



Members Bulletin

“Avalon” Historico-geographical Society

year 2015

Editor's note

Dear Avalonians,

As usual, in the beginning of the year we present to your attention the fifth issue of the annual Members Bulletin. By reading this unique report/diary, you will learn about the brightest moments in the lives of “Avalon” historico-geographical society and “Avalon” public foundation in the past year. Here we tell you about our mutual achievements and accomplishments, share with you our future plans and, just as before, hope for your active participation in the life of “Avalon”.

Upon looking through the photos taken in 2015, one may get an impression that we spent every day of it in motion, never standing still, constantly exploring, investigating, discovering and finding new things, people and places. This year has indeed turned out extremely interesting and eventful. In the first place, this applies to our travels whose geographical coverage this year was quite wide. We travelled regularly and involved more and more new members into our travelling projects. Langtang and Gosaikunda, Kolsai and Torgen, Ortau and Ulytau, Kent and Kyzylarai, Irtysh and Pavlodar, Urumqi and Hami – all these geographical names have been written into the history of our discoveries for the first time or in a new way. Travelling is, however,

not the only activity in which “Avalon” has been engaged. We continue with the project on the Northern Tien-Shan (alas, its implementation takes longer than we have planned) as well as work out the plans of developing Ulytau region. The Avalonians took part in the first Kazakhstani brevet as well as in the bicycle races in Temirtau and Stepnogorsk. Against all the odds, “Karaganda-VeloCity” bicycle festival took place and was held in a very new format. The record number of sessions of the Traveller's club were held. The historico-geographical club by the Karaganda high school №1 came into being. It goes without saying that we haven't managed to implement everything which was planned. However, we are not concerned about that too much. It only means that next year our life will be even more exciting.

By the way, in 2015 we became a member of “Mountain Partnership”, a voluntary alliance of governmental and non-governmental organizations, which was started up with the support of the UN for improving the life quality of mountain communities and protecting the environment in the mountain regions all over the world. We see it as some sort of acknowledgment of the minor but still very important role that “Avalon” plays in the development of mountain regions of Kazakhstan.

At some point a few years ago in



one of the Himalayan expeditions, unofficial motto of “Avalon” was born which reads as follows: “Adventure and Experience”. Now we may honestly say that we spent the year 2015 in accordance with it. Let us further create, inquire, discover, see more, gather experience and use it for a good cause.

Vitaliy Shuptar
President
of “Avalon” HGS
and “Avalon” PF

Contents

Biodiversity conservation.....	2
Tourism development.....	2
Bicycle culture / infrastructure.....	5
Camping trips and expeditions.....	7
Maps and guide books.....	10
Climate change.....	10
Clubs of “Avalon” HGS.....	11
Our guests.....	11
Organizational issues.....	12

Langtang, Himalaya, Nepal / Vitaliy Shuptar





Snow leopard, Northern Tien Shan

Biodiversity conservation

“Avalon” continues to work at the project on “Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region “Northern Tien Shan mountains” which will continue until the end of 2016. This project is implemented in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in cooperation with Nature and biodiversity conservation union of Germany (NABU), its affiliated branch in Kyrgyzstan, Rural Development Fund of Kyrgyzstan (RDF) and Association for the conservation of biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) with the financial support of Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ).

Just as before, flora and fauna monitoring in the framework of this project is carried out in cooperation with ACBK and Institute of zoology (towards the end of the year Kazakh Geographic

Society joined our activities in the field of snow leopard monitoring). Throughout the year we took a few working trips to the territories of National Park “Kolsai Kolderi”, Ile-Alatau National Park and Almaty Nature Reserve in order to mount the new camera traps for snow leopards and remount the old ones, as well as acquire the data that they have collected. The camera traps repeatedly detected snow leopards, as well as revealed the presence of Eurasian lynxes, wolves, wild bores, red deer, roes and wild mountain goats. In August at the camera trapping workshop we organized showing of the movie about the joint activities of “Avalon” PF, ACBK and Institute of zoology in this field. These activities were often highlighted by television programmes broadcasted on such channels as Kazakhstan, Turan-TV and 24-KZ.

The project specialists have

been taking part in the meetings of scientific-technical council, annual wild animal censuses as well as the record routes mapping in the “Kolsai Kolderi” and Ile-Alatau National Parks.

Moreover, the project group took part in the making and editing of some sections of the management plan of Ile-Alatau National Park, namely the sections on flora, fauna, wildlife monitoring and socio-economic situation.

In March, we published the informational booklet about the activities carried out within the Northern Tien-Shan project. Later in the spring we supported the organization of the creativity contest “Snowdrops of Kazakhstan” held in Almaty.

Tourism development

In the framework of the above-mentioned project “Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region “Northern Tien Shan mountains”, our organization is engaged in ecological tourism development.

During the past year, we participated in the making and editing of tourism section of the management plan of the Ile-Alatau National Park, as well as the passports of the tourist routes in its territory. As for the affiliated branch of Ile-Alatau National Park in Turgen, where we had planned to reconstruct ranger cabins and develop nature trails, the project group experiences some (hopefully temporary) difficulties. For example, our activities are being slowed down by the fact that the agreement about starting up the Ile-Alatau support foundation has been under the review at the national park administration for more than three months and still has not been signed.

One way or another, in 2016 we are planning to build a wheelchair accessible trail in the territory of Ile-Alatau National Park (beyond the scope of the above-mentioned project). If our plans work out, this will be a trail leading to the Kayrak Waterfalls.

During this year we undertook considerable amount of the



Alexey Grachev (Institute of zoology) and Saltore Saparbaev (Avalon), Northern Tien Shan / Balzhan Baltasheva

fieldwork aiming to explore and describe travel routes (current as well as some new ones) in the territory of the Turgen branch. We investigated the walking and bicycle routes in Issyk, Turgen, Chinturgen and Kishi-Turgen gorges, Donzhaylau and Oyzhay-lau plateaus, as well as in the territory of Malovodnenskoye forest district, including Torzhay-lau tract.

As for the ecotourism development in “Kolsai Kolderi” National Park, here we have made some considerable progress. In January, we organized a workshop on “Establishment of a guest house” in Kurmety village. The workshop's participants were coached by Aigul Issagulova, a representative of Ecotourism Information Resource Centre of Kazakhstan Tourism Association. At the workshop, local inhabitants had a chance to familiarize themselves with the ecotourism conception, based on the use of ordinary village houses as the main and most common way of accommodating tourists. The workshop participants were then introduced to the general principles of opening a family-run guest house and quality standards were explained to them. It is worthy of note that in 2015 some of the future guest houses already had a chance to welcome their first “test” tourists (i.e. our employees and volunteers).

By the way, Kurmety is the starting point of some rather interesting treks to the Lower Kolsai Lake and to the Middle Kolsai lake, as well as numerous tours in the Kurmety valley and the neighboring Taldy valley, which include visiting Kurmety lake and climbing up Kyzemshek peak. We have explored and tested a large number of these routes in 2015.

All the data collected during the field trips in the last two years will be used for preparing the travel map of mountain routes of the Northern Tien-Shan, at which we are currently working (planned to come out in 2016). What is more, we are working at the map's



Workshop in Kurmety village / Vitaliy Shuptar

printed version as well as adding the respective information to the Google Maps system.

Just as last year, from May to September we were engaged in the recreational load measurement and tourists polling on the two paths in Ile-Alatau National Park and “Kolsai Kolderi” National Park. Tourists counting was carried out within the approbation of “Methods of evaluation of the acceptable tourism carrying capacity and recreational loads on specially protected natural areas (SPNA)”, drawn up by Centre for Remote Sensing and GIS “Terra”. The polling results will be used in the marketing research carried out in the framework of our project.

We would like to honour our numerous volunteers who were of great help in the tourists measurement and polling, as well as in our activities aimed at exploration of the old routes as well as discovering of the new ones. Most of them are members of “Avalon” HGS, whom we encourage to participate in such activities on the first place. In this connection, Alexander Novikov, Georgiy Markovskiy, Timur Tilmashev and Azamat Shegenov joined our volunteers team in 2015. However, as it did not seem possible to fulfill our objectives with the help of the Avalonians only, we also searched for volunteers outside our organization. In this connection, Green-Board Nature Conservation Info-

resource was of particular help in attracting the interested people. With their help, we received hundreds of applications from different countries. One way or another, the following people became our volunteers in the Northern Tien-Shan: Timur Makhanov from Karaganda, Nargiz Shaker, Nurlan Kapuov, Dina Dzhulayeva and Roman Dyupin from Almaty, Petr Glushkov, Anna Belova and Anna Bubnova from Moscow, as well as Oxana Meshkova from Penza (by the way, Petr also became the member of “Avalon” HGS).

We pay due attention to our dear Central Kazakhstan as well. Unfortunately, we have not managed finding the funding for resuming our Kyzylarai activities yet. However, we have a great deal of interesting ideas such as the Zhaman-Kyzylarai area improvement, social paths establishment within the main mountain range, event tourism at the main ecosite in Central Kazakhstan, etc. and hope that implementation of our plans is just a matter of time. Until then we are busy developing tourism in the western part of Central Kazakhstan, namely in the Ulytau area.

In summer, we resumed our exploration works in the Ulytau region area (read more about it in the section on “Camping trips and expeditions” below). In August, our team took part in “Khan Koryk”



Bolgan Ana mausoleum, Sarysu valley / Vitaliy Shuptar

youth festival, organized by Kazakhstan National Geographic Society (KNGS) and Ministry of education and science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The festival was held in Ulytau. It was here that our ideas and plans for developing ecotourism in the region were presented. These ideas were then brought together to form the conception of the full-scale three-year-long project whose implementation will hopefully start next year under the aegis of KNGS and United Nations Development Programme in the RK.

Together with KNGS, we made one of the first steps towards the project implementation by planning organization of the workshop on “Theory and practice of community-based ecotourism” in the end of 2015 in Sarlyk village of Ulytau region. Having gained support from ERG, KAZ Minerals PLC and Kazakhmys PLC, we completed all the preparatory works, including the development of six educational modules (General principles of ecotourism, Guest houses and their working standards, Starting a small business, Price formation, Tourist product promotion, etc.). However, unfavorable weather conditions did not permit our team to reach the Ulytau in December. In this connection, we were forced to postpone the workshop until

January 2016.

Talking about our activities on the regional and republican level, we would like to mention that in the past year we developed suggestions for exploring tourism development opportunities along M36 highway on its segment from Karaganda to Priozhorsk. The suggestions were developed by request of the Tourism industry department of the Ministry of investments and development of the RK as well as World Bank.

We keep promoting Kazakhstan travel opportunities on the domestic and inbound tourism markets. In this connection, in March 2015, Katja Voigt and Gregor Qualitz, members of “Avalon” HGS from Germany, as well as Dagmar Schreiber, our friend and partner, presented our ecotourism development activities in the Northern Tien-Shan and Central Kazakhstan at the tourism exhibition ITB Berlin. Being there, they took part in the 2014 Sustainable Destinations Global Top 100, an event dedicated to the nomination of the 100 most sustainable travel destinations of 2014. You will recall that since recently this Top 100 list includes Kyzylarai and Shabanbai Bi.

Results of our work with mass media are worth telling as well. One of the issues of the Karaganda student newspaper “Limonad” published the article about a small bicycle excursion

around Karlag sights, organized by “Avalon” HGS in April 2015. The article telling about our journey to one of the most interesting parts of the Northern Tien-Shan, the Assy plateau, appeared in the summer issue of “Mir puteshestviy” magazine. Moreover, a story telling about the journey from Astana to Ulytau in the autumn of 2008 was published in two other issues of this edition. The travels of Chokan Valikhanov in Central Asia and “the Great Game” period were covered by yet another article of ours, which was published in the British magazine “Open Central Asia”. Tourism in Kazakhstan became the central topic of the programme “Obsudim” broadcasted on “Kazakhstan-Karaganda” TV-channel as well as of the broadcasts about Karaganda and Karaganda region in the series of programmes “Routes and Notes: 9th largest country in the world”, shot by “Kazakh TV” channel with our support. Photographs of Begazy necropolis were published in “An Illustrated History of Kazakhstan: Asia's Heartland in Context”, a book by Jeremy Tredinnick. In the past year, our friend Guillaume Tiberghien's doctoral thesis came out under the title “Authenticity and tourism in Kazakhstan: neo-nomadic culture in the post-soviet era”. Notably, Central Kazakhstan (including Kyzylarai and Shabanbai Bi) was used in this paper as one of the two practical examples.

In June, “Avalon” with the support of Kazakh Geographic Society, “Almaty City Tour” company, “Trekking Club” and “Raft Service” provided assistance to the shooting team of “CNN International” channel in their shooting of the Kazakhstani part of the programme “The Silk Road: Past, Present, Future”. The shooting took place in the Northern Tien-Shan mountains, namely in the Turgen gorge and on the Assy plateau. Led by Vitaliy Shuptar, the shooting team consisting of Jon Jensen, Alasdair Skene and Sumnima Udas first paid a visit to a zhaylau (summer

pasture) and went rafting down the river Turgen on the next day.

As for other events concerned with the tourism development in Kazakhstan, in which “Avalon” took part in 2015, we may mention “KITF” and “Astana Leisure” exhibitions as well as the Karaganda regional contest “Sary-Arka for tourists 2015”.

In September, in the capacity of guests we visited the celebration of the “Day of the Irtysh” organized by our friends, Pavlodar’s Geography House and Kazakhstan National Geographic Society. Besides, this time we took part not only in the official part of the programme, but also in the active part of the event, namely in the floating down the Irtysh river.

In 2015, we kept the Tourist hotline in Central Kazakhstan up and running. “Avalon” financed its maintenance from January to April, whereas from May to December we received financial support from Department Entrepreneurship of Karaganda region. For more than one and a half years now, everyone who is interested in tourism in Karaganda and Karaganda region may reach “Avalon” team at 8-800-080-7212 and get all the necessary information on the subject (also in English). The hotline operates daily except for holidays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Calls are free of charge and can be made from



The shooting team of CNN International, Northern Tien Shan / Vitaliy Shuptar

every landline in Kazakhstan, as well as from the mobile phones provided by all Kazakhstani mobile operators. Just as before, we are not certain about the financial grounds of the hotline operation in 2016. However, we are planning to keep it up and running and to simultaneously search for financial means for supporting this project, which by all means makes lives of the Kazakh as well as foreign tourists a lot easier.

Bicycle culture and bicycle infrastructure

Karaganda and its satellite towns are still on their way to the bright bicycle future. The process of bicycle infrastructure development is slow but steady, although

not always as we would like it to be. The year's beginning was marked by the introduction and enactment of the new rules of the road, which on the one hand considerably complicated the lives of cyclists and on the other hand somehow triggered the bicycle infrastructure development. It is quite likely that the first bicycle lane (along Shakhtyorov avenue in Yugo-Vostok district) appeared in the past year in Karaganda in response to the escalation of conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians. Of course, the city authorities built it independently, without taking into account the experience and ideas of Karaganda cycling community. For that reason, it turned out to be far from perfect. However, this way of solving problems seems to be the only possible way of further developments in the situation, at least initially. Even if the first step is always the hardest, it is still the step taken in the direction of bicycle culture development: now citizens of Karaganda finally understood that bicycle lanes are not just a sporting establishment, but rather an element of transport infrastructure.

The bicycle tourism season was traditionally opened in Dariya, where our members had a chance to ride and wheel their bikes through the wet steppe. In early June, Avalonians together with other Karaganda cyclists



The first bicycle lane in Karaganda / Alexandr Kuznetsov



Karaganda-VeloCity 2015 / Alexandr Kuznetsov

joined the bicycle march dedicated to the Day of State Symbols, which was organized by Department of physical culture and sport of Karaganda region. After the march was over, our members continued the bicycle ride and got to the spring located to the east from Karaganda city.

In advance of the day marking the start of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), the “Avalon” team organized a bicycle ride along the Karaganda sights which are connected with the war history. These sights included all four evacuation hospitals located in the city at that time, the first Kazakh drama theatre, the venue of the former regional Stalin war commissariat and “Oktyabr” cine-

ma, from where soldiers were sent to the front. The team of four people (3 “Avalon” members, namely Ruslan Telegin, Nikolay Zakharchuk, Kairat Yeleussizov, as well as a simply good person, Asylbek Alimbekov) dedicated their bicycle ride to the 70th anniversary of the Victory.

On June 28th, 2015, the 8th annual bicycle festival “Karaganda VeloCity” was held. It was organized by “Avalon” in cooperation with “Limpopo Outdoor - Karaganda” store and “Centre of coordination and information on ecological education “EcoObraz” PA. “Radio TEX” and “eKaraganda” portal became the event's media partners. “Pyatyi ugol” band traditionally provided “the musical

support” of the festival. As usual, numerous volunteers helped us in the organization and management of the festival.

This time the festival's format underwent some fundamental changes. The programme started on the Cascade square in front of the store “Limpopo Outdoor-Karaganda (here the bicycle contests for children were held). However, its main part, comprising contests and entertainment, took place outside the city, in the territory of “Lesnaya skazka” hotel complex located 16 km far from Karaganda city center. Having formed bicycle march, the festival participants covered this distance in no time. Several changes have been introduced to the contest programme which made the event less formal and more entertaining, accompanied with a lot of contests and prizes. However, the biggest innovation of the 8th “VeloCity” festival was in its super prize, the mountain bike from “Limpopo Outdoor – Karaganda”, which was raffled off among all the registered festival participants. By the way, its happy winner, Pavel Chikulayev, later became a member of “Avalon” HGS.

Being extremely busy with other things, we could not organize any other bicycle-related sporting events in the past year. However, our members have been taking an active part in the sporting events, organized by our friends and colleagues in other cities of Kazakhstan. In April, two “Avalon” members, Kairat Yeleussizov and Sergey Savin, participated in the first official Kazakhstani brevet “Astana-Karaganda BRM 200” organized by “Randonneurs Kazakhstan” randonneurs club. They scored quite well and received medals for the successful completion of the bicycle marathon. Kairat Yeleussizov, Alexandr Motkov and Olga Toporkova successfully represented “Avalon” in the amateur bicycle race “Cross-country Temirtau EXTREME 2015” by taking medal places. Furthermore, Alexandr Motkov showed great results at “ST-Cross 2015”



The participants of the first Kazakhstani brevet / Ruslan Telegin

bicycle race in Stepnogorsk. Hopefully, next year we will be able to organize “Avalon-Trophy” cross-country race, as well as support or organize bicycle orienteering contest in the vicinities of Karaganda or Temirtau by our own forces. For that reason, we are planning to make the working group out of “Avalon” members, whose primary aim would be organization of such events.

New bicycle stands appear in Karaganda and its satellite towns and we instantly mark them on the Karaganda interactive map, which is available on our website. It is worthy of note that one of the bicycle stands was mounted near the business-center “Kazakhstan” which houses “Avalon” office.

Our activities in the field of the bicycle culture and bicycle infrastructure development were brought into focus at the discussion club meeting held on Earth Day (April 22nd) in the American corner in Astana. We promoted Karaganda cycling community several times on air on “Radio Tex”, as well as shared our thoughts on the topic of conflicts between pedestrians, car owners and cyclists with a great number of newspapers and internet-portals in Karaganda and beyond. Towards the end of the year, development of the Karaganda cycling community became the topic of a large publication on the web-portal “Vlast.kz”.

In December, “Avalon” delegation consisting of Sergey Savin and Kairat Yeleussizov, took part in the Kazakhstan bicycle teams presentation held in Astana.

We celebrated the end of the year by organizing a small, but very nice bicycle tour and a celebratory picnic in the forest nearby Karaganda.

Camping trips and expeditions

Our expedition activities in 2015 were active more than ever. We travelled around Kazakhstan and beyond and our journeys were frequent, long and had no



“ST-CROSS 2015” bicycle race, Stepnogorsk / Sergey Balashov

season limitations whatsoever.

In February, a four-member team (consisting of three “Avalonians”: Vitaliy Shuptar, Yelena Kim and Vyacheslav Tyukhtin, as well as Vyacheslav Gorshkov) reached the sacred lake of Gosaikunda in the Nepali Himalayas (Langtang National Park). In the course of their one-week-long journey they climbed up to the height of 4426 meters above the sea-level and (partially) experienced some of the altitude sickness “blessings” along with the esthetic pleasure of watching the breathtaking sceneries from above.

Just as before, expedition activities of “Avalon” in 2015 were largely carried out in the framework of the project on ecological tourism development and biodi-

versity conservation in the Northern Tien Shan (you may have read about it earlier). Our efforts were focused on the two main sites namely “Kolsai Kolderi” National Park and affiliated branch of Ile-Alatau National Park in Turgen. We took an impressive number of camping trips in the Northern Tien-Shan, including volunteer trips. Of these, one was especially long, namely the camping trip from Turgen gorge through Donzhaylau plateau, Amanzhol pass and Atzharganzhota tract to the Kolsai lakes, which connected both our project areas.

Between late June and early July, Avalonians in cooperation with KNGS and “Nomad 4x4 travel club” of Astana carried out a



Karaganda-VeloCity 2015 / Alexandr Kuznetsov



Gosaikunda lake trail, Himalaya, Nepal / Vitaliy Shuptar



The Flaming mountains, Xinjiang, China / Vitaliy Shuptar



Karlag museum in Dolinka, Karaganda region / Vitaliy Shuptar

quite successful reconnaissance exploration of Ulytau region in the framework of our tourism development activities in the Ulytau. The team took a path through already well-known Karakengir valley and explored the famous archaeological monuments as well as a few new sites. Then its members ascended Auliye peak from its southern slope and, therefore, added one more interesting mountain trek to their trek collection. The most unknown part of the area was left for later: in the end, we went to the site where the Battle of Bulanty between the Kazakhs and Jungar armies took place in 1720's. Exploration of Ulytau region was also undertaken at the time of “Khan Koryk” youth festival: Avalonians explored the northern part of the region (Terisakkan and Shenber, including its mines), its western part (including Dulygaly mosque), as well as the mausoleums in the Sarysu river valley. All the collected data will be used for developing Ulytau region guide book, as well as for developing the travel routes network.

In the summer of 2015, the “Avalon” HGS provided consultative and administrative support of the bicycle expedition from Almaty to Dushanbe carried out by “Lucky Adventures KZ” bicycle travelling club consisting of Alexandr Sipetiy and Nikita Melnichenko (the latter is an “Avalon” member). After having covered three thousand kilometers by the mountain roads of the Tien-Shan and Pamiro-Alai, the expedition participants contributed to the shooting of the three-part documentary film.

Despite the fact that we did not gain any support in the organization of “The Jade gate” bicycle expedition, we decided to ride our bicycles through the Xinjiang deserts and mountains anyway. That said, we had to change its format and decrease the trip length. In the course of the expedition, which took place in September 2015, Vitaliy Shuptar and Yelena Kim visited western

China and covered around 700 km from Urumqi to Hami by bicycle. They rode their bicycles along the northern branch of the Silk Road in the tradition of “Avalon”, whose members tend to explore China by bicycle. During their journey, they had a chance to see the sites of ancient settlements and oriental bazaars, as well as sand dunes, mountain passes and many other interesting things. By the way, during the trip its participants got the idea of making another bicycle journey around Xinjiang, namely the idea of the expedition along the southern edge of the Taklamakan Desert, from Hami to Kashgar, which is planned for 2017. By taking this trip, we will finalize the exploring of the Xinjiang area and finally visit the famous “Jade gate”.

In the warm seasons, we organized more than ten journeys of various lengths and formats in Central Kazakhstan, by bicycle as well as on foot. Let us attempt to list and briefly outline some of them. First, we would like to mention the trekking trips in the Kent, Bugly and Kyzylarai mountains. Second, some of our bicycle trips are worth telling about: they are our traditional three-day-long bicycle trip “Velo-Dariya” (this time we managed to cover the most part of the local sights within one trip) as well as the bicycle tours in Karlag area (the most large-scale event in which roughly 40 people took part), the Ortau mountain-forest oasis (one of the most picturesque journeys of this season), the Tekturmas mountains (a day trip which some Avalonians decided to prolong for another day) and the Ishim headstream (which turned out to be less picturesque than expected). It is also worthy of note that Avalonians organized a few bicycle trips (to the west of Karaganda and from Karaganda to Karkaralinsk) which were rather sporting events than entertaining mass rides. Two of our bicycle expeditions did not achieve their destinations: we were not able to get to the



Ortau mountains, Central Kazakhstan / Alexandr Kuznetsov



Floating down the Irtysh river / Alexandr Kuznetsov



Amanzhol pass, Northern Tien Shan / Alexandr Kuznetsov



Balkantau peak, the Ku mountains / Alexandr Kuznetsov

Narshoky mountains (but successfully fed mosquitoes and other insects) and to Ayirtau (but got wet and cold). We will try to make it better next year, which promises to be even richer in trips. By the way, last year, for the first time, Avalonians took part in the event, which did not take place on the ground. Here we are referring to the floating down the Irtysh river, organized by Pavlodar's Geography House in the framework of the “Day of the Irtysh” celebration. Two of our members, Vladislav Chumilo and Alexandr Kuznetsov, took part in this event.

Interestingly enough, in 2015 we decided to challenge the common opinion of winter being exclusively the season of plaids, fireplaces and hot tea by organizing two winter camping trips to the mountain oases of Bugly and Ku in Central Kazakhstan (despite awful storm and strong wind, we succeeded in ascending the highest point of the Ku mountain range, Balkantau peak). We also planned two more events of this kind to be held in January 2016, namely the ascent of Kyzemshek peak in the Northern Tien-Shan, as well as the ascent of Aksoran peak in Central Kazakhstan. All the above-mentioned winter trekking trips have/will become a good test of our skills in advance of the journey to Nepal, which is planned for March 2016. During

this journey, we will go trekking in one of the regions of the Himalayas (at the moment we are considering circling around Dhaulagiri).

Among the bicycle-related events planned for next year are the bicycle ride to “Shunak” meteorite crater in Central Kazakhstan (May 2016), as well as the bicycle expedition in the footsteps of Pyotr Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, namely following the route of his first journey to the Tien-Shan from Semey to the eastern shore of Lake Issyk Kul (August 2016). As for the car trips, we are planning to further explore the Ulytau area in combination with the parts of Aral and Turgai regions which border upon it (in cooperation with KNGS). As for our journeys abroad, in March 2016 Avalonians will visit Nepal, later in June they will ride along the western shore of Lake Baikal, in July they will familiarize themselves with the Tajikistan mountains. These are not all our plans. For that reason, just as before, we are searching for people among “Avalon” members who would agree and be capable to lead our travelling events.

Maps and guide books

We spent 2015 developing Ulytau guide book, but financial problems in our country prevented the publication of this title. We hope that implementation of our

plan will be possible in 2016. We also hope that next year we will be able to expand the range of our cartographic products by developing the travel maps of Bayanaul, Bugly and Karlag. At present, we are in search of financial means for their production.

In the autumn, we started to develop the tourist map of mountain routes of the eastern part of the Northern Tien-Shan, whose publication is planned for the first half of 2016. Its development is financed in the framework of the project “Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region “Northern Tien Shan mountains”.

Over the past year, some new chapters from our AvalonTravel-Guides/Nepal guide book were published. Just as before, on our website you may access not only the online-versions of these articles, but also the articles in pdf-files, which are useful for off-line use, as well as the maps developed on the basis of Google Maps. Unfortunately, we are not currently capable of adding more information to the content of this guide book. Moreover, due to the earthquake of April 2015, a considerable part of the information presented in the guide book is rather unreliable and needs updating. However, we are eager to continue this project and therefore invite to cooperation all the Avalonians as well as other people, who are interested in Nepal and know this country quite well, as well as encourage you to contribute to the development of our guide book (for now on voluntary basis).

Climate change

We are making our first steps in this new area of work. In this connection, over the past year we made a situation survey reporting on the preparation of the new Global Agreement on Climate Change. This survey is an attempt to analyze the situation observed at the international negotiations focusing on this problem. Next year we hope to proceed to

implementation of the educational programmes and projects aiming to increase social awareness in the field of climate change.

Clubs of “Avalon” HGS

In 2015, we hosted Travellers' club in Karaganda seven times. In spring, we welcomed in our club Vitaliy Shuptar, Yelena Kim and Vyacheslav Tyukhtin, who told us about their recent journey to Nepal. Since autumn we have been holding this event in “The OFFICE Nargilia Lounge” which is famous for its water pipes. Within its four walls, our club received numerous guests, namely Andrey Kuzmin, who told the club members about his bicycle journey from Karaganda to Moscow; Vitaliy Shuptar and Yelena Kim who shared their impressions from the bicycle journey around Xinjiang; Olga Toporkova who presented the results of her trip to Mangyshlak; Artyom Yazev who reported on his attempt to ascend Mount Elbrus; Nikita Melnichenko and Alexander Sipetiy who told the audience about their two-month-long bicycle expedition to the Pamir. By the way, the latter travelers organized the first showing of the film shot during their journey. At the last meeting of the Travellers' club in 2015, some conclusions were made: we made an overview of the camping trips and expeditions undertaken by “Avalon” over the past year, as well as highlighted our plans for the next year.

In December 2015, we started up one more new project: in cooperation with Karaganda high school №1, we organized historico-geographical club. We are planning to hold the club meetings about two times a month. Attending the club meetings, its members will learn about the theoretical and practical aspects of travelling, get to know the remarkable historical and natural sights of Kazakhstan, as well as the countries which Avalonians have already explored or are going to explore in future. At the club meetings, we

Travellers' club in The OFFICE Nargilia Lounge / Artur Saussin



will highlight the activities of “Avalon” HGS and develop new projects by joint efforts. Thus, with our help club members will learn the principles of travel notes writing and travel photography, acquire the cartographical and inland navigation skills as well as the skill of using various navigation equipment. We hope, that when warm season comes, some of them will also have a chance to take part in the outdoor events organized by “Avalon” HGS.

Our guests

Thanks to our cooperation with Green-Board Nature Conservation Info-resource, some volunteers from Russia became our guests, namely Petr Glushkov,

Anna Belova and Anna Bubnova from Moscow, as well as Oxana Meshkova from Penza, who provided great assistance in our activities in the Northern Tien-Shan.

In June, Karaganda welcomed the initiators of Association of Tourists and Travelers and their leader Igor Vovnyanko. In August, we received another guest, our old friend Guillaume Tiberghien: due to his research, numerous people in the world of academia become aware of the tourist potential of Central Kazakhstan. In September, we greeted the bicycle travelers from Ukraine, Andrey Malitskiy and Yelizaveta Vasiliyeva.



Volunteer Oxana Meshkova, Northern Tien Shan / Petr Glushkov

Organizational issues

In 2015, the number of members "Avalon" HGS increased quite considerably: more than forty new people joined our organization. That said, soon we will probably have to part with some of our old members, who had lost connections with the society and failed to pay membership fees in the last two years.

Aside from our website (www.guide.kz) and bicycle forum, we continue using social networks for keeping in touch with our members and those who are likely to join our organization in future. We do so by means of our groups on Facebook (707 subscribers as of end 2015) and Vkontakte (1179 subscribers – here we observe the most

considerable growth in the number of followers), as well as with the help of our newly opened account on Instagram (212 sub-scribers). Furthermore, we utilize the instant messengers, namely "WhatsApp" and "Telegram" (since 2015 both of them have chats for "Avalon" members). As you all can see, we use various means of communication in order to inform you about our activities. If it has been a long time since you received anything from us, this means that you somehow fenced yourself off from our information by turning off the option of receiving invitations for events on social networks or by leaving our chats in one of the messengers. On top of everything else, we use electronic mail to discuss the most important (and

often internal) issues with our members and mailing lists are of great help for us. Therefore, we kindly ask you to keep us updated about possible changes in your e-mail addresses.

In 2015 we approved the Regulation about membership in "Avalon" HGS and made it public on our website. The present regulation closes up some gaps that existed in the constituent documents of the Society. Thus, this document introduces the norms which give a detailed account of the order of entering the society, including the rules of membership fee payment, as well as the order of membership suspension and expulsion from "Avalon" HGS.



Bicycle New Year, Karaganda / Artur Saussin

Present bulletin is distributed among the members and employees of HGS "Avalon" in printed or electronic forms (as desired). It is available to the third parties only in the electronic form, which is usually published with a bit of a delay. As before, we would like to kindly ask you to keep us updated about your contact data and notify us about the change of postal address and e-mail in proper time, so that we would be able to deliver you this bulletin, as well as other pieces of information about our society's activities.

Detailed information about "Avalon" and our projects is available at www.guide.kz, as well as on our

Facebook-page: www.facebook.com/avalongeographic

Vkontakte-page: www.vk.com/avalongeographic

Google+: <https://plus.google.com/u/0/110564846475924275058>

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/avalongeographic/>

You may also find us on Foursquare: <http://4sq.com/17vV0oT>

and Google Maps (Google Places): <https://plus.google.com/101035541698303947937>

"Avalon" Historico-geographical Society and "Avalon" Public Foundation

Headquarters: 49, Bukhar Zhyrau Ave. (Business centre "Kazakhstan") – office 209, Karaganda, Kazakhstan

telephone: +7 (7212) 996263, e-mail: avalon@guide.kz

"Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region "Northern Tien Shan mountains", project office
(as our branch in Almaty city): 176, Zhambyl street – flat 4, Almaty, Kazakhstan; telephone: +7 727 2223431