



Expedition “Mt. Elbrus – 2008”

This year the number of the participants of the International Youth Expedition «Elbrus - 2008» was only 20 persons. However, the diversity of them was remarkable. Young climbers have arrived from various parts of the world: England, Germany, Spain, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Switzerland, Russia and Ukraine. Climbers from Turkey and Iran have also applied to participate in the expedition, but unfortunately they had to cancel their participation right before the event start.

The majority of participants did not have experience of high altitude ascents. (Mt.Elbrus is almost six kilometers over the level of the world ocean!) However, some participants had already made ascents to Mont Blanc, Matterhorn and other well-known peaks. Luis Carlos Garranzo from Spain had even climbed the highest peaks of four continents: the Mt.Everest, Aconcagua, Denaly (Makkinli) and Kilimanjaro. There were also six women among 20 participants. During the expedition all these persons from different countries and various cultures teamed up so quickly into such a cheerful and sportive youth group, that climbing together was great pleasure and a lot of fun!

On the 7th of July the leaders of the expedition met participants at the Mineral Vody International Airport. Then having covered by bus more than 160 kilometres all participants arrived to a mountaineering base "Ochag" situated in Adylsu valley of Mt.Elbrus area of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic of Russian Federation. Tents of participants were settled under sprawling pines on the bank of a small mountain river. Beautiful grandiose covered with snow peaks surrounded the camp.

The Caucasus is not quite Europe or it is better to say: the Caucasus, it is not Europe at all. There is no comfort usual for European people here, no well-groomed footpaths with guide signs and cozy benches; there is no huts and cafes on the

routes. However there is wonderful wild nature which almost did not experience impact of civilization and remains primordial.

Tongue of Kashka-tash glacier is well seen from our base. Anatoly Brynza and Valery Karlovich, instructors of the expedition, are experienced climbers who climbed the tops of Mt.Elbrus many times. They conducted training for the participants on ice of Kashka-tash glacier. It is important to estimate ability of the participants to use crampons – “steel teethes” put on boots for movement on ice. After all Mt. Elbrus is covered with ice armour and it will be necessary to ascent along it wearing crampons for many hours!... Besides, this training is also a part of acclimatization, which means adaptation to the high altitude. The base "Ochag" is located at the height of 2200 meters; the glacier is couple of hundreds meters above. But of course, it is not enough for the ascent to Mt.Elbrus. Therefore one day later participants left the base for acclimatization ascent to Mt. Andyrchi. It took 3-4 hour ascending on grassy steep slope to a place for the overnight stop under the pass at the height of 3310 meters. The participants did not hurry up to set their tents: they were amazed at magnificent panorama of the Main Caucasian Ridge snow peaks. Cheers of admiration and chatters of cameras shutters were heard now here, now there...

A part of participants went towards the nearest rocks. At the instance of Ahija Sottaev and Osman Sogaev, the rangers of the National Park "Prielbrusje", the participants have brought packs of salt in their rucksacks. The salt is necessary for the Caucasian goats, living in these mountains. Salt were scattered under the rocks. It is the place which goats visit very often. To help rangers from National park to take care about wild animals in mountains – that has already become a good tradition of our annual expeditions to Mt.Elbrus.

Early in the morning a chain of climbers started moving towards the pass. They began ascending along the ridge to the Mt. Andyrchi, which rocky top is almost 4000 meters. Adaptation to the high altitude came not easy, but it is impossible even to dream about the ascent to Mt. Elbrus without preliminary acclimatization...

The ascent was successful. Is not it great to climb the first mountain peak on the Caucasus? There was a cheerful atmosphere in the camp; all climbers were sharing the impressions about the first ascent, making jokes, despite tiredness.

Next morning instructors started preparing the participants for the main ascent – ascent to the Western Peak of Mt.Elbrus, of 5642 meters. The tents, sleeping bags and special isolate mats are packed in rucksacks. Next night will be spent in tents

on snow slopes. Warm clothes, special sun glasses, food, gas burners, tents, gas balloons and first-aid sets were checked and packed in...

...Cable -way cabins started going up from ground station "Asau" and in a few minutes moored to a platform of the next station named "Starij Krugozor" (stands for Old Horizon in Russian). After change we went up to a station "Mir" (stands for "Peace" in Russian) at height of about 3500 meters. It was already rather colder there. There were boundless snow fields and slipping down tongues of glaciers around us. There were a lot of young people with snowboards there. It is a paradise for them. At last a seat- hoist took participants to the height of 3800 meters. From that point it was necessary to go by foot to a place of the basic camp at the height of about 4200 meters. It took a bit longer than an hour to get there. We found on a snow slope a flat place and settled the tents of the camp. The weather was still rather good but the forecast promised that the weather would start getting worse next day in the evening. Thus, the following decision should be made: either to spend the next day as another acclimatization day and to climb to Pastuhchov's Rocks at 4700 meters or to start the ascent to Mt.Elbeus. In the evening Instructors' council took a decision to leave the camp and start the ascent to Mt. Elbrus at night.

... Life in the camp woke up at one o'clock in the morning. In darkness the lights of the torches and silhouettes of preparing for the ascent inhabitants of the camp were seen. Two o'clock in the morning. Two chains of figures with head lights lined up on the slope spreading to the darkness. Two groups of ten persons under the leadership of trainers Anatoly and Valery were ready to start an ascent. Good luck!

In full darkness, lighting a way with the head lights, groups accented to Pastuckov's Rocks. From that point the route goes abruptly upwards and then turns to the left, bypassing Eastern top of Mt. Elbrus. The weather was quite good: it was a bit freezing but there was no wind. Snow was hard and it was convenient to climb with crampons. However the movement pace was getting slower and slower. Everybody started feel a lack of oxygen: the groups moved at the altitude higher than 5000 meters. It was getting lighter gradually and snow of the tops became pink. But the climbers are concentrated on the ascent. Panting for breath, they tried not to give way to tiredness and hypoxia. One of the girls felt bad and had to return to the camp. The others persistently moved ahead along «a slanting shelf» in the direction of a col between two tops of Elbrus. Here, at the height of about 5400 meters the participants halted. All climbers dropped from tiredness on snow, took out from backpacks tea or juice and drank avidly... Not a long way left till the

Western top but those meters were the most difficult ones. Besides, the weather started getting worse, the wind became stronger, the clouds wrapped up the top and visibility started getting lower...

Like in a slowed movie, making the last steps with great efforts, the participants reached the top of Mt.Elbrus at 5642 meters! One after another participants went to the top, embraced each other, made photos with the national flags and with a banner of Youth Commission UIAA. The gorgeous panorama of the ranges and canyons of the Caucasus spread till skyline under them: the teeth of forbidding Shhelda-tau and gloomy towers of double-headed Uzhba, ridges of Svanetia and peaks of Uzunkol ... The goal of the expedition was reached on July 14th, 2008. Eighteen climbers from eight different countries made an ascent to the highest peak of the European Continent!

... Good-bye, Elbrus! You have presented new friends to us, you have cleared our souls and helped us to understanding ourselves better. That was unforgettable days! Good-bye, dear friends! Have a safe trip home! I wish you new adventures and new beautiful tops!

Alexander Zaydler

Head of the Expedition "Mt.ELBRUS - 2008"