

**11024  
WYCAWIN**



## During the summer of 2001, Di Gilbert led the successful Adventure Peaks Expedition to the summit of Muztag Ata (7546m), China.

We were a small team compared to others on the mountain; Jim M, Mari V, Duncan M, Chris H with Jason taking up the role of Base Camp Manager.

### The approach

Muztag Ata can be approached by 2 routes - Pakistan or Kyrgystan. Due to many reasons Adventure Peaks approached via the latter.

### Flights

International flights to Bishkek can be found easily on the web and prices will vary.

### Bishkek

Bishkek is one of the youngest capitals of the former Soviet Union and is the capital of the Republic of Kyrgystan. A modern city with vast squares, crowded bazaars, impressive administrative centres and educational institutions. A city of wide boulevards and marble-faced public buildings combined with numerous soviet-style apartment blocks. The city sits at c.800m just off the fringe of the Kyrgyz Ala-Too range, an extension of the famous Tien Shan mountain range and provides a spectacular backdrop to the city. There is plenty of accommodation to suit all wallet sizes, restaurants which provide

impressive dishes, supermarkets to purchase last minute food and money exchange facilities.

If you travel through Bishkek during the month of Ramadhan, you will probably not be able to buy beer - not very good if you heading home after a successful expedition.

There are roughly 73 Soms to £1.00 and it will roughly cost around 200 - 250 Soms for a good evening meal.

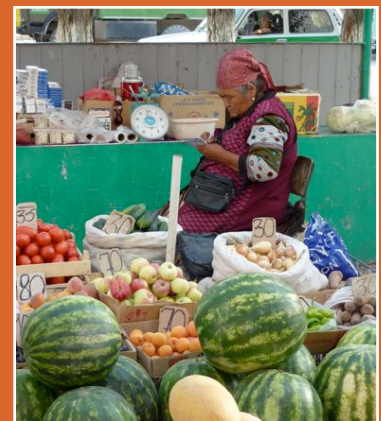
### From Kyrgystan to China

From Bishkek you drive along a well maintained highway for about 5 hours to Lake Issyk Kul to the east. You will leave the comfort of the tarmac, drive over the Dolon Pass (c.3000m) before dropping down to the small town on Naryn (c.2800m). Not much really to do here but if you find the same guest house that we used, you will have some excellent hearty home cooking. Great open views with the first signs of original yurts.

From Naryn, you can now look forward to a very long day as you leave Kyrgystan and slowly, very slowly enter China. There are very little, if not no facilities until you are well and truly into China, so it might be worth picking up a few nibbles in Naryn - if nothing to pass some time.

This season there are major roadworks from Naryn to the border. This is expected to be finished for next year.

# KYRGYSTAN



### the facts

population: 5.5 million

capital: bishkek

area: 77,182 sq miles

language: kyrgyz & russian

religions: islam & christianity

major exports: fruit, vegetables, gold & tobacco

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# KASHGAR



## the facts

the westernmost city of China and is under the administration of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Regions

it borders Taklimakan Desert to the east, the Karakoram range to the south, the Pamirs to the west and Tien Shan to the north

population: 3.83 million

## Kashgar

This is an amazing city and only on return from the mountain, and having a day to become sightseeing tourists, do you really appreciate it. A city where old meets new (and sadly it looks like new is winning); a city with Asia's largest bazaar; a city bringing together a mixture of ethnic cultures.

An abundance of accommodation, shops, supermarkets - think about a growing, modern city and you're there.

Kashgar works on Beijing time (+2 hours from Bishkek) so make sure you confirm if you are working on local time or Beijing time.

It took us a long time to reach Kashgar - we departed Naryn at 0600 and arrived at 2100. There are roughly 10 Yuan to £1.00 and it will cost hardly anything to about 150 Yuan for a good slap up meal.

## From Kashgar - Subashi

Another long day driving to Subashi via the Karakoram Highway taking you through an impressive mining gorge and through many roadworks. After about 200km's you will reach Karakul Lake (c.3600m), the highest lake of the Pamir plateau. Surrounded by Muztag Ata (7546m), Kongur Tagh (7649m) and Kongur Tiube (7530m), the lake is popular with travellers.

Most expeditions will spend the evening in a stone built yurt before setting off to base camp the following day.

## To base camp

The walk to base camp will take anything from 3 - 5 hours, depending on how many photo opportunities there are. There is a little river to cross after about 5 km whose size will vary depending on the recent weather conditions.

Most expeditions will use local camels to transport their equipment to base camp, although vehicles can travel up the dusty track to camp without too many difficulties.

All of the teams at Base Camp employ a Chinese Agency to organise logistics. This would seem to be essential for actually getting to the mountain through China, let alone stepping foot on the mountain itself.

There are very little facilities at base camp and this season, resembled a dust pan and not a grassy meadow as in previous seasons.

There is a communal toilet which is currently been replaced by a more modern looking structure. Despite this, there is crap everywhere.

Apart from a few local families who relocate to base camp for the climbing season, and will provide a porter service if desired there isn't much to do.

Water comes off the hills from above via pipes (can sometimes taste the plastic) and if you are



## The mountain

Climbers for Muztag Ata will fall into 2 clear categories: those who plan to ski and those who plan to curse and swear at snow shoes. We joined the latter category.

Muztag Ata appears to be a very popular mountain with European ski mountaineers. We were the only British company on the mountain and there was no North American groups present whilst we were there.

People will obviously have their own tactics for climbing Muztag Ata, but this is our actual itinerary:

- Day 1 - Depart UK
- Day 2 - Arrive Bishkek, Kyrgystan
- Day 3 - Bishkek - Naryn
- Day 4 - Naryn - Kashgar, China
- Day 5 - Kashgar - Subashi
- Day 6 - Trek to Base Camp
- Day 7 - Preparations & Acclimitisation
- Day 8 - Load carry to Camp 1
- Day 9 - Load carry to Camp 1
- Day 10 - Move to Camp 1
- Day 11 - Acclimitisation
- Day 12 - Load carry to Camp 2
- Day 13 - Acclimitisation
- Day 14 - Load carry to Camp 2
- Day 15 - Move to Camp 2
- Day 16 - Acclimitisation
- Day 17 - Carry to Camp 3
- Day 18 - Return to Base Camp
- Day 19 - Rest at Base Camp
- Day 20 - Base camp - Camp 1
- Day 21 - Camp 1 - Camp 2
- Day 22 - Camp 2 - Camp 3
- Day 23 - Camp 3 - Summit - Camp 3
- Day 24 - Camp 3 - Camp 1
- Day 25 - Camp 1 - Base Camp
- Day 26 - Base Camp - Kashgar
- Day 27 - Kashgar
- Day 28 - Karshgar, Naryn
- Day 29 - Naryn - Bishkek
- Day 30 - Depart Bishkek

Muztag Ata is a non technical mountain but it is high. Part of the success of being able to summit is having the mental willpower to remain focussed at the correct time. Lets be perfectly honest here, it is rather dull and boring walking up and down the same route day after day. It is amazing how many people do not summit on this mountain. Even those who remain fit and healthy, have acclimitised well, have access to weather (the weather is pretty unsettled out here) forecasts and have all the pieces in jigsaw in the right place, will find this a hard mountain to climb.

We opted to return to base camp for a decent rest before attempting the summit.

## The Route

Base camp (4450m) to camp 1 is basically a long ridge with a pretty well defined path winding up it. It took us 4 hours to ascend on our first attempt, which was slowly whittled down to about 3. It is possible to hire mules at a cost of approx \$3 per kilo. The camp is situated just below the glacier line and we had to melt snow for water for the duration of the trip. Camp 1 is littered with crap and rubbish. Camp 1 is roughly 5400m.

Many people refer to the terrain between Camp 1 and Camp 2 as the crux of the route. If you call having to pass through some small crevasses the crux, so be it. Personally, I felt that summit day was the crux of the route. The terrain to Camp 2 is nothing more than snow & ice walking with one section of crevasses to negotiate. It took us 6 hours to complete our first carry and this time reduced the more we acclimitised. Camp 2 is located in a nice flat sheltered area below an obvious gradient change. If you think Camp 1 was dirty, Camp 2 was disgusting. There was litter and human waste all around camp. In fact, I think that this has to be one of the dirtiest mountains I have been on with no regard to the environment.

Camp 2 is roughly 6100m. It is possible to get porters to carry your equipment to Camp 2 at a cost of approx \$15 per kilo. There were a few camps between Camp 2 and Camp 3, named as Camp 2.5. Personally speaking, I feel that camping below Camp 3 would make summit day too long for commercial expedition on snow shoes. We opted to use the traditional Camp 3 which seemed a very lonely and quiet place at times. There seemed to be a very big difference in temperature between Camp 2 and Camp 3 and it did seem to snow more. It took us 6 hours to load carry to Camp 3 on the first time.

Camp 3 is roughly 6780m. It is possible to get porters to carry your equipment to Camp 3 at a cost of approx \$23 per kilo. All porter costs seem to cost the same in descent as ascent and many of the porters do not have the appropriate equipment or clothing.

We had planned to have an early departure for summit day, but the weather was not agreeing with this. As a result, we did not depart for the

# MUZTAG ATA



## Acclimitisation versus Rest

*"There is no such thing as resting on big peaks....it is called acclimitisation and normally involves a long lie, some good tunes and a good book." Di Gilbert*

summit until 10am. The route to the summit is gradual but seems to go on forever. We encountered complete white out conditions with a light wind and snow fall thus resulting in a zero view from the summit. Jim and Di did not reach the summit until 1830 and took about 2 hours to descend to Camp 3.

### The weather

Our weather seemed to be rather unsettled but I am not sure if this is normal or not. We would normally have good weather in the morning and then it would deteriorate as the day went on. We opted for early departures (to be honest they were late departures but compared to everyone else on the mountain, they were early) which meant we benefitted from the firm snow.

### Equipment

I used the Adventure Peaks equipment list as a guideline. As a team we did have a lot of tents with us so that we could move up the mountain without having the flaff of dismantling lower camps. Being a big mountain, it is cold and you should therefore have appropriate clothing.

I fully recommend the following brands:

Scarpa

Grivel

Deuter

Outdoor Research

Lorpen

Edelrid

Strongly recommend a GPS for summit day, since I did mark numerous points in ascent and relied on them in descent.

### Thanks

Thanks to Dave Pritt at Adventure Peaks who, once again, came up trumps with another excellent expedition for Di to get her teeth into. Thanks to both Stu Peacock and Maddy back in Ambleside who provided the light hearted banter and, more importantly, the weather forecast when asked for. A big thanks must go to the guys (& gal) who joined in the laughs and shared the experience and finally to Derek, back home, who watered the house plants and fed the tomatoes in the greenhouse.

### Blatant advertising

Adventure Peaks Worldwide mountaineering offers one of the most extensive programmes of Expeditions and Courses for walkers and climbers provided by any British expedition company. Their aim is to offer something for all levels and abilities.

For more information on Adventure Peaks visit [www.adventurepeaks.com](http://www.adventurepeaks.com).



Di Gilbert Mountaineering has been providing mountaineering instruction and guiding worldwide since 1993. Di first worked for Adventure Peaks in 2004 when she led their successful Cho Oyo (8201m) Expedition.

Since then she has worked with them on Mount Everest (8848m), Khan Tengri (6995m), Carstensz Pyramid (4884m) & Aconcagua (6962m).

For more information on Di Gilbert Mountaineering visit [www.digilbert.co.uk](http://www.digilbert.co.uk).



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