of the Kichkesuu left valley and set up our ABC (the two ITMC 3-person tents) on the moraine just below the glacier at 4410m. Our location was probably 1km SE of your ABC of last year at 4363m. We overnighted here.

22/08/16; Day 6:

From ABC we ascended the glacier directly behind, to the coll at 4970m just west of Pk 5052m, and from there headed west and summited Karten Aughuze, 5250m. We descended from there back first to our ABC to leave as much kit there as possible, and then on down to BC.

23/08/16; Day 7:

Second rest day at BC.

24/08/16; Day 8:

We ascended to ABC and overnighted here.

25/08/16; Day 9:

We ascended our same line up the glacier as before to the 4970m coll and from there turned west attempting to summit Pk 5190m. However shortly after descending the shoulder from 5100m and the ridge narrowed, we found the midday snow to be very unstable and therefore turned back. We returned ack over the 5100m shoulder and after descending approximately 60m, constructed a snow shelter at 5040m and overnighted there.

25/08/16; Day 10:

We headed east from our snow shelter along the ridge and traversing over Pk Tohm, 5052m, continued and summited Pk Uch Tubur, 5243m. From there we returned to our 5040m snow shelter and overnighted there for a second night.

26/08/16; Day 11:

We descended down the glacier by our ascent line to ABC and on then to BC.

27/08/16; Day 12:

Third rest day at BC. We considered our plans for our last high altitude trip. We did consider attempting Pogranichnikov from the coll just south of it, between it and Veronica and Anna but decided against this as we didn't have time for this and to go back up to the summit ridge, so opted for that instead, hoping to get as far east as Pk 5917m.

28/08/16; Day 13:

We walked into ABC and overnighted there.

29/08/16; Day 14:

We ascended the glacier to the 4970m coll and headed east, traversing Pk Ush Tubur, 5243m. We stopped at the coll immediately east of its summit at 5190m and pitched one of our ABC tents here, deciding this as the best point along the ridge to give us the best chance of getting to Pk 5917m the next day without having to carry the overnight gear any further than necessary. We overnighted here.

30/08/16; Day 15:

We left the tent and continued east, immediately ascending an unclimbed summit, Pk 5475m that lies just south of the ridge line and therefore completely in Tajikistan. From here we then retraced our steps for a short distance, then headed north dropping down to the 5270m coll between Pk 5475m and Pk 5505m. We traversed on both north and south side s of the ridge around some cornices, and started to ascend Pk 5505m but it became clear we were not moving fast enough to make Pk 5917m until after midday which would leave us to return over potentially very soft snow well into the afternoon. Therefore we decided to turn at this point and return back to our tent. On reaching this we packed up, continued over Pk 5243m and on down the glacier to our ABC, and overnighted here.

31/08/16; Day 16:

We packed up our ABC and returned to BC.

01/-9/16; Day 17;

We packed up BC and returned to Osh.

We did not therefore make it up Pk 5917m. If we had been moving quicker then I am sure we would have summited, but with a group of five we were always going to be relatively slow moving, and we had previously decided we would stick together as a group of five. We are very happy all the same with what we did get done, and especially pleased to have ascended a peak not previously climbed. Do you know is there a procedure to register the ascent of a peak for the first time, and if so are we allowed to name it? If we can, we would like to name it воин принцесс - Peak Voin Printsess – Peak of the Warrior Princesses, after certain family members! As mentioned above, we would also like to name Pk 4367m that we climbed on day 2 just west of our BC Peak Jenga Jenga?