

British Little Poobah 2014

Kyrgyzstan certainly lived up to its reputation of an area with huge exploratory mountaineering potential with relatively straight forward logistics. Thanks to the Alpine Club symposium in 2012 and past expeditions, identifying objectives in the Western Kokshal Too proved to be straightforward. The I.T.M.C. were excellent and their 6 wheel drive Russian UAZ trucks certainly lived up to their reputation and our driver skilfully delivered us straight to 4,100m.

Whilst starting at 4,100m may not seem ideal, it enabled us to have relatively pain free carry-ins pretty much down-hill all the way to basecamp. The only snag was crossing the sporting glacial meltwater rivers. With base camp established around 3,400m, we were able to get on with the mountaineering and after negotiating some wild hummocky moraine one team bagged the first virgin 4,645m peak by the W ridge (Facile). Next up was an unclimbed 4,780m peak that had caught my eye from basecamp. We ascended up the 600m West Couloir, which was guarded by 3 bergschrunds that led us onto dinner plating ice up to 70 degrees (Difficile?). Summit celebrations were dampened by the deteriorating weather approaching from the south, we changed our descent plan and headed north over a 3 mile PD+ ridge which took in a further 2 unclimbed summits before darkness and blizzards forced us to descend to our high camp.

Snow then fell for three days on the larger mountains. Thankfully the 4th day dawned bright, clear and noticeably colder. Once the snow had retreated sufficiently from the Limestone faces above base camp, 2 of the team climbed a 350m HVS. The following day dawned clearer and colder, so one team crossed the Sarychat river to establish a high camp, whilst the other team made the long wade up the Fersmana glacier to establish a high camp below the Little Poobah itself. Unfortunately the weather remained too cold for any significant consolidation of the snowpack, which consisted of a thin breakable windslab crust on top of knee to thigh deep unconsolidated powder largely consisting of graupel. Gut instinct suggested these were not the conditions to be attempting our intended south west facing gully and later observations of avalanche activity confirmed this. Fortunately the other team had been more successful and summited an unclimbed 4,753m peak that day (PD), with a further 4,849m unclimbed peak the following day via the 350m west face (AD). Little time remained before we had to start carrying everything out to the pick-up point, so our attention returned to the Limestone faces above base camp with a further 3 new routes up to 460m and HVS 5a. All in all a successful expedition, which was the first taste of mountaineering in the greater ranges for most of our team!





Walking in to Little Poobah

