

Karavshin, Kyrgyzstan 2018

BMC Reference: 18/ 14

19/07/2018 to 13/08/2018



Contact Details:

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The Team:

Sophie Nunn (British)

Jane Gallwey (Irish)

Liam Brophy (Irish)

Suzana El Massri (Syrian / Polish)

Summary:

Expedition to the big granite walls in the Kara-Su and Ak-Su Valleys in the Batken district of Kyrgyzstan. Successful ascents of Yellow Wall, Pamir Pyramid and Slesova Peak. Unsuccessful attempts on Asan and Little Asan.

Logistics:

Prior to visiting the valley we provided our insurance documents to the Kyrgyzstan Mountain Rescue service. This is a requirement of the service prior to any rescue.

Prior to the trip, Ak-Sai Travel were used to obtain the Border Permit required to be in the area. This was shown to border guards on arrival in Ozgorush.

Ak-Sai travel also coordinated the transport from Osh to Ozgorush (6 hours) and organised the horse and donkeys to carry our food and kit (250kg) to the Kara-Su valley.

Ak-Sai travel was a reliable operator and we would recommend using them.

Equipment:

We did not take a portaledge and associated haul set up, instead opted for a lighter weight option to sleep on ledges and go fast and light, only hauling on pitches which would require it.

We hired a two-burner gas hob and a 25 litre gas cylinder from Ak-Sai travel which we used in Kara-Su Base Camp. We had two Jet Boil stoves for use at other camps and on the wall. We purchased Kovea Co gas canisters also from Ak-Sai travel. We bought some additional pots/pans and utensils in Osh.

Some freeze dried meals and cereal bars were bought from UK/France and Poland. The rest of the food shopping for the 3 weeks was completed in a jet lagged state on the morning of arrival in Osh at a large supermarket and a quick stop in the market to pick up large packing bags for the food to go on the donkeys and to be used to put food in the river fridge. We managed to find everything we needed.

We used a combination of Steripens, Iodine and tablets for water sterilisation and water was not required to be filtered.

For communication, we had a Satellite phone and generally had good signal, although in Ak-Su valley we had to move a little out of camp to pick up the signal.

Location:

The Kara-Su and Ak-Su Valleys are in the Batken district in the Osh province of Kyrgyzstan. The two valleys run parallel to each other and can either be approached from Ozgorush over a 2 day trek over several high passes or from Vorukh in 1½ days.

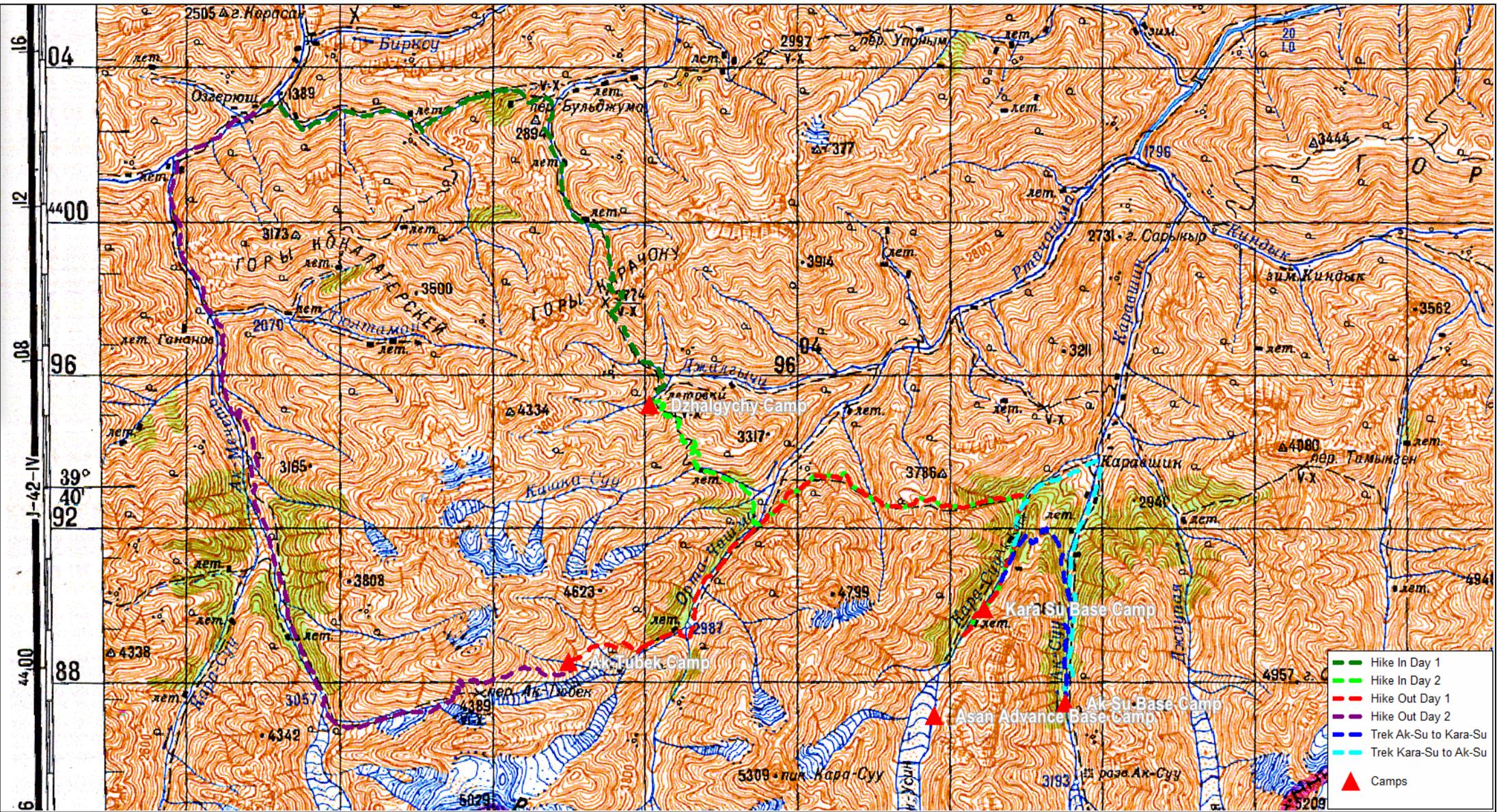
We started the trek in Ozgorush and headed east over the Buldzhuma pass (2,894m) and then south over the Dzhalgychy pass (3,774m) to an overnight camp. The second day then crossed the Kosh-Moinok pass (3,260m) and Kara-Su pass (3,760m) where we got our first view of the granite towers and down in to the Kara-Su Base Camp which was our main base camp for the trip.

For the second part of the trip, we relocated to the Ak-Su valley but left our main base camp in Kara-Su to return to after climbing in the Ak-Su valley. There are two routes which connect the two valleys; we approached on the longer of the two routes (approx. 6 hours) where the bridge is more substantial. We returned to Kara-Su via a much shorter route (approx. 3 hours) but this required a single log river crossing just downstream of the base camp which may not be in place in future years.

On the return from Kara-Su to Ozgorush we went back over the Kara-Su pass (3,760m) and the Kosh-Moinok pass (3,260m) but continued up the Ak Tubek valley to an overnight camp. The next day we then crossed the Ak-Tubek pass (4,390m) and followed the other Ak-Su valley through the gorge back to Ozgorush.



View from the Kara-Su pass of Kotina (left), Kirkchilta (a.k.a 1,000 Years of Russian Christianity), Pik 4,810 (right)



Hiking Routes and Base Camps on Russian Maps from <http://loadmap.net>



Route Research:

Free old Russian maps are available to download here:

<http://loadmap.net/>

We collated as much information on routes in the two valleys prior to going from the following sources.

<http://www.chriswalkertrust.co.uk/>

<http://publications.americanalpineclub.org>

<https://www.risk.ru/>

<https://www.mountainproject.com/>

<https://www.alpinejournal.org.uk/>

www.ukclimbing.com

www.bmc.co.uk

<http://mountains.tos.ru/>

Once in the valley we found out about the Стены Каравшина. Путеводитель Russian guidebook to the valley which details some but not all routes in the valleys.

Camps:

Kara-Su Base Camp 39°38'8.25"N, 70°16'5.99"E

Our main base camp was set up at an Ak-Sai Travel's trekking camp alongside a group of Russian climbers and occasional trekking visitors. The area is grassy with two springs and streams flowing through camp. These were used for drinking, food storage and washing. One of the springs and the main stream flowing through the camp dried out in our last week in camp. We were still able to use the second spring for drinking. The water was clear and no filtering was required. A UV Steripen was used to sterilise the water. The main glacial melt river had a significant amount of sediment and would require filtering if the second spring was to dry up. Bread, cheese and butter were available to buy from the Shepherd and his wife whose house was a 10 minute walk back down the valley. The shepherd had a number of donkeys which we used later in the trip when we relocated to Ak-Su base camp for 2000som for one donkey.

Asan Advance Base Camp 39°36'38.01"N, 70°15'10.62"E

Prior to the attempt on Alperien route on Asan, we relocated to an Advance Base Camp at the base of the route at 39°36'38.28"N, 70°15'9.75"E. At the recommendation of the Russian climbers we carried all our water in. It was difficult to find water at this camp, with the exception of some drainage lines of the cliffs giving a slow drip and a meltwater lake on the glacier which looked difficult to access.

Ak-Su Base Camp 39°36'47.25"N, 39°36'47.25"N

About halfway through the trip, we relocated to the Ak-Su valley base camp. The camp was located in a grassy meadow and boulder field at the base of Slesnova peak. Bouldering in the camp was good for a rest day and one of the larger of the boulders even had a couple of bolts (possibly French 7a?). Water at this camp was a little more difficult and can either be taken from small streams coming from the main glacial river which during the morning were clear but by mid morning were thick with sediment. There was a stream

which crossed the path 15 minute walk up the valley which was clearer and was used to fill up in the afternoons. A shepherd family had a hut built into one of the larger boulders and sold bread, butter, cheese and meat. They had a horse which was used to transport our kit back to the Kara-Su valley for 1000som.



Ak-Su Base Camp

Weather:

The weather remained stable and good for the initial part of the trip during the walk in and first few days in the Kara-Su valley. The weather then turned and we had an unstable period with clouds building during the day resulting in afternoon thunderstorms. This lasted a week before a return to stable conditions in our final week of the trip.

Routes climbed:

Yellow Wall (3,800m): Diagonal Route (First Ascent 1987)

Date of Ascent: 25/07/2018

Valley: Kara-Su

Length: 500m

Grade: Russian 5b / French 7a

Style: Successful Trad (Repeat Ascent)

Climbed in 2 separate pairs: 1. Jane Gallwey and Liam Brophy (In 1 day)

2. Sophie Nunn & Suzana El Massri (Bivvy on summit)

Weather: Good

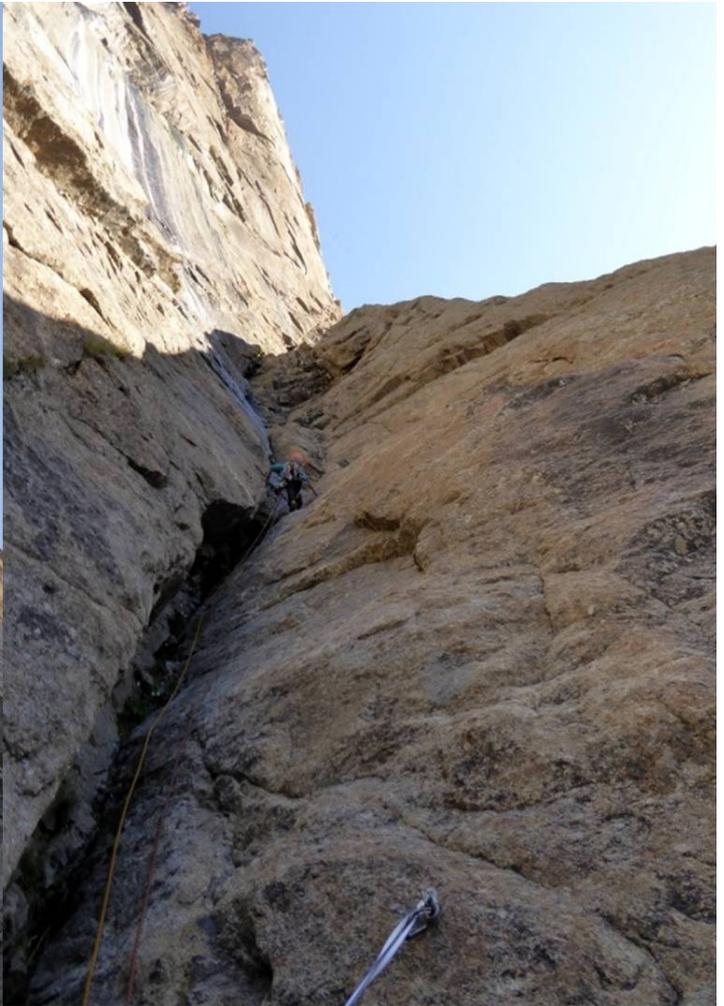
We approach by a Tyrolean across the Kara-Su River just upstream of Kara-Su base camp and followed a path to the base of the obvious Diagonal route at the base of the Yellow wall. 14 Pitches to first summit, one pitch of French 7a which was at the end of the diagonal on P9. P10 then followed a wide flake crack on the right to a steep hand crack on the left, onto a ledge and up a corner. P11/12 went up through boulder chimney off widths with a few different options of ways to go. P13 traversed right to a through hole and chimney. P14 we continued up to reach the 1st summit where Sophie and Suzana bivvied for the night as arrived late and tired whilst Liam and Jane enjoyed the comfort of the Kara-Su Base Camp. To descend, there is a pitch of 6b+ diagonal crack and a scramble to reach the main summit before descending on foot down scree to the southwest of the summit.



Yellow Wall, left image shows view from west and right photo shows same route from Kara-Su Base Camp



Diagonal ramp pitches



Suzana and Sophie's Bivvy lights on summit

Asan (4,230m): Alperien Route (First Ascent 1986)

Date of Attempt: 30/07/2018

Valley: Kara-Su

Length: 900m

Grade: Russian 5b / French 6c+

Style: Unsuccessful Trad (Repeat)

Reason for retreat: Thunderstorm clouds building

Climbers: Sophie Nunn and Liam Brophy

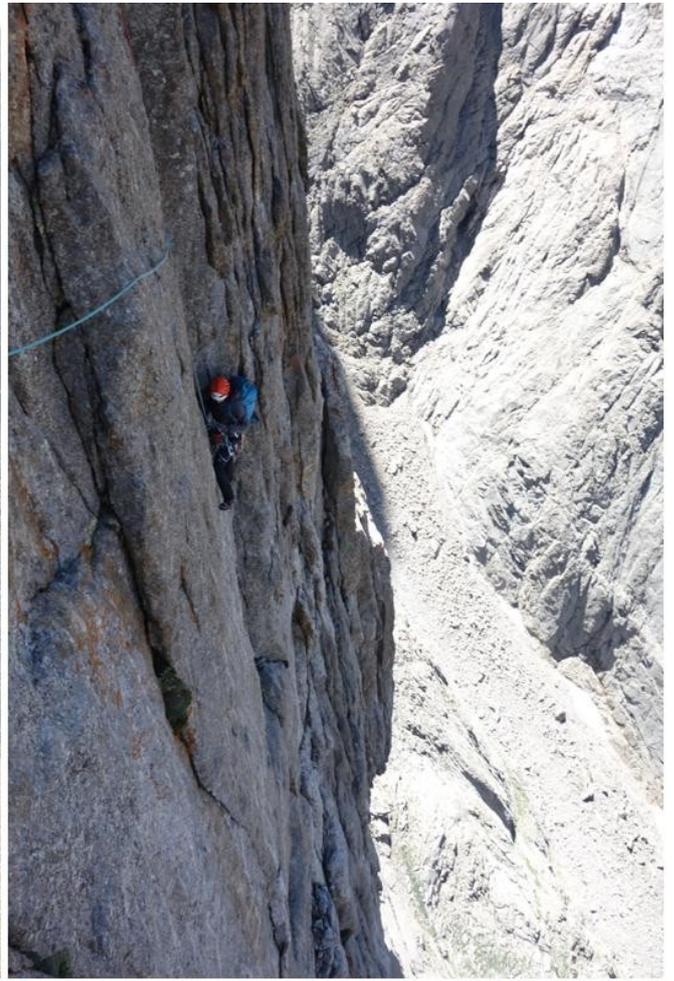
Weather: Good early, but thunderstorms and rain in afternoon resulted in a retreat from pitch 10.

Started from an advanced base camp at the base of the route and scrambled up to the small col at the start of the climbing. We made it to pitch 10 at the base of the wide chimney nearing the top of the first pillar and decided to retreat due to the building thunderstorm clouds and abseiled back down the line.



Alperien route viewed from ABC





Yellow Wall (3,800m): Southwest face corner

Date of Ascent: 31/07/2018

Valley: Kara-Su

Length: 250m

Grade: HS

Style: Successful Trad – Route not documented anywhere, unsure if new.

Climbers: Jane Gallwey and Suzana El Massri

Weather: Good early, but thunderstorms rain in late afternoon/early evening

Thin Red Line shows route, thick red line shows Темерев 2B 2014 route shown in the Стены Каравшина. Путеводитель guidebook.

Descent same as Yellow Wall (see black arrow).



Little Asan (3,900m): West face corner and cracks (?)

Date of Ascent: 31/07/2018

Valley: Kara-Su

Length: 400m 10 pitches

Grade: 6b+

Style: Unsuccessful Mix Sport / Trad – Possibly new P7/8. Route was bolted to P6. Trad from P7 onwards.

Climbers: Sophie Nunn and Liam Brophy

Weather: Good early, thunderstorms and rain in late afternoon/early evening

Started at the base of the corner system and followed bolts up the corner which gave good corner climbing albeit a bit damp. From top of bolts of P6, P7 followed the left hand of the two cracks on the right until it ran out. Then did a pendulum into the hole and continued left to the bottom of steep broken ground above. P8 continued through this to a big ledge and a join to the main route which went up the right hand of the two cracks. From the big ledge there was two options, the 6b+ left finish was unprotected unless you had a size 7 cam and the rock quality was poor, or 7b+ direct. We had a go at both options but with building thunderstorm clouds, we decided to bail. The route had fixed abseils back down route to base.



P7



P10



Pamir Pyramid (3,700m) Reluctant Chief E3 5c (1999) / Missing Mountain French 6b (1998)

Date of Ascent: 03/08/2018

Valley: Ak-Su

Length: 600m 13 pitches

Grade: 6b+

Style: Successful Trad, repeat.

Climbers: Sophie Nunn and Liam Brophy

Weather: Good

We started on Reluctant Chief but on P4 we were too far right to get into the corner system so we continued right which seemed the more obvious line and found a bolted belay on the route Missing Mountain. We continued up the corner until P10 then headed right to more solid rock. 13 pitches to summit then scramble down to the col and fixed abseils down the north side of the col to scree (same abseils as for Perestroika Crack).







Russian Tower / Slesova Peak (4,300m): Perestroika Crack (First Ascent 1991)

Date of Ascent: 05/08/2018-06/08/2018

Valley: Ak-Su

Length: 900m 28 pitches

Grade: 7a+

Style: Successful Trad with P15 & 17 aid, (Repeat Ascent), 1 night bivvy ledge.

Climbers: Sophie Nunn and Liam Brophy

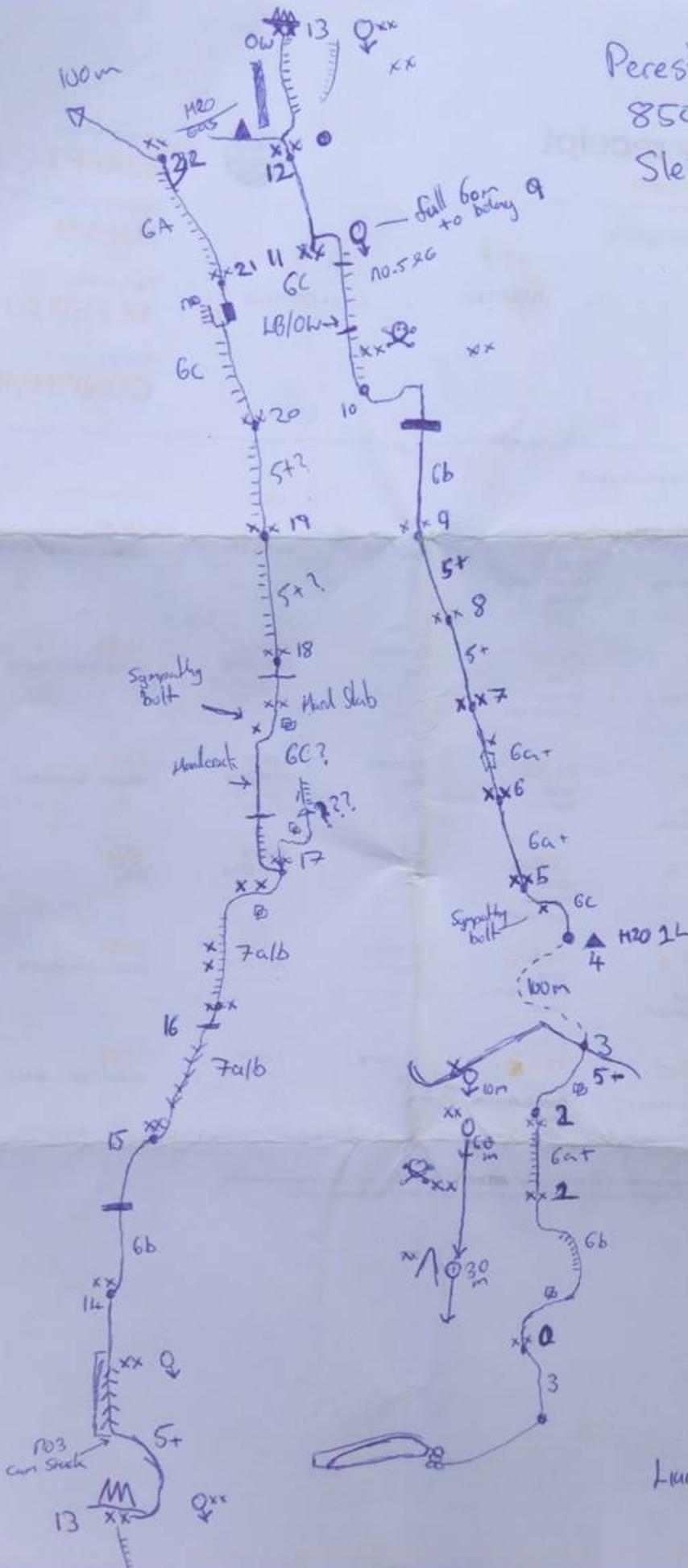
Weather: Good

Fixed abseil anchors.

Approach up the boulderfield and scree behind the base camp (approx 1hr30m). First four pitches take you to the summit of Pamir Pyramid and then drop down to the col between the Pamir Pyramid and Slesova Peak. P5 is a 6c traversing pitch which gets you in to the start of the crack which continues with awesome crack climbing until the P10 offwidth where a no. 5 and 6 come in very useful. We reached the bivvy ledge at the top of P12 early enough to enjoy the early evening sunshine, swooping vultures and thankfully a reasonably warm night with no thunderstorms.

Next day, we continued up a mix of corners/cracks and offwidths. P15 and P16 being the crux pitches, although P17 also proved difficult with a blank slab. All 24 pitches were top quality and 3 stars, not a single bad pitch! Descent was on fixed anchors, we replaced some of the tatt on the top half of the route, whereas the lower half had been reequipped more recently so we did not have to replace anything. The lower half proved a little tricky to avoid ropes getting stuck in the deep splitter crack and care should be taken when pulling the ropes but it seemed inevitable. Our ropes eventually got stuck around P8 or P9 and Liam ascended to free them just as it was getting dark. The rest of the abseils were in the dark, which included a pretty atmospheric free hanging abseil into space, which thankfully we'd already done descending from the col with the Pamir Pyramid a couple of days before. We then had a never ending walk down the scree and boulder field maze, enjoying the stars and a return to base camp by midnight.

Perestroika Crack
 850m 7A+/A7
 Slesova 4240m



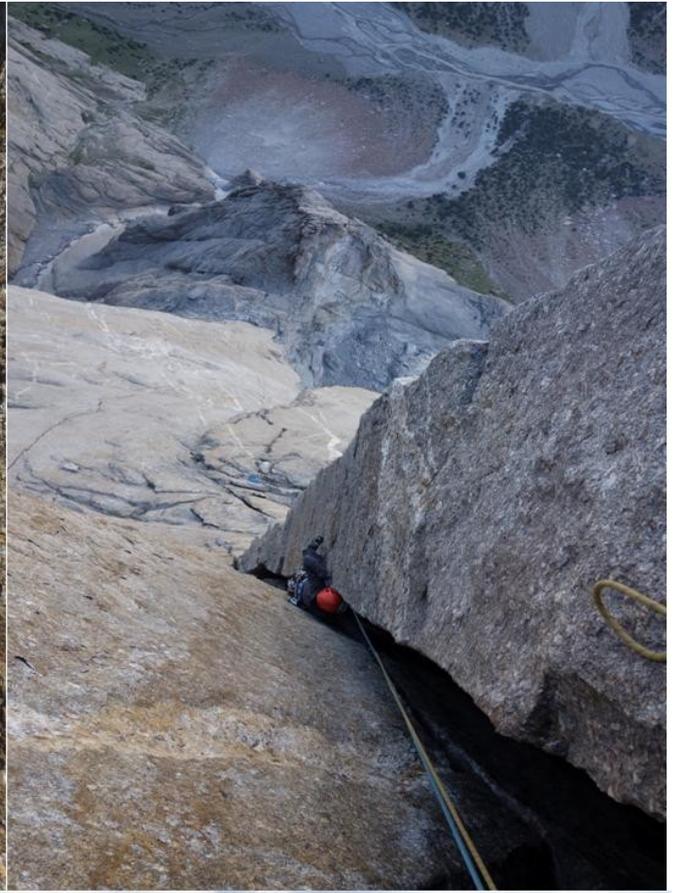
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Diary:

Date	Activity
20th July	JG Arrive Osh
21st July	SN/LB/SEM Arrive Osh Food shop in Osh 6 hour drive Osh to Ozgorush
22nd July	First day of trek to Kara-Su Base Camp, over the Buldzhuma pass (2,894m) and then south over the Dzhalgychy pass (3,774m) to an overnight camp. Good weather.
23rd July	Second day of trek, over Kosh-Moinok pass (3,260m) and Kara-Su pass (3,760m) to Kara-Su BC. Good weather.
24th July	Rest day / Route Finding. Good weather.
25th July	All climb Diagonal on Yellow Wall. JG and LB up and down in a day. SN and SEM unplanned bivvy on the first summit. Good weather, temperature inversion overnight thankfully!
26th July	SN and SEM climbed the final pitch to get to the main summit of Yellow Wall and descended to meet JG and LB part way down the descent with welcomed supplies of food and hot chocolate. Good weather.
27th July	Thunderstorm showers all day. All rest at camp.
28th July	Thunderstorms all afternoon. No climbing.
29th July	SN/LB/JG move to advance base camp for Alperien Route on Asan. Heavy rain in afternoon again.
30th July	SN/LB attempt on Alperien Route, clouds building through the morning and expected thunderstorm and heavy rain in afternoon so retreated from P10.
31st July	SEM/JG climbed the Southwest face corner of Yellow Wall. LB/SN climbed the West face corner and cracks of Little Asan. Late afternoon rain.
1st August	Rest day. Light rain and overcast most of the day.
2nd August	All relocate to Ak-Su camp. Good weather but clouds around. No rain.
3rd August	SN/LB climb Reluctant Chief/Missing Mountain on Pamir Pyramid Good weather.
4th August	All rest day Ak-Su Base Camp. LB and JG climbed the bolted boulder. JG returned to Kara-Su. Good weather.
5th August	SN/LB climb first 14 pitches of Perestroika Crack and bivvy on ledge. SEM returned to Kara-Su Good weather.
6th August	SN/LB climb remaining 14 pitches of Perestroika Crack, summited, abbed back down the route and return to Ak-Su Base Camp. SEM/JG first day of trek Kara-Su to Ak-Tubek Camp. Good weather.
7th August	SN/LB rest day in Ak-Su Base Camp. SEM/JG second day of trek to Ozgorush. Good weather.

Date	Activity
8th August	SN/LB relocate back to Kara-Su Base Camp. SEM/JG travel Ozgorush to Osh. Good weather.
9th August	SN/LB packed up the Kara-Su Base Camp. SN walked to base of Pk 4,810m. Good weather.
10th August	SN/LB first day of trek Kara-Su to Ak-Tubek Camp. Good weather.
11th August	SN/LB second day of trek to Ozgorush. Good weather.
12th August	SN/LB travel Ozgorush to Osh
13th August	All fly home.

Expedition Accounts:

The following table details the expenditure and grants received for the expedition. We are grateful for the grants received from the British Mountaineering Council and Julie Tullis award.

Item	Income	Expenditure
Flights		£2,481.00
Insurance		£581.00
Border Permits		£120.00
In-Country Transport		£375.00
Hotel Accommodation		£183.00
Horses/Donkeys		£562.50
Rent of Gas Stove/25l Gas Cylinder/12 230mg Gas Cartridges		£151.50
Satellite Phone		£197.25
First Aid Kit and Water Purification		£180.00
In-Country Food / Pans / Donkey Bags etc		£412.50
Total Expenditure		£5,243.75
BMC Grant & Julie Tullis Award	£575.00	
Total Grant Contributions	£575.00	
Total Personal Contributions (4 People)		£4,668.75

Ethics and Environment:

At base camp all human waste was buried in a single deep pit. At other times human waste was buried and the toilet paper burnt. Food waste was either fed to the donkeys or buried. All packaging was either burnt or carried out.

Some leftover food was donated to another climbing expedition.

Pots, pans and water containers were donated to the local shepherd and his wife.

Remaining tatt was donated to the horsemen. The shepherds we met in the valleys and on the return trek were all interested in buying our ropes to use for the donkeys and horses. Our ropes were still in reasonable condition and hence were not sold.

No pitons or bolts were used. Some abseil anchors were replaced with new cord and slings and the occasional nut was left to allow for retreat.

Further Route Potential:

Kara-Su Valley:

Asan/Usen/ Pik4810: Reports from Russian group in camp that all solid routes have been done on these.

Kotina / Pik 1000yrs of Christianity / Yellow Wall / Wall's opposite Asan: Potential for new routes, portaledge required.

Ak-Su Valley:

Pamir Pyramid / Slesova: Both have a number of routes on them, minimal options for new lines.

Ortotyubek / Wall of dykes: Fewer routes and may have potential for new routes with a portaledge.

