



AAC Publications

Four First Ascents in the Fergana Range

Kyrgyzstan, Fergana Range

From July 12 to August 10, our team of five British climbers explored Kyrgyzstan's relatively unknown Fergana Range, summiting four unclimbed peaks. We had planned to visit the Torugart-Too, but after discussions with ITMC (a Kyrgyz logistics company) we decided on the more remote Fergana. The Fergana runs southeast to northwest, west of the Torugart-Too, skirting the southern edge of the sparsely populated Arpa Valley.

Alasdair Anderson, Thomas Nunns, Sam Ring, Nicolas Weir, and I had just graduated university, and with a good amount of alpine and Scottish winter experience behind us, we were keen to explore beyond our mountaineering horizons. The Fergana had been visited by the expeditions of Dmitry Shapovalov (2007) and Mark Weeding (2010 and 2011). Shapovalov's team summited Uch-Seit (4,905m), the highest peak in the range, whilst Weeding had a fruitful expedition to the southeastern part of the range in 2010. Many peaks were still unclimbed.

Our first days in Kyrgyzstan consisted of trekking in the Ala-Archa National Park south of Bishkek. We departed for the Fergana Range on July 19. It took a day and a half of road driving and another 24 hours off-road (including an overnight stop on the western bank of the Karakol River) to reach base camp. Our driver pulled off some impressive maneuvers crossing rivers and rugged terrain to get us to the base of a glacier that is a main source for the Karakoman River.

Base camp was situated close to the river, about an hour's walk from the bottom of the glacier (which we called the Karakoman), at an approximate elevation of 3,320m (40°41'4"N, 74°27'4" E). Over the next three weeks we trekked to the nearby valleys, foothills, and rivers, exploring the glaciers, peaks, and ridgelines above camp.

At our camp it barely fell below 0°C at night. This meant the snow had little chance to recover from the blazing daytime sun. Consequently, the snow was often slushy and sometimes quite unstable. By 8 a.m. the dry portion of the glacier was a maze of fast-flowing streams cascading into the Karakoman River. Little wonder the rivers running into the Arpa Valley were so powerful and difficult to cross. We recommend future expeditions visit the range in late August or September, when, hopefully, the snow will be in better condition.

We summited four notable peaks (all elevations and coordinates are per the Soviet military map):

Joru (4,300m, 40°41'9"N, E 74°26'3"E, F). Sam and I reached this summit, an easy trekking peak at the north end of a chain of peaks accessed via the foothills above our base camp. We followed the northern ridge with huge amounts of loose rock and scree that made for a tiring ascent. Near the top there were several snowfields, and the summit offered spectacular views of the neighboring glacier as well as our own. Joru is Kyrgyz for "vulture," of which we regularly saw large numbers circling the peak.

Aiguille Weetabix (4,483.5m, 40°41'5"N, 74°24'8"E, PD+). Nicolas, Alasdair, and I made an attempt on an impressive peak much farther to the southwest down the same long ridgeline we had used to ascend Joru. Although the rock was extremely chossy and the snow conditions were poor, it was a

slapstick moment involving Alasdair's bag and an extremely steep snow ramp that foiled this attempt. As an alternative, the team climbed an outlying rocky peak on the ridge. A short but slightly exposed scramble over blocks of appalling consistency led to the peak of Aiguille Weetabix, as we came to affectionately (or not!) describe it.

Komur Chokusu (4,434m, 40°40'4"N, 74°27'2"E, F). Sam and Alasdair summited our third peak, the closest to base camp on the eastern side of the valley. The summit is at the head a knife ridge that looks incredible but offers highly suspect rock quality. The name of this peak was inspired by our driver, Valerii, who described the mountain as a vast heap of coal. The name means, roughly, "Coal Peak" in Kyrgyz.

Karga (4,692.8m, 40°40'3"N, 74°23'1"E, PD+). Given its distance from base camp, this peak required an advanced base camp at 3,700m. Thomas, Nicolas, and I followed a line up a steep snow ramp to gain a ridge on the east side of the peak, which we followed up to the main northeast ridgeline. A hanging glacier and a corniced section of ridge led to the final summit slopes in deteriorating snow conditions. After a quick photo at the summit we beat a hasty retreat. In better conditions we would strongly recommend this line, as it makes for a fantastic ascent of a peak that offers stunning views. We named the peak Karga (Kyrgyz for "raven") after the raven that followed us halfway up the mountain.

The Fergana Range and the Arpa Valley are incredibly beautiful, and the remote nature of the location was fantastic. Two issues to consider are that access can be difficult (a good 4WD is required, in addition to a low water level for river crossings) and much of the rock is poor quality. Good snow coverage and cooler weather could allow for excellent mountaineering opportunities, with an abundance of unclimbed routes and peaks. We would like to thank the BMC and ITMC for their support and assistance.

[[Click here to download the team's full expedition report with photos, maps, and other info.](#)]

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Images



Approaching the Fergana Range.



Karga Peak (4,693m) with the route of ascent.

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