



Members Bulletin

"Avalon" Historico-geographical Society

year 2016



Dear

Avalonians,

Allow us to welcome you and present to your attention our annual Members Bulletin: a short, but rather comprehensive report on all the achievements and suc-

cesses of the "Avalon" historico-geographical society and "Avalon" public foundation in the past year 2016, as well as on our dreams and plans for the future.

In the past year, we were at different heights – from the sea level to over 4000 metres above it; we saw diverse landscapes – from hot deserts and endless steppes to taiga forests and mountain tundra, our routes went by land and water. This time, once again, we have proved that our journeys are nearly always of practical nature. For example, Ulytau travel guide publication in 2016 became the logical result of many years of travelling in this region, whereas the idea of establishing a network of mountain shelters in the Northern Tien Shan mountains (which we have already started to implement) originated during our winter trekking trip in the Kungei-Alatau.

It is quite symbolic that accessible tourism was made the topic of the World Tourism Day in 2016. As it was in this year that we discovered a completely new field of work, namely the development of accessible social tourism, and started working in this field by establishing the first accessible tourist trail in the Ile Alatau. Talking about our new or relatively new fields of work, we would also like to highlight our activities in the field of climate change, where we have been making our first confident steps.

We have been taking an increasingly active part in the expeditions organized by Kazakhstan National Geographic Society (KNGS) and more and more of our ideas gain their support. We continue to maintain friendly relations with Pavlodar's Geography House (PavGeo) and in 2016 we even proceeded to the implementation of our joint project. Furthermore, our participation in the Day of the Irtysh celebration has become a good tradition. By the way, it was at this celebration that we had the luck to get to know the members of the expedition "In the footsteps of Buchholz", organized by the Omsk regional branch of Russian Geographical Society, and see their impressive fleet. It is our hope that this acquaintance will further develop into some joint projects. Avalonians continue to take an increasingly active part in the bicycle-

related events organized by "Randonneurs Kazakhstan" club (Astana) and "S.T.BIKE" bicycle team (Stepnogorsk). And the festival "Karaganda-VeloCity", which we traditionally organize in close cooperation with our friends from "Limpopo Outdoor - Karaganda", got a new co-organizer in the past year, namely "Aerofit" fitness club.

In 2016, the Avalon's birthday celebration lasted for 2 days and this time our friends from the KNGS and Astana-based travellers' club "Nomad 4x4 travel club" joined us in celebrating it. And our New Year's party in Karaganda brought together over 30 Avalonians.

We have been trying to involve more and more of our members into expeditions and other spheres of our activities. This way, for many people "Avalon" has become more than just a group of people to have a good time with, but also a workplace or a place for volunteering. We keep discovering new fields of activities without forgetting the old ones. And just as before, we try to get the most of our lives, as well as provide benefit to society and environment by means of our work.

Vitaliy Shuptar
President
of the "Avalon" HGS
and "Avalon" PF



Akzhar mountains, Ulytau, Central Kazakhstan / Vitaliy Shuptar

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A mountain goat, Northern Tien Shan / Saltore Saparbayev

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

"Avalon" continues to implement the project on "Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region "Northern Tien Shan mountains" which has been prolonged until 2017 due to objective reasons (initially we planned to accomplish the project in December 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 the science divisions of the protected areas (PAs) involved in the project and Institute of zoology. Lina Valdshmit is the head of the Kazakh-

stani project group.

Throughout the year, we carried out activities aimed at fauna monitoring with a special focus on a key species, snow leopard, and its fodder base (mounting, demounting and remounting of camera traps, retrieving information from them) in the territories of Almaty Nature Reserve, Ile-Alatau National Park and National Park "Kolsai Kolderi" (this part of the project was implemented by our PA expert, Saltore Saparbayev). The camera traps were demounted at Kaskelen gorge, at the upper reach of the Chilik river and at the second Kolsai lake. Later some of them were mounted in the Middle Talgar river gorge. You will recall, that in the period between 2014 and 2016, i.e. within the time that our camera traps were used in the wildlife monitoring, camera traps repeatedly detected snow leopards, bears, wolves, lynxes, ungulates and other fauna species. For instance, in late December 2016, a camera trap in Almaty Nature reserve revealed the

presence of a male snow leopard, a female snow leopard and a snow leopard cub. The results obtained from the camera traps in the past year could have been even more impressive, if it was not for the technical problems (batteries of the some camera traps had been discharged much earlier than expected).

The project's specialists continue to take part in wild animal censuses in the PAs involved in the project and are engaged in educational events organization. One of these events was a training held in June for the employees of National park "Kolsai Kolderi" on the subject of flora and fauna monitoring, based on the methodological recommendations developed in the framework of the project. A similar educational workshop on flora and fauna monitoring was organized in August for the employees of Chon-Kemin Nature park in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, a special programme was prepared for organizing internships for the students majoring in natural sciences on the basis of PAs in the future.

Within the project framework, two reports were prepared: one on the prospects of adding the Northern Tien Shan to the nomination "Xinjiang Tien Shan" included into the UNESCO World Heritage List from China, and another one on the prospects of nominating Ile-Alatau National Park, Almaty state nature reserve, Almaty wildlife sanctuary and National Park "Kolsai Kolderi" for UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB).

The project contributed to the updating of the electronic database by providing the results of flora and fauna monitoring at the project PAs.

In August, a working meeting between representatives of the public authorities, protected areas and environmental organizations of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan took place in Almaty. The meeting focused on discussing the areas of cooperation in the biodiversity conservation and ecotourism development in the transboundary region "Northern Tien Shan". The meeting resulted in the draft agreement between the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani PAs, as well as a draft joint work plan of creating the most favorable conditions for intensifying cooperation in the field of biodiversity conservation in the Northern Tien Shan region in 2017. Last but not least, a movie about the results of wildlife monitoring using camera traps made by Saltore



Northern Tien Shan working meeting in Almaty / Saltore Saparbayev

Saparbayev was shown at the meeting.

We shared our ideas about the potential activities in the field of biodiversity conservation in Kazakhstan during the meeting organized by Zoi Environment Network and Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) in Almaty. This meeting aimed at preparing the characteristics of the mountain ecosystems of Central Asia, which will become the basis of the grants programme starting in summer 2017. During the meeting in Karaganda, we expressed our opinion about the work strategy and priority destinations for the future grant projects within the GEF/UNDP Small grants programme in 2017-2019. We hope that very soon our ideas will transform into the projects, whose implementation will greatly contribute to nature conservation efforts in Central Asia.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

As in the past, we focus our tourism development activities on the Kazakhstani part of the Northern Tien Shan and Central Kazakhstan. Our work in the Northern Tien Shan is carried out in cooperation with Nature and biodiversity conservation union of Germany (NABU) in the framework of the project "Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region "Northern Tien Shan mountains". This project is implemented with the financial support of Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and has been prolonged, as stated above, until 2017. Our projects for tourism development in Ulytau, which are jointly implemented by "Avalon" and Kazakhstan National Geographic Society, are on the other hand funded by ERG, "KAZ Minerals" PLC and "Kazakhmys Corporation" LLC.

After years of working in the field of tourism development, we came to a discouraging conclusion that national parks are generally hard to establish contact with and unwilling to cooperate in the field of ecotourism development. For that reason, for instance, we failed to negotiate and sign the agreement for the establishment of Ile-Alatau support fund (designed for reconstructing ranger cabins, developing nature trails and involving the families of national park employees into working with tourists based on creating financial motivation for them). Eventually, German donors ordered us to abandon our efforts in this



direction. Yet, we had wasted more than a year on this! The situation with State National Nature Park "Kolsai Kolderi" is hardly better, as the agreement with this national park still has not been signed either. Yet, according to this agreement, we could have provided the park with the financial means for developing tourist infrastructure (reconstructing 2-3 ranger cabins for receiving tourists) and legally involved the families of national park employees into the tourist service industry, thereby creating financial motivation for them. (We initiated the process one year ago and this working mechanism had been approved in principle by the Committee of forestry and fauna at the Ministry of agriculture of the RK). It is noteworthy that the legal and practical elaboration of this mutually beneficial mechanism of cooperation between the national park's administration and its employees, including their family members, could help to create a typical working scheme. Such a scheme could be introduced in all the protected areas of Kazakhstan and may solve some of the problems, which tourism development in national parks and reserves is confronted with.

The national parks administrations' inertia is, of course, not the only problem. Generally speaking, from time to time we get the impression that our tourism activities are implemented contrary to the state policy, which has been lately based on the introduction of additional bans and limitations and, therefore, in no way works towards attracting inbound tourists and limits domestic tourism development as well.

Nevertheless, let us remain opti-

mistic and hopeful that the situation will improve soon. We move on towards the victory despite all bans and misunderstanding and may proudly state that some progress has been achieved: we advanced our activities at the Northern Tien Shan and made our first steps in the field of accessible tourism, quite a new direction both for us and Kazakhstan in general. What makes us especially happy is the proactivity of our members and friends. In the past year, our activities aimed at the national parks infrastructure development in Turgen and Kolsai and managed by Alexandr Novikov, our ecotourism development assistant and an "Avalon" member, were supported by numerous volunteers: three Avalonians, namely Valeriy Kharitonov, Sergey Ibrashev and Georgiy Markovskiy, as well as simply good-natured and helpful people, namely Rustam Khibulayev, Dmitriy Dvortsov, Alexander Koshel and Turekhan Zhakupov.

In 2016, in cooperation with Kazakhstan National Geographic Society and Pavlodar's Geography House, we got started with the design of Bayanaul travel map-scheme. However, weather conditions in the second half of 2016, coupled with some technical difficulties, prevented us from completing this task and the project was therefore extended until 2017. We were also forced to postpone the completion of the Northern Tien Shan travel map-scheme until 2017 due to our failure to timely accomplish the works aimed at the creation of tourist infrastructure and because of the necessity to correct our working schedule from time to



The Day of the Irtysh / Vitaliy Shuptar

time owing to circumstances beyond our control. Some difficulties in the completion of the both maps mentioned above were caused by Google Maps system (both projects envisage the creation of printed maps, as well as the enrichment of this cartographic system with the respective information). At present, Google Maps undergo some major changes: by March 2017 Google Map Maker will cease to exist and in future one will be able to accomplish such tasks (or similar ones) by means of Google Maps. Until then, adding new objects to maps presents some difficulties and becomes increasingly problematic with each passing day.

In 2017, we are planning to develop and publish a guidebook on Ecotourism in Kazakhstan and hope to find financial support for doing it.

Information about Kyzylarai and

Shabanbai Bi was once again published at the TravelMole website (TravelMole is one of the organizations which established the Sustainable Destination Global Top 100 nomination, the latter included Kyzylarai and Shabanbai Bi in 2014). We opened up the Kyzylarai page at Wikitravel, a popular travel resource, and filled it with information, whereas Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change published yet another interesting article about the authentic tourism and Kyzylarai written by our friend, Guillaume Tiberghien. We talked about the potential of our travel destinations, existing tourist products and future plans in the framework of the Regional communications service by the President of the RK at a briefing on the subject of Development of tourism clusters, as well as in the course of KITF exhibition in Almaty,

Karaganda Invest forum and Astana Economic Forum, as well as on air at "Radio-Astana" and on "Kazakh TV" channel. In September, we attended the celebration of the Day of the Irtysh, organized by our friends, Pavlodar's Geography House. It is noteworthy that this was the second time that Avalonians took part both in the official part of the programme and in the active part of the event, namely in the floating down the Irtysh river.

Unfortunately, based on financial considerations, in the second half of 2016 we were forced to give up the idea of supporting the Tourists hotline in Central Kazakhstan (8-800-080-7212) at our own cost. You may recall that the hotline had operated since 2014 – partly supported by Department of Entrepreneurship of Karaganda region, partly financed at our own cost.

Throughout the year, we have published new chapters from the Avalon Travel Guides Nepal on several occasions. Just as before, upon visiting our website, you may access the on-line versions of the articles and download the respective pdf-files, which are convenient for the off-line use, as well as the maps, created on the basis of Google Maps. In other words, slowly but steadily we keep filling out the blanks on the map of Nepal and just as before we encourage Avalonians and other people who are interested in Nepal and know the country well, to assist us in the improving and updating of our guide.

And now we would like to tell you in more detail about the projects, in which we have had some real progress:

Guest houses in Sarlyk village (Ulytau)

In April 2016, we finally succeeded in holding a workshop in Sarlyk village (Ulytau region), which had been delayed for so long because of the unfavorable weather conditions in the winter period. The workshop on "Theory and practice of community-based ecotourism" was organized in cooperation with Kazakhstan National Geographic Society for those, who wish to open up guest houses based on their households.

During this event, Yelena Kim and Vitaliy Shuptar, both Avalonians, introduced the concept of ecotourism to local villagers and familiarized them with the general principles of opening and running guest houses, peculiarities of working as a guide,



One of the guest houses of Sarlyk village / Vitaliy Shuptar

opening small business in tourism, promoting tourism product and other theoretical and practical information. Furthermore, after inspecting and assessing the potential guest houses, our project group provided recommendations for their improvement.

The holding of this workshop was made possible thanks to support of the Department of entrepreneurship and industry of Ulytau region and Gulnara Aугanova in particular, as well as the Akimat administration of Amangeldy rural district and especially Amanbek Suleymenov.

Considering the fact that the lack of suitable accommodation options is one of the key problems of developing tourism in Ulytau region, whereas local population is hardly involved in the working with tourists, our workshop presents a rather important step for developing tourism in the region.

Guest houses in Kurmety (Kolsai)

In May 2016, the project "Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region "Northern Tien Shan mountains" and the residents of Kurmety village entered into a simple partnership agreement, envisaging the work order of Kurmety ecosite. Later, in the framework of this agreement, necessary equipment (refrigerators, water heaters, furniture and plumbing fixtures) was delivered to the village and used for establishing seven guest houses, whose hosts had expressed the wish to provide accommodation for tourists.

It was also in May that we held the beginners course in "English for tourism and hospitality" for the hosts of Kurmety guest houses. Language instruction was carried out in two formats: language classes were traditionally held at the premises of a local secondary school, as well as on site (in guest houses) in the form of situational dialogues designed to model typical working situations. The course taught by Roman Skvortsov of "Avalon", comprised 42 academic hours of lessons and was mainly designed to develop the conversation skills of course participants at the levels A0-A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In spring, in the framework of the project, we also carried out a socio-economical study in Kurmety village. For this study, we conducted polls and interviews with the local residents participating in the project



English language course in Kurmety / Roman Skvortsov

activities. Therefore, in future we will have some comparative data.

Just as before, our activities in Kurmety are mainly supported by Zhomart Shegebayev, a coordinator of the guest houses network established within the project. The overall project activities aimed at the ecosite development are supervised by Vitaliy Shuptar, the expert in ecotourism development.

We have no doubts that in the future Kurmety village will become a great base and starting point for trekking routes in "Kolsai Kolderi" SNNP, including some of its areas that have not been explored by tourists yet. At present, in Kurmety one may start the simple routes to the famous First and Second Kolsai lakes. Aside from those, it seems possible to organize walking tours and horse rides in the Taldy and Kurmety gorges, as well as

the treks to the top of Kyzemshek peak starting in the village. In other words, our activities aimed at promoting the "unknown corners of the famous Kolsai" have good chances for success. Especially if our works on developing nature trails (read more about it below) will be successfully completed as well.

Tourist infrastructure in "Kolsai Kolderi" national park

Although the reconstruction of ranger cabins is still a debatable issue (as it has been explained earlier, the agreement with the national park on this matter has not been signed yet), our works on developing nature trails in the park have been approved, at least on paper (and with some reservations). Nevertheless, bureaucratic obstacles have been holding up the progress of our work with "Kolsai Kol-



Delivery of equipment to the guest houses of Kurmety / Roman Skvortsov



Materials for building a mountain shelter / Alexandr Novikov

deri" SNNP since May 2016. It was in May that our first team of volunteers arrived on site, ready to work. However, instead of developing nature trails, our guys were forced to additionally redevelop some of the routes, as the national park administration did not agree with our viewpoint. It was finally decided that the nature trail from Kurmety village to Kyzemshek peak via Taldy gorge would go through a different, less convenient route (that is unless we succeed in convincing the national park administration that the areas, where limited economic activity is permitted, are also suitable for nature trails).

Aside from the additional development of routes, our team was also forced to reexamine the draft routes passports (including their topographic parts). Then the draft

passports were submitted to the national park administration for their further submission for approval at the Committee of forestry and fauna of the Ministry of Agriculture of the RK. We then had to introduce some changes to our working schedule and budget estimates. Then it took us several months to obtain the permission from the national park administration for starting our works. In fact, we only obtained it in the second half of August, i.e. when very little time was left for carrying out any construction works, especially taking into consideration that winter came very early in the past year. Nevertheless, we purchased most of the tools and equipment needed and transported it to the work site.

It is noteworthy that in the course of our trekking trip in the Kungei-Alatau in January, we got the idea of

creating a mountain shelters network. Later this idea was formulated, integrated into the conception of developing nature trails, approved by the donors of the project "Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region "Northern Tien Shan mountains" and submitted for approval to the administration of the "Kolsai Kolderi" SNNP. We suggest starting with building mountain shelters at a summer camp, the so-called zhaylau, at the starting point of the ascension route to Kyzemshek peak, on the path linking Kurmety valley and Second Kolsai Lake, as well as at the upper reach of the Chilik river. Each of these three shelters will be essentially an unstaffed log cabin equipped with an oven and a bed. The availability of mountain shelters will make winter tourism more convenient. Furthermore, tourists will also be able to use the shelters in warm seasons, in case of bad weather conditions or in the event of emergencies.

In autumn, the first log cabin (to be built at the zhaylau at the starting point of the ascension route to Kyzemshek) and some building materials were delivered to Kurmety village and prepared to be transported to the construction site. However, we did not succeed in transporting them to the zhaylau or building the log cabin because of overly deep snow.

One way or another, by the end of summer 2017, tourists will be able to duly appreciate our efforts of developing tourist infrastructure in Kolsai. We are planning to resume working at the natural trails at the beginning of June: in summer, we are going to develop two nature trails, one of them from Kurmety village to Second Kolsai lake and another one from Kurmety village to Kyzemshek peak. The trail from Kurmety to First Kolsai lake will also be developed, but taking into consideration that, as it turned out, this trail goes through the territories outside the SNNP, the algorithm of working on it will be a little different.

Because of our failure to finish the construction works, we had to postpone the media trip for the representatives of mass media outlets and travel companies until next year. Within this media trip we are planning to present the infrastructure, which we have created at the territory of the national park, and demonstrate the potential of its unknown corners to the wide audience.



A viewing platform nearby the Kayrak Waterfall / Vitaliy Shuptar

Accessible trail in Turgen gorge (Ile-Alatau)

The idea of creating the first accessible trail in Kazakhstan originated last year at Kassiyet Omarova's suggestion. The respective project was supported by Kazakhstan National Geographic Society and later, in order to expand the scale of the project, we got approval from the donors of the project "Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region "Northern Tien Shan mountains" to co-finance the construction works.

Despite some red tape, construction of the nature trail leading to the Kayrak Waterfall located in Turgen gorge of Ile-Alatau national park started in August 2016 and we already have something to report on. For the trail construction, we purchased reinforcing steel, pipes, channels and L-steel. Furthermore, we purchased a specialized toilet cubicle, whose design, however, will have to be somewhat improved in order to ensure its increased durability. A viewing platform was built nearby the Kayrak Waterfall, which made visiting and taking photos of this tourist attraction a lot safer. The upper segment of the nature trail (from the resting place at the junction of the Turgen and Kayrak rivers until the waterfall) was partly equipped with metal ramps.

The construction of the accessible nature trail for disabled people (including wheelchair users) in the territory of Ile-Alatau SNNP will become the first example of developing infrastructure for socially accessible tourism in Kazakhstan. The construction of the nature trail is to be completed in August 2017.

What is more, our project on creating the first accessible nature trail was presented at the events dedicated to social tourism and organized by "Arzhan" PF, including the workshop on Accessible tourism in natural zones of Kazakhstan (Almaty, June 2016) and international conference "Social tourism: travelers' club" (Almaty, September 2016).

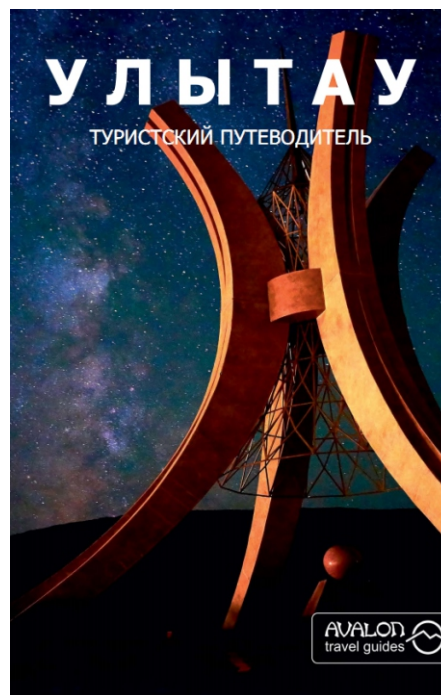
Ulytau travel guide

In mid-December 2016, we published the first practical travel guide to Ulytau region titled "Avalon Travel Guides Ulytau". This travel guide, dedicated to one of the most interesting travel destinations in Kazakhstan, was created in the framework of the joint project implemented by Avalon and Kazakhstan

National Geographic Society. On its 100 pages we tried to tell about more than 70 tourist objects, arranged 6 maps and about 60 photographs.

The guidebook preparation proved to be a rather difficult and time-consuming project, but, hopefully, the results of our work pleased everyone who is in this or that way involved in tourism development in Kazakhstan. It is our hope that the travel guide will also please those for whom it was actually created, namely Kazakhstani and foreign tourists. Many Avalonians to a different extent participated in the creation of the travel guide, namely Vitaliy Shuptar, Makhabbat Nugerbekova, Mariya Tyuryuchsheva, Oxana Kamper, Katherine Hall, Nadiya Bekmetova, Mariya Brizitskaya, Natalya Manuilova, Yelena Kim, Aygerim Torzhanova and Alexandr Yermolyonok. The scientific and historical fact-checking of the travel guide's text was carried out by the employees of Ulytau National Historical, Cultural and Natural Reserve-Museum, including Bakhtiyar Kozhakhmetov.

The travel guide was issued by Avalon in three language versions (Kazakh, Russian and English) with the total circulation of 3000 copies. At present it is distributed free of charge through Avalon's office in Karaganda and KNGS's office in Astana. You may find the complete list of the places, where you may acquire it, at our website. It is noteworthy, that we also issued the electronic editions of all three language versions of the travel guide in pdf-format and they may be downloaded from our web-site as well as from the website of KNGS.



We hope that the Ulytau travel guide publication will further contribute to the development of tourism, including community-based ecotourism, in the region, particularly in view of our initiatives of developing the guest house network in the region, of which we had told you earlier.

BICYCLE CULTURE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The situation in this field may be briefly described with one sentence: bicycle culture keeps developing in spite of the complete absence of bicycle infrastructure. New bicycle stands keep appearing in Karaganda





Valeriy Vyryva and Kairat Yeleussizov with their medals / Mariya Brizitskaya

and its satellite towns, but that is not the only thing that matters. The problem of bicycle lanes is still unresolved: after building the first bicycle lane in 2015 (the one along Shakhtyorov avenue in Yugo-Vostok district... better luck next time!), authorities for some reason decided to stop at that. Then again, in July, regional authorities contributed to the organization of the bicycle march dedicated to the Day of the Capital. However, this event turned out to be practically by invitation only (attended by sportsmen, officials and some ordinary cyclists, who had found out about the event by chance), as the cyclist community was not informed about the organization of the event and, therefore, learnt about everything post factum. As for us, we were mainly busy with bicycle tourism (read more about it in the section on

Trips and expeditions) and cycling sports.

That being said, we succeeded in holding the main bicycle-related event of the Karaganda summer. Because of some extraordinary events in our country and, mainly, because of the authorities' strange reaction to these events, we could not hold our traditional bicycle festival in June, as we have always done in the last eight years. Thus, in 2016 we only got a chance of holding the festival, the ninth one in a row, on August 21st, albeit without the traditional bicycle march, which would have caused predictable reaction on the part of the authorities. The ninth annual bicycle festival "Karaganda-VeloCity 2016" was held in the territory of the horse riding club "Karat". It was organized by "Avalon" historico-geographical society in close cooperation with "Limpopo

Outdoor – Karaganda" shop and "Aerofit" fitness club. Among the event's media partners were "EKaraganda" portal, "Novoye televideniye" TV-channel and "Radio TEX". The "musical support" of the festival was traditionally provided by "Pyatyi ugol" musical club and Marlen Smagulov.

Sergey Savin of "Avalon" and Eduard Grossul, a representative of "Aerofit" fitness club, moderated the event. The festival was held in the format that we had tried out last year: with the prior participants' registration, a large number of contests and prizes for participating in them, as well as the super prize which was raffled off among all the registered festival participants. By the way, this time the super prize, a mountain bike, went to Nikolai Kuchma. The festival had nearly 200 registered participants. If you add about 100 viewers, then you will get the idea of the scale of the ninth "VeloCity". By the way, we managed to feed (and even overfeed) all the participants with watermelons, which made our festival into the "tastiest" event ever.

The sportiest members of "Avalon" continue taking part in the brevets organized by "Randonneurs Kazakhstan" randonneurs club under the aegis of "Audax Club Parisien". In the past year, our members took part in the four of them: "Karaganda towns BRM 200", "Karaganda-Astana BRM 300", "Karaganda-Karkaralinsk BRM 200" and "Pine Trip BRM 400". As a result, Sergey Savin, Kairat Yeleussizov and Valeriy Vyryva were awarded with medals for the successful completion of the bicycle marathons (some of them – not for the first time). Meanwhile another member of "Avalon", Alexandr Motkov, keeps winning the cross-country and mountain bike contests: in 2016 they were "Zerenda Cross-country 2016" and "ST-CROSS 2016" in Stepnogorsk (both events were organized by "S.T.BIKE" bicycle team).

In September 2016, two Avalonians, Kairat Yeleussizov and Sergey Savin, independently organized and held an unofficial, but still rather a serious staggered start race, which came to be known as "Saran the mighty". It is our hope that in 2017 we will be able to organize our own race: at least – revive the tradition of organizing "Avalon-Trophy" cross-country race and at best – open some new destinations for "Avalon". In this connection, we appeal once more to Avalonians to make up a working group, which would deal with the



Climate change report meeting / Vitaliy Shuptar

organizational issues of cycling events at the aegis of "Avalon" HGS. We in our turn will try to provide the administrative support of the activities.

CLIMATE CHANGE

In the past year by order of UNDP in Kazakhstan we conducted a study titled "Climate Change and Ecotourism in Kazakhstan: potential, impacts, resilience, and adaptation". This study attempted to analyze the mutual impacts of climate change and ecotourism development. The corresponding report was prepared by two members of "Avalon", namely Katherine Hall and Vitaliy Shuptar. The report revealed that global climate change had already had serious local impact on the situation in Kazakhstan and rural communities prove to be most vulnerable to its consequences. It is a well-known fact that ecotourism has great potential to be an effective tool in increasing ecosystem and community resilience to climate change. However, our report tells about the downside of this process, as the consequences of global climate change lead to the changes taking place in ecosystems nowadays, which in their turn have a negative impact on ecotourism activities. Moreover, the report points out that the ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan may already be feeling the impacts of climate change, however, key ecotourism operators, although already experiencing the consequences of climate change financially, appear to know very little about climate change and have no plans for adaptation. Such adaptation plans and strategies are also missing on the state level. In the near future, we are going to publish the brochure, which will summarize the results of this study. Moreover, we are planning to further investigate the impact of climate change on tourism development.

TRIPS AND EXPEDITIONS

Our trips and expedition activities in 2016 were as usual quite dynamic.

In March, a team of two Avalonians, Vitaliy Shuptar and Sergey Kulakov, undertook a journey in the Langtang valley in Nepal and nearly reached the very head of the Langtang river. The trekking trip took place in the areas, which had been destroyed and somewhat changed by the earthquake of 2015, which forced our team to introduce some changes to the initial programme of their journey.



Team of "Avalon" in Aralkum desert

Nevertheless, the expedition team managed to reach Kyanjin Ri peak (4300 m), visited a place called Langshisha Kharka, astonishing with the beauty of its landscapes, and spent some time before and after the trekking part in the Katmandu valley and Pokhara.

In May-June 2016, an "Avalon" team (Sergey Klovkov, Nikolai Zakhar-chuk, Kirill Motov, Viktoriya Baidildina and Alexandr Baryshev) made a cycling tour along the western shore of Lake Baikal. During their 20-day trip in the saddle, the travellers visited Irkutsk, rode along Krugobaiikalskaya railway and through Tazheran stepes, as well as saw the Olkhon island, which is famous for its beauty.

In June 2016, another "Avalon" team (Vitaliy Shuptar, Yelena Kim, Yevgeniy Yermolyonok, Vyacheslav Tyukhtin and Makhabbat Nugerbe-

kova) took part in "Ulytau-Aral", a car expedition of Kazakhstan National Geographic Society. Its itinerary linked the country's central part and the region surrounding the Aral sea. The ancient necropolis of Terekty-Auliye, ruins of the Kengir division of Steplag in Zhezkazgan, deserted expanses of the Aral Karakum, Akespe thermal spring, the famous Middle Asian cliffs rife with fossil fauna, the ship cemeteries in Zhalanash place and Tushibas gulf, once notoriously famous Barsakelmes island, the space harbor - Baikonyr town, the ancient Oghuz settlement of Yangikent, Russian steppe outposts network dating back to the 19th century, the Bulanty battlefield, as well as the Kyzylkiya place with its impressive sceneries – this is just an incomplete list of the things that the expedition team had



Team of "Avalon" on the Kyanjin Ri peak, Langtang / Sergey Kulakov



Bektau Ata mountains / Vitaliy Shuptar

seen in 11 days. In September 2016, two "Avalon" members, namely Vitaliy Shuptar and Yelena Kim, took part in yet another KNGS expedition to the Turgai steppes. This expedition did not have such impressive results as the previous one and was mainly interesting for the scientists, who study geoglyphs, and other members of the expedition team who had drones for filming them from air. Nevertheless we got another chance to enjoy the sceneries of the northern Ulytau and observed the alleged meteorite crater to the north of the river Ulken-Zhylanshyk (we discovered this crater in the ground, as well as several formations of this kind upon studying the satellite picture, and the question of their origin still needs to be resolved).

The bicycle tourism season was traditionally opened in Darija. Since

our bicycle trip to Dariya in the past year was a "commemorative one" (the first VeloDariya trip was held 10 years ago, in May 2006), we decided to take the route that had been worked out in 2006, but was never passed because of some technical difficulties. This time we managed to do everything as planned, even though there were, as usual, a lot of cold water and deep fords in our journey. About fifty people took part in this cycling trip (more than a half of them are Avalonians).

Although the summer turned out to be rather rainy, we succeeded in organizing a considerable number of small trips in Central Kazakhstan. In this connection, we would like to report on our walking tour in the Bektau-Ata mountains, which became perhaps one of the year's most picturesque summer trips. Unfortunately, during our trekking trip in the Karkaraly

mountains, we failed to ascend Kom-somolskiy Peak (initially we chose the route which was not exactly optimal for ascending the peak, and this was yet aggravated by spoiling weather), but we are going to do that someday. During our trekking trip in the Bayanaul mountains (one of its aims was to collect the information for designing the tourist map of Bayanaul in cooperation with PavGeo) we succeeded in ascending Akbet peak and visited a considerable part of the Bayanaul's places of interest, including Konyr-Auliye cave. During our trekking tour in the Ku mountains, we ascended Balkantau peak using the route that we had already tried out in winter, and finally got a chance to see the beautiful view from its top (last time this was not possible due to a snowstorm). We also rode our bicycles from Karaganda to the Taldy river valley, where we visited the so-called Begazy pyramid (in reality it is not a pyramid of course, but rather a typical mausoleum of Begazy-Dandybai culture, which is rather spacious and resembles a pyramid in its shape). We also made another attempt of making a bicycle tour to the Ortau mountains: unfortunately, weather conditions and awful roads (this time the situation was only a little better than last year) did not allow us to ride through the circular route via Kyzyltau and Aiyrtau, as it had been initially planned. Nevertheless, we managed to explore the Ortau mountains in more detail. Furthermore, in May, Avalonians and our volunteers undertook a number of working trekking trips in Kolsai (Northern Tien Shan), which aimed at collecting information for the subsequent nature trails construction.

In winter, we were also quite active. It all started in January with trekking in the Kungei-Alatau mountains and our failed attempt to ascend the Kyzemshek peak. Then we undertook a number of trekking trips in the Central Kazakh mountains, namely in the Bayanaul (twice), Karkaraly (twice), Bugly and Kyzylarai. By the way, some Avalonians celebrated the coming of the New year 2017 trekking in the Karkaraly mountains on the trip organized by Himalayan club and "Avalon".

It is noteworthy that in the past year we once again floated down the Irtysh with our friends from PavGeo. This time our floating trip was longer than last year and lasted 4 days. It started in Akku village and finished at the Pavlodar riverside at the Day of



Team of "Avalon" at Akbet mountain, Bayanaul / Alexandr Kuznetsov

the Irtysh celebration. At this event "Avalon" was represented by Yelena Kim and Alexandr Motkov.

As always, we have a great deal of expeditions and trips planned for 2017, namely trekking in the Northern Tien Shan (Ile-Alatau and Kungei-Alatau) and mountain oases of the Kazakh Upland (Bayanaul, Karkaraly, Ulytau, Kyzylarai, etc.). As for bicycle-related travelling, we are going to make some trips to the Central Kazakh archaeological sites, including "The 37 warriors", better familiarize ourselves with the Taldy river valley and go on a bicycle trip from Karaganda to Pavlodar on the Day of the Irtysh. Furthermore, in 2017, we will most certainly get to the meteorite crater Shunak by bike (we have been planning to do that for already 2 years). We also hope to realize our idea of undertaking the cycling expedition in the footsteps of Pyotr Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, namely following the route of his first journey to the eastern shore of Lake Issyk Kul (it was initially planned for 2016). We are also going to ride our bicycles in Western Mongolia, famous for its material evidence of the Turkic epoch. That being said, our next bicycle journey around Xinjiang, in the course of which we were planning to finalize exploring the area by completing our circular route around the Taklamakan Desert, will be most likely postponed until 2018. We are also planning to go trekking abroad extensively. Among our destinations are Nepal (Dhorpatan and Lower Dolpo), India (Ladakh) and Tajikistan (Pamir trip, which was initially planned for 2016). We are hopeful that our idea of the car expedition from Astana to the Caspian Sea in the wake of the Great Game events, will be approved by KNGS and realized.

On top of everything else, we are ready to consider any interesting offers regarding trips and expeditions coming from Avalonians. Furthermore, just as before, we are in constant search for the Avalonians who are ready to and capable of leading our field trips.

CLUBS AND OTHER EVENTS

Throughout the year 2016, we hosted Traveller's club nine times. It was held in the Karaganda branch of "The OFFICE Nargilia Lounge", a place famous for its water pipes. Several Avalonians, who participated in the trekking journey in the Nepalese Langtang, "Ulytau-Aral"



A part of "Avalon" team, shore of Lake Baikal / Kirill Motov

expedition and the bicycle journey along the western shore of Lake Baikal, shared their impressions with the public. We also welcomed other guests, namely Aidos Zhomartov who told us about hitchhiking on his round-the-world trip, Olya Tropinina with her story of trekking in Skandinavia, Ruslan Karatsai with his very detailed and substantial report on living and travelling in Egypt, an Avalonian Vladislav Chumilo who shared his experience of travelling around the world and gave a lot of useful tips and Denis Krukhmalyov with his talk on how one may start travelling without having to stop ever again. As always, at the end of the year we organized one more meeting of the Traveller's club, where we gave a full account of the trips and expeditions carried out by "Avalon" in 2016 and shared our plans for 2017.

Based on the general interest of the Karaganda public in travelling-themed events and our understanding of their positive influence on creating motivation and sharing valuable practical information about travelling, we decided to organize a large-scale event in 2017. If everything goes well, in September we will hold the Travel festival in Karaganda. For several days, this Travel festival will become a platform for communication between famous travellers, scientists and activists in the field of tourism and travelling on the one side and wide audience (including young people) on the other side. This platform will enable the distribution of positive experience and practices, as well as help to generate new ideas, whose realization may be of interest for nature conservation, tourism development, world exploration and



Meeting in the office of "Avalon" / Dimitri Pazas

volunteer movement development.

OUR GUESTS

In late July, we welcomed as our guests two guys from Belgium, Jorgo Kokkinidis and Dimitri Pazas, who were shooting a movie about Central Asia, and helped them with the part which tells about Karaganda.

In early August, we received another guest, our old acquaintance, one of the participants of "80 edays" electric cars challenge, Rafael de Mestre, whom we had a chance to meet 4 years ago during his independent round-the-world trip.

A while later, in the first half of August, we got a visit from the authors of "Caravanistan" web-portal, Stephen Hermans and Saule Kalysheva, with whom we shared our plans on developing tourism in Central Asia.

In late September, Karaganda welcomed the participants of "The two capitals" bicycle ride led by Bakhtiyar Bazarbekov. This bicycle ride brought together people with visual impairments, who then covered over 1200 km from Almaty to Astana on their bicycles and tandems.

In autumn, we received guests from Kazpotreboysyuz Karaganda Economic University, namely students specializing in tourism, three times (we would like to express our gratitude to the KEU teachers, Akmaral Maimurunova and Marina Bedelbayeva, who made these

meetings possible). At these meetings, we told our guests about our activities in the field of tourism, as well as the activities of receiving tourists carried out by the travel company "Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan". We also shared our secrets of how one may live an interesting life, which would also provide benefit to society and environment.

Our hashtag is **#avalongeographic**
Please use it if you post something connected with the activities of "Avalon" on social networks.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

In 2016, 19 people joined "Avalon" HGS. However, we had to part with some of our old members, who had lost connections with the Society and failed to pay membership fees.

Aside from our website (www.guide.kz) and bicycle forum, we continue using social networks for keeping in touch with our members and all those who have not joined us yet. We do so by means of our pages on "Facebook" (860 subscribers as of end 2016) and "Vkontakte" (1346 subscribers), our "Instagram" account (487 subscribers), as well as "WhatsApp" and "Telegram" instant messengers. As you may 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.

Our activities on the project "Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region "Northern Tien Shan mountains" have been for the most part finished and our office in Almaty, therefore, seized to exist. Thus, In 2017, only a small transshipment base will be active in Almaty for securing the construction works and other activities in Turgen and Kolsai.

We would like to remind you one more time that "Avalon" is not just all about trips and expeditions, it also encompasses a range of other activities and interesting projects. For implementing all these projects we often need volunteers and paid employees, and are always pleased to see the members of "Avalon" HGS among them. Therefore, if you think you have some skills, which could be useful for "Avalon", we will be happy to find out about it.



Kyzylkiya place, southern border of Ulytau / Vitaliy Shuptar

This bulletin is distributed among the members and employees of HGS "Avalon" in printed or electronic forms (as requested). 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 as always available at www.guide.kz, and on our

Facebook-page: www.facebook.com/avalongeographic,

Vkontakte-page: [www.vk.com/avalongeographic](https://vk.com/avalongeographic)

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

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