

Scottish Kyrgyzstan Expedition 2025 – Ak Su

August 7th – September 2nd 2025



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Expedition Summary

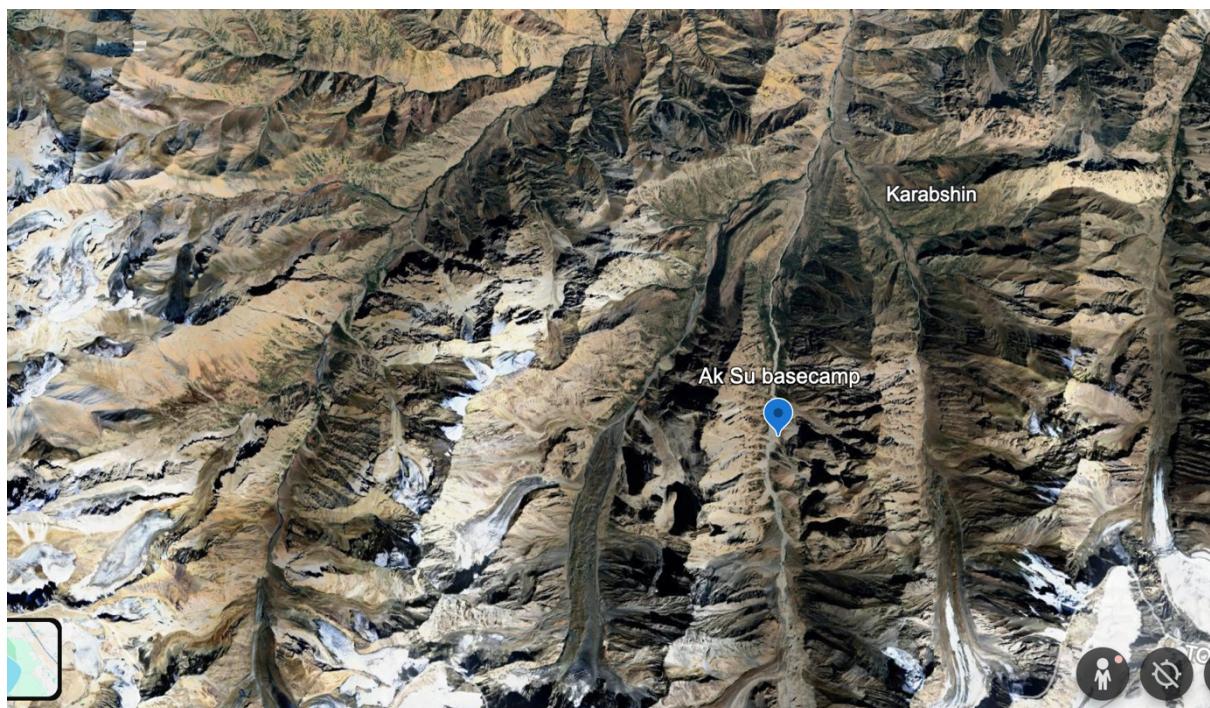
We spent most of the month of August in the Ak su valley, Kyrgyzstan repeating existing routes and trying to add some of our own. We had originally planned to move basecamp to the Kara su valley but in the end decided to just focus on the one valley. We had a few team members get sick at various points but in general were fortunate to have an amazing weather period to get a lot of climbing and exploring done.

The Team

Ali Rose (aliirose@hotmail.com), Jack Morris (jmor8894@gmail.com), Ella Wright, Al Docherty, Neil Adams, Nathan White, Connor Holdsworth and Ben Clarke.

Location

The Ak Su valley in the Karavshin region is well known as a granite big wall destination and has steadily been getting more popular in recent years. This season the main base camp was @ 39°37'06"N 70°17'43"E and can be seen at these co-ordinates on Google earth (just look for the white dome tents and orange sleeping tents). The Kara Su valley is just to the West and is usually accessed from the same trailhead.



Logistics and Access

All our logistics were arranged by Central Asia Tours (CAT) including in country travel, accommodation, basecamp food and permits. There is another company that offers a similar package, Ak-Sai Travel, though it seems that they often work together or are perhaps the same company.

Basecamp

Our Basecamp setup was supplied by CAT and was at the base of the “Central Pyramid” Below Ortutyubek. This is a different area than has been used in previous years, about 1km north of the original basecamp. Presumably CAT have relocated to this area as it is more protected from rockfall but the old basecamp area up the valley was still being used by some smaller teams. Basecamp was pretty luxurious and the following notes might be useful to teams coming here in the future.

- Starlink. Available most days (sun in middle of day and when generator runs in evening). The generator did break down for a couple of nights and without sun/generator the starlink won't run so worth not being too reliant on it.
- While there was a generator and some solar panels supplied by CAT it was definitely worth having our own solar panels as well.
- There is a Shower in camp. You can heat your own water or ask the host family to provide some and take it down to wash. The river is also a (very cold) option.
- The toilets in base camp are open long drops. Toilet paper is provided but not that good so it's worth buying some extra in Osh along with plenty of hand sanitizer.
- Food provided by CAT is good though it's not very varied. We would recommend taking soy sauce, multiple chilli sauces, tins of tuna, peanut butter, Nutella, pepper, salt etc. For the most part we had three evening meals on rotation – Fried Pasta, Plov or Bulgar Wheat all with some meat and veg combo and some salad. Breakfast was either porridge or fried eggs, both served with traditional bread. Near the end of the trip they shot and butchered an Ibex so there was plenty of meat.
- Water needs purified/ filtered. There are springs on either side of the valley so we would gather water from these. The gravity/ drip filters work the best with some chorline tablets just to be sure!
- Worth bringing tea and coffee though there's endless chai (seemed to be green tea) and instant coffee supplied
- Lots of nuts and fruit etc in camp though often served on uncovered plates and left out all day.
- Tough to control hygiene in camp as if you are catered by CAT the host family could be catering for quite a few teams. Might be worth brining own mug and cutlery.
- Extra horses to get kit to basecamp cost £79 per horse and each horse can carry 60kg. We asked for 4 extra horses on the approach as were concerned by how much weight we had.



Basecamp, (the white blobs are the group tents just left of centre) can just be made out below Ortutyubek (centre), with the much higher Slesov looming behind. The Little Russian Tour is blending into its bigger counterpart but can just be made out.

Equipment notes

Communication Equipment.

We took four Garmin inreaches as well as a set of three PTT radios. We all had smart phones and the basecamp Starlink was invaluable for doing more in depth research when in country and checking the weather. We found the following:-

- Inreach to inreach is way better than radios. While it can take a bit of time for the message to get through it is better than relying on the person on the other end of the radio having it on/ listening in.
- The Radios are very useful if there's an accident. Didn't use ours until the final day but were invaluable and worth keeping charged for emergencies.
- Sim/esim - if one or two in the party get an eSIM with unlimited data then everyone can hotspot off them when first in the country. Good for contacting agent along the way and sorting things out on the way home.

Climbing Equipment

We took enough climbing equipment for four pairs of climbers to operate independently. Usually we were climbing in teams of three but this gave a lot of leeway in terms of lost or broken kit

- **Gear.** Most routes seem to favour large gear and we often had multiple big purple and green cams on the rack. (We had 8 Purples and 8 Green cams as a team). We never climbed with less than a double rack of cams. Sometimes triples in gold and blue (hands).
- **Ropes.** We mainly had 60m triple rated ropes for climbing and either old 60m $\frac{1}{2}$ ropes or skinny static ropes such as the Petzl Pur-line for hauling. It would be very easy to trash a rope so it was great that we had extras with us.
- **Bolting.** We took two hand drills with cleaning kits and a set of 8x60mm bolts. It would be possible to take an SDS battery drill as the generator usually runs for 2-3 hrs every evening. Quite a few belays could be improved with the addition of a stainless steel bolt.
- **Aid gear.** We took some basic aiding equipment but for the most part climbed free or “French free” We had a variety of 70-80L haul bags in the group. Micro traxions and jumars were useful on pitches when fix and following with big bags.

Overnight food and equipment

- **Gas** - we were charged 100 som (£9) per medium gas cylinder. Quite expensive so worth thinking through how many are needed. We asked for 10 between the 8 of us but only used 6 (some of which still had gas at the end). It's highly likely that other teams in the valley would have spares or leftovers at the end of their trip if you ran out.
- **Snacks** - We went to a large supermarket in Osh which seemed to have most things. We bought a lot of noodles, tuna, trail mix (DIY), bars, wraps, cheese, meat etc for climbing day food. We brought some dehydrated dinners from the UK.
- **Overnight gear** - We had bivi kit along with a couple of single skin bivi tents. This seemed to be a good combo though it is worth noting that it would be very hard to fit a tent on the “good ledge for 6” on Perestroika (it is in fact quite awkward to fit six on that ledge!). A -7degC sleeping bag was more than enough for the weather we experienced.

Diary of Activity

Day of trip	Activity
0 (7 th Aug)	Fly from Edinburgh – Istanbul – Bishkek (Pegasus Airlines)
1 (8 th)	Fly from Bishkek to Osh (Tezjet). Supermarket to buy snacks/ noodles etc. Transport to Guesthouse.
2 (9 th)	6hr jeep ride to trailhead. Long wait for horses. Walk to basecamp – 20km, 1300m (very little water to fill drinking bottles on route) Got to camp pretty late and fairly dehydrated.

3 (10 th)	2 teams of 3 (Jack, Ella, Nathan, Connor, Neil, Ben) to climb central route on little Russian tower (LRT).		Ali and Al climbed the first few pitches of missing mountain on Pamir Pyramid
4 (11 th)	Neil, Jack and Ben back to climb the French route, LRT	Nathan, Connor and Ella w flu in base camp	Ali and Al back to Pamir to climb complete Missing mountain.
5 (12 th)	Team rest day – exploring round camp, washing, resting		
6 (13 th)	2 teams (Jack, Ella, Connor, Neil, Nathan, Ben) Climbed Missing mountain.		Ali and Al climbed central route on LRT. Went a bit off piste and finished up the French route.
7 (14 th)	Team rest day		
8 (15 th)	Ali and Al approached and climbed to the bivi on “Une Etoile pour Ulug Beg”	Ben, Connor + Neil approached the S Ridge of Odessa. Bailed in evening due to horrific rock.	Jack, Ella and Nathan set off to climb Perestroika but chose to stash kit at the breche and descend due to illness / fatigue
9 (16 th)	Climbed the rest of “Ulug Beg” descending from the end of the hard climbing (due to high winds) and returned to basecamp	Ben and Connor added “55 years of Scottish Alcoholism” to Central buttress behind camp	Neil, Nathan and Jack climbed La Bolla. Not great, “would be the third best E2 on the Shelterstone”
10 (17 th)	Neil, Ella and Al attempted central route on LRT but bailed due to migraine. Started replacing one of the abseil anchors.	Ali and Ben climbed a new route on the flank of the central buttress “The Russian Midget”	Nathan, Jack and Connor bouldering and chilling
11 (18 th)	Team rest day. Raining in the morning. Afternoon chilling and scouting out approaches. Had a party with other climbers in basecamp. Should have brought more vodka.		
12 (19 th)	Neil, Al and Ali climbed the start of E Ridge of Kirchiltka	Team of 3 (with kit stashed) approached Perestroika but turned around due to Jacks explosive diarrhoea	2 people bouldering and packing
13 (20 th)	Bailed after not finding decent bivi ledge. (Climbed 25, 60m pitches the day before to a very small ledge)	Nathan, Connor and Ben Climbed to the bivi on “Une Etoile por Ulug Beg”	Others resting in camp
14 (21 st)		Climbed 6 pitches but decided to descend due to time constraints and concerns about the ropes getting caught on descent.	Others resting in camp
15 (22 nd)	Ali and Neil attempted “Atlandtide” on Ortutyubek but only climbed 2 and a bit pitches before choosing to ab due to loose rock.	Ben and Al went exploring round to Kara su valley	Jack, Ella and Connor on LRT climbing the “voie de droite” (its actually small hands!) and finished replacing two of the abseil anchors on the central route (the common descent line)

16 (23 rd)	Forecast storm didn't come to much. Team chilling in camp or exploring locally.		
17 (24 th)	Everyone in camp again, packing, playing on single pitch routes behind camp and starting to bolt some new ones. Played Monopoly deal, almost destroyed all team morale with one card game.		
18 (25 th)	Jack, Nathan and Ben left for Perestroika (with stashed kit at breche) set off early to climb to "good ledge for 6"	Ali, Al + Neil left for Perestroika. Set out later to climb to breche	Connor set off on solo trip to traverse the peaks behind Slesova.
19 (26 th)	Climbed to summit and back to the ledge	Climbed to the "good ledge for 6"	Connor continued to 4500m
20 (27 th)	Descended to basecamp	Climbed to above the crux pitches but descended to base camp from there	Descended from high point due to lack of water/ loose rock
21 (28 th)	Rest day for most. Al and Ben bolted new line near base camp "Baked Margin"	Ella and Jack set out with 1 austrian climber to climb SW ridge or Kyrkchilta	
22 (29 th)	Ali, Nathan and Connor attempted new route on R Edge of Pamir Pyramid. Descended after 120m due to poor rock. Bolted new line near base camp instead "Batholith"	Climbed to summit of Kyrkchilta	Al and Neil explored round to Kara-su for overnight (bivied on top of yellow tower)
23 (30 th)	Ali, Nathan and Connor – single day walk to Kara shin. Ran back to BC after news of the accident via inreach	Descend from Kyrkchilta. Jack broke his arm due to rockfall 25 pitches up	Return to base camp
	Pm / evening – Rest of team arranged to climb the lower pitches of Kyrkchilta descent route, rig tyrolean by the rope bridge and get ready to receive injured climber. Got Jack back to camp at 9pm. Starlink allowed a remote consultation with a GP in the UK.		
24 (31 st)	Walk out of valley, 5hr jeep ride back to guesthouse.		
25 (1 st Sep)	Minibus to Osh. Night in Hotel and fancy dinner		
26 (2 nd)	Flight Osh – Istanbul – Edinburgh		

Finances

We were very generously supported by the BMC, The Alpine Club, The Rick Allen Memorial Fund and the Neil Mackenzie Trust. We were also given headtorches to test by Fenix Light.

Costs	
International Flights	£772.70 per person
Internal flight	£52 per person
Extra baggage (in country)	£20 per person
Snacks etc in country	£ 45 per person (some members spent a lot more!)
Paid to Central Asia Tours	£1055 per person
Extra horses	£39.5 per person (total £316 for 4 horses)
Extra Gas	£11.25 per person (£90 total for 10 cylinders)
Insurance	£230 (per person)
Total per person	£2225.45

Grant Money	
BMC	£2960
Alpine Club	£2500
Rick Allen Memorial Fund	£1500
Neil Mackenzie Trust	£500
Total	£7460
Total per person	£932.50

Total contribution per team member =
£1292.95

It's worth noting that the agent charged us everything in Euros, much of which was paid in cash when in country. The internal flight from Bishkek to Osh and the extra baggage for this was paid in Kyrgyz SOM. The amounts here are all converted from these original numbers so would likely be different depending on exchange rates.

In-depth route summary

As British climbers we found the use of the French grading scale for these routes to be a bit misleading at times. This was most noticeable on the first two pitches of "Atlantide", respectively 6a and 6a+ which gave climbing that we would have graded E2 5b and E3 5c. This was also true on Perestroika where after the two 7a/b pitches there is a pitch graded 6b. This pitch would probably be hard E4 5c in the UK and a fall from the crux would be onto an ancient bolt a few meters below. This may have got a little harder too as Ali ripped the most useful crimp off trying to skyhook to the good bolt.

Little Russian Tower

As a team we climbed the main lines on the main face of the Little Russian tower including – "The French Route" (6c), "The Central route" (6b+), and "voie de droite" (6c) on the right of the face (this only appears as a finger crack from below but is actually small hands.) . The approach is pretty quick from base camp and with a relatively

simple abseil descent this can be quite popular. We added bolts to two of the abseil stations later in the trip.

Pamir Pyramid

All members of the team climbed “Missing Mountain” (6b) at some point. While “only” 650m this is still a pretty big day with the lower part giving thin slab climbing and the upper amazing cracks and corners. The descent is from the breche on Slesova and this route is sometimes used as a “sit start” to Perestroika! The route “Lazy Lizard” appears to just be a variation on this route. The abseils from the breche are on modern 10mm expansion bolts plus threads/ old bolts. It’s possible to abseil on fixed anchors for the first 7 pitches of Missing Mountain (old bi-metallic bolts and pegs).

Ali, Connor and Nathan attempted a new route on the far right side of the Pamir Pyramid, more on this in the New Routes section.

Slesova

We had two teams climb Perestroika (7a/b) all using some aid/ French free. One team to the summit and the other to a couple of pitches below. We found that the best system was to climb with haul bags to the breche and then haul to the ledge. There is lots of space at the Breche to bivi but the ledge above here is much better for 2-3 people than it is for 6! The approach to Slesova from basecamp is extremely threatened by rockfall – we witnessed some spontaneous releases of rock from high on the wall. Worth moving quickly and avoiding time directly in the line of fire.

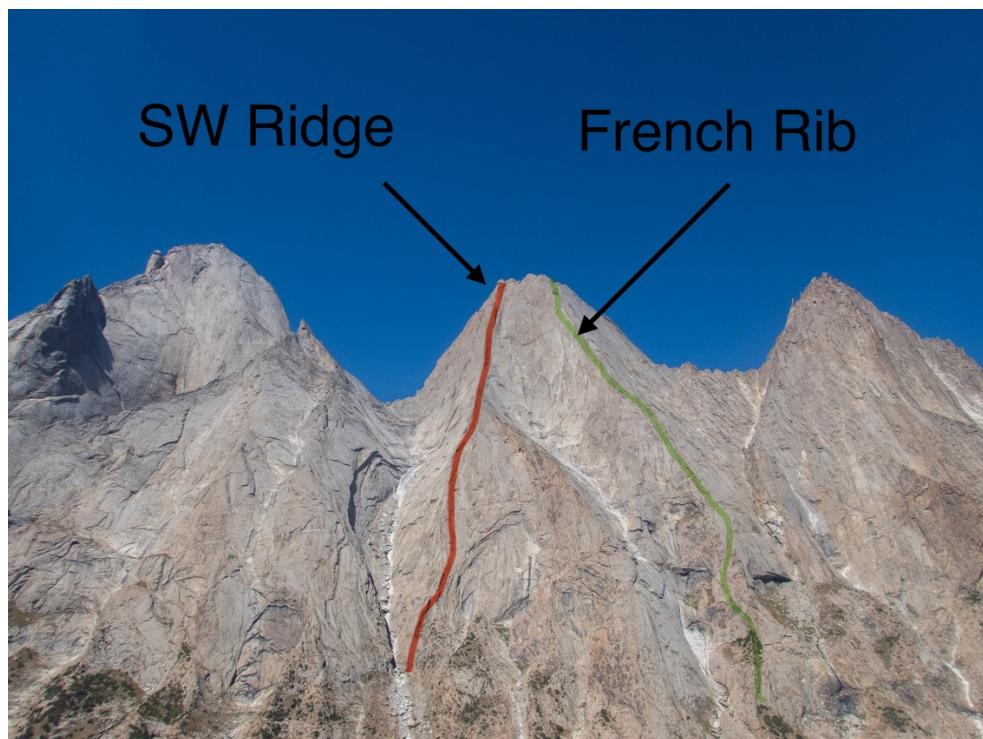


The “good ledge for 6” on Perestroika. Great for three! (there’s 5 people in this photo).

Ortutyubek

Neil and Ali climbed the first couple of pitches of “Atlantide” (6c) but found the climbing to be on scrittly rock and not that pleasant. The best approach to this is up the rake that runs up and right from the left side of the continuation of the Central Pyramid crags. The belays are equipped for abseil.

Kyrkchilta



Kyrkchilta (aka 1000 years of Russian Christianity) in the centre with Odessa to the left and Kotina on the Right

Jack and Ella (with an Austrian climber from another team) climbed the SW ridge (1500m 6c+/) over three days (including the descent) this is called the Pontankina route (5B/6A) in the Russian guidebook. They found some ice to melt on the summit and descended the French Rib. . “one of the finest alpine rock routes on the planet”.

Neil, Ali and Al tried to climb the “French Rib” aka the “East ridge”, (6a+) and found amazing rock quality and climbing but after 25, 60m pitches up to about 6a were forced to bivi on a very small ledge. They had a brief look higher for a better ledge to stash kit on to go for the summit but decided to descend. The good ledge on this route is probably approximately thirty 60m rope lengths up. This is the standard descent route and has a lot of abseil points consisting of tat around spikes, pegs and trad gear. Despite following a rib in both ascent and descent the best/correct line is not always obvious.

Odessa

Connor, Neil and Ben went for an explore round to the South Ridge of this massive peak with the hope of climbing it. This is sometimes descended by teams and rumoured to be about 5.10 but they found very poor rock quality from the base and decided it was not worth it.

Pik 3805

Two of our teams climbed “Une etoile pour Ulug Beg” 6b+ over two days. This would be possible in a day from basecamp though as it has a spectacular, big bivi ledge with running water nearby it seemed a shame not to bivi!



The bivi ledge on “Une Etoile...”, There is also a bivi cave on the big traverse ledge to get to this point that would fit three and offer more shelter.

Central Pyramid

Neil, Nathan and Jack climbed “Le Bolla” (6b) up the middle of the big slab behind base camp. This was another good example of the French grade not giving much away as the climbing is very run out. Abseil descent.

Ben and Connor added “55 years of Scottish Alcoholism” to the far left side of the central pyramid, while Ali and Ben added “The Russian Midget” to the South side of Central Pyramid. (more on these routes in the New Routes section below)

New Routes

Pamir Pyramid



Ali, Connor and Nathan attempted to climb the right edge of Pamir pyramid (starting from the bottom arrow) to access one of the two corner systems right of the Missing Mountain corner (main corner left of the two red arrows). They found the rock to the right of the edge to be very poor (crumbly/ kitty litter rubbish) and abseiled off after 120m. There was a bail point from another team as well. It's likely that the lefthand of the two corners is taken by the 1999 Forest/ Baker route "Mr Chippendale" E2.

Good Morning Slab

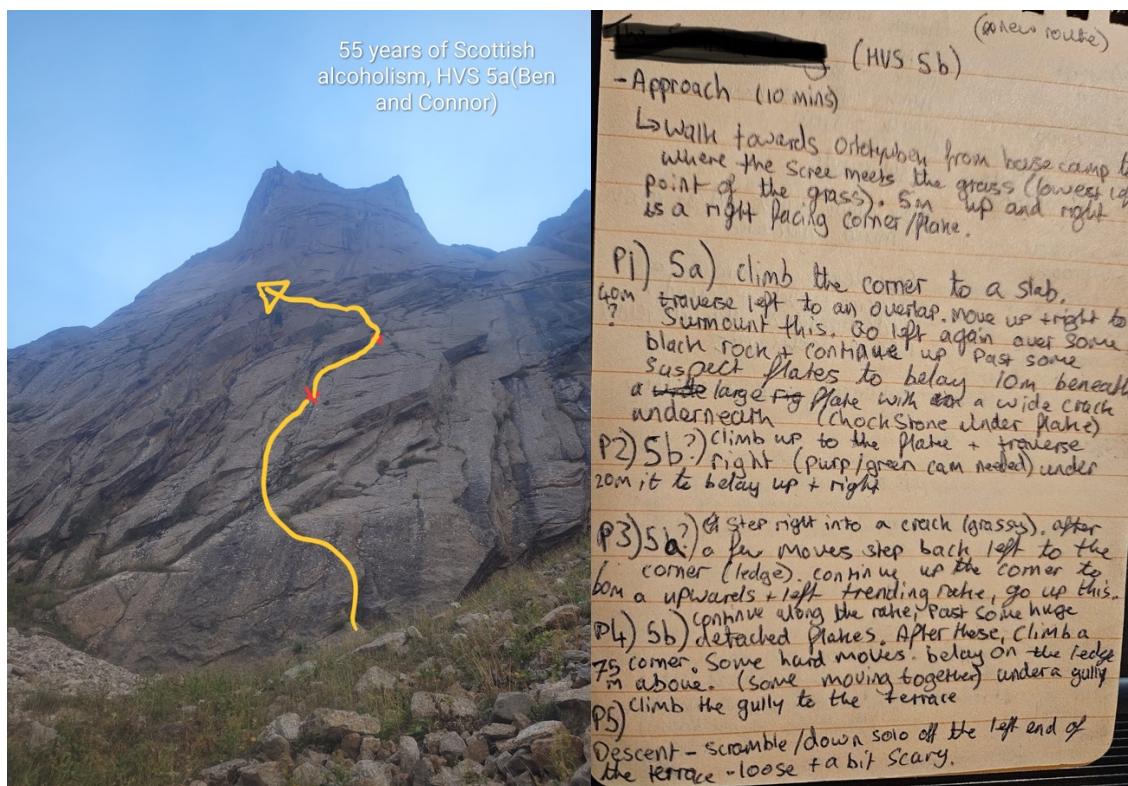
A single pitch crag flip-floppable from base camp, this had been initially developed by some Polish teams. We added two new routes to the righthand side of the crag, "Baked Margin" (6b+) that climbs the slab and arete on the far right of the crag and "Batholith" (6a) which climbs a groove and flakes to the same lower off.

Search climbs, buttresses, or descriptions

↓	✓	Name	Grade	Stars
■	✓	1. The Last Month of the Bachelor ↗	VI+	★
■	✓	2. Waiting for Ibex ↗	VII+	★
■	✓	3. Batholith ↗	6a+	★
■	✓	4. Baked Margin ↗	6b+	★

This topo and another showing the Polish routes on the left side of the crag are now available on UKclimbing.com.

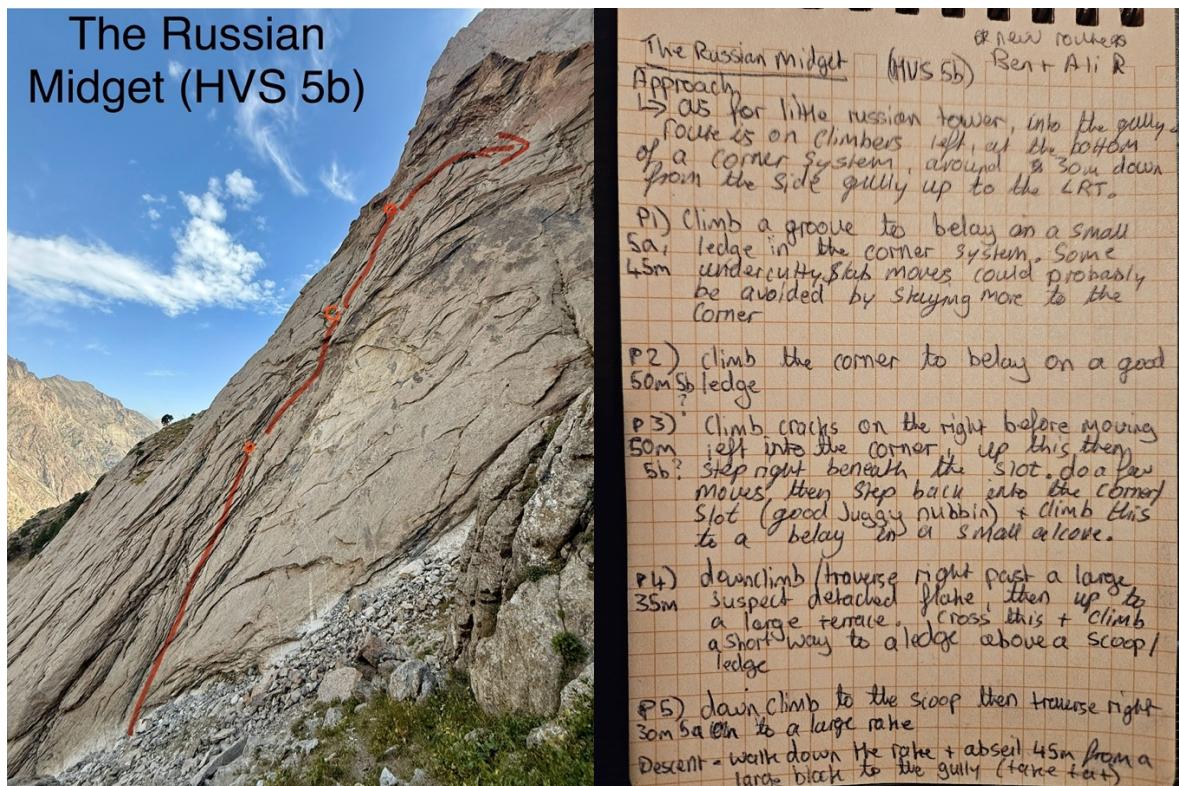
55 years of Scottish Alcoholism HVS 5b, 5 pitches. (Left side of Central Pyramid.)



There is a big shelf/rake that runs between the Central pyramid crags and Ortutyubek. This is hard to make out in the topo but is a simple scramble and abseil. This can be used in ascent to get to the wall with Atlantide on.

The Russian Midget, HVS 5b, 5 pitches. (S face of Central Pyramid)

This route lies directly above where the approach to the Little Russian Tour joins the gully. This route climbs three good pitches onto a large pillar. We had a brief look above here but it was incredibly blank so pitched off rightwards to where it was possible to scramble down and do a short abseil. A braver team might be able to continue straight up where we traversed off right.



While we had done our best to gather as many guidebooks, expedition reports and journal articles before our trip, once we were in the valley and able to exchange with other teams from other countries we became aware of quite how much has been climbed in these valleys. We had been unable to obtain a copy of the Russian guidebook before leaving but got hold of a translated copy once in basecamp. This guide outlines a vast amount of climbing that were largely unaware of and is well worth getting hold of before going. Please get in touch as we have a pdf translated copy of this guide. In hindsight the Kara Su valley may have more potential for new routes.

Summary

It was truly amazing to spend a month in such a beautiful place and we would like to thank the British Mountaineering Council, The Alpine Club, The Rick Allen Memorial Fund, The Neil Mackenzie trust and Fenix Lights for their support. Without access to the grants and funding it would be incredibly hard to finance trips like these. We were keen to experience some of the famous big walls and attempt new lines while also having some members newer to "big wall" style climbing and expeditions. It was brilliant to climb famous routes like Perestroika Crack. However, having access to the Russian guidebook and observing several large rockfalls curbed our enthusiasm for new routes on the bigger faces.

Ella's diary eloquently sums up how it feels to be "in at the deep end" on an expedition like this:

"By the end of the first week, my confidence had taken a serious knock. It was a mix of things, the lingering flu, the altitude, and just how remote and serious everything felt out there. It's confronting, pushing your limits when your body isn't firing, and knowing that if something goes wrong, help isn't exactly close by."

"I decided not to go for it. It looked hard, long, and honestly, I just didn't have the mental bandwidth to take it on. I was also scared I wouldn't be able to contribute enough to the team. That feeling of not wanting to let others down weighed heavier than I expected. Still, it was inspiring to watch the others climb it (Perestroika) through a pair of binoculars from camp. Knowing what it took, how deep they had to dig... it was pretty special to witness, even from a distance. With eight of us on the trip, the energy was always high. We got on incredibly well and more than anything, we were all just genuinely psyched for each other. We knew how much every route took, mentally and physically. No ego, just support. That was rare, and it meant a lot. I didn't know many of the group very well before Kyrgyzstan, but I'm so grateful I got to spend four weeks with such an amazing bunch of people."