



## AAC Publications

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### **Ascents Near Arabel Pass**

Kyrgyzstan, Tien Shan, Djetim Bel Range

**On August 2 our four-strong expedition left Europe and arrived in Bishkek in the early hours.** The first day was used to get accustomed to the time difference of four hours and to acquire dried fruits, nuts, and other delicacies in what proved to be a magnificent, large market: Osh Bazaar in the west of Bishkek. Finding gas canisters for a possible ABC was slightly trickier, but achieved during the morning of August 4, before we got picked up by our Kyrgyz tour operator, Misha from [kyrgyzland.com](http://kyrgyzland.com). We reached Tamga Guest House after a six-hour drive through a flat, largely agricultural area and then the gorges of Kyrgyzstan before we reached Lake Issyk Kul and took a dip in its supposedly curing waters.

We left Tamga for the high plateau of the Arabel early the next morning. Our two off-road vehicles reached base camp around lunchtime. Base camp was west of the main road through Arabel Pass at 3,844m (N41.81562, E077.67891). Our chosen spot was central to all the mountains that were of interest to us, but in retrospect it could have been more protected from the wind, which seemed to have taken a particular liking to our base camp.

Our expedition was housed one tent per person and we also had a mess tent. Food was prepared by our cook, a young Kyrgyz woman who works for expeditions and treks in the summer months and who looked after us with local dishes, lots of salads, and a warming porridge in the freezing mornings.

After lunch the expedition party went on a two-hour reconnaissance hike to get a first look at the mountains, which we had thus far only been able to explore on Russian Army maps and via satellite pictures. An icy storm with graupel showers gave us a good introduction to the changeability of the weather and to the fast-moving systems, usually from the west, which mostly restricted to the afternoons on days with good weather. As there were enough opportunities for ascents in our area, we decided against an ABC camp. Temperatures at BC ranged from several degrees below zero to relatively mild temperatures in the low teens during the day when the sun was out.

With the exception of August 16 to 18, when a wet weather system brought the area prolonged periods of snow and wind, the expedition members managed to venture out and explore the mountains to the south and north of BC. Moving north meant crossing a range of hills just north of bamp, an ascent of ca 150m, which we usually did via Cwm Da Loch, the lowest saddle between the two valleys and also a scenic route linking several mountain lakes.

Ventures south were usually done via a dirt-track down into the next valley. From there we climbed into smaller valleys, all of which are dominated by glaciers.

Tour 1 on August 6 led us to the glacier that dominates the range north of base camp. Because of its intriguing shape, we named it "Whirling Glacier" back home. Glacier retreat, however, is also taking place in Kyrgyzstan and nothing of its whirling action around a central rock formation, which is shown to be completely covered by ice on our maps and the satellite pictures, remains; it is now a glacial system of two separate glaciers, the northernmost of which has a large glacier lake at its end. After a 3km hike along the glacier-fed river that meanders through the wide valley, we ascended the mountain via the glacier. We named this Pik Sepp, in memory of the father of one of our members, who had recently died unexpectedly.

On August 7 we went south and then up the western ridge of the glacier nearest our base camp. Because of their makeup, and also because they are exposed to extreme temperatures and freeze-thaw action all year round, the rock faces here were extremely brittle and we returned to camp soon after lunch.

On August 10, the expedition climbed the highest mountain in the area which they knew had already been climbed, evidence of which could be found in the form of a small cairn on the summit. We reached the summit via the glacier. Unfortunately, one of us hit her side on the ice when she fell through the snow into a crevasse and eventually decided to leave BC to recuperate her rib, which we presumed had cracked. She rejoined the group on August 17 after spending three nights in Karakol.

With weather on our side, ventures to different valleys and summits could be undertaken every day until August 15, when a weather system with prolonged and heavy precipitation (snow and graupel) together with strong winds moved in and forced the expedition members to stay in BC.

The weather improved considerably by the 19<sup>th</sup> of August. Due to the snow that had accumulated over the past days, a certain avalanche risk had to be taken into the planning process, and the group climbed a peak with a very low risk and without having to venture onto the glacier.

August 20 saw a big project: connecting several previously climbed peaks via a long ridge-route. The weather played its part and even though not all summits could be connected within that they due to a hard ridge leading to the summit of day 4 and the lack of time to set up ropes and return in daylight. It was a mighty endeavour, undertaken by three members of the expedition whilst the member with the injured rib decided to tick off the last summit on the northern half of the territory, which was technically easy, just a long slog.

The next day started with an early breakfast and we then took down BC. Because road conditions had deteriorated due to the bad weather in the previous days, the people carrier 4x4 could not come to BC, so the expedition left on foot, all our equipment had gone in and on a sturdy 4x4.

Before leaving for Bishkek and the airport, we enjoyed a half a day in Karakol and a dip in the refreshing waters of Lake Issyk Kul.

The expedition achieved its aim of climbing as many peaks of the area as possible. The mountains of Kyrgyzstan offer many routes of all difficulties and are a true Dorado for alpinists. The country itself is very welcoming and easygoing, organisation of the expedition was easy and with the help of our local tour operator [kyrgyzland.com](http://kyrgyzland.com), we found no problems in the organisational process. Everything went according to plan, careful planning paid off and we encountered no unexpected difficulties.

Download a complete expedition report, with maps of all "tours" from base camp.

Edith Kreutner, Austria

Editor's note: Given the easy access to these mountains, as well as mining and surveying activity, it's likely that a number of peaks in this area have been climbed over the years. The team of Laurent Baraquin, Radim Blazicek, and Henrik Olsen climbed four routes in 2011, and other teams en route to the Khan Tengri area are known to have climbed in these mountains.

## Images



"Tiroler Koepfl"



"Hoch Misha" and "Eiskogel" to the right.



Photo during "Tour XII," due south of base camp.



Peaks of the Djetim Bel ascended in 2014. At left: Hoch Misha (4,627m, also climbed in 2011). Farther right: ca 4,500m peaks climbed and later traversed.



En route to Hoch Misha.



On the way to "Hinterer Roßkopf"



En route to "Eiskogl"

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