

# **MUSTAGH ATA, Pamir Mt Range, China**

**7,547m (24,757'). 25 days, £2300.00, optional ski descent**



**This climb is fairly straightforward and an excellent stepping stone for those who aspire to climb an 8,000m peak. It has few technical problems, with easy gentle slopes, and in its own right gives a high altitude expedition in a remote and fascinating part of the world.**

**Our priority is to acclimatize properly, and the expedition pace is set to give everyone the best possible chance of summit success.**

Mustagh Ata is part of the Pamir Mountain range, and its highest peak. It is an isolated massif rising from the western end of the remote Taklamakan Desert in the Xinjiang province of China, where ice meets with the desert.

In Uygur language “mustagh ata” means the Father of icy mountains. The barren landscape rises more than two miles above sea level, and it is in the centre of the great mountain ranges of Asia. The Karakoram mountains lie to the South, the Pamir to the West; the Kun Lan and Tien Shan to the North.

As it rises from a remote corner of the central Asian Plateau the easiest approach is by the famous Karakoram highway. Small settlements lie scattered along the highway, otherwise nomadic Kyrgyz people roam the vast plains with their camels and horses. The lack of any industrial development and sparse population means the entire area is ecologically untouched.



## **History**

Mustagh Ata first gained the attention of climbers in 1894, when the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin attempted it on a yak! Unfortunately they were denied the summit and retreated from 19,500 feet. All early attempts were thwarted including one by the British explorers Tillman and Shipton, who in 1947 got to within 200 feet of the summit. It was finally conquered in 1956 by a large Russian-Chinese expedition.

## **Weather**

The best season for climbing is June until mid September, with low winds and long days of warm sunshine. On the summit you can expect temperatures to vary between -20 and -30c.

## **Preparation**

Although Mustagh Ata is one of the easier 7,600m peaks, climbers are recommended to have previous high altitude and mountaineering experience to at least 6,000 metres, although this is not a pre-requisite. Mountains such as Denali, Aconcagua, Ojos Del Salado and Island Peak are ideal stepping stones to this expedition. To increase your chances of success you also need to be in good physical condition, and prepare for long days requiring stamina and determination. This will require a regular programme of exercise for 6 months prior to the trip.

Additionally, team members should be prepared to carry loads at high altitude, and be prepared to camp on snow and ice for an extended duration, using stoves to melt snow and prepare meals. A long expedition like this requires strong teamwork skills with good communication, a good sense of humour and a tendency towards an open minded, sharing nature.

## **Getting There**

The expedition starts in Kashgar which can be reached by air from Beijing, Tashkent (capital of Uzbekistan) or Bishkek (capital of Kyrgyzstan). We will provide information on the most economic means so that everyone travels together.

The team will meet in Kashgar and drive to the village of Subashi, enjoying outstanding views of Mustagh Ata, Kongur and Karakul Lake along the way. Camels will carry our loads into base camp. From here we will establish three higher camps. The Expedition will make our summit attempt from our high camp at 6800 meters. There is an option to ski from the summit.



## **Itinerary summary: 25 days**

### **1<sup>st</sup> section – home to base camp – 6 days**

Day 1 Depart UK (flight to Beijing and Kashgar)

Day 2 Arrive Kashgar , transfer to hotel, and welcome dinner.

Day 3 City tour of Kashgar exploring all the famous local sites

Day 4 Bus travel to the village of Subashi at 3600m, 200 kms along the Karakorum highway taking 5 hours, a spectacular trip through the narrow gorge of the Gez river. Lunch en route and overnight in a local hotel.

Day 5 Acclimatization, an extra day in this area doing local walks.

Day 6 Trek with camels to Mustagh Ata base camp. Initially over a flat plain, then climb steadily through gentle hills for about 5 hours to a height of 4,500m.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> section – climbing period – 17 days**

Day 7 Settling in, acclimatisation, sorting gear

Day 8 Carry to camp 1 at 5,300m over rocky moraine, 8 -10 hours, return to base camp.

Day 9 Camp 1 and sleep overnight

Day 10 Carry to Camp 2 at 6100m on a snow plateau and descend to base camp.

Day 11 Rest day, and packing for next carry.

Day 12 Climb to camp 1

Day 13 Climb to camp 2, establish camp and sleep overnight.

Day 14 Carry to camp 3 at 6,800m, gentle slopes, descend to base camp

Day 15-16 Rest days in base camp with some local walks.

Day 17 Climb to camp 1

Day 18 Climb to camp 2

Day 19 Climb to camp 3 , establish camp and sleep overnight

Day 20 Summit day. Early start on moderate slopes becoming gentle near summit. At the top we gain a panoramic view of the Tibetan plateau to the East, the Karakorum to the South and the Pamirs to the West. Descend to Camp 3, or even lower if we are feeling strong.

Days 21-22 Extra days for bad weather and extra acclimatization.

Day 23 Return to base camp

### **Section 3 – Return – 2 days**

Day 24 Trek out to the village of Subashi and drive to Kashgar. Overnight in hotel.

Day 25 Depart home



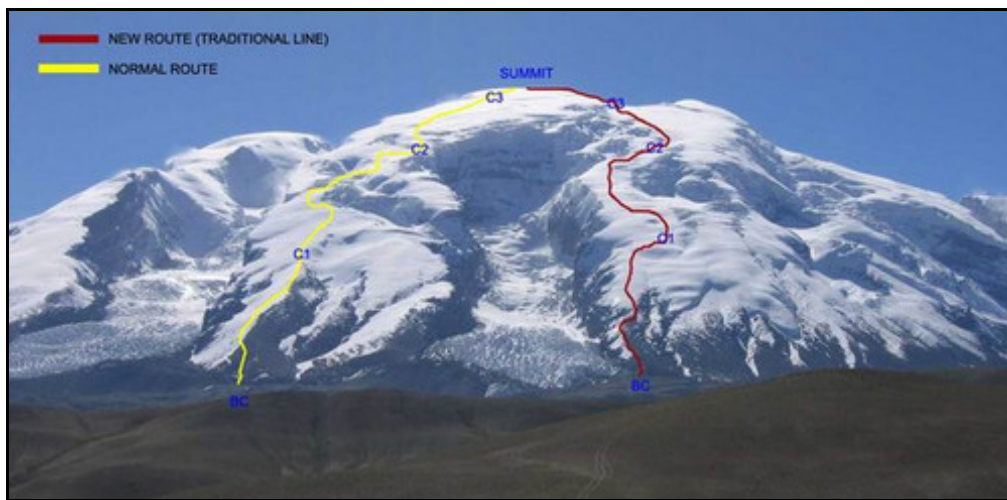
### The normal route

This is not a technical route, more of a high altitude walking route, despite a small icefall on the way up to Camp 1. However, dangers associated with going to high altitude and into a cold, dry atmosphere must be noted, and although the slopes are gentle, there is exposure to high wind above Camp 2. Conversely, temperatures can rise to +40 Celsius during the day in very strong sunlight. Doing carries at high altitude with such a big diurnal temperature range is tiring and debilitating.

One specific feature of the mountain is potentially deep snow and crampons are often not necessary in these conditions. Skis or snowshoes offer good options, although it is still possible to summit in plastic boots, although the going can be tough. During the high season there is often a good trail with other groups on the mountain, but this is easily obscured with snowfall.

This expedition will be run on the basis of ascending the mountain on foot in plastic boots with crampons, but if you would like to bring snowshoes then this will definitely be an advantage.

Skiers must be accomplished and confident ski-mountaineers, since it is particularly difficult to put in turns at altitude and with a rucksack. Additionally using skins on skis to ascend is a skill, and Mustagh Ata is not the place to learn it!



The routes on Mustagh Ata. We will follow the yellow line.



## **The camps**

Subashi and nearby offers good acclimatization peaks all around, a good stream, and occasional food to buy from locals.

Base camp has fresh water in a stream, good ground for camping, mobile phone signal from nearby, plus toilets and a shower provided by KMA. Emergency transport back to Subashi is available on a camel, donkey, motorcycle and sometimes jeep. Camp one has running water most of the time, and mobile phone reception in some places. Camps 2 and 3 have no mobile phone reception, no running and lots of space.

## **Equipment List**

A variety of clothing will be requires for the expedition. You will need clothing for around town, traveling and eating out, trekking in the heat and humidity, plus clothing for the extreme temperatures on the mountain. Down jacket, crampons, ice axe, poles, good 4 season sleeping bags, winter mats and a variety of layered thermal and fleece clothing is necessary. A harness, descender (abseil device), 2 tape slings, 2 screwgate karabiners, and prussic loops (or jumar) is required. Large rucksacks will be needed for carries, kept in a duffle bag, plus 40 litre day sacks for walks and summit day.

Plastic boots are necessary, and we intend to use snowshoes also. For ski descents it is necessary to bring heel free bindings and skins to ascend the mountain. Normal alpine skis are fine.

Equipment needs to be lightweight, functional and adaptable to a wide variety of conditions, and the quality of the equipment and clothing you bring will have a lot to do with how warm, dry and comfortable you feel. When making the final choice of what to bring, remember it's about taking enough to do the job and not carrying items you will probably not use. There are some good gear shops in Kashgar and the Chinese Mountaineering Association also have some for sale and for rent.

Kashgar has plenty of supermarkets which sell any kind of base food and we will buy our mountain supplies here. Noodles, rice, oats, muesli, milk powder, chocolate etc. are all available, and Kashgar is famous for dried fruits and nuts.



## Team Composition

The Mustagh Ata expedition will be led by experienced leaders Gavin Bate and Steve Pinfield. Base camp staff are supplied by the Chinese Mountaineering Association. There are 12 places available on the expedition, which is the maximum amount for one permit.

## Red tape

A valid visa for China is easy to get from the Chinese embassy in London. We will also be applying for a climbing permit to climb Mustagh Ata which is for 12 climbers. There is also an obligatory fee for a Chinese liaison officer and a conservation fee.

## Cost

£2300.00 per person. Our price is a land only price that includes all costs including all fees and climbing permits in compliance with the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992.

Includes: scheduled hotel nights and transport as per the itinerary, camels to and from Mustagh Ata base camp, all meals on trek and on mountain, group tents and cooking gear and fuel, Adventure Alternative guides.

Excludes: International air fare to Kashgar, Chinese visa, meals in Kashgar, rescue and cancellation insurance, personal equipment and expenses, airport departure tax

Insurance: Insurance can be bought through the BMC, or specialist companies such as Campbell Irvine, Insure&Go, Snowcard or the Austrian Alpine Club.

