

# Elbrus

# 2010







Sunset at Uncle Nicks Hut © digilbert

*"What's Millet?"*

*"It's what you would normally give to your budgie to eat" Di to Derek when trying to determine what dinner is that evening.*

### Introduction

Without speaking to friends, I would have never even thought about climbing Elbrus from the North Side. Without the valuable advice from both Alison Culshaw and Bruce Goodlad, this trip would have been an utter nightmare to organise. This was to be Di's Seventh Summit and she had decided that she did not want to work on the Expedition. In the end it was a 2 person team and our Russian NewRoute Guide Kirill Ivanov.

### The North Versus The South

I will be brutally honest and say that I have heard very little good things about Elbrus – with the exception of the views on summit day – with much mention of rubbish dumps and clumsy climbers. We were both expecting to have a fairly unenjoyable time on the mountain but to our surprise we found the North Side of Elbrus to be fantastic. Very few people (apparently 200+ summits per day from the south on good weather days compared to 1000+ summits per season from the north), very little rubbish, amazing views and friendly people.

### UK Planning:

To be honest, the planning, compared to other expeditions that I have been involved in, was minimal.

We researched loads of companies and decided that we would go with NewRoute (<http://www.marchroute.com/>). They provided a good service and ensured that visa applications and invitation letters were dealt with accordingly. I think it would be highly impractical to try and attempt climbing Elbrus without a Russian interpreter/guide. Just make sure that your guide can speak English ☺

The Russian Visa application process turned out to be the biggest nightmare, resulting in a day trip to Edinburgh. The correct website address is <http://ru.vfsglobal.co.uk/> . The visa cost is £80.00 per person.

International flights were arranged through Aeroflot ([http://www.aeroflot.ru/templates/index\\_en/](http://www.aeroflot.ru/templates/index_en/)), with the assumption that if anything went wrong, we were flying with the same carrier. We flew from Aberdeen to Heathrow with BA and then transferred to Aeroflot for Heathrow to Moscow-Sheremetyevo and onwards to Mineralnye Vody. Domestic flights were c.£120.00 per person and international flights were c.650 Euro's per person.

By flying out of Heathrow in the evening, this avoids any expensive overnight costs in Moscow. We departed Heathrow at 2230 and arrived into Mineralnye Vody at 1400 due to the time differences. The flights are only 4 hours and 2 hours 15 minutes.

We allowed quite a bit of time between flights in Russia to allow for any problems. This proved to be a smart move since on every single flight we had delays from either computer breakdowns, baggage problems and aircraft problems.



### Mineralnie Vody & Pyatigorsk:

We flew into Mineralnie Vody and were met by both Kirill and Uncle Nick who transferred us the 30km to Pyatigorsk and the \*\*\* Intourist hotel.

*“Pyatigorsk is the oldest resort among the group of health resorts of the Caucasian Mineral Waters. A good combination of curative springs of Mt.Mashuk, the highly effective medicinal muds of Lake Tambukan, the favourable climatic conditions and the wonderful landscapes contributed to the development of the city as a health resort” **Tourist Literature.***

### Accommodation:

We stayed at the \*\*\* Intourist Hotel in Pyatigorsk. Normal standards applied here.

At Hathansu Base Camp we were accommodated in mountain tents, with a dining tent, and when at Uncle Nick's Hut we were living in the original 'Uncle Nick Hut.' The limited provision of toilet tents and the inability for individuals to aim properly provided the normal eye-rolling that occurs on mountain trips.

### Communications:

WiFi is available in Moscow airport and Pyatigorsk. We managed to get Orange Mobile signal for the majority of the trip apart from when on the actual mountain.

### Food:

Excellent food is available in Pyatigorsk.

All camp food was provided by NewRoute and, to be honest, wasn't particularly inspiring. The meals were the same and whatever wasn't eaten/finished would reappear every time until it was finally finished. When staying at Uncle Nicks Hut, Vova provided excellent meals considering where we were. Lots of porridge, soups, stews, cheese, spam type ham, muesli and sweeties.



Uncle Nicks Hut © digilbert

### Weather:

The weather follows a general trend of being nice in the morning and then turning cloudy and rainy in the afternoon – if you are lucky. Other days it will remain wet all day. We hadn't really expected this.

There is no way of obtaining an accurate weather forecast on the mountain (unless you have your own facility) and the reports we got seemed to be best guessed if that.

### Summit Day:

We departed at 0230 for our summit attempt being the first team to depart. The snow was firm up to Lenz rock but not long after leaving Lenz rock, we encountered unconsolidated snow and later heavy, wet snow.

We marked the route from Lenz Rock to the Saddle with GPS. It took us 4 hours to get to the saddle – it is miles away. From the North side of the saddle we did a long traverse to join up with the south route.

We took 11 hours to get to the West Summit – many teams who apparently attempt Elbrus from the North will attempt the East Summit which is closer – having to put in the trail. It took us about 4 hours to bumble back into camp.

For being apparently a really easy summit to achieve, it wasn't :)

### Financial:

Costs are mentioned throughout this little report.

There are plenty of ATM's in Pyiatigorsk.

Once you leave Pyiatigorsk for the mountain there is nothing to spend your money on – except any tips and beer at the hut (if you are lucky).

Everything in Pyiatigorsk is pretty cheap.



Looking down to Hathansu base camp © digilbert



#### Actual Itinerary:

Note: all timings include photo stops, food breaks, sunbathing etc etc – i.e. we were on holiday ☺

1	Tue 13 July	Fly Abz – Heathrow – Moscow
2	Wed 14 July	Fly Moscow – Mineralnye Vody. Drive to Pyatigorsk (40mins)
3	Thurs 15 July	Drive 6 hours to Hathansu Base Camp (2500m) (early departure for river crossing).
4	Fri 16 July	Acclimatisation walk up to Mushroom Valley (3016m) and onto what we called cloud top (3440m)
5	Sat 17 July	Move up to Uncle Nicks Hut (3623m). 5 hours.
6	Sun 18 July	Acclimatisation to Lenz Rocks (4600m). 3 hours.
7	Mon 19 July	Rest Day.
8	Tues 20 July	Summit Day (11 hours up + 4 hours return).
9	Wed 21 July	Spare Day.
10	Thurs 22 July	Head down to Hathansu Base Camp.
11	Friday 23 July	Drive to Pyatigorsk
12	Sat 24 July	Fly Mineralnye Vody – Moscow – Heathrow.
13	Sun 25 July	Fly Heathrow – Abz.

#### Equipment:

We pretty much took Alpine PD equipment which included our own rope.

#### Thanks:

Big thanks to Ali and Bruce <http://www.mountainadventurecompany.com/> for inspiring us to climb Elbrus from the north.

A huge thanks to a group of special people who made Derek & Di's trip very special – you know who you are ☺

Big thanks to Scarpa, Grivel, Deuter and Edelrid as always.