

## Kamchatka Ski Exploration 2008

### **Project Significance:**

Kamchatka is a fascinating destination. Known as the *land of fire and ice* – it is a narrow peninsula separating the Pacific Ocean from the Sea of Okhotsk. Most interesting, it has only been open to foreigners in recent years. Geographically remote, the coastline has seen little development. As previously explained, our main objective is to backcountry ski in an unexplored region close to the village of Milkovo (north of Petropavlovsk). Access to this area will test our route finding skills, our physical and mental toughness, and our ability to function as a team.

Backcountry skiing is increasing in popularity. People attracted to backcountry skiing tend toward adventure and experiencing the local culture. They are more likely to support a regional economy by utilizing local lodging, transportation, and guide services with minimal impact. This is exactly the type of activity to counter overuse of the land and resources. Developing a sustainable, eco-adventure-driven economy where the footprint left behind is minimal is a better alternative. Even the weather and topography are ideal for backcountry skiing and touring. For example, in an e-mail communication with a guide, he indicated that using locals to access certain regions was becoming more difficult because of population decline due to no jobs in the area.

We differentiate our project from others in that our objectives identify a difficult challenge tempered by experiencing the more typical backcountry available on the Peninsula. We also believe it will inspire others to one day visit Kamchatka. In essence, documenting our expedition will be interesting for everyone – from the hard-core adventurer to the armchair explorer to the weekend-warrior. We have fostered relationships with the people we have met via the internet and, likewise, will develop partnerships with the people we have yet to meet. Mainly because, from all of our research, we think this will be our first of many explorations and visits to the Kamchatka Peninsula.

### **Project description and goals:**

We would like to accomplish the following:

1. Experience Far East Russian culture, make life-long friends, and foster current and new relationships. We have communicated with two local guides and they have supplied information and recommendations. We have invited them to join us at any point and have promised to meet them for dinner and vodka in Petropavlovsk.
2. Bring awareness to this unspoiled region – highlighting its volcanoes, wildlife, mountains, and culture. We think this area will become more popular (we have heard that in July 2008 direct air service will be offered from Anchorage to

Petropavlovsk) and it is our goal to assist in a positive way. A sustainable, eco-tourism-based economy is one possibility to finance local preservation and conservation. Some of the challenges Kamchatka is facing include over-hunting of grizzly bears, over-fishing (1/4 of all Pacific Salmon comes from Kamchatka), and rehabilitating areas scarred by past mining and logging operations (particularly in the region's Zapovedniks, or nature preserves). It is our intent to generate attention to this area to promote a low-impact, eco-tourist economy in the region.

3. Attain some first ski descents. Through extensive research and dialog with local guides, we have identified two locations which have yet to be skied.
  - a. Our primary focus will be the Valaginsky Range to the east of Milkovo (54.6826°, 158.833°). There are 4 major peaks here ranging from 5000 to 6000 feet. We will ski from the town approximately 15 miles to base camp 1 (54.5644°, 158.944°) between peaks Vieltlovaya (altitude 1556 meters, 54.5487°, 158.913°) and 1863 (altitude 1863 meters, 54.5752°, 158.985°). We will follow the Vieltlovaya river drainage to an approximate altitude of 750 meters. From here, we will climb each peak in an alpine style and ski descend. In addition, access to two other peaks, Kudraysh (altitude 1779meters 54.7572°, 159.398°) and Savulch (altitude 1724 meters, 54.8368°, 159.45°), can be approached from base camp 1 by skiing approximately 32 miles to a second base camp, or from the nearby town of Kirganik (54.8099°, 158.82°) (the distance is approximately 23 miles). Base camp 2 (54.7846°, 159.392°) will be established at an altitude of 1000 meters on a tributary of the Kitilgiha River. Route information and photos of these peaks are unavailable. See images 1, 2, 3, and 4 below.
  - b. Our secondary focus is Shish Peak (altitude 2340 meters, 55.754°, 161.178°) and its surrounding mountains. This peak is often used for training by local mountaineers. However, based on our research it has never been skied. Our information indicates a descent is not possible from the high point because of its sharp and rocky summit. However, a descent from its shoulder is possible. This peak is accessed from Klyuchi (56.3125°, 160.849°). There is a road that is passable in winter when the ground is frozen. It will take us to an access point at the Khapitsa River (55.9937°, 161.193°). The approach would then cross the river and continue southeast for approximately 15 miles (55.7925°, 161.013°). From here we will be able to follow one of three drainages of the Khapitsa and establish base camp 3 (an approximate distance of six miles). This climb would be more technical in nature. Other lesser peaks surrounding Shish could be climbed and skied. An added difficulty is the closure of Klyuchi to foreigners, although we are working on obtaining special permission. See images 5, 6, and 7.

4. Experiencing what may be considered *normal* backcountry skiing in Kamchatka. This includes spending time at developed resorts near Petropavlovsk and ski touring nearby Crab Peak and Kamchatka Rock (accessed from the ocean and central wharf in the city of Petropavlovsk), a ski-tour of the Paratunka River Valley with a post-ski soak at the hot springs, and a ski descent of Mount Koldun.

Of course, these priorities can change significantly based upon the conditions, weather and information we receive upon arrival. Like any expedition, half of the adventure is just getting there.

### **Hazards:**

We believe our number one hazard will be the remoteness of this trip. Self-reliance and proper risk mitigation is vital. Other hazards include weather, avalanches, route-finding, river crossings, grizzly bears, grizzly bear hunters, and Russian military detainment and interrogation.

1. Weather patterns should be similar to conditions found in south central Alaska, with perhaps more marine influence.
2. Avalanche conditions will have to be constantly evaluated. We hope to find stable, spring snow conditions. Because these are volcanoes, natural anchors such as trees are absent. Also, these conical volcanoes tend to have constant 30-40 degree slopes for thousands of feet.
3. GPS navigation may be possible, but should not be relied upon as GPS's are currently not permitted into Russia by foreigners. We have heard of GPS's finding their way into Russia by other expeditions. We will utilize Google Earth for coordinates and acquire a proper topographic map with appropriate scale once in Russia.
4. River crossings may be different from the time of entry to the time of our exit. From our research the Kamchatka and Khapitsa Rivers (the two main rivers we will need to cross) do not have rapids where we intend to cross but are wide and swift. Local information indicates previous crossings have been made easily with a 'puffed' boat (we assume this to mean a boat we blow up), or by using vodka as a bribe to a local with a boat. Routes may have to be adjusted based on this information and upon size of the rivers and availability of snow to cross.
5. Grizzly bears will be waking from hibernation. The Kamchatka bears are considered to be the largest in the world. They should not be a threat and may even be scared of humans because of over-hunting. However, we will take all precautions.
6. Grizzly bear hunters are an unknown. We understand this is hunting season and we may encounter hunters in the area east of Milkovo.

7. Previous expeditions have been detained in Klyuchi area for not having proper papers. They were held and questioned. Hopefully we can acquire the proper permissions, but even then the possibility exists.

**Itinerary:**

Day #	Date	Activity	Russian Visa
Day 1	2-Apr	Fly LAX to Seoul	
Day 2	3-Apr	Fly Seoul to Vladivostok	Visa 1
Day 3	4-Apr	Fly Vlad to Petro	Visa 2
Day 4	5-Apr	Explore Petro	Visa 3
Day 5	6-Apr	Explore Petro	Visa 4
Day 6	7-Apr	Bus to Milkovo (Klyuchi)	Visa 5
Day 7	8-Apr	Ski to base camp	Visa 6
Day 8	9-Apr	Ski to base camp	Visa 7
Day 9	10-Apr	Ski to base camp	Visa 8
Day 10	11-Apr	Weather day	Visa 9
Day 11	12-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 10
Day 12	13-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 11
Day 13	14-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 12
Day 14	15-Apr	Weather day	Visa 13
Day 15	16-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 14
Day 16	17-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 15
Day 17	18-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 16
Day 18	19-Apr	Weather day	Visa 17
Day 19	20-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 18
Day 20	21-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 19
Day 21	22-Apr	Climb/Ski	Visa 20
Day 22	23-Apr	Weather day	Visa 21
Day 23	24-Apr	Ski to town	Visa 22
Day 24	25-Apr	Ski to town	Visa 23
Day 25	26-Apr	Ski to town	Visa 24
Day 26	27-Apr	Bus to Petro	Visa 25
Day 27	28-Apr	Ski Petro	Visa 26
Day 28	29-Apr	Ski Petro	Visa 27
Day 29	30-Apr	Fly Petro to Seoul	Visa 28
Day 30	1-May	Explore Seoul	Visa 29
Day 31	2-May	Ski in Seoul	Visa 30
Day 32	3-May	Fly Seoul to LAX	

**Budget (per person):**

Airfare - \$2100.00

Visa fee - \$250.00

Transportation – Ground (busses, taxis, vans) \$1000.00

Air transfers - \$200.00

Accommodations – Homestays for up to 10 nights \$300.00

Accommodations – Backcountry ski hut (1 night) \$150.00

Food - \$400.00

Miscellaneous - \$100.00

\$4500.00 per person

(Total: \$18000.00)

**Project Preparation:**

First, we have made e-mail contact with two local ski guides. We have been in touch with Fedor Farberov, a local Russian guide whose name is associated with many of the first ascents on the Kamchatka Peninsula. He is a sought-after heli-guide and has many valuable insights as to the volcanoes in the region and the areas where ascents have yet to be made. We have also been in touch with Andrei Nikiforov, another local tour operator and adventure enthusiast. His knowledge of the area has also been valuable. His humor and sense of adventure have inspired us to push the limits. We will be meeting with him in Petropavlovsk and he may have time to join us on a portion of our expedition.

We have also sought out assistance from other agencies. We are working through Martha Madsen, Vice President of the Kamchatka Ecotourism Society (and owner of Explore Kamchatka, a tour operator) in obtaining the proper visas, invitation letter and special permissions to accomplish our objectives. We have also received help from Aaljte van Zoelen, Managing Partner of World Wise Ecotourism Network based in Seattle. She was valuable in facilitating travel to and from Petropavlovsk and has offered to be of assistance for Cathleen in any forthcoming editorial pieces regarding the subject of eco-tourism and responsible travel. Tobias Luthe, Head of Environmental Affairs for the German Ski Federation (DSV), has been invaluable in directing us to the right people. Luthe organized a ski tour of Kamchatka in the spring of 2007 to bring awareness that conservation on the Kamchatka Peninsula can be funded through eco-tourism development.

We have purchased topographic maps of the region to study at home before arriving in Kamchatka and have reached out to our contacts to help understand the hazards that exist. Obtaining this knowledge before arriving will assist us in getting right to the

expedition details upon arrival and also help us select the appropriate gear for our objective(s).

Physically, we are regularly snow shoeing and skinning peaks in Southern California (including San Gorgonio at an elevation of 11,499 feet).

### **Project documentation and presentation:**

Team members Cathleen Calkins and Scott Cordner are professional photographers, each with editorial credits to their name. Most recently Cathleen and Scott showed their work for a two-month exhibit at Focus One Gallery in Monrovia, California. Their fine art photography is featured in various galleries in their hometown of Big Bear Lake. In 2006, Cathleen and Scott were able to attend National Geographic's Adventure Photography workshop at the Banff Centre in Canada, studying under Gordon Wiltsie and Bill Hatcher. In 2002, Cathleen and Scott were the keynote speakers at the NSP Far West Division's annual Tri-Advisory in Yosemite Valley. They discussed their expedition to Lake Baikal and gave a slide presentation. Additionally, Cathleen and Scott regularly give slide shows of their travels to non-profit groups such as the Sierra Club and Rotary International. They both have partnered with the local outfitter in Big Bear Lake, Equada Outfitters, to promote awareness of hikers that come through Big Bear every April on their way North by giving slide presentations about the Pacific Crest Trail. Both are excited to continue to produce quality adventure prints, editorial images and fine art photography and at this time are discussing presenting at the 2008 Tri-Advisory gathering.

In addition, Scott believes expedition photography is often more focused on the adventure aspect. Although adventure photography is important and one of his passions, he thinks there is opportunity to use large size, gallery quality prints to promote the area. Scott is considered an expert print maker; his process for printing is environmentally friendly and archival. Examples of his fine-art and adventure photography can be viewed at [www.summit-photography.com](http://www.summit-photography.com).

Cathleen is also a freelance writer and copywriter. Her corporate clients have included Mammoth Lake Conventions and Visitors Bureau, Grand Canyon Club, 248 SolidState and USBee, among others. She provides clear and concise content and copy with imagination and style. As a freelance writer, she has primarily focused on lifestyle, adventure and health pieces. She just completed an article for the May 2008 issue of *The Rotarian*. This particular piece is a report on a Rotary Club based in Irkutsk, Russia and their commitment to building an eco-based, sustainable economy for remote villages along Lake Baikal's remote Southwest shore. This article was a result of her travels to Russia in 2002 and on information she learned about the Irkutsk Rotary Club while researching an article for *LA Weekly* on the Great Baikal Trail. Her photographic images have also been included in all of her published work.

She is currently finishing up work on a mountain bike guidebook for the Big Bear Valley in California. The book is set to publish in May 2008. She is also at work on a story about Southern California's backcountry skiing scene – not something that is widely written about or known. You may view samples of her writing and photography at [www.CathleenCalkins.com](http://www.CathleenCalkins.com).

Cathleen sees many opportunities to write about Kamchatka. She will pitch articles about the adventure itself and the Kamchatka Peninsula as a vacation or adventure travel destination. She will also pitch stories on the essence of the Russian culture in the Far East. She will submit pieces on the subject of eco-tourism, responsible travel and innovative partnerships and their effects on creating sustainable, responsible development, as well as generating funds to support conservation and preservation. To date, Cathleen has been in contact with Rotary International for a piece in their monthly magazine *The Rotarian* regarding the Kamchatka region's local Rotary Club and she has approached *BackcountryMagazine*. She has plans to pitch FOB pieces to *Powder*, *E Magazine*, and National Geographic's *Adventure*, among others, as well as online content to *Alpinists 'Newswire'* and other like websites. She will also contact the *NY Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* and other similar publications for feature opportunities. In addition to backcountry skiing and touring, Cathleen has already begun to research other seasonal adventure travel activities in the area. She plans to meet with Martha Madsen when in Petropavlovsk to discuss this subject. While this expedition is about backcountry skiing it is also about the region and Cathleen is committed to positively support in any way she can.

Cathleen and Scott will also contact REI and Adventure 16 in Southern California to schedule presentations about the expedition. As experienced presenters, Cathleen and Scott will reach out to all of their contacts and can provide a schedule of events at a later date. We think traveling to Kamchatka's unexplored area for first descents presents an interesting topic to discuss, promote, write about and photograph.

While in Russia - and when possible - Cathleen and Scott will post about their travels at [www.airstreamnomad.blogspot.com](http://www.airstreamnomad.blogspot.com).

#### **Team members:**

**Scott Corder (39)** Scott has been skiing for 25 years and for the last 15 years he has been a ski patroller. As a professional ski patroller he was Assistant Ski Patrol Director for Bear Mountain Ski Resort from 2002 until 2004. Currently, he is an American Red Cross CPR and First-Aid instructor and a course instructor for the National Ski Patrol in a variety of disciplines, including Mountain Travel & Rescue, Outdoor Emergency Care, and Ski and Toboggan. He also serves as an Instructor Trainer for Mountain Travel and Rescue and is the program's advisor for Southern California. He was named

Professional Ski Patroller of the Year for the 2006/2007 season. In addition to his ski patrol experience he is a member of the local Search and Rescue Team. He is also a Mountaineering Instructor for the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. He assists the California Office of Emergency Services as a Winter Search Management Instructor teaching the Mountaineering and Avalanche disciplines. Finally, he is a Team Lead for California's OES Search and Rescue Ski Team.

Aside from his professional qualifications, he frequently leads and/or participates in backcountry ski trips in the San Bernardino Mountains and the California Sierra Nevadas. At the age of 23, he backpacked the Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada. In 2002, he kayaked Central Siberia's Lake Baikal, paddling the remote northeastern coast. (We believe we are the first Americans to have done so.) In 2004 he reached the summit of Denali. His climbing partner, Todd Nelson, and he choose to use skis to reach 14,000 feet before climbing to advanced camps and the summit. In 2004 he participated in an attempt of Apu Asungate (22,000) in the southern Andes of Peru. In 2006 Scott and Todd attempted a ski descent Mt. Fairweather. They traveled by kayak to the Grand Pacific Glacier to begin their climb. He has also climbed/mountaineered extensively in California, Oregon and Washington.

**Cathleen Calkins (42)** Cathleen has been skiing for 37 years. The last six of those years she has been a professional ski patroller for Bear Mountain Resort. She is also a ski instructor – attaining her PSIA level II certification in her second season of instruction. A professional member of the National Ski Patrol, she was named Female Ski Patroller of the year for the 2001/2002 and 2002/2003 seasons. Through her membership with National Ski Patrol, she is a course instructor in the following disciplines: Outdoor Emergency Care and Mountain Travel and Rescue. Her credentials have allowed her to guest-teach first aid training clinics to members of the local search and rescue team.

Aside from her involvement in ski patrol, she has over 8 years experience skiing in the backcountry – from the local mountains in Southern California (Mt. Baldy, Mt. San Gorgonio, Mt. Charleton, Mt. Jepson, among others) to northern California (Mt. Shasta, Mt. Dundenberg, Mt. Dana and Dana Couloir, Blue Coulior, among many others). In 2002, she was instrumental in organizing a kayak expedition to Central Siberia's Lake Baikal. (We believe we were the first Americans to kayak the remote northeastern shore from Aya Bay to the village of Davsha.) In 2004 she participated in an attempt of Apu Asungate (22,000) in the southern Andes of Peru. She is a recreational rock climber – climbing sport, trad and multi-pitch routes in Joshua Tree and the Eastern Sierra.

**Matt Theis (25)** Matt is a third year volunteer patroller for Bear Mountain Resort and a member of the National Ski Patrol. He has completed NSP coursework, including Avalanche and Mountain Travel and Rescue, and is a course instructor for Mountain Travel and Rescue. He holds certifications in American Red Cross Emergency Response,

Emergency Medical Technician and CPR. He was NSP's Candidate of the Year for the 2005/2006 season.

Outside of the ski patrol, he heads to the mountains as often as possible, skiing local and Sierra Nevada backcountry. He believes the best education is through first hand experience and squeezing every bit of knowledge out of more experienced compatriots. He thrives on travel to exotic and mountainous destinations. He has climbed or ski mountaineered in France, Scotland and England. During a recent trip he climbed volcanoes in Ecuador summiting Cayambe and Iliniza Sur. He learned a valuable lesson in Ecuador - Always bring skis!

**Todd Nelson (41)** Todd has been an avid skier for over 30 years. He has a decade of experience with the National Ski Patrol working on some of the busiest and most accident-prone slopes in the United States. He is EMT trained and CPR qualified. He has contributed to the National Ski Patrol Mountain Travel and Rescue Program as a guide and as an instructor since his first year as a patroller. He mountaineering experience includes summiting all of California's fourteen thousand foot peaks – most on multiple occasions and seasons. Several of these have been mid-winter summits. He has led two expeditions to Denali The first attempt in mid-April, his team was faced with a storm system that lasted eight days and dropped to -35 degrees inside the tent. His second attempt was a successful summit utilizing skis. His partner was Scott Cordner. This success cemented our commitment to skiing as an approach method and we packed our skis into our kayaks for a 40-mile approach to Mount Fairweather in 2006. Preparation for these expeditions has included several trips to Mt. Rainer in summer and winter conditions using skis as an approach to the upper mountain. Finally, I have led and organized an expedition to the Mexican volcanoes, successfully summiting Iztaccihuatl and Pico De Orizaba. On this expedition, the logistics of getting to the mountain were more difficult than the technical requirements of climbing. This experience applies directly to the proposed expedition.



Image 1

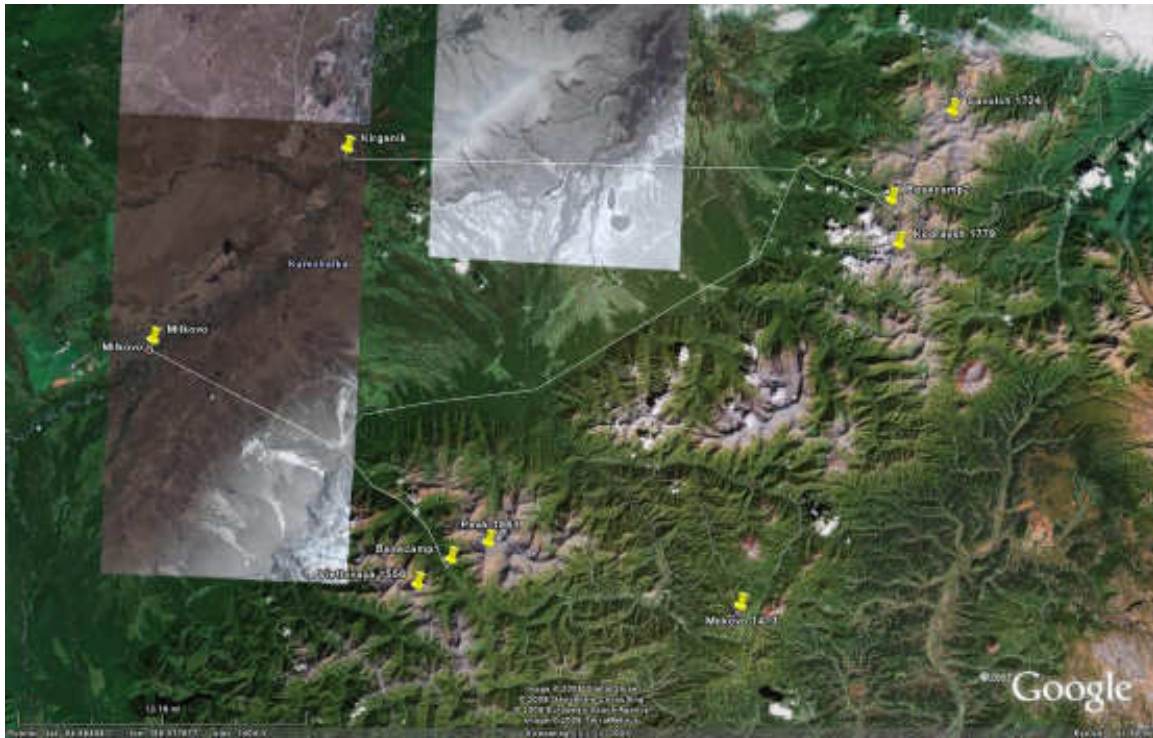


Image 2



Image 3

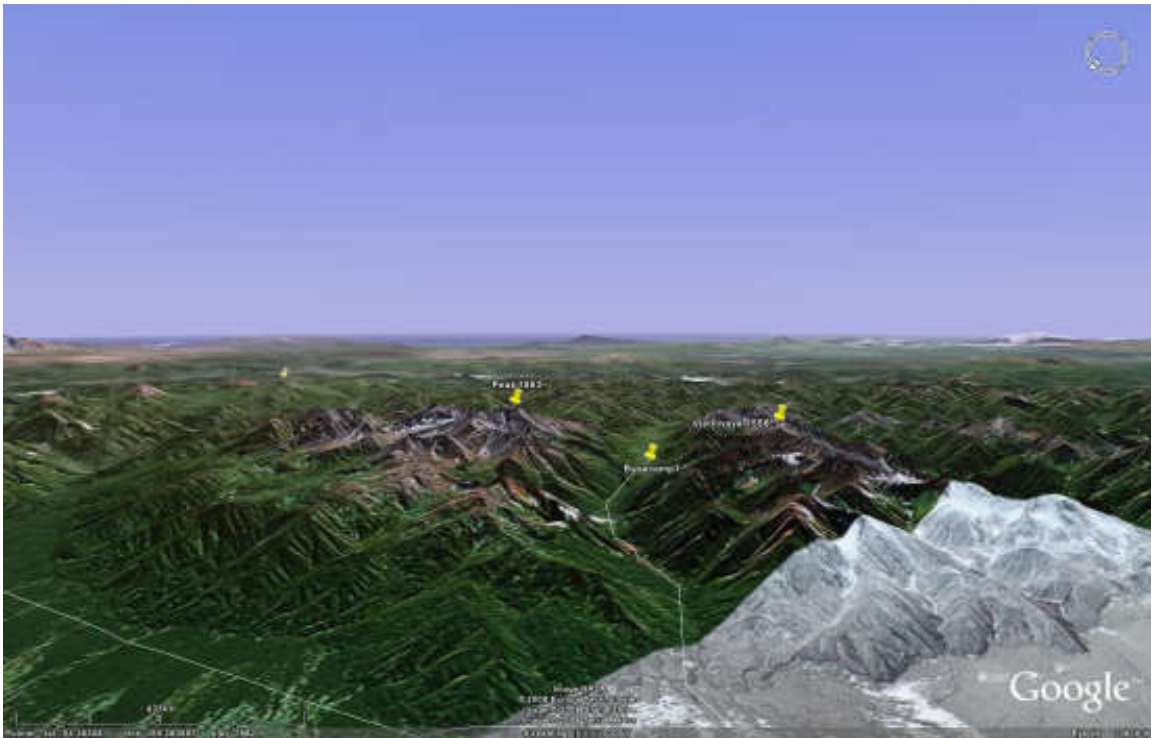


Image 4

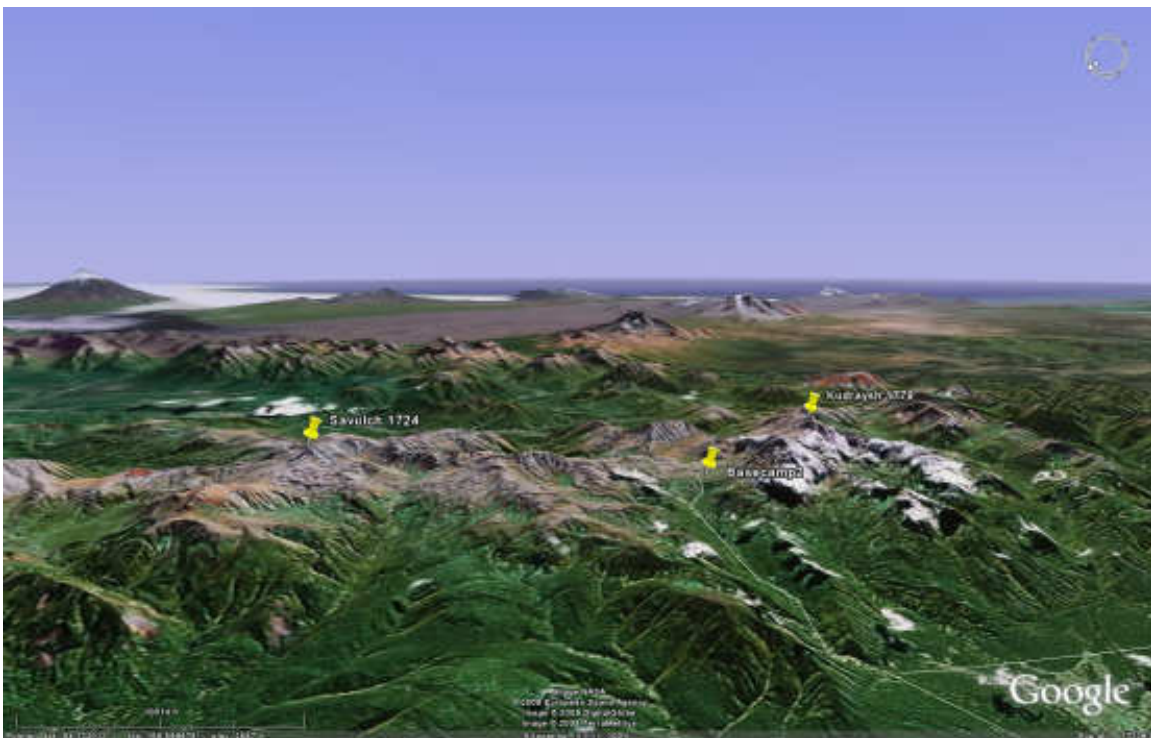


Image 5

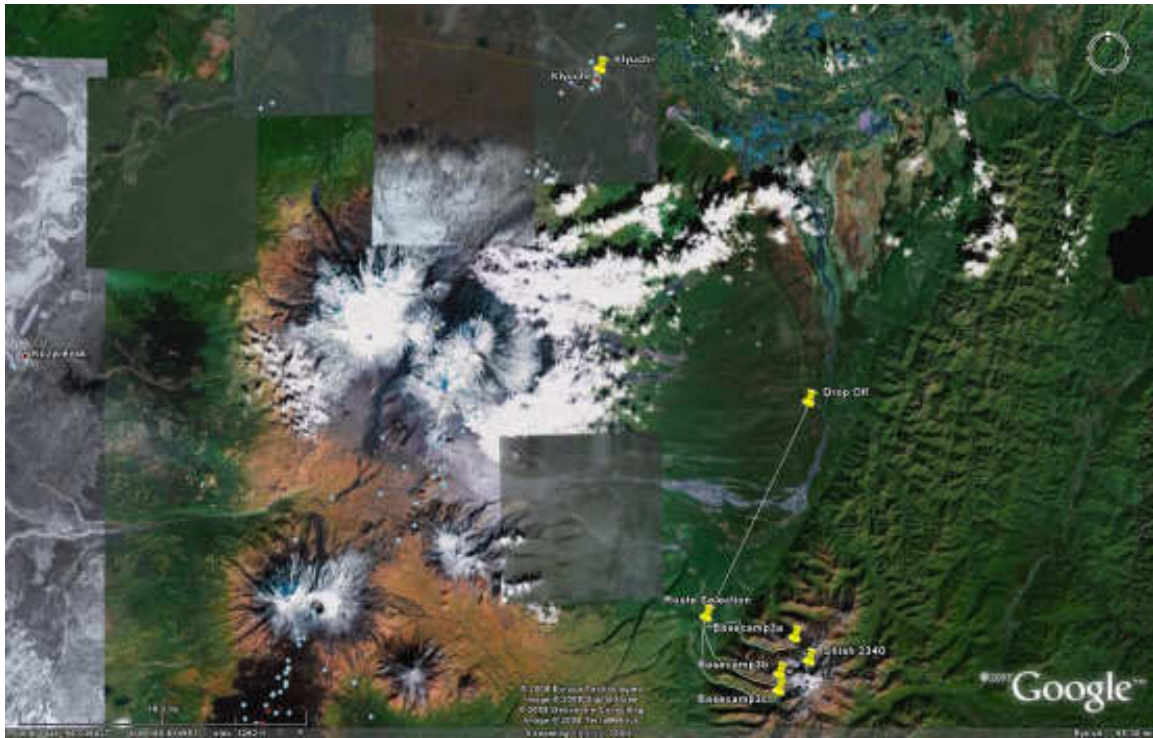


Image 6

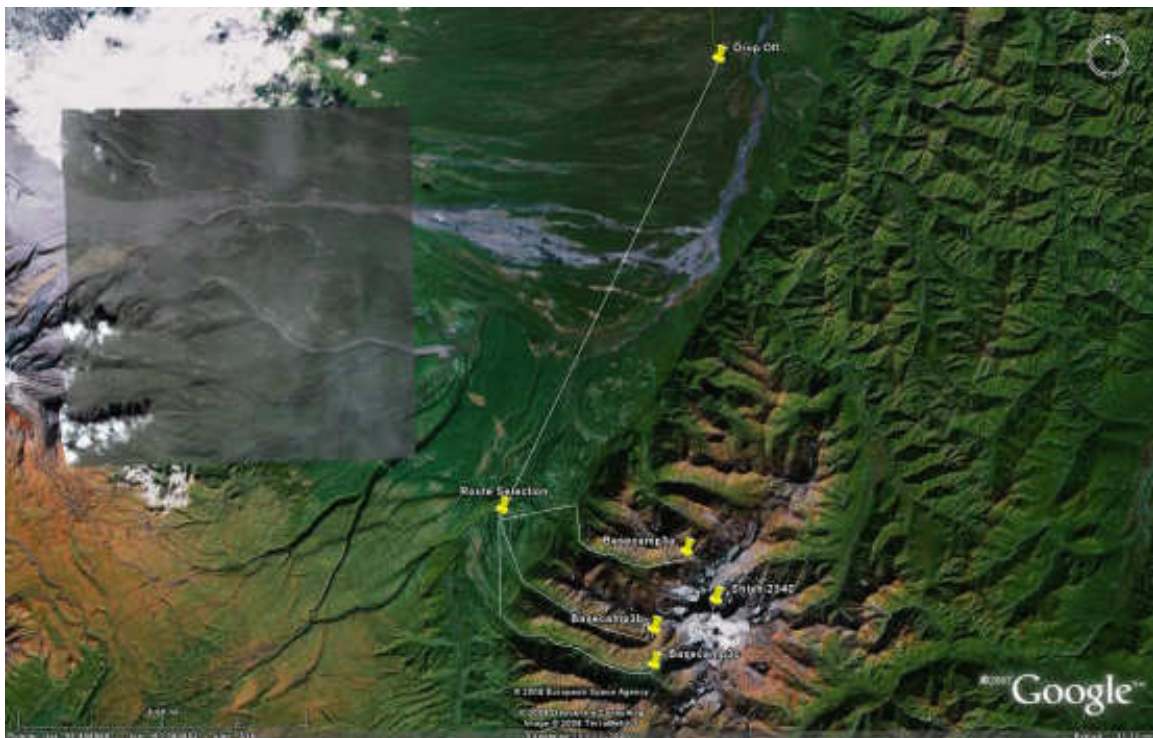


Image 7

