

## Travel notes: Kyrgyzstan borders

July – August 2009

I do not remember when this idea was born. I looked up the catalogue (terrible word in the context of nature) and the search engine spat out three summits few kilometers east of Lenin peak (7134 m) - slightly lower and completely deserted. The area was described by the last expedition, which wandered there about 5 years ago. Three Czechs tried to descend on ski from Kyzylagyn peak (6684 m), but went up to about 5000 m. Photos of the site certainly looked impressive, but the maps from the Internet inspired some hope for success. People sometimes ask me how am I choosing my next destination - in fact, I often start with 3-4 projects at once in several unrelated geographical areas. In time one of the ideas overcomes the others, but in the case of Peak 6624, this idea just took me over. The relatively affordable airline tickets to Bishkek and the toll free peaks in Kyrgyzstan also had its word. In most of my travels I don't have a fixed goal and I decide on the spot what to see from a certain region. In most of my travels I don't carry more than 10 kg. Here I had to proceed in a different manner. Prior I had to examine an almost deserted place, and the list of inventory and food at the foot of the summit materialized into a pile of backpacks, snowshoes, tents and shopping bags - a total of 120 kg. It was 3 of us - me, Svetla and Teddy - the more the merrier.

The preparation itself was a marathon. An endless running, a swift communication over the internet and shopping with the large basket. The first optimistic inventory list was short - 2 pages only, but literally every line in it had something that required time. Then the swelled to 3, even 4, like a loan whose interest grows despite the first diligent monthly payments. Booked the international and domestic flights, and the hotel (almost - we slept in a yurt) and researched the rest of transportation. Got in touch with the Czechs (my gratitude to "hothead" Ian Pala - which gave me the most details), I realized that we need border permits, I ordered gas canisters to wait for us in Osh since we couldn't fly them, etc. etc. I must have ridden hundred kilometers around the city on my bike in search of this or that, it all took at least a month, month and a half. Shortly before departure we celebrated with a group of diverse friends, some of which even appeared at the bus terminal. Looking back, everything from the organizational perspective was taken care of so that there were no major surprises.

Finally we took off from Istanbul and landed in Bishkek in the middle of the night. There are no international flights from there because during the day NATO military machine is supplying Afghanistan with democracy. The Metropolitan Airport carries the name of the legendary Kyrgyz hero - Manas, and so is the U.S. base through which pass 70% of the supplies for the fraternal Pashtun-Khazar-Uzbeks-Tajik-Persian (i.e. Afghan) people. At daybreak we made it to the nomadic yurt on the outskirts of Bishkek, and the next two days spent walking around the capital. Huge avenues, monumental buildings 100 m apart, Central Department Store in post-socialist stage, communal housings, newly developed currency exchange booths and agencies selling airline tickets (aviodesks) every 5 m. Kirghiz don't fly so much, but regularly go back home on autopilot and the ditches are full with helpless drunks. Passing by tourists feel the smell 5 m in advance and then comes the sight of wettish and soiled alcohol body. I have recollections of something similar in Warsaw 1991, but the mutants here circulate around mosques and the true muslims wondered at our surprised faces and asked with earnest - "What's up? Don't you have such thing where you come from?" Drunkards were of both sexes. Most of them drank in parks in the neighborhood, the menu in one of the central restaurant had the following information at the bottom: 'Dear customer - the following fees apply to broken crockery - cup 100 som, chalice - 150 som, mug - 150 som, plate - 80 som; and for broken inventory - table 3000 som, chair - 1000 som, vase - 2000 som.' There was a local proverb - Kirghiz do know how to break - but somehow Kirghiz were saying it with pride and mockery, and Russians - with nostalgia of the good old past..

We then flew to Osh and the aircraft struggled to slip through the huge faults between the peaks of Ala Archa. On the TV harsh voice shouted - "Nu zaec, Nu pagadi!", and shortly after the fifth episode we took out backpacks from a hangar at the airport. The city is not as megalomaniac, and certainly more conservative than the capital - you can feel the proximity of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan - countries that prefer Islam to the vodka bottle. On the second day in Osh were stocked up food for three weeks. You can find almost everything on the market - dried fruit, chocolate, onions, Bolgarskii Peretz, bread, garlic, cans, "easy nuts" <sup>1</sup> (hazelnuts), etc. Transport to the starting point for the mountain found us shortly after he publicly expressed our wish to be off to Bardobo - outpost at the Tajik border and 230 km further south. There was one more small problem - my new sandals tore down just before leaving town, besides them I had only the plastic shoes - but a drunken shoemaker quickly took care of them while chatting with his even more drunken friend.

We arrived and the outpost (3500 m). The "tamozhnik" (customs official) greeted us, and we showed him our border passes and the route. We left him a copy of and he took us to his superior. We register, gave out another copy and put down our names in a notebook. The superior insisted on leaving a "little" stamp on top of our single visas, but we managed somehow to reason him out of it without money. Then we informed them that we wanted to set up a tent nearby and encamped at 30 m from the border guards - also without camping fee. At the end of the day the tamozhnik came again and talked on "customs and folklore of the local drug traffickers". The road went along at 2 km from Djanaydartaka river, and we could get there from the lower parts of the Pamir-Alayskiya Ridge - this was the direction where we were headed. Traffickers were resistant muzhiks <sup>2</sup> who didn't go breathless and knew the area. They rarely caught them, but several months ago found a corpse - after the border his greedy buddies decided to divide his dope amongst them. "You can sing all you want Penke le ..." - a popular song circled in my head. Which self-respecting trafficker would sweat the hills? Just look at this road and this outpost, how much opium can fit in a truck, and why the tamozhnik hasn't been paid for 2 months now? In the evening two other penniless soldiers jumped over the fence of the checkpoint, and also visited our tent to beg for cigarettes, then with fear of dismissal smoked them with great pleasure behind the nearest hill.

Rested one day for acclimatization and then sent out on first inspection of the area. We took a few bags and went to the valley. West of the outpost a flat field was trenched with dozens of branches Kyzyl-Art and Djanaydartaka rivers. Morning they are clean and not so deep, because the glaciers are still frozen, but in the afternoon crossing them is not always possible. Border guards filled water for themselves before 9 and after noon the small streams increased dangerously dragging sand, stones and all kind of red-yellow sediments. In cases like that I had to pre-filter or leave the water to settle, but nevertheless, the filter was clogged after only 5-6 liters. We started with sandals no socks, which turned out to be a good idea. Shortly before the major flow of Kyzyl-Art began puddles and feeders and then we went without taking our shoes off - stones are not sharp, but unstable and definitely uncomfortable if barefoot. So far there were no problems (water up to the knees), but as we started late, we would not get back until evening and I didn't want to think what would be the river like then. In the distance yaks were foraging and then after the rocky, stone pseudo-bed of Kyzyl-Art appeared light vegetation which grew into grass on the first slopes of the Pamir-Alay Ridge. We didn't have to cross the Djanaydartaka (local said it was possible not later than dawn), but we passed one or two of the spills and continued along the right bank of the river. On the other side of Djanaydartaka emerged the form of the massif "Icy Cape", and south a mountain ridge began to raise and stood white in its higher parts. Our sandals crunched on the small stones, the moss and vegetation in the valley, and soon we saw the first edelweisses. They proved to be so many, that sometimes appeared between our feet or bottles with water at resting stops, but eventually we got used to the edelweiss and noticing

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<sup>1</sup> In Russian "лесной" (from the forest) sounds like „лесен" (easy) in Bulgarian

<sup>2</sup> Russian peasants

them. Much less common was for example the thyme which we were unable to pick for even one tea. The path hardly climbed in the first kilometers, but at some point we noticed the first signs of a glacier and in the distance came into view the outlines of another - called "Confusion", where despite the name we hoped to find a place for a base camp. It was almost 2 pm and crossing streams descending from the high became increasingly complicated. So we left the luggage in a hole in a stone pile, trying to hide and cover it as much as we could, and went back. At 7 pm we were at the outpost - traveled about 30 km, of which only with the last one (and the flow of the river) we fought for about an hour. So we decided to hire mules - to the point where they can manage - instead of doing 3 runs with luggage.

Kirghiz are traditionally nomadic people, but often in front of the yurts or trailers are parked BMW or at least a battered, all-terrain UAZ. During the summer time, Jannah pasture is covered with tents and endless herds of rams, yaks, and horses. People have divided the territory, but the grass is gone and the extreme pasture leaves only gray, dry sand behind. Wheat or even potatoes barely grow in Kyrgyzstan, and people feed on fat mutton and horse milk - slightly fermented and whipped 1000 times. This is how kumis is made (like a long forgotten Bulgarian "mutenitza"), from which I didn't try to limit the brown trail signature on these pristine cliffs. We quickly found two locals with a horse and mule for the baggage tomorrow, and people brought us yogurt (here called "ayran"), bread and some cream, which I also didn't try. The next day, we secured all luggage on the animals, walked few hours, gathered the inventory we stocked yesterday on the glaciers and loaded it too. Then we walked another two hours after the first grumble that the animals will break their legs. Our way was blocked by deep river, on the other side could go infantry only indeed. We forked out \$20 for the service and saw off the muleteers. From here forth we were left the whims of mountain and weather, but even from this point we would need at least 2-3 days to get to the nearest civilization. Then we set our tent up well above the river and went to bed early.

Before dawn at the light of the headlamps we examined the unknown tributary of Djanaydartaka. We really hoped that passing through without a rope will be possible, packed the luggage and carried everything across in 3-4 runs. Around 6:30 having breakfast on the west coast we looked at the rising level of the growing feeder. The lush river in the low roared with massive stones rolling around the rapids. At first you do not know if the rumbling is a stonefall above you or below you, but we got used to these constant noises - at least according to the map there were no other major crossovers before us. We made another 3 two-hour courses with the luggage up to the only more or less flat spot ahead and stopped, but since the river banks were steep and the water - already muddy, tried to look for another source of water. The weather the last 3 days was perfect, without rain or too much cold, but nevertheless we managed to find a pool of rainwater at 100 meters above the camp, where I filtered 10 liters and carried down yet as much for washing. Summer, the preferred season in Pamir is between mid July and mid August, but the weather could be extremely variable and the clear sky can overflow with clouds for like 15 minutes. Often came out strong winds or pouring rain, but equally quick the view of ridges opened again. We put stones on the tent skirt, but sometimes they proved insufficient. After one more day we continued up, the landscape now resembled a massive construction site and miles ahead of us were only stones and stones again. Often when we bounced on top of them they gave way, because despite its size, under them there were other more unstable rocks, cinder and rubble. We passed by a steep section of the glacier 20 m north of us on which were rolling continuous stonefalls and then reached the bottom of a wide ridge leading to "Confusion". Going up the ridge narrowed gradually and its top narrow as a razor - one steep slope going hundred yards down and the west side disappeared just as "slant" after 10 m in a glacier fissure. It turned out the best way to cross these few meters was by running to the little flat spot after them where the crampons stopped the momentum. After another 10 minutes we hit a white even glacier and walking on it was a delightful treat compared to the "construction site" in the low.

After an hour wandering and lookout we found a spot for a base camp (4,200 m) on something like gravel island (20 m<sup>2</sup>) in the flat part of the glacier. The place was raised 2-3 meters above the river, and to the north bordered with the lake. Around it were clearly defined but dry the beds of flood flows which still had not undercut and faulted the "island". A few meters from the river there was a smaller lake, and from the ice next to it ran very clean stream. We set up the small tent and left the luggage in it, and after marveling the beauties of the glacier for a while rushed back to sleep in the low (3800 m). On the back we passed the razor with a lot more confidence knowing the way and quickly got to the big tent. That same evening ended the good weather. It rained several hours, stopped for a while and during the night rained again and more heavily.

In the morning the weather was warm and the sky - clear, so that in 2 more rounds I carried everything to base camp. Despite the rainfall we found the island intact. We used for a laundry rope two ice axes and some prusik, hung the clothes and barely set up the big tent when clouds came down from the sky. We brought out all metal inventory and slipped into the tent. At first it shed a little, then turned to snow which continued for 20 hours - we had steady weather after all. It was snowing and snowing. In the beginning it wasn't much that remained on the warm pebble island, but gradually a white cover laid on the glacier. One shake from the inside of the tent was enough to clean the snow, but often went out to check on the other tent or to make tea and soup. The metal objects piled up outside turned into white heap. We didn't have books, played 3-5-8 and at some time went into the sleeping bags. Didn't sleep too deep because from time to time someone had to hit the tent between the racks. At some point the snow stopped and I went out enthusiastically just to find out after I dug the piled up snow that outside was still snowing - we just stopped hearing anything because there was 10 cm cover, which perfectly isolated noise and heat, and on the skirt of the tent the snow reached up to the vent openings. Yes - I had to use the shovel ... then cleared with the idea rather not repeat the same procedure. Then I slept and snored, which I was scolded for, and it continued to snow in the morning - snowflakes dry as styrofoam, whose pellets break with every press. The shapes of the glacier had already mellowed, smoothed and the surrounding stones, rocks and grooves were painted in white. I could only guess where was the stream from the day before. Well - at least, instead of filtering from now on we would melt water. Appointed an area for snow depository and otherwise cleaned the island to make it more presentable.

Next day was to sightseeing. Since early in the morning small avalanches slid down on the side of "Confusion". When there were no avalanches we heard stonefalls and in general our conversation went like this - Look, look at the avalanche! Wow, this one was huuge! Look at that piece coming down! East and west, 800 m above us rose snowy ridges and peaks who reached the main backbone (the border) and peak 6624. The north wall behind the ice mass was awfully glacial so it was clear from the very beginning that we didn't belong there. The plan was to advance on "Confusion" for another 3 km and then try to find a way to climb the northern edge to the top on elevation 5200 m. The critical point of the route was between the bloody 4700 and 5200 m. There the glacier grew steeper and splintery, and the wind was blowing mostly from the west so the east side of edge peaks had serious overhangs. Probably we should have passed through one of them, but from there on things looked smooth, no gendarmes and no high avalanche risk - with only two camps on the ridge we could have gotten way ahead. Alas - the following scene totally changed our mind. Just before bedtime we heard unusual sounds. Avalanches and stonefalls had long been abated, but around the tent there was this particularly obtrusive growling and gurgling. We went to look around at the light of the headlamps and saw how large bubbles emerged on the surface of the lake at regular intervals. The water was churning towards the bottom and spray flew around - as if someone had pulled the cork on this natural, ice bath. The lake whistle for five minutes, and all of its content gradually disappeared in the glacier, and in its place remained only a black and white, frayed hole. The landscape around had changed, and if a day or two before the water ran down from the smallest to the largest lake, now the inclination of the river bed was in the opposite direction... all within 3-4 m from the tent - as if

we were on the back of that mythical beast described in the memoirs of Jonah and Captain Han Solo. More than a week ago, while I was walking around the outpost I saw dozens of meters of cables stretched flat on one of the tops. I asked the guards what are they for and they answered that the seismologists are making tests in the area. Lying in the tent I remembered the seismologists and the horrible crash 20 years ago when an earthquake started an avalanche over second camp on Lenin peak, killing many people. The next day one word from Svetla and I knew she had the same thoughts in her head. On the white glacier the snow would hardly melt in the coming 3-4 days, where we were headed were falling avalanches and stones, where we were staying the terrain beneath our feet was moving. There was interpersonal friction although we never disagreed on technical issues - it was enough to make us rethink... and we unanimously gave up.

After another two days of grueling work, we went down to Djanaydartaka feeder, which we had to cross early in the morning. We spent the night there (3700 meters), and the demand for clean water took me well over the camp - we had lots of time and even bathed in a lake we found behind a heap of stones. After another 20 min we could see the slopes of peak Nazarov (5000 m). We got up both with Teddy, but where I expected to see the bed of the river in front of us actually showed flat area. The river appeared to be hiding in the glacier much prior to that point. At the clearing we saw rusty Russian cans, and only 30 meters from it there was another river - very clean at 3-4 in the afternoon, and this was incredible. From the camp we could get to the glacier, located east of "Confusion" and examine this route. It is difficult for an observer to understand how the sight of a meadow, some green grass and the clean water source can inspire such euphoria and strength. We went back to Svetla, told her what we found, and decided to stay for another day. If it was possible to do it from this side, we would transfer the camp to the meadow and continue. It was Sunday and we went for a walk as if it was Vitosha, but with crampons and ice axes, glacier "Nazarov" looked pretty shrunken compared to our map from 10 years ago. In most parts we walked on stones until we reached the icefall on 4700 m. We checked the east side of the ridge, didn't like it, so we abandoned this attempt as well - we looked at peak 6624 for the last time, and then the gray clouds swallowed it. After two days all three of us with the inventory reached the outpost at the foot of the mountain. The mules helped us with the luggage again and the muleteers noticed wolf tracks around the tent on the highland ... fortunately wolves have a serious respect for the people who they overcome only with long, systematic starvation. Border guard greeted us like old friends and invited us to "pabuhat"<sup>3</sup> with a bottle of vodka in the canteen.

Then the nomad with the BMW drove us back to Osh. In many parts of the road the Chinese were working laying asphalt over this crossmountain artery, beginning gradually to replace the old route and checkpoint on the Torugart pass. As elsewhere, the Chinese lived in the colonies (trailers), had chefs, they were importing most of their products and food supplies and didn't get in touch with the locals. Kirghiz valued them as disciplined and hardworking people who stoically suffered inhuman efforts, unlike their Turkish colleagues, for example, who despite the similarities in the language, were not favored - the Turkish "repair area" of the road was deserted, with large holes and only one machine for 30 km. Then the driver told the following story, which I find plausible. Many of the workers here were second child. I do not know what's their percentage in China, but we are talking tens of millions of people and along with fines or castrations of the parents, there are difficulties to issue papers of identity for them. So together with the provincials who moved to the metropolis probably many of the second children belong to the "illegal Chinese" class in China. To make the long story short - hard working in such facilities, they (not as teenagers) got housing, food and the exclusive privilege in exchange of 10 years of free labor to become legal and return home as beloved and legal offspring. And if someone complains against this unjust and inhuman Chinese system - will it be interesting to hear his opinion of India, where demography is regulated

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<sup>3</sup> Party

arbitrarily. In support of the theory that "the scourge defines the mind"<sup>4</sup>, the driver of the BMW kept nattering. "I was lucky! I got a good woman. We never quarreled except once I slapped her hard. She was drunk and wanted to dance with another man. I had to take off her devil's horns." Then we learned that inheritance in Kyrgyzstan is traditionally been passed down to the youngest son, who assumes the obligation to take care of the parents. Easily understandable since first children in crowded Kyrgyz families grow and settled well before their last born brother.

In Osh we parted with Svetla and continued with Teddy to lake Sarah-Chelek (yellow bucket) near the town of Tash-Kumyr (coal). The old Soviet factories and chimneys visible 10 km ahead appeared as rusting skeletons on the side of the road, and the few remained in the city Kyrgyz and Russians were occupied mainly with idling and drinking. Other - more entrepreneurial - had parked battered taxis in front of the bus station which served 1-2 buses per day, and some were selling consumer goods of their fellow citizens. Mines couldn't be maintained, because parts, money and the specialists were Russian so the railway going there was deserted and wrinkled. The monument to Lenin, however, stood in front of the park intact and pointing with his hand raised to the bright future that never came. There were dozens of similar landscapes - ghostly tower cranes close to Karakol on Isyk-Kul lake, the forgotten harbor, oil refinery and cannery in Grigorievka, several stations in ruins between Bishkek and Balakchi, and so on. The only activity on a grand scale after the collapse of the Soviet Union could be what the Chinese workers were doing, asphalt roads. Isn't it indicative for example that nomadic Kyrgyz is importing milk from Russia? Not surprising since Kirghiz export their milk only to the road (20 m from their yurts) and there they are selling it to the passing cars. It is not profitable and in smaller quantities but they are selling it today - at this very moment. Then we met Zhenya (the husband) and Rima (his wife) - Russian family that sold their apartment in St. Petersburg 5-6 years ago and came to live in Kyrgyzstan. Rima's parents (she is born here) worsen and she had to take care of them. Now, after their death, both had spent most of the money from the savings, although they had cow, goats, garden and one of two shops in the village. Last year hay was expensive and they got rid of their second cow, the shop didn't go well, for the obvious reason that where once there was work for 10,000 (!) now remained hundred people. There were signs "For Sale" everywhere on the bleached paint of houses and fences, but hardly any of the locals could afford to repaint them. Zhenya and Rima kept two huge dogs who roamed the yard at night, another way to fight the criminals in the village was ... by giving them vodka on credit. On our departure when they were giving us a ride in exchange of several litres of fuel Rima pointed to the right and said with nostalgia - "There was a huge white poppy field here ... And there were so many people from the "kolhoz"<sup>5</sup> working on it at that time (of the USSR) ... When we were sick as children they gave us a small ball of opium to put in our mouth ... and there were no thugs, thieves or drug addicts".

Sarah-Chelek is a huge lake with wonderful blue color located below the steep slopes of unknown 3000 m peaks. Timber logs float in its calm surface and dense vegetation around blocked the few paths on the banks. Cliffs around are inaccessible from everywhere and walking around the lake is impossible. This lake was big and tough mouthful for the entrepreneurs, besides the motor boats and jets there were not much traces of human activity on the way to the water. Perhaps due to lack of organization, locals will not raise lifts and will fully cut down the forests in this paradise any time soon, but people here have a large potential for such activities. Tourism in Kyrgyzstan means to take your grandmother, grandfather and three other relatives in the jeep, then open the bags on a meadow and crank up the music until the car battery dies. We felt nostalgia for Bansko and the Seven Lakes<sup>6</sup> while paddling through plastic bags, broken bottles of vodka, beer cans, along dozens of yurts with ram barbeque in front selling Fanta and kumis. On the stones around the narrow

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<sup>4</sup> "Matter" is replaced with "scourge" which in Bulgarian are "bit" and "bich" accordingly

<sup>5</sup> Form of collective farming in the Soviet Union

<sup>6</sup> Popular and overcrowded resorts in Bulgaria

mountain roads said "P", and smokes rose from every widening of the road not used for parking. Curious tourists photographed us from the windows of their cars - footmen are still considered exotic - and over 10 km spry entrepreneurs blocked our way insisting on horse ride or picture with a hunting falcon, which they immediately place on my shoulder. Somebody with sense of humor had tried to turn his donkey in zebra by painting black stripes on it. Years ago, the crew of "hidden camera" of the German TV lifted with a helicopter newspaper stand bellow Matterhorn. Seller with cutaway had settled in and shortly after boasting before the first climbers that he actually carried the daily newspapers in three suitcases appeared Reinhold Messner himself. With his mouth wide open he listened to the plans for establishing a chain of newspaper booths on Alpine summits, and when together with a huge firework (to celebrate at the top) and Japanese climbers' favorite souvenir (a cuckoo clock), the seller offered him to buy his own most recent book... Messner just lost it. Today - only 20 years later - the footage of this program seems more like an Orwellian prophecy.

What else? We visited another border - this with Kazakhstan, that follows the main ridge of Kungey-Alatau, north to the Isyk-Kul lake. Following the traffic of auto-tourists in the Grigorievska ravine, finally we reached the land of nomads. Small herds of cows and horses gave modest means of living in the summer and around a deep river there were only 2-3 yurts. Locals rode to us, but when they came down from their saddles they could barely stand on their feet and the communication was limited to something like - "Hey bro, do you respect me or not?" Teddy must have forgiven me that after I said "we are going to a lake and a beach" we actually got to the pass at 4000 m. We left our clothes and shoes in Bishkek, so after sunset, fed or not we had to be in the sleeping bags. The water froze, the soil froze, the wind froze and the weather went really bad when we decided to go back, but 10 min after entering into the civilization we were regretting that we went this direction. We went (now fully equipped) to Ala-Archa, 40 km from Bishkek, where is one of the largest alpine polygons of the USSR is still widely used by Russians. Observing military discipline and greetings, as well as group classes all day long in 20 meters range on the glacier, one can easily understand some of the miracles in the Russian alpinism ... without even seen the two cemeteries nearby. Ratsek shelter itself is raised on one of the most unique places for such purpose. After four hours of walking through forests, slopes, ridges and unstable stones, having lost the trail path and looked for water, suddenly you come to a close, but a flat meadow with a creek. One side borders with the edge of the lateral moraine of the glacier - perfect detached from the camp site place for a toilet. But as if nature anticipated that the river will be eventually turn all filthy by men, there was a vertical wall mount waterfall with all clean water. The shelter was not very full and most people were in tents, and at sunrise dozens of groups started towards the extremely beautiful edge of the glacier, Korona Peak (4800 m) and countless walls around. There peaks are named after: Pavlik Morozov, 40 years VLKSM<sup>7</sup>, Uchitel (Teacher), Svobodna (Free) Korea, Razuznavach (Secret Agent), etc., but these are only details of the landscape<sup>8</sup>.

Epilogue - In the two weeks bellow Peak 6624 we saw total of 2 Russian groups headed to base camp of Lenin peak. Only in September I learned that the first group had the same problems with the new snow - they waited for several days, two of them got sick, but somehow all of them got to the top. The leader of the second group showed me where did they wander on "Ice Cape" the year before and what avalanche slopes did they cross. I got the chills like someone who understands but does not approve such heroics, now I remember the inscription on the tombstone of a Russian climber. In Bulgaria we often say "come back so you can go again", but over Ratsek shelter the colleagues of the deceased climber had written another, their truth - "Alexis, 23 years - If he had turned around, who would have gone?" A man is happy when he finds sense in the things he does. Do they make sense is another matter, but if things get boring it is enough to reach the horizon and

<sup>7</sup> Leninist Communist Youth League

<sup>8</sup> Idiom in Bulgarian that means „details that we shouldn't pay too much attention to“

look beyond. Before you open new sights and new worlds ... but eventually everyone decides where to put on his own borders - the ones we obeyed and behind which we didn't manage to peek in Kyrgyzstan.