

and Google Earth at 4,200m. We named it Naryn Tau (ca 4,500m; N 76°27'30", E 41°21'00" Google Earth). It is the highest summit at the head of the Kandy valley, which rises from the village of Imeni Kalinina.

We visited these areas in late April–early May and experienced Scottish spring conditions: four seasons every day and heavy snowfall once a week. We had assumed it would freeze every night above 3,500m, but it didn't. However, this was another great trip to a remote, enchanted land. If you go with a local mountaineer—not as qualified guide but as companion and fixer—you'll have a great time.

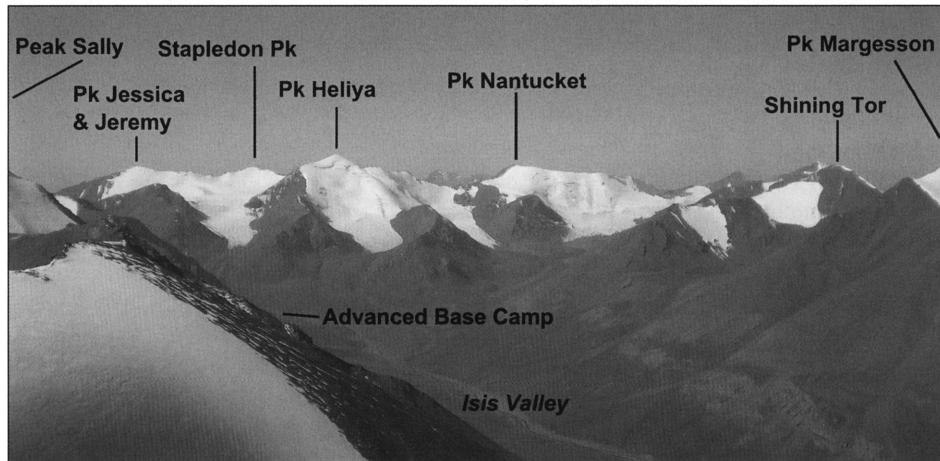
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### WESTERN KOKSHAAL-TOO

*Bolgandy West Valley, Pik Margesson, Pik St. George, Shining Tor, Pik Nantucket, Pik Heliya, Pik Jessica and Jeremy, Pik Stapledon, Pik Sally; Pik 4,705m, attempt.* In August David Jorden, Chris Lloyd, Tom Sutherland, Ben Sutton, and I traveled to Kyrgyzstan to climb in the eastern Borkoldoy. However, on arrival in the Ak Sai Valley we discovered that the track had been damaged by floods, and we could not get close enough. Our backup plan, exploring the Djangidjel Range, also proved impossible; we were stopped at the Kubyrgyty Pass by Russian hunters barring entry into the valley. We settled on a cirque in the Western Kokshaal-Too, 14km west of Kyzyl Asker. This was a fortuitous find, and we made several first ascents.

On August 23 we established base camp at 3,500m near the head of the valley that is four main valleys west of Kyzyl Asker, rising to the Chinese border (N 41°06'24.9" E 77°10'55.1", GR 835544 on the Soviet Military map). Our first summit was Pik Margesson (4,526m) on the western side of the valley. Shattered rock made bypassing gendarmes tricky (PD+). The peak just to the southeast of base camp, named Pik St. George (4,496m), was straightforward (F+).

We then moved up valley to establish an advance camp on the eastern side of the cirque. From here we climbed Shining Tor (4,607m, F) from the south and Pik Nantucket (4,600m, PD). On Pik Heliya (4,660m, PD) we scrambled up a scree face onto the northeast ridge near the summit. We attempted Pik 4,705m, which dominates the head of the valley, but the snow—



Panorama of the upper Bolgandy West Valley from Pik St George (4,496m), showing peaks climbed in 2008 by the Oxford University Expedition. George Margesson

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which fell frequently and never consolidated—did not allow us to cross the large crevasse field at the base. However, from the bowl below Pik Heliya, Pik Jessica and Jeremy (4,600m) and Pik Stapledon (4,600m) proved relatively accessible (both PD-). The highest peak in the valley, Pik Sally (4,818m), dominated the eastern rim. We climbed it via a direct route from the cwm immediately east, reaching the northeast ridge just below the summit (PD). Weather and rock were limiting factors on our trip. We had several heavy snowfalls with minimal consolidation. The rock, a finely layered and shattered siltstone, was extremely poor; narrow crests were highly unstable. However, the most terrifying part of the expedition was our vodka-loving driver taking the vehicle, a not-very-well-pimped minibus, down a boulder-strewn river on the way out. Miraculously we arrived home in one piece.

GEORGE MARGESSON, *Oxford University Mountaineering Club*

*Kotur glacier, Pik Judith-Brian, south ridge; Nomad Domes, various ascents; Son Kul Canyon, new rock climbing area.* The International School of Mountaineering (ISM) organized its regular expedition to the Tien Shan. It proved a successful trip, despite our not achieving our main objective, Pik Byelyi (Grand Poohbah, 5,697m). With guides Adrian Nelhams and Vladimir Komissarov and members James Bruton, Anthony Froud, Neville Howarth, Leif Iversen, Simon Liebling, Jacki Liebling, Gareth Read, and Stephen Taylor, I set up base camp below the Kotur Glacier in the same spot I had used 10 years earlier, a perfect campsite at 3,950m. Glacier recession was striking; in the intervening period the retreat appeared to be several hundred meters. Our plan was to establish an advanced base as far up the Kotur as possible, climb a couple of peaks to acclimatize, and traverse the head of the next glacier to the east, the Nalvakin, to reach the base of Byelyi.

The camp was on the east side of the Kotur below Pik Judith-Brian (5,050m), a nice snowy summit climbed on the 1999 ISM expedition. Its south ridge was unclimbed and looked attractive, so my group made the first ascent via the easiest line, at PD+. The remaining climbers reached the Kotur Pass at the head of the glacier and climbed the adjacent Pik Pyramida (5,140m) via the northwest ridge, repeating the line of our 1999 ascent (PD), and almost certainly that of the Russians who made the first ascent in the 1980s. Not long after, Adrian's team climbed the south ridge of Judith-Brian by a more direct line, going straight over a huge gendarme that my team had outflanked. This gave a stiffer route, at AD+. However, the weather was beginning to deteriorate, and my group had to work hard for an ascent of Pik Pyramida in hostile conditions, experiencing severe crosswinds on the summit ridge.

Repeated heavy snowfalls then pinned us at camp, until it became unlikely that conditions in the mountains would improve sufficiently to achieve any of our planned objectives. Instead, we retreated before deciding to visit a couple of lower-lying destinations, where we could guarantee some climbing. The first of these was Nomad Domes near the hot sulfur springs of Arashan. The Domes were opened for climbing by ISM in 2001 and are in a lovely area of "classic" Kyrgyz nomad life, open pasture dotted with yurts. We feasted on local produce (fresh flatbread, cream, yogurt, and cheese balls) and enjoyed excellent rock climbing. Existing routes were up to three pitches long, and we added three more from British VS to E2, but many unclimbed lines remain.

We then continued toward Bishkek, and, after covering around half the distance, discovered Son Kul Canyon, with limestone hills with the potential for alpine rock routes up to 700m long. We put up four routes on good rock, from British HVS to E2, the longest 12 pitches. We