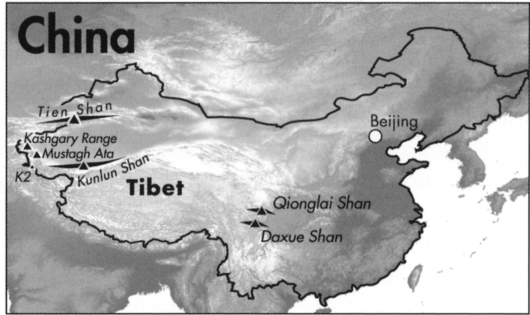


## China

*The effect of SARS in 2003.* The outbreak of the SARS virus played havoc with many expeditions visiting China in the pre-monsoon season. On April 25 the Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region announced that it was closing its borders to both Chinese and Foreign tourists. Travel permits to enter Tibet were immediately withdrawn and two days later a similar pronouncement was made in Kathmandu and Zhangmu (the Tibet border post on the Friendship Highway connecting Kathmandu and Lhasa). Fortunately, most pre-monsoon mountaineering expeditions to popular destinations such as Everest, Cho Oyu, and Shishapangma (Xixabangma) had already entered the country, though other smaller trips with later departure dates were forced to cancel or postpone their plans to the autumn. At the end of May there were no confirmed cases of SARS in Tibet, though according to the Ministry of Health, the neighboring province of Sichuan had a total of 17.



Coming shortly after a spate of terrorist activities in Nepal, this dealt yet another body blow to the Nepalese tourist agencies, many of which derive considerable income from the organization of Tibetan tours. Fortunately, despite initial pessimistic predictions concerning the length of time the country would be closed, the Chinese Government officially re-opened Tibet to foreign visitors on July 1 and other regions were quick to follow.

## XINJIANG

### KUN LUN MOUNTAINS

*Mustagh Ata, The Golden Eye, new route with ski descent.* On July 18, “Sneaky” Pete Lardy, Chad McFadden, and Tom McMillan completed a route to the summit of Mustagh Ata (7,546m). The team then descended the route on skis and snowboard. The trio climbed from Camp 2, skipping Camp 3, in an 11-hour push. Pete Lardy set the record for the highest descent with a split snowboard. The route was named Golden Eye for a prominent region of yellow talus located near Camp 1.

The slopes of Mustagh Ata were made for ski mountaineering. In 1955 a joint Russian/Chinese team made the first ascent of the regular route. Ned Gillette, Jan Reynolds and Galen Rowell completed the second ascent and first ski descent in 1980. Since then, this route has become very popular, seeing about 75 ascents a year. In 2001, Dan Mazur, Walter Keller and Jon Otto made the first ascent of the east ridge, which involved technical ice climbing. *[Editor’s note: ascents of Muztagh Ata by lines other than the original route have been reported since 1981, though the exact lines are unknown to us.]*

Located on the western slope, north of the Kartomak glacier, Golden Eye provides a moderate ascent, which was completed mostly on skis. It offers stellar turns down one of the highest descents in the world. Avalanche danger is minimal and crevasses are easily negotiated. The route was skied mostly unroped. This allowed for a rapid ascent of 14 days from our arrival at BC, most of the time in good weather. The lower part of the route shares the same approach

as a French route on Mustagh South.

Mr. Guo Jin Wei, member of the 1985 U.S.–Chinese Ulugh Mustagh expedition, organized the trip. Total expedition cost was less than \$3,000 per man Beijing to Beijing. This was approximately a 50% discount compared to list prices. Checked baggage allowances were a hardship (20 kg for economy air tickets). It costs about 50 Yuan/kg for excess baggage Beijing to Kashgar. We were surprised to find that Xinjiang has equal or even higher quality substitutes for most of the food that we brought from the U.S. We could have saved several hundred dollars by sending a shopping list to our agent in Urumchi.

Our Chinese agent from Xinjiang Mountaineering said that this was a first ascent. However, after some research I believe this route may have been first climbed in 1982. The evidence is not clear. But it makes no difference: it was a wonderful trip and a great life experience.

CHAD MCFADDEN, AAC

## KASHGAR RANGE



The unclimbed Peak Gez (left) from the south. *Otto Chkhetiani*

*Complete crossing of the southern section of the Chinese Pamir and first ascents of Pts 5,430m and 5,975m. Andrei Lebedev (leader), Otto Chkhetiani (assistant leader), Mikhail Babich (Saint Petersburg), Tatiana Belyaeva (Saint Petersburg), Yura Maksimovich, and Oleg Yanchevsky (both from Kiev) flew from Moscow to Kashgar via Urmchi. This was our third visit to the Kashgar Range.*

We traveled south down the Karakoram Highway and turned east into the Tashkurgan Gorge. We found that a new road was currently under construction to Yarkand. After 20km we stopped in the Tadzhik village of Shindi (2,900m), where we bid farewell to our escorts and began following a path to the north.

For the first 20km of our journey we hired two donkeys to carry part of our load. In two