

04

# Kyzyl Asker\*



E X P E D I T I O N R E P O R T

## SUMMARY

Area visited: Western Kokshaal Too, Kyrgyzstan.

Dates: 21 August-26<sup>th</sup> September 2004

Team members: Es Tresidder  
Guy Robertson  
Pete Benson  
Matt Halls  
Robin Thomas

Objective: Unclimbed south east face of Kyzyl Asker (picture on front cover)

Result: The main objective was found to be thawing whenever the weather was good. Instead we focussed on safer objectives in the area. All in all we climbed 5 fantastic new routes, including the second recorded ascent of Kyzyl Asker and the first ascent of the great walls of China. In addition we repeated an existing route and attempted three others. The weather for this region is notoriously bad but it should be noted that we experienced much better weather in September 2004 than on our previous trip here in July/August 2002.



Supported by:

Alpinist **bmc**

MEF



Copyright

Copyright of this document lies with the Scottish Kyzyl Asker expedition. The text may be freely copied and distributed to aid mountaineers who are interested in the area. The pictures may not be copied or uploaded onto websites etc. without permission from the copyright holders, Pete Benson and Matt Halls.

\*

---

\* Kyrgyz translation. *The Red Soldier*

## INTRODUCTION

At a height of 5800m Kyzyl Asker - which translates to "Red Soldier" from the Kyrgyz – stands proud in a small collection of mountains in the Western Kokshaal Too on the Kyrgyz – China Border.

In 2002, Es Tresidder and Guy Robertson attempted the fairytale ice line on the totally unclimbed SE face of Kyzyl Asker. Alas the two attempts on the route were shut down by the ice line thawing in the sun. Inspired by what they both agreed was the best alpine route they'd ever seen, they vowed to return but later in the year in an attempt to catch colder conditions.

Several expeditions have been to the area, including Pat Littlejohn's ISM trip, an Anglo-American expedition in 1987, and Sean Isaacs trip in 2001. Through talking to these expeditions, and from the experience of 2002, we thought there was a good chance that colder conditions would be present around September.

The weather of the area is notoriously bad, and it is not uncommon for an expedition to get no climbing done in a four week trip. This was a problem in 2002, with several long storms throughout the trip.

Whilst planning for the return to Kyzyl Asker it was considered that the odds could be more stacked in our favour if we were to climb as a team of three. Whilst there are some disadvantages of this setup, there are many good reasons: increased safety, to share the burden of so much hard climbing, and because it would be more sociable. Guy convinced Pete Benson that it would be a good idea and the team was three. Later on in the planning Matt Halls and Robin Thomas also decided they'd like to come, which suited us - the more the merrier! Because all the funding had already been awarded Matt and Robin were self funded.





## THE EXPEDITION

We flew from Heathrow to Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) via Moscow with Aeroflot on the 21<sup>st</sup> August (arrive 22<sup>nd</sup>). Aeroflot proved to be the cheapest (the alternative is BA direct to Bishkek) and also had more lenient excess baggage penalties (£4 per kilo for Aeroflot as compared to £17 per kilo BA). It seems to be getting harder and harder to sneak excess baggage onto flights without paying for it these days. In 2002 we simply got fully dressed in expedition gear and stuffed our 50 litre hand luggage with climbing hardware. This wasn't really an option this time around as everything was weighed and we ended up with a hefty excess baggage bill on both outward and return flights. It would have been worth getting written confirmation of Aeroflots charges for excess baggage in advance, as it seemed fairly random what they decided to charge per kilo. We were charged different rates on the return journey from the outward, and both charges were different from what we had been told over the phone.

On arrival in Bishkek we were met by Pavel, our driver from Tien Shan Travel, who took us to a very pleasant home-stay accommodation. After a short sleep and breakfast, we were whisked off to see our Tien Shan travel agents. After establishing that the truck they planned to take us in was about the size of a people carrier and had no roof rack, we set about arguing for more space. Eventually we were assured that a roof rack would be fitted and we set off to shop for supplies.

Es had spent three months of the summer in Bishkek with his girlfriend, and his local knowledge was very useful in getting our shopping done quickly. Apart from a few things, we managed to find everything we needed in one afternoon. The remaining supplies were picked up the next morning. When Pavel arrived at our home stay to pick us up for the drive to Naryn, lo and behold there was no roof rack. We crammed as much of our stuff (about 1/3) into the van, and went back to Tien Shan travel where we eventually persuaded them that we did need a roof rack. For some reason they seemed convinced that five people, plus expedition equipment and food for five weeks would fit in a six seater minibus! We also persuaded them we needed another vehicle. Initially Guy and Es argued for a larger vehicle, like the one they had used in 2002, but Tien Shan seemed convinced that the bigger the vehicle, the more likely it was to get stuck (this had been a big problem in 2002). Finally we arranged for a taxi to take us to Naryn, where we would spend a night before carrying on in one Lada Niva and one van. This of course was at additional cost to the expedition.

The journey to Naryn went smoothly enough, although we didn't arrive till late due to not leaving Bishkek till the early afternoon. The taxi ride was made all the more exciting by having two engineers (Pete and Matt) in the car, who would point out sounds made by the car and explain exactly what they meant; "ah yes, that's the bushings,



*Engine Trouble boys?*

means the steering doesn't work too well!". Very reassuring! In Naryn we stayed in a "hotel" adjoining a yurt camp as there were no free yurts (the yurts were more comfortable than the hotel, and cheaper).



*Night time bivi by the vans*

The following morning we were met by our driver and his trusty Niva, which then failed to leave Naryn, misfiring worryingly for several hours. Eventually we went to a garage and after lots of shouting and gesticulating a new distributor was fitted and we were on our way. All went smoothly until the first military checkpoint (The Western Kokshaal Too China, and a permit is required) where it turned out that the Niva driver didn't have the required permit. This made us pretty angry as we had been specifically told by Tien Shan Travel that he would have a permit. In retrospect they were probably just trying to get us out of the office as we had become quite vocal in our complaints! It took four hours of bargaining, riding the border guards horses (they were friendly, just couldn't let our driver past without a permit), and being plied with Kumys (a traditional Kyrgyz drink of fermented Mares milk!) before we were allowed through. This was largely due to Pavels negotiation skills. Due to the delay we didn't make basecamp that day but we did sleep quite high up (~3400m) so hadn't really lost anything in terms of time, as we knew it would take time to acclimatise at basecamp anyway.

The next day Pavel proved to be a bit of a star in the off road driving department, and there were no problems with getting stuck in bogs. The ground seemed a little drier than in 2002 and coupled with Pavels route knowledge and the lighter vehicles, we didn't really encounter any problems. We arrived at basecamp around midday and set up camp that afternoon (25<sup>th</sup> Aug).





## ACCLIMATISATION

The acclimatisation process was slower than we had hoped. Es had spent much of the summer high up and managed to do a gear run to halfway up the Komarova glacier on the second day at basecamp but after this he was knocked out by bad illness (see medical report).!

Between the 27<sup>th</sup> August and the 5<sup>th</sup> September people who weren't ill ferried loads between basecamp and window col (4900m), and then down to advanced basecamp below the south-east face of Kyzyl Asker. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> September everyone except Es repeated the Mrak-Willis route on Unmarked soldier (~5400m) in bad weather. This was an excellent acclimatisation route, being not too hard (about Scottish II or III), quite short and going to the summit of one of the higher peaks in the area. The final summit ridge was found to be extremely corniced and dangerous, and the team stopped at a point about 50m short of the true summit.

Skis were used on the glacier and proved very useful, making the trip to advanced basecamp both quicker and easier. Pulks would have been useful and if we had taken them we might have been able to get all the gear from the bottom of the Komarova glacier to advanced basecamp in one trip, rather than the multiple trips (four I think?) that it took to get kit and two weeks worth of food over there.

## THE CLIMBING

By the 6<sup>th</sup> of September we were established and more or less acclimatised at advanced basecamp. Up until this point we had been fairly confident of the south-east face remaining frozen during the day, but it would seem the cirque of peaks around advanced basecamp act as a bit of a sun trap, and temperatures seemed warmer than at basecamp, despite being about 600m higher (~4500m). One advantage of this warm weather was that there was running water each afternoon at basecamp, meaning we didn't have to melt snow for water.



On the 8<sup>th</sup> September Pete, Guy and Es set off for a "warm up" route before the main objective on Kyzyl Asker. We chose the south face of Panfilovski Division which we believe is unclimbed. Our line was a prominent icy corner to the left of a wide ice couloir. It was climbed in poor weather and we were exposed to punishing spindrift avalanches

throughout the day. The climbing was superb, steep pure ice (led by Guy) leading to a cul de sac where an umbrella of icicles clad a cave. Gaining the cave proved to be the crux, with a 5m wall of vertical very hard ice leading to a very tight squeeze to gain the cave. From here it was easy to bypass the fragile part of the curtain and make a few steep pulls to get above the difficulties. Another excellent pitch, this time an icy mixed gully leading to the end of the difficult climbing (both led by Es). From here Pete led on for two hundred metres or so of moving together up moderately difficult but insecure ground. This led to a junction with the wide easy couloir. Due to the fatiguing nature of the weather, and still needing to acclimatise, we descended, reasoning that although we hadn't reached the summit we had climbed "the route" to it's end and the end of difficulties. We christened the route Haggis Supper after it's resemblance to the Isaac-Decapio route Royale with Cheese, but with a Scottish slant. It went at a grade of 500m WI 5+.

On the same day Matt and Robin tried their main objective, the unclimbed south ridge of Kyzyl Asker. Gaining the ridge by an easy snow gully, they then found the climbing to be much harder than anticipated, offering at least one pitch of Scottish VII and very difficult route finding. After a day of getting gnarled by the weather and with the way ahead far from clear, they descended. They estimated that their highpoint was about 5200m.

The following day the weather cleared and we set about preparing for the south-east face in what seemed (and turned out to be) very stable clear weather. After skiing to the foot of the face in the middle of the day we realised it was thawing once again, probably as bad as it had been in 2002. We briefly considered attempting a climb by night, sleep in the day strategy, but decided this was a bad idea. On our two attempts in 2002 we had experienced a lot of falling ice during the thaw. At that time we had been able to get shelter under the right wall of the gully as it slanted left at this point. Higher up there would have been no guarantee that we could get shelter, and I think to try the face in clear conditions would be extremely dangerous. Finally we decided that unless we got stable overcast weather then an attempt was off the cards. In good weather it would be thawing, and our experience on the south face of Panfilovski Division convinced us that such a long route (3 days?) would be beyond us in bad weather.

Matt and Robin added an excellent route on the south face of pic Jerry Garcia. They got around the thawing problem by climbing the crux steep ice pitch before the sun hit it. Higher up when the thaw kicked in they were on easier ground. The route followed a gully line and went at about Scottish V.

Instead of the south-east face we set about other objectives, ones that would get around the problem of the sun. Guy and Es chose a north facing line on the unclimbed great walls of China while Matt, Robin and Pete went to try another line on Kyzyl Asker.

The Great Walls route was one of three or four superb thin ice routes on the pillars of the Great Walls, all facing north. There are numerous more lines but it would not be inadvisable to go on anything that didn't face north, or even to stand at the bottom of the walls in the daytime, the foot of the routes are littered with large and small rocks!

The route started with 100m of very hard mixed climbing (up to Scottish VII/VIII) that was led in three pitches. The pitches were excellent thin ice/mixed, just enough gear and hard climbing. One crux pitch was a steep bare crack leading to a small roof, a niche and more thin ice. Es made one big effort to free the pitch, nearly gaining the niche that marked the end of the main difficulties before his arms gave out; two points of aid later and the niche was gained.

Above this the climbing eased slightly, but was sustained steep ice with lots of long pitches up to Scottish V/VI. This was made all the more interesting by only having six ice screws. In addition they had lost 3 of their 4 litres of water at the bottom of the route and in their parched state their progress slowed to a crawl.

To round things off Es dropped his belay plate just as darkness fell. Finally the two weary travellers gained the ridge crest at 1am and given their health elected to descend immediately. The first ascent of the walls was in the bag but the summit remains unclimbed. Eleven long abseils mainly from abalakov threads, brought them to the base of the walls a few hours after dawn, 28 hours after starting. The route was climbed on the 12-13<sup>th</sup> September and christened Border Control (ED, 500m, Scottish VII/VIII).

Matt, Pete and Robin's foray had been fruitful in terms of information gained but not in terms of summiting. They climbed a gully at the eastern end of the south-east face to gain the col between Kyzyl Asker and Panfilovski Division. This was mostly easy but involved a pitch of steep ice which went at Scottish VI. From here they hoped to gain the easy angled north face and ski to the top. Unfortunately, upon arrival at the ridge it became evident that there was still a good deal of technical ridge climbing to avoid a band of seracs on the north face. It was clear that if the ridge could be gained a little further west, the face could be gained relatively easily.



*Pete on the Summit of Kyzyl Asker*



*Climbing on the North Face of Kyzyl Asker*

This knowledge was put to good effect two days later (14<sup>th</sup> September) when Matt and Pete went for another crack at Kyzyl. Climbing a gully further west (left looking at the face) with skis on their backs, Pete dispatched a steep pitch at Scottish VI and the ridge was gained. From here a bit of delicate and exposed traversing led them onto the easy angled north face which they then climbed to the col between the east and west summits of Kyzyl Asker. From here they climbed the west summit, but reckoned there was little between the west and east summits in terms of height. Given that the only previous recorded ascent of Kyzyl Asker was by the north west face (Valiev, 1985, Russian 6a) it would seem fair to assume it was the west summit they climbed also, and thus that the east summit is probably unclimbed. Pete and Matt descended from the summit and were back in camp about 17 hours after leaving. The Scottish route (1200m, 1 pitch of Scottish VI) was probably the second ascent of the mountain (certainly second recorded). Previous attempts from the north have encountered problems getting above the serac band at the



base of the face, by approaching from the south east, this problem was avoided. Skis were found to be useful.

The following day (15<sup>th</sup> September), nearly out of food, the team packed up and left advanced basecamp. Skiing with huge sacks was difficult, especially for the inexperienced amongst us (Es and Guy)! We dumped the tent and climbing gear below the Ochre walls on the west Komarova glacier and headed back to basecamp for some rest and recuperation.

After a few days at basecamp (19<sup>th</sup> September) Pete, Guy, Matt and Es headed back up to the Ochre walls to try some routes. Pete and Es were intent on trying an excellent looking smear to the left of the Isaac-Decapio route Beefcake (2001) - the smear had been tantalising us from basecamp for the entire trip. Guy and Matt fancied the look of a line of icy ramps on the rocky east face of Pik Gronky.



After a night in the tent both teams made an early start. Pete and Es's route turned out to be superb, after 250m of moving together they reached the base of the smear. This provided three hard pitches, the first being a Scottish VII torque crack leading to thin ice. The second a thin brittle pitch of steep ice before a final pitch of steep ice led to the ridge. Two more pitches on the ridge led to the unnamed summit at dusk. The weather for the entire route was severe spindrift and very cold (it never got above -8 °c). The descent was made by the ascent route from abalakov threads and the tent gained after about 15 hours. The route went at about TD+/ED, Scottish VII, 500m and was christened Fire and Ice after a memorable Bishkek nightclub.

Meanwhile Guy and Matt weren't getting on so well on their route. Despite being only about a kilometre away from the other team, their route faced the sun. Although it was freezing hard on Pete and Es's route, theirs thawed in about fifteen minutes of sunshine, leaving them little option but to descend. They abseiled off and descended to basecamp the same day.

The team packed up basecamp to leave on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September, allowing a little lee way because we were worried about how Pavel might cope with the small amount of snow now present on the high Steppe. As it turned out, once the van was started, he had no problems whatsoever, but getting it started involved heating the sump with a blowtorch, hand cranking the engine and finally the most optimistic jump start I've ever seen. We pushed the van to the top of a very gentle, short slope, and then pushed it down the other side, which was just enough to allow the engine to start. To our horror Pavel promptly stalled the engine but luckily it started again! Two days later we were back in Bishkek and after a few nights experiencing Kyrgyz nightlife we were on the plane, albeit \$1000 poorer after being fleeced for excess baggage!

## **MEDICAL REPORT**

Everyone got some sort of stomach upset/food poisoning early in the trip. Many of these cases were suspected *Ghiardia* and were treated with Metronidazole. In addition Es had something that could also have been *Ghiardia*, but due to the presence of a persistent fever, Typhoid was feared and treated successfully with Ciprofloxacin. These were almost certainly water borne diseases. Although we were very careful early on in the expedition (the water at BC would appear to be safe if collected above camp) there were a few instances in which we could have been infected. Notably drinking Kumys with the border guards (we didn't really have much choice as it would have been rude to refuse and they were who decided whether we got to go or not!) and Guy eating a dodgy meat pasty from the bazaar!

A full first aid kit was taken, including altitude drugs (Acetazolamide (diamox), Nifedipine and Dexamethazone) although no one needed anything more than an aspirin to ease the acclimatisation process. It is worth taking these drugs to this area however as it would be very difficult to descend quickly (because basecamp is on a vast high steppe) in the case of severe altitude illness.

## **OTHER THINGS**

Our agents in Bishkek (Tien Shan travel) were in some ways very good and in some ways pretty awful. They proved to have totally underestimated the amount of stuff we would need to take with us, and were dishonest and inefficient at solving the problem. In addition they charged us extra for a vehicle that they could reasonably have foreseen that we would need. However, they were good at some other things. Pavel was an excellent driver and a nice guy. The home stay was perfect for an expedition, having a large enclosed garden for drying kit. The basecamp tent was a superb, large, fixed frame job, much better than the tent we'd been given by ITMC in 2002 and also a bit cheaper (8 euros per day). Perhaps most importantly they were right about a lighter vehicle being better for getting into this sort of area. Although it didn't look as impressive, the vehicle we had this year had absolutely no problems getting stuck in the wet ground. This was also due to the ground being drier, but if we were to go again I'd make sure we had a light vehicle like this. They also threw in satellite phones for Pavel to stay in contact with Bishkek (in case of emergency). In 2002 we had had to hire these from ITMC. However, on the whole ITMC, while more expensive, were much more honest, and a lot less hassle. There was always the feeling that Tien Shan travel might be trying to rip us off, based on fact as they misled and lied to us several times.

## MARCO POLO SHEEP



While we were at advanced basecamp Pavel shot two Marco Polo sheep, which were very tasty and a welcome break from bland food. We have since discovered that they are on the endangered species red list. They aren't in the most endangered category (trade in them is legal if licensed). However, any expedition who does not feel happy about this happening should make this clear to their travel agents in advance, as doing so in sign language might prove problematic.

## ACCOUNTS

The table below presents a summary of the accounts for the expedition. Note that the contributions and costs of Robin and Matt have been excluded since they paid their own way, and did not benefit from the grant money, which was awarded for the three man attempt on the SE face of Kyzyl Asker.

The national currency in Kyrgyzstan is the Som. It is unlikely that your local post office will have a ready supply, but there are many places to exchange either US \$ or Euro €. The expedition paid Tien Shan travel in Euro's.

There are a couple of VISA ATMs in Bishkek, but generally shops, restaurants are not set up to take plastic.



Balance Sheet		
Description	Income	Expenditure
MEF	£ 600.00	
MCoS	£ 600.00	
BMC	£ 1,900.00	
Alpinist (\$2500 equivalent)	£ 1,316.80	
Personal Contributions	£ 1,229.17	
Flights (London - Bishkek)		-£ 1,450.00
Flights to London		-£ 270.00
Visas		-£ 168.00
Mountain Food		-£ 150.00
Ropes		-£ 141.51
Insurance		-£ 450.00
Tent		-£ 326.00
Transport Bishkek - BC - Bishkek		-£ 493.12
Driver /cook staying in BC		-£ 350.66
Hire of two additional radios		-£ 95.88
Accoms in bishkek		-£ 71.91
BC tent hire		-£ 175.33
Airport pickup		-£ 17.12
Food (including chairs and other stuff)		-£ 700.00
Driver/car for 22 August		-£ 13.70
Travelling expenses to BC And back		-£ 102.73
Expenses in Bishkek		-£ 75.00
Satellite Phone usage		-£ 95.00
Excess Bagage		-£ 500.00
Sub Totals	£ 5,645.97	-£ 5,645.97
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£ 5,645.97</b>	<b>-£ 5,645.97</b>

## WASTE MANAGEMENT

The team applied different methods to manage different fractions of the waste stream, as follows:

- Non-putrescible materials were stored separately, physically compacted and taken back out to Bishkek for disposal at the end of the expedition;
- Food wastes were stored separately and periodically spread into a deep pit situated approximately 200m north-north-east of the tents. At the end of the expedition the pit was dug over so that material was evenly incorporated into the soil, and then covered over;
- Faeces were deposited into a purpose built 'latrine' pit (4' deep), situated approximately 200m north of the Base Camp tent. This was in-situ when the team arrived at Base Camp, but filled in and dug over by the team at the end of the expedition. Toilet paper was burned.

Both the food waste pit and latrine were situated at least 100m from the nearest

watercourse.

Whilst the team was located at Advanced Base Camp, all wastes (food included) were stored and then taken back out to Bishkek for disposal at the end of the expedition (a small amount of waste was burnt on a rock prior to the return journey to Base Camp, with all ash / residual material being taken out). During this same period human faeces was deposited into a deep crevasse located approximately 100m north of the tents. Toilet paper was burned.

It should be pointed out that the team found substantial evidence of previous expeditions in the area around Base Camp (mice were an on-going problem in the Base Camp tent). A shallow pit some 50m north of the tents showed evidence of previous French expeditions, with substantial accumulations of non-putrescibles left uncovered. With the help of two American climbers, most of the obvious material was dug out and removed to Bishkek for disposal at the end of the expedition. There was noticeable littering (packaging, cigarette ends, etc) in the Base Camp area.

## THANKS!

The expedition team would like to thank all the organisations that helped the trip become a reality.

**Alpinist**

The expedition was awarded one of the annual Alpinist magazine 'B Team' grants, which had a value of \$2500.  
[www.alpinist.com](http://www.alpinist.com)

**bmc**

The expedition was awarded £1900 from the British Mountaineering Council.  
[www.thebmc.org.uk](http://www.thebmc.org.uk)

**MEF**

The expedition was awarded £600 from the Mount Everest Foundation.  
[www.mef.org.uk](http://www.mef.org.uk)



The expedition was awarded £600 from the Mountaineering Council of Scotland.  
[www.mcofs.org.uk](http://www.mcofs.org.uk)



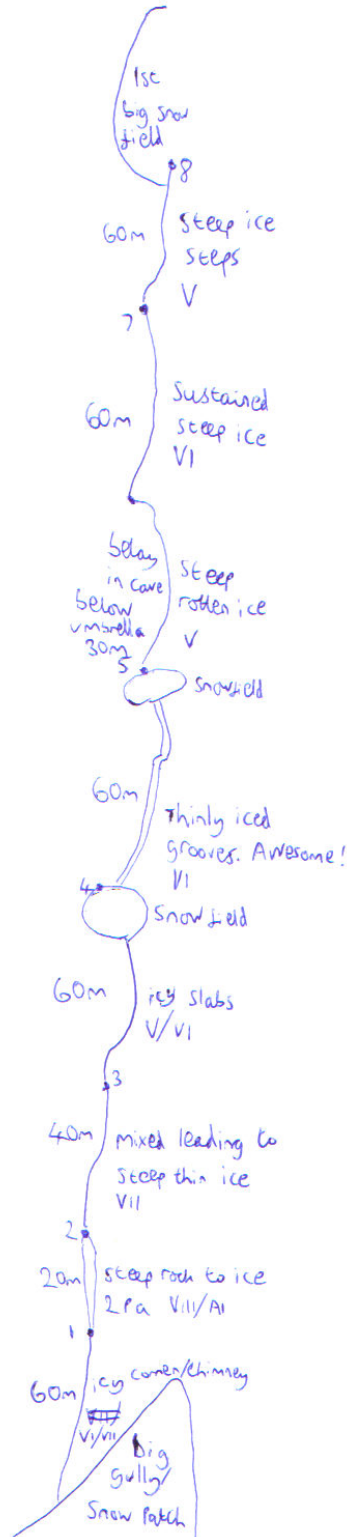
Mountain equipment supplied the expedition with sleeping bags. In addition Guy and Es received mountain equipment clothing as part of Mountain Equipment's sponsored climber programme.  
[www.mountain-equipment.co.uk](http://www.mountain-equipment.co.uk)



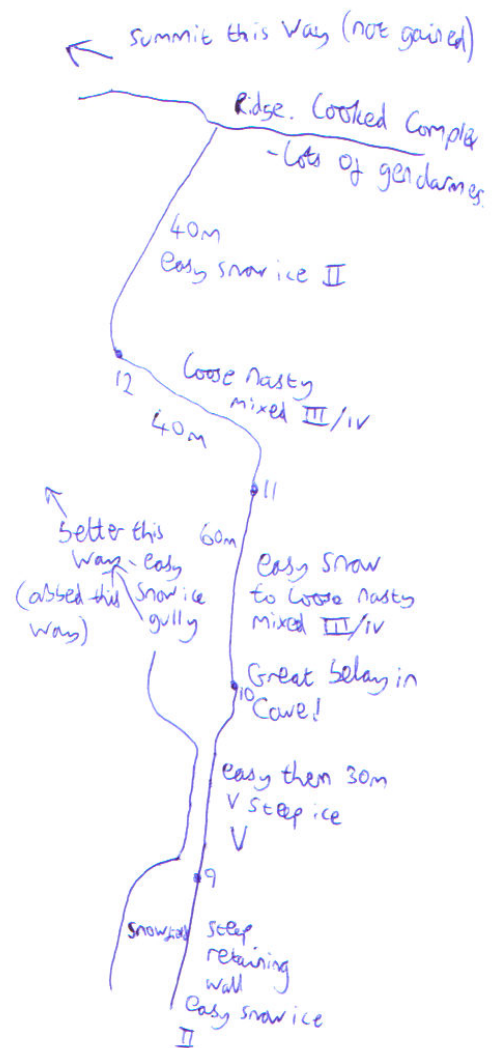


Border Control EO 500m 12-13 sep 2004  
 Guy Robertson + Es Tresidder  
 28hrs round trip. Great Walls of China.

PITCH  
 Grades  
 Scottish



Descent by abseiling  
 line of ascent.



# Ochre Walls

FIRE AND ICE

500m

ED

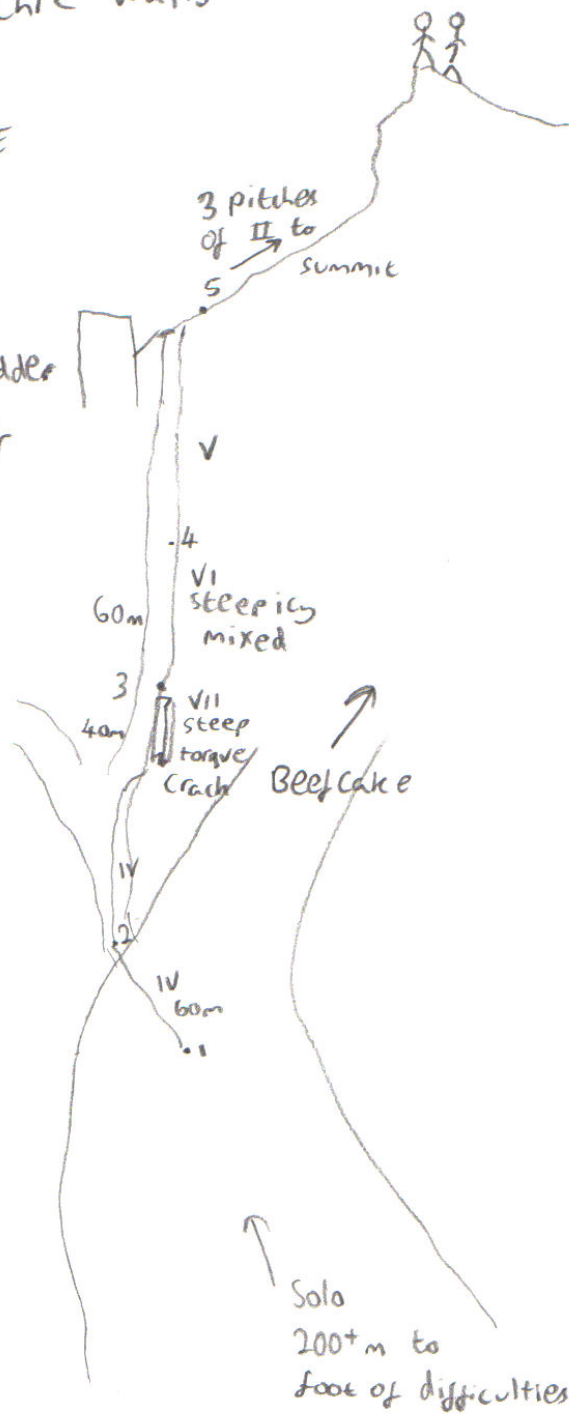
Scottish VII

Benson/Tresidder

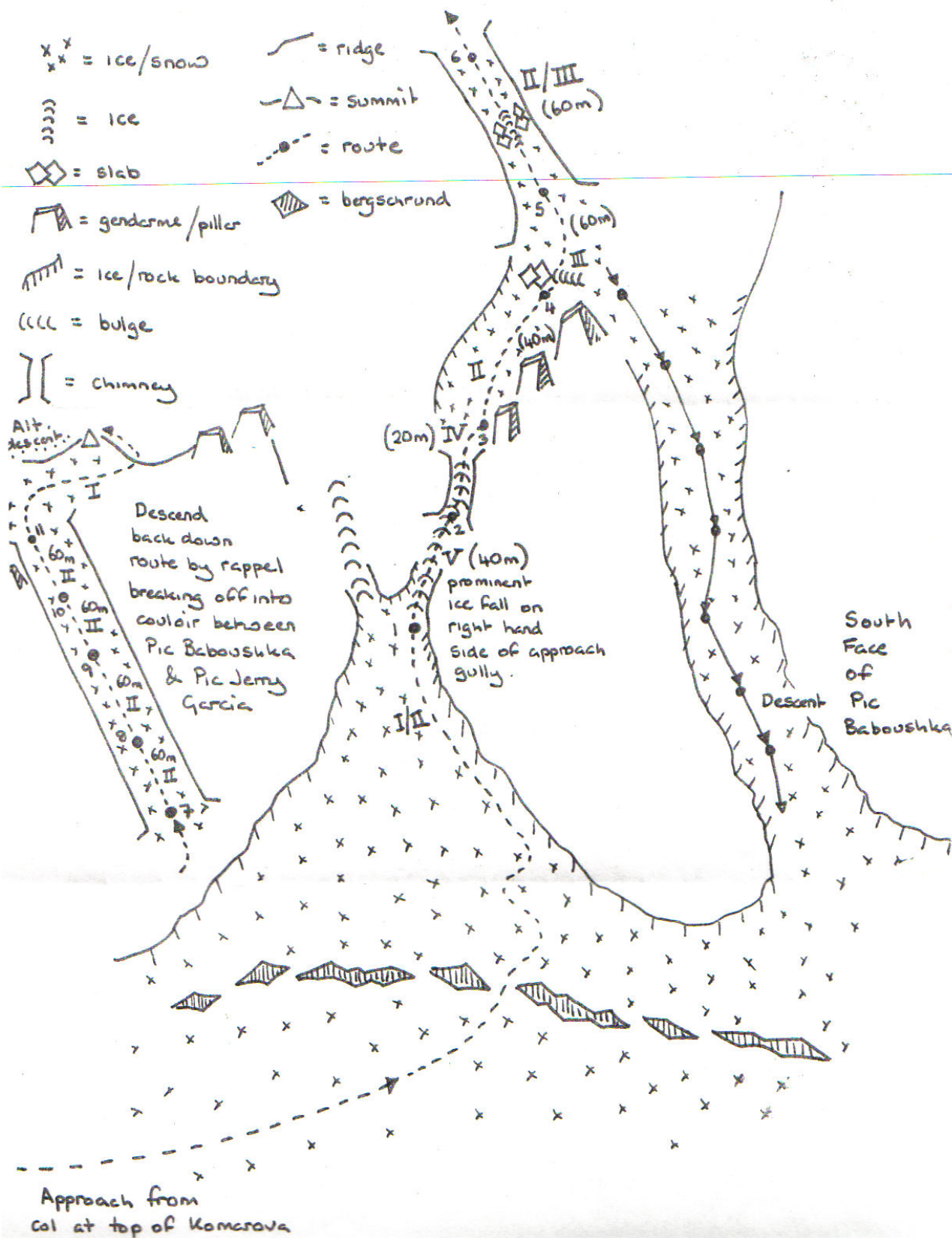
20 September

Pitch grades

are Scottish



# South Face of Pic Jerry Garcia, 5300m





PANFILOVSKI

DIVISION

HAGGIS SUPPER

500m

Scottish VI

WI5+

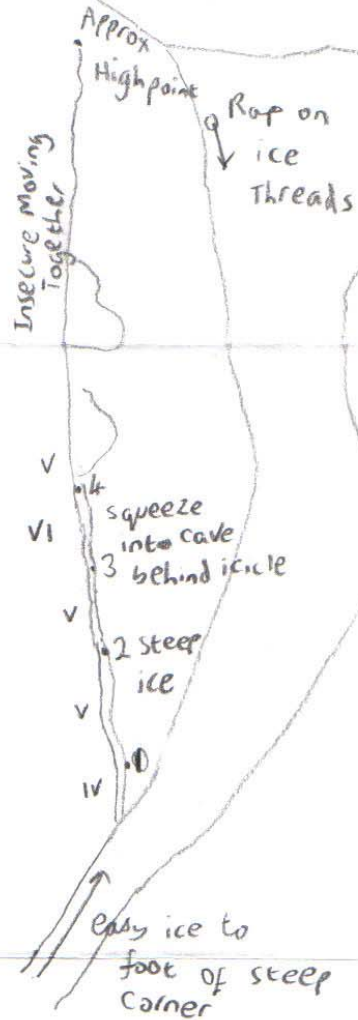
Benson, Tresidder

Robertson

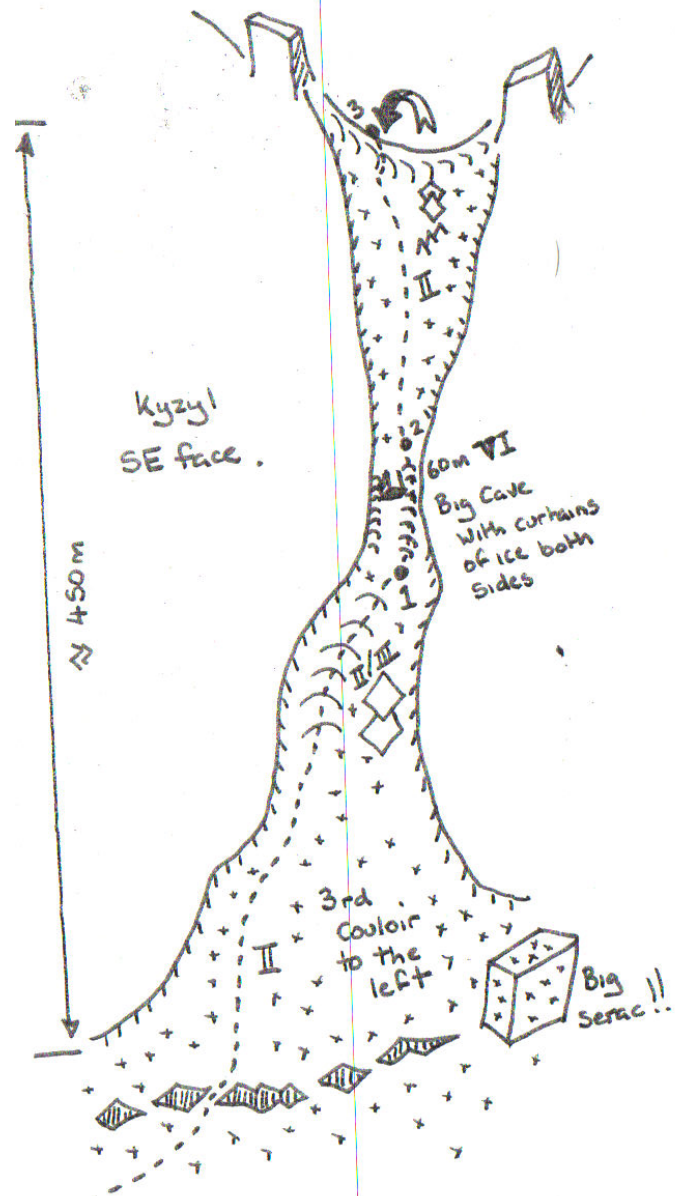
8 sep

pitch grades

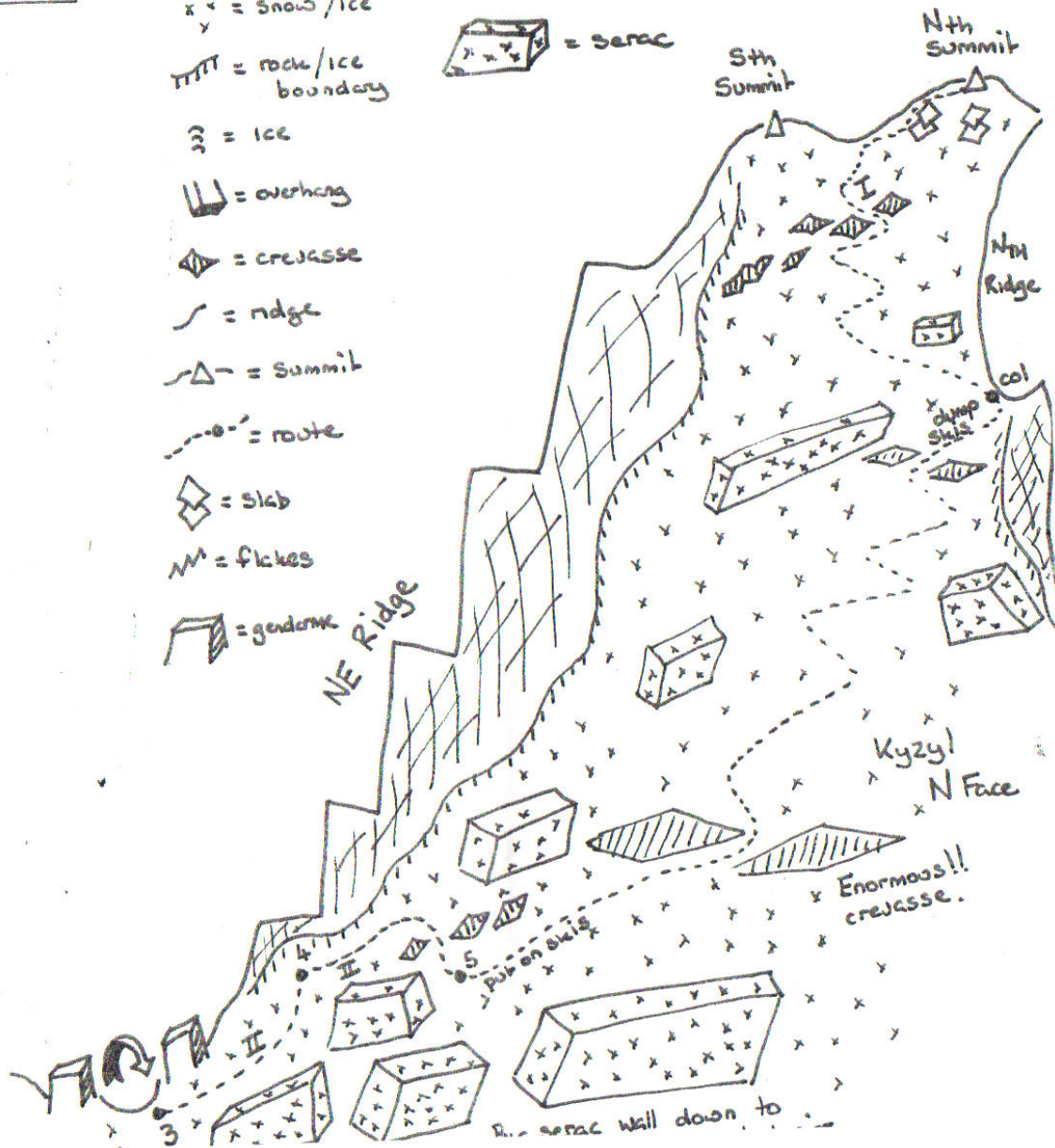
Scottish



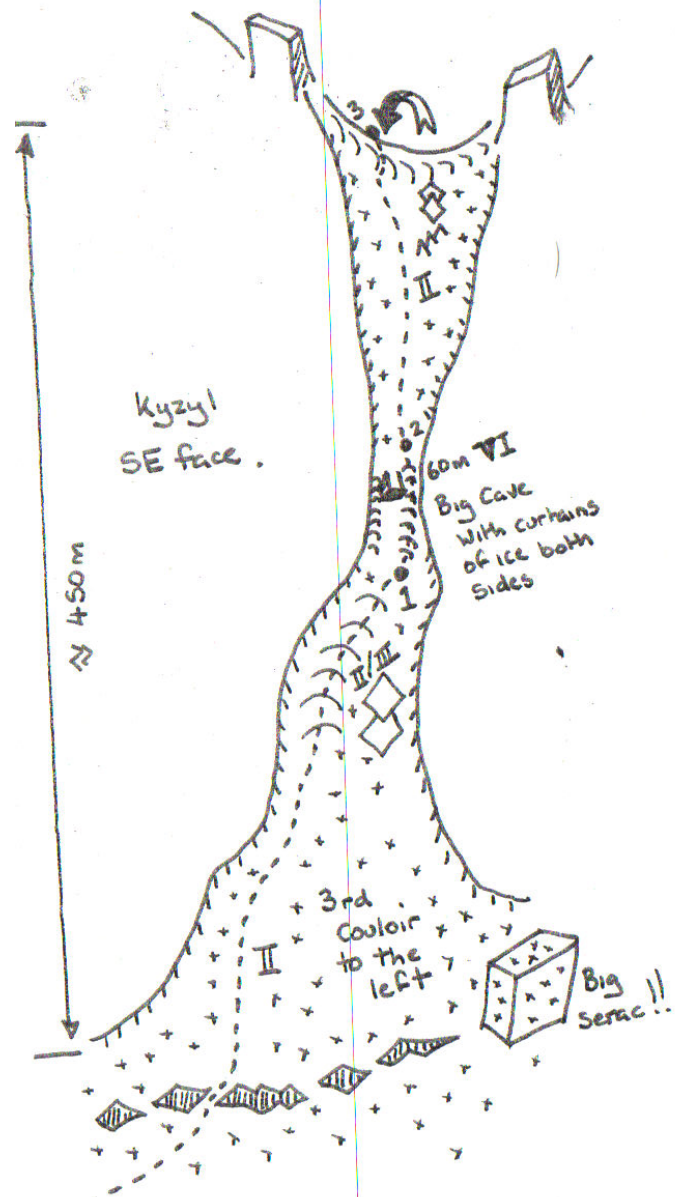
# North Face of Kyzyl Asker, Dduum.



- x = snow/ice
- |||| = rock/ice boundary
- 3 = ice
- U = overhang
- ◇ = crevasse
- ~ = ridge
- △ = summit
- - - = route
- ◇ = slab
- |||| = flakes
- ⌂ = gendarme



# North Face of Kyzyl Asker, Dduum.



- x = snow/ice
- |||| = rock/ice boundary
- 3 = ice
- U = overhang
- ◇ = crevasse
- = ridge
- △ = summit
- - - = route
- ◇ = slab
- |||| = flakes
- U = gendarme

