

## British Eren Habirga Expedition 2011

The Eren-Habirga and Borohoru ranges are part of the Tien Shan and stretch over 300 miles, forming the southern edge of the Dzungarian basin. They were pretty much unexplored by mountaineers until last year, though a Japanese party did climb the highest peak in 1997. In 2010 the leader of the current expedition explored the route leading into the Ak-Tash valley. The valley holds several 5000m peaks, including the NE approaches to the highest peak, Borgora, 5248m, via the Ak-Tash glacier. Our team was composed of John Town, Jerry Lovatt, Iwonna Hudowska, Tadeusz Hudowski and Richard Wojtaszewski

On 16<sup>th</sup> August we drove to the roadhead at Wen Chuan, a spa-resort village about 4-5 hours drive SW of Urumqi. There we hired horses and late the next day set off up the Sirgdavan valley. Progress was slow, probably due to deliberate delaying tactics by the horsemen, and it took 3 days to cross the Sirgdavan Pass. (see right for view)



The route normally takes 5 days and involves crossing three big passes between 3400m and 3800m. A further day was lost through bad weather before we reached Base Camp. This was located about a kilometer below the snout of the Ak-Tash glacier and across the river from a steep scree slope. This led to a col which gave access to the next valley to the east.



The 5024m snow peak (left) which rose above the camp to the east was chosen as the first objective. We climbed steep slopes above the Base Camp and established a camp high up in the shallow valley on the NE side of the peak, about 80m below the snow line. In the afternoon Iwonna and Tad climbed the rocky 4300m peak to the north. The

next day we all climbed onto the snow fields of the upper peak at about 4000m and were immediately faced with repeated and ominous cracking, resulting from a layer

of 'ball bearings' below the upper few cms of crust. We retreated as the weather, which had never been good, started to deteriorate.

From then on we were at the mercy of the weather, which put on a mercurial performance of bewildering variations in visibility and temperature (see below). In particular this caused us to worry about snow conditions on the upper mountain.



An attempt on the 4495m peak to the SE of the Base Camp (above left) was eventually made on 1<sup>st</sup> September by its North Ridge, via the col to the east of the camp. Three of the team climbed in 'zero' visibility and gently falling snow for 3 kilometers along and around a series of loose granite towers. Jerry and Rick remained to place a camp at c3900m, a few hundred meters below the point where the North Ridge joins the summit dome of the mountain. After an initial sortie the next day, they too retreated, in the face of a 10cm of new snow over tottering granite blocks.

The weather was beautiful that day, and remained so for the 5 day journey back to the roadhead, where we arrived on the 7<sup>th</sup> September.