

*Siykhem Nuruu National Park, exploration and a first ascent.* Our six member team from the north of England comprised Ken Findlay, Stuart Gallagher, John Given, Les Holbert, Karl Zientek, and myself. We had as our goal exploration of the area around 3,939m Ikh Turgen Uul in the Siykhem Nuruu National Park. This lies directly north of Bayan Olgi and not so far from the increasingly popular Tavan Bogd mountains. Karl and I arrived in Ulaan Baatar ahead of the others, only to find that an outbreak of foot and mouth disease had put the region of Aimag Olgi out of bounds. Our pre-booked air flights to Bayan Olgi were now useless: if we were to have flown there, we would simply have been stopped from leaving the town. Instead, when the rest of the team arrived, we moved by mini bus to Ulaangom; three days of virtually non-stop travel on non-existent roads. On our arrival we obtained permission to enter Aimag Olgi and visit Siykhem Nuruu National Park Area "B." We were directed to a base camp in the Ongorchoi Valley at the southern end of the range. This proved to be the summer grazing ground for flocks of sheep and goats owned by a group of Kazakhs. After an initial few days settling in and exploring the nearest mountains, we realized our camp was really in the wrong location. We therefore tried to get into one of the valleys further north, but unfortunately it proved impossible with the resources at hand. We therefore only explored the region that was relatively close at hand, making two main excursions: a three-day circular route climbing over two of the nearer tops, both of which were first U.K. ascents, and a more exciting five-day trip, which resulted in the first ascent of an alpine ridge (named Noodle Ridge) on the far side of the next valley north. The latter route, completed by Findlay and Zientek, took almost two days to reach. On the third day the pair traversed the ridge, climbing and rappelling rock towers to a bivouac just below the final summit. This day involved mixed climbing roughly equating to Alpine D with a harder section of steep ice up to 80°. After crossing the final and highest tower at 4,200m, the pair spent a further two days returning to base.

Although the area was interesting, it held much less snow and ice than expected, with glaciers obviously in retreat. Approaches from the north could well pay dividends, and if a party was to find a way into one of the area's middle valleys, I'm sure they would discover many alpine possibilities.

PAUL HUDSON, U. K.

*Tavan Bogd Range, probable new route on Kowalewski, and other early repeats.* The primary aim of the British Heart of Asia Expedition 2002 was to explore the Altai Mountains in the far west of Mongolia and attempt some new peaks and routes. Unfortunately, due to an outbreak of foot and mouth, we were initially forbidden from entering the region. We were effectively quarantined for 24 hours outside Bayan Olgi and subsequently fumigated and sprayed at various points in a somewhat haphazard fashion.

Instead, we visited an alternative area, the popular Otgon Tenger Uul National Park near Uliastai, then after much persistence, some bribery, and a lot of help from our Mongolian drivers and local "friends" made along the way, we were eventually allowed into the Altai Mountains.

The road head for the Otgon Tenger Uul is four days' drive from Ulaan Baatar. From here it was a day's walk to base camp located at the head of a lake (N 47°38'10.1, E 97°33'03.3). Possible new routes were climbed for acclimatization purposes on two unnamed peaks of ca 3,100m. On the first (N 47°37'40.6, E 97°31'51.2) Janet Fotheringham, Alan Halewood, Sebastian Nault, and Robert Watts climbed a pitch of British Severe up a chimney, after which the last two

named climbers continued to traverse the ridge on loose rock. On the second (N.47°37'40.6, E 97°31'51.2) Michael McLaughlan and I climbed the two-pitch Platypus Crack (British VS 4a). All climbers bar myself then ascended the Normal Route up Otgon Tenger Uul (3,905m: N 47°36'32.3, E 97°33'08.7). This peak is very popular and the ascent is nothing more than a hard walk over loose scree.

We later established a base camp alongside the Potanina Glacier in the Tavan Bogd mountains of the Altai (one day's drive and a further day on foot from Bayan Olgi). From here Michael and myself made a southeast to north traverse of Huiten (4,374m), the highest summit in Mongolia. From an advanced base on the southeast flank of the mountain we traversed all five summits (Scottish II), reaching the highest point at 9 p.m., then descending via the north flank to the Potanina Glacier, where we dug a snow hole at 2 a.m. We eventually regained our tent at 10 a.m.

Seb and Rob climbed the east ridge of Snow Church (4,100m) at the head of the Alexandra Glacier, finding the ridge mainly snow-free loose rock with a final 120m of steep ice and loose unconsolidated snow at Scottish III/IV. The overall grade was Alpine AD. Janet and Alan made an ascent of an unnamed peak of 3,900m at the head of the west end of the Grano Glacier. They traversed the mountain via the Northeast face and descent of the South ridge at Alpine PD. These two also climbed a probable new route to make the second ascent of Kowalewski (3,903m) on the southern rim of the Grano Glacier. The pair climbed a snow gully to reach the north ridge, which they followed to the summit and returned to camp in a round trip of eight hours. The overall grade was PD+. Apart from Huiten, which was climbed by a Russian-Mongolian expedition in 1956, all these other peaks were first ascended by the 1967 Polish expedition led by Witold Michalowski.

Weather conditions throughout our stay in August were usually dry, very hot, and fairly stable. However, during the last couple of weeks some electrical storms with intense rain were experienced. It also became very windy in the Tavan Bogd immediately prior to incoming frontal systems. Although most (but not all) of the principal summits in the Tavan Bogd have been climbed, many have only been ascended once or twice and often only by one route. The rock is generally loose and the glaciers fairly technical. The latter can be very hard work after mid-morning. Otherwise, the couloirs and ice fields seemed stable and there exists much opportunity for new routes at Alpine AD and above. To the south of the main range and probably accessible by foot from the Gljadien valley, a small collection of snow-covered peaks is visible and would probably repay exploration.

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