



## **Edinburgh University Torugart-Too Expedition 2010**

Report compiled by John Proctor

# 1 Summary

The expedition was inspired by a report on Alpinist magazine's online newswire<sup>1</sup> about an expedition in 2007 to the Torugart-Too mountains in Kyrgyzstan, organised by the International School of Mountaineering and Pat Littlejohn. The article described the Torugart-Too mountains as an area of glaciated 5000m peaks 35km long on the border between Kyrgyzstan and China, and described the first ascent of the highest peak in the Torugart-Too mountains, Mustyr (5108m). Further research revealed that a total of 4 expeditions had visited the area, and that many possibilities remained for first ascents and new routes. The team members (John Proctor, Adam Russell and Robert Taylor) are all climbers associated with Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club with previous experience of Alpine climbing but no experience of climbing in the Greater Ranges. We visited the Torugart-Too mountains for 3 weeks in July/August 2010 and established 3 first ascents – Mur Samir (5008m), Pik Karyshkyr (4836m), and Pik False (4801m).

## 2 Introduction and background

### 2.1 The Torugart-Too mountains

The Torugart-Too mountains is a 35km long range of glaciated 5000m peaks on the border between Kyrgyzstan and China, to the southwest of the western Kokshaal-Too. See map (photograph 1).



Photograph 1. Satellite image of the Torugart-Too mountains and map showing their location within Kyrgyzstan. The Torugart-Too is the range stretching from left to right in the lower half of the satellite image. Lake Chatyr Kol is the lake shown in the red box on the map.

It has been visited by 4 expeditions. The first one, a Russian expedition in 2006, made only a brief visit to the area but attempted to climb the highest peak in the area, Mustyr (5108m). They did not succeed in climbing Mustyr, but did reach the top of a subsidiary peak to the south of Mustyr's southern peak. See Ref. 2. They approached the Torugart-Too on foot, taking a photograph (photograph 2) of most of the range as they did so.



Photograph 2. The Torugart-Too, photograph taken by Lipin's expedition in 2006<sup>2</sup>. The lake in the photo is lake Chatyr-Kol (see satellite image and map in photograph 1).

The next expedition was a commercial expedition in 2007, organised by the International School of Mountaineering and led by Pat Littlejohn. They succeeded in climbing Mustyr via a couloir and traverse on the western side, at AD. The expedition also made the first ascents of several other virgin peaks at PD – AD+<sup>1,3</sup>. Later in 2007 the range was visited by the Anglo-Cypriot expedition of Constantinos Andreou and Andrew Barrett<sup>4</sup> who climbed several more peaks at a similar standard. Finally, Dave Molesworth, Mark Weeding and Misha Sokhorukov visited the unexplored western part of the range in April-May 2008<sup>5</sup>.

## **2.2 Planning and organisation of the expedition**

The logistics for the expedition were planned by consulting articles and reports from previous expeditions to the Kyrgyzstan – China border area (e.g. refs. 3-8) and receiving helpful advice from Constantinos Andreou, Andrew Barrett, Es Tresidder and several acquaintances who had previously travelled to Kyrgyzstan. Several sources recommended ITMC (<http://www.itmc.centralasia.kg/ALP.htm>) as a reputable and reliable company to provide transport, sat. phone etc and arrange border permits for expeditions such as ours. We found them to be trustworthy and reliable and would recommend them to other expeditions. Two of the previous expeditions to the Torugart-Too mountains (the ISM expedition and Andreou & Barrett's expedition in 2007) had used ITMC for transport and had been able to access a suitable basecamp site in 2 days driving from Bishkek, 1½ days on-road and ½ a day off-road. This was therefore also the plan that we made.

John Proctor attended lessons to learn some Russian beforehand (Russian is the main second language in Kyrgyzstan, and is very widely spoken). Attempts to speak Russian whilst in Kyrgyzstan met with a variable degree of success, but the time

invested in learning some Russian was definitely time well spent. It is something that we would recommend other expeditions to do, as even if you only learn the alphabet it will enable you to recognise place names, food names, and words which sound similar in Russian and English, but which you would otherwise be unable to recognise due to the different alphabet – e.g. passport (паспорт), tooalet (туалет), Aeroport (аэропорт), yoghoort (йогурт), stop (стоп), addressoo (адресу) and visa (виза).

Unfortunately, only 2 days after we booked our flight there was a violent revolution in Kyrgyzstan, in which president Bakiyev was ousted and replaced by an interim government led by Rosa Otunbayeva. This led to the Foreign Office advising against “all but essential” travel to Kyrgyzstan. Fortunately this restriction was lifted a month or so later. Had it remained in place, the expedition could not have taken place as the only affordable insurer we could find (the BMC) does not insure for travel to countries that the Foreign Office advises against visiting. Large-scale ethnic violence erupted in Kyrgyzstan in June, but this was confined throughout to Osh oblast (province) in the south-west of the country, so did not cause any issues for us as the Torugart-Too mountains are not located in Osh oblast.

## **3 The Expedition**

### **3.1 Travel to base camp**

We travelled from Edinburgh to London on the sleeper train on the evening of 21<sup>st</sup> July, and flew from Heathrow to Bishkek with BMI on 22<sup>nd</sup> July. After packing the evening before, we had weighed our baggage and calculated how much excess baggage we would have. The answer was £450, and after we had recovered from this trauma we repacked, leaving out anything that may have made us comfortable whilst in Kyrgyzstan. Robert then did a good job of putting his foot under each bag on the scales at the airport and no excess baggage needed to be paid. On our return the check-in staff at Bishkek noticed us doing this and charged us 235 Euros in excess baggage. However, due to a miraculous malfunctioning of modern technology the money never left John’s account.

It is worth noting, however, that Aeroflot charge less for excess baggage allowance than BMI. When we checked fares they were significantly more expensive than BMI but this may not always be the case.

Our schedule allowed for 2 days in Bishkek at the start of the expedition to buy food for our 2 weeks at base camp, collect and test the camping gas and satellite phone etc. Most of the food shopping was done at Osh bazaar and Dordoy bazaar in Bishkek, which have all the basics available very cheaply. A few more upmarket items were purchased at Narodniy supermarket. We purchased 5kg bags of pasta very cheaply at the bazaars, but discovered when we first tried to cook them that the pasta emitted a powdery sauce-like substance that tasted like cardboard and had the consistency of plaster of paris. It didn’t make enjoyable eating, and we would advise future expeditions to test their pasta before departing for base camp! The only foods brought from the UK were small quantities of specialist foods such as freeze-dried meals, energy gels etc.

Whilst shopping in Osh bazaar we were intercepted by a group of policemen, taken to a nearby police station and searched. It is a common problem in Kyrgyzstan, which we had read all about prior to the expedition, for the police to take visitors passports then extract a bribe in return for the return of the passports. Being polite but not letting go of the passport worked, and we were released without any bribes being extracted.



After a day's driving we reached the town of Naryn, where we stayed overnight in bed & breakfast accommodation booked by ITMC. The next day we reached the military checkpoint controlling access to the area near the Chinese border. Our border permit was presented to the soldiers and we were allowed through. We rounded a corner and, for the first time, we could see the Torugart-Too mountains in front of us. We left the road to drive as close as possible to our planned basecamp site and were confronted with a problem. We needed to cross a river (photograph 3), which was too deep for our vehicle (see map, 4.3). 2 previous expeditions had crossed this river in a 4WD vehicle, but they had visited later in the summer. Perhaps the river is lower then?



Photograph 3. River crossing to reach base camp. Adam Russell.

We stayed overnight near the river, local nomads who lived nearby kindly offered us tea, flatbread and jam. We were also introduced to Koumys. Koumys is Kyrgyzstan's national drink, and is very highly regarded there. It is fermented unpasteurised horse's milk, and as such none of us enjoyed drinking it. Having read numerous stories beforehand of its horrific effects on the digestive systems of other western visitors to Kyrgyzstan, we decided that rather than waiting to get ill we would take some ciprofloxacin from the first aid kit prophylactically. None of us got that ill, so it seemed to work...

We hired horses from the nomads to make the remainder of the journey (4-5 km) to a suitable base camp site. This did, however, leave us with a remaining problem. We had planned that our driver would guard our basecamp against pilfering whilst we climbed, but this would no longer be possible unless he left the vehicle unguarded. Therefore, we had to take it in turns to climb as a team of 2 whilst 1 of us guarded the basecamp.

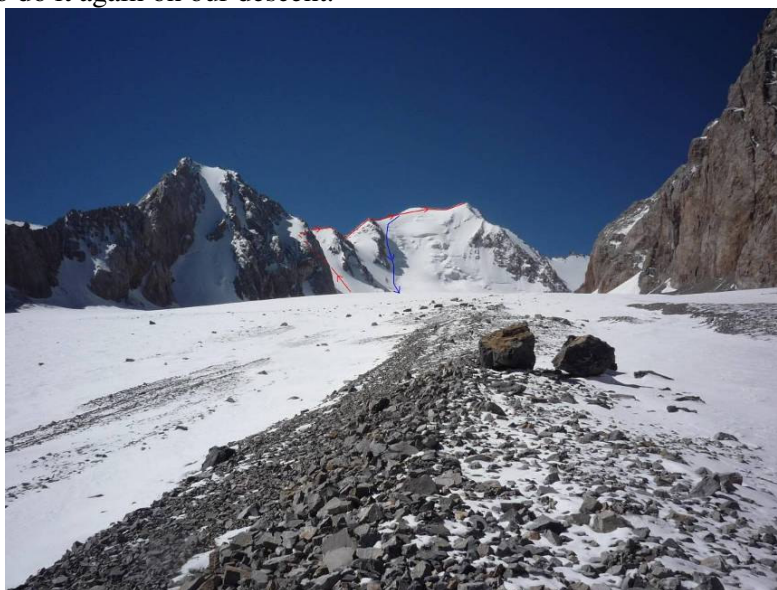
### **3.2 Acclimatization**

To acclimatize, we took it in turns to climb 3 peaks around the ~4500m mark on the opposite side of the valley from our basecamp (3743m). These peaks were climbed in 2007 by Constantinos Andreou and Andrew Barrett<sup>4</sup> and named Little Sister, Middle Sister (check!) and Big Sister (see map, 4.3). Andreou and Barrett climbed in October – in July when we visited the ascent was a straightforward hillwalk and excellent acclimatization. Adam guarded basecamp whilst myself and Robert went

for a walk, then myself and Robert guarded the basecamp whilst Adam went for a walk. We had hoped to get views up the glacier to the east of Mustyr to see possible routes on Mustyr and the unclimbed 5000m peak at the head of this glacier, but all we got were occasional partial views through the mist. Our first ascents are now described in chronological order.

### 3.3 First ascent – Mur Samir

For our first first ascent, myself and Robert decided to have a look at the mountain marked Pt. 5008m on the Russian map (section 4.3). It is the peak at the head of the glacier east of Mustyr. Our ascent route was AD, descent route PD. Here is the reason - as you can see below (photograph 4), the main face of the mountain has séracs. From the limited and distant views we had had of the mountain before our ascent, it appeared that these séracs could not be avoided. Hence, as shown, we climbed up the broad couloir on the left and traversed the ridge to reach the summit. The ridge traverse took longer than we thought it would, made worse by the fact that we chose the wrong couloir in the mist, giving us an even longer ridge traverse. Most of the ridge traverse was easy snow, but there were also sections of scrambling, thin and brittle ice. When we neared the summit the weather cleared and we could see down the main face. We could see that, in fact, there is plenty of space to descend the eastern side of the main face staying well clear of the séracs. It was frustrating to find out that our lengthy ridge traverse had been unnecessary, but also a relief that we did not have to do it again on our descent.



Photograph 4. Mur Samir, with topo. Ascent route is in red, descent route is in blue. John Proctor.

Mustyr was already named prior to the visit of the ISM expedition in 2007<sup>3</sup>. However, the ISM expedition named their other first ascents. Since the ISM expedition included staff who speak Kyrgyz and Russian, if other mountains in the range had an existing name this would have been known to them and recorded. Subsequent expeditions have also named the first ascents they made<sup>4,5</sup>. We chose the name “Mur Samir”. “Mur”, we were told by the local nomads, is a Kyrgyz word for Marmot. The Torugart-Too is absolutely overrun by these animals. The full name refers to the mountain in eastern Afghanistan “Mir Samir” made famous by Eric

Newby in his book “A short walk in the Hindu Kush”. In addition, “Samir” is an Arabic word meaning friend or faithful companion. Hence “Mur Samir” could be taken to mean “the friendly marmot”. It is a pun that works on many different levels.

### **3.4 First ascent – Pik Karyshkyr**

For our second first ascent, Adam and Robert climbed a peak towards the northern end of the Mustyr ridge. The route commenced from the glacier to the east of Mustyr and took a couloir to a col, then snow/ice slopes to the summit. Scottish I/II, Alpine PD+. Substantial stonefall was encountered.



Photograph 5. Pik Karyshkyr topos. Left – from east. Right – from west. Adam Russell.

The name “Pik Karyshkyr” was chosen. “Karyshkyr” is Kyrgyz for wolf, and was chosen because the local nomads had been having a lot of problems with wolves recently (see section 4).



Photograph 6. Pik Karyshkyr from our basecamp site, to the north. John Proctor.



### 3.5 First ascent – False Pik

For our last first ascent Adam and myself had hoped to try the attractive peak to the left (north east) of Mur Samir in photograph 4. However, the river crossing which myself and Robert had had to make above our basecamp to get to the glacier leading to Mur Samir was now impossible as the river had risen significantly. So we diverted our attentions to the glacier to the west of the Mustyr glacier (the Teke-lutor glacier). This is the most well-explored of the 3 main glaciers, probably due to the fact that no difficult river crossings are required to reach it. However, the main peak between this glacier and the Mustyr glacier was still unclimbed (it had defeated an attempt by the ISM expedition<sup>3</sup>). We climbed a 700m (according to GPS) snow and ice slope (AD, Scottish II/III) leading to what had looked like the summit from the glacier below. However when we arrived here we found that this was only a subsidiary summit, and that the real summit was hidden from view by a ridge traverse for which we did not have the time or gear (we had only taken basic ice climbing gear, - screws, quickdraws and short slings).



Photograph 7. Our route up Pik False, from the west. Adam Russell.

### 3.6 Travel back to UK

Travel back to the UK was without incident, except for the delay to our flight which resulted in new train tickets needing to be purchased... We had a day sightseeing in Bishkek, where we were able to visit all the sites we recognised from the BBC coverage of the revolution in April – Ala-Too square, the presidential palace, Tsum department store etc. There are also several outdoor shops selling very cheap gear.

## 4 Miscellaneous

Food was distributed between 3 caches near to our base camp site due to the risk of being visited by wolves – the thinking being that if they discovered one of the 3 caches we would only lose 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of our food, instead of all of it. Small piles of stones and ice axes were kept in / next to the porches of our tents in case we were visited during the night. Our driver, Hassan, did not seem to think that these measures would be effective, but he did not have any other ideas. We took a Jetboil for use while



bivvying high up (ITMC supplied gas canisters) and a petrol stove for use at basecamp.

Rubbish was carried out from our basecamp to the vehicle, upon which Hassan (our driver) decided that it should be buried there rather than disposed of properly. Our Russian did not stretch to explaining the environmental arguments against burying our rubbish there, so eventually we gave in to this demand. We would suggest that future expeditions make clear their opposition to burying rubbish in-situ before leaving Bishkek, while still in contact with English speakers at the ITMC (or other company) office.

The satellite phone had very poor reception, and we were not that far away from normal mobile phone reception.

We would like to thank a number of people for providing us with advice about most aspects of the expedition, translating things for us, showing us photos, agreeing to act as referees for funding applications and lending us equipment:

Constantinos Andreou, Andrew Barrett, Tom Barraclough, Eddy Barratt, Dr. Stuart Blair, Paul Diffley, Dr. Steven Fortune, Krzysztof Gorgolewski, Dr. Eugene Gregoryanz, Harry Holmes, Vladimir Komissarov, Lyndsey Mackay, Ondrej Mandula, Tony Stone, Es Tressider.

We would also like to thank our sponsors, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland/SportScotland, and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust (via the Sang Award), for much needed money to fund the expedition (see accounts, 4.2). We also tried for commercial sponsorship, but the only result of these efforts was a box of flapjacks from the Fabulous Bakin' Boys (they were very good flapjacks though).

We publicised our expedition afterwards by means of Alpinist magazine's online newswire<sup>9</sup>, UKClimbing.com<sup>10</sup>, the BMC's website<sup>11</sup>, alpkite.com<sup>12</sup> and a blog<sup>13</sup>. We also got the back page of Edinburgh University's student paper. A report was written for the 2010 American Alpine Journal<sup>14</sup>.

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#### **4.1 Medical / 1<sup>st</sup> aid provisions**

A first aid kit was compiled using information from reports written by other expeditions (e.g. Refs. 6-8), the Cicerone book "Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine", and advice from John Proctor's GP, Dr. Stuart Blair. Here is what we took:

##### ***Medicines***

- Painkillers – Declofenac (strongest), Ibuprofen, Paracetamol, Aspirin
- Altitude-related illnesses – Diamox for emergency use.
- Metronidazole (antibiotic - main treatment for suspected giardia)
- Ciprofloxacin (antibiotic - main treatment for bacterial diarrhoea or suspected typhoid)
- Piriton (antihistamine)

- Imodium
- Sennocot
- ORS (Oral Rehydration Solution) – Dioralyte
- Insect repellent
- High factor suncream
- Domperidone (anti-nausea)

### ***Instruments***

- Tweezers
- Safety pins
- Protective gloves
- scissors

### ***Dressings & Wound care***

- Plasters of different sizes
- Plaster tape
- Blister covers
- Gauze squares, absorbent pads, wound dressings of various sizes
- Bandages, slings
- Duct tape
- Sealed antiseptic wipes

Chlorine tablets and a water filter were also taken for treatment of drinking water whilst in towns and cities. We would take a similar first aid kit again, but would probably include some treatments for snow blindness in addition, as John did suffer from snow-blindness at one point – thankfully whilst back at base camp after finishing the route.

We all took ciprofloxacin on various occasions, Adam took Diamox the evening before the first ascent of Pik Karyshkyr and John hurt his knee badly during a river crossing early in the expedition – and thereafter needed to take Declofenac in order to walk any reasonable distance.

Malaria is not found in south-eastern Kyrgyzstan, where the Torugart-Too mountains are located, but is found in and around the capital city, Bishkek. The city has a lot of stagnant water and hence mosquitoes. It is therefore worth taking anti-malarial medication even if you only intend to be in the capital city for a few days.

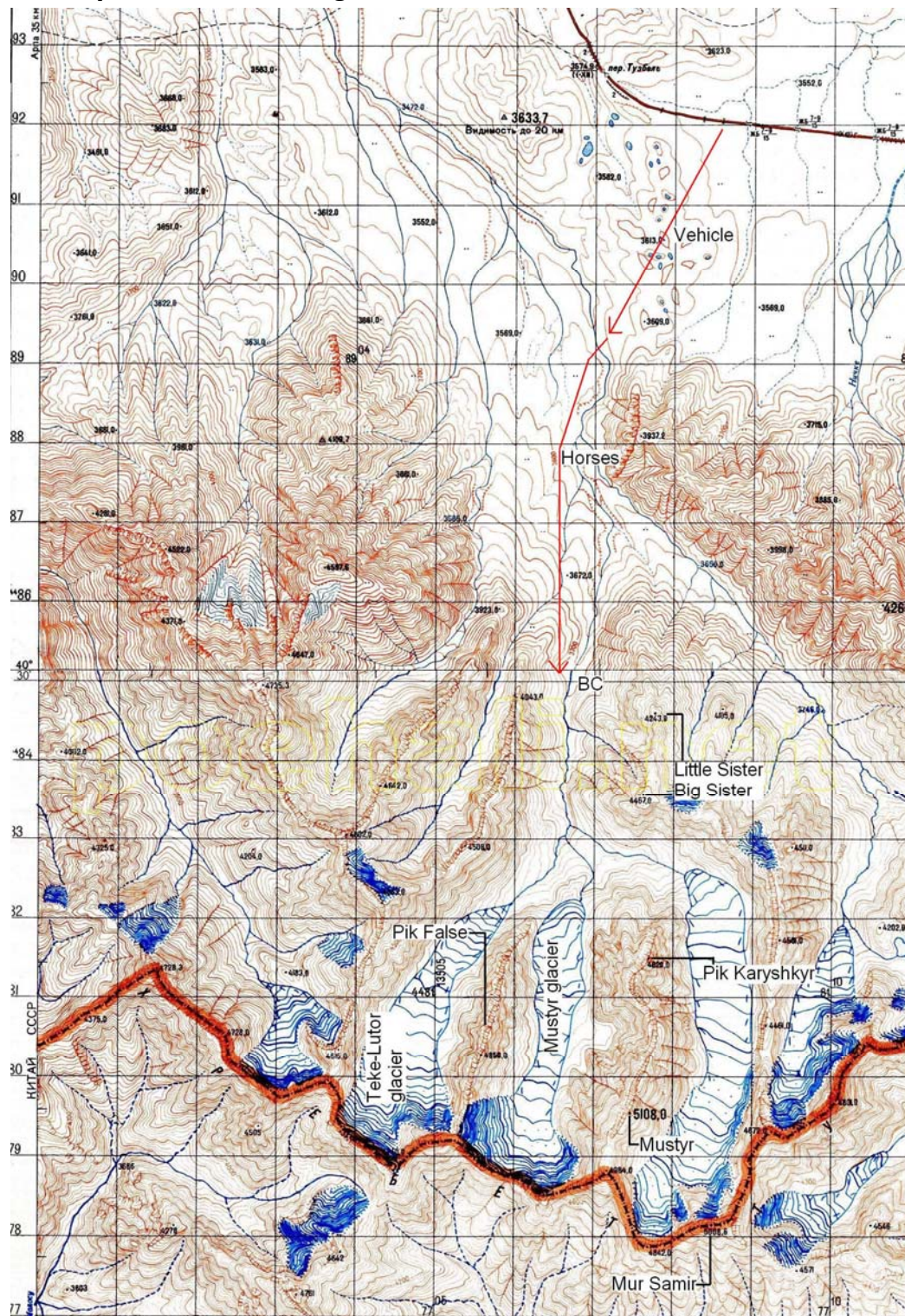
## 4.2 Accounts

Item	Cost
<b>Transport</b>	
Vehicle hire + petrol	£965.13
Flights	£1,830.00
Train travel in UK	£252.80
Airport transfers in Kyrgyzstan	£54.57
<b>Accommodation</b>	
Accommodation in Bishkek (guest house)	£103.67
Accommodation in Naryn (home stay)	£51.16
<b>Food</b>	
Spending in Kyrgyzstan*	£553.89
Food brought from UK	£124.99
<b>Insurance</b>	£617.64
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	
Satellite phone hire + credit	£21.83
Camping gas	£43.65
Border permits	£53.56
Medical - First aid kit, suncream etc	£83.66
Presents/bribes	£40.00
Miscellaneous (notebook, batteries)	£6.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£4,802.55</b>
<b>Income</b>	
MCofS expedition bursary	£500.00
Sang award	£250.00
Expenditure – Income	£4,052.55
<b>Cost per expedition member</b>	<b>£1,350.85</b>

\* The item “food spending in Kyrgyzstan” was produced by adding up how many pounds we had all changed into dollars and then into som (Kyrgyzstan’s currency), then deducting the money we had spent on individual souvenirs (Kalpaks, “Kyrgyzstan” T-shirts etc). As such it also includes petrol for our petrol stove at base camp, taxi fares around Bishkek etc.



### 4.3 Map and GPS readings



Map showing principal peaks and glaciers of the Torugart-Too mountains, our base camp location etc. From [www.poezali.org](http://www.poezali.org)

GPS readings:

3743m Base Camp  
4342m Bivvy Spot before Mur Samir climb  
4419m Bottom of route on Mur Samir  
5035m Mur Samir  
4836m Pik Karyshkyr  
4801m Pik next to Pik Helen  
4243m Bivvy spot beneath Pik Helen and Pik False

## 5 References

1. <http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web07-08w/newswire-ism-tien-shan-littlejohn>
2. [http://skitalets.ru/foot/2007/tyanshan\\_lipin/](http://skitalets.ru/foot/2007/tyanshan_lipin/) (In Russian)
3. 2008 American Alpine Journal. p. 302.
4. 2008 American Alpine Journal, p. 304.
5. 2009 American Alpine Journal, p. 243.
- 6 – 8 See reports on previous Scottish expeditions to Kyrgyzstan online at <http://www.mcofs.org.uk/expedition-reports.asp>
9. <http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web10f/newswire-kyrgyzstan-exploration>
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