

“If you stare at the map of the Urals long enough, sooner or later you'll see a road, which will certainly call you”

Oleg Chegodayev

In 2021, the author of the book undertook a trans-Ural hiking expedition, traversing the Ural Mountains in their entirety—from the latitudinal flow of the Ural River in the south to Mount Konstantinov Kamen in the north. The expedition lasted 109 days, covering a total distance of over 3,194 kilometers. The cumulative elevation gain was 73,654 meters, with an average daily distance of 29.3 kilometers.

Along the route, the expedition made over 80 ascents of the Ural Mountains, including such significant peaks as Gora Maksim, Bolshoy Iremel', Kruglitsa, Solyanka, Konzhakovskiy Kamen', Lyampa Kutimskaya, Oykachakhl, Munintump, Otorten, Man'pupuner, Tel'posiz, Neyroyka, Manaraga, Narodnaya, Payer, and Konstantinov Kamen.

The book you hold in your hands is based on the traveler's own diaries. Step by step, from the first to the last, the author tells the story of the Urals and reveals the region in all its diversity.

EMBASSY OF THE URAL MOUNTAINS

MADE IN URAL

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Oleg Chegodayev

CHEGODAYEV'S URAL EXPEDITION



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How the Idea to Cross the Entire Ural Was Born

The idea to cross the Ural Mountains from south to north didn't appear suddenly. It crystallized over many years, growing gradually and taking over my mind slowly but surely. When I first started getting into tourism, I didn't even think about such a grand, all-encompassing route. I didn't even consider it when I first read one of the most important books about Ural tourism – 100 Days on the Urals by N. Rundkvist.

But as the years went by, I became more and more fascinated by the Urals, making them the central theme of my travels. I remember about ten years before the events described in the book, I was discussing with fellow travelers the idea of a solo hike across the entire mountain range in one go. At that time, I leaned toward the opinion that it was impossible.

Meanwhile, I spent a lot of time hiking in the Urals. I explored more and more of the region, walking through taiga wilderness, crossing polar areas, and making fast passes through individual ridges. With experience, something began to change. The most valuable thing I realized was that in the Urals, it was possible to hike effectively and quickly anywhere.

A key moment in the birth of the idea for a trans-Ural expedition came in the winter of 2017. Two guys from Ufa announced their intention to cross the entire Ural, starting on March 1 of that year. The authors of the project were verbose, making plenty of promises and engaging actively with journalists. However, for anyone with even a basic understanding of tourism and our mountains, it was clear that their idea was doomed to fail. The guys had a very vague notion of what hiking entailed. Nevertheless, their media push didn't go unnoticed in the tourist community, sparking a lot of discussions, in which I participated as well. Perhaps it was then that the seeds of the idea took root in my mind. I must also mention my good friend, Yevgeny Bannikov, a tourist, speleologist, and writer. I will never forget his remark that if anyone could complete this route, it would be Chegodaev. I joked it off at the time, but since I remembered it, there was something significant

about it for me. As for the expedition of those guys, it never happened. They talked and talked, and then they faded away.

That same autumn, a large map of the entire Ural appeared on my wall –it became a crucial working tool for me. I could sit in my chair for hours, staring at it and mentally planning new journeys. Perhaps it was then that I first gazed at the entire Ural and realized that I wanted to study it comprehensively, visit every part, film it, and show it to people. I felt like a commander-in-chief planning an offensive operation. I marked regions, drew arrows directly on the map, and made plans to "conquer" certain heights.

At some point, while looking at the narrow dark strip of mountains stretching from one edge of the map to the other, I came to a very simple realization: the Ural is a road that crosses the entire country from south to north. A bad road, heavily worn down, but importantly, with a solid surface and incredibly beautiful. On either side of this natural road are taiga, swamps, deep rivers that cannot be forded. And perhaps, the mountain ridges are the only paths suitable for a pedestrian crossing of Russia in this part of the country.

It seems that during this period, I told my wife, Tatyana Sergeevna, that I would likely have to try and cross the entire Ural in the foreseeable future. But she needn't worry just yet –it wouldn't be anytime soon. Around the same time, I began taking the idea of a trans-Ural crossing more seriously. I deliberately re-read Rundkvist's 100 Days on the Urals. I started looking for information on other similar expeditions, and to my surprise, I found that this tourist challenge, possibly the most important and difficult one in the Urals, had yet to be fully resolved. This, of course, added fuel to the fire of the growing idea.

The final straw that tipped the scales toward the decision to begin preparing for my own trans-Ural expedition was the expedition of Kirill Fronyuk, an athlete and tourist from Magnitogorsk. I remember in May 2019, on the slopes of Elbrus, where we met, he told me that he planned to cross the entire Ural solo in a month. I had mixed feelings upon hearing this –on the one hand, I was upset, as similar thoughts had already crossed my mind. But I must admit, they weren't too pleasant.

It all seemed incredibly terrifying and hung over me like some heavy obligation, and I still couldn't fully believe I was capable of fulfilling it. So, on the other hand, I was even relieved: if Kirill accomplished it, finally solving the main Ural challenge, I wouldn't have to. With great interest, we followed the brave traveler's progress all summer, but unfortunately, the weather conditions and shortcomings in preparation didn't allow Kirill to complete the entire Ural cross. However, he gained invaluable experience and insight into how to organize such an expedition. And that was when I decided that my time had come.

On May 1, 2020, a sunny spring day, when the whole world was under lockdown due to the coronavirus epidemic, I opened a bottle of dry red wine. I poured it into two glasses and told Tatyana Sergeevna that I wanted to set out on my trans-Ural expedition exactly a year from now, on the same day.

I asked if she would object to these plans. She didn't object, but she did set one condition: before I left, we had to have another child. And exactly nine months later, on January 30, 2021, Olga was born. The path along the Ural was open.

The history of Trans-Ural crossings

Was I the first to come up with the idea of such a route and to cross it? Of course not. This idea is so logical and simple, so obvious, that it has fascinated the minds of many generations of Russian tourists long before I was born. And without a doubt, my Ural expedition would not have taken place in the form in which it was realized without the work of those who came before me. As I prepared to set off, I carefully studied all the available information on long linear routes through the Urals, and it gave me a lot. I can even say that my success is the collective success of many generations of tourists who developed and tried to implement the ideas of Trans-Ural routes. Without their experience and bravery, this story wouldn't exist.

In this chapter, I want to pay tribute to my predecessors who walked through the Urals, but I also want to highlight the moments that prevent acknowledging the fact that they crossed the entire Ural range. I won't hide the fact that the unresolved nature of the main Ural tourist challenge played a major role in my decision to try my hand at it. Ambition and the spirit of being first are among the most important drivers of tourism, and there's no getting away from that.

However, before talking about Trans-Ural crossings, it is necessary to define the term – what exactly "Trans-Ural" is?

While studying the history of the question and developing the route, I formulated it for myself like this: Trans-Ural is the full or partial crossing, in a single route, of all five parts of the Ural: Southern, Middle, Northern, Subpolar, and Polar.

Based on this definition, I am aware of at least three expeditions that fit the outlined criteria. I will talk about them here.

N.A. Rundkvist's Expedition

"Bolshoi Ural – 1991"

Dates of the route: *April 23 – July 31, 1991 (100 days).*

Length of the route: *3,335 km.*

Mode of travel: *bicycle, kayak, hiking, catamaran.*

Route thread: *Magnitogorsk city – Beloretsk city – Verkhnearshinsky village – Tyulyuk village – Iremel mountain – Zlatoust city – Otkliknoy Ridge mountain –*

Yurma mountain – Kyshtym city – Revda city – Chusovaya river – Chusovoy city – Kizel city – Kosvinsky Kamen mountain – Konzhakovsky Kamen mountain – Karpinsk city – Ivdel city – Dyatlov Pass area – Manpupuner ridge – Torreporeiz mountain – Atertump mountain – Manyangtump mountain – Mankhambo South mountain – Shchugor river – Torgovaya river – Neroyka mountain – Manaraga mountain – Narodnaya mountain – Grubeiz mountain – Skalnaya mountain – Payer mountain – Subpolar village – Kharnaundrykeu mountain – Bolshoye Shchuchye lake – Khutasangerei mountain – Nyarmayakha river – Konstantinov Kamen mountain – Kara river – Ust-Kara village.

The route was planned and executed under the leadership of the master of sports in tourism, Nikolai Anatolyevich Rundkvist. During 100 days, the main group, consisting of eight people, with the support of numerous auxiliary groups, passed a combined bike-hiking route across the Urals.

As a result of the expedition, one of the most important Ural tourism books, “100 Days in the Urals”, was published.

The southern half of the Southern Urals, from the city of Magnitogorsk to the Ural river, **remained incomplete.**



Nikolai Rundkvist with his team on the shore of the Kara Sea.
Photo by Evgeny Savenko

Sergey Karzhaev



Dates of the route: *May 12 – August 21, 2011 (102 days).*

Length of the route: *2,500 km.*

Route thread: *Zlatoust city – Taganay ridge – Yurma mountain Nezyapetrovsk city – Mikhaylovsky Zavod village – Serga river – Nizhniy Sergi city – Staroutkinsk city – Chusovaya river – Baronskaya village – Serebryanka village – Sarany village – Basegi ridge – Oslyanka mountain – Kytlym village – Konzhakovsky Kamen mountain – Olvinsky Kamen mountain – Sosvinsky Kamen mountain – Vsevolodo-Blagodatnoye village – Khozatump ridge – Ekvachakhl mountain – Munintump mountain – Saklaimsorichakhl mountain – Otorten mountain – Vologda Grange area – Manpupuner ridge – Torreporeiz mountain – Manyangtump mountain – Mankhambo ridge – Subpolar village – Telposiz mountain – Volokovka river – Torgovaya river – Torgovoe lake – Neryoka tourist base – Manya river – Parnuk river – Konglomeratnaya mountain – Kosyu river – Manaraga mountain – Narodnaya mountain – Zhelannoe tourist base – Kozyum river – Bolshaya Lemva river – Grubeyu river – Khulga river – Mokraja Synya river – Kushvozh river – Chigimkharuta river – Severnaya river – Tumbalova river – Kokpela river – Paga river – Left Loxorta river – Logarta river – Burkhoila river – Makar Ruzya river – Sob river – Polar Ural railway station.*

In the spring and summer of 2011, Krasnoyarsk resident Sergey Karzhaev completed a route from the city of Zlatoust to the Polar Ural station. The route was completed solo, with provisions and equipment dropped at post offices along the way.

A year earlier, Sergey Karzhaev had completed a route across the Southern Urals from the city of Mednogorsk to Zlatoust. **The linear route left** most of the Southern Urals and the northern half of the Polar Urals **unexplored.**

Unfortunately, there are almost no mentions of Sergey Karzhaev's route in the information space. While preparing for my own Trans-Ural expedition, I found the traveler and we recorded a large video interview. He also consulted me on some issues during my expedition preparations.

Kirill Fronyuk

"Big Ural Walk"

Dates of the route: *June 15 – August 24, 2019 (71 days).*

Mode of travel: *hiking.*

Route thread: *Orenburg city – Mrakovo village – Starosubkhangulovo village – Kaga village – Beloretsk city – Nikolayevka village – Iremel mountain – Tyulyuk village – Zlatoust city – Kruglitsa (Taganay) mountain – Karabash city – Pervouralsk city – Kachkanar mountain – Srednyaya Usva village – Konzhakovsky Kamen mountain – Karpinsk city – Ivdel city – Dyatlov Pass area – Manpupuner ridge – Yangtump mountain – Subpolar village – Pelenyor Pass (50 km by car) – Khoraiz mountain – Telposiz mountain – Shchugor river – Torgovoe lake – Neryoka tourist base – Konglomeratnaya mountain – Manaraga mountain – Narodnaya mountain – Inta city – Yeletsy village – Payer mountain – Vorkuta city – Konstantinov Kamen mountain – Kara sea.*

In the summer of 2019, Kirill Fronyuk hiked – partially alone, partially with a companion – along a route between the city of Orenburg and the Kara Sea. As part of the route, he traversed most of the Ural mountain range, summiting key and highest peaks in all parts of the Urals, and completed the "Ural Crown" project with a record.



Kirill Fronyuk, on the penultimate day of his journey

Unexplored were the northern part of the Subpolar Urals beyond mount Narodnaya and the entire Polar Urals, except for radial ascents of mount Payer and mount Konstantinov Kamen.

Vladislav Karelin

"Trans-Ural as a Lifelong Journey"



Vladislav Karelin at a map of the Urals with marked routes

Formally, the route taken by Vladislav Georgievich Karelin does not meet the criterion of continuity defined by the term "Trans-Ural." His journey consisted of several dozen separate expeditions.

However, the significance and contribution to the development of tourism in the Urals made by Vladislav Georgievich cannot be excluded from this chapter.

Karelin is one of the oldest living tourists of the Urals, a master of sports, and an honored traveler of Russia. In the mid-20th century, he formulated the idea of stage-by-stage traversal of the Urals, and over 36 years, from 1955 to 1990, he systematically implemented it. As a result, he completed 33 expeditions, covering the Urals with a dense network from Pay-Khoy to the southern tip of the Mugodzhary mountains.

At my request, Vladislav Georgievich provided handwritten descriptions of his routes. The data was processed and added with minimal changes in the spelling of some toponyms to the book, in the form of combined route threads by Ural regions. Based on them, an approximate overall route line across the Urals was reconstructed and reflected on the general map.



Pai-Khoi

Amderma settlement – Tarepata-Yakha river – Sebetayakha river – Moreiz mountain – Talotayakha river – Ngebteyakha (Ebete) river – Lake Maly Turychey – Kheyyakha river – Sopchayu river – Sopchamylk mountain – Khengoryu river – Sibirchatayakha river – Buredan waterfall – Khalmer-Yu settlement.

Polar Urals

Ust-Kara settlement (Kara) – shore of the Arctic Ocean – mouth of the Labyakha river – mouth of the Pekucheyakha river – Ngo-Yakha river – Ngalekoseda hill – Nerusaveyakhako river – Lake Bolshoye Yambuto – Lake Bolshoye Ngosaveyto (Osoveyty) – Kharapeshor river – Konstantinov Kamen mountain – Lake Khalbemerto – Syabtaya river – Nyarmayakha river – Lake Tisnenzato – Tisnenzashor river – Shiroky pass – Trehozyornaya river – Aleshkov glacier – Ochetyvis river – Lake Ochety – Ochenyrd ridge traverse – Lake Gnetty – Kara river – Malaya Kara river – Hoytape mountain – Shchuchiy glacier – Lake Maloye Shchuchye – Karsky glacier – MSU glacier – Uraganny pass – Malaya Usa river – Obruchev glacier – Lapytpe Ridge (Grebenka mountain) – Lake Bolshoye Khatatayoganlor – IGAN glacier – Bolshaya Usa river – Bolshaya Pypudyna river – Polyarny settlement (Polyarny Ural railway station) – Yelets river – Kharuta river – Right Kechpel river – Left Kechpel river – Payer mountain – Main watershed – Source of the Khoila river – Main watershed – Lagortay river – Bolshaya Lagorta river – Pogurey river – Sources of the Igyahey

river (Igyadeyyogart) – Sources of the Nelkayogan river – Sources of the Laptapay river – Sources of the Chigimkharuta river – Sources of the Pozhemay river – Sources of the Mokraya Synya river – Sources of the Kolokolnya river – Sources of the Grubevozh river (Grubeyu) – Sources of the Khoimad'yu river (Khaymayu) – Sources of the Upper Dzyolyayu river (Left Delyayu) – Sources of the Tykatlova river – Upper reaches of the Balbanyu river – Sources of the Bolshaya Tynagota river – Sources of the Malaya Tanygota river – Sources of the Ponyu river – Sources of the Khasavarka river – Source of the Kozhym river (Kozhymvozh).

Subpolar Urals

Source of the Kozhym river (Kozhymvozh) – Karpinsky mountain – Narodnaya mountain (Poeng-Ur) – Source of the Naroda river – Didkovsky mountain – Mansinor mountain – Blucher mountain – Zashchita mountain – Manaraga mountain – Kolokolnya mountain – Maslennikov mountain – Source of the Povsyan-Shor river – Ural Pathfinder peak – Reguli mountain – Impenetrable ridge – Upper reaches of the Vangyr river – Upper reaches of the Parnuk river – Manya river – Sources of the Bolshoy Patok river – Shchekurya river – Neryoka base – Neryoka mountain – Kobyla-Yu river – Nyamga lake (Patok) – Left Nyamga river (Nyamga) – Torgovoe lake – Torgovaya river – Shchugor river – Volokovka river – Sastemnor ridge – Pelenkurya river – Gas pipeline – Yaruta mountain – Sources of the Yanymanya river – Source of the Sysya river – Source of the Pasya river – Neryoka mountain (Oyka-ner) – Tollya-Atallyasyakhal mountain – Sources of the Parya river – Sources of the Pyrs'yu river (Khomsensoria) – Mankhambo ridge – Sources of the Right Ukyu river – Source of the Nyaismanya river.

Northern Urals

Source of the Nyaismanya river – Satenzi mountain – Mansatenzi mountain – Yangtump mountain – Sources of the Nerimyuyu river – Khurumpataly mountain – Sources of the Ichetlaga river – Torreporreiz mountain – Ydzidlyaga river – Manpupunor mountain – Source of the Pechora river – Main watershed – Otorten mountain – Source of the Lozva river – Dyatlov Pass site – Auspiya river – Source of the Purma river – Gumpkapay mountain – Oshenyar ridge – Upper reaches of the

Vishera river – Main watershed – Sampalchakhyl mountain – Sources of the Niols river – Sources of the Bolshoy Toshemka river – Maspalnelpattump ridge – Source of the Malaya Moyva river – Khusoyk mountain – Source of the Vizhay river – Oykachakhl mountain – Vels river – Chural river – Sources of the Kutim river – Solva river – Denezhkin Kamen mountain – Sosva river – Kolonga river – Bajanovka settlement – Pokrovsk-Uralsky settlement – Olenya river – Lyampa river – Vagran river – Tulayka river – Olva river – Nizhnyaya Olenya river – Kamenka river – Knyaspa settlement (Novaya Knyaspa) – Karpinsk town – Kakva river – Kakvinsky Peci settlement – Kakva river – Southern Kakva river – Sources of the Tylai river (Eastern Tylai) – Konzhakovsky Kamen mountain – Kytlym settlement – Source of the Lobva river – Source of the Kyr'ya river – Pavda river – Pavda settlement – Yurty settlement – Staraya Lyala settlement – Is settlement.

Middle Urals

Is settlement – Valerianovsk settlement – Kachkanar town – Bolshaya Imennaya river – Asian railway station – Kedrovka village – Serebryanka settlement – Sinegorsky settlement – Visimo-Utkinsk settlement – Visim settlement – Bolshie Galashki village – Verkhny Tagil town – Bunar mountain – Visyachiy Kamen mountain – Medvezhka mountain – Murzinka railway station – Taraskovo village – Tavatuy village – Chernizhnaya mountain – Kotel mountain – Vershina railway station – Volchikha mountain – Degtyarsk town – Dyrovaty Kamen mountain – Sokoliy Kamen mountain – Azov mountain – Polevskoy town – Glubochinsky pond (Glubochinsk reservoir) – Source of the Zapadnaya Chusovaya river – Krasny Kamen mountain – Verkhny Ufaley settlement – Nizhny Ufaley settlement.

Southern Urals

Nizhny Ufaley settlement – Takhta settlement – Upper reaches of the Suim stream – Source of the Shigir river – Bolshoy Kuvatul river – Maly Kuvatul river – Source of the Azyash river – Source of the Kusa river – Yurma mountain – Bolshoy Taganay ridge – Zlatoust town – Uryenga ridge – Zyuratkul lake – Maly Kyl river – Bolshoy Kyl river – Berezyak river – Tyulyuk village – Iremel mountain – Alexandrovka village – Upper reaches of the Yuryuzan river – Mashak ridge –

Bolshaya Kazavda river – Yamantau mountain – Katav river (likely Maly Katav) – Mashak railway station (narrow-gauge railway). Bolshoy Kumardak mountain – Miselya river – Tirlian river – Tirlian settlement – Beloretsk town – Rysakayevo village – Arvyakryaz mountain – Uzyanbash village – Maigashta village – Khamitovo village – Kulganino village – Sargaya village – Yaumbaevo village – Abdulmambetovo village – Novomunasipovo village – Starosubkhangulovo village – Novousmanovo village – Shansky village – Kananikolskoye village – Ivano-Kuvalat village – Krasny Kushak farm – Petrovka village – Zilair village – Sosnovka village – Novoalexandrovka village – Kazanka village – Idelbakovo village – Kuzhanak village – Kuruil village – Kuvandyk town.

Mugodzhar

Kuvandyk town – Adayevo village – Krasnoshchekovo village – Ilinka village – Ural settlement – Ural river – Mayachny settlement – Or-Illek plateau – Shevchenko settlement – Erzurum village – Leninskoye settlement – Kargalinsk reservoir – Karabutak river – Troitskoye village – Nikel'tau village – Khromtau town – Sukhinovka village – Matveyevka village – Oysylkara village – Or river – Kumsai village – Kazatsky settlement – Rodniki settlement – Emba river – Kunduzda settlement – Emba town – Sources of the Kunduzda river – Altyndy village – Sources of the Kaiyndy river – Sources of the Aulya river – Airyuk mountain – Sources of the Alabas river – Berchogur railway station – Bolshoy Bokhtybay mountain – Sources of the Tebensay river – Sources of the Kokpekti river – Sources of the Ashkolak river – Jamantau mountains (Yamantau).

The letter from Vladislav Karelin

Hello Oleg!

I had never previously compiled my detailed journey through the Urals. I went through my diaries and, at your request, put together my consolidated route along the Ural mountain range. I am sending you my notes for eight Ural regions.

My summarized route is presented in my book “Ural Mountains: Knowledge and Nomenclature. Volume 1. Knowledge” (page 196), which I sent to you. The same summarized route is marked on a large map of the Urals, which hangs on the wall in my apartment.

Best regards,

sign

Preparation for the Route

General Questions

“An expedition is preparation”, said the great traveler and explorer Roald Amundsen. Understanding this, and also knowing that the success of my endeavor depends more than 50% on the work done before taking the first step on the route, I tried to prepare for my small expedition as thoroughly as possible, anticipating all possible surprises and ensuring they would not be surprises.

To jump ahead, I can say that overall, everything worked out, and the entire route proceeded smoothly, without surprises or extreme challenges. Although, of course, one cannot ignore the luck factor, but as my father likes to say: “Luck favors those who are prepared.”

The entire preparation for the route can be divided into two stages.

The first stage is quite conditional: the previous 15 years of practicing tourism in the Urals. Some of these 15 years, I didn't even realize I would eventually travel across the entire Ural range; some of those years, I was afraid to think about it; probably, over the last three years, I started thinking about it, but still found it difficult to imagine how it would all unfold. Despite this, I unknowingly prepared for my route. I built connections, which helped me with logistics, got acquainted with various areas of the Urals, and most importantly, accumulated experience walking through scree, fallen trees, tundra shrubs, and all other specific surfaces encountered on the path of a trans-Ural traveler.
Only practice, having covered large distances, could teach me effective and relatively safe movement across these complex terrains.
The second stage of preparation was much shorter. It began in December 2020 and lasted until the end of April 2021–about 5 months.
The first thing I did was sit at my computer, load GPS tracks from previous trans-Ural expeditions, my own hikes, and started mapping out my route day by day, kilometer by kilometer.

It’s funny: when I mapped out the Southern Urals on the map, my knees began to hurt. My brain understood what lay ahead on all these endless mountain, forest,

and scree kilometers, and it sent clear signals to my legs. This worried me, but I continued on. After a couple of weeks, when I finished plotting the route, my knees stopped hurting, and I regained my spirits. For the first time, I understood: if there are no surprises, I will probably be able to accomplish what I set out to do. I saw the overall picture, divided into 120 daily sections, each of which individually didn't seem to pose a big challenge.

When planning the daily legs, I took into account my experience from numerous hikes across the Urals and divided the route into sections averaging 25 and 20 km in length.

The 25-kilometer sections were planned for the first half of the route, from the Dolgye Mountains to the entrance to the Polar Urals. Then, the planned distance decreased to 20 kilometers per day. The logic was simple: the southern half of the Ural range has good road infrastructure, low, linearly stretched ridges, which often allow travel above the taiga. This meant that it would be easier to move, and more distance could be covered in a day. The second half of the journey, however, included radial ascents, alpine forms of relief, numerous passes, the longest section of the route requiring autonomy, and the overall fatigue from the long journey. That is why I decided to reduce the planned load for this section.
It is important to understand that the route outlined by days was precise in terms of direction but approximate in terms of time. The 120 days mentioned did not account for rest days, which I would definitely need on the route. Based on my hiking experience, I knew that I would likely be traveling more each day than planned. The kilometers I planned were seen as the minimum target I should cover daily. Exceeding the planned distance each day meant that I would accumulate extra days ahead of schedule, which I intended to use for rest. When planning the route, I tried to, on the one hand, make it more direct, and on the other, include all the most significant, beautiful, and interesting locations of the mountains.
After the route was mapped out, the logistics stage began. I understood that it was impossible to walk more than 3,000 km through the mountains and carry all the gear and food for the entire journey. It was necessary to organize resupplies. Here, my

personal connections with people living and working across the Urals helped me greatly. In the end, the route was divided into 18 stages, with 17 resupply points. Resupplies were organized to tourist bases (6), nature reserve and national park stations (4), by mail (2), with the help of volunteers (4), and by railway (1). The first part of the journey–about half of the southern Ural region, which is the most populated and accessible–was divided into segments of 5-6 days each. The second half, from the GUX ridge onward, was divided into six unevenly sized segments, the longest of which was an autonomous section of 400 km.



Boxes with resupplies – food and equipment. A few days before the start. Photo by Alexey Klyanin.

Having calculated and coordinated the logistics of resupplies, I began packing the gear and food. Everything had to be packed in advance. Over the course of a month, I prepared 18 boxes containing daily food rations, maps of the area, batteries, spare clothing (socks, underwear), and other items.

Food

It is hard to overestimate the importance of food on a long expedition. I approached this issue with maximum responsibility. When composing the rations, I followed four main principles.

1. **Balance of proteins, fats, and carbohydrates.** I can't say this balance was perfect, but I aimed to achieve it.
2. **Maximum calorie content.** The daily rations turned out to be quite heavy: about 800 grams of dry weight, which on average corresponded to 3500-4000 calories.
3. **Variety and individual taste preferences.** I belong to the category of travelers who love to eat a lot and well on the trail. After all, you're already constantly feeling bad and exhausted, and if you add monotonous and tasteless food to these tiring factors, then what's the point of such hikes at all? Mealtime should be a celebration, a ray of light in even the darkest clouds. So, I didn't skimp on food and made sure to bring only the best, tastiest, and most diverse products.
4. **Quick food preparation.** To save on gas, water, and time, I selected only those products for my meals that required minimal cooking. Thin pasta, pre-cooked grains, mashed potatoes, freeze-dried meals, and meat.

My food plan, like the route, was divided into two types.

The first was adapted to the southern part of the Ural Mountains, with frequent resupplies and numerous settlements along the way. The pre-prepared dry food packs were supplemented with perishable items like bacon, sausage, and cheese. In populated areas, I never missed an opportunity to eat, loading up on extra fats, proteins, and carbohydrates.

The second type covered five sections in the wild northern territories. It was impossible to take perishable, high-calorie products with me. For each day, in addition to the standard set of dry side dishes and freeze-dried meat, I added additional freeze-dried meals and pine nuts.

Table 1: Segment 2 – Drop-off at Berdyash Village (for 5 days)

Day 1	Weight (g)	Snack (kcal)	Breakfast (kcal)	Lunch (kcal)	Dinner (kcal)	Total (kcal)
Mashed potatoes with cream	110		404			404
Boiled sublimated pork	50		255			255
Steamed chicken fillet patties	50			180	180	
Red lentils	110			360	360	
Lard	100		450		450	900
Sweets (12 servings)	200	950			950	
Crispbread	50		50	50	150	
Cheese	50			185	185	
Sausage	50			275	275	
Instant soup	50			140	140	
Total	820					3799

Table 2: Segment 17 – Drop-off at Sanyavozh Base (for 19 days)

Day 1	Weight (g)	Snack (kcal)	Breakfast (kcal)	Lunch (kcal)	Dinner (kcal)	Total (kcal)
Barilla pasta	110		394			394
Sublimated “Homemade” patties	50		180			180
Boiled sublimated pork	50			255	255	
Peeled buckwheat	110			374	374	
Sublimated processed cheese	30	77			77	

Day 1	Weight (g)	Snack (kcal)	Breakfast (kcal)	Lunch (kcal)	Dinner (kcal)	Total (kcal)
Beans with pork in chili sauce	136		600		600	
Sweets (12 servings)	200	950			950	
Crispbread	50		50	50	150	
Pine nuts	100	640			640	
Total	836					3620

Examples of preplanned rations

Each daily ration was packed in a separate bag and labeled. Inside, everything was tightly sealed in individual packets.

A huge help at this stage of preparation came from my mother, Elena Pavlovna, who took on the task of portioning and packing tens of kilograms of grains and other products into 110-gram single servings. Without her, I definitely wouldn't have been able to start on time.

Equipment

Choosing the items I would carry with me was no easy task. On one hand, I had many years of experience trekking in the Urals, with a well-established set of equipment and habits. On the other hand, I had never undertaken such long journeys across different parts of the mountain range, with varying terrain and weather conditions. This posed additional questions, some of which I didn't have answers to at the time of departure.

I understood that in preparing for the journey, I needed to reduce the weight of my backpack as much as possible, without compromising on quality and safety. This eternal dilemma, which plagues every traveler, was particularly pressing for me.

At this point, I received great help from my friends, with whom I had worked for many years: the Moscow-based outdoor equipment store “Sport-Marathon” and the domestic equipment manufacturer Red Fox. Believing in me and my project, they provided everything I requested.

It probably makes no sense to go through each item of gear in the book, so I'll focus on a few key aspects of my equipment choices that I believe are important.

1. General main equipment, such as the tent, sleeping bag, backpack, mat, stove, etc. I chose fairly traditional gear, based on my many years of personal experience. I preferred well-known equipment manufacturers and selected items from their lightweight lines. Since I was starting in the south and heading north, with no clear idea of how long the expedition would last, I had to consider the possibility of finishing the route in September, which is already deep autumn in the mountains above the Arctic Circle. I planned to switch from a summer sleeping bag to an autumn-winter one and to switch to a larger backpack at the Polar Ural border at the Sanavoz station, as well as acquiring additional warm clothing. For the main stage of the journey, I chose the simplest and lightest backpack with one spacious compartment. In the end, this backpack gave me many joyful and challenging moments on the route, which I will describe in the main part of the book.

2. I want to focus on the choice of a sleeping mat, although I already mentioned it in the previous point. Initially, I started with a standard, self-cut foam mat, shortened to 120 cm. I had used such mats for many years, loving them for their minimal weight (less than 200g) and compact size. However, I soon realized my mistake: the discomforts that were bearable during short expeditions became critical over a longer journey. The thin and short mat reduced the effectiveness of my sleep. I slept poorly, tossing and turning, trying to find a comfortable position for my weary body. I had to spend more time selecting a camping spot, avoiding the slightest stones and inequalities. So right along the route, I asked them to send me the most compact and lightweight inflatable mat. I will never forget the first night spent on it. The greater weight and bulk were more than compensated by a comfortable sleep.

3. Footwear is probably the most difficult question I had to resolve when preparing for the route. And one of the most important. The wrong choice could have put an end to the entire endeavor. As luck would have it, by the time of the expedition, I was in the process of changing my long-standing habit of using specific footwear and hadn’t yet developed a new proven approach. This was due to an

incident that occurred while crossing the Pay-Khoy in August 2020. I was trekking in tried-and-true high running shoes. After switching between many manufacturers and types of shoes over five to six years before the described events, I found a suitable model for myself and would buy the same new pair every year, which lasted me the season. The shoes served me faithfully until Pay-Khoy.

During the trek, my Achilles tendons became inflamed, hurting so much that I started to consider abandoning the route. Fortunately, I had rubber boots with me. On one particularly waterlogged day, after putting them on, I noticed my feet stopped hurting. But as soon as I put the running shoes back on, the pain quickly returned. Upon examining the heels of the shoes, I found small, hard irregularities under the lining, which apparently were pressing on my Achilles. I finished the route in the boots.

About a month passed after this unpleasant incident, my feet no longer bothered me, and I set out on a short but intense hike through the Southern Urals. A few hours into the trek, the pain in my Achilles returned with renewed sharpness. I had to take a knife and simply cut the heels of the shoes down to the level of regular running shoes. The pain disappeared, and I completed the route. I entered the winter, at the end of which my expedition was to begin, with the unresolved problem: what shoes to take on the expedition?

After thinking it over, I decided to take a risk and apply my experience from multi-day racing and the experience of Kirill Fronyuk, who completed his route in lightweight trail running shoes. At least for the first half of the route, where the majority of the path goes along roads. And if this approach proved unsuccessful, I planned to change to more reliable, protective shoes at one of the supply points.

The second important question was the amount of footwear needed to complete the planned route. I had no statistics on how long lightweight running shoes would last. I prepped and broke in four pairs in the city: three pairs of low running shoes and one pair of lightweight high-tops.

As a result of the route, I ended up using five pairs of shoes; I had to buy one new pair and send it to the Polar Urals. Overall, the idea of using lightweight running

shoes on the Urals fully justified itself. The only downside, in my opinion, was their lower durability and slightly less foot protection. But this was more than compensated by their lightness and quicker drying, which added comfort to my feet. As my personal experience showed, the ankle protection from twisting in high boots was adequately compensated by a well-developed, flexible ankle joint.

4. One of the pressing problems that required an individual solution in terms of gear was the danger of ticks. There were expected to be many ticks on the first section of the route, so I had to effectively address the issue of protection from them. I was, of course, vaccinated against encephalitis, but unfortunately, these blood-sucking insects carry many more diseases. The very fact of being bitten could cause major problems if it happened in a place on the body that was difficult to reach for removing the tick myself. I would have had to change the route, head to populated areas, and seek medical assistance, which would have jeopardized the idea of an exclusively hiking route through the Urals.

To effectively counter ticks, it was necessary to seal the body. Tuck the leggings into high socks, the t-shirt into the pants. In theory, everything sounds simple, but in practice, while moving with a backpack, as my experience showed, the tucking would periodically come undone. It was difficult to constantly control this, and often the path for ticks to the back became open.

So, specifically for the expedition, I designed a special t-shirt, which I called the “Taiga Dress.” It had an extended cut at the bottom, which, when hiking with a backpack, prevented the lower back from being exposed; long sleeves that left the only area accessible to ticks being the wrists; a high collar and a zipper that allowed the dress to be unzipped down to the navel. The zipper provided better ventilation on hot days and made it easier to check oneself for ticks.

The dress was made from a lightweight, elastic synthetic material that dried quickly and had excellent durability. The color was chosen as white–ticks were easily visible on it, and white clothing is cooler in the heat of summer days.

During the journey, the taiga dress performed excellently on the route – so much so that even when the tick danger was over, I continued wearing it every day and finished the expedition in it.

5. One of the main objectives of my expedition was to showcase the Urals in all their diversity and the gradual change from south to north. To achieve this, it wasn't enough just to traverse this long route–I also had to take photos and videos along the entire journey. This was no easy task.

I realized that carrying my standard hiking photography kit, which weighs over 5 kg, was a bad idea–it would be too heavy. I had to compromise: I took a small mirrorless camera and one universal lens. With this decision, I sacrificed some quality and focal range, but gained in reduced weight, cutting it down by almost five times.

I shot video traditionally on my phone. Fortunately, with advances in technology, the introduction of quality stabilization and wide-angle lenses in phones made shooting on the go very convenient. Thanks to a special case integrated with a cord and carabiner, I carried the phone almost always within easy reach in one of the open pockets on my backpack's shoulder strap, which allowed me to capture the most interesting and important moments of the expedition.

This principle of quick access was also applied to the camera. I realized long ago: "If the camera is in the backpack, it stays in the backpack." This means that if you have to stop, take off your backpack, retrieve the camera, and then put it all back, you are very likely to miss many interesting and important moments. Some moments will simply pass too quickly, and for others, you may just be too tired or unwilling to go through the hassle of retrieving the equipment. It might seem easy from the outside, but when you're hiking for long hours, carrying a heavy load over mountains, every unnecessary movement can become something you despise.

I developed a special system that allowed me to carry the camera on the belt of my backpack, like a holster. The case was integrated with a waterproof dry bag, so it was safe from any precipitation. I could pull out the camera, take a shot, and put it back at any moment, even on the move.

In total, I took over 25,000 photos and shot more than 100 hours of video during the route. From the footage, a 26-episode film was produced.

6. Despite the fact that, for some surprising reason, my two predecessors–Sergey Karzhaev and Kirill Fronyuk–did not encounter a single bear during their expeditions, I didn't want to rely on such luck. I knew there were many bears in the Urals, and encounters with them were not uncommon. So I took special bear deterrents with me: a whistle, flares, and a can of pepper spray.

An important issue that needed to be carefully thought through and practiced in advance was the placement of these deterrents. They had to be always within reach, ready to be used quickly and correctly in any situation, even the most unexpected–whether I was on the move, in the tent, or even in the toilet. Dangerous bear encounters happen fast, and there's little use for a flare that's buried in a backpack compartment. You simply won't have time to grab it.

I placed the pepper spray canister and the flare on my belt in special pockets attached to the backpack, securing them with special cords to prevent them from being lost.

7. While traveling through the Urals, I had to cross about three dozen rivers of various sizes. Some of these crossings were planned over bridges, but others required a solution that would allow me to cross the water without delay, regardless of the water level–whether it was during spring floods or after prolonged rains, should they occur on the route.

Fortunately, Sergey Karzhaev, whom I've mentioned several times in these pages, had already thought about this problem during his own trek through the Trans-Urals. He had traveled without a boat, and after returning, he created a small company that now produces some of the best packrafts in the country. Naturally, I reached out to him, requesting the lightest boat possible for my needs.



The ultra-light boat "Korolek." Photo by Alexey Klyanin

By spring, everything was ready, and I had the lightest and most compact packraft in Russia, weighing just 900 grams. I suggested naming it after the smallest bird in the Urals–the yellow-headed kinglet. The boat had just enough space to fit a passenger with bent legs and a small backpack. But that was all I needed, as the primary purpose of the packraft was to comfortably cross calm water obstacles. That's what it was made for.

In the end, the dry summer largely solved the problem of water crossings. I only used the boat twice–on the first and second days of the route. However, its presence and the ability to use it in case of unforeseen water obstacles played an important psychological role during the journey.

8. A separate major task and urgent issue was ensuring power for my electronic devices.

The following devices required power:

1. iPhone 11 Pro (for filming, photos, communication, and internet);
2. Garmin 64st navigator;
3. Iridium 360 satellite communicator;
4. Sony Alpha 6600 camera;
5. Xiaomi Youpin Power Bank 3 (30,000 mAh).

Each device's power needs had to be addressed individually.

1. Charging the phone was the most pressing daily task, requiring the most effort. From previous experience, I knew that a 20,000 mAh power bank lasted me two weeks (without internet usage on the phone) while filming a five-part series. For the inhabited part of the route, I carried a 30,000 mAh power bank and charged it at every opportunity. Sometimes I would stop at shops and ask to charge it for a few hours. The charge wasn't always sufficient, especially since I actively used the internet in the inhabited areas, which significantly increased power consumption.

In the wilderness, I increased my energy reserves to 60,000 mAh, which was more than enough for all the autonomous sections of the route.

2. I used lithium batteries to power the navigator. One pair lasted two to three days of operation.

3. The satellite communicator had a large and powerful battery that allowed it to transmit my location every 20 minutes for more than 20 days on a single charge. This was more than sufficient for the longest autonomous segments of the journey.

4. Camera. I carried three batteries with me and charged them whenever possible from an electrical outlet. Sometimes, I had to charge them from a power bank.

5. Power bank. I charged it from the grid at overnight stops.

During the planning stage of the route, I factored in access to electricity, which was a key consideration in selecting overnight stops and determining movement tactics. Whenever possible, I used electrical outlets to recharge all devices. For this purpose, I carried a multi-outlet adapter. This allowed me to quickly connect all the electronics that needed charging to a single socket. It was very convenient: I would pack everything into one opaque waterproof bag, with the adapter cord sticking out. I could then ask in a shop or post office to charge my phone. Presented in this way, the numerous devices and wires didn't seem alarming to people, and I never encountered a refusal.

When preparing for the route, I also considered the use of solar panels, but decided to abandon the idea for three reasons.

First, because of their dependence on weather conditions. In the mountains, rainy weather and the lack of direct sunlight can last for weeks. Since photo and video shooting was one of the most important tasks on the route, I needed a solution that would allow me to charge devices every day, regardless of the weather.

Second, the lower reliability of the system. It’s hard to break a power bank, especially when it’s inside a backpack in a waterproof bag. It's much easier to break a solar panel hanging outside the backpack while moving through mountains and forests.

Third, the route did not involve autonomous sections longer than 25 days. The energy reserve for this period could be provided by power banks, which would not significantly exceed the weight and volume of solar panels.

For me, the choice was obvious: to stock up on energy in rest areas in populated settlements and carry it with me.

9. And finally – the first-aid kit. This question is traditionally asked by many, and I traditionally try not to give a direct answer. My firm belief is that the use of medications in any field, including tourism, should be explained by professionals with specialized education. I will limit myself to general information.

In my small first-aid kit, I only had the most essential items and medications that might be needed for treating common and most frequently encountered health problems on the route. Wounds and abrasions, stomach issues, allergies, colds, throat medicines (individual issues), and of course, painkillers.

Probably the most important and frequently used item from the first-aid kit was the nail clippers. I specifically bought them before setting out. They were heavy and powerful. I spent many evenings in the tent, using them and scissors to trim my toenails.

Fortunately, I rarely needed to use the contents of the hiking first-aid kit otherwise.

List of equipment used on the route

In this table, I've compiled my equipment that I used on the route. The total weight of the items gives some idea of the backpack's weight. However, it's important to note that this is the weight without accounting for food, the amount of which varied depending on the stage's duration, and without the water I had to carry with me.

List of equipment used on the route	***Weight (g)***
Tent MSR Hubba NX Grey	*1065*
Backpack Sierra Designs Flex Capacitor 60-75 Birch	*1115*
Sleeping bag Sierra Designs Synthesis 50 Multi	*735*
Self-inflating mat Therm-a-Rest Prolite Small Poppy	*410*
Gas stove MSR Reactor 1.0	*400*
Trekking poles Black Diamond Expedition 3	*480*
Headlamp Petzl Tikkina Red	*90*
Dry bag sized for backpack	*320*
Navigator Garmin GPSMAP 64ST	*180*
Power bank Xiaomi Youpin Power Bank 3 30000 mAh	*685*
Satellite communicator Iridium 360 RockSTAR	*293*
Network adapter Xiaomi Super Fast Charger 6 Ports 60W	*185*
Camera Sony Alpha ILCE-6600 Body	*540*
Lens Sony E 18-105 mm f/4 G OSS PZ	*474*
Battery Sony NP-FZ100 (3 pcs)	*250*
Phone iPhone 11 Pro	*210*
Phone iPhone 8	*140*
Case integrated with dry bag for photo equipment	*300*
Jacket RedFox Vector GTX IV	*430*
Sweater RedFox Power Stretch Multi	*620*
Jacket Norrona Follettind Thermo60 Hood	*700*
Hiking pants RedFox Active Shell	*650*
Thermal underwear, pants RedFox Active Light	*400*
Cycling gloves	*50*
Men's pants Arcteryx Zeta SL Black Long	*280*
Taiga dress	*250*
Cap with visor	*75*

Buff	*50*
Belt	*100*
Mosquito net	*30*
Gloves RedFox Transmitter II	*100*
Socks (2 pairs)	*90*
Men's sneakers Salomon X Ultra 4	*700*
First aid kit	*250*
Sewing repair kit	*25*
Emergency fire starter	*34*
Whistle	*5*
Battery Energizer Ultimate Lithium AA (weight of 1 pair)	*30*
Tooth powder + brush	*45*
Compass Moscompass Model 2	*50*
Flare	*117*
Bear repellent Control-AC 225 ml	*144*
Small dry bag for small items	*45*
Massage roller	*20*
Topographic maps (General Staff)	*50*
Oakley glasses	*31*
Packraft Korolek	*900*
Total	***14,143***

In conclusion to this chapter on equipment, I would like to say that, in my opinion, the importance of equipment is often greatly overestimated. It is not the first or even the second most significant factor for success. Psychological and physical preparation, skills, and abilities are more important than the items you use on the route.

Of course, good, lightweight, and reliable equipment is always pleasant and more efficient, but let's not forget that our entire vast planet was discovered and explored long before the advent of modern gear.

Physical preparation for the route

It was probably one of the most challenging and unclear aspects for me. I can honestly say that I didn't know – and still don't know – how to properly prepare for such long physical loads.

Reflecting on this before the departure and studying the experience of others, I came to two conclusions.

First, there is no universal method; everyone solves such problems based on their own experience, physical characteristics, and capabilities.

Second, you should try to strengthen and prepare all the moving parts of the body, especially the joints, since they will bear the main load of the challenges.

After completing the route, I would add a third conclusion: your physical condition is not the most important factor; much more crucial is your psychological state and overall preparation. Such routes are primarily walked with the mind, not with the legs.

But let's return to the starting point. What did I do to prepare for the journey?

Firstly, I almost completely abandoned long and smooth running, and instead focused more on strengthening the strength and endurance of my legs. I did special running exercises, accelerations, and hiking with a backpack, imitating ascents and descents.

I packed a 15-kilogram backpack and walked up and down the stairs in my nine-story panel building, gradually increasing the time until I could do it for an hour or more.

Secondly, I focused on overall physical fitness and spent more time on the pull-up bars. Pull-ups, push-ups, and core exercises. It is hard to overstate the importance of strong shoulders, arms, and core.

Thirdly, I worked with a movement specialist to restore proper biomechanics in my joints through corrective exercises.

In addition to the above, I continued going on hiking routes with a backpack. It was winter, so these were ski hikes.

Unfortunately, I must note that other aspects of expedition planning, family duties, and business did not allow me to fully concentrate on physical preparation, and it wasn't at the systematic level I would have liked.

But still, it seems that the continuous experience of many previous years of hiking and sports competitions, which served as a foundation, along with the measures mentioned above, yielded results. I set out on the route and, throughout its entirety, did not feel that I had taken on an "unbearable burden."

Information Preparation

Since the expedition had educational goals–to tell the story of the entire Ural region–I needed to have an extensive amount of information about the places along the planned route.

The problem was that memorizing such a large volume of factual information was impossible; there was neither time nor energy for that.

That's why, during the route planning process, I created a separate file where I compiled information about interesting and important locations in chronological order. In the end, this document reached 350 pages. As I traveled along the route, I actively used it for filming the documentary and writing this book.

In addition to the "route sheet" – as I called this document–I also took electronic versions of printed books, which I read both during my preparation and along the journey. Here is the list:

1. Arkhipova N.P., Yastrebov E.V. *How the Ural Mountains Were Discovered*. Sverdlovsk, 1990.
2. Rundkvist N.A. *A Hundred Days in the Urals*. Yekaterinburg, 1991.
3. Prokhorov B.V. *To the Peaks of the Southern Urals*. Ufa, 2017.
4. Karelin V.G. *The Ural Mountains: Exploration and Naming. Part I: Exploration*. Yekaterinburg, 2019.
5. Matveev A.K. *Geographical Names of the Urals*. Sverdlovsk, 1987.
6. Maslennikov E.P., Istomin P.I. *Routes of the Middle Urals*. Moscow, 1971.
7. Kemmerich A.O. *The Northern Urals*. Moscow, 1969.
8. Kemmerich A.O. *The Subpolar Urals*. Moscow, 1970.
9. Kemmerich A.O. *The Polar Urals*. Moscow, 1966.
10. Olenyev A.M. *The Urals and Novaya Zemlya*. Moscow, 1965.

11. Hofmann E.K. *The Northern Urals and the Coastal Ridge Pai-Khoi*. St. Petersburg, 1856.

12. Chibilev A.A. *The Natural Heritage of the Orenburg Region*. Orenburg, 1996.

13. Rundkvist N.A., Zdorina O.V. *The Urals: An Illustrated Local History Encyclopedia*. Yekaterinburg, 2013.

14. Zatonsky A.V. *A Guide to the Passes of the Northern Urals*. Perm, 2020.

15. Savelyev N.S. *Antiquities of the Bashkir Urals*. Ufa, 2018.

16. Ivanov M.N. *The Evolution of Glaciation in the Polar Urals in the Late Holocene*. Moscow, 2013.

17. Elakhovsky S.B. *Through the Snowy Mountains by Boats*. Moscow, 1969.

18. Zaplatin M.A., Vibe F.I. *The Most Beautiful Urals*. Sverdlovsk, 1983.

19. Mikhalevich S.I. *The Masters of the Ural Mountains*. Perm, 2009.

20. Ural-Batyr / Translated by G.G. Shafigova. Ufa, 1986.

21. Zhuravlev S.V. *The ABCs of the Subpolar Urals (The Highest Peaks of the Urals)*. Syktyvkar, 2016.

22. Gareev E.Z. *Geological Landmarks of the Republic of Bashkortostan*. Ufa, 2004.

23. Zaplatin M.A. *To the Mountain of Stone Idols (Manpupuner)*. Perm, 1959.

24. Mamin-Sibiryak D.N. *Novellas, Short Stories, and Essays*. Moscow, 1983.

Each of these books covered some part of my route and helped me gain a deeper and fuller understanding of the Urals.

Commemorative Tokens

Since childhood, I have loved stories about buried treasures hidden on remote, uninhabited islands. While preparing for the expedition, an idea came to me–why not do something similar in the Urals? Let those who read this book set out on their own adventures in search of treasure.

That's how the unique commemorative tokens were born–each cast in silver as a one-of-a-kind piece, with a total of five made. One for each part of the Urals.

We created them together with my colleagues–designer Alexey Klyanin and jeweler Ilshat Sharipov–at our jewelry workshop.

As I traveled through the Urals, I hid them in different parts of the mountains, leaving descriptions of their locations within the pages of this book. May they be found by the boldest, the strongest, and the bravest!



Silver tokens hidden along the road

However, before you, my friends, begin your treasure hunt, I would like to ask two things.

First, be cautious. Do not let excitement and the thirst for adventure cloud your judgment. Some of the tokens are hidden in remote and objectively dangerous mountainous areas. Searching for them requires a responsible approach–study the region, consider the weather and the season. Remember: no piece of silver, no peak, and no route is worth your life or health.

Second, be careful with nature. Throughout my journey across the Urals and in all my outdoor activities, I follow the *Leave No Trace* principles. In short, they can be summed up as: “After you, the trail should look the same as before–or even cleaner.”

I realize that hiding these treasures was a slight departure from this principle, and I take full responsibility for it. I took every possible precaution–visually, there is nothing at the hiding spots that would indicate the presence of a token. I also have no doubt that they will be found fairly quickly and removed from the mountains.

Still, I worry that the hiding spots may lose their pristine appearance. I sincerely ask and hope that whoever finds a token will be as careful as possible when retrieving it and restore the site to its original state. Additionally, I ask that the discovery be publicly reported in any accessible way.

Anyone who learns about the hidden tokens in the Ural Mountains should check first whether they have already been found before setting off on a search.

A Charitable Story

In my travels, I realized something about myself: it's important that my journeys benefit more than just one person. Because when everything is done solely for oneself, travel becomes just a trivial form of consumption, not much different from mindless shopping for the sake of shopping. In both cases, the planet's resources are consumed, but nothing new is created.

For me, it's always crucial to bring back information, emotions, and knowledge from my journeys, to share them with others, and, I hope, make their lives a little better.

When preparing for the expedition, I also thought about adding a charitable goal to it. However, at that time, I was far from this topic and didn't even know where to start. Given the catastrophic lack of time, it was very likely that these thoughts would remain unfulfilled desires. But fate works in strange ways.

Just a couple of weeks before departure, I received a call from a good friend, a wonderful athlete and organizer of mass amateur sports events in Ufa, Vladislav Litvinchuk. He asked if I would like to raise funds for the educational charity foundation "Marhamat." He mentioned that he had helped them several times and could vouch for the transparency and efficiency of their fund usage.

A few days later, I met the people who had created the foundation, as well as the special children who were studying there. That's when another goal was added to my project.

On the fundraising page, this goal was described as follows:

"One of the goals of the expedition I set for myself is to support the beneficiaries of the 'Marhamat' foundation–children with limited health capabilities. You can support my cause with any comfortable sum on the charitable platform "Sdelaj.Org." The funds raised will be used to organize a four-day summer camp in the Ural Mountains near Beloretsk for 10 children with disabilities, their parents, and teachers. Visiting this camp will help the children get to know the region's nature, socialize, and acquire new skills. The total amount to be raised is 400,000 rubles."

It was interesting not just to collect money but to use it for a targeted project related to the Ural Mountains. But how could I combine two seemingly unrelated stories–children with disabilities and the mountains? It turned out that the foundation had experience organizing summer trips to tourist bases, but they had never been to the mountains. Well, this was the perfect opportunity to address that gap.

In the end, in just two months, we received 497 donations, raising 111% of the required amount. On July 26, 2021, 10 children with disabilities, along with their parents and teachers, went to the Southern Urals for the first time.

They climbed the summit of Malinovaya mountain (1152 meters), touched the warm, rough Ural scree with their hands, inhaled the mountain air, saw the highest peaks, and got to know their homeland at its best. These were five days of active work and recreation with teachers–horseback riding, activities, walks, and sports games.

I want to especially emphasize that, from the outside, this might look like a regular vacation trip to an uninitiated person. But it wasn't. A trip to the mountains is a vivid and important part of the long-term work with special children, who are greatly limited in their ability to explore the world. It's systematic work that helps them better socialize and, perhaps, find their place in life. Unfortunately, such work in our country can currently only be carried out by non-governmental organizations and enthusiasts. And to do this, funds must be raised.

I am deeply grateful to everyone who responded and supported this small initiative. When the necessary amount was raised–this happened near the Manpupuner ridge–I realized that, regardless of what might happen, the expedition had already been a success, even if something went wrong and I had to cut it short. This, of course, increased my psychological comfort, which is crucial in such projects.

In conclusion, I want to encourage everyone who is involved in interesting and notable projects in tourism and sports not to neglect the additional charitable responsibility. Who, if not us, strong and confident people, will help those who are in difficult life circumstances?



At the meeting with the children supported by the "Marhamat" foundation. Photo by Lilia Zagirova

How and Why This Book Was Written

In the 21st century, almost anyone can write a book, and many take advantage of this. On one hand, it's a wonderful opportunity to speak and be heard; on the other, it inevitably leads to an abundance of "one-hit wonder" books–those written for the sake of the process and left to collect dust on shelves.

In my view, there is nothing worse in writing a book than creating a useless dust collector, a book that's opened only once, at the time of purchase.

My primary goal in writing this work was to create a useful book–a book that the reader would return to again and again. A book that would inspire new adventures across the Urals. I will be happy if my book becomes the most worn-out one on the shelf of any Ural traveler.

That's why the book is full of texts, photographs, and maps. After reading it, you can journey through all the natural zones of the Urals with me, listen to their

descriptions, see how the mountains look at different points along the range, and immediately match it all with the map.

Perhaps every experience is important in a person's life. The years I spent in the police force and studying law were not wasted on me. It's likely that these experiences are the roots of the principle I used in structuring this book. Formally, it resembles the Criminal Code–fortunately, only in form. It is divided into two parts.

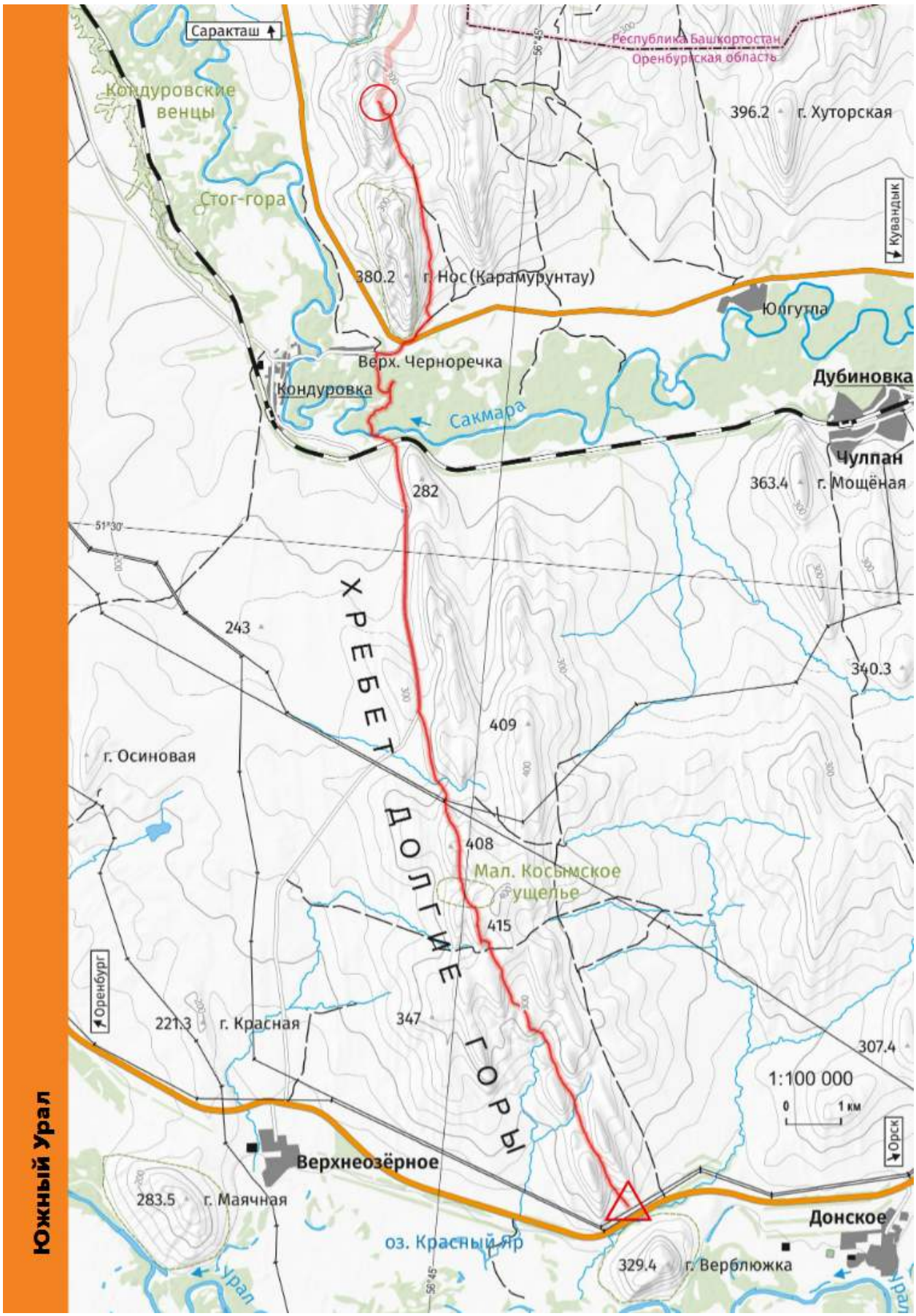
The first part is general. It tells the story leading up to the expedition, explaining the terms, ideas, tasks, and goals that I faced.

The second part is special. It is divided into 109 chapters–one for each day of my expedition. Each chapter is a separate block consisting of text, photographs from that day, and a map with the route.

I hope this clear structure will help the reader better navigate the events and their geographical context.

With that, I conclude the introduction, and we move on to describing the events that took place with me in the vast expanse of the Ural Mountains during the spring and summer of 2021.

Let's go! Join me through the Urals!



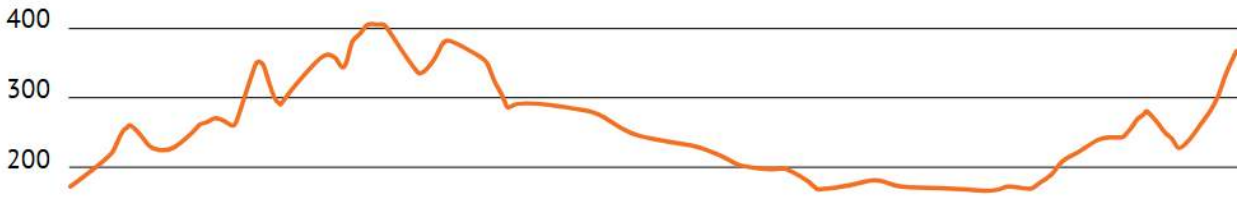
The Southern Urals

Saraktash
Kondurovsky Rings
Stog mountain
The Republic of Bashkortostan
Orenburg region
Khutorskaya mountain
Nos mountain
Yulgutla
Dubovinka
Chulpan
Sakmara
Verkh. Chernorechka
Kondurovka
Moshchennaya mountain
The Dolgie Mountains ridge
Osinovaya mountain
Krasnaya mountain
Camel mountain
Red Yar lake
Mayachnaya lake
Donskoye
Verkhneozernoye
Ural
Maloye Kosym gorge

Day 1

Dolgye mountains – Sakmara river – Karamuruntau ridge

25 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 25 km



May 1, 2021*

**Based on audio diaries I recorded daily.*

I'm sitting on my backpack and crying. I'm alone, so small and weak – my stride is less than 50 cm, and ahead of me lies the enormous Ural: over 3,000 km of mountains, roads, trails, windfalls, scree slopes, cliffs, and swamps. Ahead is a lot of hardship, pain, longing for my family – and there's no guarantee that I'll be able to accomplish what I've planned.

Big tears are streaming down my face, and I can't do anything about it.

It's a good thing I'm alone, and the journalists who threatened to come didn't show up. That would've been weird – a grown man, who's already hiked all across the Urals, sitting and bawling like a kid.

But now, I can let my emotions out. It's okay – let the tension of the past months drain away. It's all already happened. I've dreamed about this moment for so long and feared its arr – and now it's here. I just need to take the step.



Start of the Expedition

Wiping my eyes, I get up, put on my backpack, and say like a mantra:

"You have to go, Oleg. The Urals won't cross themselves."

And I take that step. That's it – Trans-Ural route has begun.

I’m going to walk across the entire length of Russia, along the Ural mountains, from south to north. I’m sure it’s going to be an amazing journey – beautiful and full of variety.



Dolgye Mountains ridge

The weather is beautiful – the sun is shining, and a brisk but gentle wind pushes against my chest. All around me is one of the most stunning and beloved places in the Urals – the Dolgye mountains. You couldn’t imagine a better starting point for the journey. Just a couple of kilometers to the south flows the Ural river – a fairly symbolic but tangible border of the Southern Urals – and right from the first step, it’s mountains. Still low and smooth for now, but they stand out clearly against the flat plains of Orenburg. This visually striking place was exactly what I needed to start the route – something that immediately grabs the viewer's attention without a long prelude.

I walk between two ridges and climb the highest point in the area – an unnamed summit at 415 meters. The view to the south is absolutely magical – a postcard-perfect landscape of the Orenburg Urals. It’s a truly unique place, unlike anything else in our mountains. Dolgye mountains and then Karamuruntau ridge stretch for more than 100 km in a straight line – the southwesternmost folds of the Urals. As I like to say, “Here, the steppes rise in waves.”

And what’s just as wonderful – these gentle, treeless, open mountains are easy to walk. Up and down, up and down. The terrain is very accessible, with a dense network of roads around and, unfortunately, cutting through them. The beauty and

accessibility, combined with human laziness, tempt people to drive across these mountains – up to the summits, leaving tire tracks, which of course takes away from their natural charm. Even now, as I walk, I see cars on the slopes.

After 15 kilometers, I approach the first major and nerve-wracking obstacle: Sakmara river. In May, it's full, dark, and cold. When I was planning the route, rivers were among the biggest concerns. Nearly thirty water crossings could become impassable without ferrying equipment under bad weather conditions – and Sakmara was definitely one of them.

In summer, you can cross it via a small bridge near Kandurovka village, but in the high spring waters, that crossing floods. To get to the other side, you'd have to make a big detour, losing at least a full day of hiking. Luckily, I had a plan for this – the lightest boat in Russia: a packraft, specially made for me. I shared the story of it in the chapter on preparation.



Everything goes just as planned. I inflate the boat by mouth, place my backpack at the front, paddle slightly upstream using the reverse current, and then surrender to the fast, springy flow. Rowing furiously with the blades of my paddle, I cross to the opposite bank. My legs even got a bit of a rest while I was getting the crossing ready.

On the opposite bank, I find myself in a thicket of poplars and experience the first tick attack of the route. These eternal companions of spring crawl over my clothes by the dozens – large and speckled.

The day is already drawing to a close. With my last ounce of strength, I complete the planned daily distance – 25 km. I climb one of the ridge's peaks, hoping for a sunset. I pitch my tent, utterly exhausted, not caring much about the choice of location. The stress of the past days and the near-total lack of sleep the night before departure are taking their toll.

By some universal law of misfortune, my youngest daughter got sick – and the older one isn't sleeping well either. So instead of getting at least a bit of rest before the early departure, I spent the night cradling a feverish three-month-old baby in my arms.

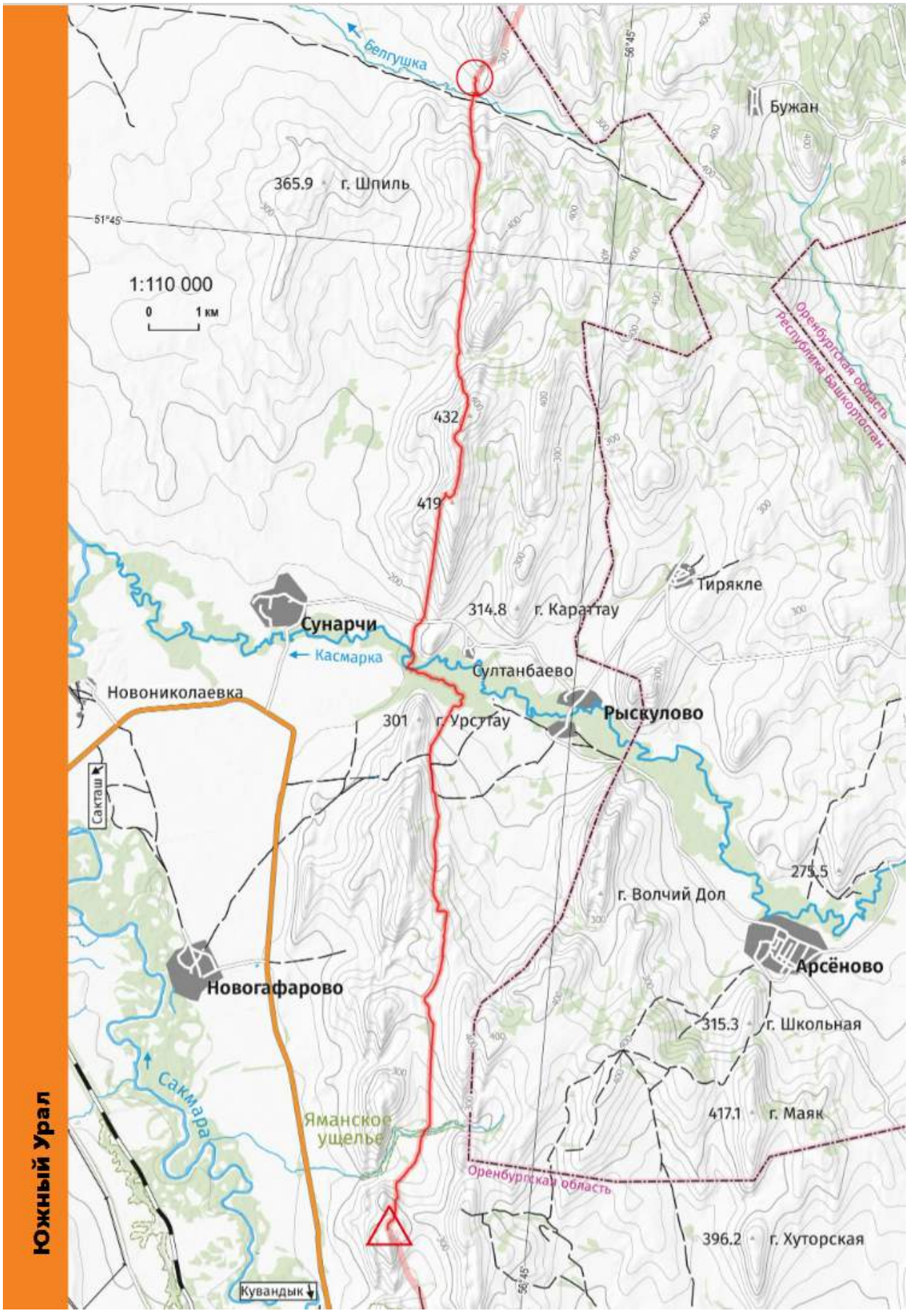
The sun sets behind dark clouds on the horizon, dashing any hope for a beautiful sunset – but granting me permission to close my eyes and drift off half an hour earlier. My mind is a mess, and only sleep and the road can bring peace. The most important thing is: I've set out.



Sakmara river



Karamuruntau ridge at Sunset on the First Day



The Southern Urals

Belgushka *Buzhan*

Shpil mountain

Tiryakle

Sunachri

Kasmarka

Novonikolayevka

Saktash

Volchiy Dol mountain

Urstau mountain

Sultanbaevo

Ryskulovo

Novogafarovo

Arsyonovo

Shkolnaya mountain

Mayak mountain

Yamanskoye gorge

Sakmara

Orenburg region

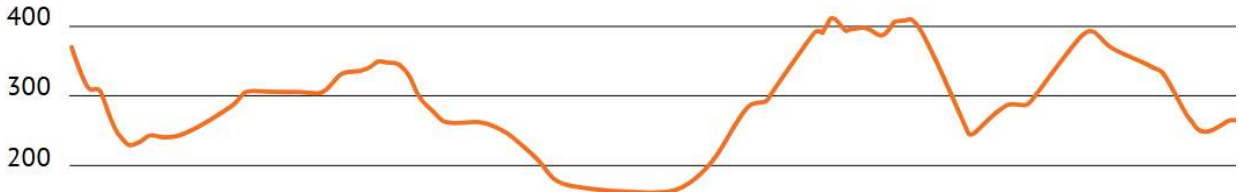
Khutorskaya mountain

Kuvandyk

Day 2

Karamuruntau ridge – Kasmarka river – Belgushka river

27 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 52 km



May 2, 2021

**A kolok is an island forest in the forest-steppe zone, typically growing along interfluves, in lowland areas of the landscape.*

The wind is fiercely whipping the tent, reminding me that I didn't secure it properly yesterday. I'd like to sleep a bit longer, but I need to get going – the gusts are threatening. The sun rises behind clouds, so instead of waiting for dawn, I quickly stuff the tent into my backpack and descend to a small forest clearing, that has grown along a stream. By its bank, I have breakfast to the cheerful murmur of the water.



Waves of the Karamuruntau ridge

I try to write my journal, but it's not going too well. Even under normal conditions, sitting at a desk, I hardly write anything, and now, lying on my side, holding the notebook in one hand and scratching out letters with a pencil, it’s all happening very slowly and awkwardly. I need to do something about this: if I continue this torture, I’ll either be unable to read it later when I need the journal entries after the project is finished, or, more likely, I’ll quit or approach it only formally. My brain, I’m sure, will find an excuse to ignore this routine and unpleasant task that will be needed sometime later, especially with more pressing tasks at hand.

The rest of the day is spent walking through the long, lined-up mountains. The weather is gloomy, with occasional raindrops, but otherwise, everything is fine. Karamuruntau ridge rises and falls with smooth peaks. Each time I climb to the top of one of these steppe waves, I admire its beautiful, harmonious shapes, stretching into the horizon to the south and north. On some peaks, you can clearly see the linear layers of rock, visibly showing how this relief was formed.

As my friend, the geologist Faniz Ardislamov, explained to me, these folds formed as a result of compression during the collision of two major lithospheric plates – the East European and West Siberian plates. As one plate pushed over the other, the relatively pliable rocks composing this ridge were squeezed into these whimsical, wave-like hill mountains.

But there’s a deceptive aspect to this terrain. When you look into the distance, at the mountain slopes, it seems as though I will walk on a carpet – the path will be easy and comfortable. The eye hardly catches any major obstacles. Unfortunately, it’s not so simple. The steppes covering the slopes are full of unevenness, stones, patches of dry grass, and prickly bushes. My feet suffer as much as they would in the taiga, especially now, after the winter season, when they haven’t yet adapted to the varied summer loads and the strain of the journey. I walk as carefully as I can, and like a mantra, I repeat to myself, “Your main task now is not to hurry. You have a clear plan, follow it.” The smoothness of movement, the loads, and the terrain – that’s what defines my days at the beginning of the journey. Luckily, the Ural

provides me with that opportunity. The first half of the entire project is taking place in more accessible areas with better infrastructure, which allows for a gentler acclimatization to the physical demands. This is one of the reasons why I started my route from the south.

In the middle of the hiking day, I again use the packraft to cross an old meander of the Kasmarka river, saving some walking time. The bridge is not far this time, but since I have the boat, why walk? After the crossing, on top of one of the mountains, something amusing and yet important happens.

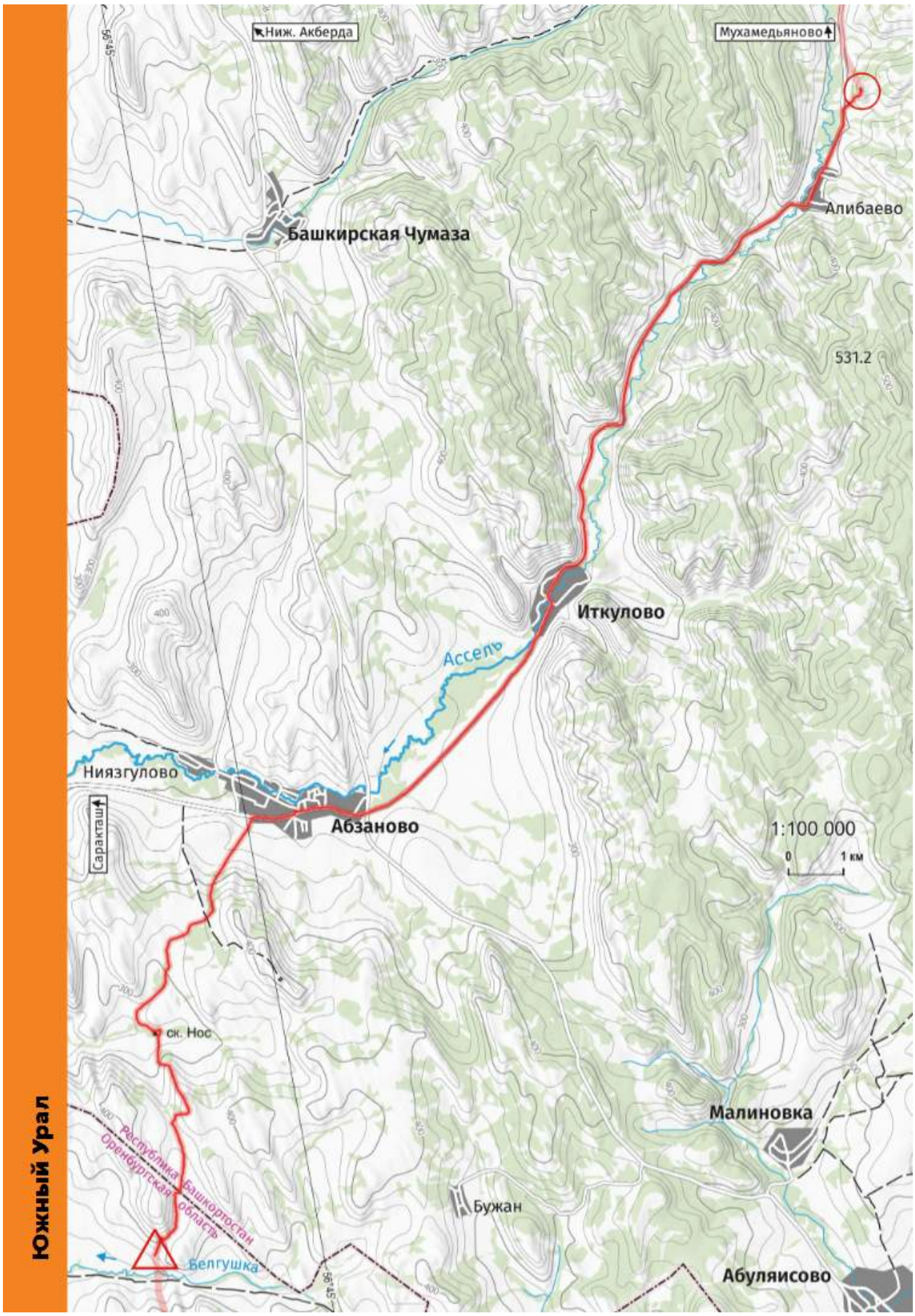
A guy and a girl catch up with me, telling me that they saw information about my expedition, jumped in a car, and came to support me. They bring salo (pork fat), bread, and eggs, as today is Easter. I gladly accept the extra fats, proteins, and carbohydrates. It seems the girl was a bit disappointed to learn I was only on my second day, but on the other hand, she was happy to have visited the mountains. She lives not far from here, but there had never been a reason to appreciate this beauty before.

Well, this is exactly the main reason I started my route – to show people the beauty of the Urals and try to make them want to see it for themselves. I've only just started, but the goals are already beginning to be realized. This is inspiring.



Overnight in a Secluded Hollow

I set up camp in a hollow between the mountains, near a small stream, a right tributary of Belgushka river. I stop by the water to clean up. Although I've only been on the road for two days, my legs are covered in the black dust of the steppe. The ground around me is trampled by cattle, so I make sure to boil the water thoroughly. As the sun sets, a herd appears, slowly but menacingly moving toward me. The situation is saved by the herder – spotting the small patch of my tent in the narrow saddle of the mountains, he drives the herd away.



The Southern Urals

Nizhnyaya Akberda *Mukhamedyanovo*

Bashkirskaya Chumaza

Alibaevo

Itkulovo

Niyazgulovo

Abzanovo

Assel

Saraktas

Skala Nos

Buzhan

Malinovka

Belgushka

Abuliyasovo

Republic of Bashkortostan

Orenburg region

Day 3

Belgushka river – Nos rock – Abzanovo village – Itkulovo village – Alibaevo village – Uslutau mountain

31 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 83 km



May 3, 2021

The morning was wonderful – yesterday's clouds had vanished, and the sun was shining. I left behind my beloved Karamuruntau and headed northeast, toward Zilair plateau. I crossed from Orenburg region into Bashkiria.I descended from the ridge feeling a bit disappointed – I didn't get to fully enjoy the spring steppe greenery and flowers. It seems I'm going too early. In just a week, by Victory Day, this area will be completely transformed: the still yellow, faded grass from last year will give way to new life, to fresh green shoots. Flowers will bloom in abundance. For a brief moment, the steppe will become a paradise after the long, cold Ural winter. And while farther north, in the central part of the Southern Urals, everything will still be brown and muddy, here on the ridges the celebration of life will begin. However, it won't last long – the hot southern sun and winds will quickly burn and wear out the greenery. So I think mid-May is the best time to visit the southern mountain-steppe regions of the Urals.



Descent to Nos rock



In the first half of the day, I had planned to visit an interesting local natural landmark – the Nos rock. Seeing it from afar, I noticed some movement around the rock. As I got closer, I found a tractor scooping gravel from beneath the slope. Climbing to the top, I began filming and photographing what was happening.

After a while, the work stopped, and the tractor driver appeared. To me, it was obvious what was going on at the foot of the mountain – it was almost certainly illegal extraction of construction materials. It was especially upsetting that they were taking them from a beautiful rock that could be a local point of interest.I decided to take a bold step and shouted down, asking if there was a permit for gravel extraction. The answer came back with a question: “Who are you?” Without thinking long, I replied that I was a representative of the environmental prosecutor’s office. That was the end of our short dialogue. The machinery roared to life, and a few minutes later I saw the tractor quickly disappearing across the field.

By noon, having finally left the western foothills behind, I reached the road leading to Zilair plateau. As I walked, I reflected on an idea that had come to me during the first two days of the journey. I toyed with it like a new gadget, admiring its seeming neatness and logic.The essence of the idea – Little Orenburg trail. Around

the world, there are long-distance hiking trails – marked walking routes through the most scenic natural areas of a region or country. These trails stretch for thousands of kilometers and enjoy massive popularity.



View from Nos rock

Russia, with its beautiful nature and vast territory, is no exception – lately, more and more such projects have been appearing here as well.

Trails are being created in the Urals too, for example, Great South Ural trail, along part of which I plan to hike further. After spending two days on Karamuruntau ridge, I thought that it would be a wonderful and promising idea for a trail. Starting in Dolgie mountains, it could be laid out to, say, the road to Zilair – just over 100 kilometers of beautiful views and easy trekking with good transport accessibility. The trail could easily be divided into separate one- and two-day sections so that people could walk it in parts, depending on their physical condition. I'm sure many would gladly do so if they were given a little information and if the path were marked.

By lunchtime, having covered almost the entire planned distance for the day, I decided to slow down a bit. I found some willow thickets by the roadside, settled in

their shade with a firm intention to lie down for a couple of hours and read a book. Behind me were 20 kilometers, ahead – 5 kilometers according to the plan. But my plans for a rest were not destined to come true. After about 15 minutes, a car stopped nearby, covering me with clouds of dust, and a guy jumped down almost onto my head from the high roadside embankment, bringing the cheerful news that he wanted to walk with me for five days, all the way to Muradymovsky gorge. I can't say that this prospect thrilled me, but who am I to deny people the desire to support me? Especially since I myself had written that anyone who wanted to walk part of the route with me was welcome to do so, as long as they were prepared for two things. First, complete autonomy – yes, we would walk nearby, but not together in terms of food and equipment. Second, they had to be ready for the fact that I might be unfriendly and uncommunicative. The hardships of the path and the psychological pressure of what lies ahead could take a toll on my mood. And after all, I wasn't walking alone for no reason – obviously, I love the state of solitude.

After gathering ourselves, we continued on. The guy introduced himself as Ildar Mazitov. I was surprised to learn that in 2019, he had met Kirill Fronyuk roughly in these same places and had walked part of the way with him. What an interesting kind of continuity.



My companion Ildar Mazitov

Soon the wide, open valley ended, and we entered the mountains again. The mountains were still gentle in shape, but the previously linear arrangement of the ridges gave way to chaos. More forest appeared on their slopes. Now it was no longer just isolated groves along the rivers, but rather extensive forested areas covering most of the mountains.

Very soon, we covered the distance planned for the day and kept going, because it would have felt strange to suggest stopping just an hour after setting out with my companion. And that's one of the reasons why I don't like hiking with

someone else – you have to adjust and find compromises. Even in situations where the other person is willing to follow my decisions without considering their own interests, my conscience still doesn't let me completely disregard them.

However, Ildar soon proved to be useful. At a water pump in Alibaevo village, we found ourselves in a rather unpleasant situation. Stopping to fill up on water, I learned that my companion only had one plastic container, while for a comfortable overnight stay it's better to have two. I asked some children playing nearby if they had any spare ones at home, and after a couple of minutes, they returned with a plastic one-and-a-half-liter bottle that had once held beer – and with a very drunk young man in tow. While we were filling our containers, the drunk man began to act restless, trying to explain something to me in Bashkir and through gestures. Judging by his gestures, he liked my glasses. When I told him that, unfortunately, I didn't understand what he was saying, he got upset and started promising to teach me his native language right there on the spot. Luckily, Ildar understood him and spoke with him, which helped defuse the situation a bit and gave us time to finish collecting water, avoid an unnecessary conflict, and move on.

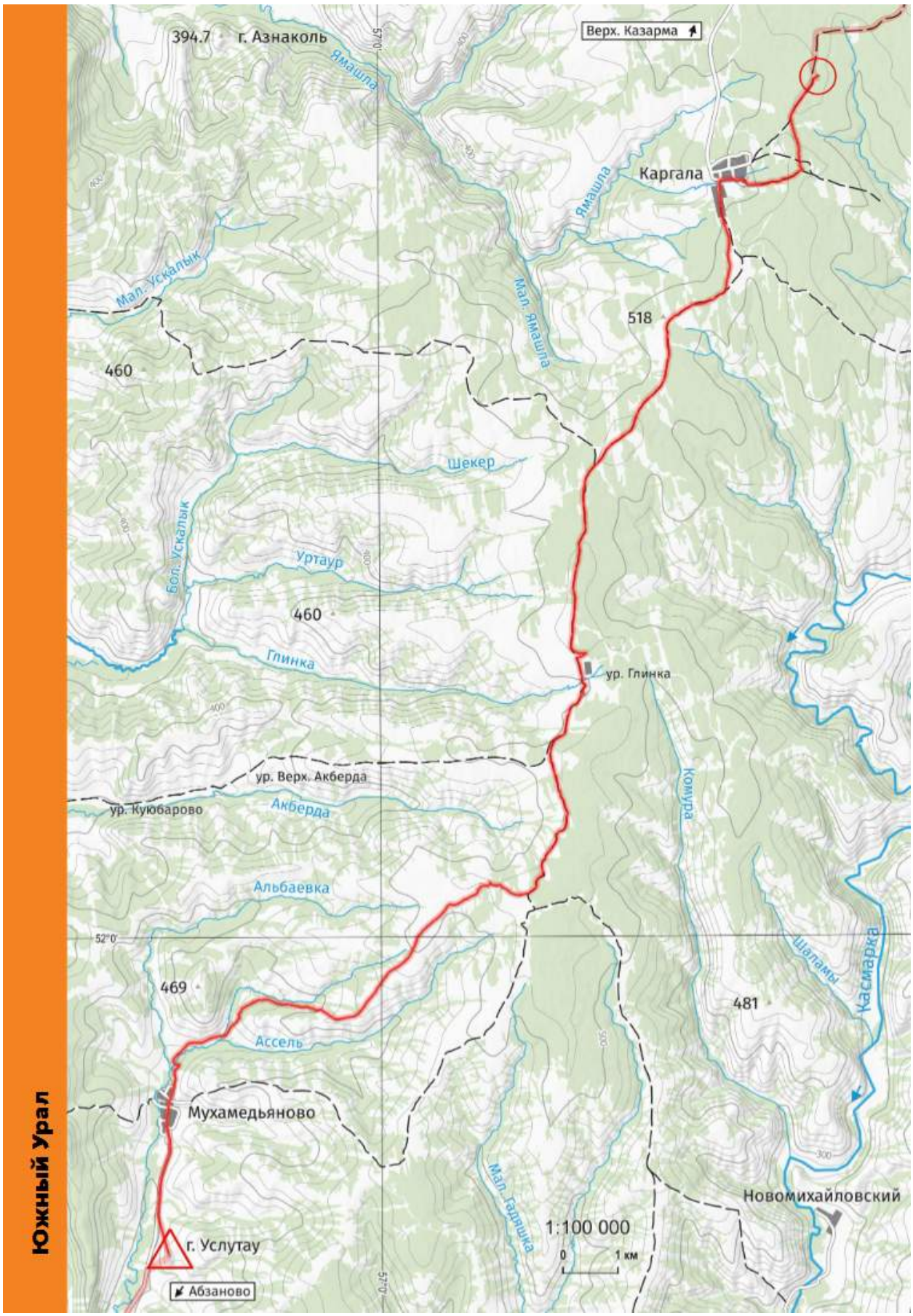
A few kilometers beyond the village, a notable peak could be seen rising above the road – marked on the map as Uslutau. I decided to camp there, to catch both the sunrise and the sunset. Ildar translated the name as "Sharp mountain": "uslo" meaning "sharp," and "tau" meaning "mountain." At the top, we found a good flat spot, hidden from view and offering stunning vistas over the valley. After pitching the tent, I collapsed inside to finish reading my book. A few hours later, once the daytime heat had eased and the evening approached, we climbed up to the summit. Below us stretched the valley – villages in the distance, the road winding through, and Assel river gleaming in golden curves, its name sounding as melodic as its appearance. Somewhere down in the hollows, the soft jingling of horse bells reached us. We sat there, chatting about all sorts of things. Ildar showed me how to eat wood sorrel – something I'd always wanted to try but never knew how. It turned out to have a refreshing taste.



Overnight Stay Beneath Uslutau Summit

The sun set at a right angle to the valley, filling it with evening twilight even before disappearing behind the horizon itself. The forest on the horizon flared up in a blaze of sunset fire – and then night fell.

Well, it seems I managed to stick to the planned pace for only two days; today it was exceeded by 15%. And it looks like, with good weather ahead, there's no point in setting up camp so early anymore. Idleness under the heat is just as exhausting as moving – maybe even more so from a psychological point of view. Tomorrow, I'll try to set out earlier, while the morning is still cool.



The Southern Urals

Aznakol mountain *Yamashla*

Verkhnyaya Kazarma

Kargala

Malaya Yamashla

Sheker

Urataur

Glinka

Akberda

Albaevka

Kuyubarovo ravine

Verkhnyaya Akberda ravine

Komura

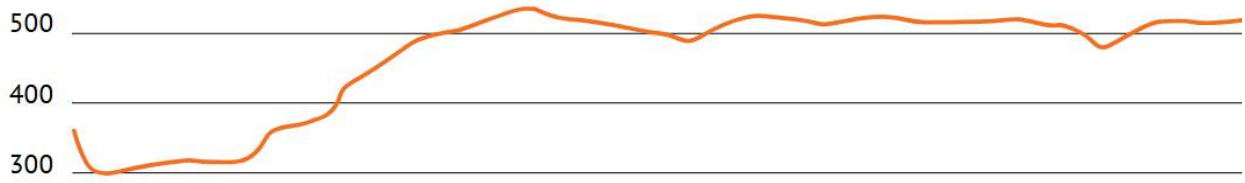
Maly Uskalyk

Glinka ravine

Day 4

Uslutau mountain – Mukhamedyanovo village – Glinka tract – Kargala village

31 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 114 km



May 4, 2021

The weather continues to please – not a single cloud in the morning sky. However, the sunrise isn't as pleasing in terms of its position, just like the sun yesterday evening, setting perpendicular to the valley. While the positioning isn't ideal for photography, it's compensated by the tenderness of the colors. Born above the mountain, the sun bathed the mountain tops in a soft pink, contrasting beautifully with the valley still filled with bluish mist from village smoke, not yet touched by light. And even though there isn't much worth photographing, I'm still happy. The birth of the sun is worth the early rise and the numb fingers. There is no better time of day for me than this. It's especially thrilling and heartwarming to see the very first point, the very first ray of the new day emerging from behind the horizon. The pleasure it brings is even greater than purely aesthetic – it feels like a symbol of life and the journey continuing. And when people ask me which I prefer – sunrise or sunset – I always choose morning without hesitation. Sunsets can be just as beautiful, but their meaning is different. Usually, when you admire the sun at the end of the day, you're already tired, carrying the weight of the kilometers you've walked on your shoulders.



The Birth of a New Day



Alibaevo village in the Pre-Dawn Hour



The First Bear Track

The light and colors seem different; the sunset hues feel heavier. But in the morning, everything lies ahead. You've rested, full of energy, and the world isn't fading into darkness, but waking up. There is so much interesting and important left to do.

We had a quick breakfast and set off before the full weight of the southern heat descended upon us. A few kilometers to Mukhamedyanovo village were along yesterday's dusty country road. After the village, we took a forest road and began to ascend gently. Gradually, the road became flatter, and before we knew it, we were on a nearly level surface. The hills that had towered above us for the past few days were gone, replaced by a blue sky and endless space in every direction. Here it was – Zilair plateau, the first significant change in the landscape along the route. Its territory is vast, stretching about 150 km from south to north, from Ural river to Belaya (Agidely) river. We'll be walking across it for the next few days.

As we reached the top, larches appeared, and so did the bears. I found the first small tracks. It was an important milestone.

From now on, my faithful companions will be the slant-footed ones. I knew this would happen, but still – encountering the first bear tracks after a long winter break always stirs emotions and excitement.

Zilair plateau, a modestly beautiful part of the Urals, enchants with its isolation and vastness. The wind carries the scent of spring grass across the plateau, clouds drift just above us, and the picturesque road winds through fresh green meadows and thickets. It feels like walking on flat land, but that's not the case. Above, indeed, nothing rises, but deep ravines stretch downward, eventually merging into even deeper river valleys. We can hardly see them, as the road is laid along a broad watershed, but they are there, and the numerous spring streams flowing from the plateau indicate that there must be plenty of water below. It's water, in the form of streams and rivers, that shapes the landscape here, cutting through the soft sedimentary rocks with its currents.

By noon, we passed through Glinka tract. The road had indeed become clayey before we reached it. People used to live here, but now, there is nothing left except the foundations covered in weeds and a cemetery on the forest's edge. It's always interesting how people ended up in such remote, inhospitable places, on the open windswept plateau. Sometimes, the answer or at least a hint comes from the graves. The crosses and stars on the monuments indicate that this was likely the first Russian settlement along my route. The last burials were from the mid-20th century.

I wonder what they did here, why they settled here. It's possible this wasn't a voluntary choice. The Ural Mountains have seen much grief, and many broken lives due to the Soviet punitive machine. The forests have witnessed many shattered fates. But now, standing on the brick foundations, it's impossible to know exactly what was here.

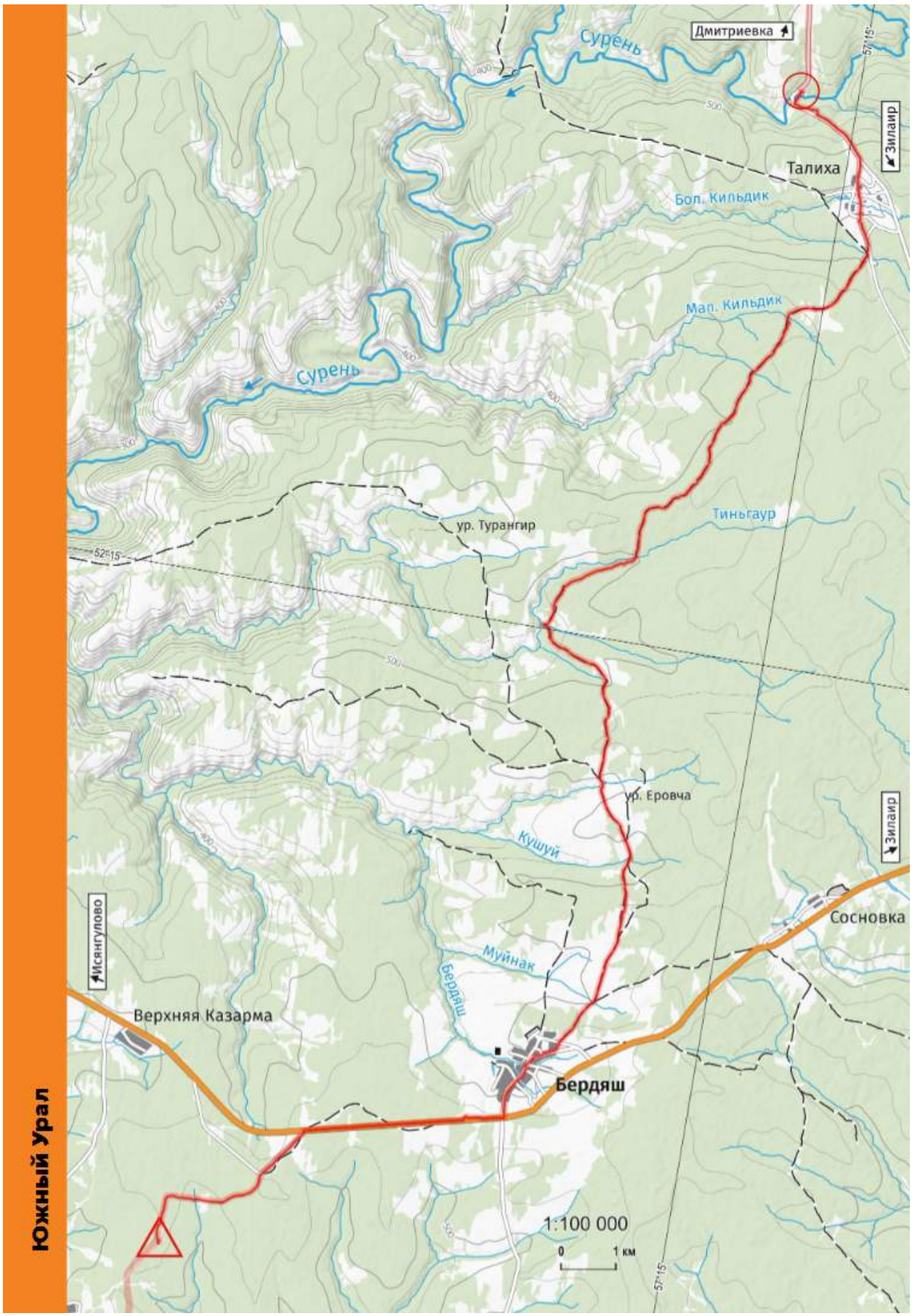
By evening, we arrived at Kargala village. After filling up with water, we moved a few kilometers away and set up camp in the forest. A notable moment: we met two elderly women near the village, hugging the oak trees, and completely

ignoring us. It looked, at the very least, strange. In the evening, I was kicking myself with frustration: the treetops lit up in beautiful sunset colors, but I had no chance to even glance at the sun. The dense, tall forest surrounded us.

We once again covered more distance than planned. It seems that tomorrow I will be ahead of schedule by one day if the food drop-off meeting happens in the morning.



The Vastness of Zilair Plateau



The Southern Urals

Suren *Dmitrievka*

Talikha

Zilair

Bolshoy Kildik

Maly Kildik

Tingyaur

Turangir ravine

Yevrocha ravine

Kushuy

Sosnovka

Muynak

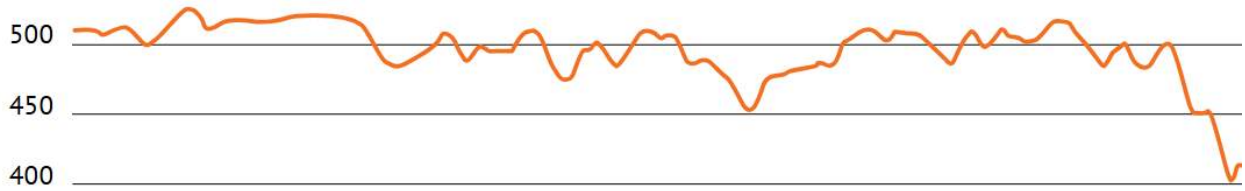
Berdyash

Verkhnyaya Kazarma

Day 5

Kargala village –Berdyash settlement – Talikha village – Suryen River

33 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 147 km



May 5, 2021

I don't understand people who stop for the night in the forest when they have the opportunity to camp in an open space. They're missing out on much of the beauty that the day can offer. Not wanting to be like those unfortunate souls, I woke up early and set out to find an open spot towards the direction of the sunrise. It wasn't easy; by fate and route, we had ended up yesterday in a dense, tall forest. How dramatically the vegetation had changed in just four days and about 100 km straight north! I was no longer walking through steppes or small forest clearings, but a full-fledged, tall mixed forest. Birch, pine, oak, and larch trees–forest beauty.

A few minutes before the sun appeared, I found a meadow with a couple of trees at the center–a sprawling birch and a slender pine. I climbed the pine, met the sunrise, and greeted the sun. And then, back on the road. Today was the fifth day of the journey, and I was starting to get used to the load. My body, it seems, now understands better what is expected of it. The initial pain in my legs has subsided. The good dirt roads and the lack of steep climbs and descents on the plateau contribute to a gentle acclimatization.

A couple of hours later, we reached Chuvash village of Berdyash. Here, I was to receive my first resupply of food and other supplies for the journey. Faniil Irmakov, a tourist and photographer from Sibai, was helping me with this. I met Faniil a year ago while fighting forest fires in the Bashkir Nature Reserve. When the question of organizing the resupply arose, he was the first person I asked for help, and he immediately agreed. Right on time, a car stopped at the side of the road, and the necessary box for continuing the journey was handed to me, along with some

extra supplies: two pieces of fragrant dried moose meat, prepared by Faniil using an old Bashkir recipe passed down from his grandfather.


Receiving the First Resupply

Heartily thanking Fanil for his help – without his responsiveness it would have been much harder for me to organize the route – I moved on. Through the village and into the fields and forests.

Perhaps the reader is now wondering: why do I need supply drops if there are plenty of villages with shops along my route? Wouldn't it be simpler to just buy food as I go? In my opinion, it wouldn't. When planning the route, I carefully thought through and mapped out the daily rations, calories, and weight. Gas consumption is also tied to these calculations, and overall, the food matches my taste preferences. Having prepared rations, I'm not dependent on the shops' working hours or their assortment. I can completely avoid villages and not adjust my schedule around them.

Moreover, the supply drops include not only food but also maps, batteries, gas canisters, socks, and other small items. Of course, I could have used shops to restock during the first part of the route – that's a normal option – but it's simpler for me to rely on home preparations and the help of friends.

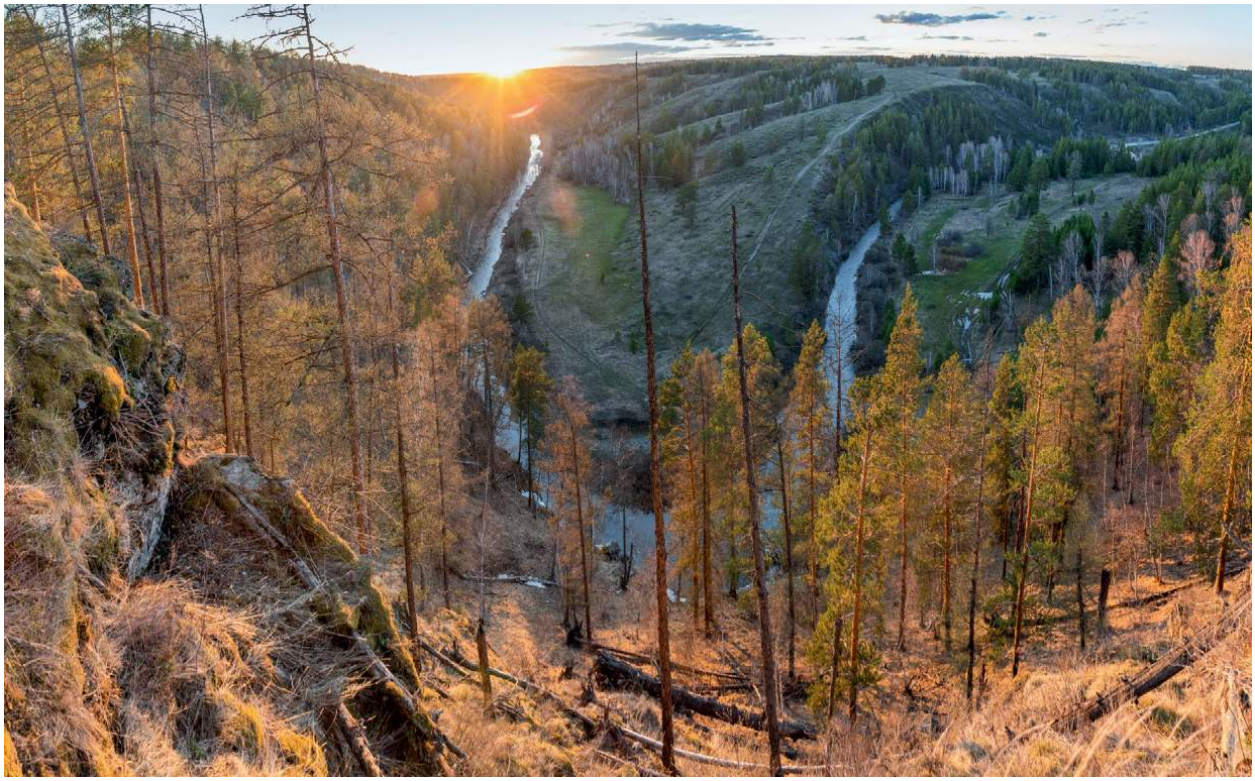
The rest of the day was spent walking along forest and field roads; it's hard even to recall any specific moments – everything was fairly monotonous. Everything changed by evening. First, near the Talikha hamlet, the sky became overcast, and the first rain of the journey caught up with us. Under its streams, we descended a long, sluggish slope into the valley of the Suren River. On the opposite bank, we found a spot to pitch our tents – and quickly settled down to rest.

It seemed like the day wasn't particularly hard, but by evening, my strength had noticeably drained.

And then a small, ordinary miracle happened. Less than an hour later, the weather, which had seemed hopelessly spoiled, suddenly cleared. The clouds, which looked like a solid leaden blanket, scattered, and the washed world sparkled again in the bright sunlight. Seeing this, I decided to walk to the nearest stream to wash up, do some laundry, and then immediately come back to rest.

“Well, I just went to wash my socks...” – savoring this phrase, I found myself, thirty minutes later, climbing up a cliff and figuring out where else I needed to climb to catch the sunset from the best possible spot.

It happened like this: carrying my socks to a pipe by the roadside – from which a man-made waterfall flowed – I peeked into it and saw a picturesque stream on the other side. I decided to get a closer look, scrambled up a high embankment, crossed the road, and approached the mountain slope.



The sunset over Suren River valley

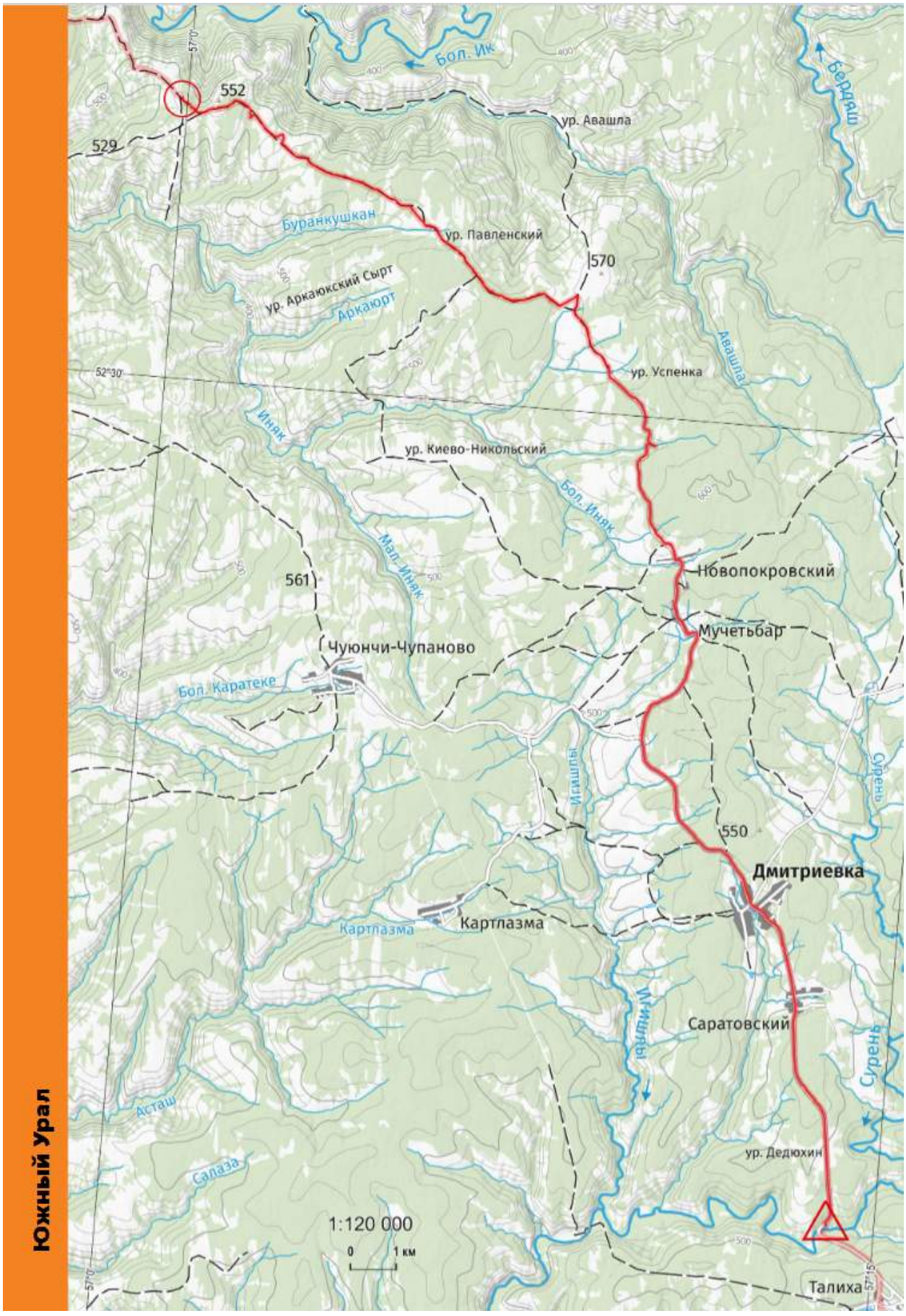
I lifted my head and saw a beckoning open slope and the sunlit tops of pine trees. After that, everything was a bit of a blur for a few moments, and suddenly I was already at the top. The views opening up over the river valley seemed to carry my legs forward on their own. So much for just going to wash my socks…

Very soon it became clear that I needed to cross to the other side of the valley, so I descended and then climbed up the tall cliffs that curved around the river in a semicircle. The view was nearly perfect–some lone trees at the edge got in the way a little, but the sun was setting right in the direction of the valley, which was a rare stroke of luck. Ildar came over, and we spent a couple of hours sitting on the edge of the cliff, admiring the river and the landscape it had carved out.

I think deep river valleys are the main beauty of Zilair plateau.

More exhausted than after a full day's hike, I made my way back to the tent in the dark and spent a long time dealing with many small but important tasks. I dictated my journal entry, struggling to stay awake. I've finally abandoned the idea of writing about my daily adventures by hand–it's just impossible in a tent and in such a state of fatigue. It ends up looking like an erratic cardiogram. I decided to use a voice recorder to capture the day's events, and I think it's a good idea.

By the way, I received an article from a newspaper today–an investigation has been opened as a result of my publication about the illegal extraction of gravel on Nos mountain. I don't expect any real individuals to be prosecuted; I deliberately didn't mention any license plate numbers in the article–after all, ordinary people don't plunder natural treasures out of a good life. But I do hope gravel extraction in such a beautiful place will no longer continue.



The Southern Urals

Bolshoy Ik *Avashla Ravine*

Burankushkan

Berdyash

Arkayuksky Syrt ravine

Arkayurt

Pavlensky ravine

Uspenka ravine

Avashla

Kievo-Nikolsky ravine

Bolshoy Inyak

Maly Inyak

Chuyunchi-Chupanovo

Bolshoy Karateke

Dmitrievka

Kartlazma

Novopokrovsky

Muchetbar

Suren

Dedyukhin ravine

Talikha

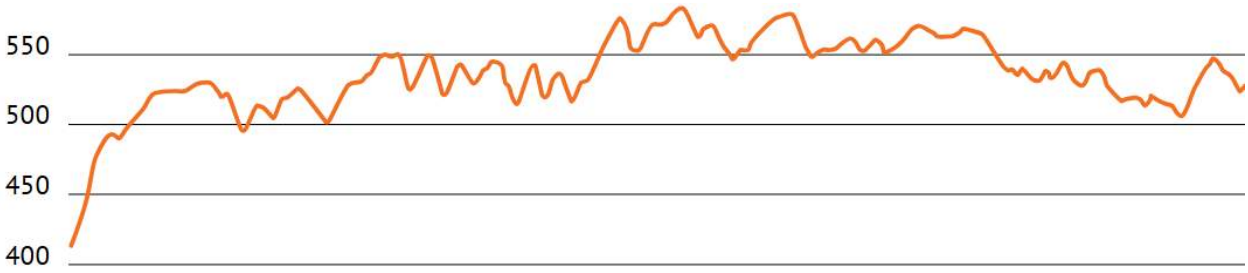
Astash

Salaza

Day 6

Suren river – Dmitrievka village – Muchetbar farmstead – Novopokrovsky farmstead – valley of Bolshoy Ik river

37 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 184 km



May 6, 2021

And yet, it's still not summer. It got chilly at night–I measured the temperature inside the tent with my watch, and it was +2°C. Outside the flysheet, judging by the ice in the pot, it was below freezing. To top it off, a fresh headwind added to the chill. Despite the sunny weather, I had to bundle up and stay wrapped up the entire day.

The day was generally similar to the previous one–dirt roads and a couple of settlements along the way. It seems a certain walking routine is starting to take shape: I set off and walk for the first 2–3 hours without stopping. Then I take a break for about an hour. Another 2–3 hours of walking, followed by lunch and rest for 1–2 hours, and then another 3–4 hours of walking after lunch.



The Road to Dmitrievka Village



On the horizon – the valley of Bolshoy Ik River. Zilair plateau comes to an end.

Such a gentle pace allows me to easily cover the daily goal of 25 km without exhausting myself–plus an extra 5–10 km on top. However, perhaps I was a bit hasty yesterday when I wrote that my body had fully adapted to the load–today, my left knee started to bother me. Not severely, but enough to cause some concern. I'm trying to take care of it. It was to be expected–my left leg has always been the more troublesome one. And the question of whether my body will hold up, whether something vital might give out along the way, remains the most pressing risk factor for the entire expedition. Not bears–though their tracks are appearing more frequently each day–not the weather, nor the terrain, but health. Well, I'll keep an eye on it and try to minimize the risk.

I spent the whole day walking through fairly unremarkable terrain. Only the large oak groves stood out. But everything changed dramatically by evening: we reached the upper edge of Bolshoy Ik river valley. The forest began to thin, and finally, on the opposite side of the river, the mountains came into view. And although geographically it's still Zilair plateau, the landscape is already starting to look more mountainous–which is a delight. Tomorrow, these long gentle stretches will be behind us; the cliffs, caves, and ascents will begin. I'm looking forward to it.

In fact, Zilair plateau is perfect for bicycle touring. The route we've taken over three days could easily be cycled in one or two, and the long stretches wouldn't feel as monotonous.

We set up camp on the edge of the river valley, with a view of the mountains on the far bank, though not of the river itself. The forest covering the slopes blocked the view of the water, which had carved a deep valley through the land. Still, I wasn’t deprived of beauty this evening. I grabbed my camera and wandered the area, searching for good shots and scouting potential sunrise angles. The morning sun promises far more interesting lighting than the evening one at this spot.

Would you like a cleaned-up version suitable for publishing, or do you prefer to keep the natural, diary-like tone?

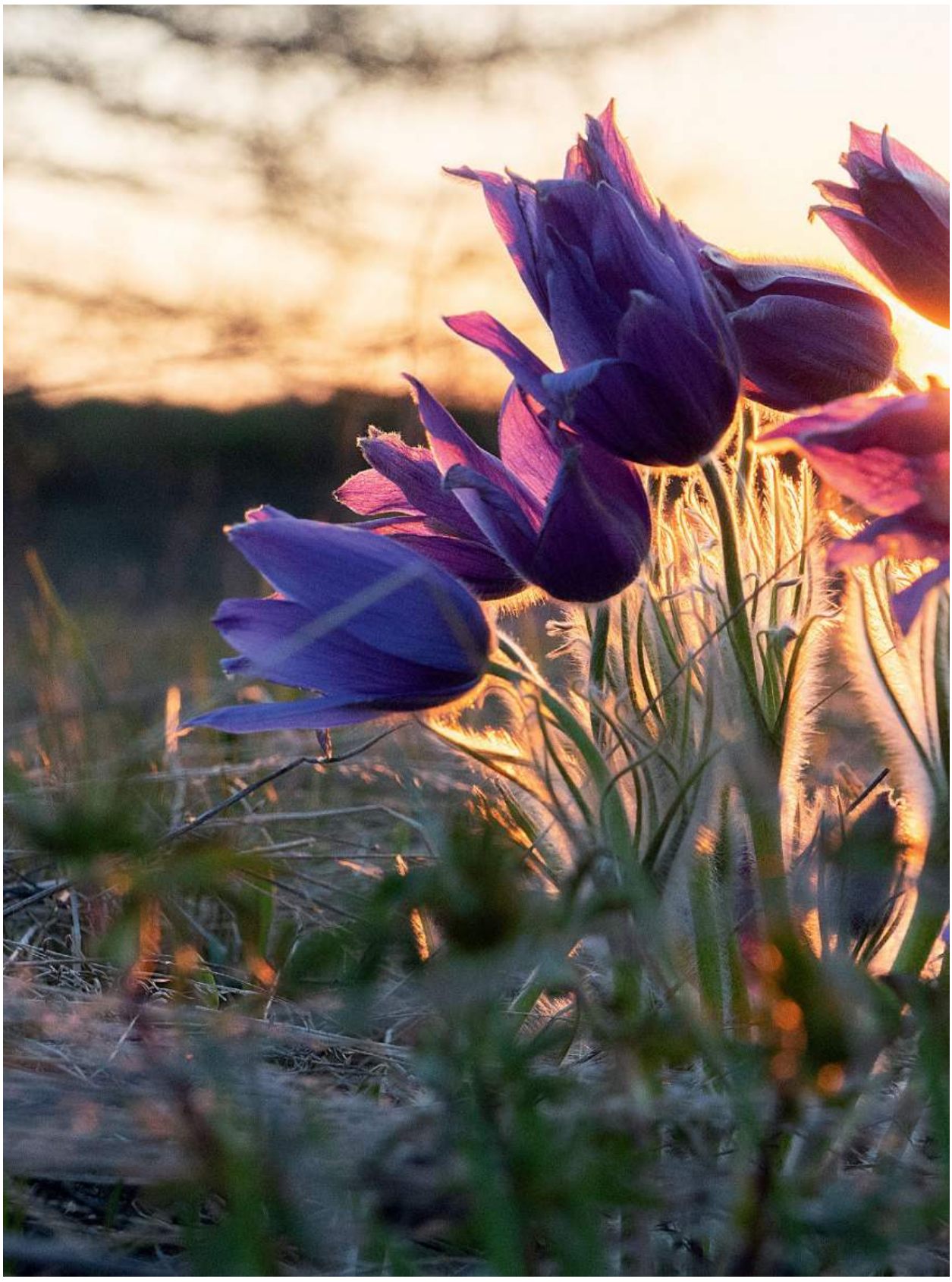
This time, beauty wasn't somewhere in the distance – it was right under my feet. The moment of wonder was gifted by the pasqueflower, or, more precisely, Pulsatilla patens. These beautiful violet flowers have been accompanying me from the very first days, delighting the eye. During the daytime, when the sun is high, they appear like a typical classic flower: a bluish-purple bud with a yellow center. Thanks to them, the otherwise gray, brown, and lifeless early-spring ground with withered grass is dotted with vivid spots and patches of color.

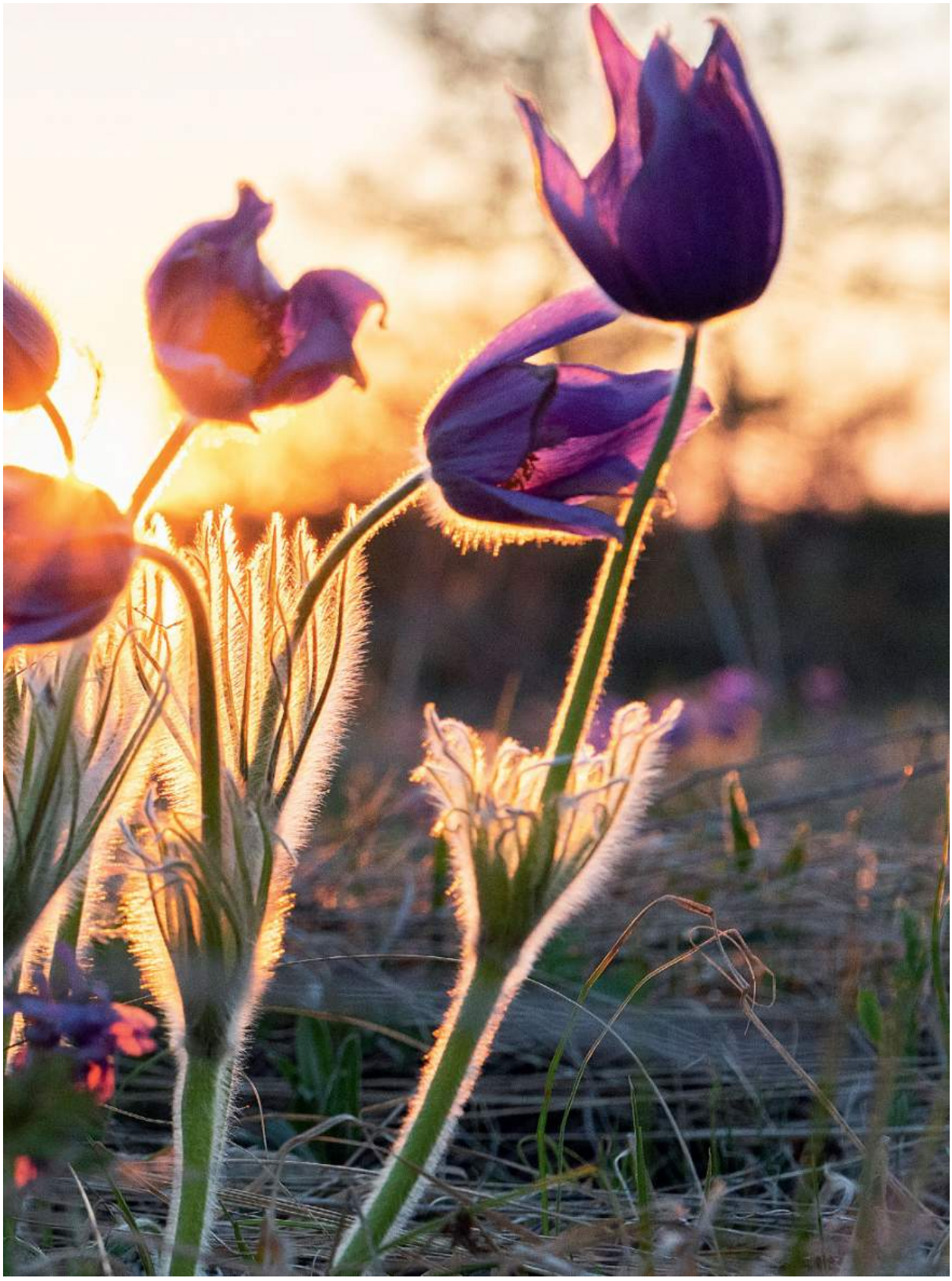
But the real beauty–the true spectacle of light – happens when the sun begins to dip toward the horizon. Today, I witnessed just such a moment. The sun was setting over the flat expanse of the plateau, and at a certain point, just before it touched the horizon, the countless tiny hairs on the pasqueflower stems lit up with a soft, glowing light. I was walking through the field, surrounded by hundreds of glowing, fiery stalks. Usually, scenes like that are shown in sci-fi movies about alien planets, but sometimes, they happen in real life – in the Southern Urals.

Struck by this unexpected beauty, I was utterly captivated and ended up crawling around among the fragile flower stems until the very last light of sunset, trying to capture the moment on camera. Needless to say, I couldn’t come close to conveying the full magic of it.

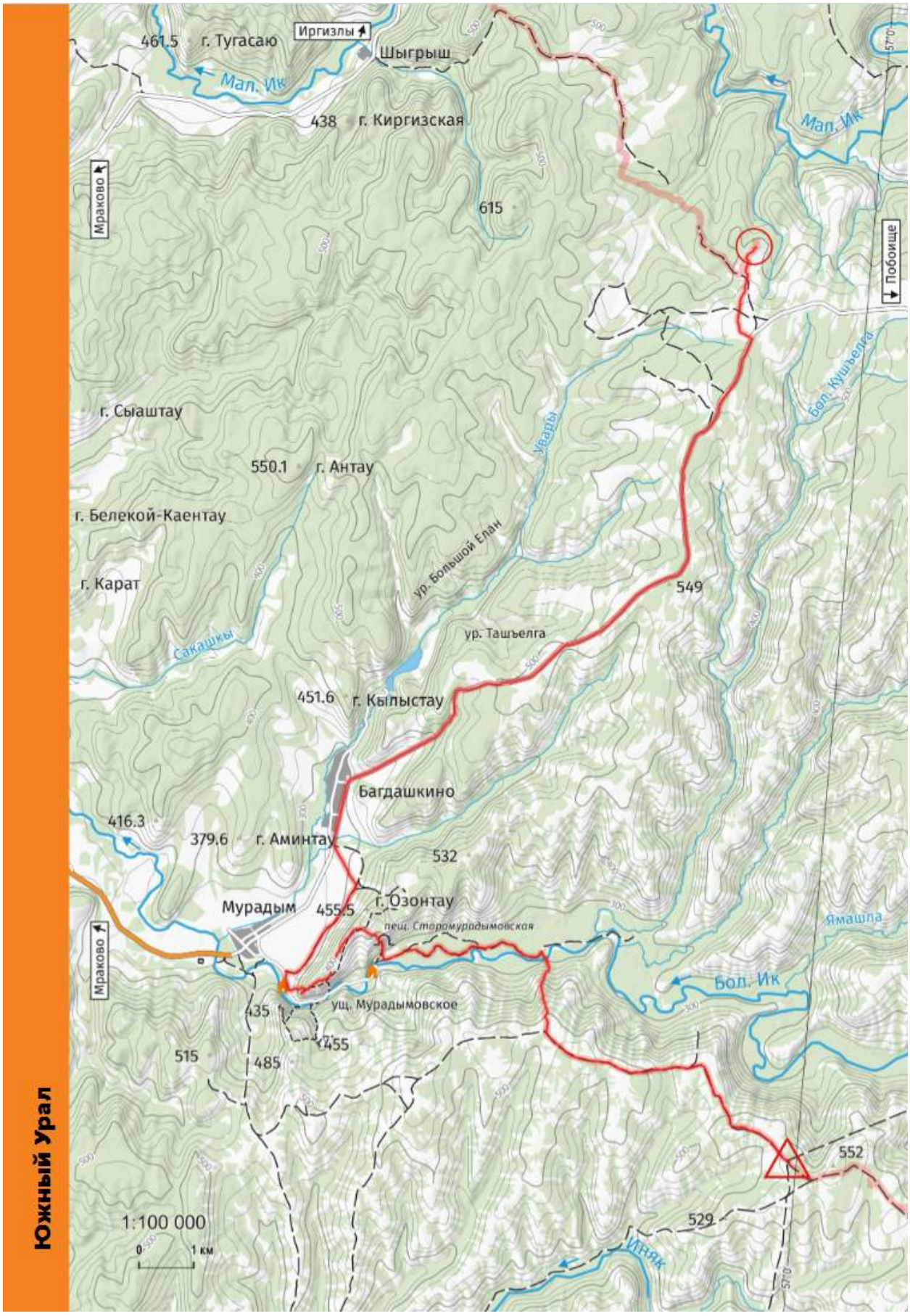


Camp at sunset





Pasque flower in the rays of the setting sun



The Southern Urals

Tugasayu mountain *Irgizly*

Shygrysh

Kirgrizskaya mountain

Maly Ik

Antau mountain

Syashtau mountain

Belekoy-Kaentau mountain

Karat mountain

Bolshoy Yelan ravine

Sakashky

Tashyelga ravine

Bolshaya Kushyelga

Bagdashkino

Amintau mountain

Ozontau mountain

Muradym

Staromuradymovskaya cave

Muradymovskoye gorge

Mrakovo

Yamashla

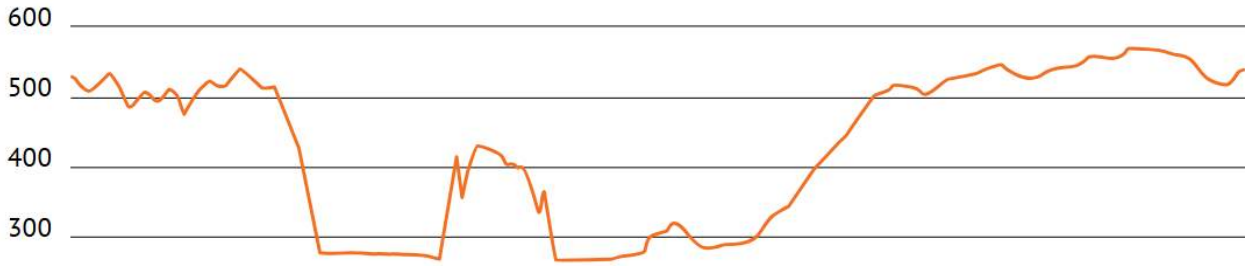
Inyak

Battlefield

Day 7

Bolshoy Ik river valley – Muradymov gorge – Bogdashkino village – nameless peak

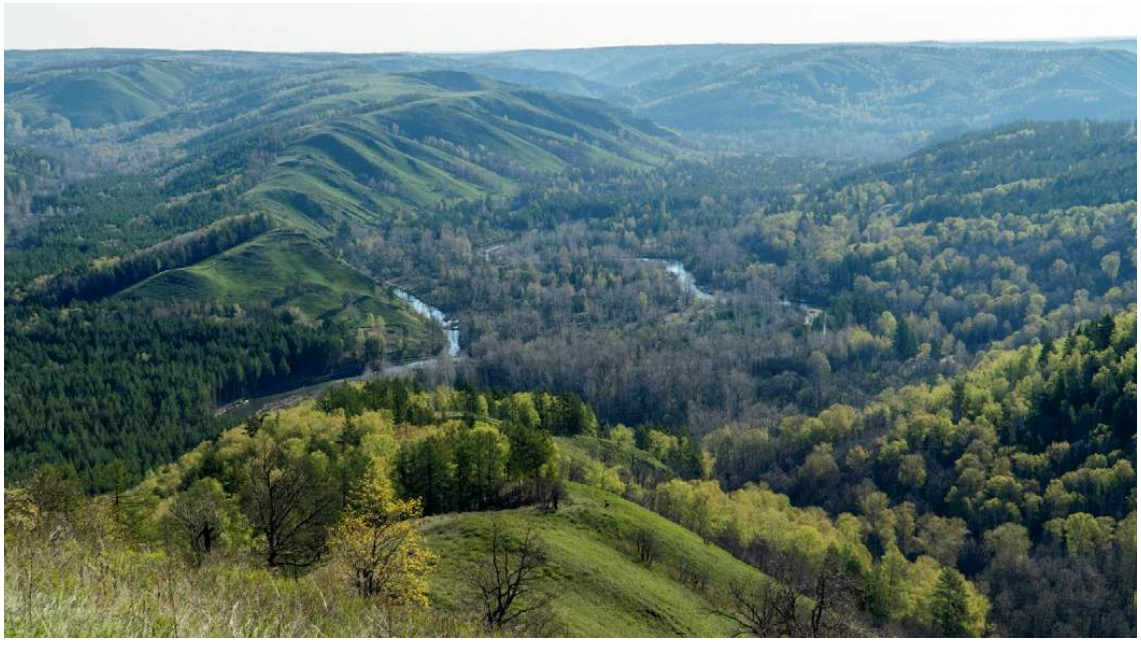
39 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 223 km



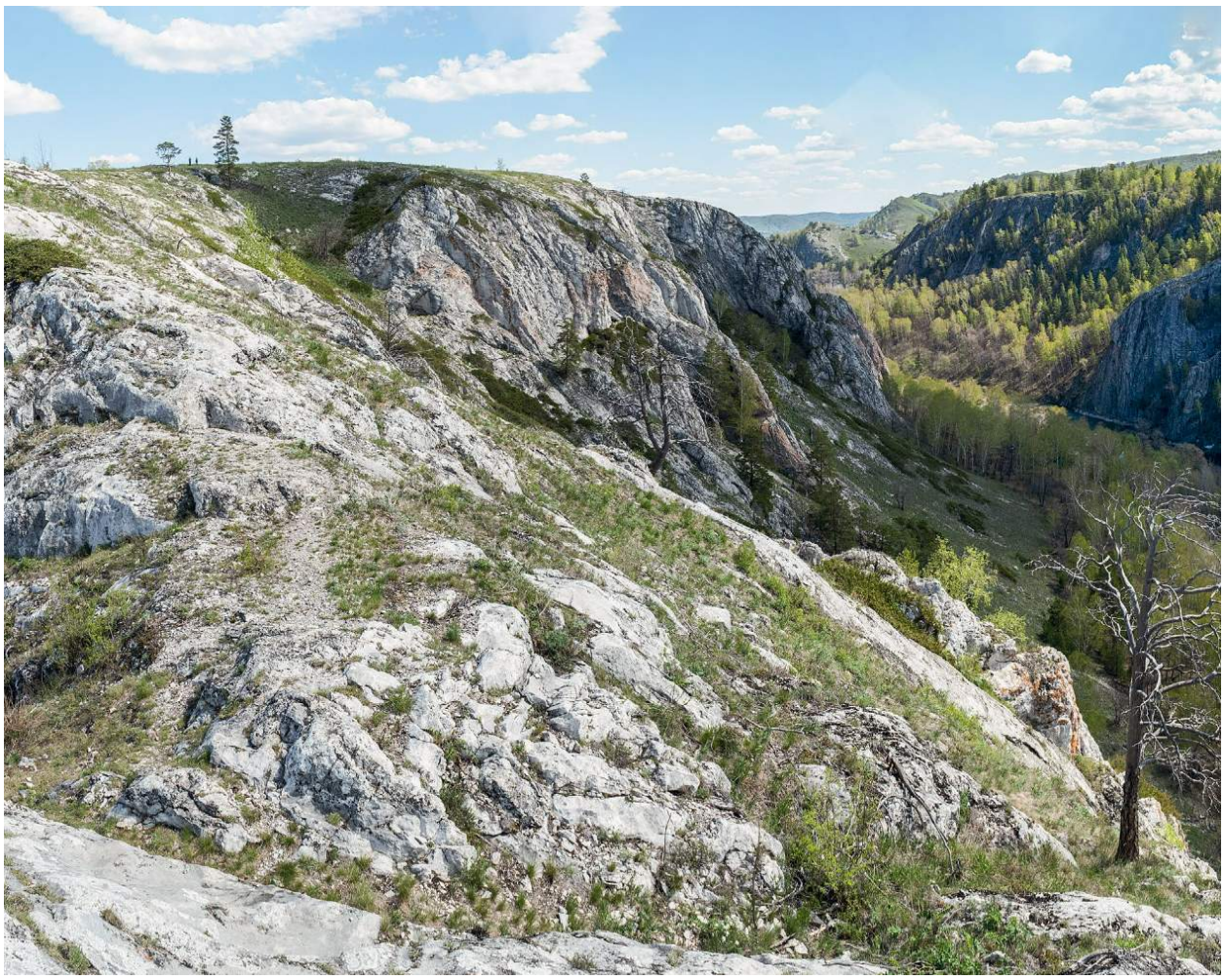
May 7, 2021

The plateaus were beautiful, but that's enough, it's time for us to go to the mountains. With such thoughts, with a good mood, I climbed out of the tent into the still cold night world. Dawn is about an hour away, and the orange-red glow of the horizon makes it clear in which direction to wait for sunrise.

As time passes, the area of the dawn fire narrows, and the place where the sun should appear becomes clearer and clearer. Five minutes before the main point, it becomes clear that the fire of the new day will break out in a small group of trees on top of the mountain. The air begins to move, it almost always does this before dawn, and here it is, the first edge of the sun, I'm shouting with delight saying hello.



The Bolshoy Ik river

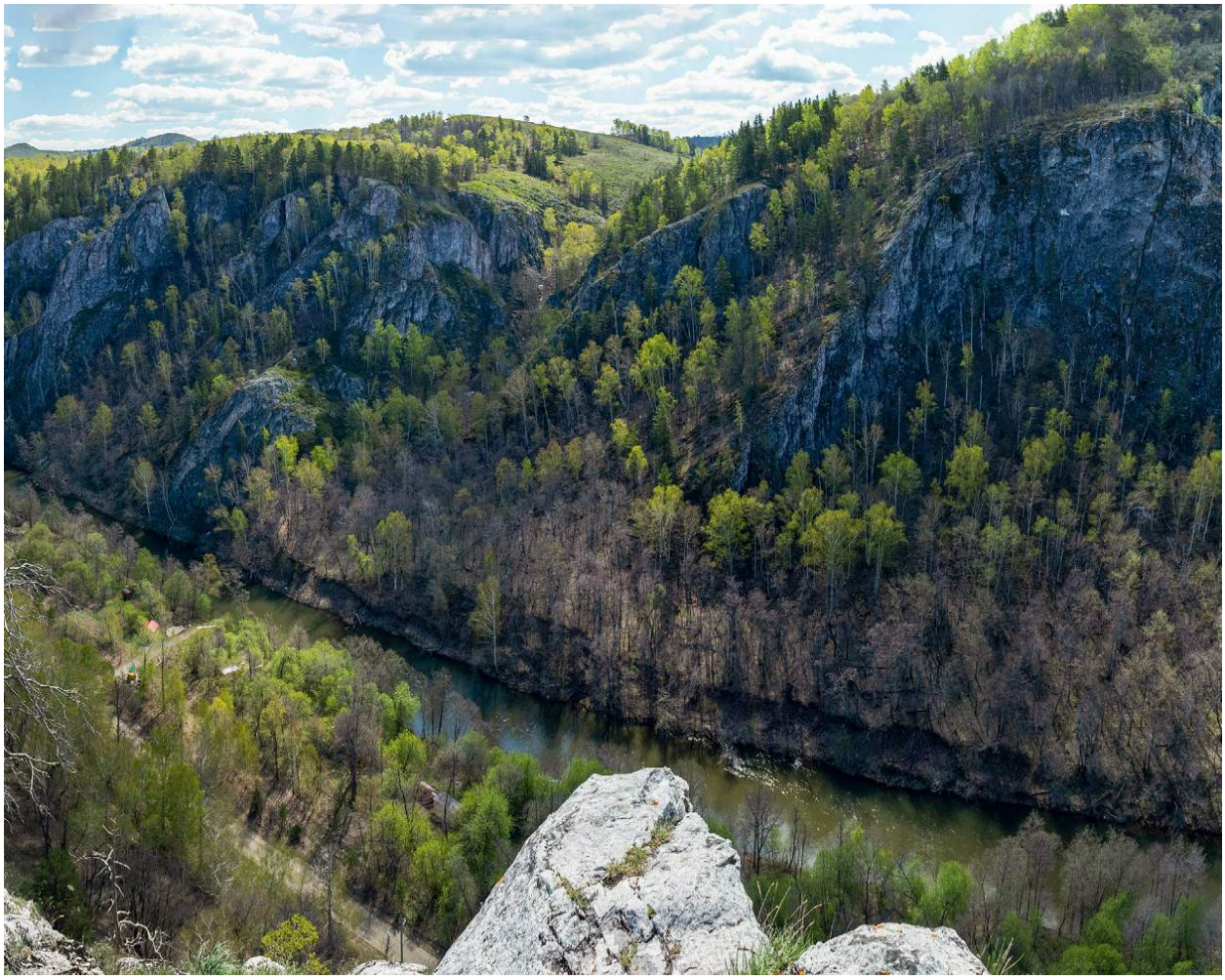


Muradymov gorge

Maybe it looks silly on the pages of the book now, but at that moment it was completely natural and logical for me. “Hello, sun!” I shout. “Glad to see you!” And my fiery friend, without pausing for a second, rises from the horizon, the world is bathed in colors, the shades of which are constantly changing, and here you can not to snap your beak. Take pictures and videos, and enjoy the beauty of the moment.

For the first 8 km we walk uphill, a good country road winds through the woods, every now and then opening up views of the lovely gentle, not completely overgrown with broad-leaved forests of the mountains. I really want to take pictures of this beauty for a book, because these are just reference views of the “Bashkir Southern Urals”, as many people imagine it. Although, of course, there can be no standard in this matter. Bashkirs have always lived throughout the Southern Urals, and everywhere it is unique and beautiful in its own way. Before the more or less mild morning light has left, I'm looking for camera angles and I can't find them.

Something always gets in the way. In particular, the forest is not dense, but it gets into shot with tops or individual trees. I climb a larch tree hoping to get a good shot from there, which also turns out not the best option: gnarled branches interfere, but I notice a long open section of the slope, a side spur extending towards the river.



You can definitely take some photos from there. Big deal, an extra couple of kilometers for a day trip, these are little things. I leave my backpack, I don't take my navigator with me, so that these garbage photo kilometers are not included in the total mileage, and I go to get photos. The angle is really quite good, right on a wide valley, in the depths of which the bend of the river is silvered. Oh, it's a pity we didn't reach this place yesterday, at dawn the sun rose right in the direction of the valley. And now I have to admit that I'm too late. While I was looking for a place, the light became hard. Well, it's not necessary to take pictures of everything. You can just sit on the young, fresh grass alone and admire the view. To memorize it and come back here later.

I allow myself to relax a little, to observe. First, I watch the bird of prey making endless loops below, under my feet, in the valley. Then the eyes are fixed on a dark dot in the middle of fresh greenery. It’s clearly moving in my direction. I take out my camera, shoot, zoom in – a young moose. The first encounter with a large forest animal. I sit and watch him for a while. Oh, I wish I had a normal telephoto lens here, but I can't carry a full set of photographic equipment on this route. We have to make do with what we have.

We continue on the road for a few more kilometers, until we reach the next spur that descends through clearings to the river. After 10 kilometers, the road will lead us to the place I need to reach, the entrance to the Muradimov Gorge, bypassing it along the top. However, I cannot ignore one of the most beautiful and unique natural attractions of the central southern Urals. We leave the road and start descending into the valley of the Bolshoi Ik River. The open spaces that looked like meadows from a distance turn out to be overgrown with thorny bushes that we have to climb through. There are many thorny plants in the south, which can be one of the most unpleasant aspects of hiking. It's important to keep this in mind when hiking in mountains – protect your hands and eyes.

Bolshoy Ik is a large river, and I have been carrying a packraft with me in order to cross it. It has been difficult to predict the water level in early May, but when I reached the shore, I found that it was possible to cross the river without using a watercraft – the water was below the waist. The warm and early spring had done its job, and they were already waiting for us on the opposite shore. A friend of mine, Rinat Ibragimov, ran to the ferry site in order to take a short walk with me. In fact, it was a miracle that we met. There was no connection, and we knew only approximately where we would cross the river. However, everything worked out and the three of us continued on our journey.

The Muradimov Gorge is, without a doubt, the jewel of these places. It is pierced by the river in rocks composed of soft sedimentary rock, rising in sheer cliffs over 100 meters. The vertical lines above are pleasing to the eye, especially after the vastness of the Zilair Plateau of the previous day.

In addition to beautiful rocks, this area is also known for its caves. There are about 50 caves in a small area, making this place perhaps the most cavernous in the entire Urals. We will visit one of these caves, the most popular and easiest, the Pigeon Grotto or Muradymovskaya First, located in the upper part of the valley and visible from afar. You can easily recognize it by the string of trampled paths leading to it from below, indicating the lack of organization in tourist traffic in the park. I believe that in such frequently visited places, we should attempt to direct the flow of visitors and prevent the trampling of new paths near existing ones. After all, this is not only unattractive, but also causes erosion of the slopes.

It's cool and pleasant in the grotto. Except for the three of us, there are no other people yet. A weekday keeps people away. The cave has a very ordinary appearance, which is typical of most uncontrollably visited caves. There are inscriptions on the walls and clay floors that have been trampled into concrete. There are no beautiful patterns on the walls. However, its only undisputable aesthetic asset is the view of the mountains and the other side of the valley.

The window, framed by rocks, looks very attractive and pleasing to the eye on a sunny spring day. That's why it's worth visiting this place, especially when there are not many visitors and no one blocks the view.



The View from the Pigeon Grotto

After the cave, we climb up to the plateau-shaped rock and, along the path, approach the rocky entrance to the gorge. From this spot, the view of the cliffs is not very advantageous. The best angle would be from the opposite cliffs. However, there is no time or energy to go there. We could have reached the opposite cliffs along the road we walked on in the morning.

We descend to the administrative area of the park, have lunch at a cafe, and bid a warm farewell to Ildar. He was a great companion. Thank you, Ildar, for sharing the difficulties of the first few days of our journey.

Then, I continue with Rinat.

As I leave the park, I look back at the rocks and sadly remember the words of my friend Alexey Klyanin, one of the best cyclists in the Southern Urals. He once drew my attention to the way natural objects are equipped with infrastructure for viewpoints, which is done in a very poor and destructive way. The entrance to the Muradimov Gorge offers a wonderful view, with its vertical rock formations and narrow neck. However, these beautiful features are “decorated” with poles, randomly hung wires and fences, as well as a parking lot and siding. This is a shame, as everything that man has created looks alien in this natural landscape and discourages anyone from admiring the view. Unfortunately, we often don't think about beauty and harmony when we develop natural areas.

We spent the rest of the day walking on a dusty country road with Rinat. In the evening, he left me, taking my pack raft. There won't be any significant rivers ahead in the near future, so I am asking you to send the boat to Tatiana Sergeevna, who will send it to me at one of the drop points, most likely in the area of Telposis.

And I'm finally on my own. No, it was nice to walk a part of the journey with the wonderful people, but I still feel most comfortable on my own, especially when I need to constantly take videos, record thoughts, think, analyze, and tell stories. It's easier for me to do all that alone than to have a pleasant but, in truth, pointless conversation.

Turning off the road and going deeper into the forest, I decided to spend the night on a lonely picturesque hill with open slopes and the edge of the forest covering the top.

The place was advantageous from two angles. Firstly, you could go down the hill and take pictures of it. Secondly, you could try to find good angles from it, as if it were a hill.

Perfect. Exactly the way I like it: to stand in a place that provides maximum viewing opportunities, and then it's as it turns out.

Up above, in the woods, I find a table and benches made of rough planks. You can't think of a better gift at the end of the day: after a hard, exhausting day, sitting on a flat and cooking dinner at the table is a great pleasure.

By sunset, despite my fatigue, I decide to go down the mountain and take pictures of it. I walk through the vast glades, admiring the evening light. I'm alone, what a blessing!

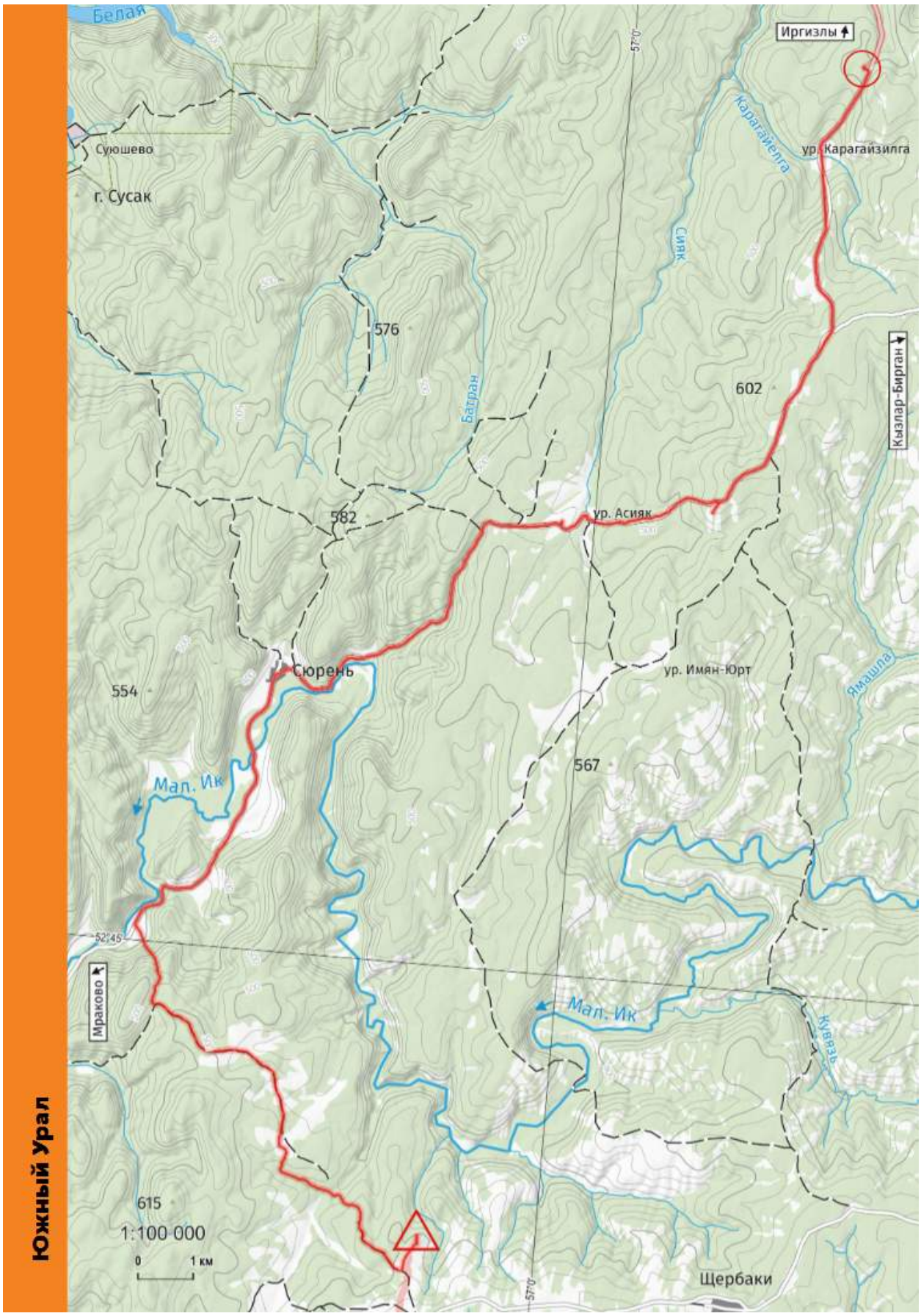
There is a very prominent peak on the horizon. Perhaps it is Mount Masim, the southernmost thousandth mountain in the Urals, and my goal for the next few days. In the evening, I “smoked the map” (author: to learn the ropes of the map) in the tent in an attempt to figure out if I identified Masim's peak correctly.



The Unnamed summit that offered me refuge

On the one hand, the direction of the mountain coincides, and it is clearly the highest in the area, on the other hand, the distance is confusing. We are about 55 km apart in a straight line, but the peak on the horizon seems closer. The situation is further complicated by the fact that there are no other points on the horizon to which you can attach yourself. Still not coming to a final conclusion, I went to bed.

One of the most frequently asked questions is about the expression “smoking a map,” which I traditionally use in movies at the end of the day before showing the route I've traveled. The history of this phrase goes back to the tourist years. I can't remember when or where I heard it. For many years, she lay in memory on the shelf of unnecessary knowledge, until it wasn't useful in movies. Yes, now it's on the pages of the book. But in general, it seems that if you think about where such an expression comes from, it's not difficult to guess. There are two ways, as I see it. Or a real break, during which tourists also look at the map, or using a curvimeter to measure distances on the map.



The Southern Urals

Belaya r. *Irgyzly v.*

Sursak m.

Karagayzilga tr.

Suyushevo v.

Karagayelga r.

Siyak r.

Batran r.

Kyzlar-Birgan v.

Imyan-Yurt tr.

Syuren v.

Maly Ik r.

Yamashla r.

Kuvyaz r.

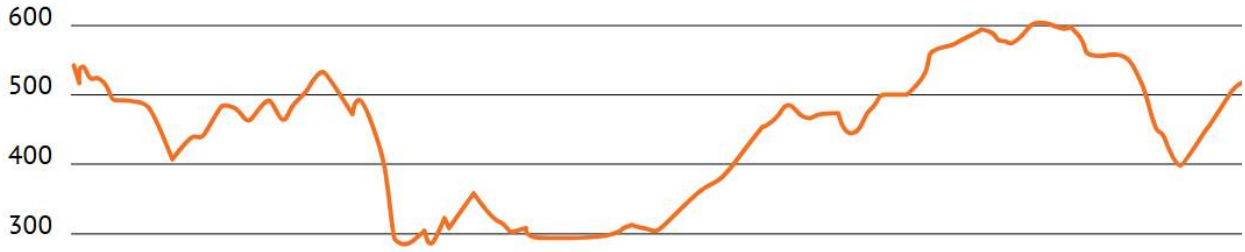
Shcherbaki v.

Mrakovo v.

Day 8

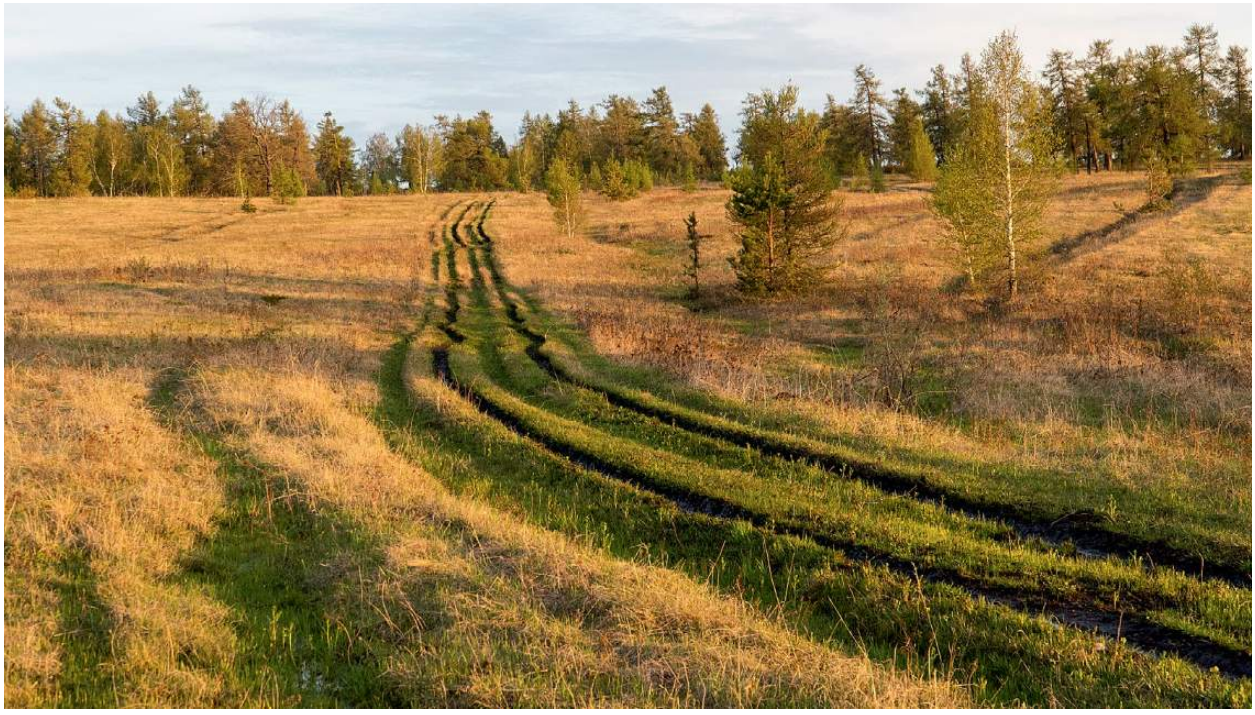
Unnamed peak – Maly Ik river – village of Syuren – unnamed height

40.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 263.5 km



May 8, 2021

Today was the first night I wasn't cold at all. And the reason for this, most likely, is not adaptation or the approach of summer, but temperature inversion. A natural phenomenon in which the temperature increases with altitude. Even such a small rise, on which I spent the night, was enough to separate the air layers. I woke up warm and dry, but as soon as I dropped twenty meters, I just physically felt the boundary of the air layers, as if I had descended into a cellar. The border was clearly visible on the grass – it became wet and covered with frost down the slope. Another argument for spending the night upstairs.



Forest road of the first half of the day



Forest landscapes of the central part of the Southern Urals

Unfortunately, dawn didn't happen, the sun rose into the clouds, but I'm not in the habit of just admiring the young spring forests stretching in all directions from the top.

After thinking about the peak on the horizon one more time, I decided that it was still Masim. I think I'll be there in two or three days.

The subsequent route of the day can be divided into two stages.

The first is the forest crossing to the road leading to the village of Irgizli. Near 10 km. The most beautiful and enjoyable part of the day. He walked along forest roads, sometimes straight along the azimuth. Closer to the Maly Ik river, numerous karst craters and dry valleys began to occur, which clearly indicated their approach to the main Ural cave province. On the same stage, I took off the first small red tick, before him, all the bloodsuckers I met were large and spotted, less familiar to us, residents of the more northern regions of the Southern Urals. And finally, I met my dear small red friend. Now we have to keep our eyes open. After all, the tick itself is dangerous, and it is even more dangerous for a single traveler.

After descending a steep, dry streambed into the valley of the Maly Ik river, he fell onto the road. And the second stage has begun, the dusty road, about which it will not be possible to say something good. Dust from passing cars, heat, and long, slow ascents and descents. One of the most remarkable things about the whole day was

that at one point a car stopped next to me, and the young guys advised me not to go ahead, saying that there were bears by the roadside a few kilometers away. Thanks guys, that's what I need, I thought. In general, it's not surprising, because I'm in one of the most bearish areas in the Urals. I remember a few years ago, Bashkiria National Park, which I am now approaching, generally stated that their territory has the highest density of bears in Europe. It is impossible to verify this, but in general, to deny a large number of bears in the central part of the Southern Urals definitely won't work.



Unfortunately, I did not meet them, I stopped for the night 10 km in front of the village of Irgizly.

I walked more than planned, although initially I wanted to limit myself to only 30 km that day, slow down a little, and rest. But I walked and walked and walked 10 km more.

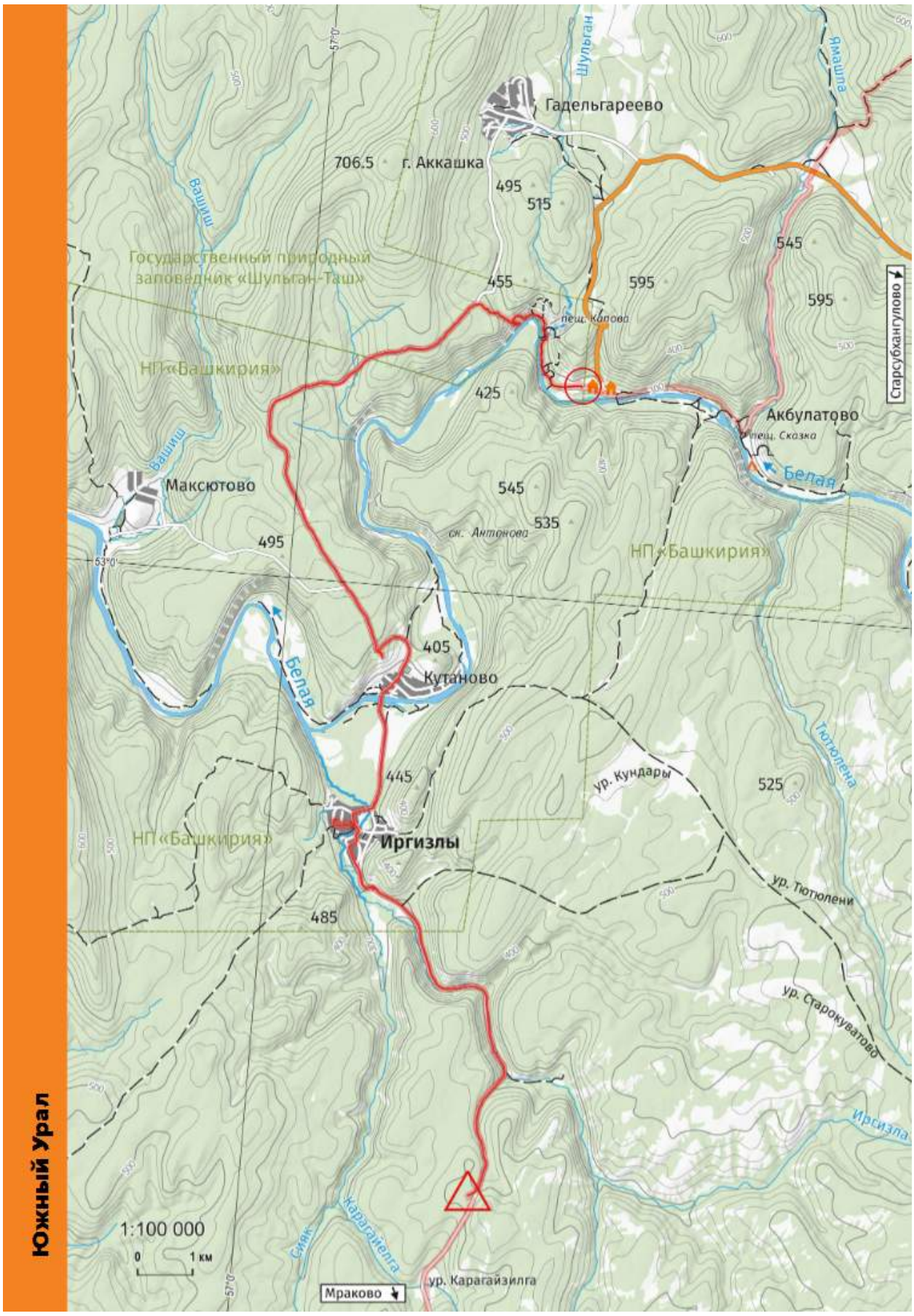
In the evening, before going to bed, lying in the tent, I thought about the upcoming Victory Day. I remembered my grandfather, Pal Palych Bystritsky, a war veteran who, I don't know why, maybe because it was a very difficult memory, or maybe because he was always a man of action and always thought about what was ahead, not what was done. But he almost never talked about the war. It was, it's over, we remember it and move on. So every day I move on step by step. With such thoughts, I fell asleep.



Gravel road in the afternoon



On the road in the dust



The Southern Urals

Bashkiria National Park *Village of Irgizly*

the Belaya (Agidel) river

Shulgan-Tash State Nature Reserve

Maksyutovo village

Kutanovo village

the Kundary tract

Tyutyuleni tract

Starokuvatovo tract

Karagaizilga tract

Karagayelga river

Siyak river

Irgizla river

Skazka cave

Kapova cave

Akbulatovo village

Antonov mountain

Galdergareevo village

Shulgan river

Yamashla river

Washish river

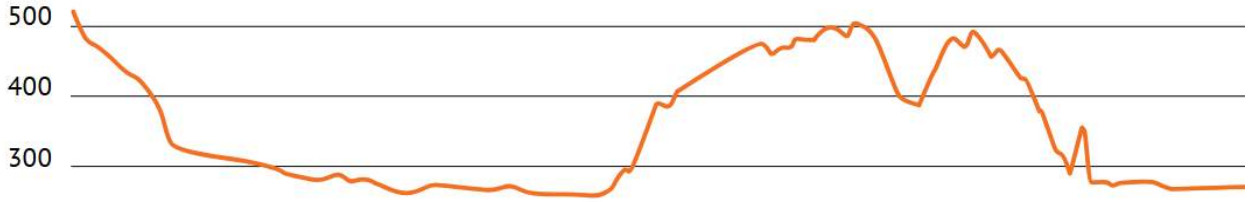
Starosubkhangulovo village

Mrakovo village

Day 9

Nameless peak – Irgizly village – Kutanovo village –Kulyurt Cave-Tamak – Shulgan-Tash Nature Reserve

35 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 298.5 km



May 9, 2021

I woke up at night in alarm: it seemed as if someone was breathing next to the tent. I felt for the flare, which was always nearby in my polo pocket, and for a while listened intently to the night forest, trying to figure out what was going on there. I realized quickly enough that the source wasn't getting any closer and was somewhere above. After listening a little more, I decided that it was probably a bird, most likely an owl. The sound was muffled and rhythmic, not quite what the hooting sounds like, but if you listened closely, you could see something in common. Realizing this, I turned over on his other side, wishing the night singer to burn in hell and fell into the blackness of a heavy sleep.

It was a sunny morning, like most of the previous ones. Before the sweltering heat set in and cars appeared on the road, carrying dusty tails, I hurried out.

And all around me are snow-white limestone cliffs, the bottom of an ancient sea. Millions of years ago, its warm waters lapped here, and for millions of years, the remains of living organisms from the area that now tower over my head grew over a grain of sand, grain by grain. It is the numerous rocks along the river banks that are perhaps the most interesting thing in this area of the Urals. The mountains are low and covered with forests, but the bastions offer beautiful, breathtaking views, and of course, caves. There are all conditions for their occurrence, pliable karst rocks, the height differences that create watercourses, and the exits of all this splendor to the surface in the form of many funnels, dens and springs.

I walked along the road parallel to the Irgizly river, its cheerful spring noise filled the valley, and this sound curtain created the conditions for an unexpected meeting. Literally 15 meters away from me, a wolf jumped out of the bushes onto the road.

A moment. The animal's bewildered, frightened look is gone. And only the swaying of the branches by the roadside says that it didn't seem like it to me. It was annoying that I didn't have time to take a picture, but I calmed down with the fact that it was simply impossible. I think if I had been looking down at my feet or in the opposite direction at the moment of the meeting, I would never have known about such an oversight by the wolf, it all ended so quickly.

I am often asked about wolves, if I am afraid of meeting them. And I honestly answer that I just dream about it. In 15 years of active hiking in the Urals, there have been two such meetings. The first one is in the evening in the Iremel area. I saw him somewhere out there, on the edge of the forest, a dark silhouette watching me and disappearing into the darkness as soon as I made a movement with my hand towards the camera. The second one is today. The wolf is a very cautious animal that does not seek to meet a human at all. Thousands of years of wolves' coexistence with humans have done their job, they have developed an instinctive fear. And the statistics confirm this. Attacks on humans are extremely rare. There is a chapter dedicated to this in M. P. Pavlov's book “The Wolf”. After examining the well-known, documented stories of attacks, the author concludes that these are mostly either animals suffering from rabies, but this is a slightly different story, or attacks on children. Wolves rarely attack adult healthy men, and women too. So I tend not to demonize this forest dweller.

On the way to the village of Irgizly, I went to the local cemetery. I love the place of burials, they can tell a lot about the people who lived in these areas. So here, for the first time on this route, I met log graves. In some areas of Bashkiria, mainly mountain forests, such an ancient unusual tradition has been preserved. As I understand it, there is no clear opinion about its origin and meaning, but many scientists believe that it dates back to ancient pre-Islamic religious cults.



Log graves near the village of Irgizli



One of the many springs on the mountain slopes



View from the cliff to the village of Kutanovo

In Zoroastrianism, it was forbidden to desecrate the earth with the corpse of the deceased, and the dead were left in log cabins until all the flesh was eaten from them by scavenging animals. In addition to this explanation, there are many other beliefs, and most often they are routine. I liked the idea most of all that in conditions of shortage of suitable land for burial (in the mountains) log cabins above the grave were placed as a marker. The logs have decayed, which means that the body has decayed in the ground, and you can bury it in the same place again.

When leaving the cemetery, a car stopped next to me, and I was ready to explain what I had left there, behind the fence. But everything went according to a

different scenario: the man who got out of the car said that he knew me, and offered to give me a ride to the village, as well as to have breakfast with him. I refused the offer of a ride, by the way, it wasn't the first one, it was enough for me – but it was often offered. But you can have breakfast, and recharge your electronics, too. I try to use every opportunity to get calories and electrical energy. We made an appointment, and he went to set the table, I went to the village.

The Irgizli made a pleasant impression. A clean and tidy village, some of whose inhabitants definitely live off tourism. When I entered it early in the morning with a light gait, I had no idea how hard it would be for me to leave it in a few hours.

First, I found the house of Ilvir Safiullin, my new acquaintance, and spent an hour and a half with him, had breakfast, charged up as much electricity as possible, and talked with the owner. As it turned out, he leads tour groups in Belaya, which is an interesting coincidence: in the past, he was the boxing coach of my previous companion, Ildar. How small the world is!



Descent to the Belaya River (Agidel)

After waiting for ten in the morning, I went to look for the visitor center of the National Park Bashkiria, which I entered in the morning. In Irgizli, with the assistance of park Director Vladimir Kuznetsov, a food drop was organized for the third stage of the journey. After I successfully filled my backpack with new food

rations, they just wouldn't let me go any further, but persuaded me to drink tea there too. It didn't end with one cup of tea, so I had to eat a second time.

By noon, already feeling very heavy, I went to look for the house of the director of the Shulgan-Tash Nature Reserve, on whose territory I wanted to enter today to spend the night. Mikhail Kosarev, the head of the reserve, met me in the courtyard of the house and refused to discuss work issues until we had lunch.

Two hours later, with difficulty moving my legs, I left the village and walked towards the nature reserve. Permission was obtained with great difficulty, and I had to eat three more courses to do this. But the main thing was that the job was done: I was allowed to spend two nights on the territory of the reserve in the volunteer house, relax and visit the Shulgan Tash cave.

Near the village of Kutanovo, he crossed the Belaya River on a bridge. An interesting fact is that right behind the bridge, the riverbed was artificially created, spurred by a 500-meter channel. Earlier, as the villagers recall Irgizly, the bend of the river passed right next to it, but was diverted.

This work was done in the 1960s by the Meleuzovskaya rafting office for more efficient timber rafting. Tellingly, most of the work is done manually and with the help of horse traction.

The long, dusty road stretched out again. In order to somehow shorten the path along it, I decided to go straight to the reserve, through the forest. He turned off the road and entered the shade of the May forest. There was only so much to go through 800 m in a straight line from the road to the river. As they advanced, the slope began to fall more and more. I went out into a dry ravine with a flat bottom and walked along it. And when there was no more than 100 m left to the shore, he ran into a cliff. It was clear from the rounded rocks and water holes that water had flowed here before, or maybe even in the spring. Don't come down. I had to go back and take the left side of the ravine, along which I came to a barely noticeable path leading along the rocks. Stitch led to the Cosmonauts cave. I wandered around its cool passages for a while, at first it was nice to hide from the merciless sun rays, but very quickly I started to freeze, and since there is nothing interesting in the cave as a whole for a

simple observer, I hurried outside. Unfortunately, accessibility and frequent visits have made the cave dirty in the truest sense of the word.

By the way, the cave has a second name, and to be fair, the first is Kulyurt-Tamak. And it is more correct to call it that, out of respect for the people who inhabited these regions, for the people who discovered it long before the official discoverers. After all, we have a lot of “cosmonauts” on the map of the country, but there is only one Kulyurt-Tamak. In general, this is a fairly common phenomenon in the Southern Urals – double names of geographical features. And I must admit, the Russian speakers, in my opinion, are much inferior in beauty to the locals. For example, the Belaya River and Agidel, Kapova cave and Shulgan Tash, Lake Bannoye and Yaktykul, and the list can go on for a long time.

From the cave, I went down to the shore of Agideli and after a few hundred meters I came to a sheer cliff going into the water. Impassable, I'm trapped, and it looks like the only way out of it is the way I entered. I had to climb up the cliffs again, sweating in the merciless afternoon sun, clinging to thorny bushes and walking around the top of the cliff, cursing everything and everyone, spending the last of today's strength. It was all the more unexpected to enter civilization on the way down the mountain. I had never been to the reserve before, although I imagined it to be a fairly gentrified area, but I wasn't ready for such a park. Smooth roads, bridges, a turnstile at the entrance to the cave and a whole town at the entrance. And then there was a nice modern volunteer house with Wi-Fi, a bed, a sauna, and relaxation.

I planned to rest the next day. I've been going well all these days, ahead of schedule, and by the time I arrived at the reserve I was two days ahead of schedule. One of them can be used for recreation.

Day 10

Rest

0 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 298.5 km

May 10, 2021

Although it was a day of rest, I woke up traditionally early – at five in the morning. For example, I allowed myself to lie in bed for a couple of hours. Then I slowly climbed onto the large wooden porch of the volunteer house and did my daily chores until ten o'clock. I was putting my gear in order, sorting out my things, secretly watching the town wake up. Around midnight, a crowd began to gather outside the gates of the reserve, on debauchery Street. The first excursion to the cave was scheduled to take place at 11:00. I called for myself the street of "debauchery" everything that accumulated outside the gates of the reserve – huts, cafes, souvenir shops are closely glued to each other. All this contrasted quite strongly with the buildings on the territory of the reserve, not for the better. Even in the evening, I was tormented by a dilemma: on the one hand, I really wanted to go to the closed part of the cave and look at the original ancient drawings, on the other hand, I did not want to be arrogant and abuse the hospitality, because I was already very warmly welcomed. I have such a bad trait for a traveler as the fear of unnecessarily disturbing people. She's it prevents me from making videos at a party, for example, at the reindeer herders in the plague.

In the end, I decided that I would go with an ordinary group to the cave and look at some of the drawings made in the entrance gallery, and the originals – some other time. That's what I did, or at least I tried. A noisy crowd was moving along the road to the entrance, and I was walking a little further away, because I didn't want to become a part of it at all. The situation was saved by a volunteer girl I met last night, Daria Belyakova. Meeting me on the way, she informed me that, according to her information, a small group would go to the closed part of the cave today, and God himself would help us He told me to ask to go with them. But this requires

permission from the reserve's director. They clarified at the checkpoint whether the tour was true, everything was confirmed, they got through to the head and received a blessing to join the mystery of ancient Paleolithic artifacts. It turned out that anyone can visit the closed part of the cave, you just have to pay a little more money – about five times what a regular ticket costs – and get among the lucky ones, because this number is limited to ten visitors per month. For comparison, sometimes in high – during the summer season, up to 1,500 people visit the first part of the cave per day.



Entrance portal of the Shulgan Tash cave

That is why the main part of the cave was closed from mass visits, it's easy to imagine what will happen to the microclimate, and indeed to the order in it, with such a large number of visitors. And as scientists say, ancient drawings are very sensitive to any kind of effects. Nevertheless, I am glad that the management of the reserve has left an official opportunity to visit and look at the originals for a person who really needs it. It is important. A short gathering, everything that is warm – in a backpack, boots, a flashlight – and we are at the entrance to the cave. There are five of us. Two rafting tourists who bought a special tour, volunteer Daria, me and tour guide Alexander. The weather in its repertoire, it's not even noon yet, and it's already pretty hot. The sooner one wants to enter the black mouth of the cave, beckoning with coolness.

First, we follow the traditional route of all visitors. The gate, the bridge over the river, and the flagstone path lead us inside. A spacious gallery leads into the darkness. Here are the first replica drawings on the wall, made in 2002 by the animal artist Vladimir Chernoglazov. We pass by almost without pausing, we absolutely do not want to look at modern exact copies if you see the original very soon. At some point on our way, Alexander bends down, crawls under the railing and descends to the clay floor of the cave, leading us to the indispensable grid, hiding in a dark corner of the hall. The click of the lock opening, the clang of metal, and we enter the closed part of the cave. Alexander is sure, but he leads us through the darkness, leads us to red spots, dashes on the walls, and tells us. Here is a double triangle, as scientists suggest, a symbol of a woman. Distracting myself a little from the guide's story, I inspect the nearby walls, there are many traces of later rock art on them.



The original cave paintings

From Arabic script made with charcoal to a completely modern Russian alphabet, scratched on the rocks with something sharp. Looking at all this, you can understand why free access to the cave was stopped in 2002. I remember one of the

first color photographs taken in the cave by the discoverer of drawings, Alexander Ryumin. Ancient drawings are clearly visible on it and there are many inscriptions on top of them, of which three letters – MSU – are particularly striking. Yes, I guess you really need to be very proud of your membership in the country's leading university, to tell about it even in the darkest corner of the cave. I wonder if the person who made the inscription had ever seen this photograph, and then realized what he had done and how close he was to the great discovery.

Gradually we go deeper into the cave, climbing over piles of wet stone blocks. It's not the most pleasant experience, I must admit. I have a saying: “There is no better friend than a dry kurum, and a more evil enemy than a wet one.” Here I would like to add: and when it is also dirty, it is already a pure evil.

The masterpieces of Paleolithic rock art appear before us quite unexpectedly and even somehow incongruously, on a small stone ledge near the wall. At first glance, it seems that the greatness and significance of the drawings do not correspond in any way to their place of application. Maybe that's why they couldn't be noticed for so long. Here they are, big and bright: a horse, camel, two “glasses.” At the edges, the outlines of some other drawings can be guessed, hidden by the streaks. The drawings are bright because they have been stripped of the layer of calcite that covered them. Silicone visors have been made above the images to protect them from water runoff, but this does not help too well.

I stand there and think how funny and symbolic the story was. Two drawings in the shape of a faceted glass, made 15 thousand years ago, near the shores of Agideli, on the way of one of the most popular water tourist routes in Bashkiria. And the camel, of course, is the latest sensation of the opera. A rock drawing that was extracted from under the onslaught several years ago and raised more questions for scientists than it answered. After all, according to science, camels were found much further south, more than a thousand kilometers away, at the time when the images were created. from the cave. So, ancient people came to paint on the walls from such a distance? How important was this place to them, what made them travel such distances? And who am I compared to them, walking along the roads and carrying on

my back everything that a weak person might need for a comfortable existence outside the walls of his reinforced concrete cave?

We continue through the hall of Chaos, and at the end of it we come to a small table– platform, clearly hinting that we need to get up and look at something above. This drawing makes the most indelible impression on me. Zooanthropomorphic image. I shout, remembering what I read earlier. Here it is, not big at all, at a height of four meters. It looks very vaguely like a human, more like some kind of monster from a horror movie. A creature who, according to the film, could live in this cave and do his dark deeds under cover of darkness. But this is all my imagination, and scientists believe that this is an important link that shows the connection between the drawings of the Ural cave and the large cave sanctuaries of Western Europe. There are also such zoomorphic “shamans” in hard-to-reach places.

This is the end of our visit to the first floor of the cave; we turn around and climb the 15-meter iron spiral staircase to the second floor. It was there that the first cave paintings were discovered.

Climbing the stairs to the well that separates the two floors of the cave, I can't help thinking how primitive people climbed here with knives, without ropes, without ladders. It's amazing.

The drawings of the upper part of the cave are located, as a masterpiece should be, on a large flat wall. A hooked flashlight uses a weak beam to pick out the silhouettes of horses and mammoths from the darkness. A whole small herd of seven animals: two horses, a rhinoceros and four mammoths, one of which goes against all of them. They call him a “dissident.” I'm looking at this antiquity and I don't understand how people couldn't notice her for so long. I get closer: enough large images turn into faded red spots on the wall, I move away – the picture returns. Maybe that's the answer to my question. It is very difficult to see the image in them up close, and previously people did not have powerful light sources to look closely at the wall from afar.

The story of the discovery of drawings by Alexander Vladimirovich Ryumin is very interesting and revealing. It was primarily scientific. a discovery made in the

“office”, and only then a matter of chance and luck. It all started in the 1950s, when, after graduating from the capital's university, a young zoologist, Alexander Ryumin, came to a remote Bashkir Nature Reserve lost in the mountains and forests. They say he was offered to stay at the department, but he insisted that he wanted to go specifically to the Southern Urals, because he was sure that somewhere among these wooded peaks there must be a cave with ancient drawings. He came to this conclusion after studying well-known rock art monuments in Western Europe.

Several years of searching passed, and in the rays of a flashlight powered by a tractor battery, Ryumin saw the silhouette of a horse. Now it is called “Ryumin's horse.” It was a sensation. The easternmost drawings of an ancient man, the first on the territory of the USSR. The triumph of science.

And then, as often happens, there came a sad page in history, which, it seems, is not customary to talk about. Scientists became interested in the discovery, and the first professional researcher of the cave was an archaeologist Otto Bader, he found many more drawings and made many high-profile discoveries, wrote the monograph “Kapovaya cave.” Alexander Ryumin was soon forced to leave the Bashkir Nature Reserve and never returned to the place of his triumph. Although, as people who knew him recall, he always wanted to.

After the main drawings, we walked around the cave halls a little more, looked at individual images on other walls, listened to the cave in the dark on the shore of Lake Superior, and that was the end of the tour. We spent about three hours underground. On the way out, having plunged into the stuffiness of the day, I feel that I have almost no strength left. It seems that I called this day a rest day too optimistically.

There was another unpleasant surprise waiting for us at the exit. It seems to be the height of the day, but the whole space around us is immersed in some kind of fog, the edges and colors are muted. There is no doubt, this is not the first time I have seen such a thing: these are forest fires, only not here, but somewhere far away, so the smoke is not felt. To verify my guess, I am contacting Anna Evgenievna Kvashnina, director of the Denezhkin Kamen Nature Reserve. She always closely monitors the

fire situation in Russia and has accurate information about what is burning and where. Yes, my guess was confirmed, Western Siberia is flying.

I decide that I will spend the rest of the day exclusively in a horizontal position, resting, gaining strength. But it's one thing to lust after idleness, and another thing is to vegetate in it. It didn't work out. A timid thought that was born at first develops during the day and develops into a certainty that it is absolutely necessary to climb somewhere higher and watch the sunset. Under a veil of smoke, it might be interesting. A survey of the reserve's employees showed that we need to return to our daytime destination, but not go underground, but climb to the top of Tirmentau mountain.

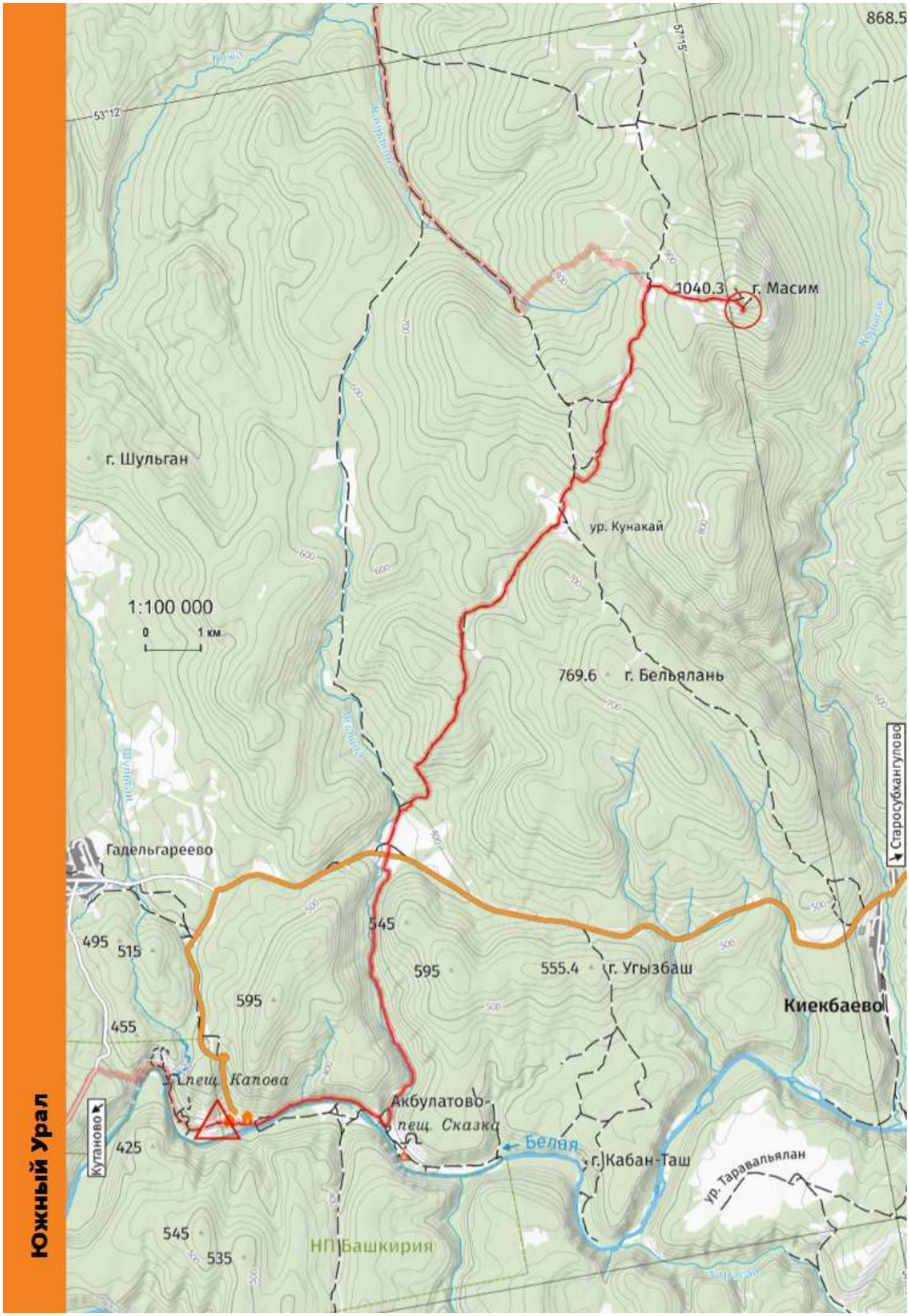


View of the Belaya River from the top of Tirmentau mountain

I left a couple of hours before sunset, and in an hour, I was already at the top. I can see the beautiful bend of the Agidel river, the rocks where I climbed yesterday, trying to find a way out, and smoke, smoke, smoke. The blood-red disk of the sun, without blinding the eyes, sets below the horizon. Bad, very bad. The fire situation could jeopardize my route. I recall with a shudder the fiery element that raged in the mountains of the Urals in 2020, as the Bashkir Nature Reserve was extinguished. We really need a cyclone and more water.

I returned to the cozy volunteer house at sunset. It turned out well a day of rest. I've covered 0 km along the route, and I'm leaving early tomorrow morning. One

problem is that I feel more tired than I did before I arrived. Well, no one promised that it would be easy.



The Southern Urals

m. Masim

m. Shulgan

m. Belyalan

Kunakai tract

Starosubkhangulovo village

m. Ugyzbash

v. Kiekbaevo

Galdergareevo village

Kapova cave

m. Kaban-Tash

v. Akbulatovo

Skazka cave

r. Belaya

Bashkiria National Park

Taravalyalan tract

r. Shulgan

r. Yamashla

r. Taraval

v. Kutanovo

r. Kuzha

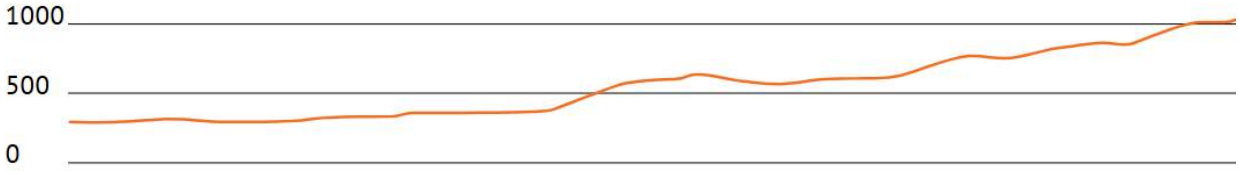
r. Kayrakly

r. Kurygas

Day 11

Shulgan-Tash cave – Akbulatovo village – mount Masim (1040)

25 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 323.5 km



May 11, 2021

Today is an important day, and I have a clear goal – to climb the mountain. Masim (1040), the southernmost peak in the Urals above 1000 m. This is important because there are very few open peaks on my way through the central part of the Southern Urals, all the views rest under the canopy of a dense deciduous forest, and Masim is a pleasant exception. I strive for it in the hope of looking into the distance.

I left at 7:30 a.m. and walked along the Belaya river for the first few kilometers to the village of Akbulatovo. Those minutes were by far the best of the day. Cool, yes, the sun, which has not yet emerged from behind the treetops, but constantly finds windows for itself and winks at me, playing with rays on the water. Morning fumes from the river, turning into bizarre shapes of fog. And the river valley filled with an orange smoky mist. If I had my way, I would have walked all day, but I had to turn off and go to the mountains.



Dawn over the Belaya river



Log hive hanging on a tree

In the village, I passed through the apiary, and a little higher up, climbing the mountain, I began to see here and there logs hanging from trees, and sometimes long hives. Beekeeping in the Burzyansky district is highly respected, especially on-board – one of the types of ancient Bashkir industries. As a matter of fact, the reason for the creation of the Shulgan-Tash Nature Reserve was concern for the preservation of the indigenous wild bee Burzianki, and not, as many mistakenly believe, a cave with drawings. They were discovered only a year after the creation of the protected area, but they also came in handy.

At the intersection with the asphalt road to Starosubkhangulovo, I met an interesting historical object – a burial mound, the burial place of Babsak Biya, the leader of one of the Bashkir clans, who died in the internecine war. It doesn't seem very correct that there is no explanation in Russian next to the mound, only in Bashkir. Taking into account the large number of tourists passing by it to Kapova Cave, it could be an additional place to learn Bashkir history and culture.

After the intersection, on the advice of the director of the reserve, I decide to slow down a bit, change the route originally planned and go straight along the forest roads, but, as often happens, the road, so logically and understandably described in the conversation, behaves quite differently on the spot. After wandering through the forest for a while, I come to a dead end. Undeterred, I take the azimuth and walk straight through the forest.

It's going well in the second half of May in the southern part of the Urals, the streams are murmuring along the logs, it's no longer dirty, the world is green and fresh, but the grass is still no higher than the zone. It's just a pleasure. A month will pass, and the logs will become dry, and the grass will rise to human height, becoming a real curse.

After a few kilometers, having reached the originally intended path, I reached the top cliffs of Mount Masim without any special adventures by noon. I stopped there, deciding that a half-day after yesterday 's active rest would be most welcome.

A board is a beehive in a natural or hollowed–out hollow of a tree.

I set up my tent right on the cliff and spent the rest of the day reading books and taking light walks along the surrounding cliffs. I went to the neighboring massif, equipped with an iron staircase and mistakenly considered by many to be the top of the mountain, but it is not. The top of Masim mountain is located 500 m to the north and is covered with dwarf birches, so it is rarely visited, only by those stubborn tourists who need a personal tick about climbing the mountain.

I spent a long time climbing a small kurum, by the way, the first on my way, and maybe the southernmost in the Urals, photographing beautiful lichens that combine very interestingly with the red rock that makes up the mountain.

I would like to say about the color of the Masim's rocks separately, this is an important point. The rocks on the mountain have a red-brown color, because they are composed of red-colored sandstones with an admixture of iron oxides, in the language of geology. But if we speak in the language of ancient Bashkir epics, then in the work "Akbuzat" it is said how Khauban, the son of Sur-batyr, the grandson of Idel (Agidel river) and the great-grandson of the Ural Batyr, saves the world, frees seven brothers who became the ancestors of Bashkir families, and kills the evil Khan Masim. In these same epics, it is often told how the defeated enemy It becomes a mountain: Thus, in the epic "Ural-Batyr", the defeated diva Azraka turns into Yamantau mountain. I do not know if there is a connection between the epic and the blood-red stones of Masim mountain, but for me personally it is quite understandable.

The damn smoke ruined all plans for sunset in the evening. Thickening in the afternoon, it swallowed up the sun and gave neither interesting colors nor even a distant view. I had to give up the idea of showing the vast forest expanses of the central Urals. If this goes on, it could be a big problem. The Southern Urals are wide.

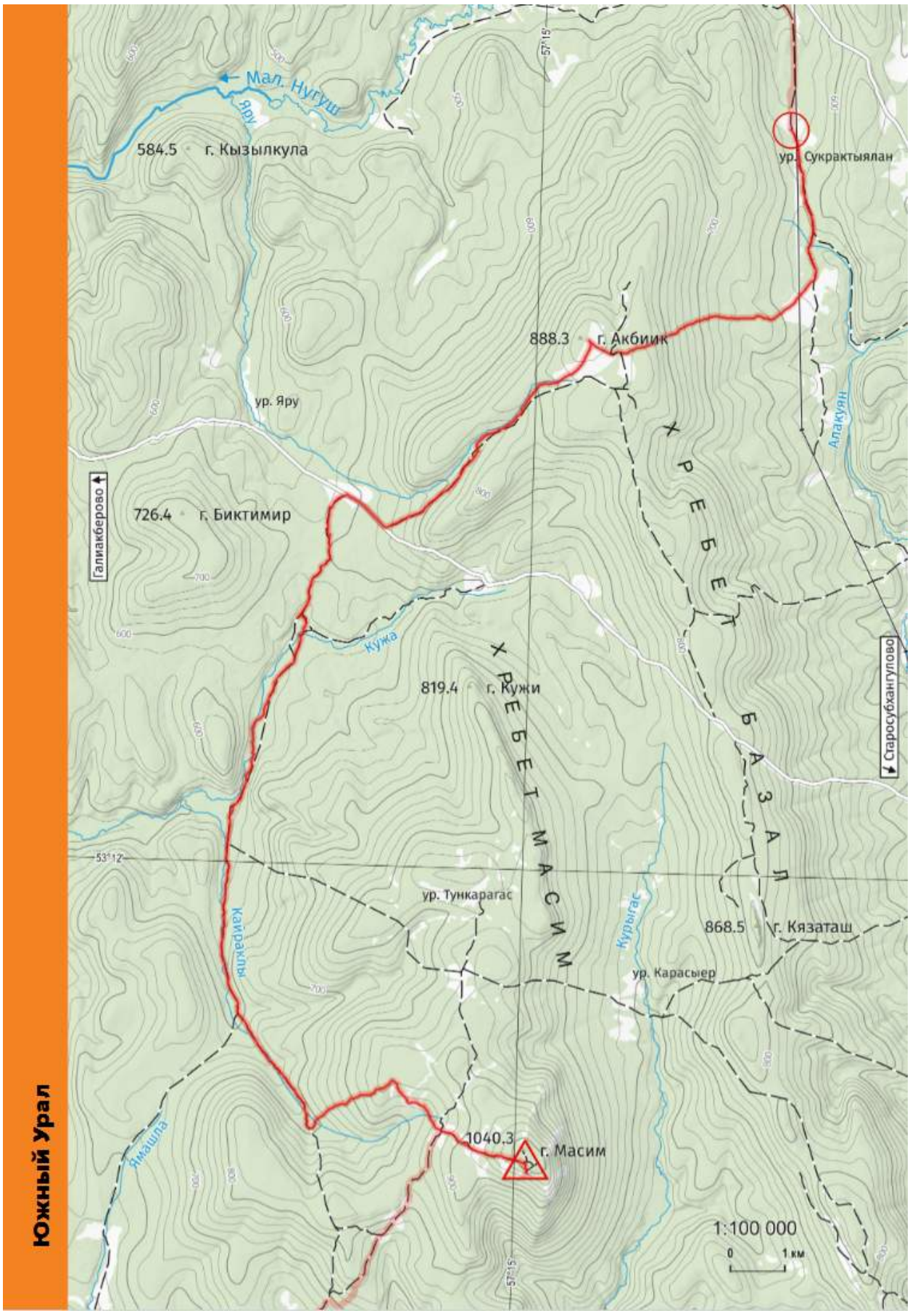
The distance between the peaks reaches many kilometers, and to capture an interesting mountain terrain, you often need good visibility, which I currently lack.



Well-deserved rest



Rocks on Masim mountain



The Southern Urals

Maly Nugush r. *Yaru r.*

Sukraktyyalan tr.

Akbiik m.

Yaru tr.

Kyzykula m.

Biktimir m.

Alakuyan r.

Kuzha r.

Galiakberovo v.

Bazal ridge

Masim ridge

Starosubkhangulovo v.

Kuzhi m.

Kyazatash m.

Kurygas r.

Kayrakly r.

Karasyer tr.

Tunkaragas tr.

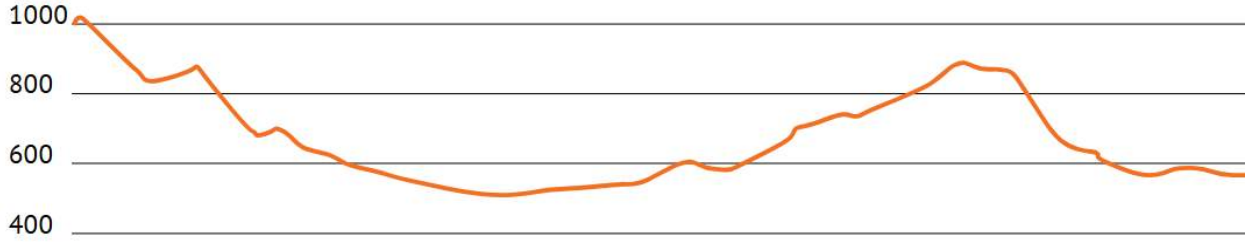
Masim m.

Yamashla r.

Day 12

Masim mountain (1040) – Kayrakly river – mount Akbiik (888.3) – Sukraktyalan tract

34 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 357.5 km



May 12, 2021

In the morning, there was some kind of gloom in my head, I even worried if I was sick. Probably the general fatigue is affecting, but it seems to have become a little brighter on the horizon, I was even able to take a photo of the forest sea. I wonder if it's just that the dust has settled overnight, or is the smoke dissipating? The day will tell.

Masim went straight down the mountain by the shortest route and fell out onto a forest road. I walked all day through the valleys of small sonorous rivers – Kayrakly, Kuzha, Yaru. The road wound from shore to shore, and I wandered through the streams without hesitation, without taking off my shoes.



Morning view from Masim mount



Park forest on the way

A long time ago, I formulated an important principle for myself, which sounds like this: “Dry feet are a luxury that is inaccessible to me.” Since then, I have been guided by this principle in my hiking life. If you try to expand a little his idea is that if you want to go fast and efficiently, like I like to use running shoes for the middle mountains. And as my experience shows, no matter how hard you resist, they will inevitably get wet anyway, because if the weather is sunny, then an early exit is likely to coincide with abundant dew. If the weather is rainy, then the feet will get wet all the more without options. Plus, the weather requires numerous fords, puddles, and wetlands, which are also impossible to avoid. In order not to waste time on endless changing of shoes and dressing, put on shoes and go ahead, and in the evening, you will rest in a sleeping bag in dry socks.

On one of the picturesque green glades, I came to a summer cottage, a pair of wooden buildings with horse pens. I looked inside the hut: there was a traditional slight mess, dirt and dust. And it would have been possible not to mention this camping episode at all on the pages of the book, if not for “mouse fever.” The danger

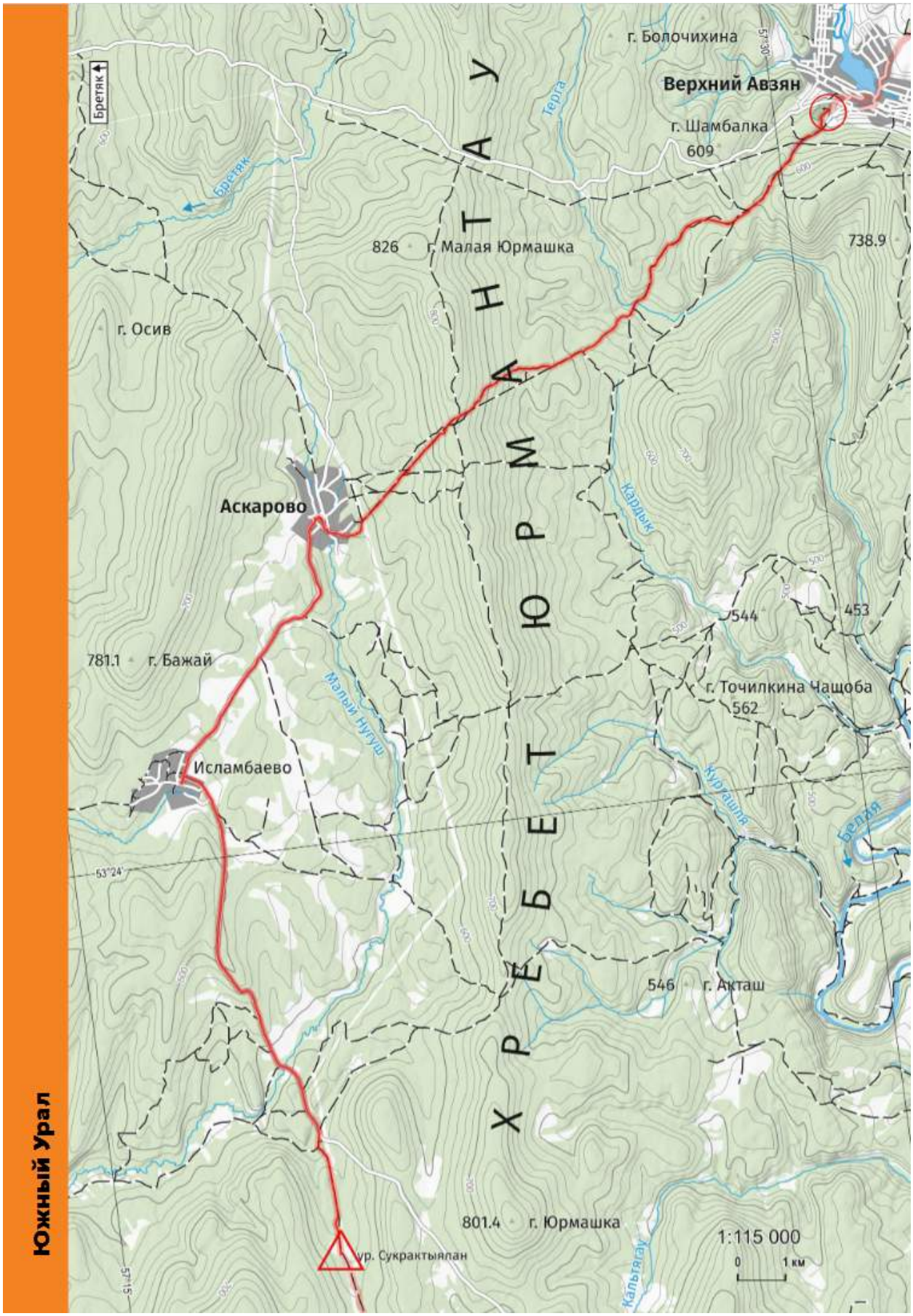
of the Southern Urals, which many people do not even suspect, especially visitors from other regions, but often awaits tourists in such forest houses. Hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS) is a viral disease, spread primarily by mice and ubiquitous in the Southern Urals. People become infected along with dust, rodents leave excrement, they dry out and lie on tables, dishes and other surfaces like virus-charged mines. Careless tourists come to a forest hut and sweep it all to the floor, raising clouds of dust, through which the virus enters the body. The disease proceeds slowly, with kidney damage, and sometimes leads to death. So, when I entered the flight deck, I looked at the situation without touching anything and also left without raising dust. If possible, I always try to avoid visiting such places.

After walking 25% more than planned during the day, I got up for the night in a very cozy green clearing with a view of Jurmashka mountain (801). This is where the Jurmatau range begins and stretches for more than 30 km to the north. The Neva river, covered with forests, is of no interest to me, it is unlikely that you will be able to see anything from it, but the open glades at its base give at least some hope for beautiful views.

The unpleasant part is that the Achilles tendon in my left leg has been bothering me for several days now. This leg is my traditional weak spot. I knead it, I smear it with Ketonal ointment at night, I try to take care of it. Overall, nothing critical yet, but it's still a concern.



Overnight in Sukraktyalan tract



The Southern Urals

Bolochnikha m.
Verkhny Avzyan
Terga r.
Bretyak r.
Bretyak v.
Shambalka m.
Osiv m.
Malaya Yurmashka m.
Askarovo
Kardyk r.
Maly Nugush r.
Tochilkina Chashchoba m.
Belaya r.
Kurgashlya r.
Bazhay m.
Islambaevo v.
Yurmashka m.
Sukraktyyalan tr.
Kaltyagau r.
Aktash m.
Yurmantau ridge
Southern Urals

Day 13

Sukraktyyalan tract – Islambaevo village –Askarovo village – Verkhny Avzyan village

35 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 392.5 km



May 13, 2021

At night, the temperature on the ground dropped to zero, it froze a little, but It was an enchanting morning. At first, an hour and a half before dawn, the birds began to sing. There was such a hubbub that it was simply impossible to ignore it – in fact, it woke me up. I was lying in a semi-darkened room and enjoying the concert. At those moments, one could imagine that I'm not in the stingy Ural forest, but somewhere in the tropics, with their exuberance and diverse lifestyle. Spring is in full swing – it's time for love!



Dawn delivery in a sleeping bag

Then the sun began to rise, right over the mountain, right at the entrance to the tent. This was the epitome of my principle of setting up a camp with “dawn delivery in a sleeping bag.”

It is based on the idea that I always try to set up the tent so that I am in the most advantageous position in relation to dawn and be able to take pictures without even getting out of the tent. After all, it is not always easy to force yourself to go out into the inhospitable cold morning world. Sometimes you can film the sunrise directly from the tent, and sometimes the beautiful view gives you additional motivation to do these unpleasant morning manipulations to get out of a warm, dry bedroom. This is also largely the reason for the idea that I try to sleep at night. It should be located at viewpoints, on the tops of mountains, away from the forest blocking the view. It involves less comfort, but at such moments I tell myself that comfort awaits me at home, and I came here for incredible beauty, so I can be patient.

I left the staying place under the hot rays of the sun, blazing over the forest wall and promising a long hot day. By noon, I reached the two Bashkir Islambaevo and Askarovo villages, lost in the forests and mountains. I was impressed by the desolation on the streets, there is no one, as if they had died out.

After Askarovo village, the country road ended, and the ascent to the Jurmatau ridge along the forest road began, however, it also very quickly turned into a direction with obstacles, abundantly littered with numerous birch trees broken by the wind.



Birch windfall on the road

Despite the obstacles, the speed did not drop much, he climbed over, crawled around, but stubbornly walked forward, trying not to waste time. The monotony of movement in the first half of the day was gone, and the need for constant unraveling of the wind maze was even enjoyable.

I washed and bathed on the Terga river, the fast, still muddy spring waters refreshed my body and washed the salt soaked into my clothes. A short rest, and then onward to the Verkhny Avzyan village. There are signs of an ancient Russian settlement approaching, and it was created in the middle of the 18th century, at the Avzyano-Petrovsky iron smelter, ten kilometers began, with the change of place names. The Turkic names of tracts, rivers, and mountains have changed to Russian. There were such, for example, as the Prokhorova Polyana tract, the Tsyryulnikov river, and the Malinovaya mountain. In general, it is a very common story both in the Southern Urals and in the Middle Urals. The places surrounding the factories lost their old names and acquired new ones, in the Southern Urals – Bashkir, in the Middle – Mansiysk. The toponymy of the Urals is generally very interesting and revealing, it can provide a lot of information for understanding the history of the development of mountains, the peoples who inhabit it and inhabited it before.

The second sign of the approaching settlement, which no longer has a national color, was garbage. Even before hearing the hum of trucks and the lowing of cows, a few kilometers before the first houses, I got into the traditional “garbage explosion”, as if someone had detonated a large bomb packed with garbage in the center of the village, and all these bags, bottles, old sofas, broken toys were scattered evenly around the perimeter of the village. Alas, this pattern is found almost everywhere in the Urals, and only the number of people inhabiting a village or settlement affects on the scale of pollution. And how to solve it is not entirely clear. It seems that the practice of throwing household garbage somewhere on the outskirts of a populated area is already an ingrained tradition passed down from grandfather to father, from father to son.



Tabyn spring and dump

With the Verkhny Avzyan village, the story looked particularly curious: on the way to the village, there was a brand-new sign “Tabyn 2 Spring” in the forest, pointing with an arrow to a fresh large garbage pile located just a couple of meters from the pointer. It's so sad that it's even funny.


Verkhny Avzyan village in the evening light

An hour before sunset, I went out into the village, or rather, I went to its edge and stopped. A beautiful view of the valley of the Bolshoy Avzyan river, a pond, an ancient dilapidated church on a hillock, mountains in the background, houses covering the slopes, and evening sunlight flooding all this wealth with amber, gave reason to believe that it was necessary to look for a place to spend the night right up here.

The search for the site led to the cemetery. It's antique, with cast-iron crosses and slabs telling about the life and death of people who lived for a century or more. There is, after all, some soulfulness in the old churchyards, they give rise to philosophical thoughts. It's not like new cemeteries littered with colored plastic trash and typical tombstones of poor artistic quality. So I, wandering between the graves, wondered what would happen. I wanted to get a tombstone. Probably, the Ural kurum stone could be the ideal solution. And what size will it be? It's up to the descendants to decide, I obviously won't care after death.

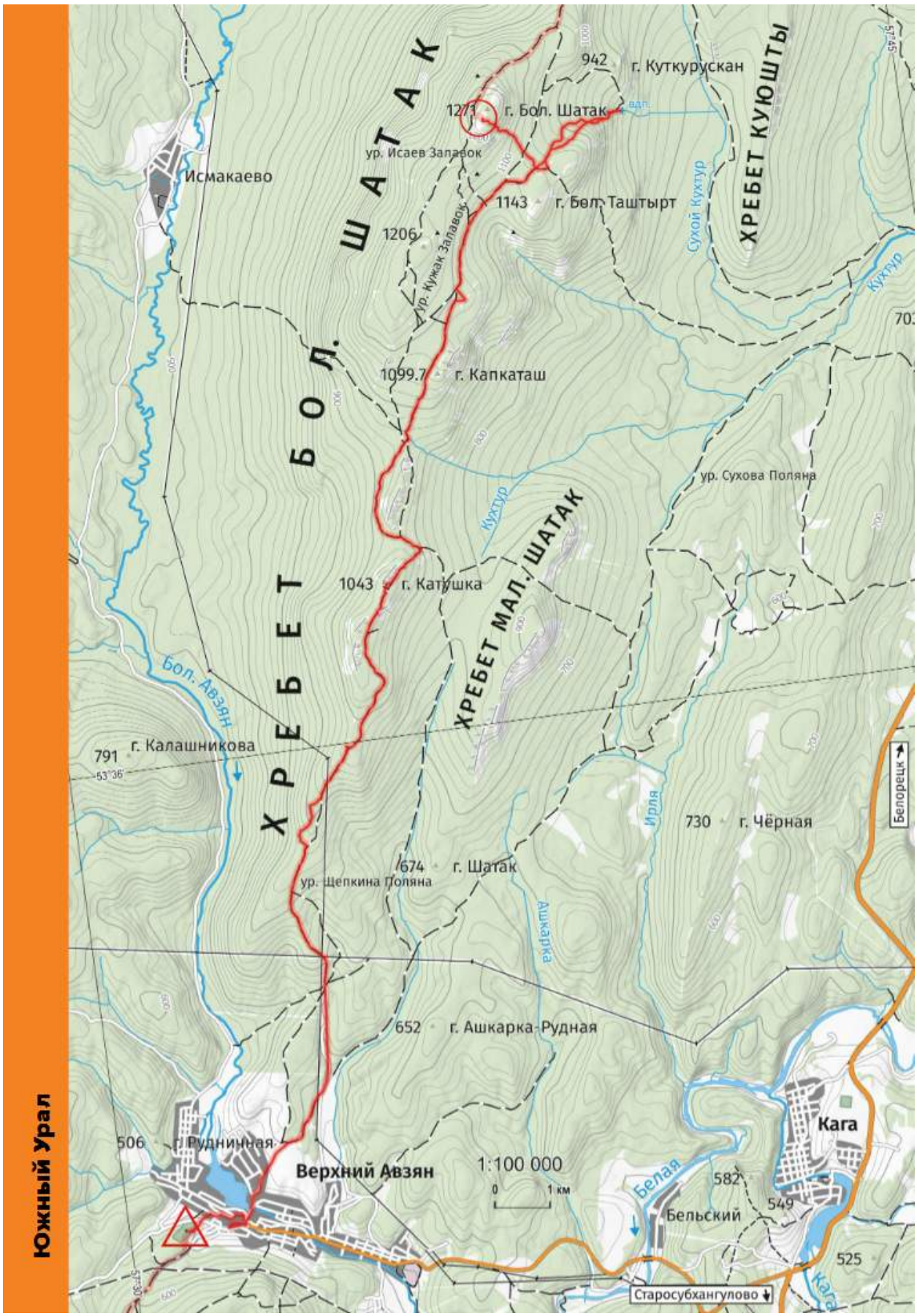
Here, next to the cemetery, literally 10 m from the ancient stone fence, under the cover of young pine trees, he stopped for the night. The dead are quiet companions, unlike the village boys in the evenings. I always try to avoid visiting populated areas closer to winter, especially on weekends and holidays.



Despite my fatigue, I didn't stay in the tent. I contacted Alexander Stanislavovich Goncharov, the head of the travel agency, by phone. “Tengri”, one of the elders of Bashkir tourism, reported that he had entered the village earlier than scheduled, found out if there was an opportunity to get food and things for the fourth stage of the journey, which were stored at his base in Kaga village. After receiving a positive response, I went to meet the car.

The smoke seemed to be slowly dissipating, but it wasn't going to give up its positions yet, and this created a special evening glow in the air. I was sitting on a hillock above the village and enjoying the moment, only occasionally lifting my camera with some noble laziness and taking rare shots. The spring greenery, the wooden houses sprawled along the sides of the valley, the huge pond sparkling with waves, once created for the needs of the factory, the mountains on the horizon, the sounds of rural life, the smell of smoke from chimneys – everything seemed so sweet in those moments., kind, dear, and soothing. I was definitely where I should be.

About forty minutes later, a pickup truck pulled up, raising clouds of dust, the tired sun sank below the horizon, and I went to the tent – finally I could stretch my legs and rest for a while.



The Southern Urals

Ismakaevo v. *Verkhniy Avzyan*

Ashtarka-Rudnaya m.

Shchepkina Polyana tr.

Shatak m.

Chernaya m.

Katushka m.

Kalashnikova m.

Kapkatash m.

Sukhova Polyana tr.

Kuzhak Zavalok tr.

Isaev Zavalok tr.

Kutkuruskan m.

Bolshoy Tashtyrt m.

Bolshoy Shatak m.

Kuyushty r.

Sukhoy Kukhtur Ruka

Kukhtur R.

Irlya Ruka

Ashkarka Ruka

Bolshoy Avzyan r.

Rudnichnaya m.

Verkhniy Avzyan v.

Kaga v.

Belaya r.

Kaga r.

Starosubkhangulovo v.

Beloretsk

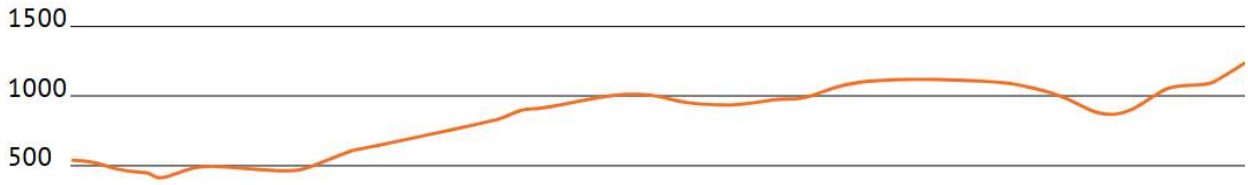
Bel'skiy

Bolshoy Shatak r.

Day 14

Verkhny Avzyan village – Bolshoy Shatak ridge

36.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 429.5 km



May 14, 2021

Despite my fatigue, I couldn't sleep properly. But it wasn't the neighborhood of the dead that was to blame, but the endless night sounds of a large village. The hum of motorcycles, some drunken screams below, the constant ringing of horse bells in my ear. I woke up before dawn completely exhausted. I threw back the tent flap and lay there watching the night horizon turn purple. Gradually, the paint of dawn, spilled over the dark spruce mountains, began to gather, shrink into a juicy spot and, a few minutes before dawn, formed into a fiery bonfire blazing above the forest. An infrequent and very beautiful sunrise phenomenon, most likely caused by the same smoke in the atmosphere.



Dawn bonfire over the village

There's nothing to do, I grabbed my camera and ran to take pictures. The sun rose from the campfire in a cloudless sky, at first a red disk gradually turning into a yellow one, and I ran around on stiff legs in delight. Again, the diffused golden light

enveloping everything around. I found some horses, who did not let me sleep, talked to them. When I returned to the tent, my appetite, which had been absent in the morning, weighed down with all its marching weight. A wonderful beautiful dawn pulled me out of my morning melancholy and energized me for the day.

After packing my tent, I went down to the village, I had to find the post office, send some groceries home: since I'm going faster than schedule, there are surpluses that I don't want to carry at all, and equipment that I realized I wouldn't need. I found the mail very timely, the operator who received the parcel informed me that a power outage was expected in the area for a couple of days and, apparently, I was the last customer at that time.

After finishing the postal business, he left the village and began to climb the mountain, there was a long climb with a set of 900 m to the Bolshoy Shatak ridge, or Bashtau. There is confusion with the name of this ridge, as with many geographical features in the Urals, which is difficult to sort out over the years. Many who write about this ridge say that the ridge was originally called Bishtau, or Bishatek, which translated from Bashkir as “five mountains” or “five slopes.” But later this name was distorted by inattentive topographers and eventually became Bolshoy Shatak.



The plateau of the Bolshoy Shatak ridge

If you follow the changes in names on the maps, a more complex picture emerges. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, this ridge was not marked on

maps at all. The first naming of these places appears on the map of Strelbitsky in the 1920s under the toponym Bashatak.

Then, in the 1940s, the Bashtau ridge with a separate mountain, Bolshaya Shatak, appeared on maps. And by the 1980s, the Bashtau ridge disappeared from maps, and the Bolshoy Shatak ridge with Bolshoy Shatak Mountain appeared. There is clearly a simplification involved, but it is difficult to say whether the number "five" was originally in the name of the mountain. It could well be the Turkic word "bash" – head or chief.

Climbing the ridge, I found myself in an unpleasant situation: relying on the abundance of spring water, I did not collect it at the beginning of the ascent and ended up on completely dry slopes. The sun was burning mercilessly, and the small supply of water ran out very quickly. Soon, thirst began to overwhelm in earnest. I tried to wander along the slope, go down in search of a stream. But to no avail. It turned out that it was necessary to descend even lower for water by a couple of kilometers. He went on. And after about 10 km, already on the watershed of the ridge, I found a small stunted snowball hidden in the shadow of the rocky walls. There was nothing to do – I made a stop and started to drown the snow, the water turned out to be muddy, but for lack of other options I had to drink it.

Having climbed the small open rocky ridge of Katushka mountain – another greeting from the complex and not always understandable toponymy of the region – I saw in the distance a plateau with patches of snowfields. There must definitely be water. Emboldened, I sprinted forward. And very soon I got into the realm of frozen water. The snow had not yet melted everywhere, and the flat, wide surface held the water well. Dry feet are a luxury, I was walking through extensive waterlogged areas, and it was hard to believe that a couple of hours ago I was suffering from thirst.

This is also where conglomerates, individual rocks, and even small ridges began – one of the beautiful features of the ridge. As geologist Faniz Ardislamov told me, an ancient echo of the great cataclysm. According to his version, long before the appearance of the Ural Mountains, catastrophic water mudslides absorbed many rounded stones, cementing them for hundreds of millions of years. When the Urals

arose, it raised these conglomerates to the surface, and now we have the opportunity to admire them.

By evening, I reached the main peak of the ridge – Bolshoy Shatak mountain (1271.7), I didn't have much strength anymore, and I wanted to climb it faster, pitch a tent, stretch out my tired legs. But not so fast, I had another interesting natural object in my plans, which I could not abandon or leave for tomorrow. A little-known waterfall on the eastern slope of the ridge under Kutkuruskan mountain. And we have to go there today, tomorrow morning the sun would be completely at a disadvantage in relation to it. And light is very important when contemplating and photographing waterfalls. This is always a difficult question, as water flows in the Urals are usually located in deep valleys or crevices.

Leaving his backpack under the mountain, I began the descent, had to go about 2.5 km down, decently drop the altitude. It's frustrating, but there's no other way out. I walked along many streams, which gradually gathered into larger streams, and then into one merrily singing stormy stream. I didn't have an exact waterfall marker, just an approximate one. The slope sloped more and more, the water accelerated. Hearing the sound of falling water, I went to it, and on the right side of the valley I saw a large rock, which was surrounded on three sides by streams of water, falling down in small stepped waterfalls. It was definitely not the waterfall I was looking for. The place is interesting and requires more time to explore, so not today.

I went on and after a few hundred meters I reached the goal. A noisy stream flowing along the bottom of the ravine ended abruptly with a 10-meter sloping stone wall. Apparently, this waterfall only works in heavy water, and dries up in the summer, in the middle of the day, perhaps that's why it is not particularly well known. After going down to its base, he did not deny himself the pleasure of washing the sweat off his face and body. The evening sun was shining from behind the left edge



Waterfall under Kutkuruskan mountain



Overnight on the ridge summit

of the waterfall, highlighting the water stream, playing and shimmering in the spray. I took some pictures and made a wish to return here next spring with a normal camera. I collected a few pieces of trash and went back. The program for the

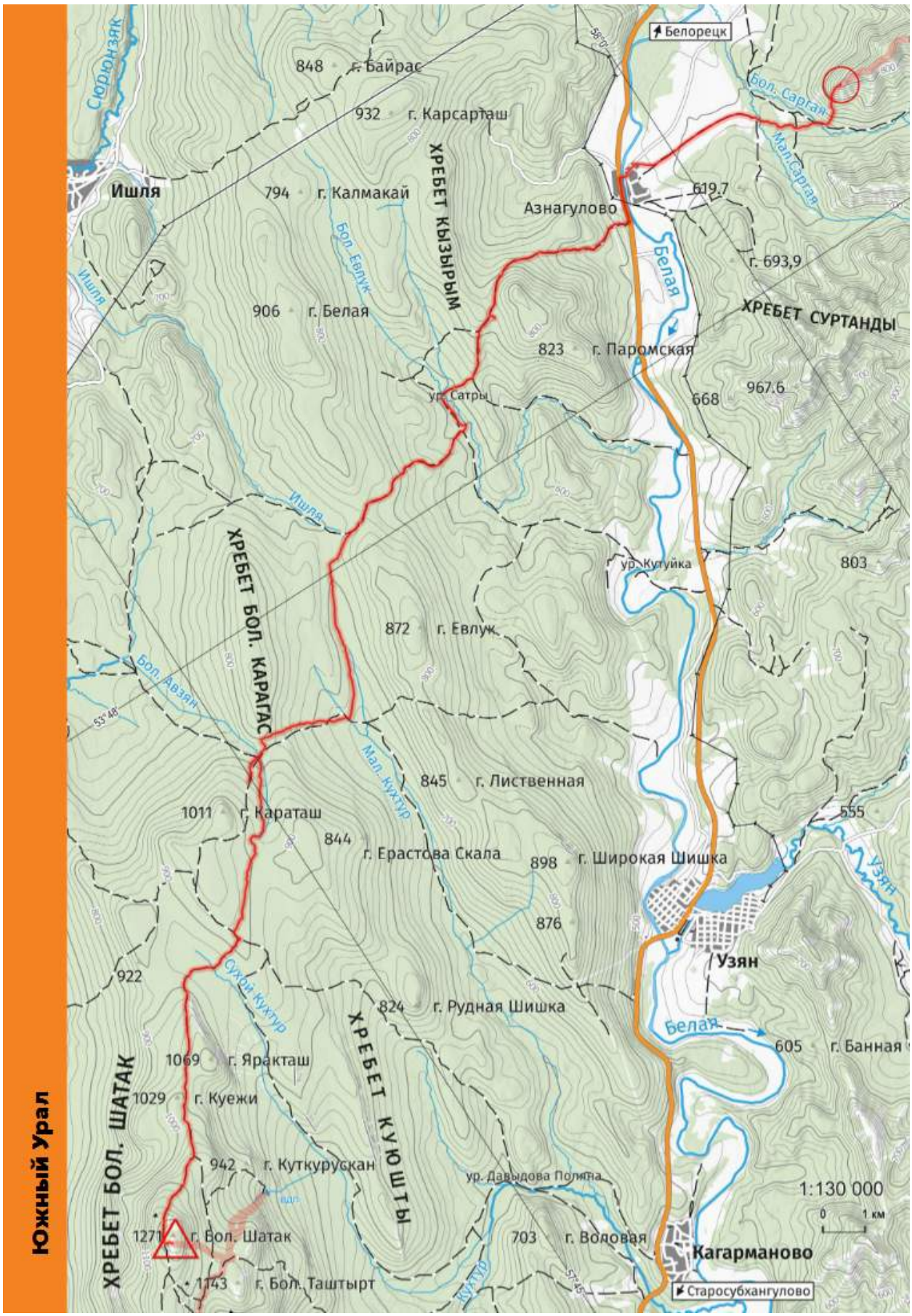
maximum day was almost completed; it remains to climb to the top. Having collected water, I used my last strength to reach the highest point of the ridge, where I was greeted by a strong elastic but warm wind, sunset and, most pleasant of all, a carpet of mountain tundra*. Perhaps this is the first, most southern tundra site in the Urals, which means that he will sleep today. softer, which is good news.

Having pitched a tent, I saw the sun setting in the gloom on the horizon and went to sleep.

Here is another important South Ural story ending. I passed through the low central part of the Young Urals and entered the conditional "High Southern Urals"** – the territory lying in the center of the northern part mountains, containing 254 of 255 peaks above 1000 m. This is the territory of kurum rivers, chars, and rocks towering above the darkness of the taiga. These are the places where most hiking and skiing trips in the Southern Urals take place. I feel like I'm at home here, and for a while I'm running out of little-used territories. It gives you confidence and uplifts your mood.

**As Andrei Grigoriev, a dendroecologist, later explained to me, the top of the mountain Bolshoy Shatak is a unique transition zone between mountain tundra and steppe (tundra steppe), where plants characteristic of both natural zones are mixed.*

***This term was first proposed by B.V. Prokhorov in his book "To the peaks of the South the Urals."*



The Southern Urals

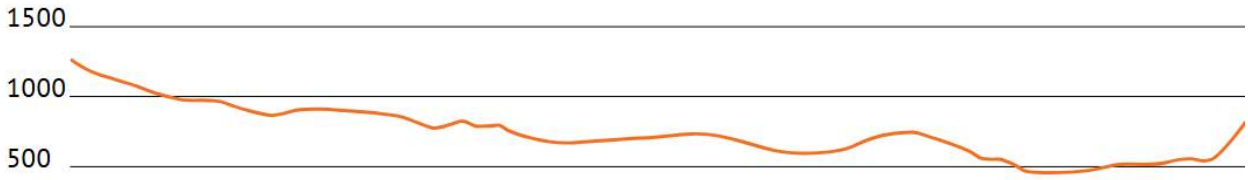
Syuryunzyak r. *Bayras m.*

Karsartash m.
Bolshaya Sargaya r.
Malaya Sargaya r.
Belaya r.
Aznagulovo v.
Kyzyrym ridge.
Paromskaya m.
Ishlya r.
Ishlya v.
Surtandy ridge.
Bolshoy Karagas ridge.
Evluk m.
Kutuyka tr.
Bolshoy Avzyan r.
Listvennaya m.
Karatash m.
Yerastova Skala m.
Shirokaya Shishka m.
Maly Kukhtur r.
Uzyan r.
Uzyan v.
Rudnaya Shishka m.
Bannaya m.
Yarakhtash m.
Kuezhi m.
Kutkurushkan m.
Kuyushty ridge.
Bolshoy Shatak m.
Bolshoy Shatak ridge.
Bolshoy Tashtyrt m.
Davydova Polyana tr.
Kagarmanovo v.
Volovaya m.
Sukhoy Kukhtur r.

Day 15

Bolshoy Shatak ridge – Bolshoy Karagas ridge – Aznagulovo village – Bolshoy Kraka ridge

46.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 475.5 km



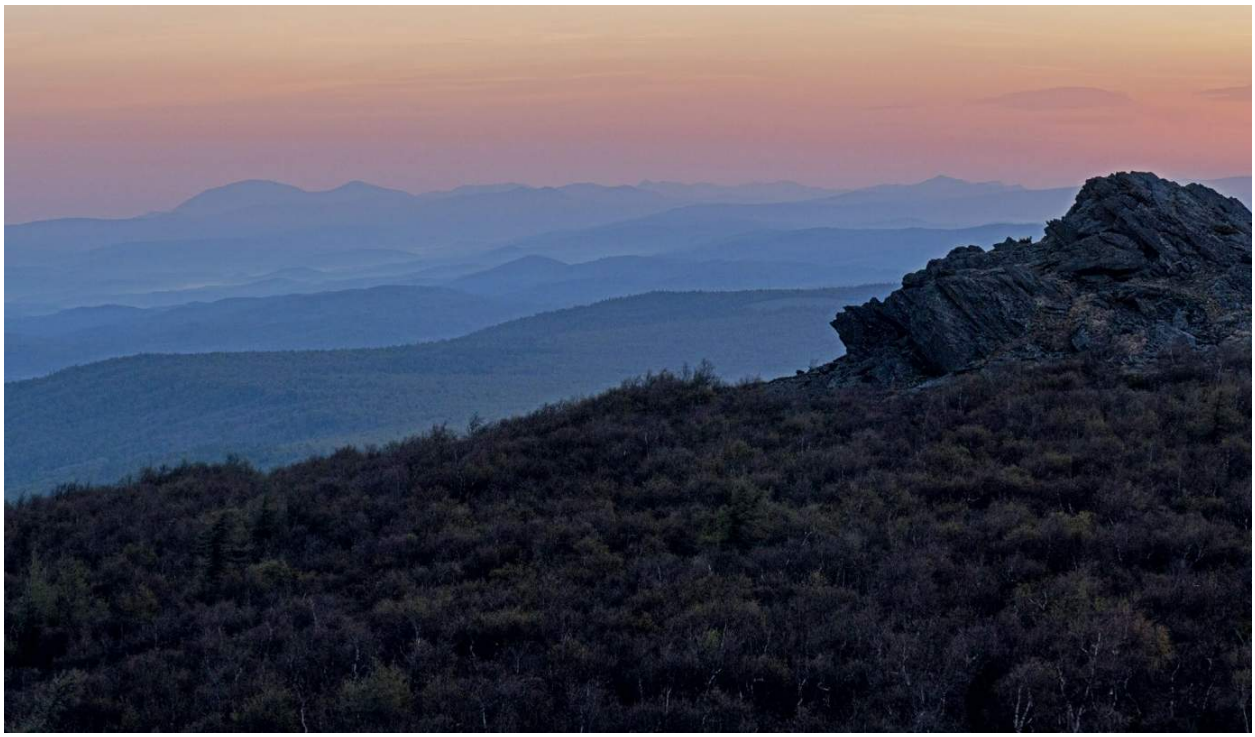
May 15, 2021

I walked a record 46.5 km today and I'm incredibly tired. There were no plans for such a mileage, as circumstances dictated. But about everything in a row.

I slept like a log on the soft tundra, even though the fresh wind blew the tent noisily all night. It was a good dawn, and I could see the sun rising, from its very red edge to its full yellow ball. It's been many mornings since I've been peering at the horizon hoping for the smoke to recede, looking for any confirmation of this process. And it seems that today they are in full view. Last night, the giants in the north were almost invisible due to the gloom on the horizon, but today Bolshoy Yamantau appeared in all its glory for the first time. Nearby are Malinovaya, Kirel and other peaks, many of which I will soon have to pass.

I ran around this morning, looked for camera angles, and took pictures. The peak is interesting, covered with small stone tiles overgrown with lichens, with hidden rocks. After dawn was over, I packed my backpack and hurried down through the remnants of the morning chill. There was a long journey ahead, and today, for the first time, I decided to deviate significantly from the planned route. And the reason for this was the invitation of my good friend, the artist Maria Fedotova. She bought a small house nearby of Malinovaya mountain and invited me to visit her, spend the night, have a wash and to chat. The invitation was tempting, so I decided to change the route plan: instead of the Mayardak ridge and Kirel peak, go through Bolshoy Kraka ridge and Malinovaya mountain. This change added about 15-20 km to the route, so I had to hurry up, which I did in the morning. At first, I walked along a forest road broken by off-road vehicles, then, when it went to the side, disappearing

into the forest, I went straight ahead. Everything was fine, and even small windbreaks were not perceived as an obstacle., It's like training in front of the taiga expanses of the Northern Urals.



Dawn over the High Southern Urals

After walking 15 km, I decided that I had the right to relax and drink tea on the banks of the still very small Bolshoy Avzyan river. Finding a shady clearing, I dropped his backpack, took out the food bag on duty, pulled out a bag with a gas burner and stared at it in disbelief. Something was obviously wrong inside. After a couple of seconds, cursing furiously, cursing my carelessness, I pulled out everything that was in my backpack. Although I already understood: I lost my bowler hat. It's so nice and easy to pack a backpack today. I forgot it upstairs at the parking lot. Damn it! The thing is that my current powerful and economical burner could work exclusively with a native boiler, it formed a single unit with it. There was nothing to do, I wiped and hid the extra things under the driftwood, got up and went upstairs.

This was the first time I was on the route back. And it turned out to be not so easy: from the first few meters, I began to experience almost physical pain, my whole gut was talking, screaming, opposing the return. And in my head, different options

were thought out, kilometers were counted. By simple addition, it became obvious that, apparently, the shore of the Bolshoy Avzyana will become a place to spend the night, because a return trip to the top of Bolshoy Shataka will add another 30 km to today's mileage. This means that my route will be extended by at least one day due to some kind of pot.

Realizing this, I stopped, stood for a few minutes in gloomy thought, cursed with gusto in those words that definitely should not be pronounced on the pages of a decent book, and turned back. Even a bowler hat doesn't make me lose a day. Moreover, there are other options. Without wasting any time, I used my satellite tracker and sent a message to Tatiana Sergeevna so that, first of all, she would publish a message on my behalf that I forgot my bowler hat at the top, and if anyone happens to be on the ridge this Saturday afternoon, to look for it. Secondly, to give Maria Fedotova, who was still in Ufa, the second boiler from the burner. It was twice the size of the lost one, but so far I could use it too.



So far, there was only one problem ahead of me, I needed to eat dry-boiled four times, because the pot was a multifunctional object for me: cooking utensils, a plate, and a mug. It was the dark side of minimalism and weight loss.

Along with the loss of the pot, water problems began. If there was plenty of it in the first half of the day and it was clean, then by some universal law of meanness, after the discovery of the loss, the springs disappeared, and only stagnant dirty, musty water began to appear on the way, which it is not at all prudent to drink without boiling. However, these attacks also had a positive moment: we had to waste no time heading to Aznagulovo village, a place where you can buy water at the store, and replenish supplies of food that does not require cooking.

On the descent to the valley of Agidel river, I saw the Kraka ridge, it was still about 10 km away, and there were very few forces. The decision on whether to go to him, I stayed until the store.

I think I looked like an ordinary tramp when I was sitting on a backpack in the shade by the porch of a store, eating sausage, washing it down with kefir, dirty, dusty and smelly. Villagers kept passing by, looking at me suspiciously. To be honest, I didn't give a damn.



Suspension bridge over Belaya river

The sun was sinking to the horizon, and the hot air, filled with the smell of hot asphalt and the countryside, was still and hot. I refreshed myself and decided that I had to go to the ridge. Then I won't forgive myself if I miss the sunset and sunrise, stopping somewhere below.

Aznagulovo village is interesting and important for tourism in the South In the Urals, this is the western entry point to Kraka ridge. The key location is a suspension bridge that allows you to cross Belaya river. The bridge, admittedly, does not look the best, but it is the only way for cars and people to enter the village.

Walking through the streets of Aznagulovo, I remembered how one night, also on Sunday afternoon, I was running around the village in search of a bridge. And all

around, some kind of frenzied village celebration of life was unfolding, and music was blaring.



Bolshoy Shatak on the horizon



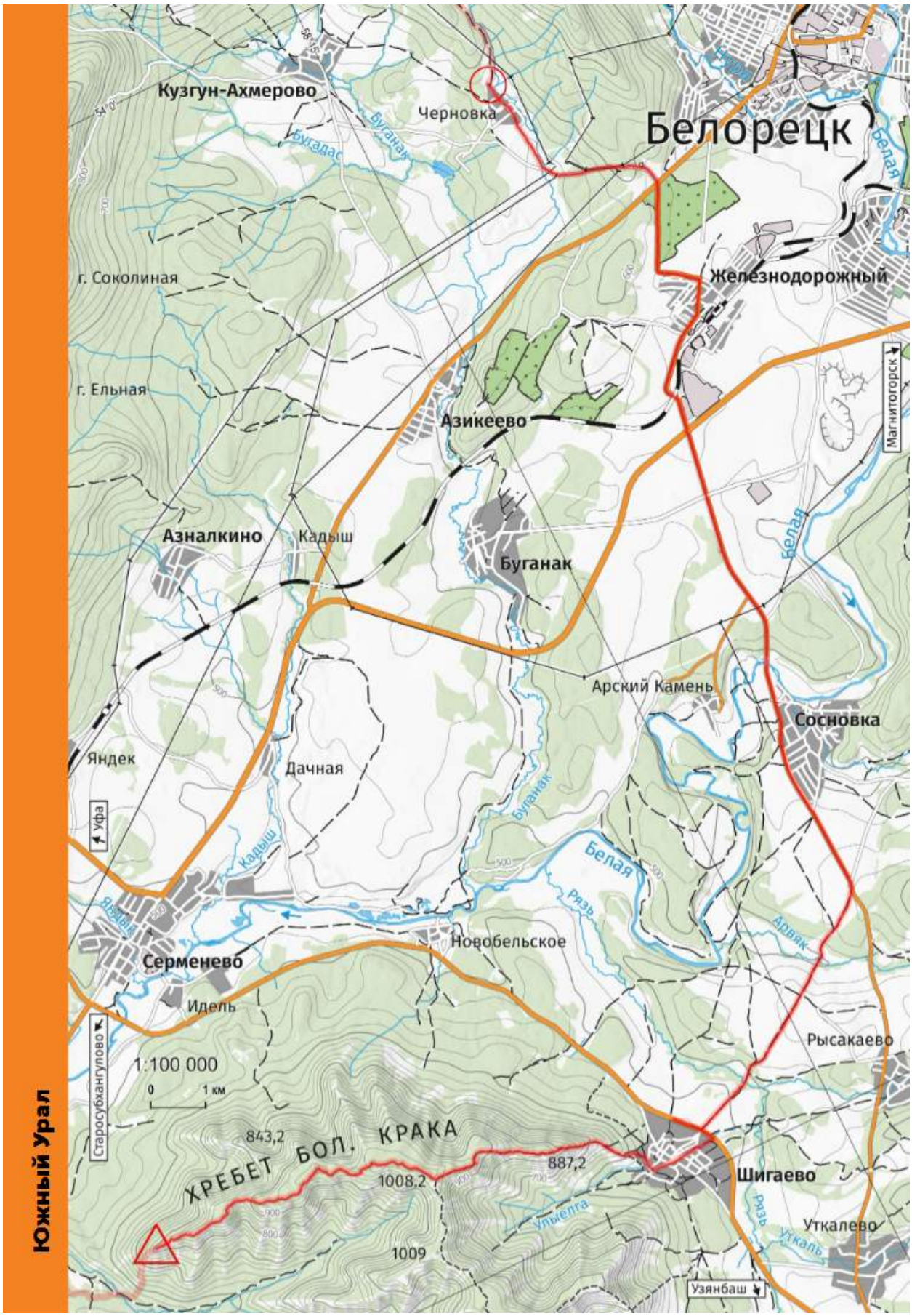
Overnight on Kraka ridge

from the windows of houses, drunken screams could be heard, motorcycles cut through the expanses of dark streets without lanterns. And I, in tight leggings, with a backpack, a hydrator, like an alien from another planet, ran between houses and could not find this damn suspension bridge. It wasn't much fun then, but it's funny to

remember now. I couldn't find any trouble as a present for my birthday, which is exactly what I celebrated in such an unusual way. I wonder where I'll celebrate my birthday this year. A year? If everything goes according to plan, I should be in the Northern Urals at that time.

Kicking out the dust of the road with all my might, I sometimes shuffled along the road to the ridge, wondering if I was pushing myself so hard today. After all, I'm not running a sprint, I need to conserve my strength. When he reached the ridge, he took on water and began to slowly climb the steep grassy slopes. After leaving the forest area, he collapsed in exhaustion under a spreading tree. After catching my breath, a little, I looked around and saw a smooth high bend of the ridge on the southwest horizon A Big Shakeup. How damn far away he is! Did I really do that today? I looked, and I couldn't even believe that I was there this morning, and now I'm here, with mountains, mountains, forests, and rivers between us.

Almost at sunset, I reached the crest of the ridge, pitched a tent, spent the sun, drank water and, without supper, fell asleep. It's been a hard, exciting, but great day behind you.



The Southern Urals

Bugadas r. *Bugnak r.*

Kuzgun-Akhmerovo v.
Chernovka v.
Beloretsk
Belaya r.
Nura r.
Sokolinaya m.
Yelnaya m.
Azikeevo v.
Aznalkino v.
Bugnak v.
Bolshaya Kraka ridge
Shigaevo v.
Utkalevo v.
Ulyelga r.
Ryaz r.
Utgal r.
Rysakaevo v.
Arvyak r.
Kadysh r.
Yandyik r.
Magnitogorsk
Starosubkhangulovo v.
Novobelskoye v.
Arsky Kamen tr.
Zheleznodorozhny v.
Kadysh v.
Dachnaya v.
Yandek v.
Uzyanbash v.
Idel v.
Sermenevo v.

Day 16

Bolshoy Kraka ridge – Shigaevo village – Chernovka village

40.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 516 km



May 16, 2021

I slept well, but waking up was difficult, sleep did not give me any rest. Yesterday's heat, malnutrition, and long stretches had done their job, and I woke up exhausted, with a heavy head and legs. I really wanted to lie down and stare at one point on the ceiling, but the lack of food and a message from the Ministry of Emergency Situations, warning of the expected abnormal heat exceeding the norm by 7 degrees, helped.



The path along the Kraka ridge



Dawn over the ridge

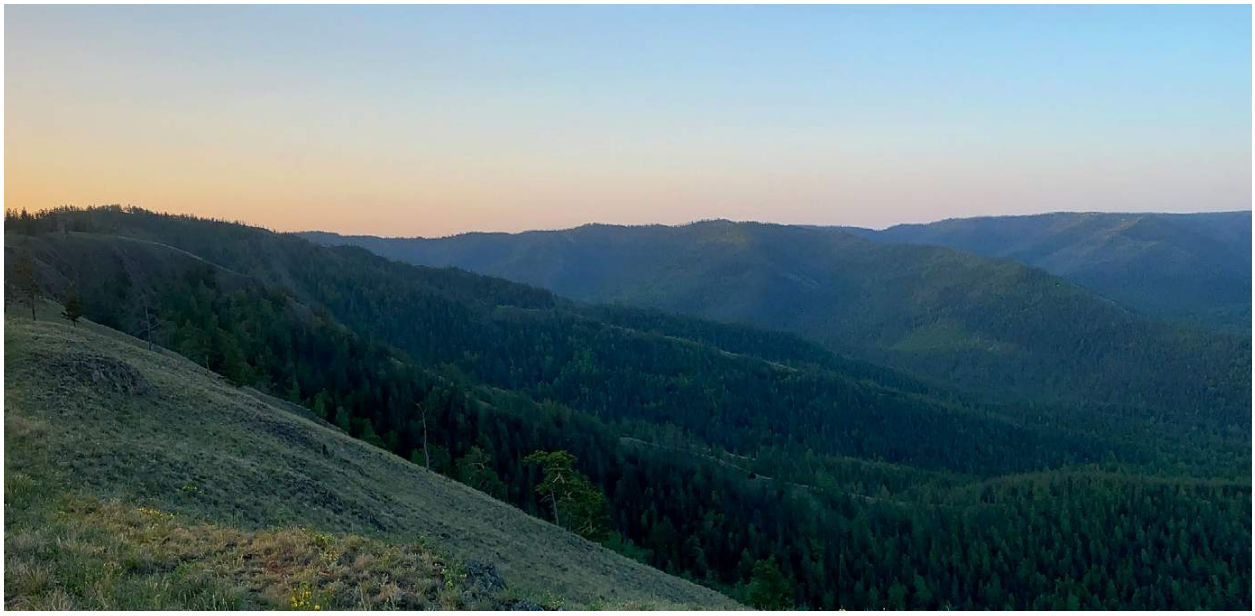
There was no doubt that a long and difficult day lay ahead. And the sooner it starts, the more I can capture the coolness of the morning, the better. I wasted no time, drank water, ate a piece of candy, put everything in my backpack, and went ahead, along the Bolshaya Kraka ridge, to the east, against the background of the rising sun.

As soon as I got out, it became easier. And the beauty of the dawning moment, without a doubt, contributed to this too. I walked and was glad that yesterday I changed the route and reached the ridge. It was a mistake not to include it in the plan initially, because Bolshoy Kraka and its “brothers” are one of the most important and distinctive mountain hubs in the Southern Urals. If I had passed by, the story would have been incomplete.

This entire mountain agglomeration, united by the common terrain and the place name “Kraka”, stretches for 70-80 km along the eastern shore of the river Agi del and includes such ridges as Bolshoy Kraka, Maly Kraka, Akbiik, Surtandy, Astoy, Kraka, Yamangyr, Sargansky and others, smaller ones. These massifs are called Southern Kraka, Middle Kraka and Northern Kraka in the literature, but these names are not marked on modern maps.

Forty ridges (Kirk arka) – this is how the name of the ridge is translated from Bashkir, and this is a very accurate definition, because it will be difficult to find

another such strongly divided relief in the Southern Urals. On the other hand, paradoxically, it will be difficult to find a more convenient mountainous terrain for hiking. It's all about its unusual structure. The ridge is an extended open grassy ridge



with minor rocky outcrops, which runs without strong depressions along almost its entire length, with turns and twists – by crossing to other ridges. And you can safely walk along its dividing line for many kilometers and not go down into the forest area. But its lateral spurs are numerous and fall steeply in logs downwards. It's like As I have already said, the terrain is very unusual for the Southern Urals, which probably has an analogue in only one place – 140 km northeast, in the face of the small Nurali ridge. The unusual beauty of these ridges catches the eye on satellite images – as if the skeletons of some marine animals lie at the bottom of the green ocean of the Southern Urals.

An interesting and beautiful feature of these ridges is their unusual overgrowth of forest. As a rule, the forest rises to the top here, but only on the slopes of the northern and northwestern exposure. The southern and eastern slopes are open and overgrown with mountain steppes. This peculiarity is also the main danger, which is atypical for the Southern Urals. In summer, the steep, smooth slopes are quite slippery in rainy weather. In winter, they become one of the most avalanche-prone in the South the Urals. Every year, backcountry skiers trigger avalanches by cutting

across slopes. Despite this, these places are very popular for children's skiing and hiking trips due to their simplicity, accessibility and the beauty of the views from them.

I was walking along the northernmost border of the massif, named ridge on the maps. Bolshoy Kraka, the most frequently visited part, is located between the villages of Aznagulovo in the west and Shigaevo in the east. Bye the path was uphill, with small ascents and descents, everything went well, but when it came to the descent to the village, it was hard. Dropping a height of 500 m along a steep ridge without much climbing did not have the best effect on the knees. It only seems that going down is easier, in fact, the descents are always more traumatic and more often harder than the ascents. Every step down is a small fall, I was a little distracted, and now I've twisted my leg. And let's get some rest. Trekking poles help a lot, without them the load on the knees during the descents would be quite threatening.

However, as it turned out, the descent from the mountain was only a prelude to the main challenges of the day. The real weight fell on me when I went out



Chernovka village

onto the paved road leading towards Beloretsk. The sun had just reached its zenith and pinned me to the open asphalt expanses with its heat. I spent most of the rest of

the day walking along the side of the road, breathing in dust and the smells of overheated asphalt.

However, there were also good moments of the day, and people. At first, Evgeny Romanovsky intercepted me on the side of the road. I had just bought a pair of chicken legs at a roadside store, and I was greedily eating them as I walked, smeared all over with fat and juice. As soon as I reached the outskirts of the village, a man with a poster with the logo of my expedition rushed at me. Unexpected and pleasant. We rested for a while in the shade of the bus stop, enjoying the ice cream we brought, and I wandered on.

Literally half an hour later, another happy news: tourist Andrey Grigoriev read the message about the loss of the bowler hat, found it and brought it, intercepting me on the road. That's the truth, a friend in court is better than



The savior of my burner Andrey Grigoriev



Support on the route is incredibly important. Evgeny Romanovsky

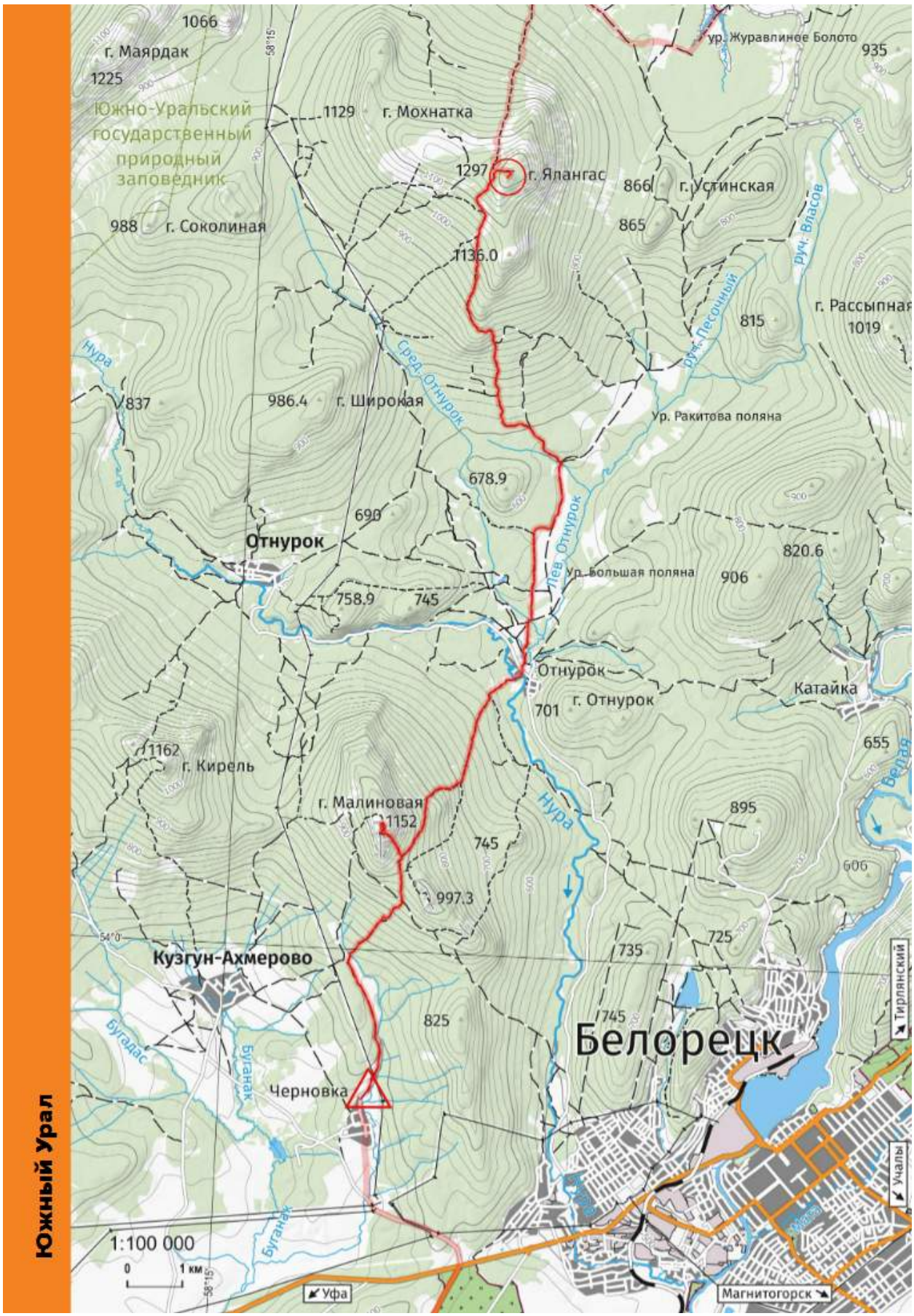


a penny in purse. Thanking Andrey cordially for his help, I ran on with a calm soul, towards the goal of my journey today – Chernovka village. And in the evening, not without effort, I approached her outskirts. I must say that this was my first visit to this place and I was positively surprised by the view that opened from the streets of this small village to Mount Malinovaya. It's quite an impressive Alpine view.

And then there was a warm meeting with Maria Fedotova, probably my favorite Ural artist, and her father. Laundry, dinner with cold okroshka and a glass of dry white wine, guests and intimate conversations well after midnight. I am sure that Maria's life and work will still receive a detailed description, I will only tell you very briefly, in a few sentences, a story that did not leave me equally stifled.

Maria graduated from the Art Institute, worked a lot at the State Academic Russian Drama Theater of the Republic Bashkortostan was a graphic designer, but at some point decided to change her life. She quit and started doing industrial mountaineering, tourism and painting at the same time, choosing the theme of mountains and nature. A year before my trip, I unexpectedly bought a house with a forest on the outskirts of Chernovka and now spends almost all her time arranging it and traveling through the local mountains. Absolutely magical watercolors come out from under Maria's brush, incredibly romantic and deep., conveying the essence of the taiga, mountains, and people in the mountains. I love them.

We went to bed late again, and we planned to go out early the next day. It's not okay, but what can you do when you're surrounded by such interesting people. Sleep can wait.



The Southern Urals

Mayardak m. *Sokolinaya m.*

Mokhnatka m.

Yalangas m.

Ustinskaya m.

Rassypnaya m.

Rusinskaya

Uchaly v.

Shirokva

Vlasov stream

Ramitova polyana

Otnurok v.

Kirel m.

Malinovaya m.

Chernovka v.

Kuzgun-Akhmerovo v.

Otnurok m.

Magnitogorsk

Katayka v.

Tirlyanskiy v.

Beloretsk

Bolshaya Polyana tract

Day 17

Chernovka village – Malinovaya mountain (1152.3) – Otnurok village – Yalangas mountain (1297.9)

25 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 541 km



May 17, 2021

The morning at Maria's was the opposite of the previous one: other people's care, delicious food and a soft bed work wonders. I didn't get much sleep, but I had a great night's sleep. In a good way, with such loads, I could have slept for a couple more hours, but I had to sort out my things and prepare for the arrival of Rais Gabitov, my friend who does a lot for the development of tourism here in the Beloretsk area, and who did not stay away when I asked him to help with the implementation expeditions.

At the appointed time, Rais arrived and brought my next drop. The fourth stage of the route has ended, and the fifth has begun, which should run from Chernovka to the foot of Iremel, Nikolaevka village. The shortest stage of the entire expedition is three to four days.



Farewell to Maria Fedotova and her father

In the cool of the morning, the three of them went out – together with Rais, a young Beloretsk athlete and an aspiring tourist, Artyom Tikhonov, arrived. I've been surrounded by a lot of people for the last two days, so far I like it, but knowing myself, I expect it to start annoying soon. I was happy to hear the news that the guys were going to see me off and back, as an ideal variant.

The most interesting and important event today is that my path is moving to the Great South Ural Trail, I have already mentioned it, walking along the waves of the Karamuruntau ridge, and now I have reached it. It is Rais who implements this idea. And this is his main contribution to the Urals today. To say that he was the first to come up with this path would not be entirely correct, the idea of creating such objects has been around in the Urals for a long time, but there is a big difference between an “idea” and an “idea being realized”, so he just shouldered it on his small but sinewy shoulders and dragged it. By attracting people, spending time and effort to create it. I also helped him a little in designing the route, shared my experience, but the main work on marking the route locally and promoting it is under the guidance of Raisa. After several years, the project is still very far from ideal, and the path is moving extremely slowly. And we don't have to go far, right at the first marker sign we met on the way, in the lowlands where the Chernovka river flows, there is a large dump of some wooden slats. They were dumped right across the stream, apparently to make it easier to cross it. Wander it really got a little more comfortable, but it all looks terrible. It is not the best infrastructure solution for the trail, which is intended to be the All-Russian business card of the Southern Urals.

The first natural attraction on the way today is Mount Malinovaya is also not without its significance for my route and for the Southern Urals as a whole. We can safely say that this is the southernmost classic rocky South Ural glacier in my opinion. It is overgrown with taiga, covered with not yet abundant, but already valuable kurums, with spectacular cliffs towering over the forest.

Importantly, this mountain is one of the most accessible. Exaggerating a bit, we can say that Malinovaya is a home mountain for the whole city of Beloretsk . From its outskirts to its top is no more than 8 km, from the surrounding villages –

Kunguz-Akhmerovo and Otnurok – about 5 km, which makes Malinovaya one of the easiest and most accessible ways to explore our mountains. It was also the first peak of my eldest daughter Ekaterina, who climbed it at 5 months old.

Of course, there are downsides to the popularity of these places, and if it's easy to clean up the trash, then the inscriptions are the real problem. Unfortunately, in the 21st century, a stupid human hand is still being raised to leave its incompetent writings on the rocks. How interesting the story sometimes unfolds! A few days ago,



Writings of wild people on the top of Malinovaya mount

we walked under the dark arches of the Kapova cave, admired the cave paintings of ancient man, and it was the epitome of high culture and progress of the Stone Age, and today I stand on top of the mountain on a stone inscribed with a modern man, and this is a monument to lack of culture. Well, let's fix these people in the centuries, because that's exactly what they wanted people to see and know about their visit to these rocks. Dima Ch., Nizaev D., Sanya B., don't thank you for messing up at the top.

After Malinovaya, it's a long drive through the forest roads, through the village The journey to Yalangas mountain, kilometers, familiar and well-traveled dozens of times, flew by unnoticed during a friendly conversation. The top of the mountain is a small rock towering over the forest, with a beautiful view of the giant Big Yamantau,

still covered with snowfields. We hugged and parted, finally I was alone again. As I've already started to want it.

In anticipation of the evening, without stopping, I set up a tent a few dozen meters from the top with a secret view of the mountains, one of the most beautiful in these places. In my opinion, the main problem of many tourists is the unwillingness to leave the beaten path, and it plays a particularly cruel joke on climbers at the top of Yalangas. Most of those who climb it are limited to the view from the highest point. They look around, admire the scenery in the distance and go back down, but if they went further, they would add just a little bit to their route. climbing and walking on the rocks, they would discover the southern tip of the mountain, crowned with rock towers against the background of the three peaks of Malinovaya and Kireli. One of the most beautiful mountain views in this part of the Urals. That’s why I came here at sunset.

Once I was comfortable, I immersed myself in preparing the news. I had to write two publications: the usual one, at the end of the day, in the late afternoon, but first about the charity fundraiser – an important story of my route, the story of which I purposefully delayed all these twelve days, waiting for when I reached the area of Malinovaya mount.

It all started about a month before the start of the route. When I formulated my goals and objectives, I realized that I wanted to add a charity story to them, which would fit very logically into the expedition. The only problem was that I had never encountered such projects, and I didn't have enough time and energy for anything. But as often happens, if you want something and you're thinking about it, fate starts giving you options. One day I got a call from a good friend of mine Vladislav Litvinchuk, athlete and organizer of sports events – the man who recreated the Ufa International Marathon. He called me asking if I would like to add a charitable component to the expedition, if so, he can advise me on who to contact, he already has extensive experience combining sports events with charity. Of course, yes!

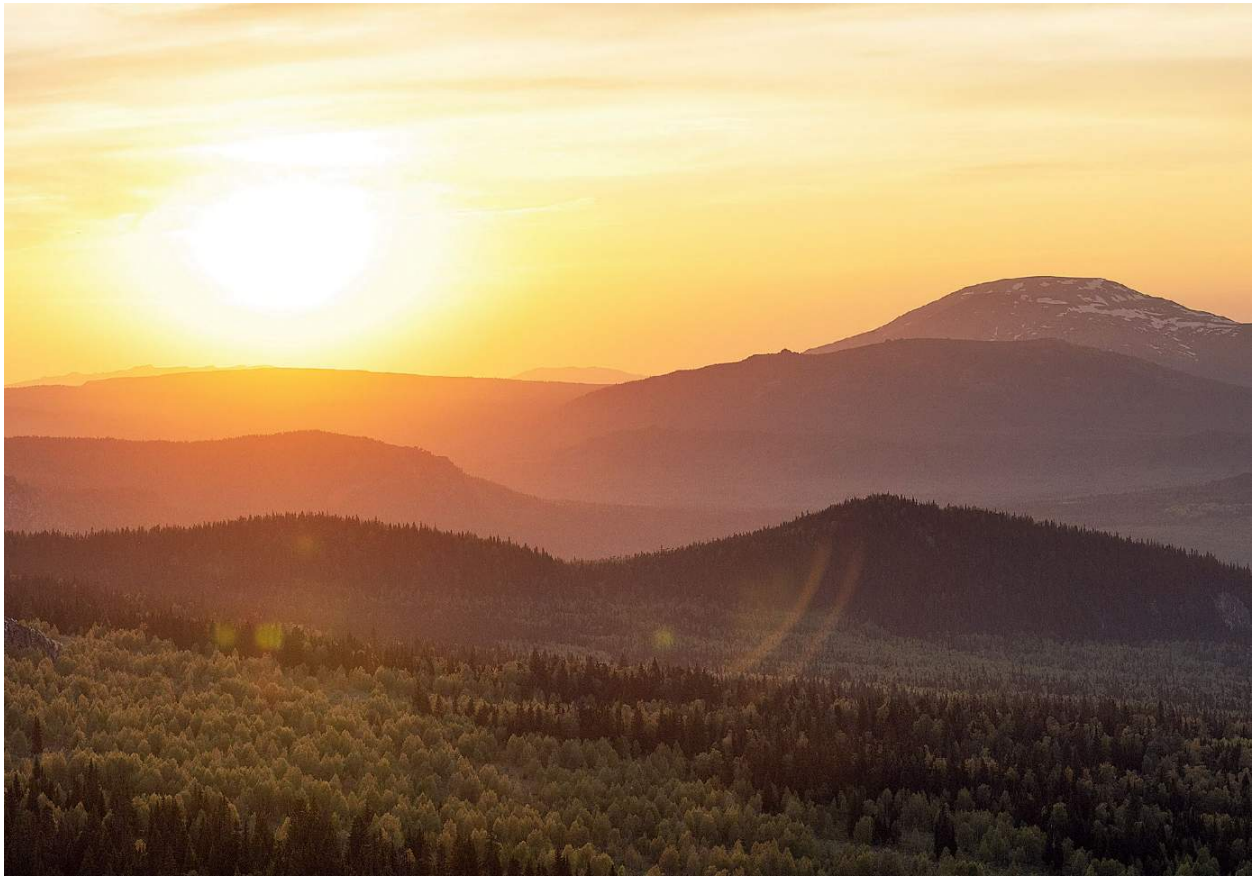
A few days later, I visited the Marhamat Charitable Educational Foundation. I got acquainted with his activities, and even came out with a short story about the

Urals for kids and their parents. When we were all gathered in the hall, I asked the children if they knew what the Ural Mountains were. Only one boy raised his hand. And then the idea was born to create a project, to take the children and their parents to a summer camp at one of the mountain camp sites. In the area of just these places, the Malinovaya, Yalangas, Kirel mountains.

This practice of socializing wards in the educational foundation has existed for a long time, but it always took place down on the plain, and this time it was decided to show the children the mountains. It was supposed to be not just a vacation trip, but a real educational event, with teachers and classes. As the foundation told me, this is a very important event for their wards, who are very limited in their knowledge of the world of children. If you constantly and purposefully engage with these children from an early age in special programs, sometimes individually, many of them they can become more successful and more independent and find their place in society.

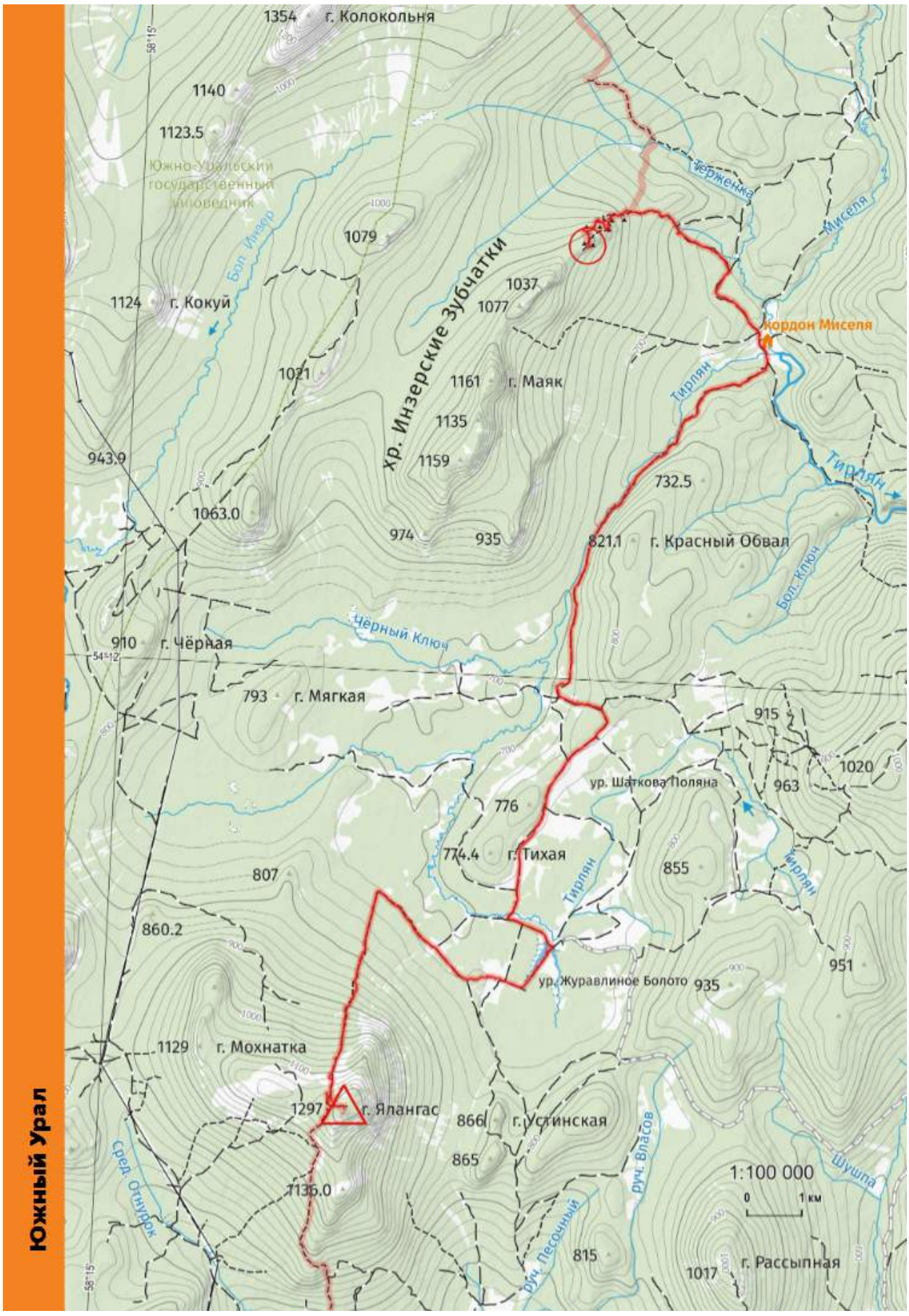
We have created a crowdfunding project on a special website to raise funds for this event. I posted a link on the project's page, but I haven't told the audience about it yet. It seemed to me that it would be logical and important to show the beauty of the surrounding mountains, the places where the children would go if my friends helped them with this. And that day has come. I wrote and published the information, and now all I had to do was wait and see how the money was going to be raised.

And on the cliff, time was slowly but inexorably moving towards evening. Rain clouds rolled around me, rumbled, flashed across the horizon like lightning, and ran away. A warm breeze blew across my face. After dinner, I sat and chatted over an ocean of fresh greenery with my new fresh sneakers. The first shoe change took place today. I sent the old ones to Tatiana Sergeyevna, she will give them to repair – to sew the skin on the upper part in the area of the bend of the fingers, the place that always tears first. And then he will send you back to the route. They will still serve.



Bolshoy Yamantau mountain at sunset

The sunset was beautiful, and the sun sank like a huge disk at the foot of the mountain. The great Yamantau. The yellow-orange sunset light flooded the numerous ridges lined up in rows. The ones closest to me were darker, and as they got farther away, they became more transparent, weightless, and somewhere on the horizon they completely disappeared into the sky of the same color. After saying goodbye to the departed sun, I also went to my reliable rag house. I regret to say that my expectations about the view from the mountain were not fully satisfied.



The Southern Urals

Kolokolnya m. *South Ural State Nature Reserve*

Kokuy m.

Terzhenka r.

Miselya r.

Bolshoy Inzer r.

Kordon Miselya

Tirlyan r.

Mayak m.

Inzerskie Zubchatki ridge

Krasny Obval m.

Chernaya m.

Myagkaya m.

Cherny Klyuch r.

Bolshoy Klyuch r.

Shatkova Polyana tr.

Tikhaya m.

Zhuravlinoe Boloto tr.

Mokhnatka m.

Ustinskaya m.

Yalangas m.

Rassypnaya m.

Shushpa r.

Vlasov stream

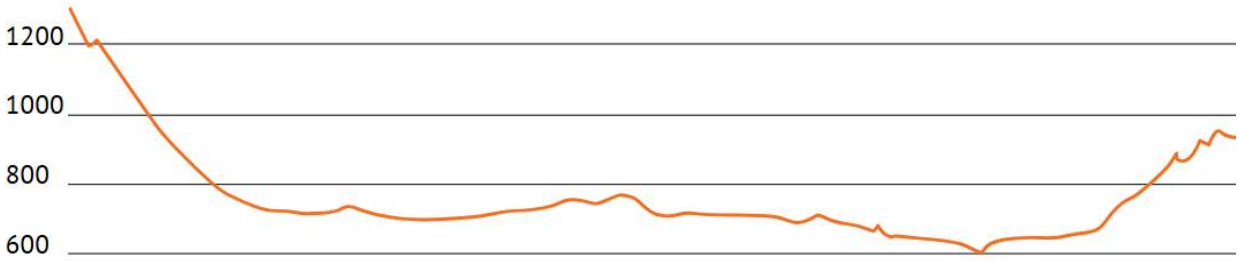
Pesochny stream

Sredniy Otnurok stream

Day 18

Yalangas mountain (1297.9) – Zhurboloto tract – Misel tract – Inzer Zubchatki ridge

32 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 573 km



May 18, 2021

I woke up to the roar of the wind. The tent flap stood motionless, protected by rocks and forest, but above them, in the crowns, the wind was blowing with might and main. It was very cozy to lie in a warm, dry sleeping bag and listen to this deep bass song through the morning half-sleep. And I didn't want to unbutton the zipper and let the fresh morning air into my cozy world... But the Urals will not pass by itself.

These days, many people ask me the same question: why don't I go through the main peak of the Southern Urals, Yamantau mountain, because I had not been disturbed by its protected status before. That's right, I've been there many times, because you can't just close the highest peak, but as the years go by, and I must admit, my attitude towards violating the protected regime is changing along with their running. For the last couple of years, I've been trying not to violate it at all, even if there are fewer traces after my presence there than after people who are called to protect his peace. And to be honest, within the framework of the trans-Ural During the expedition, it is much more important for me to walk along the Bolshaya Yuzhnouralskaya trail and give an impetus to its visit by followers than to broadcast to the whole world the violation of the protected regime and the “most secret mountain” of Russia.

After leaving the tent, I “turned on the photographer”, ran along the rocks, filmed the dawn. More precisely, there was no sunrise today as the moment the sun came out from behind the edge of the earth's surface, there was a strip of dark clouds

on the horizon. But when the sun overcame them and still appeared above the earth 's surface, a very beautiful and coveted moment came: the rock towers of Yalangas were illuminated with a beautiful clear yellow light, and I finally got the photo I wanted in the book. Great, I haven't covered a meter yet, but the day has already passed for good reason.





View from Yalangas mountain

After breakfast, I admired the view from the top for the last time, and in the clear morning air, the path for the next few days was clearly visible – all the way to Mount Iremel. I looked at those distant peaks, lost in the blue, and I felt a little uneasy: how much I had to walk in these three or four days, and how much more after that! In order to get rid off from my soul these nasty heavy stones of doubt, I focused on setting up a camp. It's better not to think about such things too much at all. I have a plan for the day, that's what I'm thinking about. But there's not much to think about

the rest of the days. It makes sense, it's enough to remember that you have a clear plan for them, so clear that you don't have to worry about it yet.

The morning magic continued in the forest, as if I had fallen into a fairy tale: in the end, firs and firs appeared en masse – something I had been waiting for for so long. My favorite dark coniferous forests. Lichens – Usnea barbata – swayed slightly on the branches, carpets of moss covered the kurums, the air was filled with the freshness and aromas of the forest, and the sun, breaking through the crowns of the trees with individual rays, created some kind of particularly joyful atmosphere. Going down the mountain, I enjoyed the moment.

But the happiness and peace were short-lived, and I suddenly found myself in the trash at the bottom. The lumberjacks who worked here in the winter abandoned everything: and some of the sawn wood, and all your work and household garbage. It is especially disappointing that all this is concentrated where a small stream with cold and delicious water flows between the roots of century-old fir trees, in the depths of the kurum. There are no words, only six months separate my visits to this place – and such different emotions. I remember last fall lying on a soft forest floor, leaning on a backpack, resting, drinking water. And now I didn't even want to stand in the middle of this mess. Oh, Russian man, why don't you give a damn about your land?



The garbage dump left by the woodcutters



Yalangas mountain from Zhuravlinoe boloto tract

The road went on and led me to Zhuravlinoe boloto, or Zhur- boloto, as the name is often abbreviated. Many people believe that this is one of the most picturesque places in the area, it's hard not to agree with this assessment, but not in the midst of a windy spring day. The hope of a beautiful reflection of mountains and forests in dark peat water was not fulfilled. There were ripples on the lake. For the second time that day, I remembered last autumn: how I admired the golden forest, the gloomy pointed fir trees and the Yalangas, which rose above me and immediately fell under my feet as a reflection in the lake. Life was once bustling here, irrigation canals were laid, peat was mined, and the train workers hummed and puffed as they dragged their wagons along the narrow-gauge railway. And now there's silence. Nature takes its toll sooner or later anyway, canals are overgrown, bridges and watercourses are destroyed, the embankment of the narrow lake is eroded.

After Zhur- boloto, the forest road passed under Tikhaya mountain and finally ended at the ford across Tirlyan river. Without crossing to its left bank, he went into the forest, onto a marked path. It seems that this is the standard that we would like to see in our mountains.



Continuous logging in the area of Misel tract

A neat forest path wound along the high bank of the river, below, twenty meters away, the water was rustling, above, in the windows that periodically opened among the forest, there was a glimpse of the Inzerskie Zubchatki, the stitch was surrounded by tall stately trees. Oh, if all the hiking trails we had were like that, what happiness and pleasure it would be, but I knew from experience that very soon I would get on the opposite road, and the pleasure I felt was tinged with sadness.

Another disappointment came even earlier than expected: the trail ended, and I went out to the site of the forest genocide – the winter logging. It's a depressing sight: everything has been cut down and taken away, there are just smooth clearings, without a single tree, mixed into the sawdust mud. But until recently, the Great South Ural Trail passed through here. How can you even plan any organized hiking trails if they change beyond recognition in just six months? And not for the better.

But this logging, as it turns out, was just the beginning. After crossing the Tirlyan river and passing by the Misel tract, I came across an intimidating sign: “Passage is prohibited. Felling the forest.” And behind it, the open spaces of the cuttings parted. And this is right in the middle of the main road leading to one of the iconic tourist ranges of the Southern Urals. It's mind-boggling! Where thousands of people who come to the region aspire to go! What kind of tourism development can

we talk about if all officials, like a mantra, sing a song about attracting guests to Bashkiria and at the same time give permission to cut down forests in places most popular among tourists. I think one of the problems is that all these cabinet dwellers have never been to the mountains and forests of their native land and only judge the tourist potential of the region by beautiful photographs of nature. Well, maybe it's my fault, too, as a nature photographer.

To be honest, when I wrote above about the expectations of the antipode road, I did not expect such logging and industrial activity on the road., It was an unpleasant surprise for me on the trail. Predicting the problems, I had in mind the road to Zubchatki – one might say, the reference problem of the entire Southern Urals. Its essence is simple: in the vast majority of cases, to get to a popular tourist peak, you will have to mix the mud well. Accessibility and a good forest road network, preserved since the last century, play with the tourist infrastructure is making a bad joke. Unfortunately, few people want to walk. 5-10 km to the mountain, everyone wants to get to its foot, and preferably to the top. Year after year, the road is being broken up, the track is deepening, and from year to year it becomes necessary to put even more effort or use more lifting equipment, which destroys the road even more.

The problem is very clearly visible under Zubchatki. They say that a couple of decades ago, in good dry years, it was possible to drive to the ridge in a non-full-drive passenger car, but now it can be difficult to walk along the road. A track filled with liquid mud can be up to a meter deep, sometimes mud occupies the entire space of the road, which forces pedestrians to bypass it through the forest. And if down in the area of logging, this state of affairs can be attributed to the work of large machinery, then the situation does not change much and already on the direct ascent to the rocks, there, where logging equipment does not work. Fans of off-road entertainment perfectly cope with the destruction of the road on their own.



The rutted road to the Inzerskie Zubchatki

Today I was lucky – I walked on a weekday. If it were a weekend, this forest road would be filled with the rumble of machinery, with trucks and all-terrain vehicles going up and down, carrying people up the mountain. I want to call them lazy, but to be fair not everyone is ready to walk a few kilometers through the mud, rather it is a destiny of the chosen ones. I don't see any light at the end of this dirty tunnel, and things will only get worse every year.

And here they are, the long-awaited Inzerskie Zubchatki – one of the important sights of the Southern Urals. It feels unusual to be alone among them. First, I climbed up to the rocks located northwest of the circus. This is a scenic viewpoint, from it one can see the jagged towers, and there is also a wonderful view to the valley of the Bolshoy Inzer River and further, to the Kumardak Ridge. Hikers feel as if they are on a balcony with the best view in this thousand-star hotel. Here I decided to set up the tent, aiming to see the sunset without having to go far.

After that, I decided to go to the rocky circus itself. About four hundred meters along a surprisingly clear path, and here I am already among the pointed pillars, surrounding almost from all sides. I climbed up, the harsh daylight didn't offer much space for photography, so I limited myself to a few photos and forgot about the camera. I just sit at the top, admiring the view. Rocks against the background of fresh

May greenery, the plan for the day is fulfilled, the sun is moving towards the horizon, huge black ants are busy running past me on the warm stones…



View of Inzerskie Zubchatki from the north-west



Inzerskie Zubchatki

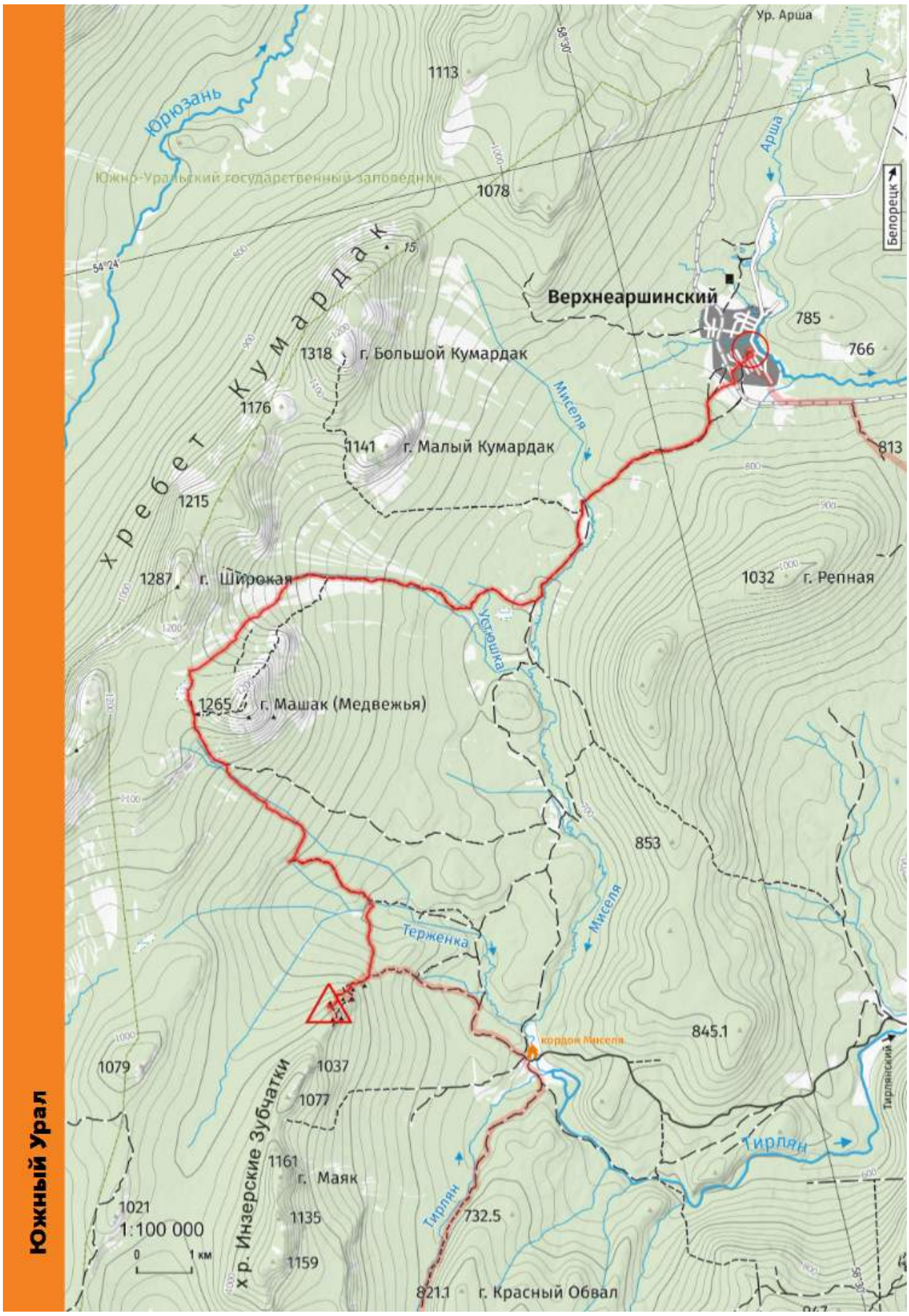
What more do you need to be happy? Only if you have a nice dinner, but that's later, I didn't think to bring my kitchen with me, but I should have. But all in all, it's

good as it is. Only at the bottom, in the valley, you can see massive forest gaps – visible reminders of the unpleasant moments of this day.

But if you look to the south, further along the ridge, you can see more and more rocks. Few people who visit these places go there, but it is no less beautiful there than here. The whole ridge of Inzerskie Zubchatki is covered with beautiful rocks and untouched forest up to its southern tip, and it is unlikely that greedy hands of loggers will reach it, because it is very rugged. Maybe it is good that few people reach the rest of the ridge.

I went to the camp to watch the sunset. Today was a hard day, and it ended with dignity. I sat on the very edge of the cliff with a full pot of stew. The big yellow sun was setting behind the top of the Kolokolnya on the Kumardak ridge. I hope this is not the last Kolokolnya on my journey. How do you know now? I don't. Will I reach the dear Polar Urals? There are many chances to fail, any step on rocks and kurums can be the last, and there are millions of such steps to be made.

When I settled down to sleep, I noted that it turned out a bit rough and not quite flat, but it was beautiful. And this also significantly smoothes and softens the camping bed.



The Southern Urals

Yuryuzan *South Ural State Reserve*

Arsha

Arsha tract

Kumardak Ridge

Bolshoy Kumardak

Maly Kumardak

Verkhnearshinsky

Mount Shirokaya

Mashak mountain (Bear mountain)

Repnaya mountain

Terzhenka

Miselya

Inzerskie Zubchatki ridge

Miselya cordon

Mayak mountain

Tirlian

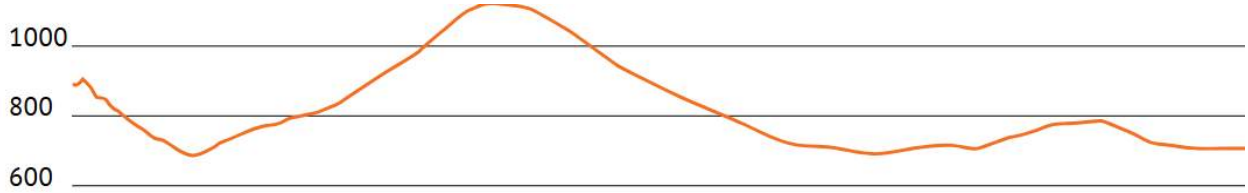
Krasny Obval mountain

Beloretsk

Day 19

Inzerskie Zubchatki Ridge – Shirokaya Stone stream (Kurumnaya River) – Verkhnearshinsky Village

25 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 598 km



May 19, 2021

It feels like morning never came today. Although the clock showed sunrise, the world was immersed in gloom, with heavy, low clouds hanging overhead. Only far to the north, where two mountain ranges meet and the ridge of Bakty rises between them, a narrow light strip free of clouds was visible. I had breakfast and wondered: was it smoke or the long-awaited cyclone? On the one hand, it seems that there is a smell of smoke in the air, on the other hand, moisture is quite clearly felt. Or maybe smoke blew in from the east and rain clouds from the west, everything got mixed up and covered the world with this inky gloom.



Gloomy morning. View towards Mount Iremel

After coming down from the ridge and crossing the Torzhenka River, I got into a chain of numerous streams running through the forest and small kurums. The streams murmured merrily, and the banks, decorated with the first yellow flowers, were pleasing to the eye. Periodically I drank delicious water with pleasure.

In the first half of the day, I planned to climb Mountain Mashak, which stands apart from the Kumardak ridge, at the top there were supposed to be beautiful rocks and a view of one of the largest kurum rivers* of the Urals – the shirokaya stone stream. But, unfortunately, by the time I arrived, the peak was covered with clouds, and there was no hope that it would clear up in the near future. I asked myself if I needed this mountain just for the sake of checking it off, looked at my tired legs and decided not this time.



Water and First Flowers

Instead of climbing the mountain, I decided to go through the high marshes located to the northwest. As I got closer, the slope became gentler, the forest became less frequent and lower, and the ground became softer. Soon the area became completely waterlogged, and the trees became sparse, stunted, and gaunt. It's hard

for them to live in such wet conditions, so they don't grow. A small fir tree, only as tall as a person, could be nearly a hundred years old.

**Kurumnaya River – linearly elongated kurums, similar in shape to riverbeds.*

I walked through the bogs and enjoyed it. There's a certain charm in such places; I've always loved wandering through the Ural mountain swamp. Fortunately, they are shallow, with no quicksand or danger of being dragged. Unfortunately, I'm not the only one who loves these swamps – the area was all torn up by quad bike tracks, and the beautiful natural landscape was ruined by off-road enthusiasts. This place clearly showed why we need the South Ural Nature Reserve. Its border was just a few kilometers away, beyond the Kumardak Ridge, and I had no doubt that all these tracks would have been more than happy to stretch further that way.

After the swamps, I headed towards the kurumnaya river, which was supposed to be the highlight of the day. Back in winter, while planning the route using maps and space images, I looked out its beginning and made a path through it

Soon, I reached a narrow strip of kurum, going down gently with the slope; it was not yet a river, more like a small stream. Only a few meters wide, it appeared in the middle of the forest and wound into the distance. It was hard to believe that in a few kilometers, it would turn into a massive stone flow. I walked along it, even though the forest was clear and easy to pass through, but I couldn't resist jumping from stone to stone. I couldn't refuse the pleasure. I hopped around and was happy that the kurums had finally begun! There's a special joy in walking over stone screens if you know how to do it.

My movements were smooth and constant, without slowing or stopping, as if I were in a continuous free fall. My gaze was focused not on my feet but a few meters ahead, tracking the general path. Where and how to place my foot was mostly decided by my brain without my conscious input, preferring the sharp edges of stones, their horizontal or inclined surfaces, considering the friction on the kurum at that time. Only when my brain signaled that a stone looked potentially dangerous, I looked down and decided whether to step around it or step on it carefully.

For the first 2 km the kurum river “flowed” in a rather narrow channel, sometimes widening to 150 meters or narrowing to 20–30 meters, but gradually, the number of stones became more and more, the firs fringing the banks grew further away from each other, and soon I reached a true stone pool, half a kilometer wide. I could see the peaks of Kumardak on the left, Mashak Mountain on the right, and a powerful stone stream flowing forward and down. Impressive sight! I threw off my backpack, climbed higher and took a few panoramas while balancing on a narrow pointed rock.



Kurumnay River – Shirokaya stone sream

It's a shame that the topic of kurumnaya rivers in the Southern Urals is underestimated. They are not talked about much, few people know about them, few people want to see them, but they are quite original and even unique. And nowhere else in the Urals – and maybe even in the world – there are such long kurums.

The whole territory of the High South Urals is dotted with many kurum rivers and streams, but the main, largest ones are four:

- Tyginskaya Stone River, 6–7 km;
- Bolshaya Stone River (Taganay), 5–6 km;
- Yamano-Shiktashskaya Stone River, 5 km;

- Shirokaya Stone Stream, 4.5 km.

The question of how kurum rivers formed has been on my mind since I first encountered them. I understood how kurums form, but not how they take on a linear, river-like shape. I heard different opinions, the most common were two. The first was that they were the remnants of a glacier. Once upon a time, glaciers flowed down from the Ural Mountains, and they stole the stones in this form, and then melted. I realized this wasn't the case when I saw real glacial traces – both active and retreated. They look completely different, leaving moraines, and the stones don't cover the surface so densely. The second version is gravitational: the mountains eroded, stones fell and rolled down the slope, eventually forming stone flows. This version doesn't fully explain how the stones could roll so uniformly in one direction for many kilometers, forming a narrow channel like a regular river.



I found the answer to my question in spring. It turns out that during snowmelt, stone rivers are very similar to regular rivers. Water flows through them, and thanks to these spring flows, they form. Here's how I understand it: over tens of millions of years, as the Ural Mountains eroded, they filled the surrounding areas with a layer of broken stones. Under the influence of gravity, glaciers, and other factors, the stones

spread out in all directions from the mountains. mountains began to become overgrown with forest, a layer of soil gradually appeared over the kurums, trees grew on it and covered most of the mountains. Only along watercourses and uneven terrain, where water flows down from the mountains, the forest did not grow. Spring waters prevented enough soil from accumulating for trees to grow. This is how stone rivers formed, following the paths of spring water flows. The higher the forest grew, the longer these rivers became. This is why the phenomenon is most pronounced in the Southern Urals, where the mountains are high by Ural standards, and the forest reaches heights of 1200–1300 meters.

After hopping over the stones for about half the kurum flow, I decided not to overdo it and switched to the left bank. I found a thin, marked “Prokhorov” trail winding through the forest and followed it.



The “Prokhorov” Trail

I call this trail “Prokhorov” after Boris Prokhorov, a climber, hiker, and local historian. He came up with the “Thousanders of the Southern Urals”* project, wrote one of the most important modern books about these places – “To the Peaks of the Southern Urals” – and maintained this trail, marking it.

The trail wound through the trees on a gentle slope, with occasional views of the kurum river to the left. I moved almost at a run, shouting and tapping my trekking sticks for prevention. Visibility was limited, and it would have been easy to run into a bear, so I tried to warn about the approach in advance. I turned, tapped my sticks again, shouted: “Hop, hop, hop!” – and then suddenly from the woods someone answered: “Hop-hop!” I stopped dead in my tracks, wondering if I had imagined it. A few moments later, a guy with a backpack appeared between the trees. I looked closer – it was an old acquaintance, Mikhail Usanov from Beloretsk! It turned out he had studied my planned route and decided to intercept me at the top of Mount Mashak, but I had unexpectedly passed by. And the race was on. He said if he hadn't heard my shout, we wouldn't have met. We walked on together, having a pleasant conversation, and the road, which was so fast and easy to get under our feet today, accelerated completely. I didn't notice how I found myself in the village of Verkhnearshinsky, where after some thought, I decided to stay the night at a small, completely empty tourist lodge on a weekday.

**“Thousanders of the Southern Urals” – a hiking project that requires climbing all the peaks of the Southern Urals above 1000 meters.*

In the evening before sunset, I walked around the village. The sun was setting behind the Kumardak ridge, filling the valley with a soft, pleasant light, in which the numerous ruined houses of the village looked even sadder. Yes, Verkhnearshinsky is experiencing not the best of times, there have been better days in its history. Once here, in this taiga dead end, lived about three thousand people, there was a factory and a quarry, trains of the Beloretsk narrow gauge railroad passed by every day. But time and economic reforms of the 1990s did not spare the village. Now it is inhabited by no more than 200 people, in the middle of the village there are a lot of old ruined houses or just wastelands with evident foundations.

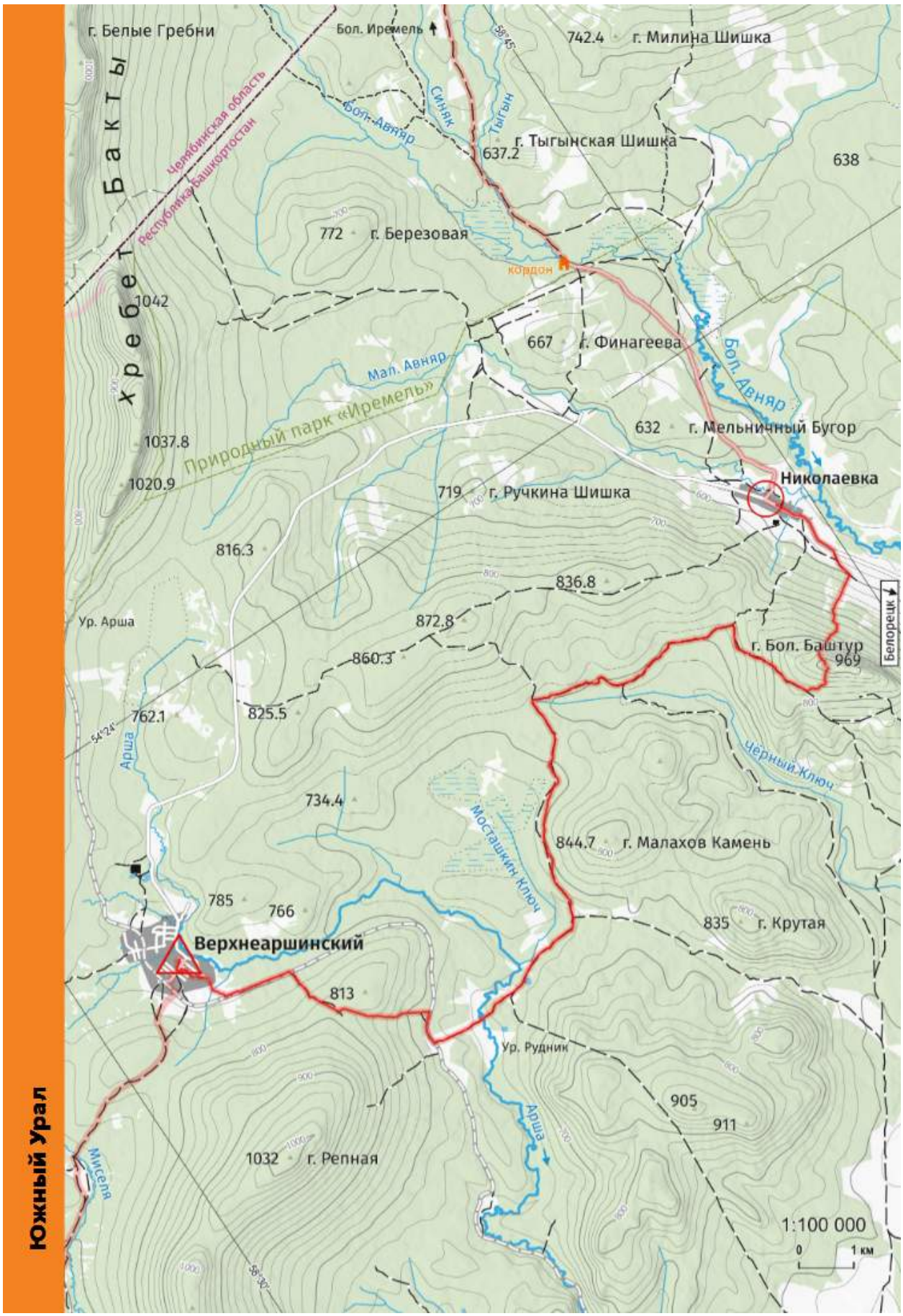
However, it should be noted that in recent years there has been a trend towards the development of the village, more and more people from nearby cities are buying land here and building summer houses. And they can be understood, it is a very quiet and beautiful place, surrounded by mountains and forests. Tourist camps are starting

to open, because the flow of visitors is growing every year, since Verkhnearshinsky is one of the most important entry points to the mountains of the Southern Urals. Routes to the Kumardak, Mashak, Inzerskie Zubchatki, Bakty, Yamantau mountain start from it. It is possible to come here at any time of the year by an ordinary car, which is very important. Many times I came here, left the car and went to my routes, there is something to remember.

I went to bed just after sunset, with the intention of getting out early, even before sunrise.



Sunset in Verkhnearshinsky settlement



South Urals

Belie Grebni Mountain

Bolshoy Iremel

Milina Shishka Mountain

Chelyabinskaya oblast'

The Republic of Bashkortostan

Bakty Ridge

Bolshoy Avnyar

Sinyak

Tygyn

Tygynskaya Shishka Mountain

Berezovaya Mountain

Cordon

Maly Avnyar

Finageeva Mountain

Iremel Nature Park

Melnichny Bugor Mountain

Ruchkina Shishka Mountain

Nikolaevka

Arsha tract

Bolshoy Bashtur Mountain

Cherny Klyuch

Malakhov Kamen Mountain

Krutaya Mountain

Verkhnearininsky

Rudnik tract

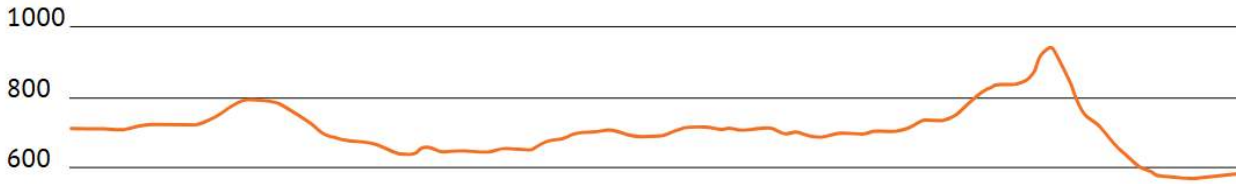
Repnaya Mountain

Miselya

Day 20

Verkhnearshinsky village – Rudnik tract – Bashtur mountain (969) – Nikolaevka village

26 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 624 km





Foggy sunrise over Verkhnearshinsky

May 20, 2021

How good it is to spend the night up in the mountains: you can see far away, and the sunrise is all yours, and it is warmer. It was with such thoughts that I met the dank, cold, fog-filled morning among the dark, shabby houses of Verkhnearshinsky. I got up at 4:30, had a quick breakfast and ran ahead. I spent about thirty minutes waiting for the sun, which still did not want to appear from behind the mountain. On the surrounding peaks it had been day long ago, but here, in the valley, it was still night. I was freezing. But I took a good atmospheric photo of the slowly dying village.



View of the Iremel massif from Mount Bashtur

Having finished with the photos, I rushed forward, only movement can warm up the feet frozen in the icy dew. The first part of the way passed along the former Beloretsk narrow railroad embankment. Once small taiga workers had been puffing here for almost 100 years, breathing life into the neighboring territories. Verkhnearshinsky village itself was a large station (87th kilometer) and lived thanks to the railroad, until the mid-1980s there was no highway connecting it with Beloretsk, but in the early 2000s the narrow track was liquidated as unprofitable. Boris Prokhorov described it very well in his book mentioned yesterday. With great love and pain he described the history of life and death of the narrow railroad. Unfortunately, I did not see it in operation, but I remembered the straight and level embankment on the side of the road a few years ago.

Loggers working on the slopes of Repnaya Mountain used the road to transport wood, smashed it with heavy machinery, and then left. The forest was cut down, sold, profit was made, and what then, God forbid... We had to constantly bypass huge puddles through muddy, dirt detours. In order not to knead the mud, I

cut over the shoulder of the mountain, though with a gain in height, but on dry and clean ground.



There had once been a small settlement on the site of the Rudnik tract, but now there were vast fields with traces of life. Somehow it is hard to imagine that here, among the mountains, life was boiling, it is so peaceful and quiet around. The civilization retreated from the Urals, rolled away to the big cities and plains, and nature immediately began to erase the footprints of human presence. And I see evidence of this all the time. Many tracts on the map show that people used to live where only bears roam nowadays, and they climbed into the harshest and wildest corners. But as soon as the power that held people together weakened, the farmsteads surrounded by kurum peaks became empty, and in a couple of decades they completely ruined. And it seems that the reverse process is not expected in the near future.

After the Rudnik tract, I walked through the forests and vast meadows to Mount Bashtur, not the highest but an important tourist peak in the area with a very convenient location. The three highest mountain agglomerations of the Southern Urals can be admirably seen from it in a semicircle. Bolshoy Yamantau – Bolshoy Iremel – Bolshoy Shelom and, of course, many other peaks and ridges. A kind of

observation tower. Especially good view opens on Iremel, it is the closest, and the village Nikolaevka, located between the observation tower and the mountain.



Rina and Airat at the walls of the future visitor center

It was already the middle of the day, and the surrounding mountains were lost in the blue haze, I wish I could be here at sunrise. Yesterday I stayed in the village for nothing, I thought uneasily. I estimated the direction of sunrise, no, it's alright. It's not a good time, the sun rises in the morning to the right of the mountain. It will not be possible to fit it into the composition of Iremel. But in a month, in the second half of June, it can be done. I have marked the idea of another route for myself. I hope, however, that it will be at least for next year. And I went down to Nikolaevka, to visit Rina Greenberg.

The path down from the top was quite steep and rugged with rocks and fallen trees. I half-run along it, because it was even more difficult to walk on such a slope, and only at the last moment I noticed something black and wriggling between my sneakers. I passed by inertia, stopped, turned around, and looked at it. Yes, that's it: a viper, hastily crawling away from me in the other direction. An unpleasant, very close contact is probably one of the most dangerous moments of the route. And

though the bite of a viper inhabiting the Urals is usually not fatal for a healthy adult, it can cause a lot of trouble. However, for years of traveling in the mountains I haven't had so many contacts with these black creatures, and, probably, today's one was the closest. Slightly slowing down, I went to Nikolaevka and found house number 61, where they were already waiting for me.

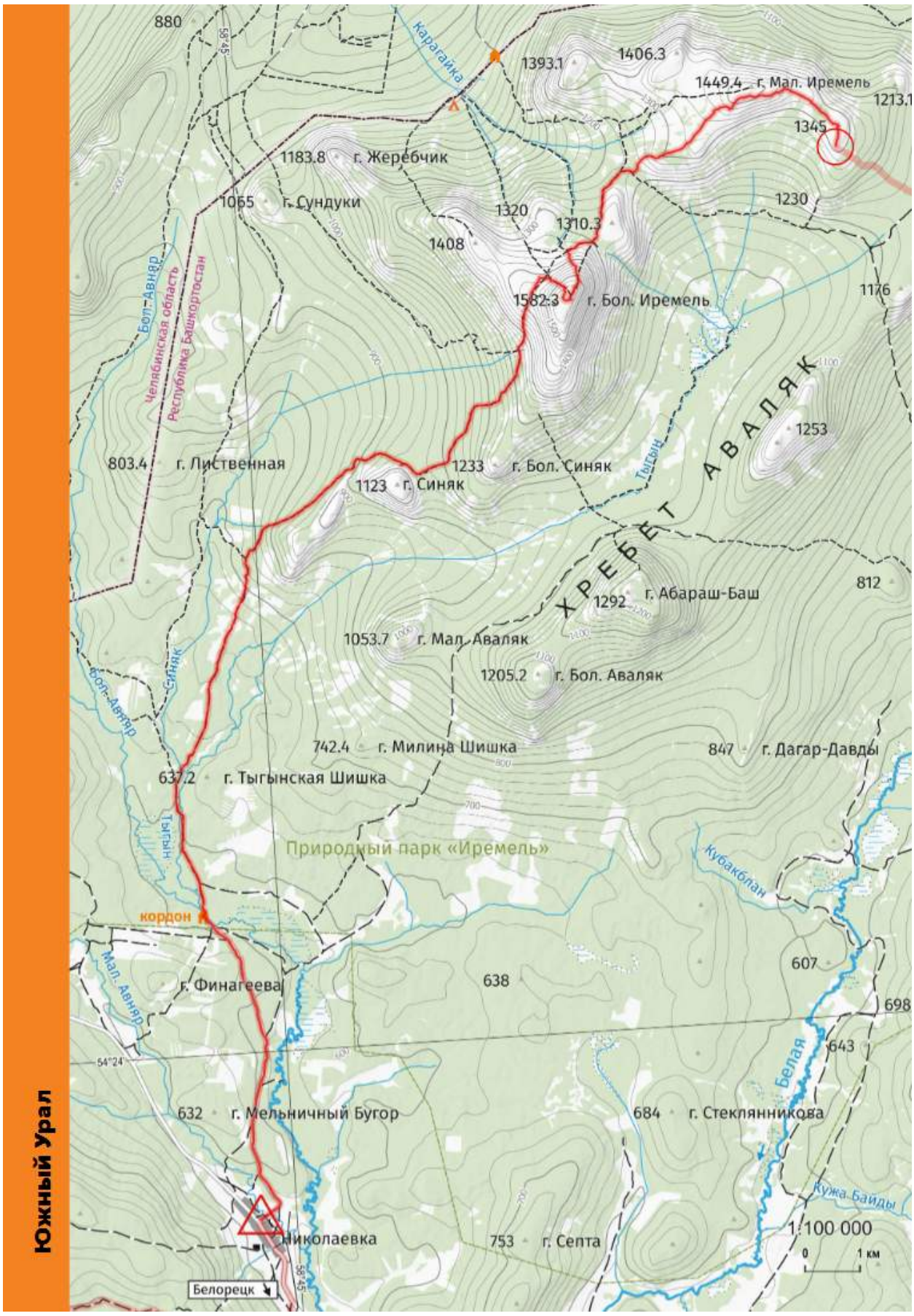
Here Rina and Airat, a family from Ufa, who decided to open a small tourist base and are working on its construction, have my package for the sixth stage of the Nikolaevka – Taganai route. Here I planned to spend the rest of the day, have a break and wash in the bathhouse. The guys showed me the construction site, and I was very impressed with the old log cabin with a natural stone wall, according to the documents the building is about 100 years old. They plan to restore it and place a private visitor center there. I think this is a great idea that could make the route to Iremel through Nikolaevka more popular and bring it out of its current poor condition.



Nikolayevsky horses

The rest of the day was spent relaxing, talking and consuming calories. In the evening, before sunset, I took pictures of Nikolaevsky horses grazing outside the neighborhood. Everything was fine, and only one moment was disturbing: a column

of smoke rising above the forest in a southeastern direction. It was one of the many wildfires blazing in the South Urals. I haven't written about it yet, but the situation is very tense, it's not even summer yet, and the forests are already closed to the public, the Iremel Nature Park is also closed and doesn't accept tourists. I had to individually negotiate and obtain permission to pass through its territory, which was given on condition of strict observance of fire safety norms. However, my position on bonfires is known to everyone, so it was not difficult to convince the officials to comply with all the required standards.



South Urals

Karagayka

Maly Iremel Mountain

Mount Zherebchik

Mount Sunduki

Bolshoy Avnyar

Chelyabinskaya oblast'

The Republic of Bashkortostan

Mount Listvennaya

Mount Sinyak

Bolshoy Sinyak Mountain

Tygyn

Avalyak Ridge

Abarash-Bash Mountain

Maly Avnyar Mountain

Bolshoy Avnyar Mountain

Milina Shishka Mountain

Dagar-Davdy Mountain

Mount Tygynskaya Shishka

Iremel Nature Park

Cordon

Mount Finageyeva

Kubakblan

Melnichniy Bugor Mountain

Steklyannikova Mountain

Nikolaevka

Septa Mountain

Kuja Baidy River

Belaya River

Day 21

Nikolaevka village – Bolshoy Iremel mountain (1582,3) – eastern edge of the Maly Iremel mountain massif (1449)

34 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 658 km



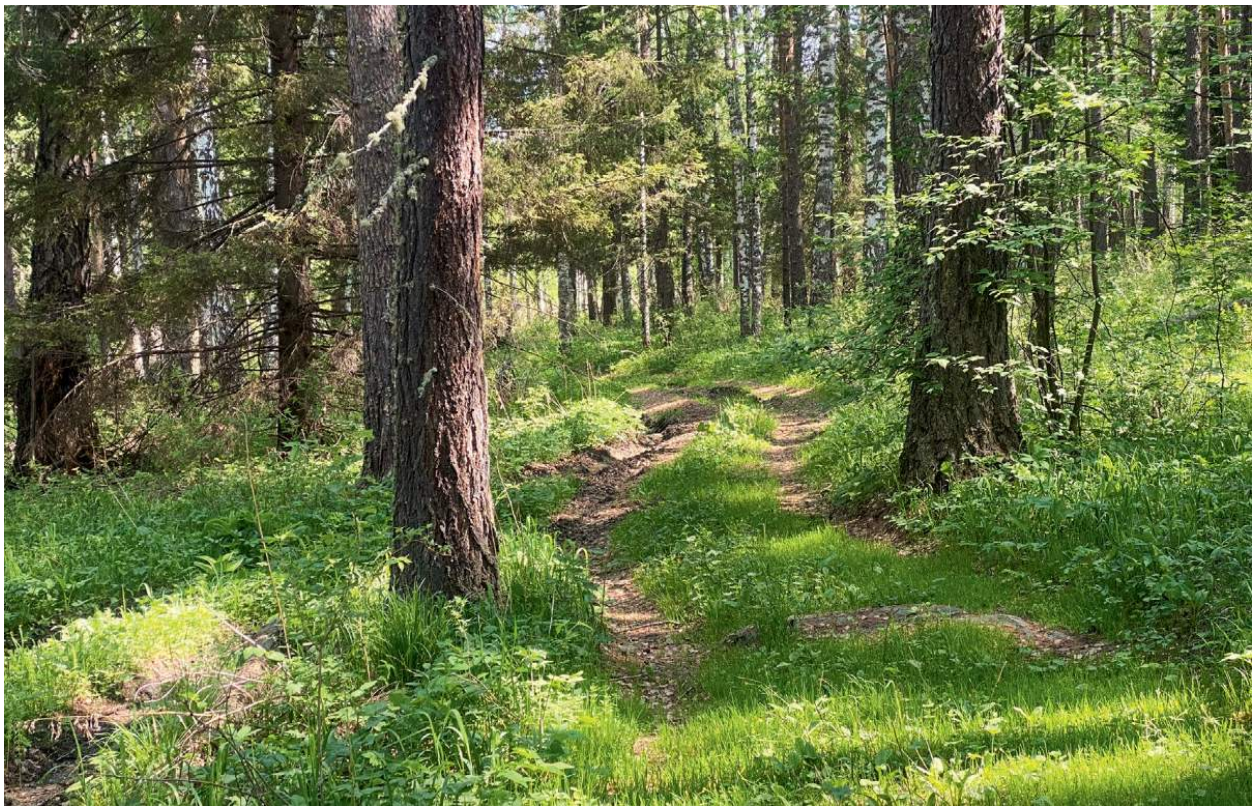
May 21, 2021

And it's cold down in the intermountain valleys below, again the temperature dropped toward zero by morning. Since I stayed the night in the yard, under the awning, the process of climbing out of the sleeping bag early was invigorating. But it was definitely worth it. The mountains led by Iremel, as if dipped in amber syrup, floated above the dark wall of the forest. At this early hour the world was divided into two opposite parts: the upper one – filled with light and color, warm and clear, the lower one – gloomy and cold, with whitish clouds of fog, fluttering to the ground, and sleeping dark huts, staring indifferently at nowhere with curtained windows. And only I was somewhere between these worlds, like a guide from one to the other.



Getting on the route

I am a lucky man after all, countless sunrises and sunsets have been seen through my eyes, but every time it is still as exciting and thrilling as the first time. How many people in a waking village now have thrown back the covers from their windows and are fascinated by the morning? I think not, the ability to take your eyes off the routine of life and look at the beauty of the world is a gift that is not given to everyone, but it can be developed in yourself. I try to bring it up in my children, to teach them to see and feel the beauty of the moment. I always draw my eldest daughter's attention to perhaps insignificant, but beautiful natural phenomena: a ray of light breaking through the clouds; the sun rising and splashing bright color on the horizon; a lonely flower breaking through the asphalt.



Road to Iremel

I left Nikolaevka at six o'clock in the morning, heading for Iremel. This part of the route is probably the most known to me along the whole route, I have walked along it more than ten times, and it can't surprise me a lot. Here is a garbage dump at the exit from the village – I remember two years ago we went with a TV group to shoot a program about the problems of tourist infrastructure, we filmed it too. After

all, you must agree, it is rather stupid to place a dump right at the entrance to the most popular nature park in the region. There was a lot of talk and discussion then, but time has passed, and the dump has not gone anywhere, only grown even bigger and continues to welcome visitors.

However, not everything is not so bad, there are positive changes. Walking along the Nikolaevskaya trail, I knew that three cold spring fords across the Bolshoy Avnyar, Tygyn and Sinyak rivers were waiting ahead of me. And I was surprised that there were bridges across the two main and most full-flowing streams. And although they are not stationary, intended for low water, but still it was pleasant and unexpected.

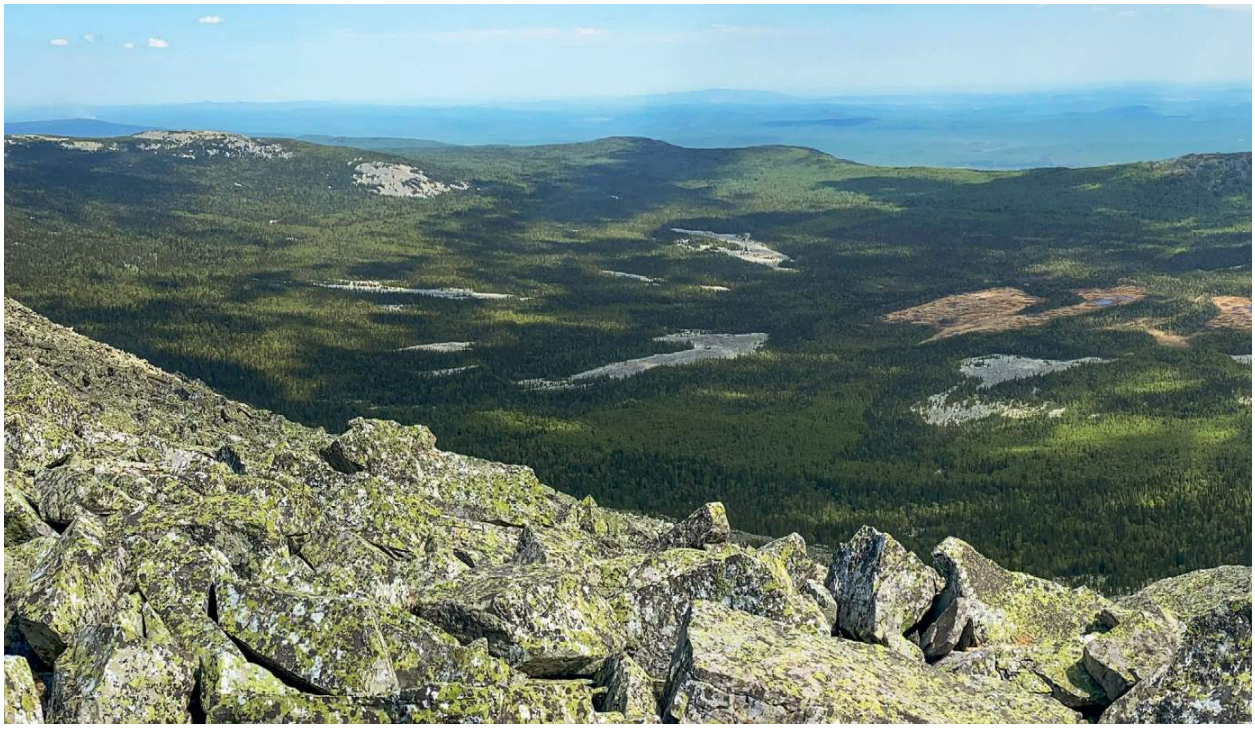
I went off the well-traveled path leading to the peak once and could not deny myself the pleasure of climbing the slope of Mount Sinyak (1067.7) – another, in my opinion, monument to human limitations. A lot of people pass at the foot of this peak, they go for beautiful views, on Iremel, but they pass by not less beauty, not daring to step 100 meters away from the path, and it is worth it. It takes only a few minutes uphill to see Iremel in all its magnificence. I think this is one of the nearest views of the mountain, closer and more majestic only from the Avalyak Ridge. Like an island, it rises above the ocean of forest. And if you spend twenty or thirty minutes and climb to the top of Mount Sinyak, you will find a real treasure: a rocky town with streets and towers, lost in the taiga, from which you can see even more of the Ural beauty and the Tygynskaya kurum river flowing on the opposite slope of the mountain. But people pass by it again and again, striving for the highest peak, naively believing that it is the most breathtaking view from it.

My experience says otherwise: the most beautiful view is usually from a small mountain under the shadow of a giant, because it is the one that is most beautiful and charismatic.

Climbing up the kurum slope of Sinyak, I clearly smelled smoke, the fire was somewhere close. But no matter how much I looked into the open part of the mountains, I could not see smoke anywhere. Somehow I felt uneasy, whether the fire would not interfere with the route. This is the question that has been bothering me for

several days now. Having come down to the trail, I went up even more quickly. Without stopping for the remaining kilometers through the forest, I flew up to the Iremel shoulder. I looked around. The smoke of the fire was still not visible.

I took a breath, lay down on the sun-heated tundra, surrendered to the wind and vastness. The path I had traveled is below, and a green path is winding up the tundra ahead. It is interesting that the trampled path is already green, while the surrounding tundra is still faintly yellowish. Apparently, there is some more hardy and different grass growing under people's feet than around them. Maybe it was brought here on the soles of boots from other places. I heard that there is such a problem on the Manpupunyur Ridge: numerous tourists coming from different parts of the world unknowingly bring seeds of plants that do not grow in the Urals to the tundra. Some of them take root and may even displace local species.



For the first time on the entire journey, I felt lonely. Whether it was the scale and the opening expanses that pressed me, or the unfamiliar emptiness, the absence of people on the mountain. It's hard to say, but I clearly felt homesickness and the heavy burden I had put on my shoulders.

Am I alone on the mountain on this beautiful warm sunny day? But no, on the way up I first heard loud music, and I managed to get off the path in time not to meet its source. Three guys came down, talking loudly and discussing some kind of

drinking. The unfortunate encounter spoiled my mood completely and only increased my loneliness.

Here is a vast pre-top plateau with a small rocky outcrop in the distance. Iremel, like all the highest peaks of the Southern Urals, is a dome-shaped kurum giant with a flat, inexpressive peak. It lulls the alertness with its accessibility and simplicity, but that is where one of the main dangers lies. At present, in good weather, seeing numerous landmarks, it is possible to follow the intended path, but when clouds cover the peak and snow falls on the trampled stones, an unprepared or inattentive person loses the direction with astonishing and demoralizing speed. One can walk for a long time along this monotonous kurum plain in search of the place of descent and with a high probability start going down to the wrong place anyway, and here the tragedy is not far away.

To expand on the above thought, a few years ago I formulated three paradoxes of the Southern Urals, which I think allow us to look at our mountains more deeply and perhaps from an unfamiliar angle.



View from the top of Iremel to the Tygynskie bogs

They sound like this:

1. The uniqueness of the Southern Urals lies in its lack of uniqueness.
2. The Southern Urals are safe mountains.

3. The main danger of the Southern Urals is their safety.

Let me briefly explain these three ideas.

“The uniqueness of the Southern Urals lies in its lack of uniqueness,” – this bold and, at first glance, even offensive statement for those who love this part of the Ural Mountains comes from the fact that there is nothing in the Southern Urals that stands out on a national or global scale.

This part of the mountain range doesn’t impress with high or steep peaks. The rivers are beautiful but mostly easy to navigate, and in summer, they often dry up so much that rafting trips turn into hiking routes. The wildlife is not as rich as, say, in the Far East, where there are more bears than people. There is an indigenous national culture, but it’s deeply integrated into mainstream Russian culture – when you visit Bashkir villages, you don’t feel a strong national identity, unlike, for example, reindeer herders' camps in the far north of the Urals or the high-mountain villages of the Caucasus.

The same goes for everything else: there are things to see, but almost always, there’s another place in Russia where you can find something similar – but on a much grander scale. The only exception, perhaps, is the kurum rivers I mentioned earlier. However, in my opinion, this moderation is also the main unique feature of the Southern Urals. Lacking any outstanding manifestations of nature, and in some cases thanks to it, the territory has a unique combination of accessibility, diversity, wildness and safety.

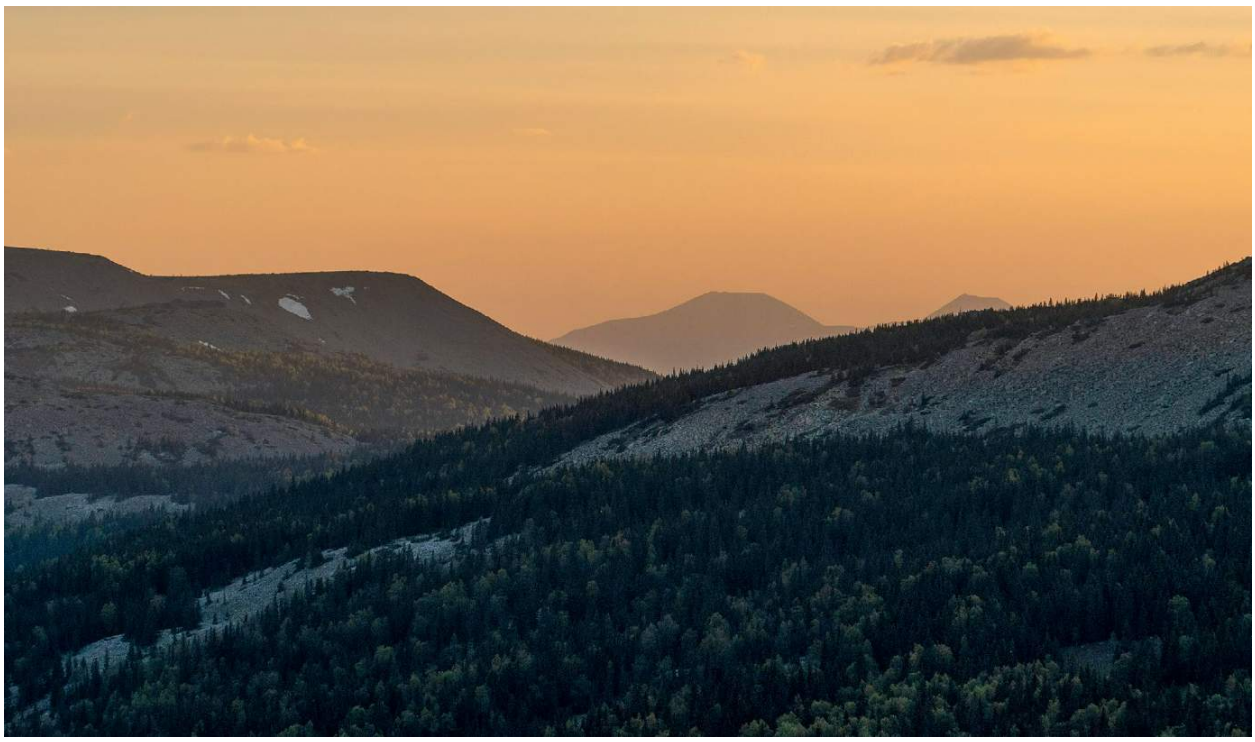
Located on the border between Europe and Asia, the Southern Urals are surrounded by big cities and connected by a dense network of roads, making them one of the most accessible mountain regions in Russia. Yet, this doesn’t stop them from being wild. Within a relatively small area, you can find diverse landscapes, natural zones, and historical sites. Almost every type of tourism is available here – though in its less extreme versions: mountain trekking, hiking, rafting, caving, horseback riding, road trips, cycling, trail running, and more. And, of course, safety!

“The Southern Urals are safe mountains,” – anyone who knows mountains firsthand might frown at such a statement. “Mountains can’t be safe,” they’d argue,

and I'd agree – but everything is relative. Compared to other mountain regions in Russia, the Southern Urals are indeed one of the safest. Again, their "unremarkable" nature plays a role. The mountains aren't high or steep, so avalanches and rock falls are rare. There are no sharp ethnic conflicts. You won't find a bear behind every bush or river bend. The weather is more stable than, say, near the country's coastal borders, and the tall (but not summit-blocking) forest provides quick shelter from bad weather. The dense road network and good mobile coverage add extra safety, allowing for faster rescue operations if needed. That's why I dare to make such a bold claim about the Southern Urals being safe.



Maly Iremel Mountain



Bolshoy Shelolm at sunset

“The main danger of the Southern Urals is their safety,” – but as the flip side of the coin, this very advantage also creates their greatest risk. You’ve probably already grasped how this works from the example of Mount Iremel, and I believe this applies to the entire Southern Urals region. Yes, our mountains are objectively safer than other mountainous areas in the country – but they are still mountains, wild territories with complex relief, and there are more than enough dangers on them. Lulled by the illusion of simplicity, unprepared travelers often fall victim to their own overconfidence. South Ural doesn't look dangerous and periodically reaps its harvest.

So what’s the conclusion? It’s very simple – though not everyone may like it. In my view, the ideal future for the Southern Urals is as a vast, nationwide wilderness park: accessible and engaging for people of all skill levels. For retirees, families with children, and beginner hikers, it could be a place to experience the wilderness while traveling on easy yet interesting, well-maintained trails. For athletes and experienced outdoorsmen, it could serve as a giant open-air training ground. Its accessibility and safety allow people to set ambitious goals and achieve them with minimal logistical hassle – come, hike, and go home.

Of course, this is still a long way off, for the realization of such an idea, first of all, at least minimal tourist infrastructure is needed. Unbroken entrances to the beginning of the routes, parking lots, convenient marked trails, and the absence of loggers on the way of the tourist flow.

In 2021 this unfortunately looks fantastically unrealizable. Only some natural areas enclosed within the boundaries of natural and national parks are an exception. Perhaps it is necessary to expand the network of such specially protected natural sites, including more and more attractions under their protection and care.

At the top among the rocks I found water, got some, cooked lunch. With no need to rush, I spent over an hour there in complete solitude – time was on my side. When would I ever get such an opportunity again? What a joy it is to stand alone atop Iremel! The weather was perfect: clouds drifting overhead, mountains bathed in fresh greenery, the wind humming its eternal tune – and not a single human voice to be heard. The surrounding mountains look quite different, not like, for example, 100 km to the south – they are quite mature, rocky, kurum peaks. If their valleys were to be shifted to each other, and then everything would be serious, and so the wide spaces between the ridges, many times exceeding their height, greatly reduce the size. Then I spotted smoke: a forest fire burning east of the Urenga Ridge, my route for the next two days. Deeply unsettling – the flames could easily spread.

After resting, I went down to the trail and moved to the Maly Iremel massif, on the way up I felt that I had little strength left for today. I have been to the Small Iremel massif five times, and only once I was lucky with weather, but then I didn't take photos. Today I went with a very clear goal – to shoot Bolshoi Iremel from the north-eastern angle, I have photos of the mountain from all directions, except for this one.



Night stay at the eastern end of the Maly Iremel

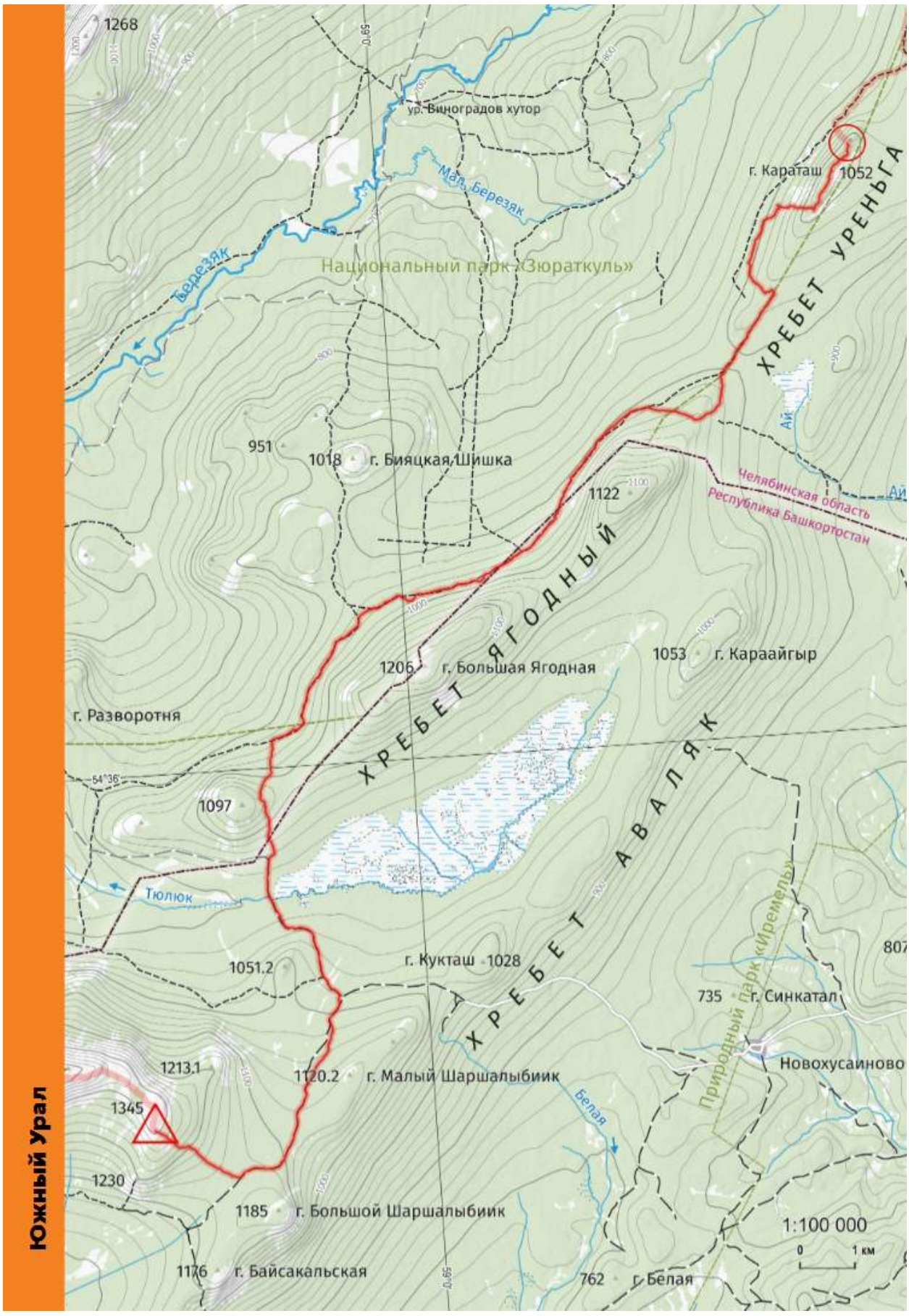


View of the Yagodny, Urenga, Nurgush ridges

I stumbled to the easternmost open part of the mountain, where I dropped my hated backpack. In front of me was quite an interesting and promising view. In the west stood the kurum hulk of the Bolshoi Iremel, its slope visually rested on the tops of the Avalyak ridge, which closed the deep valley from the southeast and east, and inside this circus lay the valley of the Tygyn river, swamps and kurum streams of the Tygyn stone river. Everything was as I wanted, in the evening at sunset the light would most likely be unsuitable, the sun should set behind Iremel, but in the

morning, if there was a sunrise, it should be beautiful. I had to hope for the best and wake up before sunrise.

Despite my exhaustion, after a short rest and dinner, I indulged in my usual folly: grabbing my camera and hopping across the kurums in search of angles, waiting for sunset. An hour before dusk, the light turned soft and golden. I moved to the northern slope, content with views of tomorrow's route along the Yagodny and Urenga Ridges, and neighboring Nurgush. Through a gap between the peaks, I caught the sunset glow on Bolshoi Shelom. That's where I should've been – near Maly Iremel's summit! But it's 2.5 kilometers one way, I can't make it. The vista there must be epic: Shelom peaks framed by Iremel's horseshoe slopes and jagged ridges. A trip for another time. As the last sunlight faded, I crawled into my tent. Tonight would be the first test of my new inflatable sleeping pad – after years of resistance, I'd finally caved and asked for it to replace my foam mat. Rina had handed it over yesterday; tonight, the trial run begins.



The Southern Urals

Vinogradov Khutor tract *R. Maly Bereznyak*

Mt. Katash

R. Bereznyak

Zyuratkul National Park

Urenga ridge

Mt. Biyatskaya Shishka

Yagodny ridge

Mt. Razvorotnya

Mt. Bolshaya Yagodnaya

Mt. Karaaygyr

R. Tyulyuk

Mt. Kuktash

Avalyak ridge

Mt. Sinkatal

Mt. Maly Sharshalybiik

Novokhusinovo

Mt. Bolshoy Sharshalybiik

Mt. Baysakalskaya

Mt. Belaya

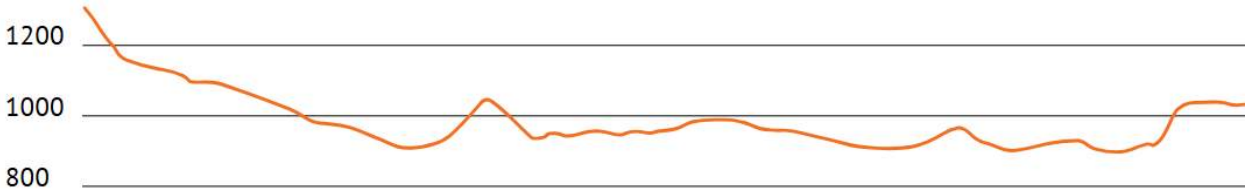
Chelyabinskaya oblast'

Republic of Bashkortostan

Day 22

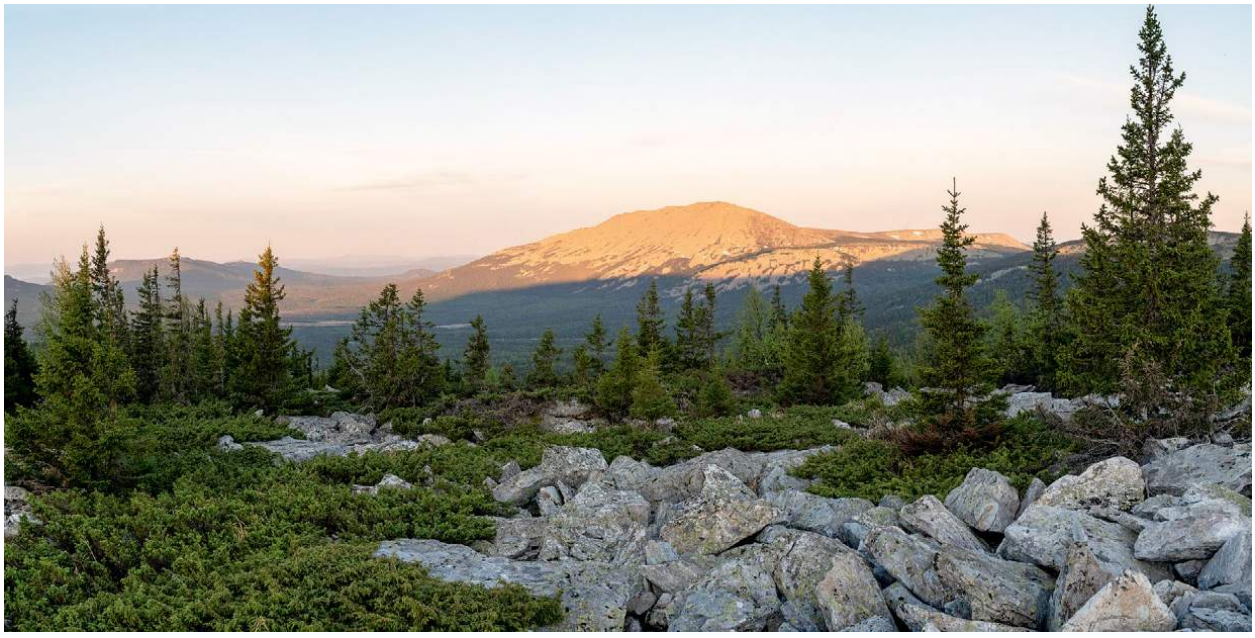
Eastern spur of Maly Iremel mountain massif (1449) – Yagodny ridge – Urenga ridge (Karatash mountain, 1052,8)

33 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 691 km



May 22, 2021

Every day it becomes more and more difficult to get up at dawn: firstly, fatigue accumulates, secondly, the night is shortening, sunset is getting later and dawn is getting earlier, thirdly, I am heading north, towards the polar day. In such a situation, proper tent setup with sunrise delivery to the sleeping bag becomes more and more important every day. Saw the dawn – climbed out. No dawn – roll over on the other side and sleep on. As I wrote yesterday, I got up for the overnight stay with the hope to shoot the missing angle on the Bolshoy Iremel mountain, and on the whole I managed to do it. Dawn was without infernality, in clear sky, the sun rose behind Avalyak and gradually from the top downward illuminated the whole mountain, last of all filling the Tygyn valley with light.



Iremel at sunrise



Descent from the Maly Iremel

Through kurums and forest I descended the mountain to the Novokhusainovskaya road – the third route leading under Mount Iremel. I ran along it to one interesting place not often met in our area – an ancient earthen road* crossing a small but wide kurum stream. As a fragment of the ancient road infrastructure, it survived to the XXI century and continues to work properly, although the road, approaching and departing from it, has long ago turned into a direction in many places. Behind the road went down and led to the ford across the Tyulyuk River. Going to it, I was a little worried about its overcoming, but very hot and stormy spring also helped. There were no problems with the crossing

I want to say a bit more about this small river – it stole my heart long ago and keeps drawing me back. The reason is its ever-changing nature. Upstream, it's calm and marshy, born between the Yagodny and Avalyak ridges. There, it lies almost motionless, reflecting the sky and mountains in the dark mirrors of its lakes. In its middle section, where the slope steepens, it enters a dark forest and rushes cheerfully through a deep channel, surrounded by a dense stand of ancient spruce trees. Then it again comes out into the open space, but it is already rocky, at first flowing parallel to the kurum river, and then diving under it, going underground. A kilometer below it comes out of the stone rubble and, already noisy, small and fast, rashes on stones down through Larkino gorge and Tyulyuk village, flowing into the river Yuryuzan, and all this on 25 km of its length. Having rested for an hour on the river bank, I

climbed up to the Yagodny ridge and the rest of the day walked along the forest road of different quality, crossed to the Avalyak ridge, leaving my native Bashkiria and entered the Chelyabinsk region – the third region on my way. I had already walked in these places once, my navigator has points with springs, so I walked confidently up to the Karatash mountain, not worrying about water.

**Road – a road through a swamp or other difficult place, which is a deck of logs, brushwood, earth.*

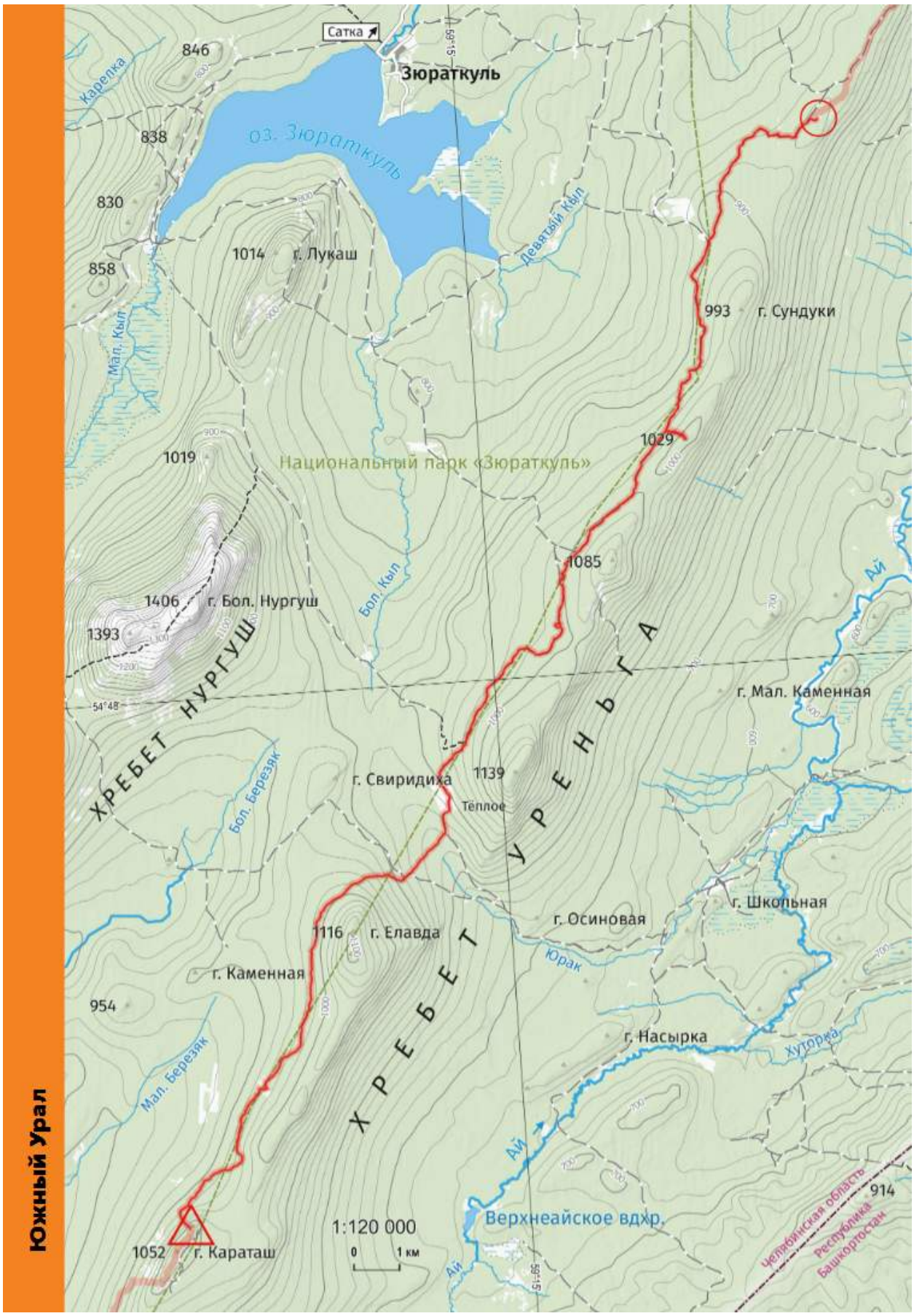
All those years I spent hiking these mountains weren't for nothing – now the hard-earned experience I've gained is incredibly valuable and useful. I remember the summer of 2018: July, scorching heat, the end of the day. I had no water left, no strength, and all around me was thick grass, reaching up to my neck, tangling around my legs, draining the last of my energy. Only one thought filled my mind: water – where to find it in this dry summer, up on the ridge. If I didn't find any, I'd have to go back down to the base, which meant I likely wouldn't have the strength to climb back up to my sunset photo spot today. Pushing through the grass, I found a small clearing with a muddy, trampled puddle-animal tracks everywhere. I tried to scoop water, to dig a hole – nothing worked. I was almost in despair. Thirst and exhaustion clouded my mind. After resting a bit, I forced myself to search a little farther. I dropped my backpack, took a bottle, and looked around. And – a miracle! Just below, my ear caught the faint, musical trickle of water. There it was – a beautiful little stream, cold and clear, hidden in the grass. I drank, filled my bottle, and now I could think about finding a place to sleep. I pushed through the grass toward the mountain, and after a few dozen meters – another stroke of luck: I stumbled onto an animal trail, well-worn and leading exactly where I needed to go. I climbed up – one last bit of luck – and came straight to a cliff with a stunning view, and below it, a flat spot for my tent. This moment taught me an important lesson: life rewards those who keep going, and sometimes, just a few steps separate total defeat from victory.

Today everything is much easier, there is no tall grass, and I know where that saving spring is. Having climbed up to Karatash, I put up the tent and, it seems, slept through the sunset. Apparently, the factors with which I started today's story played a

cruel joke. I decided to lie in my sleeping bag for an hour before sunset and fell asleep. When I woke up, the sun was already down at the edge of the horizon. Having climbed the rock, I recognized the fact that most likely the beauty was over. I went back to sleep.



An earthen path across the kurum river



The Southers Urals

Satka *Zyuratkul*

Mt. Lukash
Maly Kyl river
Devyaty Kyl river
Mt. Sunduki
Zyuratkul National Park
Mt. Bolshoy Nurgush
Nurgush ridge
Mt. Mal. Kamenaya
Mt. Sviridikha
Bolshoy Bereznyak river
Maly Bereznyak river
Karelka river
Mt. Kamenaya
Mt. Yelavda
Mt. Osinovaya
Mt. Shkolnaya
Yurak river
Urenga ridge
Mt. Nasyrka
Khutorka river
Ai river
Verkhneayskoye reservoir
Mt. Karatash
Chelyabinskaya oblast'
Republic of Bashkortostan

Day 23

Urenga ridge (Karatash mountain, 1052,8) – summit 1029 – summit 982,1

37 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 728 km





Morning on the Urenga ridge

May 23, 2021

Second night sleeping on the new inflatable mat, and it seems to have made it even harder for me to get up in the morning. Sleep comfort has increased dramatically and multiplied. It's like I'm at home, on my bed, and so unwilling to open my eyes. Most importantly for me: it greatly expands the range of suitable places for camping. Stony surfaces are less of a problem now, and both yesterday and today I specifically chose uneven places to camp, with small rock ledges, small debris. On the previous small 5 mm thick mat I would have been extremely uncomfortable, but on the new one, as I wrote above, “it's like being at home on a bed.”

There was no sunrise today – the sun rose straight into the clouds stretched along the horizon, saving me from climbing the rocks. Still, a little later, it peeked through, and at 5:16, I took a decent shot: my tent was surrounded by kurums and fir trees.

After packing up camp, I went down to the forest road and started my long, hot trek along the ridge. Almost the entire way, I had to follow a rough, uneven trail running along the high ground. The Urenga ridge is the longest in the Chelyabinsk region, stretching 60 km all the way to Zlatoust. I planned to cover it in two days – I was in a hurry because my family and some rest were waiting for me at its northern end. To be honest, lately, my thoughts have been fixed on that upcoming reunion. On one hand, it makes me happy, but on the other, it's hard to focus on work.

Urenga isn't the most remarkable ridge. Its southern and central parts are covered in forest, with no viewpoints or notable natural landmarks. And this day would've been remembered as long and monotonous – if I hadn't decided it was time to hide the first treasure on my route. I've already talked about the idea of the five Ural treasures in the general part of this book, so I won't repeat myself here. I spent a long time thinking about where to place it, which location to choose, and a week ago, I decided: it would be a spot that might not seem special to most people, but one that means a great place to me in the Southern Urals.

The cliffs of an unremarkable summit – 1029.2 meters. It was here, on July 11, 2019, that I completed my "Thousanders of the Southern Urals" project, becoming the first person to climb all 255 peaks. It took me over 20 years and roughly 3,000 kilometers on foot. Two years ago, I sat on this summit in torn pants, thinking that thousands of kilometers over so many years – that was a lot. This summer, I plan to prove to myself that back then was just a prelude, a training for a far more important and difficult goal ahead.

I hid the silver token under a distinctive overhanging rock. To find it, you'll need to move the large boulder on the right side of the crevice. Behind it, you'll see a small rectangular stone – pull it out, and inside the natural niche, you'll find the

treasure. I hope whoever discovers it will carefully return everything to its place and announce their find to prevent unnecessary disturbance to the rocks.

Toward evening I passed the point of the planned overnight stay, which means I'm already four days ahead of schedule. I've done a good job this month and can relax with my family. Admittedly, I'm already pretty exhausted from the heat and the daily traffic; I haven't had a single full day of rest since the start of the route. Even in the Shulgan-Tash Nature Reserve I managed to cover a dozen kilometers per rest day, and this does not have the best effect on efficiency.



A picturesque cliff of an unremarkable peak of 1029.2 m

By around seven in the evening, after struggling through the forest and windfallen trees, I finally reached the summit of 902.1 meters – where I was pleasantly surprised to find a tall, still-standing wooden triangulation tower. A man-made monument to all those unknown heroes who mapped our mountains, whose labor we still rely on today. Not many wooden towers remain in the Urals; most have rotted away, collapsing into piles of decay. Before this, I'd only seen standing towers in two other places: on Surtandy Ridge in the Kraka Massif and on Mount Repnaya near Verkhnearshinsk. And now, here was a third.

Sadly, their time is short – soon, they too will vanish into oblivion. If you're curious, friends, about the hardships and sacrifices that went into building them, no one has written about it better than Grigory Fedoseyev. Even now, as I hike, I often

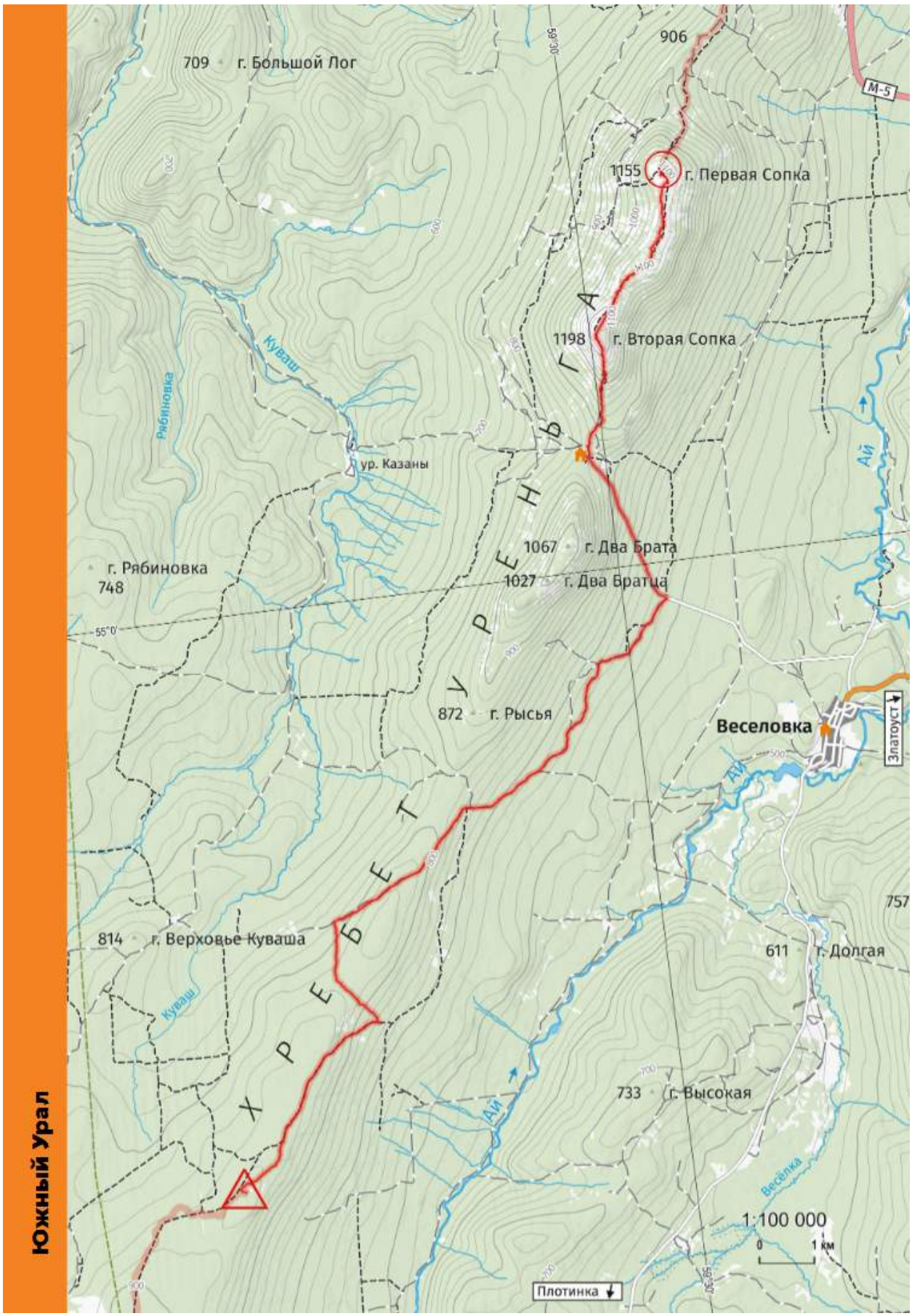
listen to his books – again and again. In moments like these, I feel utterly insignificant compared to him – in words, in deeds, in my understanding of nature. And yet, I can't stop listening. His writing is just that captivating and beautiful.



Windbreaks along the way



Triangulation tower at the summit of 902.1



The Southern Urals

Mt. Bolshoy Log *Mt. Pervaya Sopka*

Mt. Vtoraya Sopka

locality Kazany

Mt. Ryabinovka

Mt. Dva Brata

Mt. Dva Brattsa

Mt. Rysya

Veselovka

Mt. Verkhovye Kuvasha

Mt. Dolgaya

Mt. Vysokaya

r. Kuvash

r. Ryabinovka

r. Ay

r. Veselka

Zlatoust

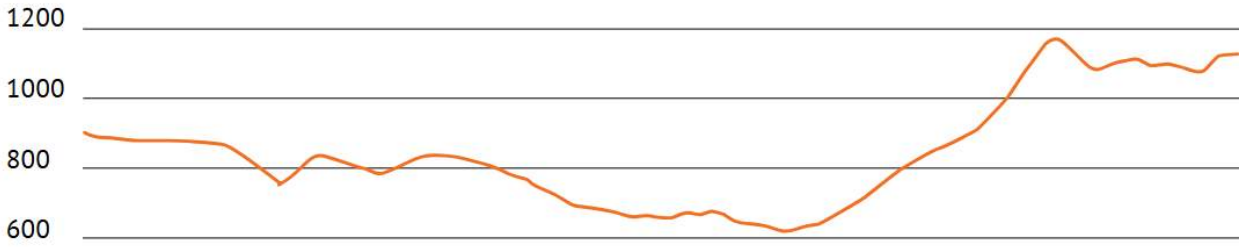
Plotinka

Urenga ridge

Day 24

Peak 982.1 – Second Sopka (1198.9) – First Sopka (1155.9)

28 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 756 km



May 24, 2021

I woke up feeling strange: I had slept long and well, but I didn't feel like eating at all – I couldn't eat, which is not typical for me at all. Normally, I'm ready to eat a lot as soon as I open my eyes. I thought about it – maybe I was tired of my usual meals, or maybe it was just exhaustion. Or maybe both. I got ready and left without breakfast, deciding to walk first to work up an appetite. After about 10 km, my appetite finally came back, and I had a late breakfast.

In the first half of the day, I walked along roads, trails, and through the forest using a compass. I noticed a funny but also annoying pattern. I put it into words like this: "If you're in a convenient, clean, bright park-like forest and decide to cut through it to save distance, a patch of fallen trees will always appear just beyond your line of sight."



Urenga ridge. View to the north from the Second Sopka

But overall, the hike went well, and by noon, after covering over 20 km, I reached the foot of the highest peak of the Urenga Ridge – Mount Vtoraya Sopka (1098.8 m). I ran up the well-trodden trail to the top, looked around, and decided to cheat.

The midday sun wasn't great for photography, but the last open four-kilometer stretch of the ridge had plenty of scenic spots and unusual rock formations worth capturing. There was no need to rush – my meeting with Tatyana Sergeevna and the girls was scheduled for tomorrow around midday, and I didn't have much farther to go. So, I decided to wait in the shade under a rock on Vtoraya Sopka until evening. The mobile internet worked well up there, so I had plenty to keep myself busy. I sat on the mountain for half a day, went out on the route, on the last part of the way, a couple of hours before sunset and very quickly realized that, it seems, I had outsmarted myself, not calculating the time, taking into account the many beautiful rocks and unusual kurums on the way.

I must say, I've been to this northern edge of the Urenga Ridge twice before – once in winter and once in summer back in 2014, during the TransUral race. For some reason, I don't remember the details of those visits, so today I was pleasantly surprised by my discovery. I can't recall any other place in the Southern Urals where such a variety of differently shaped and colored scree fields and rock formations are packed into such a small area. Right from the first steps on Vtoraya Sopka, the stone slopes began to amaze me. First, there were rocks that looked like open folios of ancient giant books, with thin and perfectly distinct stone "pages" neatly separated from one another.



Urenga Ridge. Bizarre rocks between the Vtoraya and Pervaya Sopka



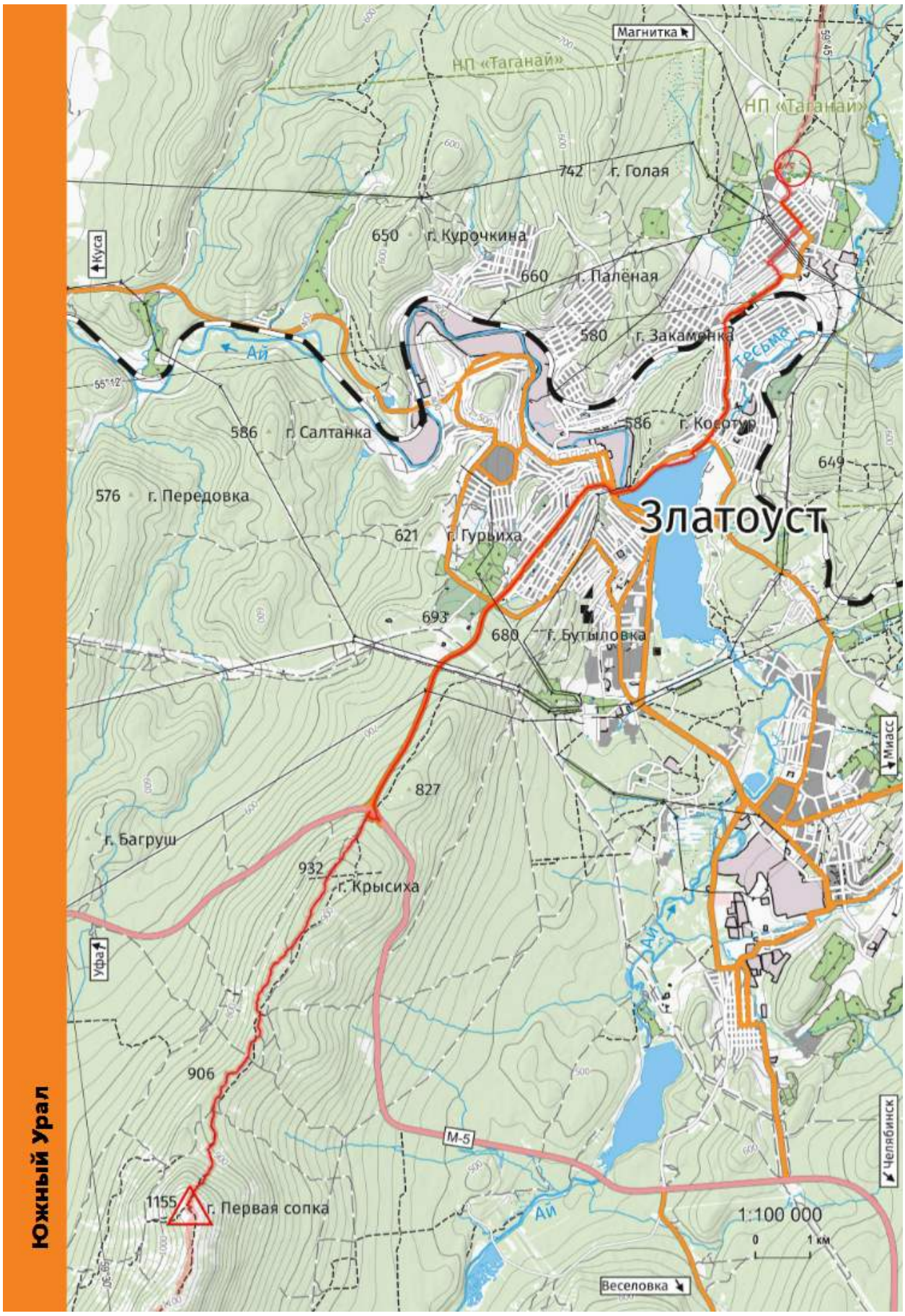
Urenga Ridge. View to the north from the Pervaya Sopka

Then, along the way, I encountered snow-white rectangular-shaped kurums with sharp edges. A little later, their color and form shifted to the complete opposite – dark, smooth stones and rocks riddled with holes. Then, as I began ascending toward Pervaya Sopka, the terrain turned into a fine screen. I walked, took photos, marveled at the sights, and wandered among the low spruce trees. But I quickly realized that budgeting just two hours for this final stretch had been overly optimistic. To stick to that plan, I'd have to push myself deliberately.

The last five hundred meters we had to run along the kurum against the sun to the top of Pervaya Sopka. It was reckless and stupid – running across loose rocks is incredibly dangerous, with a high risk of falling and getting injured. At that moment, I smirked, remembering Kirill Fronyuk's words. I once interviewed him about his Trans-Ural trek, and he said that throughout his entire journey, he had not run a single meter on principle, believing that running and such distances were incompatible. I completely agree with him – except for one crucial "but." If you're about to miss sunset, running becomes your body's only logical reaction to the situation. So I ran, all the while thinking: "What an idiot I am for doing this."

I won the race against the sun, reaching the summit about fifteen minutes before it disappeared. But honestly, it didn't help much – by then, the sunset had already lost its brilliance, and I couldn't get any decent shots. This happens often, and in moments like these, I find comfort in the Olympic principle: "The important thing is not the victory, but the participation." The chase, the excitement, the search – they matter just as much as the final result, a perfect photo. It would've been far more boring to arrive early, leisurely pick an angle, and just press the shutter button.

Tomorrow, I'll see my family – and with that sweet thought, I fell asleep faster.



The Southern Urals

Magnitka *NP Taganay*

Mt. Golaya

Mt. Kurochkina

Mt. Palenaya

Mt. Zakamenka

Tesma River

Ay River

Mt. Saltanka

Mt. Kosotur

Mt. Peredovka

Mt. Gur'ikha

Zlatoust

Mt. Butylovka

Miass

Mt. Bagrush

rMt. Krysikha

Pervaya Sopka

Chelyabinsk

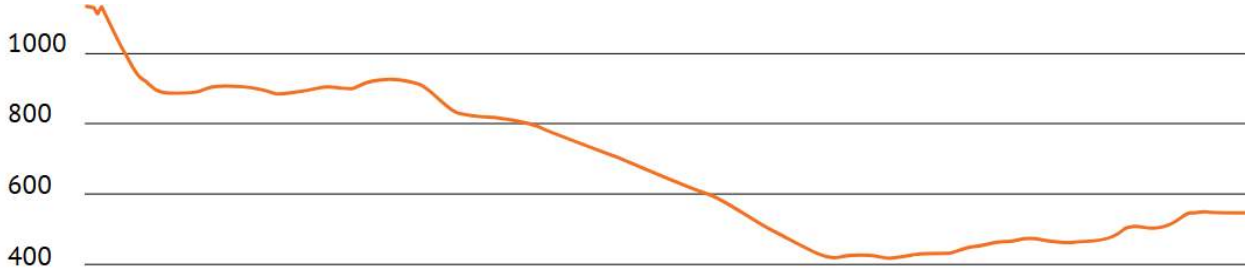
Veselovka

Ufa

Day 25

Pervaya Sopka (1155,9) – Zlatoust town – the central estate of Taganai National Park

30 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 786 km



May 25, 2021

Woke up right at the time of sunrise. Without putting on pants, jumped out of the tent, fought off mosquitoes, and ran a little on the rocks with a camera. The goal of the day is under my feet – the town of Zlatoust, the entrance to the National Park "Taganai." Almost the whole day is downhill, and that, honestly, is disturbing. As I said earlier, a protracted descent can be much more difficult and traumatic than the ascent.



Sunrise over Taganai and Zlatoust from Pervaya Sopka



A hearty breakfast at a roadside café

For the second day in a row, I skipped breakfast in the tent – but today for a more positive reason: I knew that just 8 km ahead, near the M5 highway, there was an excellent café. I figured there was no point eating my standard trail food (I'd have to live with it for the next hundred days anyway), and if I had a chance to add some variety to my diet, I should take it.

So I ran quickly down a nice forest road to the trailhead. I was a little worried that I, dirty and smelly, would not be allowed into the cafe, but, as it turned out, for nothing. There was, however, the opposite, dark side of visiting a public food establishment: when I crawled out from the table, it became even more difficult to go downhill, I had to first remove many layers of food.

As I walked down, I was struck by how quickly I'd lost my tolerance for the dirt and noise of the city. This was probably one of the toughest days on the route I'd had all month. The sun quickly became merciless, and on those asphalt-baked streets, I felt like I was frying in a pan. Compared to this, the mountains seemed like the perfect place for hiking – at least there, I could fall onto grass or tundra anytime, sit on a rock, and rest. I was walking and suffering, I wanted to get away from all this fuss as soon as possible, and if it were not for the meeting with my relatives, I would have done it tomorrow.

The time was early, I still had a few hours before the meeting, so, pretending to be a passenger on the train, I got into the city station, settled down on the floor close to the socket and in relative coolness, under the slanting glances of the guards I lay for an hour. I was probably saved from expulsion by the fact that Zlatoust is a tourist city, and at the exit from it there are often not the cleanest young people with backpacks.

At lunchtime I came to the central estate of Taganai National Park, talked to the park representatives. There was an opportunity to stay with the family right on the territory, but we decided to rent a small cottage on the shore of Lake Turgoyak, with better amenities. Preliminary plans were confirmed: tomorrow there will be a meeting/lecture in Zlatoust. I will tell you about my route and show what I had time to shoot. This means that I'll be going to bed late tonight, and I'll have to make a presentation.

If you open the map of the route already traveled, it seems that my 800-kilometer line with minor changes could be a reference for a trail crossing the entire Southern Urals. It remains to extend it through the territory of the national park up to Mount Yurma, and the Southern Urals will be traversed in its entirety. A logical, varied, beautiful line that can be broken up into small two- and three-day sections – I think these are exactly the qualities that a good hiking trail should have. We will have to discuss this in more detail with Rais Gabitov when we return home.

As evening approached, a black car rolled up in a cloud of dust near the park headquarters. Inside were the four most precious women in my life: my wife, mother, and daughters. Their arrival marked the end of the expedition’s first stage – and the start of a well-earned break. Since I was four days ahead of schedule, I decided to spend three of them with my family. After all, further along the trail, I likely wouldn’t get another chance to see them before the finish line.



A long-awaited meeting with my daughters

Days 26, 27, 28

Rest

0 km covered during three days. Total distance covered – 786 km

May 26, 27 and 28, 2021

I've never had a proper seaside holiday – not with family, not alone. But these three days came closer to that experience than anything else. For once, I almost managed to disconnect from the trail: eating well and diversely, sleeping on crisp white sheets, playing with the kids from dawn till dusk. It was like a mini-vacation on the shores of the Urals' own "sea" – Lake Turgoyak. I say almost because some trail-related tasks still crept in.

On the first day there was a meeting in Zlatoust, organized with the support of the national park. When planning the expedition, I had identified educational work as one of its important goals. As part of it, a series of meetings were to be held both on the route and after its completion.

I made a presentation in advance about the ideas, antecedents, and goals of the project. On the first evening after the meeting with the family, I managed to fill the presentation with photos that were taken as I went along, and I showed and told all this to the people who came to the meeting. The audience at the central city library was small, holding about 50 people. And it seems to have gone well overall.



Family. Photo by Zakhar Shadrin



Equipment modification



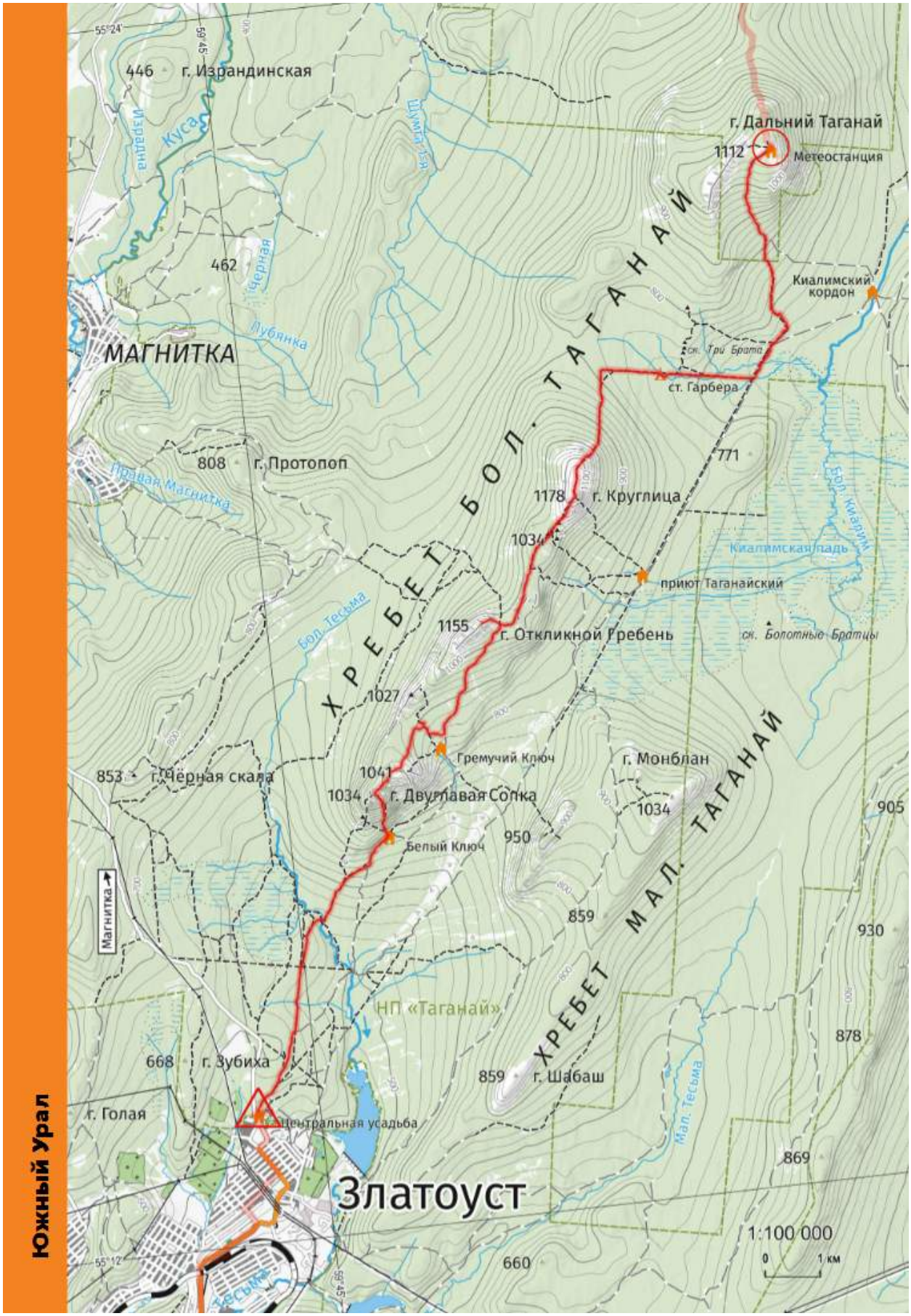
Speech in Zlatoust. Photo by Zakhar Shadrin

On the second day of rest, together with my mother we were engaged in improving my equipment. I lengthened the back of my “taiga dress” – a specially designed piece of clothing that allows me to effectively protect myself from ticks. My mom finalized my cap, sewing to it a white wader, giving additional protection from the sun and ticks. No one canceled minor repairs and repacking of equipment.

On the third day in the afternoon we took a walk together with the family to the “Chernaya Skala” – a viewing platform of the national park, after which my dearest and most beloved women went on a difficult and dangerous way back along the M5 highway, and I wandered with a heavy heart to take one of the houses in the central estate of the park. We will not see them again for a long time, the main thing is to get home well, because this highway, going through the mountains from Ufa to Chelyabinsk, is the most dangerous thing a traveler faces in the Southern Urals. Narrow, winding, heavily loaded with huge trucks, it takes many human lives every year. Sometimes I like to joke sadly that if you have reached the mountains on the “road of death”, all the worst is over and nothing will happen to you.

My plan was to go to bed as early as possible to be at the top of Dvugolovoy Sopka before dawn. Sunrise tomorrow was supposed to be at 4:32. Already close to evening, a guy contacted me and asked permission to keep me company for a couple days. Not to say I was thrilled, I'd had enough socializing for three days, and I wanted

to be alone, to put away the thoughts and events of those days, but on the other hand, who was I to deny people their desire to support me.



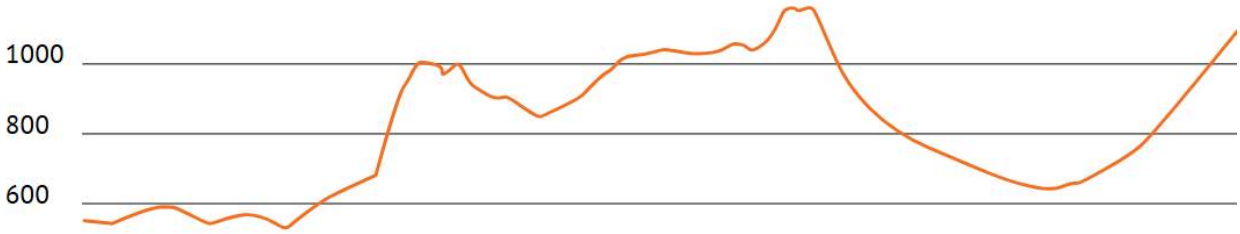
The Southern Urals

Mt. Garberal
Mt. Kruglitsa
Mt. Monblan
Mt. Dvuglavan-Sayka
Mt. Shabash
Mt. Topaya
Mt. Izrandinskaya
Mt. Dalny Taganay
Mt. Protopop
Mt. Otkliknoy Greben
Mt. Chernaya Skala
Mt. Monblan
Mt. Zubikha
Mt. Golaya
Three Brothers Rock
Bolotnyye Brattsy Rocks
st. Garbera
Izranda river
Kusa River
Shumga 1st river
Chernaya river
Lubyanka river
Pervaya Magnitka river
Bolshoy Kialim river
Kialimskaya Pad
Bolshaya Tesma river
Malaya Tesma river
Tesma river
Meteostation
Kialimsky Ranger Station
Taganaisky Shelter
Centralnaya Usadba (Farmstead)
Magnitka
Zlatoust
Bolshoy Taganai ridge
Maly Taganai ridge
Gremuchiy Klyuch (Rattling Spring)
Bely Klyuch (White Spring)

Day 29

Central Estate of Taganai National Park – Dvuglavaya Sopka (1034) – Otkliknoy Ridge (1155) – Kruglitsa Mountain (1177,8) – Dalny Taganai Mountain (1112)

30 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 816 km



May 29, 2021

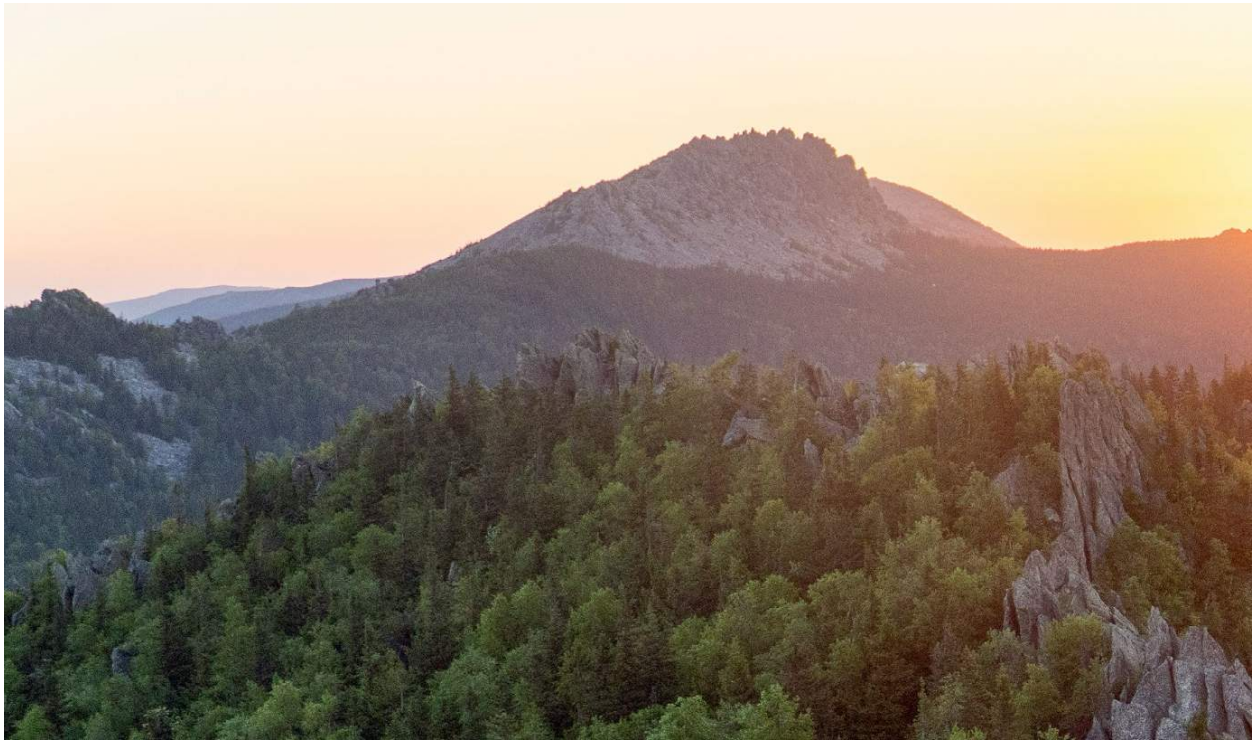
I got up at one o'clock in the morning, had breakfast, put things in my backpack and when I was ready to go out, I found my trekking poles missing. While I was looking for them, Marat Sadykov, the guy who had expressed his desire to go with me, came in. I think at the moment of our meeting I had a very gloomy and worried look. After all, poles are a very important element of equipment for me, I don't understand how I can walk without them. They are additional points of support for me, as if I am walking not on two but on four limbs, they make the way uphill easier, under the mountain they relieve my knees, it is convenient to push the summer grass apart, making a way in it, to tap each other, marking my presence for large animals, to stretch the tent and many, many other uses. Poles are a truly versatile and important piece of gear. And now they're gone.

I don't believe in fate, but it seems that providence itself sent me a companion today. Seeing my frustration, Marat offered to use his sticks until my own were found or a new one was sent to me.

There were no more reasons to delay the exit, we started cheerfully in the night and half an hour before dawn we were at the top, among the bizarre rocks of the mountain Dvuglavaya Sopka. And the most unloved competition with the sun began: who will be the first – it will come out from behind the horizon or I will find a cool shooting point in an unfamiliar, “unshot” place. At first we ran down the rocks to the eastern edge. Wrong. The view of the valley of the Bolshoy Stone River is good, but

the sunrise is closed by the hulk of the second peak of the mountain. So we have to move westward. We ran that way.

In the last minutes just before sunrise I managed to find a wonderful place between the rocks. What is valuable – it is beautiful in two directions. The sun rose in the cloudless sky between the peaks. To his left stood the Otkliknoy Ridge, a frozen wave of stone, and to his right – the second rocky peak of the Dvugolaya Sopka.



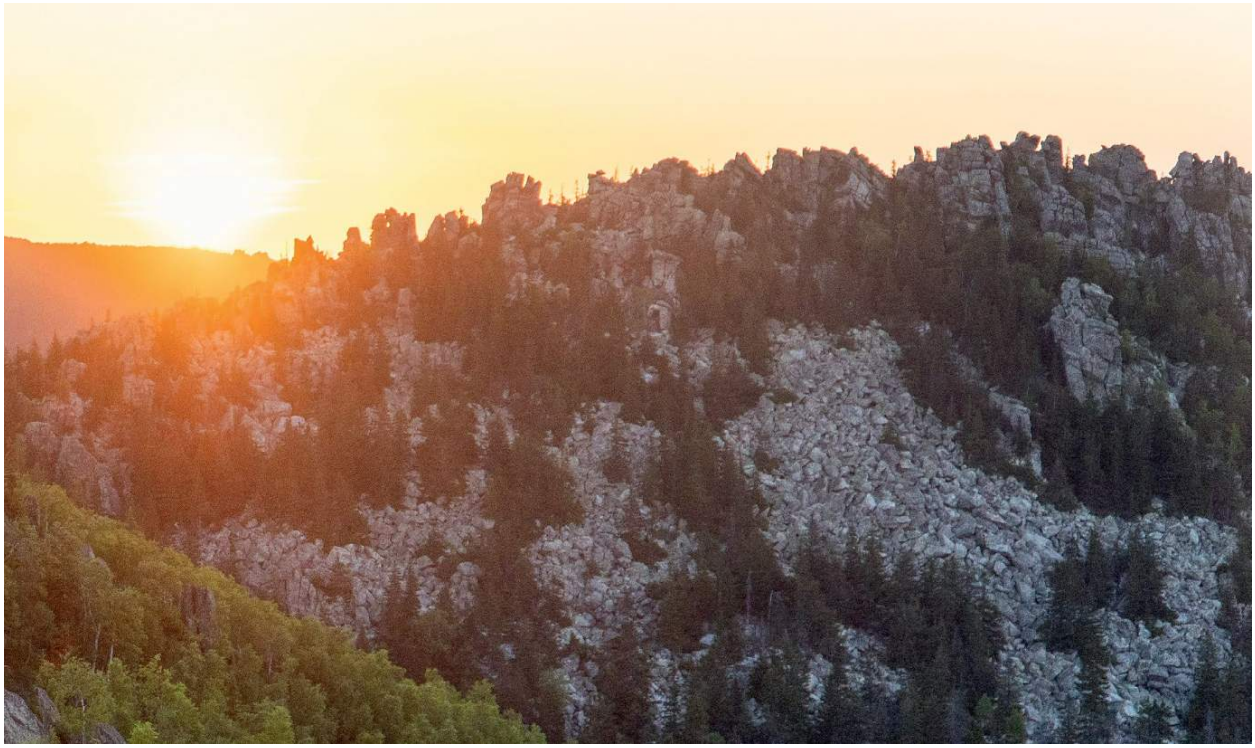
Dawn from the Dvuglavaya Sopka mountain

And to all this magnificence in the center stretched a strip of forest and rocks. It is a remarkable and infrequent dawn for the Southern Urals, when so many charismatic peaks at such a close distance from each other fit into one frame. After taking a few panoramas in the direction of the dawn, I turned around and was completely captivated by the view in the opposite direction. The already fanciful feather cliffs were colored pink, with a large moon hanging between them in the turquoise sky. Forgetting about the necessity to save energy and memory of the camera, I shot panoramas and separate shots time after time, balancing on the sharp, but, fortunately, on the sharp, but on a sharp but fortunately rough rock tooth.

It's really a big chance to shoot from one point two different colors, light and content subjects. I hadn't seen the sun in the mountains for three days, and it was as if

it missed me too and decided to make me happy when I saw it. Although, of course, our will also played a big role here: if we had gone out 30 minutes later, all the beauty would have been missed under the tree crowns.

After dawn we went straight through the forest, a barely visible path led through the bizarre rocks, and they looked very unusual. Not in vain this peak is called Perya – for the original, rarely seen anywhere form of its rocks. I think it is one of the most beautiful peaks of Taganay, and maybe of the Southern Urals. Photographers have loved it for a reason and have been taking pictures of it for more than a century. In my collection of old postcards of the Urals there are several views taken from these places by one of the main landscape photographers of the Urals of those years – V.L. Metenkov. This tireless traveler did simply titanic work, created hundreds, if not thousands, of photographs of mountains, published them in the form of postcards and thus preserved for us the Urals of a century ago.

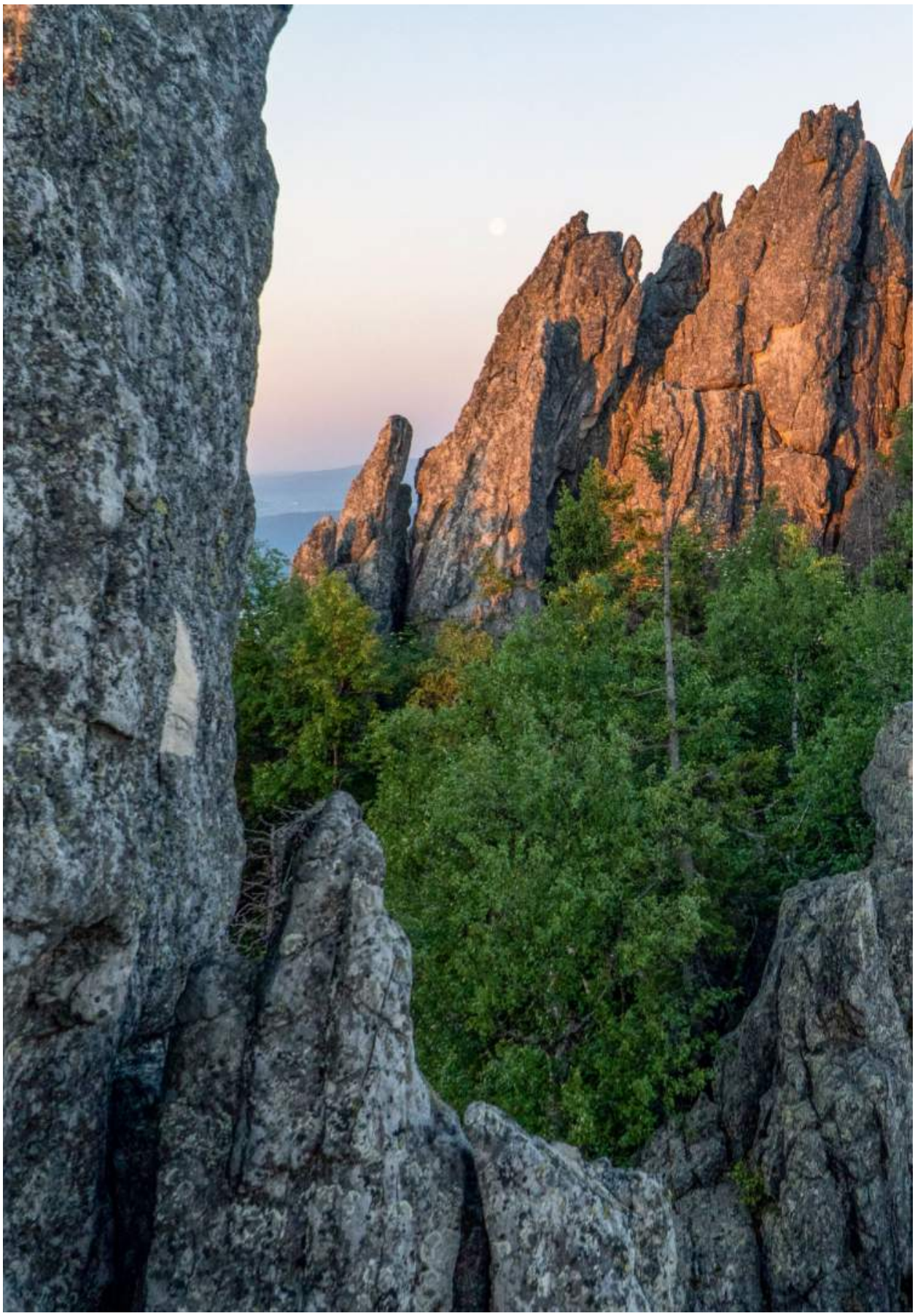


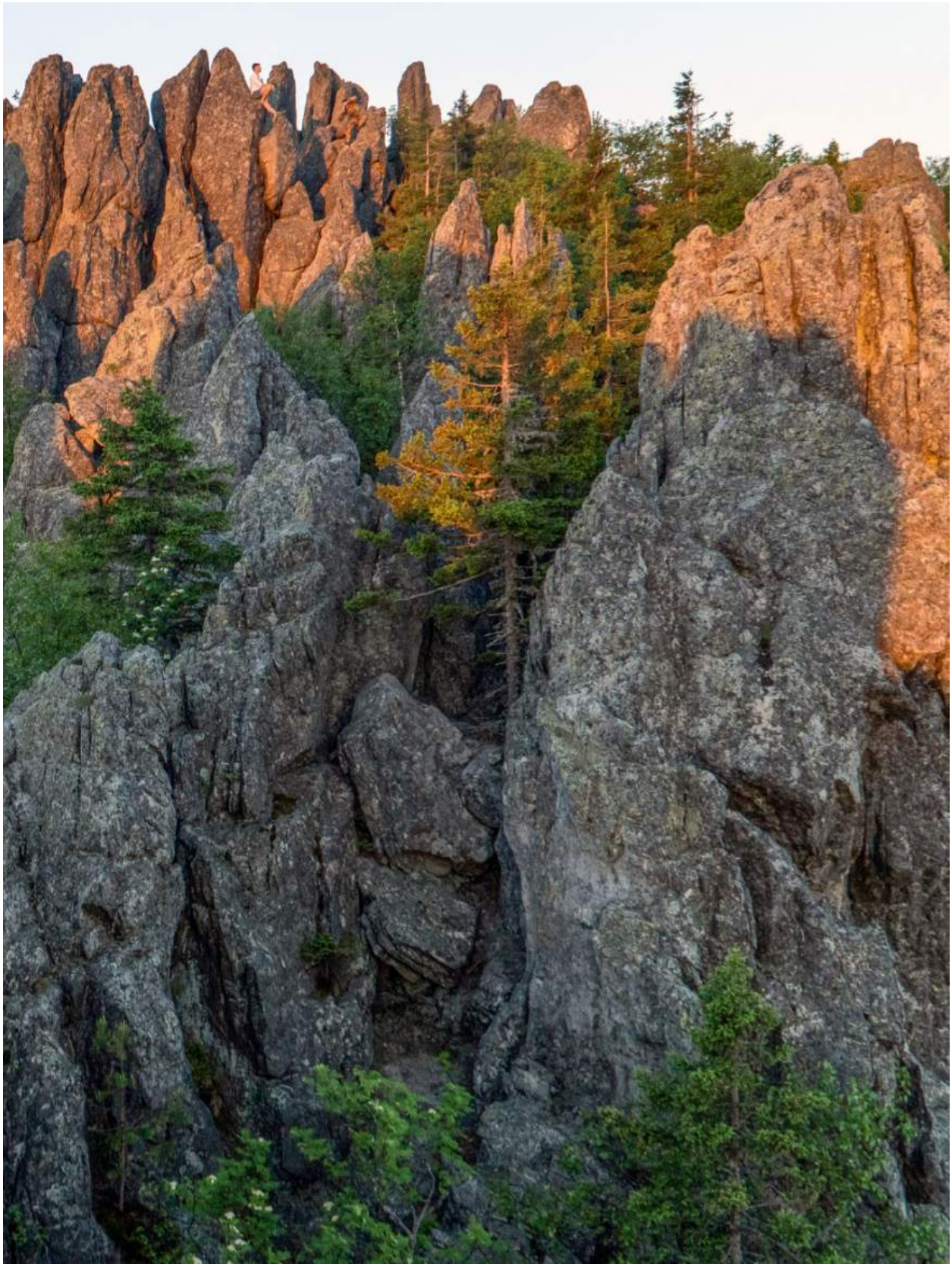
To some extent, I feel like a successor of his work, but on a larger scale, because my goal is to shoot the entire Urals, from edge to edge, to create one global photographic history of the ridge from these disparate photos.

Having traversed Dvuglavaya, we descended to the trail and further today we didn't deviate from the classic Taganay route. The beautiful Otliklicknoy Ridge was

already hot. Walking through the spruce forest, I could hardly imagine that some 100 years ago there were mountain tundras here. And in general these places looked quite different. If you look at old photographs or paintings, they show almost Martian lifeless landscapes. And if the paintings, when I saw them, puzzled me, and I suspected that the artist exaggerated a little, you can't argue with the photos. The scientists are right: in 100 years the forest in the Southern Urals has risen more than 70 meters on the mountain slopes and continues to go up. Climate change is to blame, the glaciers in the Urals are retreating, and the forest is advancing. And according to scientists' forecasts in 20-30 years there will be no tundra left on the Far Taganai mountain, where the shelter-meteorological station stands, and the shelter will stand in a spruce forest. If the book is written and published, it will be interesting to know whether the scientists' predictions have come true. Where is the forest boundary in the Southern Urals now?

I tenderly love Taganai, my first independent hikes, my first winter hike were among its mountains. And when people ask me where to start getting to know the South Urals or where a person without much experience in tourism should go on their own, I usually recommend this particular national park. I like to compare it to the big city park of Zlatoust.





Perya of Dvuglavaya Sopka

With its bears, huge kurum rivers, cliffs and peaks up to mountaineering category of complexity 3A, it is at the same time maximally accessible and comfortable. The system of marking, parking and shelters is well developed here.

Today we followed such paths and passed the Valley of Fairy Tales – one more unusually cozy and pleasant place, where among low fir-trees there are fanciful stone remnants, and the path on a sunny day sparkle fabulously with small crystals of sugar quartzite. We came to the highest point of the area – Kruglitsa Mountain. As it often happens with us, the highest point is one of the most inexpressive. It is a dome-shaped kurum giant, where it is far from Dvuglavaya or Otlikny with their unusual forms. Without delay we traversed the peak and descended to Garber's camp, named after the school teacher who died on it. Nothing but the name and a small memorial plaque told about people's respect for this place and the memory of the deceased. The parking lot is littered with trash, with the epicenter of the garbage traditionally in the fire pit. It is unpleasant and painful to see such a thing, but this is the flip side of the popularity of the neighborhood and the remoteness of this place from the main paths of park visitors. If on the main trails garbage is constantly removed, then in this blind corner of the park, apparently, the staff of the park get there much less often. And the tourists do not have enough strength to carry their garbage, because they spent it when they carried it here. I really wanted to carry at least a small part of it, but my way went further into the forest, and my backpack was still full. I limited myself to a couple of plastic bottles, which took the last places on my carrying device.

Having hid from the scorching sun, we had an hour's rest at the parking lot, then, having dozed off and gathered the rest of our strength, we ran to the top of Far Taganay, to the shelter-meteorological station, where they were already waiting for us.

Only the name of the weather station is left here, but for a long period of time the mountain was used for weather observations. And based on these observations, a loud conclusion was made that the top of Far Taganay is the windiest place in the country. A beautiful conclusion, which had one very important nuance: it was the windiest only among those places where there were meteorological stations and constant wind speed measurements.

With the development of the national park a shelter was placed in the building of the weather station, and now it is probably the most beautiful and coveted lodging

on Taganay and, it seems, the most high-altitude permanently inhabited shelter in the whole Urals. Inside the shelter is dry, warm and cozy, the caretaker Mikhail met us and put us in a room. An amazing fact is that the same evening Ildar Mazitov, with whom we walked together up to Muradymovsky gorge, came to the peak for an overnight stay. He was a little embarrassed by this meeting and separately mentioned that he was not following me, it was just a coincidence. I was glad to see him.



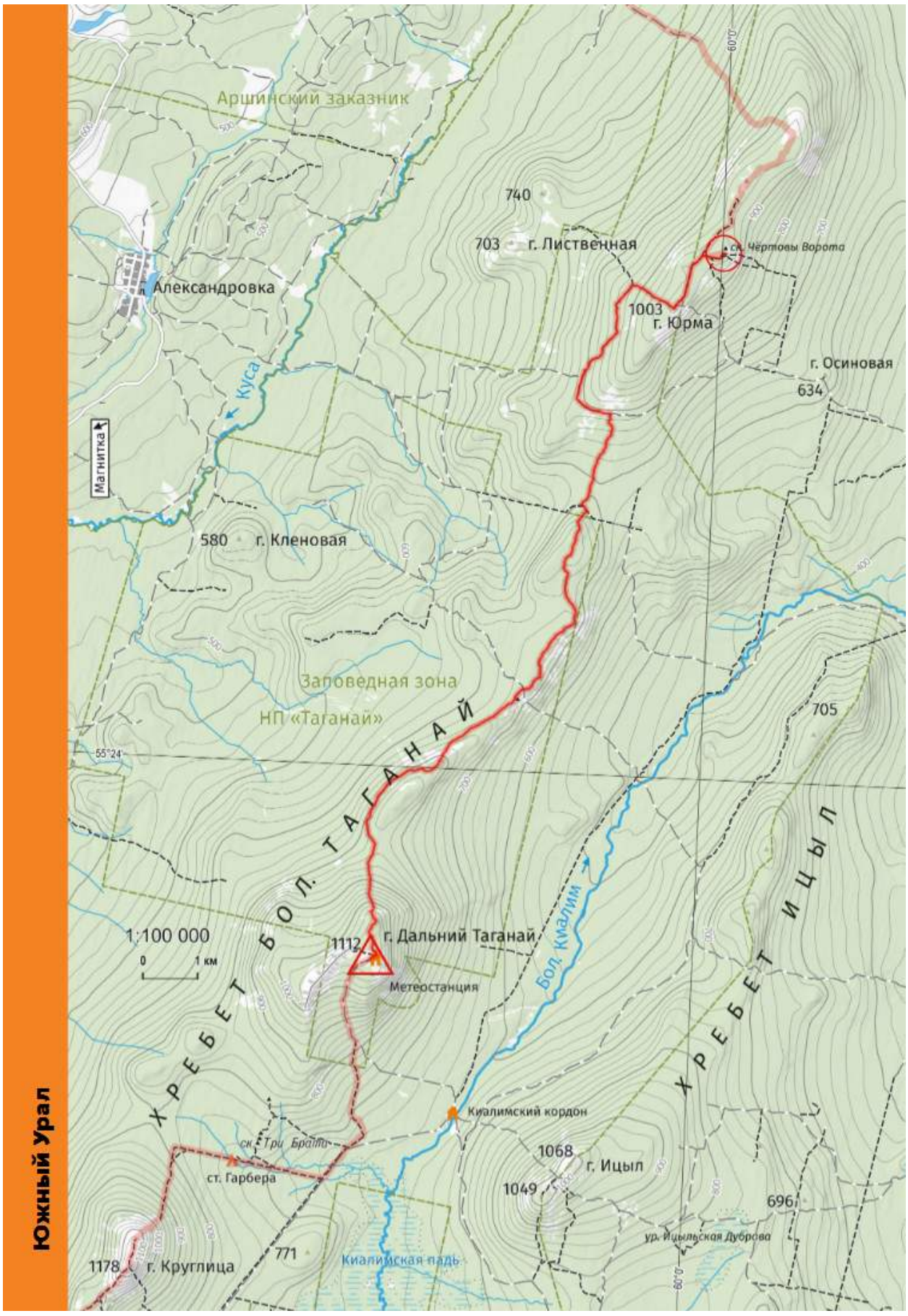
Kruglitsa mountain at sunset

The top of the mountain on which the shelter stands, a small island of tundra in an ocean of climbing forest, is decorated with bizarre rocky remnants, from which you can get a good view in all directions. The first thing that catches the eye is the striping of the forest, even in summer it is clearly visible. The whole territory of Taganay is divided into equal, one-sized strips of coniferous and deciduous forest, it is a kind of greeting to the descendants of coal burners and loggers. The territory of mountains only last 30 years is protected from felling, before that it was actively used for needs of industry of Zlatoust, Miass, Karabash. But these traces will be erased in a few tens of years. Thanks to natural processes, spruce will beat deciduous

forests, and the strips will go away, and if everything is going to be okay, it will happen in our lifetime.

In the evening the shelter filled with people, and I got up an hour before sunset and went out to take pictures. The summer sun sets behind an exposed rocky ridge, popularly called Volchiy (Wolf) ridge. I decided to climb it and look for footage there. So, step by step, hoping that behind the next rock a more interesting view would open up, I rode almost the whole rock massif, having covered 3-4 km more to the daily kilometerage, which will not be included in the official statistics of the expedition. I saw off the sun, made some more or less interesting shots and went back to the shelter seen in the distance.

By the way, it has become known where my sticks are. At home, in Ufa – I forgot them in the car when I said goodbye to my family, which is not surprising. I will be able to pick them up now only in ten days in a package near the village of Serebryanka. If it hadn't been for Marat and his timely help, it would have been quite bad.



The Southern Urals

Arshinsky Nature reserve *Mt. Aleksandrovka*

Mt. Listvennaya

Chertovy Vorota cliffs

Mt. Yurma

Mt. Osinovaya

Kusa river

Mt. Klenovaya

Protected Area of Taganay National Park

Bolshoy Taganay ridge

Mt. Dalniy Taganay

Weather Station

Bolshaya Kialim rive

Itsyl ridge

Kialim Outpost

Three Brothers cliffs

Garbera station

Mt. Kruglitsa

Kialimskaya Pad

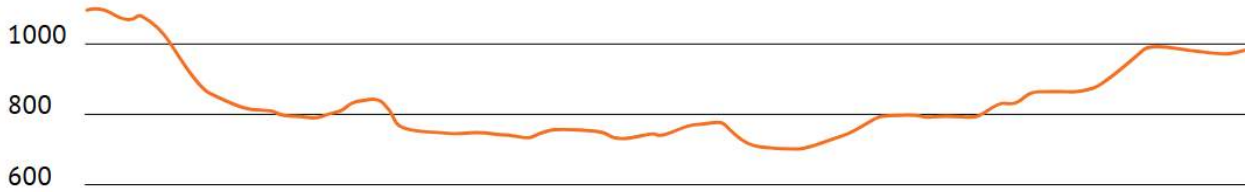
Mt. Itsyl

Itsylskaya Dubrava tract

Day 30

Dalny Taganai Mountain (1112) – Yurma Mountain (1003,2) – Chertovy Vorota Cliffs

22 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 838 km



May 30, 2021

Amazing body: as soon as I put my head on the clothes that act as a pillow, I fell as if into a dark stone bag, without dreams and doubts. I came out of this oblivion also by myself, without an alarm clock, at 3:50, just before dawn. How I do it, I don't understand. Broken, with a dissatisfied and sleepy face, I went out into the street, and the same unrested sun came out from behind a layer of sub-horizon haze to meet me. We looked at each other and went our separate ways, it – to the right upwards, and I – to pack my belongings, have breakfast and go north.

I left at 6:30, said goodbye to Marat, he had to go back. He, of course, wanted to go on with me that day, but I insisted that I would go alone, and there were two reasons for that. First, I was really tired of people and wanted to be alone, to gather my thoughts. Secondly, I had to walk through the protected area of the national park, and if the management had no objections to my walking through it, then there was no talk about additional people, I did not want to abuse the hospitality.



Shelter-meteorological station at dawn

I started my route not without excitement, I had to walk more than 10 km without trails and roads along the forested watershed of the Bolshoi Taganai ridge, up to Mount Yurma. Although it was not difficult in general, I traditionally felt psychological discomfort standing on the threshold of a long forest section. Rationally I can't explain why this happens, there is no objective reason for concern. I know and can do everything for confident and efficient movement through the forest in a given direction, I have walked many hundreds of kilometers through the most remote places of the Urals, but still I feel uneasy when I have to go into the forest for a long time after a long break. Perhaps we should look for the key to this restlessness in childhood. I grew up in nature between two elements, on a narrow strip of shore. On one side was the multi-kilometer water expanse of the Pavlovskoye Reservoir, on the other – literally a hundred meters away was the great deep taiga forest of the Ufa Plateau stretching for dozens of kilometers. And of course, most of my life was spent in the open water, under the bright sun, in open areas. I went to the forest much less often and tried not to stay in it for long. It pressed, encircled, covered with semi-darkness, hid landmarks. Maybe that's why I've loved open places, distant views ever since. Fortunately, the psychological discomfort recedes when you start moving, which I did not hesitate to do.



View on the way to Mount Yurma

Having descended from the summit, I walked all day through the forest, at first there was a zone of low spruce thickets covering the slopes – as I understand, what has grown over the last 100 years – then began quite passable, with some small

bushwhacks and rocky outcrops, the forest, on which it was quite comfortable to walk.



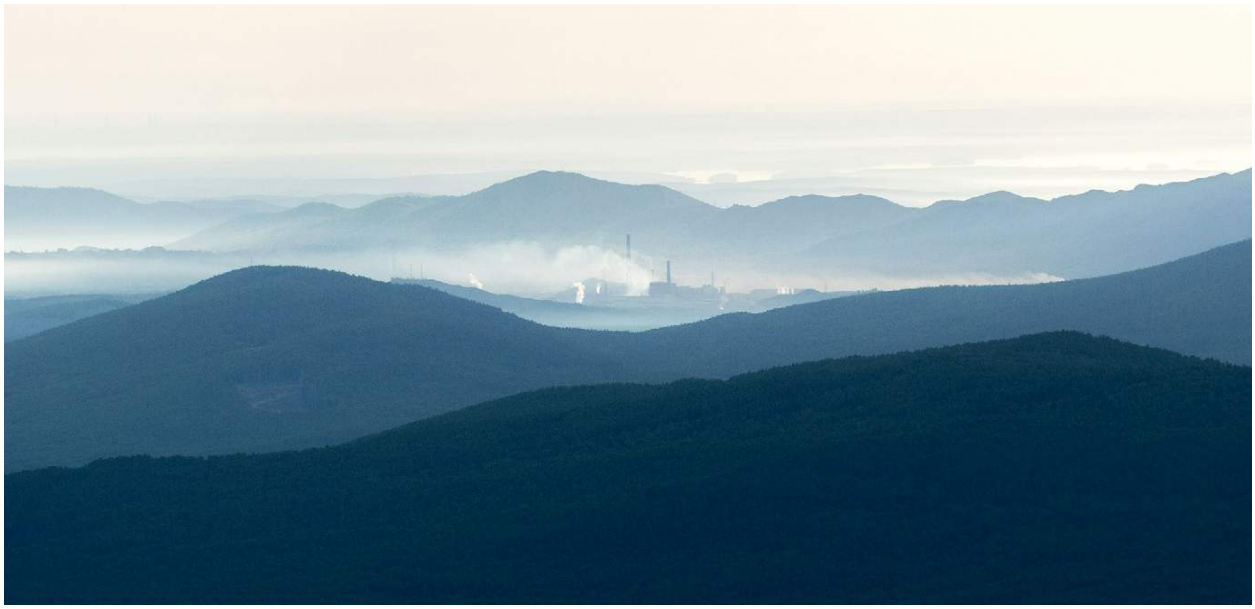
At Chertovy Vorota cliffs

Below Yurma, I shortened the road, following it climbing to the top, and picked up some large animal a couple of dozen meters away. It was hard to tell who it was that ran away: the road surface plowed over by the quad bikes was dotted with both bear and moose footprints.

At the top of Yurma an unexpectedly pleasant meeting was waiting for me. Coming out of the woods, I noticed that someone was sitting on the wooden ruins of a triangulation tower, apparently waiting for me. What was my surprise when this person turned out to be Sergey Maslov, an old friend of mine. With him we went to Manpupunyur about ten years ago, our trails also crossed under Telposiz mountain, he was the first person who realized the project “Crown of the Urals”*, which I had invented. What a meeting! We hugged each other and, since there was nothing to do on the top of Mt. Yurma – it was closed by the forest – without delay we went to its main ornament and the place of attraction for tourists – the snow-white cliffs of the Chertovy Vorota.

The main tourist attraction was met, as usual, with a garbage dump – a small clearing in the forest at the foot of the rocks was piled with all kinds of trash. Although this is legally the territory of the national park, it seems that in fact this mountain enclave, separated from the main territory by a protected buffer, does not receive due attention from the park administration.

**"Crown of the Urals" is a tourist project that requires climbing the five highest points of the five regions of the Urals: Mount Yamantau or Iremel, Oslyanka, Telposiz, Narodnaya, Payer.*



Karabash town is fuming

Serega has always been a tactful person, so we separated for a while: he went to the tent, and I went to climb the rocks and take photos.

Unfortunately, the dump at the foot of the cliffs was not the only thing. The beautiful snow-white rocks were covered with writings. The Arkhipov family from the town of Karabash was especially impressed. I have no decent words about their deed for the book. It is a very sad story.

Even on the approach to the mountain the sky was covered with clouds, and somewhere in the distance it began to rumble. The world was sinking more and more into gray gloom, a wall of rain appeared in the south, above Taganai, and in this atmospheric scenery, which seemed to be unfavorable for taking photos, the town of Karabash, located 15 km to the east, suddenly began to play. Together with its smoky

chimneys it seemed to plunge into a monochrome world, the mountains surrounding us darkened, emphasizing its ominous appearance even more. The second face of the Urals – the industrial face – appeared in all its beauty and horror.

Of course, if we talk about Taganai, we can't avoid talking about Karabash, because only at first glance they seem unrelated, completely different Ural stories. But if you think about it, if you look carefully at the map, it becomes obvious that Karabash is the northern edge of the park. How precisely this neighborhood represents life and death, nature and industry – two stories that have been neighboring very closely in the Urals for several centuries. They depend on each other and oppose each other.

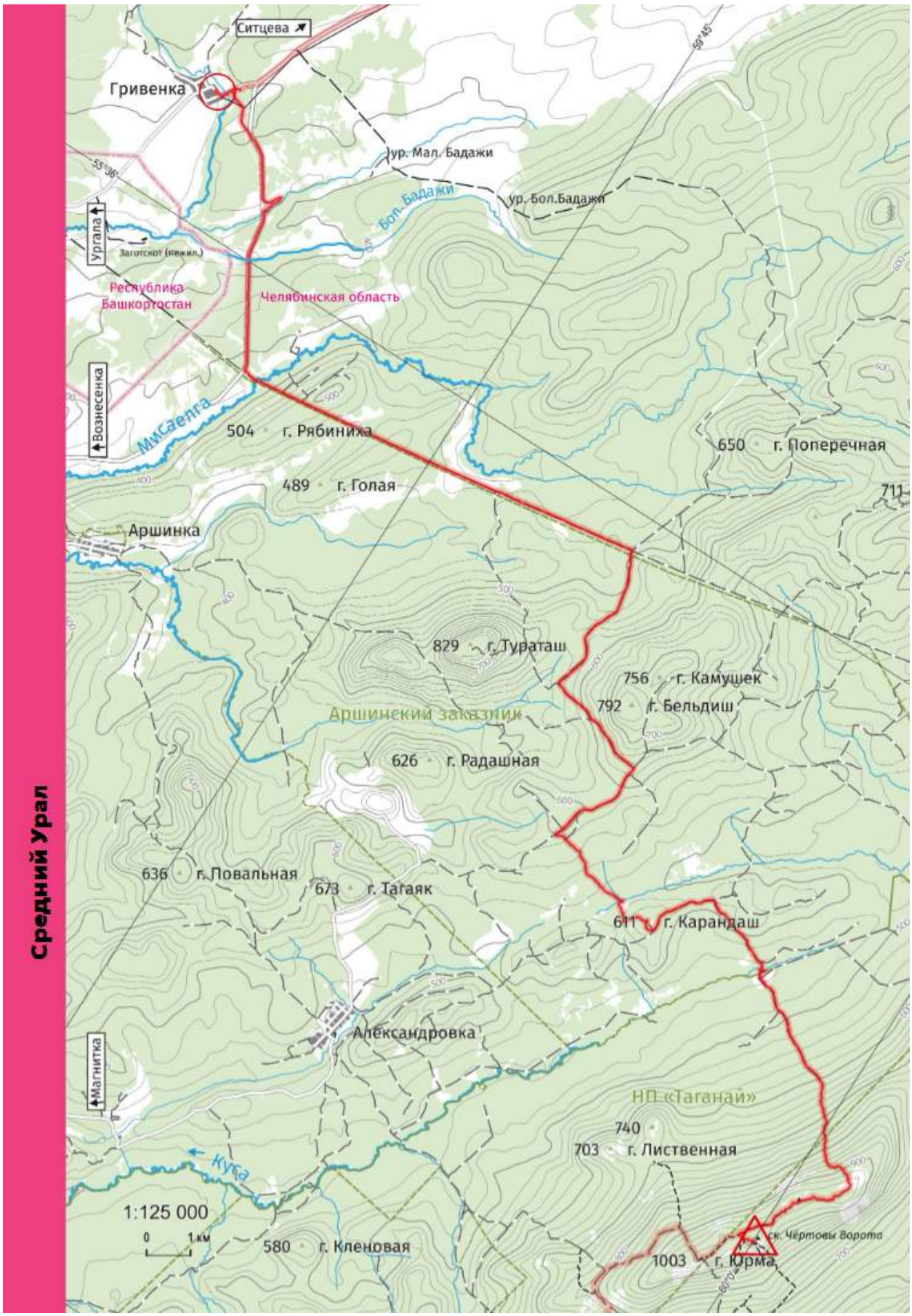
I remember a few years ago I was running a multi-race in the Karabash area, and one of the checkpoints was on the “dead mountain” opposite the Karabash copper smelting factory. By mistake of the organizers because of the wrongly set checkpoint we had to spend about an hour on its slopes, and those were scary minutes. The wind blowing from the plant enveloped the mountain with stinky smoke burning eyes and skin. I was seriously worried about their safety. There was an odor of acid in the air, and the stones underfoot were covered with a sort of layer that seemed to be slowly corroding even them. And at those moments I saw in the distance, 10-15 km away, the green slopes of the Taganai ridges, with clean, tasty air, with cool water and the exuberance of life. Then I was amazed at how close all this is, in fact – a single entity. And the idea of the route was born, which I realized a year before this expedition. On my birthday I started from the central farmstead of the national park, went through the whole park in a day, came to Karabash and finished at the top of the “dead mountain.” I showed how close life and death, Taganai and Karabash.

I wondered if the acid spewing from the pipes of the factory might have affected the brains of the Arkhipov family. With this thought I managed to jump into the tent under the first drops of rain, and in a few seconds a powerful summer downpour fell on the tent. The first downpour on my camping trip. Seryoga came, we drank tea, remembered past treks and meetings, and planned new ones.

To be honest, I'm glad that today everything was covered with clouds, it's a reason not to wait for sunset and to go to bed earlier. And maybe even get some sleep.



Rain over Taganai



The Middle Urals

Sittseva *Grivenka*

Maly Badazhi tract

Urgala

Zagotskot (abandoned settlement)

Bolshoy Badazhi river

Bolshoy Badazhi tract

Republic of Bashkortostan

Chelyabinskaya oblast'

Misaelga river

Mt. Ryabinikha

Mt. Poperechnaya

Mt. Golaya

Arshinka

Mt. Turatash

Mt. Kamushek

Mt. Beldish

Arshinsky Nature reserve

Mt. Povalnaya

Mt. Tagayak

Mt. Karandash

Aleksandrovka

Taganay National Park

Mt. Listvennaya

Kusa river

Mt. Klenovaya

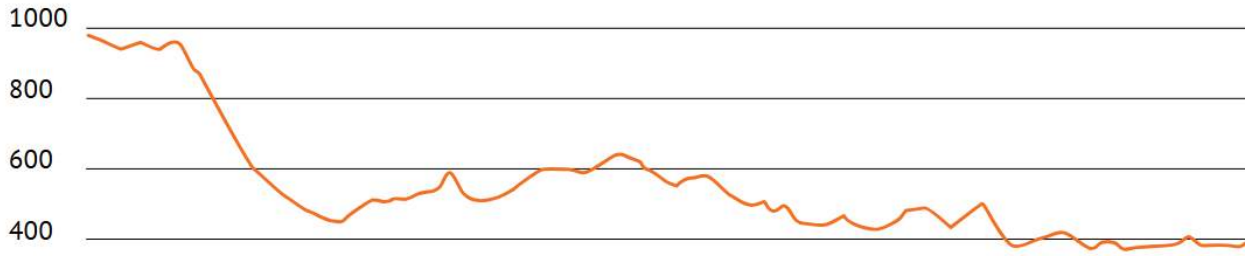
Mt. Yurma

Chertovy Vorota cliffs

Day 31

Chertovy Vorota Rocks – Karandash Mountain (610.9) – Grivenka village

47 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 885 km



May 31, 2021

Thirty-first day of the journey, the last day of spring, and today I am saying goodbye to the Southern Urals, entering the territory of the Middle Urals. Their conditional border passes along the mountain Yurma, and it can be said for the beauty of the slogan that the Chertovye Vorota on its top is the entrance to the next part of the Urals. The minimum program of the route is fulfilled, the whole Southern Urals is passed, but I don't need this minimum at all. Only forward, only to the north.

I went out late today, around eight in the morning, which was due to a cloud that had descended to the summit and the occasional drizzle of rain. I didn't want to get out of my sleeping bag in such weather, so I gave myself a little slack and lay in bed reading a book. I noted with annoyance that the good weather, which stood throughout the month, relaxed me, and yesterday I was lazy, while there was a view, to get out of the tent and write down a few words for a movie about Ufimskoye lake, and now, in a cloud, it cannot show. It is an important story for me, as a Ufa resident, to note where the source of one of our main rivers, the Ufimka (Karaideli), is located. It is located just a few kilometers from Karabash. I had to settle for general words against a background of fog.



Triangle Cliff

I said goodbye to Sergey and se
off, first northward along the ridge,

along a small path leading to the rocks hidden among the fog and forest. The Yurma Ridge is rich not only in Chertovy Vorota, there are several other rocky outcrops on it, some of them stretching for more than half a kilometer with a rocky scallop towering above the forest. But in the cloud there was no desire to jump on wet kurums, so I went around almost all of them through the forest, making an exception only for two places: the Triangle, a rock with a triangular window, and the Bashmak cliff – a bizarre rock with a shoe sole lying on its top.

But of course, all this should be seen not in such weather, when visibility is not more than 20 meters.

From the ridge I started to descend to the west, to the Yurma tract, from it there was a road to the summit on space images and maps, but in practice there was no road. We had to walk literally waist-deep in water for the first 5 km. It was exactly like walking on the meadows filled with wet grass. And the lower I went down, the higher the grass rose, the colder the water became. When I was cold and soaked to the waist, I came to the forest road.

The second important point on the route today was Karandash Mountain. I had to walk back a bit to the south, but I did it without regret, as it would have been unforgivable to ignore this peak.



The top of Karandash mountain

The mountain is nothing special in itself: a small summit open towards Yurma with an iron triangulation tower, and there are endless such summits. What was of interest to me, as an explorer of the Urals, was the rock outcrops located on and around the mountain. Izrandite is a heavy black igneous rock that deflects the compass arrow and has an impressive age of occurrence, according to different studies, from two to four billion years. It was this age that gave rise to the beautiful, appealing to the imagination of the average person, but completely the idea that Karandash Mountain is the oldest mountain on earth.

Exactly in order to record the mythicality of the claim of the oldest Karandash Mountain, I went to its summit. This is not the case. Izrandite has an ancient origin and an unusual appearance, but its age has nothing to do with the age of the mountain or the Urals. Everything is explained simply: in the course of many geological processes that took place on the territory of the Urals over these billions of years, continents moved in and out, mountains grew and were destroyed to the ground, this section of ancient rock was pushed to the surface and coincidentally ended up on the top of the mountain. In other words, the rock is ancient, but the mountain as a landform is not ancient, it is relatively young, younger than many other mountain systems, such as, for example, the Sayans and the Khibiny. The Urals as a whole are very often unjustifiably aged, although they are far from being the oldest mountains in Russia, let alone the world.

After Karandash Mountain I started the global shift westward along the forest trails, roads and power lines along this section of the route. Some trails that I had previously marked on the map as passable turned out to be grassy meadows, so I had to look for detours, but mostly everything was according to the plan.

The end of the day was unexpectedly stretched in time, I planned to finish the route at about the 40th kilometer, but unfortunate water problems forced me to go further. There was plenty of water around, but all the rivers along the way were blocked by beaver dams and were muddy puddles. We had to get to the village of Grivenka and ask the villagers for water from a well. I had no strength to go any further, so I moved 400 meters away from the village and took shelter in a forest belt.

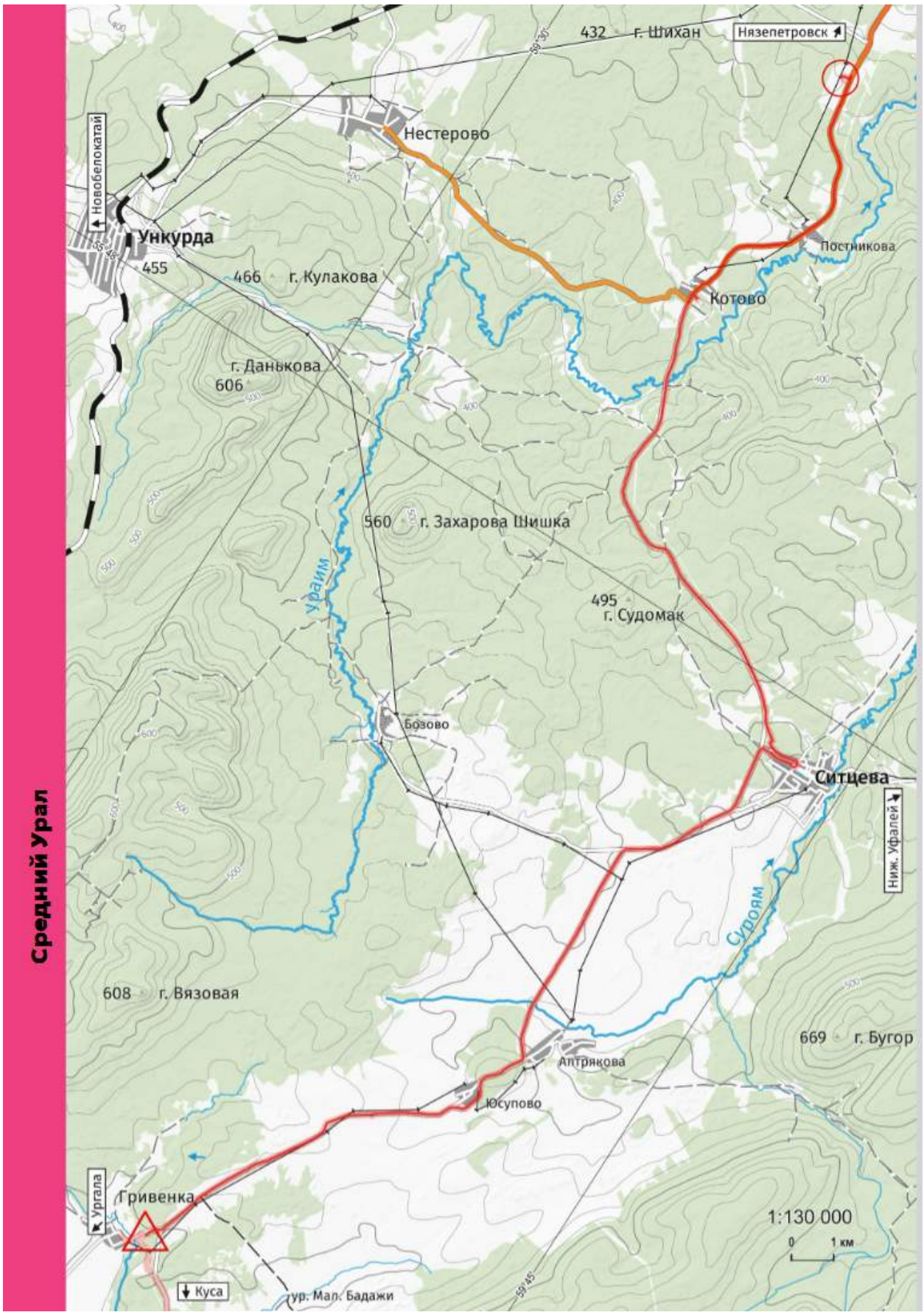
Not the best decision from the point of view of safety, but the 47 kilometers dulled its feeling. Tomorrow there is a desire to reach the town of Nyazepetrovsk, to check into a hotel, to wash, to charge the equipment. But this task is under 50 km. Will I be able to? Not sure, we'll see tomorrow.



The path after the descent from the ridge



Lunch break



The Middle Urals

Mt. Shikhan *Nyazepetrovsk*

Nesterovo

Unkurda

Mt. Kulakova

Kotovo

Postinkova

Mt. Dan'kova

Mt. Zakharova Shishka

Mt. Sudomakh

Sittseva

Bozovo

Mt. Vyazovaya

Aptryakova

Yusupovo

Suroyam river

Nizhny Ufaley

Mt. Bugor

Grivenka

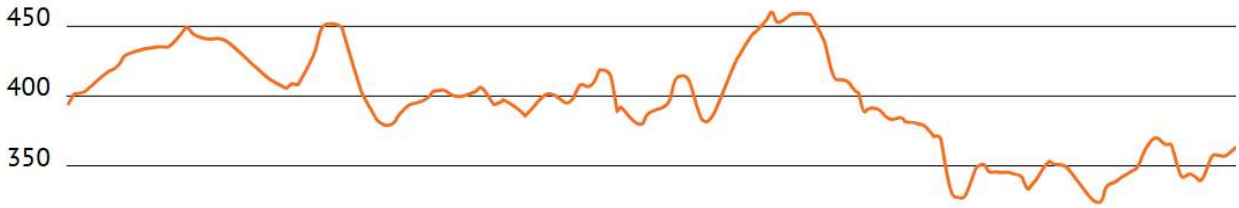
Kusa

Badazhi tract

Day 32

Grivenka village – Aptryakova village – Sittsevo village – Uraim river valley

44 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 929 km



June 1, 2021

First day of summer. Today was a long, hard, exhaustingly monotonous day. Walking along the highway towards Nyazepetrovsk up – down, up – down on the wavy mountainous terrain, the road looped and did not make me happy with anything remarkable. Unfortunately, the logic of the route forces to make this shift to the west and cross on public roads. The high ridges of the Southern Urals are still visible on the south-eastern corner of the horizon, further to the north they are lowered, flattened and overgrown with forest up to the tops. This is the Middle Urals coming into its rights.



The road I hiked all day



View back towards Taganay

When I was preparing for the Trans-Ural crossing, studying maps and comparing them with the routes of my predecessors, I noticed that they all had to bypass the watershed ridges in the southern part of the Middle Urals to some extent, either heading to east along highways or to west along more secondary roads. It makes sense: the low, forest-covered mountains are not the most interesting surfaces for movement. On the other hand, the mining history, concentrated in small villages that arose around ironworks and quarries, is fascinating. I descended from exactly those roads which go through the settlement as well as my predecessor.

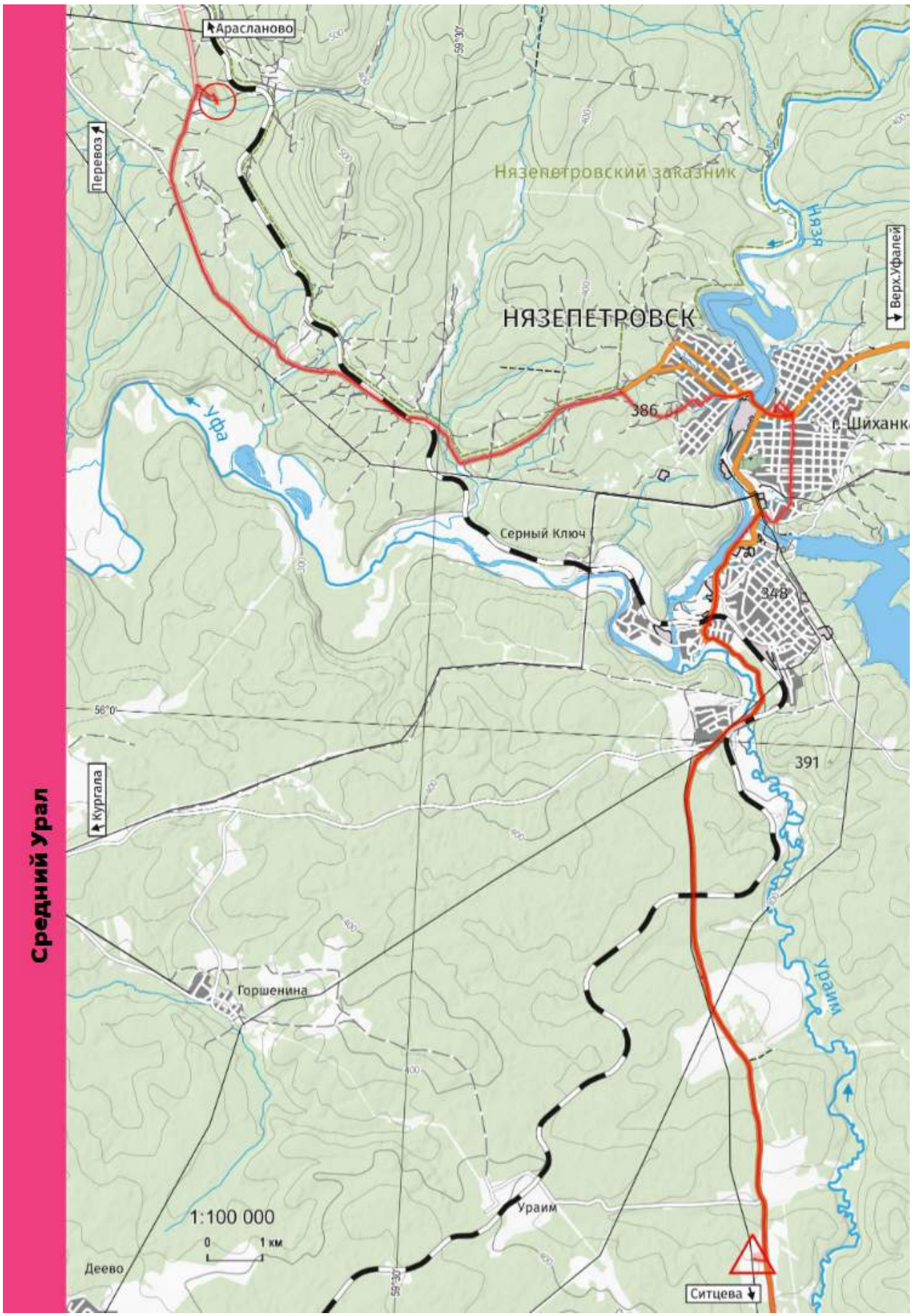
Additionally, I decided that the Middle Urals would be a conditional rest segment on my route. The logic of this decision is simple. Starting in the Southern Urals, I covered a quarter of the journey at an intense pace, adapting to the workload, with most of the path lying in mountainous and forested areas. Entering the Middle Urals, I was coming down from the main watershed to roads leading through secondary ridges, staying within the mountainous territory, passing through this part of the Urals in transit, gathering my strength as much as possible before the truly wild territories of the Northern, Subpolar and Polar Urals.



Today, I rested and gathered my strength, but despite my efforts, I couldn’t carry my backpack all the way to Nyazepetrovsk. The monotony is just as exhausting as the windbreaks. There’s hardly anything to recall from the day, except for one small but unpleasant incident. A police car stopped in front of me, blocking the path. Officer Chernov wanted to check the documents of a peaceful traveler walking along the road. The funny thing is, when he asked me where I was heading and heard my answer about the Arctic Ocean, not a single emotion was reflected on his face. After we parted ways, I was racking my brain for a long time: either he simply didn’t know where that was, or he was so uninterested in anything happening outside his territory.

Once again, I had trouble in finding clean water during the day, occasionally resorting to small villages along the way for a solution.

I set up my tent in a small strip of forest, planning to reach Nyazepetrovsk in the morning.



The Middle Urals

Perevoz *Nyazepetrovsky Nature Reserve*

NYAZEPETROVSK

Nyazya

Verkhniy Ufaley

Mt. Shikhanka

Serniy Spring

Araslanovo

Ufa lake

Gorshenina

Uraim

Kurgala

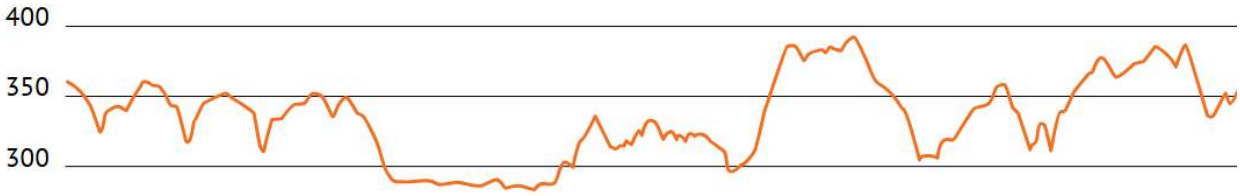
Deyevo

Sitseva

Day 33

Uraim River Valley – Nyazepetrovsk City – Bardymsky Ridge

40 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 969 km



June 2, 2021

My body has settled into a certain rhythm: lately, I fall asleep as soon as I lay my head on the makeshift pillow made of my belongings, but I wake up on my own, without an alarm, between 4-5 AM, usually 10-15 minutes before sunrise. Yesterday, I was so exhausted from the roads that all I could do was to check for mites and, with my last bit of energy, record the usual video about the route I covered on the map. It seems that as soon as I stopped recording, I fell asleep. At least, the navigator kept running all night.



When there are no mountains, all that's left is to take photos of yourself



Foggy dawn

While walking through populated areas, such oversights are forgivable, but further while walking to north, I absolutely cannot afford such mistakes. There, conserving energy for numerous electronic devices will be one of the main tasks.

In the morning, even though there were only clearings and forests around me, it was quite beautiful: light fog and the sun breaking through the clouds. I faced the dilemma of whether to get out, take some photos, and immediately soak my feet in the heavy morning dew, or to pretend that nothing interesting was happening, close the tent flap, and probably keep my feet dry. After a brief internal debate, I grumbled and crawled out of the tent.

The weather forecast came in: the first half of the day would be more or less clear with variable cloudiness, followed by a couple of days of rain. I hurried to make the most of the dry weather, cover the day's planned distance, and then rest in the evening to the sound of rain on the tent.



In the morning freshness, I reached the city of Nyazepetrovsk by ten o'clock. I was a bit worried that Russian Post might cause me some trouble, as another shipment with food and gas for the stove was waiting at the post office “to be picked up.” But everything went smoothly. I even managed to arrange for the operator to charge my power banks while I was having lunch and visiting the local history museum.

Post offices play an important role in my journeys. I often use this method to send equipment to the starting point that is prohibited on airplanes. Gas for stoves, flares – I send them by mail to be picked up, and upon arrival, I collect them and continue on my way.

The city made a rather pleasant impression – small, cozy, with many old houses scattered across the slopes of the hills, surrounded by a wall of spruce forest. However, its streets are gradually but inevitably being taken over by cheap siding, plastic windows, and other modern building materials. Observations show that the owners of old houses often do not prioritize preservation of authentic look, they take

out various door frames, replace them with faceless white plastic, and cover wooden houses with cheap and available materials.



Outskirts of Nyazepetrovsk

It's heartbreaking to see, but on the other hand, one can understand the homeowners: life in small towns is not wealthy, and the beauty of antiquity won't protect them from drafts and frost. So, they do what they can to get out of the situation.

I stopped by the local history museum, where, for a mere pittance – 35 rubles, which is almost embarrassing to mention – I was given an hour-long tour. Prices in such places always make me feel confused. It seems that even if they raised the cost by 3-5 times, it would still be cheap, but it would allow them to improve their resources a little. What's valuable in such museums is the personal, human touch. It's clear that the staff work out of passion, they are happy to see visitors, and even let you touch and handle some interesting exhibits. Larger museums often lack this warmth.

After spending a couple of hours wandering around and letting my power banks charge, I headed out of the city, hoping to cover the planned distance before the rain started.

While in the city, with access to fast internet, I received several messages from friends and followers about bears. About their attacks on people. It's a strange and interesting story, especially involving bears: as soon as some incident happens, many feel the need to inform me about it. What are their intentions: to support the person or to demoralize?



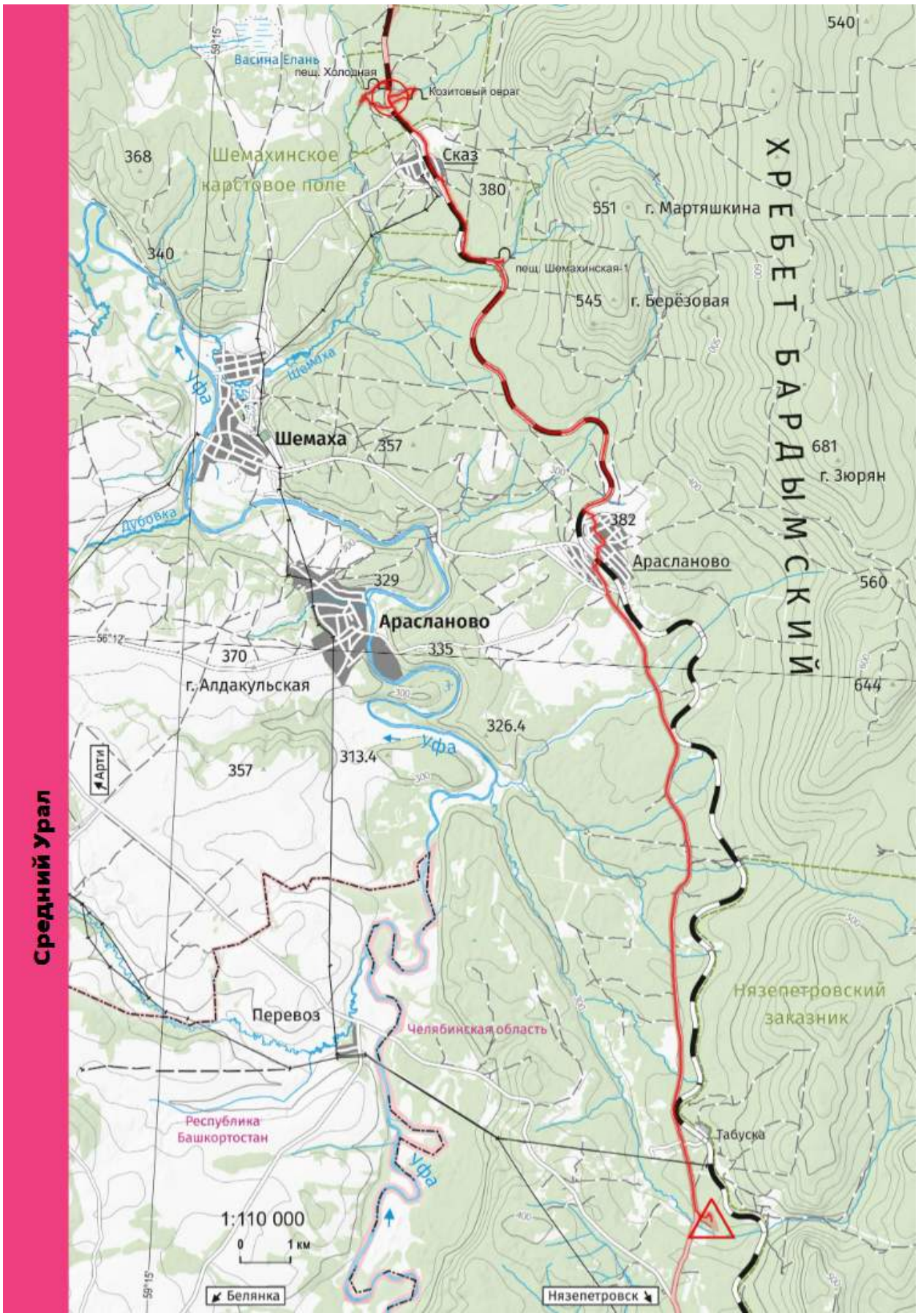
Window Frames – Old and New

Perhaps it's all a projection of their own fears and insecurities that they want to share with me. Fortunately, such stories no longer have the intended effect on me. I am well aware that bears sometimes attack people. But I would like to ask from the pages of this book: if you wish to support someone on their journey, please avoid sharing negativity unless it directly affects the traveler's route. This is important. For example, I try not to talk about or emphasize interactions with bears during my journey, knowing that it won't bring joy or peace to Tatyana Sergeevna, who is already having a hard time without me.

After leaving the city, I walked another 20 km and set up camp on the banks of the Tabuska River, at the western foot of the Bardymsky Ridge. I couldn't get water in populated areas due to their absence, so I had to take it from a beaver-dammed swamp, which was once a river. I boiled it for a long time, hoping that the high temperature would kill all the wildlife living in it.

Perhaps I should have considered getting a water filter for this part of the Urals, but I've never used one and didn't even think about it during preparation. No use wondering now. Once I pass through the Middle Urals, the water situation will improve significantly!

The midges have started to appear and are started to bother me. It's not too bad yet, but I don't have high hopes that it won't get worse.



The Middle Urals

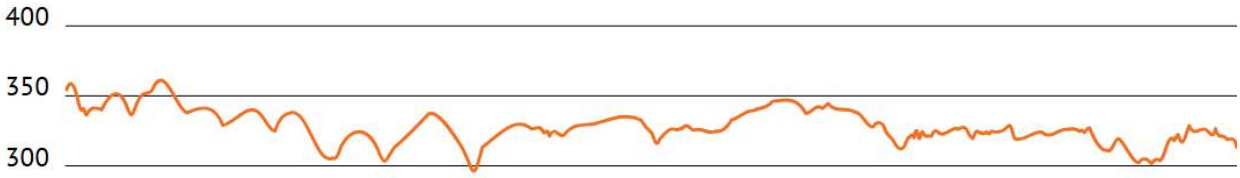
Vasina Yelan *Holodnaya cave*

Kozitovyy Ravine	*Karaz*
Shemakha Karst Field	*Chelyabinskaya Oblast'*
Skaz	*Berezovaya Mountain*
Perevoz	*Martyashkina Mountain*
Shemakha	*Bardymsky Ridge*
Araslanovo	*Zyuryan mountain*
m. Aldakulskaya	*Nyazepetrovsky Reserve*
Belyanka	*Belyanka*

Day 34

Bardymsky Ridge – Araslanovo Village – Skaz Village – Shemakha Karst Field

35 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1004 km



June 3, 2021

My maternal grandfather was a radio operator during the war, and after being demobilized, he stayed in the profession he had acquired, getting a job with a geological expedition where he met my grandmother. One of the negative side effects of his work was that in his old age, his hearing significantly deteriorated. Overall, this didn't bother him much, except for one thing I remember: he constantly lamented that he couldn't hear the birds singing in the forest in the morning.

It took me 37 years of life and 34 days of walking in the company of birds to understand his frustration. The birds and their morning chorus have become an indispensable part of my existence these days, and if earlier I struggled to distinguish individual voices, with each passing day and each kilometer across the Urals, my trained ear became better and better at recognizing individual singers. And of course, I now understand much better the sadness of my grandfather, who had to greet a beautiful summer morning in silence.

This is already the fourth day I've been walking through the Middle Urals – and the fourth day I've been walking mostly on roads. This irritates me so much; roads surrounded by forest are boring and uninteresting. I'm tormented by the question of whether I planned the route correctly. I calm down myself with the thought that sometimes you have to sacrifice something for the greater good. If I were walking through forest clearings and by compass bearings, still surrounded by forest, nothing would qualitatively change, but I would have spent significantly more energy and time. However, today there's finally something naturally interesting on the plan. The Shemakha Karst Field on the western slope of the Bardymsky ridge – a

highly karsted area with more than thirty caves, stone bridges, sinkholes, springs, and rivers disappearing into ponors. That's where I'm heading.

After Araslanovo Village, I reached the tracks of the West Ural Railway, which I will be walking along today and tomorrow. The railway itself is over 100 years old; it was once actively used, connecting the Southern Ural and the Middle Urals, but in the 90s it became deserted.



The Path Along the West Ural Railway

Recently, it was repaired, but no life was breathed into it, and it looks quite strange. Among the new rails and sleepers, young birch trees occasionally sprout. It is obvious that the road cannot become overgrown; trains still occasionally pass through, but the rust on the rails indicates that this does not happen often.

Walking along the sleepers, I reached the Shemakha karst field. The Shemakha First and Second Caves are located about a hundred meters from the road. I peeped into cave number one, although I couldn't explore the third longest cave in the Chelyabinskaya oblast' deeply: spring waters still blocked most of the passages, and I could only go about twenty to thirty meters. It was clear that a river had recently flowed from its entrance. The cave is pleasant, with beautifully water-carved walls.

Not staying too long at the cave, I headed to the village of Skaz. It's worth noting that when I was preparing for the route, I found a website on the internet

whose front page said: “Welcome to the Ural Skaz – a hidden corner of untouched nature and true beauty of the Urals.” I gathered a lot of useful, well-structured information about the area from this site. I became curious about what this project was and who was behind it, so I found the person who created it, and we arranged to meet.

The first structure that greeted me in the village was a brightly painted purple toilet – so bright that it was impossible to miss – followed by small village houses, cozy and nestled on both sides of the railway track.



Entrance to the Shemakha First Cave

At the tightly boarded-up railway station, we met Vyacheslav Goncharov and went to his house to drink some tea. We recorded a short interview for a film.

The story is wonderful and remarkable – just the way I like it. A perfect example of how a small local business can attract tourists and make a profit by investing in the development of the area. To summarize Vyacheslav’s story very briefly, it goes like this. Having a house in the village, he watched as Skaz slowly declined after the railway ceased operations. He decided that only a tourism-driven future could breathe life into it, and since the caves I had explored earlier consistently attracted tourists, he built a guesthouse, started creating and marking routes around the Shemakha karst field, and created a website with a map of the area

and descriptions. He installed a bright toilet at the exit of the village to ensure that the steadily growing flow of tourists wouldn't scatter into the surrounding bushes. And it worked. The number of tourists increases every year. I can't help but agree with Vyacheslav, as it was he who led me here through a convenient, informative website, map, and markings.



Visiting Vyacheslav Goncharov

The day was coming to evening, so after clarifying with Vyacheslav the location of two karst objects, I hurried to find them. First, I decided to visit the karstoviy bridge. I had to do a bit of climbing through the forest and searching, but overall, thanks to the markings and an understanding of the processes that create such karst phenomena, I found it without much trou I simply followed a dry stream bed through numerous karst sinkholes or wells that unexpectedly appeared along the way – breaking a leg here at night would be all too easy – and arrived at the karst bridge. It was clear that there had once been a cave here, but time and water had done their work, partially collapsing the ceiling and forming an arch. Unfortunately, with my non-wide-angle lens, capturing anything decent was simply impossible, so I settled for taking photos with my phone and quickly, shamefully fled back to the sunlight, pursued by a swarm of mosquitoes.

After the bridge, I decided to visit Kozitoviy Ovrag and set up camp there for the night. As I approached it through the forest, I realized I wouldn't be staying overnight. The beautiful, atmospheric place was completely devoid of water. It was clear that in spring, a stream flows through the ravine, but as soon as the pressure subsides, the water disappears underground through numerous karst cavities, leaving a dry gully. However, the trip wasn't in vain: the sunlight breaking through the spruce trunks gifted me some pleasant, beautiful sunset moments, which I had been longing for over the past few days. I made my way back along the perfectly flat and

dry bed of the Gremuchaya River. I collected water from the hollows under the railway bridge and set up my tent there.



Karstoviy Bridge



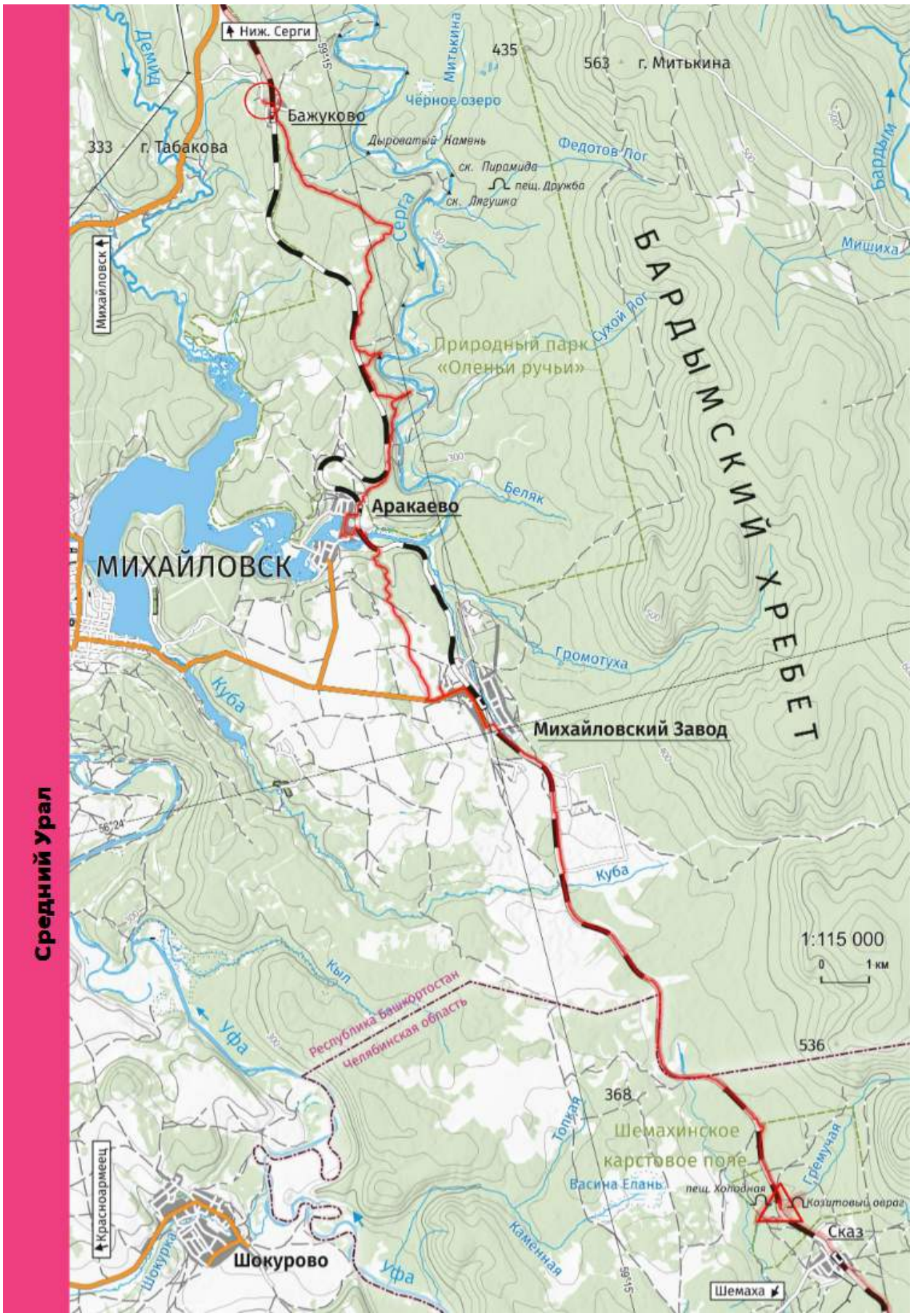
Kozitoviy Ovrag at sunset

Today is a milestone day for me – I've walked my first thousand kilometers. I've never gone this far in my life before. You could say I've crossed the boundary of the known limits of my endurance, and what lies ahead, I don't yet know.

Analyzing my physical and mental state, I can say that everything is more or less fine. My mind is in good shape; I'm not tired of the journey, and I'm still just as interested, if not more so, than at the start, as I'm walking through unfamiliar places and being supported by so many people. This is one of the most important aspects: I'm not just walking for myself, but I'm walking in the company of thousands of people who are interested in the Urals. The daily updates and the responses to them are very encouraging, although they also take a lot of energy and time. It can be difficult in the evenings to find both of these limited resources to summarize the day, sort through photos, and write the text. But I know that many people are waiting for this, and I draw strength from their feedback.

Physical condition is also fine. Not without problems, but so far I have managed to solve them. From time to time, especially in the legs, there are pains, traditionally the left leg. Knee and Achilles tendon. Every evening I do self-massage, I smear at night with anesthetic and inflammation-relieving cream. And it seems, as long as the situation doesn't get any worse, I can't get rid of it.

I hope I'll be able to rest a bit during the Middle Urals stage and prepare for the truly wild territories ahead.



The Middle Urals

Mihaylovsk *m. Tabakova*

r. Demid

Nizhniye Sergi

Bazhukovo

r. Serga

Dirovatiy kamen'

lake Chernoye

Mitkina

Lyaguska cliff

Piramida cliff

Druzhba cave

Fedotov Log

m. Mitkina

Sukhoy Log

Olenyi ruchyi Natural park

Bardimskiy ridge

Mishiha

Belyak

Arakaevo

Mihaylovsk

Kuba

Gromotuha

Mikhaylovskiy zavod

Kil

r. Ufa

Shokurovo

Shokurka

Krasnoarmeyets

Bashkortostan Republic

Chelyabinskaya oblast'

Kamenaya

Topkaya

Vasina yelan'

Kholodnaya cave

Shemaha

Skaz

Gremuchaya

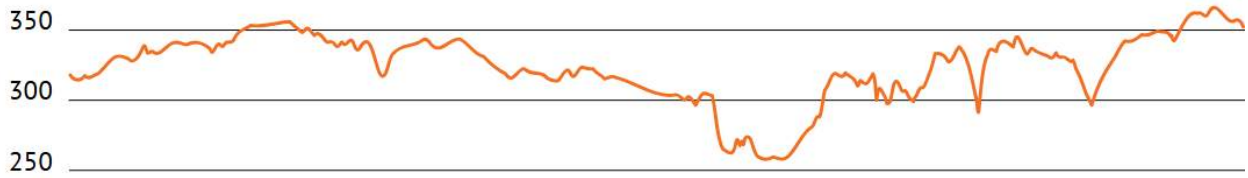
Kozitovy ravine

Shemakha karst field

Day 35

Shemakha Karst Field – Mikhaylovsky Zavod Village – Arakaevo Village – Olenyi Ruchyi Nature Park

38 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1042 km



June 4, 2021

Last night, after finishing my diary entry, I forced myself to read a bit about the surrounding area. I was surprised to discover one fact that I think directly applies to me. It turns out that the discovery of the Shemakha Karst Field and its caves was linked to the planning of a reservoir on the Ufa River. Due to the high degree of karstification in the area, it was decided that constructing hydraulic structures here would be impractical, and the dam was built much further downstream in the village of Pavlovka, where, a few decades later, I was born, still unable to walk. I grew up there and, apparently, received my first and most important taiga inoculation. If it weren't for the Pavlovsk Reservoir in my life, perhaps this journey wouldn't have happened either. Such is the twist of fate.

Today's walking day was divided into two roughly equal parts. The first part was the usual, now familiar, walking along railway sleepers and public roads. If it weren't for the change of region – I've already entered the fourth, Sverdlovsk Oblast – there would have been nothing to mention. Sun, sleepers, and dusty roads.



Railway bridge over the Serga River near Arakaevo Village

The second half was quite different from the first and began at the bridge over the Serga River. I crossed a beautiful railway bridge, which offered wonderful views of the river, cliffs, and the gentle curves of the barely noticeable forest-covered mountains. Then I entered the territory of the “Olenyi Ruchyi” Nature Park.



Houses in Arakaevo

But first, I stopped by the village of Arakaevo, and I want to mention it separately due to two memorable observations. The first is that it is a Tatar village, and with the music and singing coming from the mosque, I momentarily felt as if I were in Bashkiria, or perhaps even somewhere in Dagestan. The second observation: perhaps related to the first, a national characteristic, but the houses here are built differently from what I had seen before. In previous villages, a household typically consisted of a house facing the street with its gable, massive gates under a gable canopy, behind which was an open yard with auxiliary buildings along the edges of the plot. In Arakaevo, however, a different layout caught my eye. Many houses stood sideways to the street, occupying half of the plot, with a shed almost touching them, and small gates leading under two converging roofs. There was no open yard.

Upon entering the “Olenyi Ruchyi” Nature Park, I left the public roads and spent the rest of the day on forest trails, walking along the high rocky bank of the Serga River. As I approached the central estate of the park, where I had planned to spend the night, mobile internet became available, and I received some bad news. She had died! To be precise, she had been killed. The solo traveler Anastasia Pykhteeva. The police and volunteers had been searching for her for several days; she had started a solo rafting trip on the Serga River and had gone missing. I had also been contacted and asked to keep an eye out along the riverbanks.

In order to inspect the riverbanks, I left the road a couple of times and, emerging from the forest onto the cliffs, carefully examined the river valley. It turned out to be in vain. The killer was a repeat offender who had targeted the girl's money. Sad news, once again proving that it's not the wild animals one should fear most when heading into the forest. In populated areas, near villages and towns, one must be extremely cautious and discreet, especially when traveling alone.

By evening, I reached the central estate of the nature park and checked into their hotel. Tomorrow, with the support of active guys from Yekaterinburg led by Vyacheslav Pestrikov, a meeting will take place in the park, similar to the one in Zlatoust.



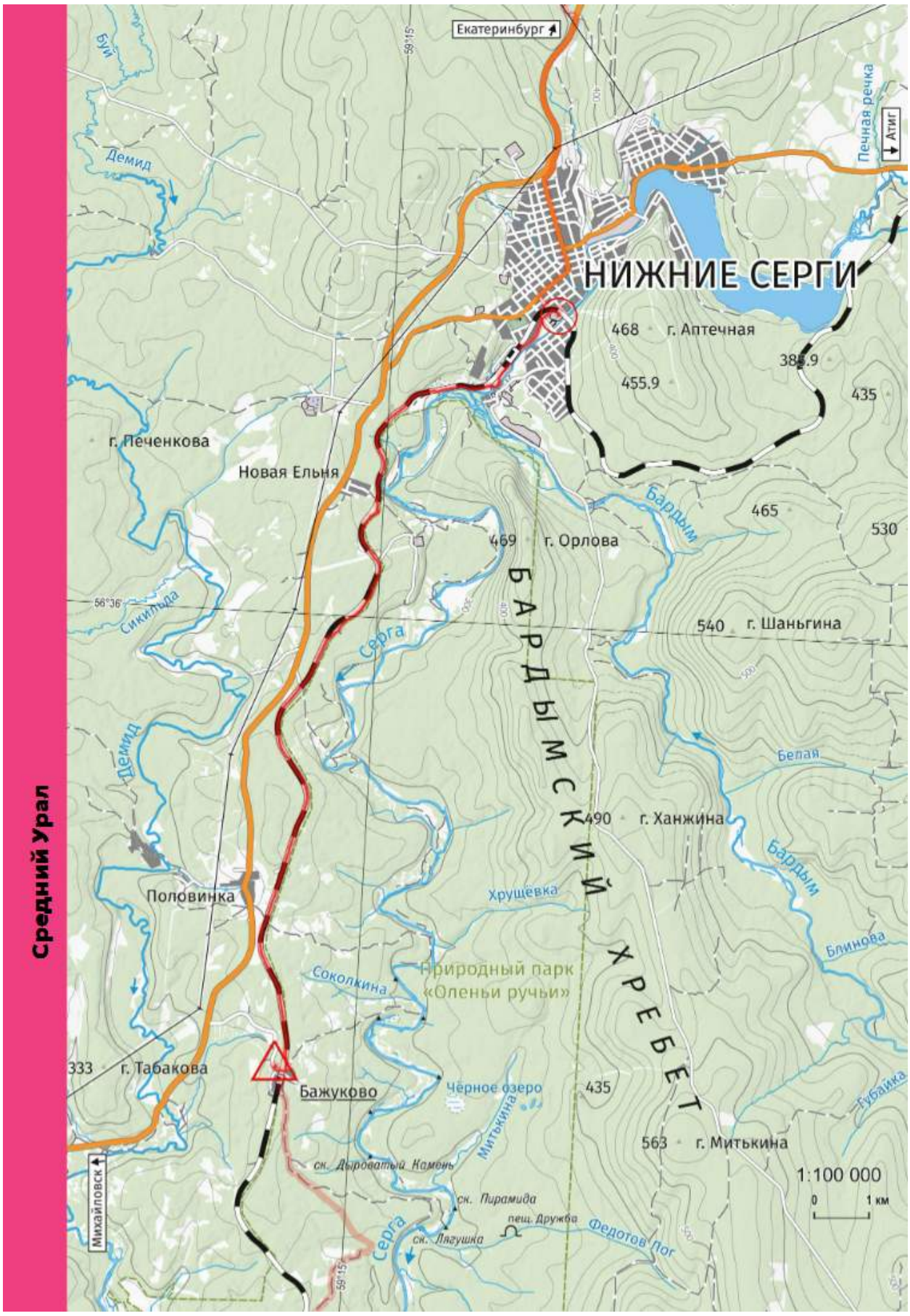
Evening walk. Discussing the future book with Larisa Pozdnyakova. Photo by Elena Malafeeva

For more than a week, we have been discussing and planning the options for its organization, looking for a place where we could coordinate a day off with my travel schedule. And it seems everything has worked out.

In the evening, friends were supposed to arrive, and while waiting for them, I decided to address an issue with my gear – my shoes were worn out. I needed to change my sneakers in Zlatoust when meeting with my family, but I decided they were still in decent condition and planned to replace them after two more stages, in the village of Serebryanka. By this evening, the tops of the sneakers started to tear seriously, and if I didn't try to reinforce them, sew them up, they wouldn't last until the next stage. So, I sat and stitched the shoes with polyester threads.

Closer to evening, two wonderful photographers arrived – Larisa Pozdnyakova and Elena Malafeeva. I have known Larisa for a long time; she is the creator of the publishing house “Azimut”, which publishes books about the Urals, helps me publish calendars, and I hope will handle the publication of my future book. I had only corresponded with Elena before, but I know she is an excellent photographer, specializing in underwater photography.

Perhaps it wasn't necessary, but can three people with cameras sit still on chairs? In the evening, we went to the park – scouting morning locations, as the sunset in the park isn't particularly promising, happening behind the forest, and it's impossible to observe in the evening, but the sunrise is another matter. The sun will rise over the river valley, and from the high rocky banks, it should be beautiful. Tomorrow we will see.



The Middle Urals

Yekaterinburg *m. Pechenkova*

Sikilda

Demid

m. Tabakova

Mihaylovsk

Novaya Yelna

Buzhukovo

Serga

Dirovatiy kamen'

Lyagushka

Mit'kina

c. Druzhba

l. Chernoye

Sokolina

Olenyi ruchyi Nature park

Khrushevka

Bardimskiy ridge

Nizhniye Sergi

m. Aptechnaya

m. Orlova

m. Shangina

m. Hanzhina

m. Mitkina

r. Belaya

r. Bardim

Blinova

Gubayka

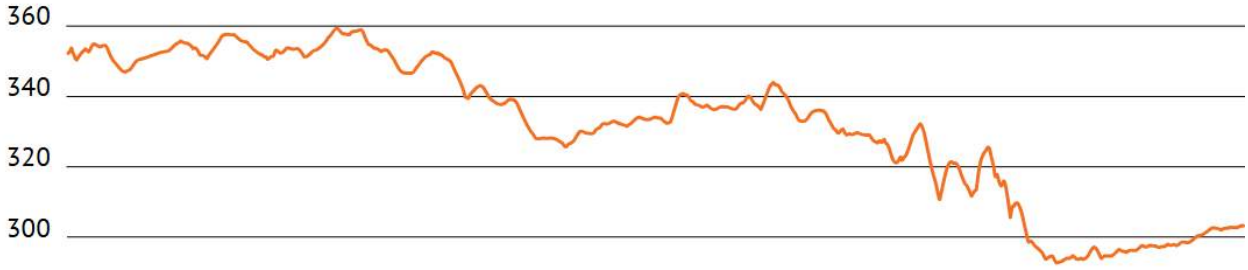
r. Pechnaya

Atig

Day 36

Nature Park "Olenyi ruchyi" – Nizhnie Sergi town

18.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1060.5 km



June 5, 2021

Amazing day. On the one hand, I covered the shortest distance of the entire route, but on the other hand, I was more exhausted than ever before.

It all started very early, at 2:30 AM. I think at that dark, nighttime hour, each of us three was lying in our own bed, secretly hoping that the others wouldn't get up. But the sky was cloudless, and we couldn't afford not to go to the spots we had scouted yesterday, as that was the only way to capture some photos. We got up and ventured out into the cold, damp night. And it was worth it.



Dawn over the Serga River

Morning light fogs, a deep river valley, a high open rock and the sun rising over the Central Urals forest sea – is there anything else you need for happiness? I'll admit, just a few days without sunrises, and I already began to wither. Today, I got my next dose of personal medicine.

The cold, hunger, and fatigue were forgotten. Like a wound-up toy, I ran across the cliffs, boardwalks, and even waded into the water to take photos. And the girls – I don't know why – paid little attention to the sunrise and instead photographed me. Not that I minded; it's nice to have a few good pictures of myself for once.

For several hours, we wandered the empty, well-kept trails of the nature park in complete solitude. One could say it was entirely ours – a rare stroke of luck, given the park's popularity among Yekaterinburg residents, the perfect weather, and the fact it was a weekend. Unfortunately, we only had time to see a fraction of its attractions. Time was relentless, and we had to return to the central lodge to prepare for the event.

What followed is a blur in my memory. People, people, and more people – endless conversations, photo sessions... By the time the presentation began, I'd already been on my feet for nearly eight hours – a full workday. It went well: a packed room, many familiar faces, important figures from the Urals. We talked, shared stories of past journeys, and discussed future plans. Afterward, we headed to a café for lunch in a large group. I sat, chatted, and at some point I realized I couldn't take it anymore.



A monument to an angel in the rays of the rising sun



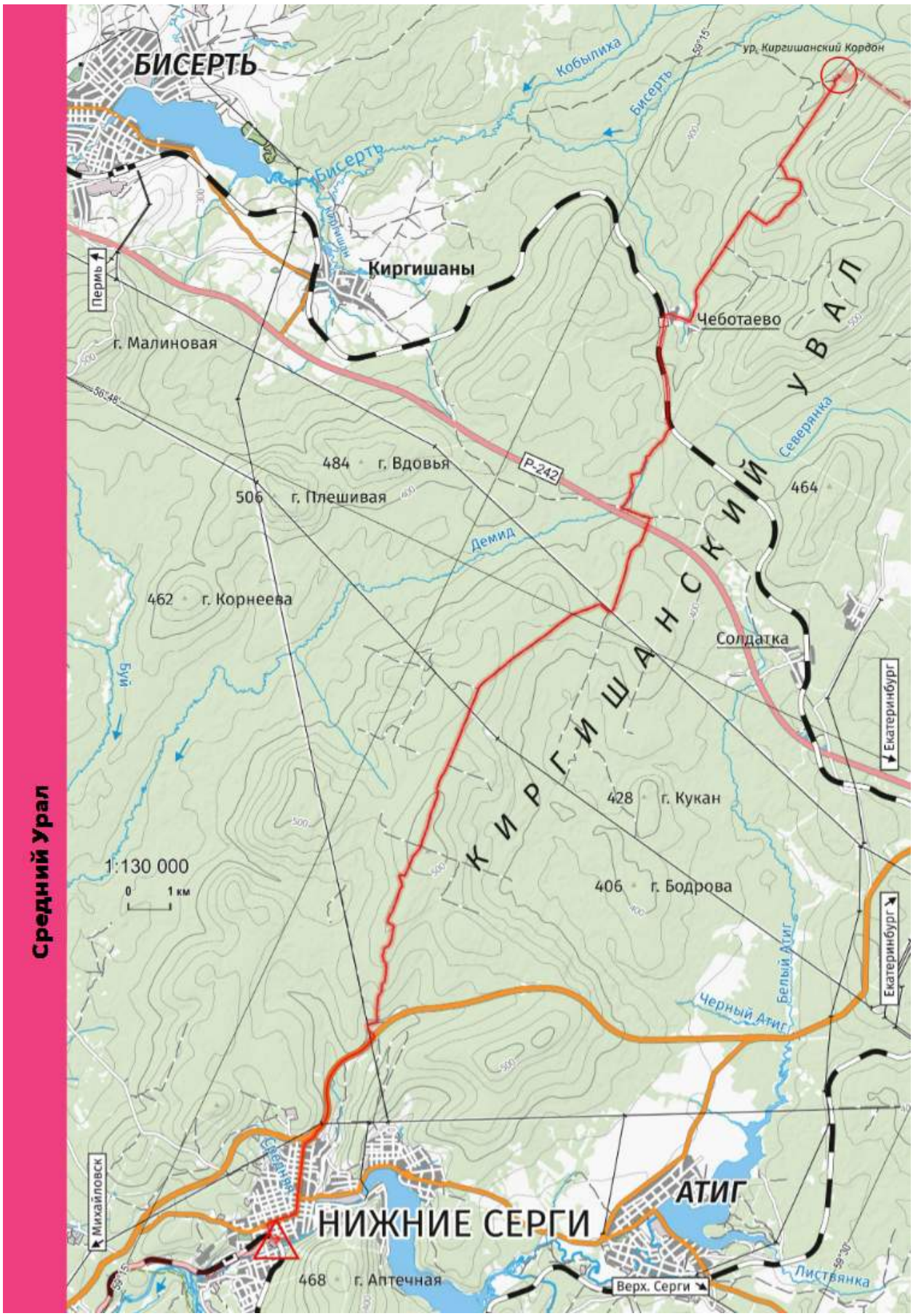
After the performance against the backdrop of the park administration. Photo by Elena Malafeeva

The overload of people and information made me feel like my brain would switch off any second.

I'm not sure if it was very polite, but out of a sense of self-preservation I suddenly stood up, took my backpack, I think I said goodbye to my friends, and walked briskly, before anyone followed me, towards the railroad crossing the park. I stepped onto the tracks and fled. I didn't get far – after a couple of kilometers, I was too exhausted to continue. I descended a few meters down the railway embankment to the first patch of forest shade, spread out my sleeping pad, and fell asleep. Trains rumbled by, blaring their horns whenever they spotted me near the tracks, but I barely noticed. I slept for a couple of hours.

By evening, sore and drained, I reached the town of Nizhnie Sergi. That morning, I'd wisely booked a room at a local "hotel" – though calling it that would insult the hospitality industry. I had been there once before, and I didn't want to go back, but there were no other options. A wretched, bug-infested dump on the outskirts of town, in an industrial zone. But none of that mattered now – all I wanted was a soft bed, a shower, a nearby store, and solitude.

Unfortunately, escaping people proved impossible. As I entered the town, I was already expected. A guy named Aidar insisted on joining me for the next few days. Luckily, I'd booked a twin room, and remembering the recent incident involving...



The Middle Urals

Bui *m. Korneyeva*

m. Pleshivaya

m. Vdovya

Demid

m. Malinovaya

Perm'

Bisert'

Kirgishani

Kobiliha

Chebotayevo

Kirgishanskiy Kordon

Kirgishanskiy uval

Severyanka

Soldatka

m. Kukan

m. Bodrova

Mihaylovsk

Yekaterinburg

Cherniy Atig

Beliy Atig

Atig

Verkhniye Sergi

Listvyanka

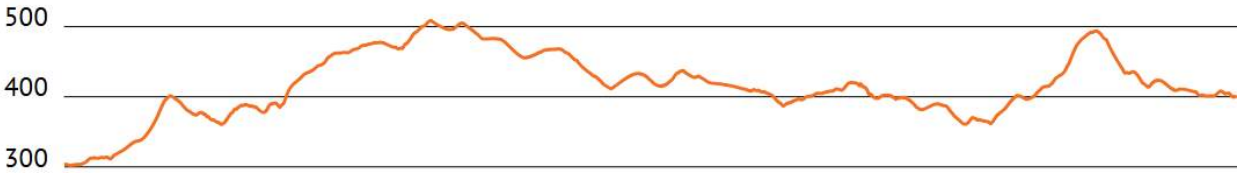
m. Aptechnaya

Nizhniye Sergi

Day 37

Nizhnie Sergi – Kirgishansky Uval ridge – Chebotaevo station – Kirgishansky Cordon Tract

40 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1100.5 km





Lost-in-the-woods Chebotaevo station

June 6, 2021

My no-longer-fresh legs are troubling me. They ache badly in the mornings, requiring long stretches and warm-ups before I can hit my stride. I need to address this. The solution is obvious: more rest – real rest, not the half-hearted attempts I've been making. Finish the day's route, lie down, and prop my legs up. No evening or morning scrambling. With these grim thoughts, I left my beloved bug-ridden den, where I'd slept so soundly.



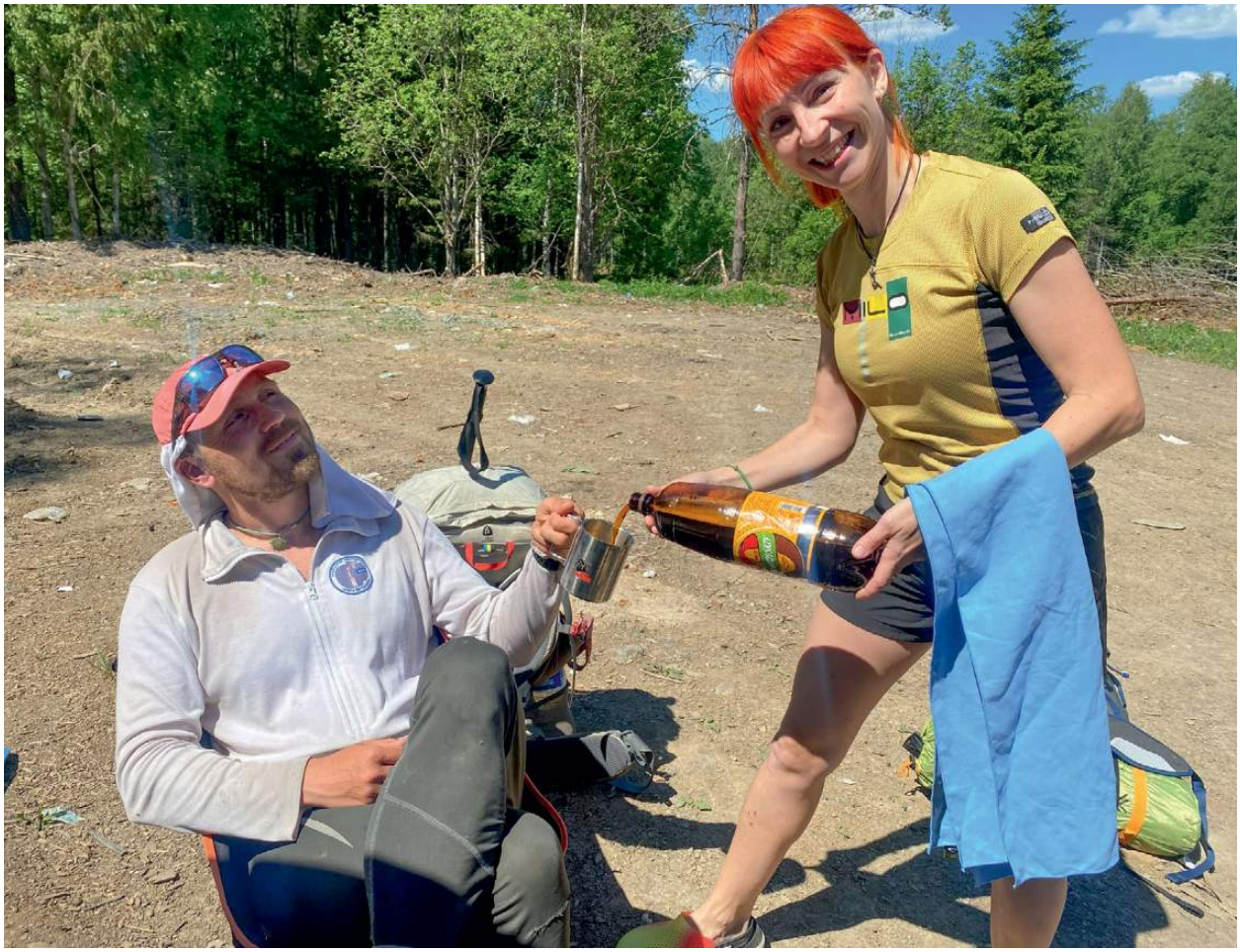
Forest Road

We set off a bit late, at around eight in the morning, but after all, it was a Sunday – a day for rest. The empty, sleepy streets of Nizhniye Sery silently agreed with such thoughts of mine. I noticed that almost all the houses in the town were built in the same style as in Arakaevo. Perhaps I was too quick to attribute this architectural style to the village's national character. I'll keep observing.

After leaving the town, there was a short stretch of scorching asphalt along the highway – then quickly into the shade of the forest, toward the Kirgishansky Uval ridge.

I was not in a very good mood, and perhaps I did not seem very friendly to my companion. But I didn't want to talk much; I wanted to go into myself and find out what was bothering me. Perhaps it was a kind of psychological trap I've fallen into many times during my hiking life – one I still don't know how to avoid. It lies in the fact that the places and peaks you approach with a certain ease or even disregard during route planning, seeing them as simple, often throw unexpected challenges at you. The same is happening with the Middle Urals. While hiking in the Southern Urals, I saw the next part as a kind of respite. Many times I told myself: be patient,

Oleg, it's difficult now, but soon the Middle Urals will begin, and there we will have a rest…



Ksenia Zelentsova

Of course it didn't happen, the same kilometers, heat, dust, people, lack of view peaks are as exhausting as the kurums and bushwhackers.

Yet, if you look at it from another angle, these thoughts of “easier times ahead” are also important. After all, if you expect the next stretch to be just as hard as the current one, it might become psychologically unbearable. At least now I understand that if I can cover most of the route and reach the Yelets River in the Polar Urals, the final 200 kilometers will be familiar terrain – I’ve hiked it before, so I know: everything will finally be good and easy. That thought keeps me going, even though I forbid myself to dwell on the finish line. Too soon.

What could be better than meeting old friends? Only meeting them on a scorching afternoon over a big bowl of icy okroshka. An unexpected reunion, though

deep down, I must admit: I'd hoped someone might be waiting for me where my path crossed the Perm–Yekaterinburg highway.

As we approached the road and began hearing the hum of cars, I spotted bright orange dots moving in the distance. There was no doubt – they were here for me. Usually, the only people you see on these roads are dressed in dirty camouflage, but this was different. One of the dots broke away, quickly closing the distance, and suddenly I found myself embracing Ksyusha Zelentsova – an old friend with whom I'd shared countless days in the Ural Mountains, enduring hardships and joys on multi-day trans-Ural mountain grails. What a wonderful reunion, what wonderful people: Sasha Orlov, Tanya Orlova, Alexander Zelentsov. And the best part is that they don't plan to go any further with me.

They sat me down at an improvised table, fed me, gave me drinks, and showered me with care. It's hard to overstate how much such encounters mean on a long trek. Every trace of gloomy thoughts vanished.

After the "feast", I was alone again. My companion headed home with the guys, and I placidly pulled the trail stitch further north. For the rest of the day, I navigated by compass through dense forest, along overgrown roads choked with windfall, then onto clear forest paths, and even a short stretch of railroad tracks, until I reached the base of an unnamed peak – one so insignificant it didn't even merit an elevation mark on maps. I'd had my eye on it for a while; satellite images and maps hinted that there might be clearings at the top, offering hope for a view.



The dried-up bed of the Klyuchevka River

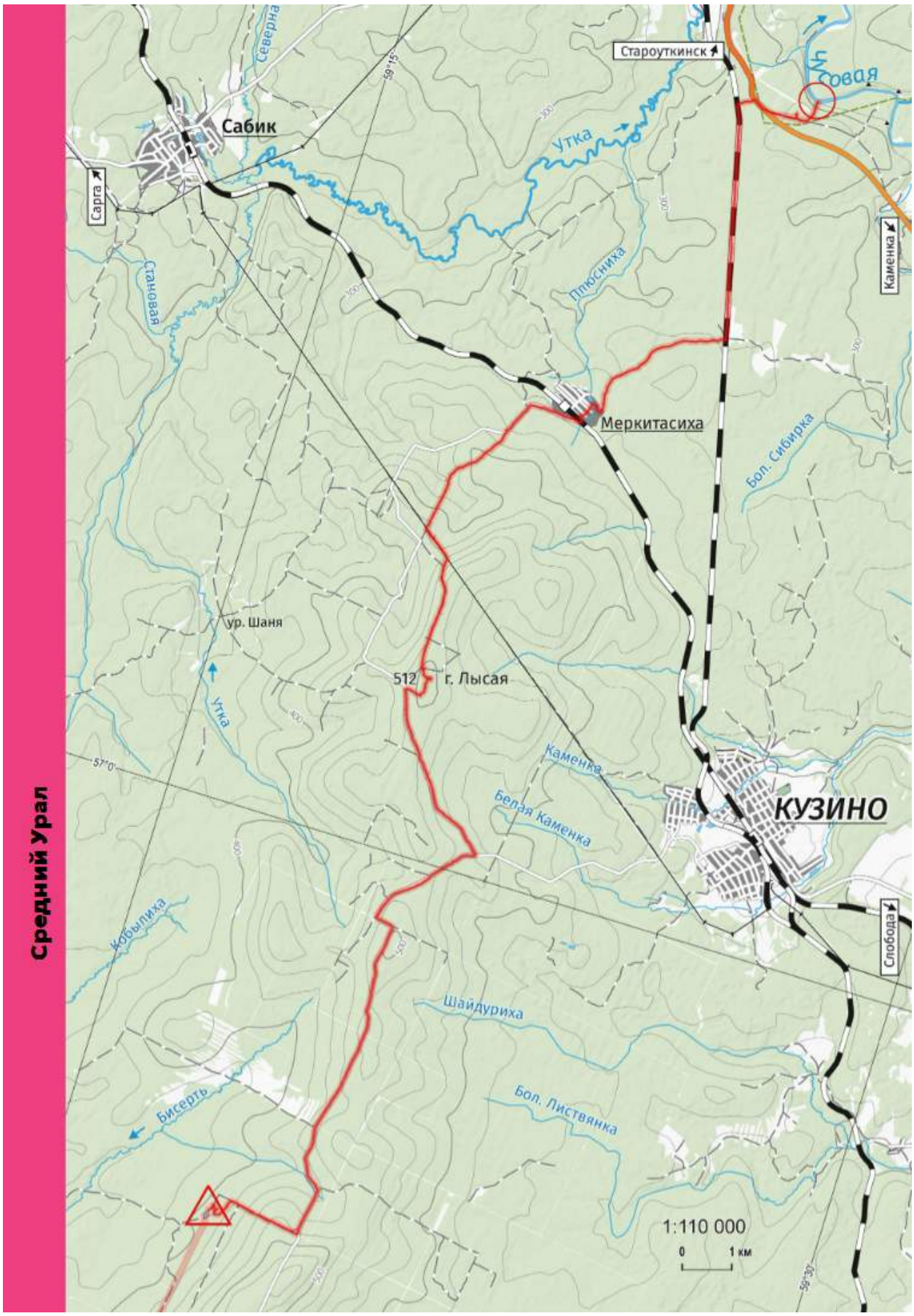


Overnight stay on the bank of a flooded quarry

I climbed up, but my hopes were dashed – the clearings had long since grown over with dense birch and aspen forest. At least I managed to find a mobile signal. I lay there for an hour, resting, then moved on toward water. And here came the problem: the streams that originated on the slopes of the mountain and the Kliuchevka River were dried up. Damp, mossy stones and even the water standing in small hollows between them made it clear that the river had recently flowed here.

And all of it had run away. We had to use the backup plan and walk a few more kilometers to an ancient flooded quarry. I didn't really want to drink from it, and I couldn't find any information about what and when the water was extracted at this place while preparing for the route. There was not zero probability that the water could have an increased content of chemical elements not the most useful for the organism, but there were no options. Of course, it was possible to go down from the ridge, where the water should have been exactly, but there was little strength left, and remembering about beavers in the small rivers of the Middle Urals, I could not be sure of good water quality there. I decided that I could risk it for one day.

I pitched my tent at the far end of the lake, right by the shore. And since the only beautiful view was from my entrance, I didn't go anywhere else that day. I had a well-deserved rest, watching ducks swimming a few meters from my canopy.



The Middle Urals

Sarga *Stanovaya*

Sabik

Chusovaya

r. Utka

Staroutkinsk

Kamenka

Bolshaya Sibirka

Merkitasiha

Plusniha

Shanya tract

m. Lisaya

Belaya Kamenka

Kuzino

Sloboda

Kobiliha

Bisert'

Shayduriha

Bolshaya Listvyanka

Day 38

Kirgishansky Cordón Tract – Mount Lysaya – Merkitasikha Village – Chusovaya River

39 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1139.5 km



June 7, 2021

I slept horribly – a downside of those picturesque photos that fill these pages. It might seem like posing, but when you're surrounded by endless forest, you crave variety in your shots. Yesterday, I chose the tent site for aesthetics, not comfort: the perfect frame with the lake in the background. But let's be honest, it was far from ideal for sleeping. The ground was uneven, and the moment I dozed off, I'd start sliding somewhere. Deep down, I knew this would happen, yet I didn't bother relocating the tent after taking the photo. Staged shots have no place in this book.

I set off at 6:30, pausing to explore the lake's surroundings. Signs of industrial activity were everywhere – what's now forested once was a quarry. Near the northern shore, I found a small stone marker embedded in the earth. Its purpose and origin were unclear, likely tied to the quarry's past.



A stone sign by the lake

In the surroundings of the lake I found several dark sinkholes, remnants of mines. Even a wooden log cabin was preserved in the center of one of them. Probably, if I walked through the forest and searched more closely, I could find many more industrial artifacts, but there was no time, so I went on.

The Middle Urals is unique: while it does not possess many bright natural gems, it contributes to the diversity of the range and my route with its mining and

factory history. Many objects, witnesses of those interesting times, big and small, are scattered among its lovely green mountains.

Today, I continued yesterday's trek along the ridges, following overgrown, abandoned roads. I'd held some hope for Mount Lysaya (512.5 m), but upon climbing I found its summit densely forested with deciduous trees.

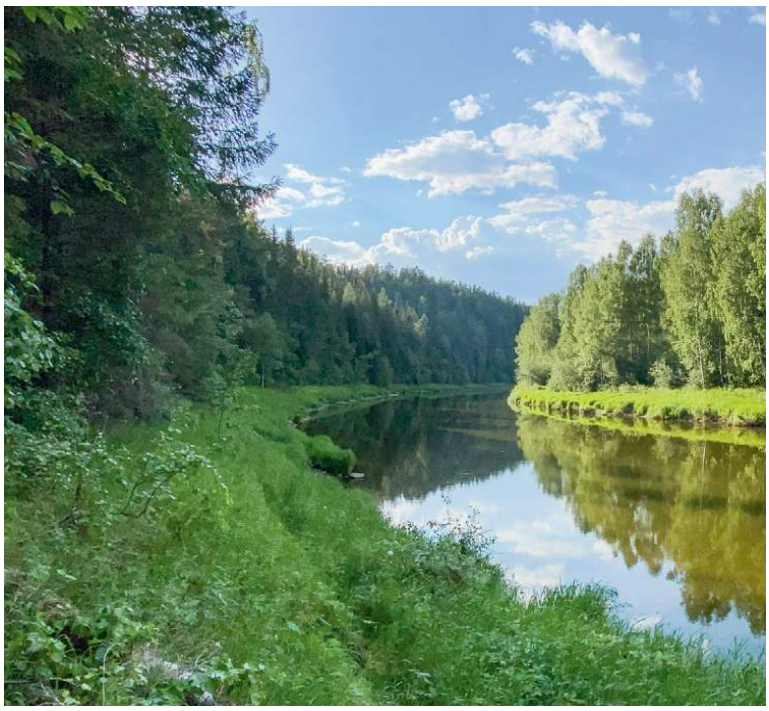
The most important event of the day was that I decided not to pick up the food package from Kuzino village. It was sent to the post office “on demand”, and everything would have been fine, it would have arrived on time – go and pick it up, if the post office worked on Mondays, but, as often happens in small towns, it is a day off for letter carriers. I realized days ago I was likely to reach Kuzino on a Monday and had been weighing options. This morning before leaving, I did a food revision: if I collected all kinds of leftovers, I would have enough for a couple of days. It will take 4-5 days to get to the next abandonment in Serebryanka village, but I can buy food in the settlements, almost every day I will meet villages or towns with stores on my way. Having weighed all pros and cons, I decided that there was no point in losing one day waiting for the post office to open and changed the route.



A forest spring



Mine remnants



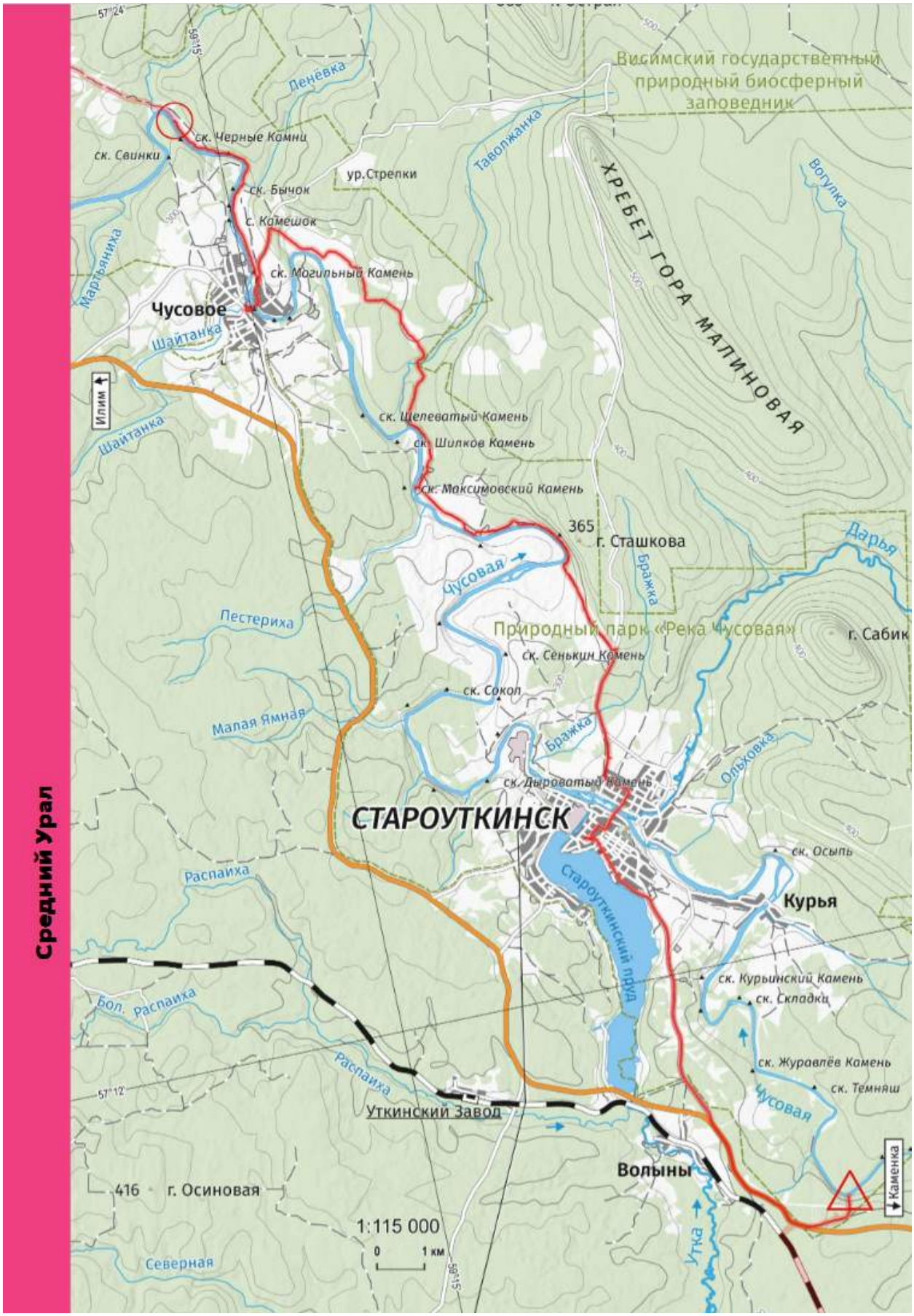
Chusovaya River

Kuzino remained to the east, and I went straight to the small station village of Merkitasikha, thereby reducing today's way by three times along the railroad, which had already become tiresome in the past few days.

I've noticed that the worst thing my legs endure is not climbing through driftwood and bogs with various surfaces and load on them, but a monotonous, unchanging load, such as, for example, continuous walking on asphalt or, even worse, on railroads. This is where the feet, ankles, Achilles, knees and up to the neck begin to ache. Fortunately, as soon as something out of the ordinary starts and the brain has no time for idle analysis of the body's working condition, all pains quickly disappear.

Since the route had been changed, I had to decide where to spend the night. Having studied the map, I decided to reach the Chusovaya River by all means. Not far from Staroutkinsk the river bend came almost close to the road, high rocky banks gave me hope for a view from above. However, when I started to descend into the river valley, I realized that these rocky steep ledges were also completely covered with forest. I went down to the water. The great Ural river was leisurely carrying its still spring muddy-brown waters. The shore was covered with tall grass and swampy. Deciding not to repeat the dubious feat of yesterday's overnight stay, I pitched the tent in the forest on a perfectly flat and soft forest floor. There was no view of the river from the tent, but there was comfort and secrecy: I was not immediately visible to fishermen, judging by the footprints that often walked along the bank.





The Middle Urals

Denevka *Cherniye kamni*

Svinki

Strelki

Bychok

Tavolzhanka

Visimsky State Nature Biosphere Reserve

Ilim

Martyanikha

Kamesho

Chusovoye

Shaitank

Mogilny kamen'

Shaitanka

Peggerika

Malaya Yamnaya

Raspaikha

Shelevatiy kamen'

Shilkov kamen'

Vogulka

Mountain malinovaya ridge

Darya

Maksimovsky kamen'

Chusovaya

Stashkova town

Brazhka

Musovaya River Nature Park

Sokol

Senkin Kamen

Brazhka

Dyrovat

Staroutkinsk

Olkhovka

Sabik

Staroutkinsky

Pacnainsky Zavod

Volyn

Osinovaya

Severnaya

Osyp

Kurya

Kurinsky kamen'

Skladki

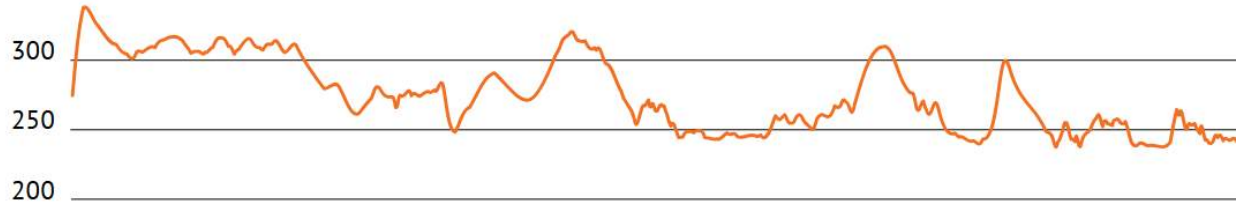
Zhuravlev kamen'

Temnyash

Day 39

Chusovaya River – Staroutkinsk village – Chusovoye village – Chusovaya River

42 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1181.5 km



June 8, 2021

I slept until six in the morning, which means I slept well. I quickly made my way to the old village of Staroutkinsk, intending to have a hearty breakfast, but this turned out to be a problem. At the only café, which had just opened, they advised me to come back in an hour or two because, as the cook said, nothing would be ready before then.

Finding an open store also proved challenging, but I managed it better, so I had a dry snack on the shore of the large Staroutkinsk pond.

Staroutkinsk left a pleasant and at the same time sad impression: a factory settlement as lovely in its fading old beauty as all the previous ones, with an unimaginably awful combination of new and old.



The Old and the New in Staroutkinsk



New type of architecture for wooden houses

Or perhaps it's the opposite – the new constructions rising on its streets or renovating the old only emphasize the antiquity and highlight, by contrast, how quickly we are losing something and how the approach to life and everyday beauty among ordinary people has changed.

I noticed another shift in the principles of house construction and layout. Many houses now occupy the entire width of the plot facing the street. The house is placed not end-on but sideways, with an outbuilding – likely unheated – on one side, a door in the middle, and everything under one large roof, without an open courtyard. These changes in private wooden construction are probably due to two things: family wealth and the push northward. The colder and longer the winters, the less open space remains in the yard, and the larger the roofs become.

After Staroutkinsk, I returned to the banks of the Chusovaya River and walked along the water's edge to the village of Chusovoye. It reminded me of the central Southern Urals, the morning after the Shulgan-Tash cave, the banks of the Belaya River. Very similar places – low forested mountains, limestone cliffs along the shores, caves, and the river – the main river of the Middle Urals, just as the Belaya is for the Southern Urals.



Suspension bridge in the village of Chusovoye



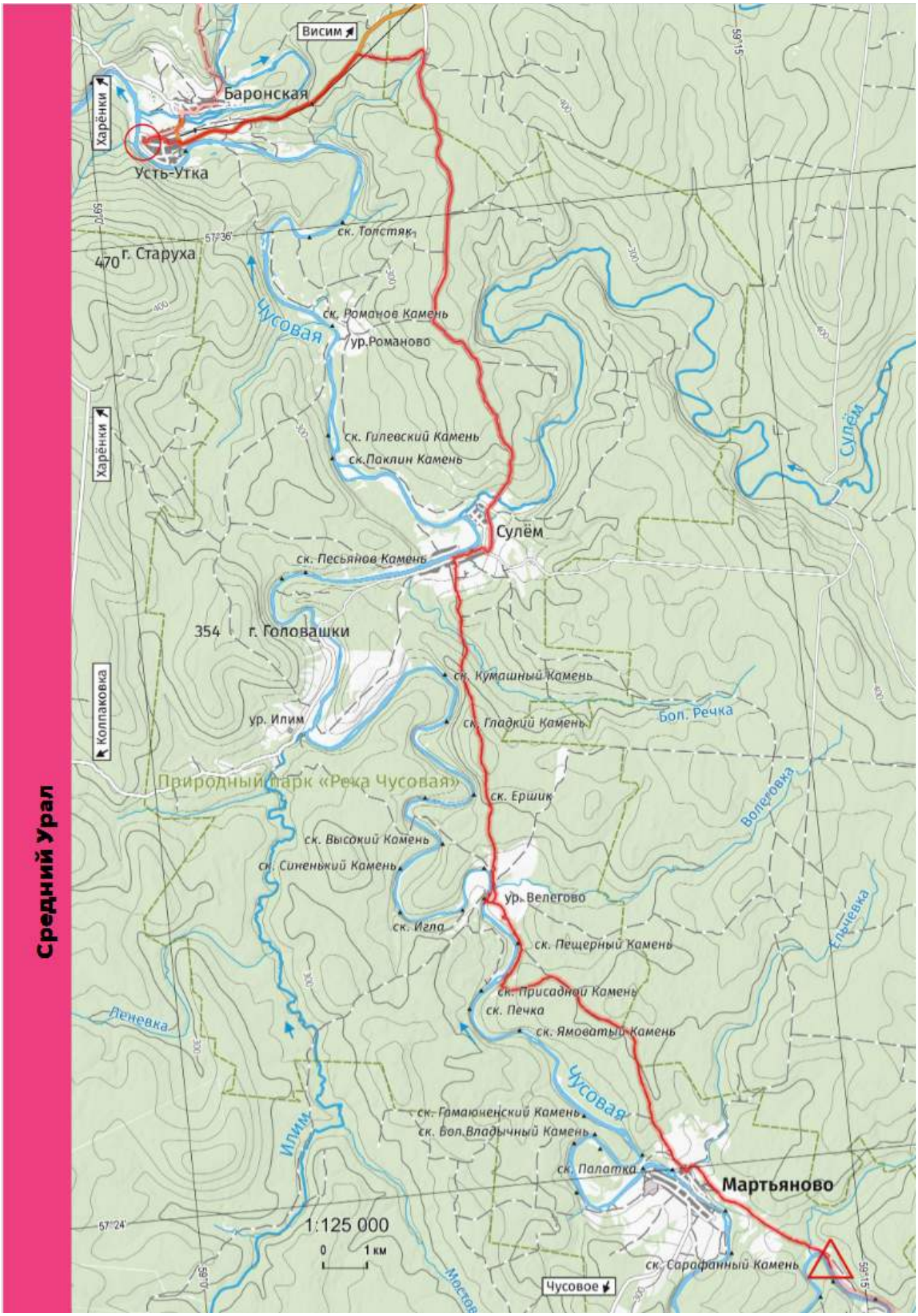
Cliffs along the banks of the Chusovaya River

In the evening, unfortunately, there was no time to explore the village, so I limited myself to a visit to the store, where I stocked up on food for the next day, and then hurried along the river. The only thing that impressed me during this brief visit was the suspension bridge. Quite the attraction: nearly 100 meters long, stretched high above the water between the banks, with minimal side railings – just a single rope – and missing planks in the deck. As I walked across, I couldn't stop wondering how many people had fallen into the river from this swaying bridge, especially on weekend evenings.

Beyond the village, I continued along the river and after 5 km, stopped at a beautiful spot with a view of the cliffs marked on the map as the Black Cliffs.

The day was, in many ways, the opposite of the previous one. I didn't even notice how I covered 42 km. From village to village, from one interesting sight to another, from one river bend to the next, I reached my campsite without exhaustion or the monotony of forest trails. Psychologically, today it was much more comfortable. This is yet another confirmation of the simple truth I've encountered many times: psychology and head in such long routes is more important than legs.

Today was one of those rare cases when I camped exactly where I had planned from home, meaning I’m now a day ahead of schedule – and I’ve earned myself a day off.



The Middle Urals

Kharyonki *m. Staruha*

Ust-Utka

Baronskaya

Visim

Tolstyak cliff

Chusovaya

Romanov Kamen' cliff

Romanov tract

r. Sulyom

Gilevskiy cliff

Paklin Kamen' cliff

Pesyanov Kamen' cliff

m. Golovashki

Ilim tract

Kumashniy Kamen' cliff

Gladkiy Kamen' cliff

Yershil cliff

Velegovo tract

Igla cliff

Visokiy Kamen' cliff

Sinenkiy Kamen' cliff

Pesherniy Kamen' cliff

Prisadnoy Kamen' cliff

Pechka cliff

Yamovatiy Kamen' cliff

Chusovaya

Ilim

Lenevka

Sarafaniy Kamen'

Martyanovo

Palatka cliff

Gamayuchenskiy Kamen' cliff

Bolshoy Vladichniy Kamen' cliff

Volegovka

Bolshaya rechka

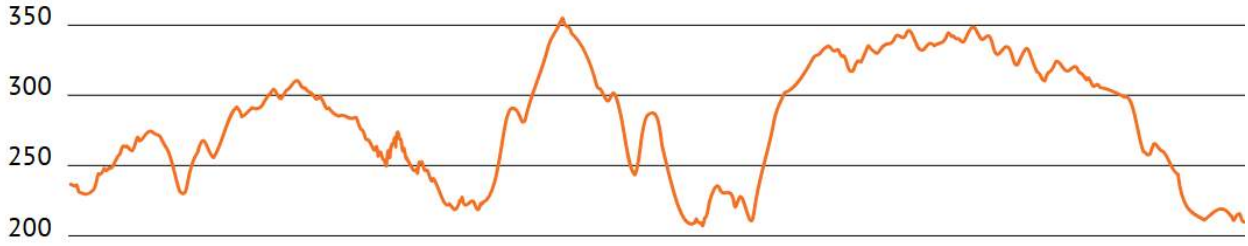
Yelchevka

Chusovaya river Natural Park

Day 40

Chusovaya River – Martyankovo village – Peshcherny Kamen cliff – Volegovo tract – Sulem village – Ust-Utka village

47.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1229 km



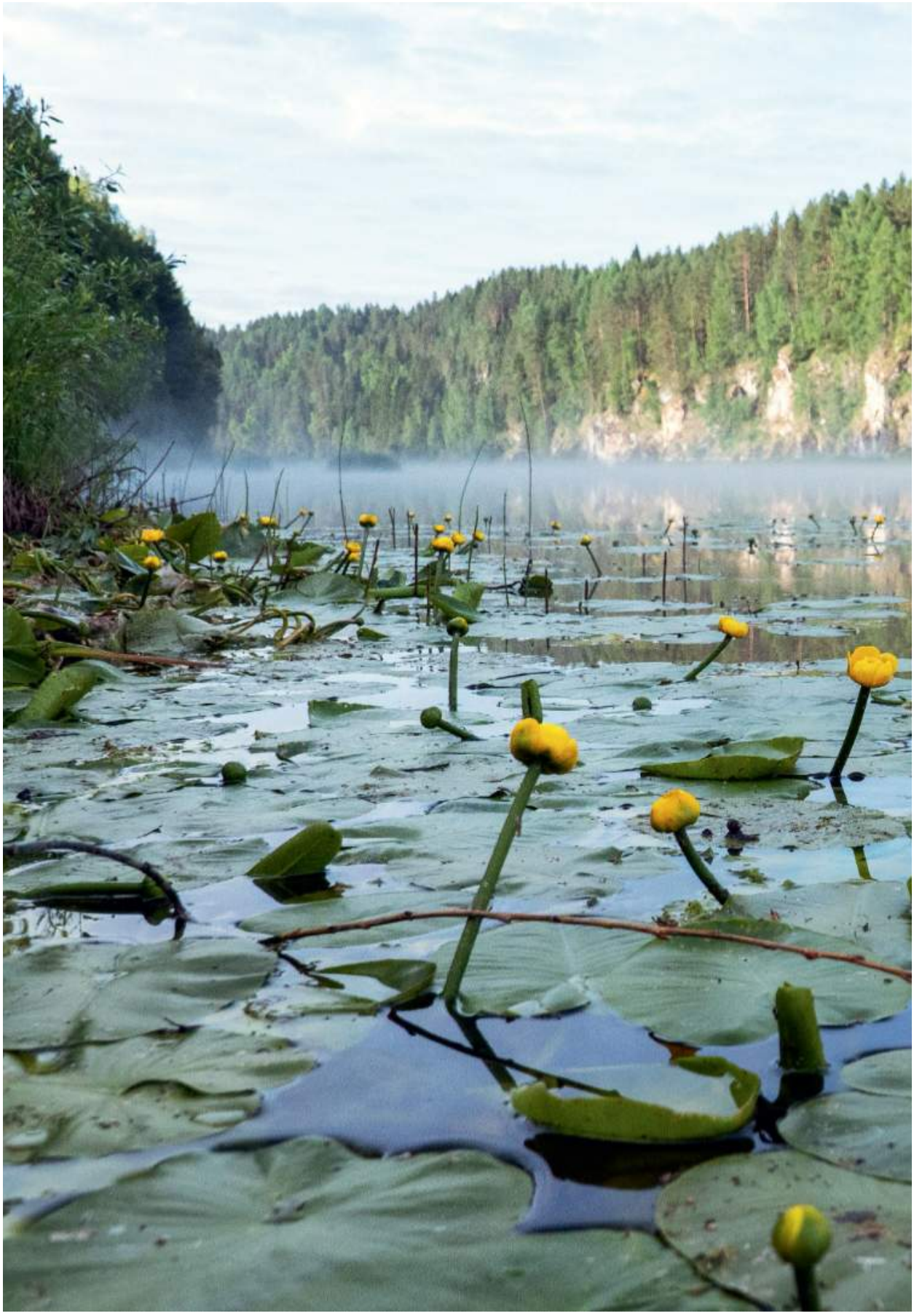
June 9, 2021

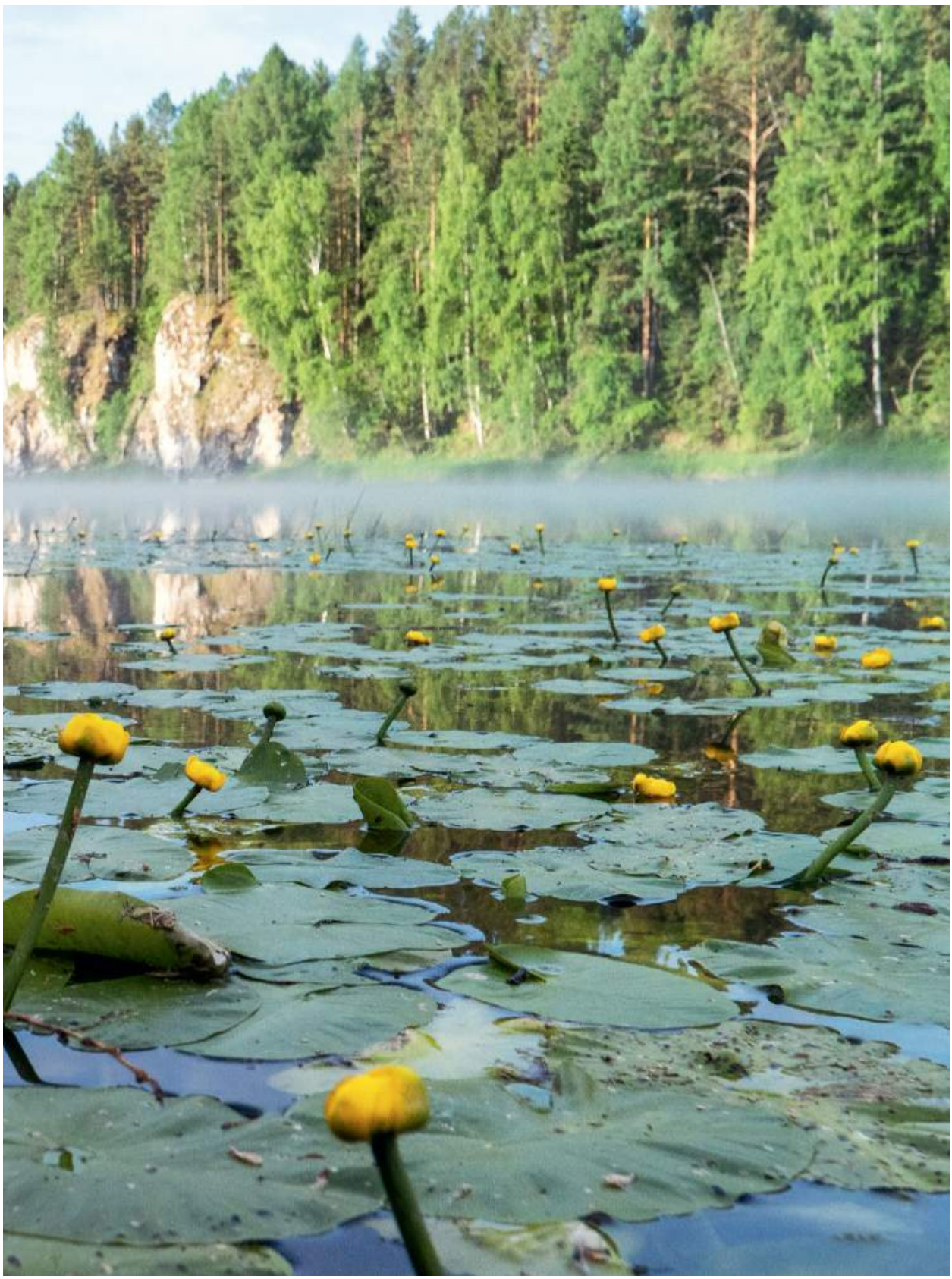
At night, my legs ache – knees crack, ankles throb. Sharp pains flare up in unexpected places, jolting me from sleep. I massage the stiffened areas, apply anti-inflammatory ointment. By morning, things settle.



Foggy Chusovaya at dawn

A chill set in before dawn, veiling the river valley in fog. Beautiful, yet uneventful – the sun, lingering far to the northeast, struggled to break through the clouds. I wandered, photographing the river and cliffs on the opposite bank, then packed up to continue the long journey.





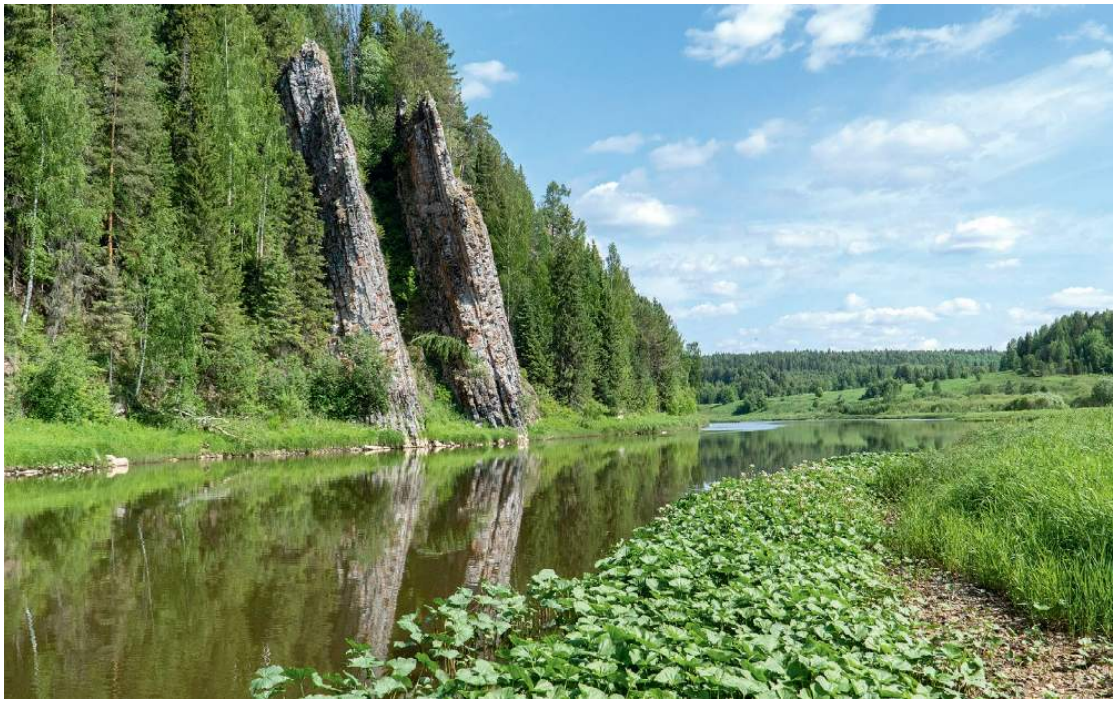
Morning on the Chusovaya river

After sorting through my remaining food and studying the route map more carefully, I realized I'd made a mistake yesterday: I should have stocked up on food in Chusovoye to last until the end of this leg and the next supply drop. Today, I'll

pass through three settlements: the first I'll reach too early (stores in small villages won't be open yet), the second is too small (it might not even have a store), and the third – the village of Ust-Utka – I risk reaching too late. If things unfold as I've described, I'll be left without food for about a day. I'll either have to stretch my rations or lose several hours waiting for a store to open.

I hurried to leave without wasting time. In the first village, Martyanovo, it was too early – I didn't even stop there – and I skipped an interesting landmark: Martyanovo Loop, where the river makes a 5-kilometer bend separated by a 200-meter isthmus. There used to be a portage here to shorten the journey. I decided I'd explore it more carefully when I return for a rafting trip on the Chusovaya.

The next planned natural point of interest was the Peshcherny Kamen cliff, which, according to descriptions, offers a magnificent view of the Chusovaya River valley. Since my photographic appetite for the river hadn't been fully satisfied, I didn't want to miss the opportunity. But things went awry. A kilometer before the cliff, I left the road and began pushing through the trees. The forest was beautiful but difficult to traverse – filled with half-light, moss, and spruce branches bristling with sharp needles, both upright and fallen, forming barricades like tank traps.



Volegovo tract, Grebni rocks



Sulem village

At some point, they got me. Deep in the thick of the forest, my battered boot caught on a spruce branch, tearing the upper part so badly that my toes kept poking out with every step. The problem was compounded by the fact that I never found the scenic viewpoints I was looking for. I could see the river through the trees below, but everything was densely covered by forest. With my boot in such a state, lacking toe protection, it was too dangerous to continue searching on this terrain. Cursing everything under the sun, I returned to the road empty-handed.

In the Volegovo tract, there used to be an old village, but now only burial mounds mark the house sites, overgrown with nettles, and a small ruined dam blocking a stream. I descended to the river and started stitching up my boot again. No matter what, I had to make sure it held together for two more days.

I reached the shore via a well-worn road ending at the water. As I walked, I wondered why people came here, but upon arriving and seeing the fire pit, the trash in it, and the beautiful cliffs (the Grebeni cliffs) on the opposite bank, I understood. People come here to relax, enjoy the beauty, and fish. They arrive in large off-road vehicles but, for some reason, don't always have the strength to take back everything they brought. And, as almost always happens, they dump their trash in the fire pit, hoping it will burn in the next visitors' campfire.

But life shows that this doesn't work – trash accumulates faster than it burns, especially tin cans, and gradually, the noble, romantic campfire turns into a local dump, attracting more trash and providing a false justification for not taking it away.

Years ago, I formulated what might seem overly harsh but, in my opinion, accurate: "Light a fire, create a dump." It's a short phrase meant to explain the harm of thoughtless, uncontrolled campfires in popular tourist spots.

I gave up campfires years ago, switching to a portable stove. It's much more convenient. You don't waste time gathering wood or lighting a fire. You're not tied to finding firewood and can camp anywhere. Your clothes and gear aren't damaged by sparks. You don't reek of smoke or cry from it. You're not dependent on the weather. You don't create a wildfire risk. You leave no trace of a fire on the ground. And you don't contribute to the creation of a dump. So many advantages, with only one loss: you miss out on the pleasure and romance of pointless campfire gatherings. But my experience says gatherings without a fire can be just as enjoyable and memorable, especially if they happen on a mountaintop at sunset.



Art space in Sulem village

By lunchtime, I reached the second village, Sulem – another disappointment. Despite its size, the store operates only once a week, on Tuesdays, and today was Wednesday. The disappointment was somewhat offset by the village's picturesque pastoral scene: the river, spruce-covered mountains, old houses, and a small herd of horses drinking at the water's edge. I would like to travel leisurely through the towns and villages of the Middle Urals, to photograph their sleepy life against the background of dark pine taiga. But not this time.

On the way out of Sulem, I unexpectedly stumbled upon an art installation with various iron structures and human figures made from antique objects. I had lunch there.

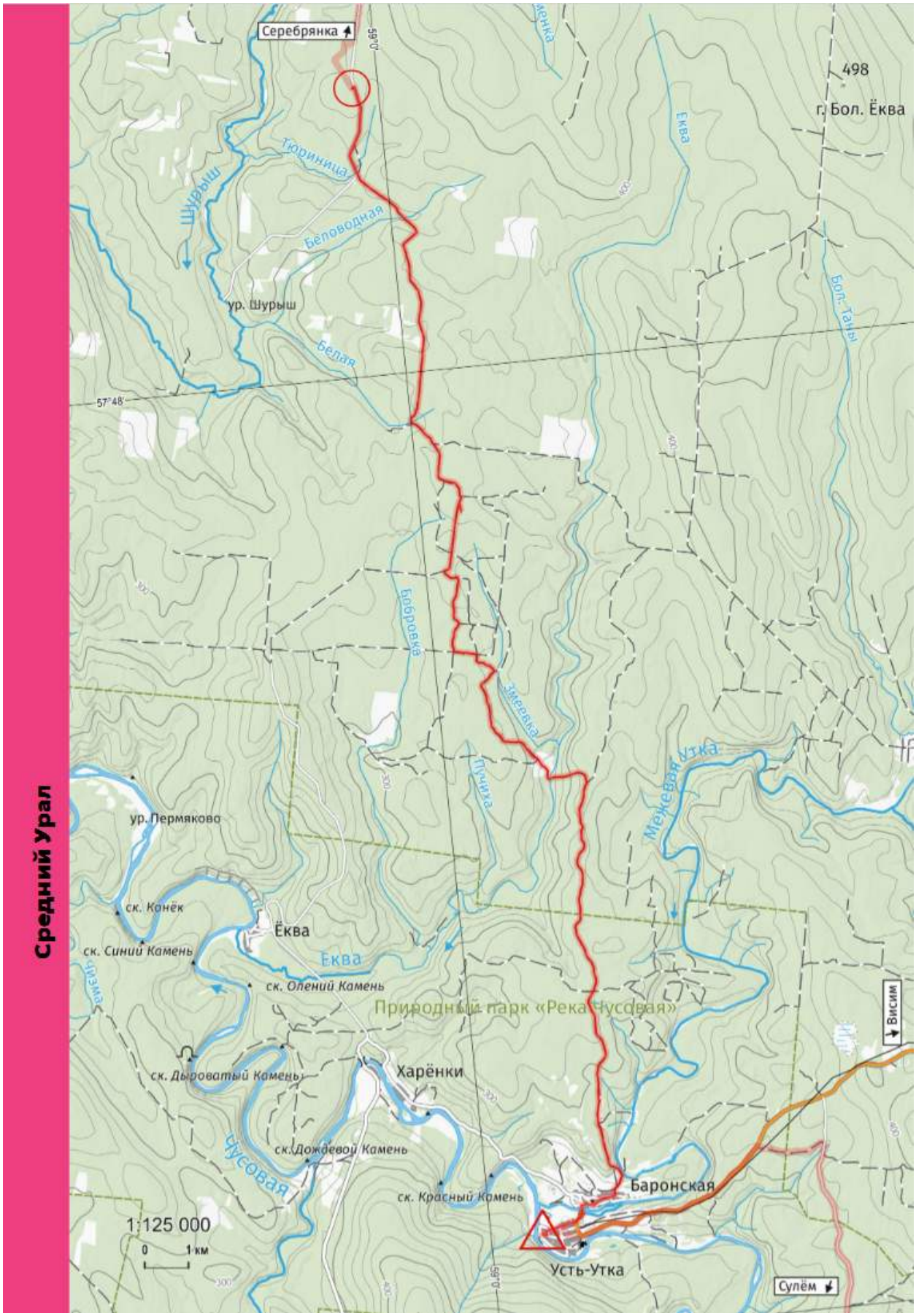
Since I hadn't bought groceries, I had to hurry to Ust-Utka, about 20 km away via backcountry roads. Oh, that endless, dragging, monotonous journey! The kilometers passed painfully slowly. I walked along a dusty gravel road, aching all over, and it seemed to stretch on forever. It was especially hard to turn down the occasional offers of a ride.

I got to the village, dragging my feet, at 18:10, and then luck finally began to smile on me. I asked the first woman I saw, where the store was. The first woman I met told me regretfully that the store was already closed, but if I really needed something, she – the owner – would open it for me. Five minutes later, we were at the store door. The cashier, who hadn't left yet, replied to my question about lodging by offering her own place: a separate little house. In just 10 minutes, I had everything I needed and more – a shower, a soft bed, food, and internet, which I used to finally write about the past few days' events.

In the evening, there was a knock at my window, and a cow's wet, rough nose poked through. I thought to myself, "I've had a good life today."



Evening in Ust-Utka



The Middle Urals

Serebryanka

Shurish

Belaya

Yekva

Turinitsa

Belovodnaya

Bobrovka

Zmeevka

Puchiha

Yokva

Oleniy kamen'

Konyok

Siniy kamen'

Permyakovo

Dirovaty kamen'

Dozhdevoy kamen'

Kharyonki

Baronskaya

Mezhevaya Utka

Krasniy kamen'

Ust'-Utka

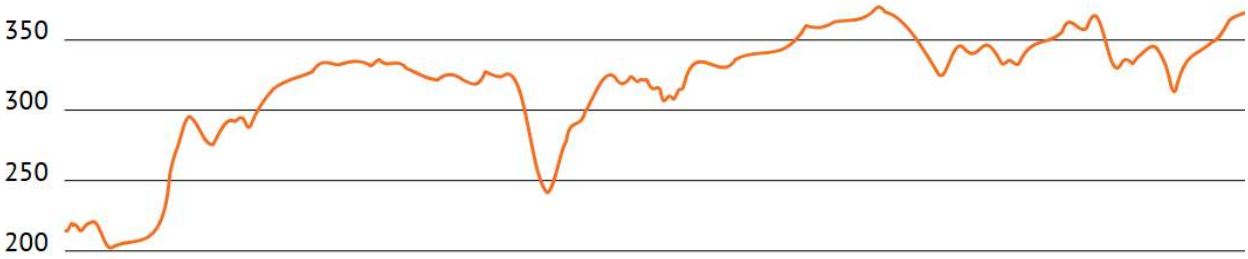
Sulyom

Chusovaya river Natural Park

Day 41

Ust-Utka village – Baronskaya village – Slope of peak 386

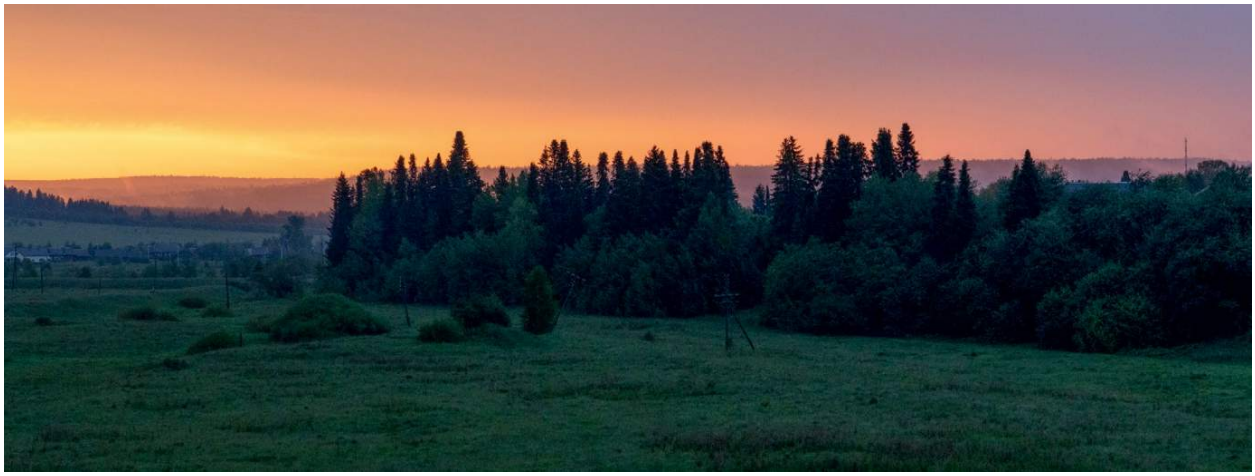
35 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1264 km



June 10, 2021

All these twists and turns of yesterday with the stores clearly answer the question I am often asked: why carry food with you and send fords in a populated part of the Urals, because you can buy everything as you go. You can, but you will have to spend the lion's share of time on logistics between stores. This will distract from the route and eat up time and energy. Not to mention the lesser variety of food.

The morning began unexpectedly. I'd slept soundly on an old wooden bed with a soft mattress. Around dawn, the sound of pouring rain drifted through the open window. I rolled over and, with a clear conscience, decided to sleep until exhaustion. But at some point, I did open my eyes – and my gaze immediately caught the pink hues shimmering in the spruce treetops visible through the window. That could only mean one thing: somewhere on the opposite horizon, dawn was breaking.



The magic colors of dawn

I grabbed my camera and stumbled outside on stiff legs to find a strip of the horizon blazing crimson. It was one of those rare moments when the sky was entirely

covered in low, dark clouds – except for a narrow gap near sunrise, flooding the world with ever-shifting morning light that painted the clouds. The reflected glow then tinted everything beneath them in delicate hues, even the wet asphalt.

It's hard to capture something worthy when you're in a place for the first time, know nothing about it, and have only minutes to act. Forgetting my sore legs, I ran through the streets but, to my great disappointment, got no good shots. Even so, I didn't regret leaving my warm bed for a second – the moment was truly beautiful and instructive, and it's definitely going into my collection of this journey's best sunrises.

Since I was up, I changed my morning plans (I'm not one to go back to bed). After a quick breakfast – these days, 15–20 minutes suffice – I set out to explore the village. The light had long faded, and the sky was choked with dark rainclouds, which perfectly suited the surroundings, accentuating the unique atmosphere of this Russian settlement lost in the Middle Urals' taiga: its dark old houses, the sleepy Chusovaya River winding through fog, and the mountains and spruces fencing it in. It's hard to say whether those mountains protect the village from the outside world or, conversely, trap it there.



Monument to Russia's unity in Ust-Utka

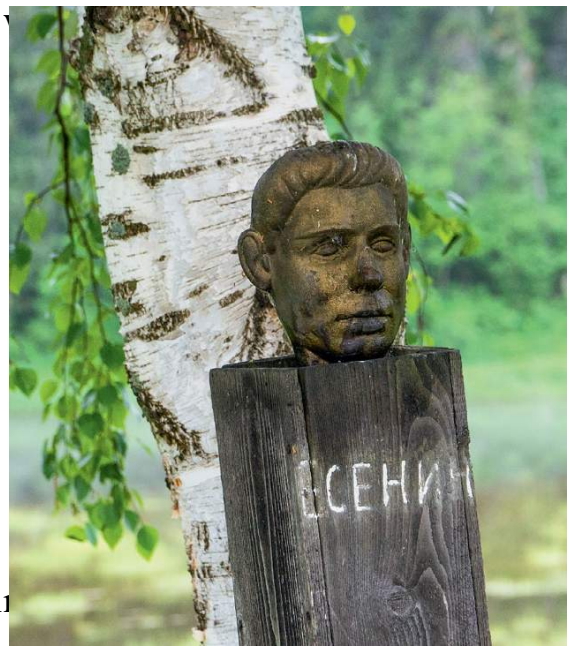
I wandered aimlessly through the village streets. Naturally, my feet soon led me to the riverbank – the lifeblood that gave rise to this settlement nearly five

centuries ago. Once, this place bustled with activity: wooden barges were built here, loaded with metal, and sent on their single, perilous journey down the raging spring river. Dmitry Narkisovich Mamin-Sibiryak vividly describes this Ural phenomenon – the “Iron Caravans” – in his story The Fighters. I’d brought it along specifically to reread while traveling the Chusovaya. The hardships those people endured make my personal struggles seem trivial.

Little remains of Ust-Utka’s former glory as a bustling dock – just a few informational signs marking where artificial ponds and lock systems once loaded and launched barges. The regional government reportedly plans to reconstruct part of the dock, which would be wonderful.

On the northern edge of the village, at the mouth of the Mezhevaya Utka River, stands a monument to the Unity of Russia: on a large block of Karelian stone are carved burlaks pulling a barque upstream. Both the origin of the stone and the fact that the Chusov burlaks did not carry cargoes upstream, but rafted downstream, raise questions and bewilderment. But maybe I misunderstood something in the author's idea.

At the opposite end of the village, I was surprised to find a small art installation dedicated to Sergei Yesenin. Stones engraved with his poems are arranged around a wooden post bearing a bust of the poet – a rather non-canonical, odd-looking one, barely recognizable.



Monument to Yesenin

I might have missed some noteworthy sights – it was early, the village was still asleep, and there was no one to ask. Unwilli to waste a minute, I packed up and, without saying goodbye to my hosts, moved on.

This was the end of my neighborhood with the beautiful Chusova, I was going north, and it was going more and more to the west. It was very important to pass along its banks and rocks in this route, but this is only a light touch to its beauty, in the foreseeable future I will return to its banks more thoroughly.

Crossing the Mezhevaya Utka via a bridge, I entered Baronskaya village. The river once marked the boundary between the Stroganov and Demidov estates, hence its name. Baronskaya is one of the earliest Russian settlements in the Urals, once the easternmost point of the Stroganovs' domain.

A forest road led me into low mountains, where I spent the rest of the day – no scenic viewpoints or other attractions. My sole mission was to keep my disintegrating sneakers intact until tomorrow's supply drop. I camped in a dense young spruce forest, a regrowth after logging. No views, no prospects.



Bear claw marks

Of the interesting points on the route, two things are worth mentioning. First, this day was one of the richest in bear sightings. In addition to the traditional heaps of droppings and ruined anthills, I saw two fir trees with claw scuffs, I don't often see such scuffs in the Urals, but here there were two at once. However, I didn't manage to observe the leaper yet. Secondly, this day was the richest in ticks – perhaps, it was a small rain that moistened the ground. As far as I understand, ticks do not like hot dry weather. The whole day I walked and shook them off in large numbers.

Yet, through sheer carelessness, I failed to avoid one. During lunch, the sun emerged, warming me so thoroughly that I spread out my foam pad, took off my socks, stretched my legs, and dozed for half an hour. Of course, the ticks couldn't resist such an invitation. I woke to find one burrowing into my calf. I removed it quickly – luckily, it had only just begun – but the incident was a nasty, instructive reminder of breaking one of my four anti-tick rules.



Chusovaya

It's been years since I formulated these rules for myself and forgot what ingrown ticks were. They sound like this.

1.Dress properly. In tick-prone areas, seal yourself up. Tuck pants into socks. Wear long-sleeved shirts tucked into pants. This leaves only two entry points: sleeves and neck. Light, solid-colored clothing makes crawling ticks easier to spot.

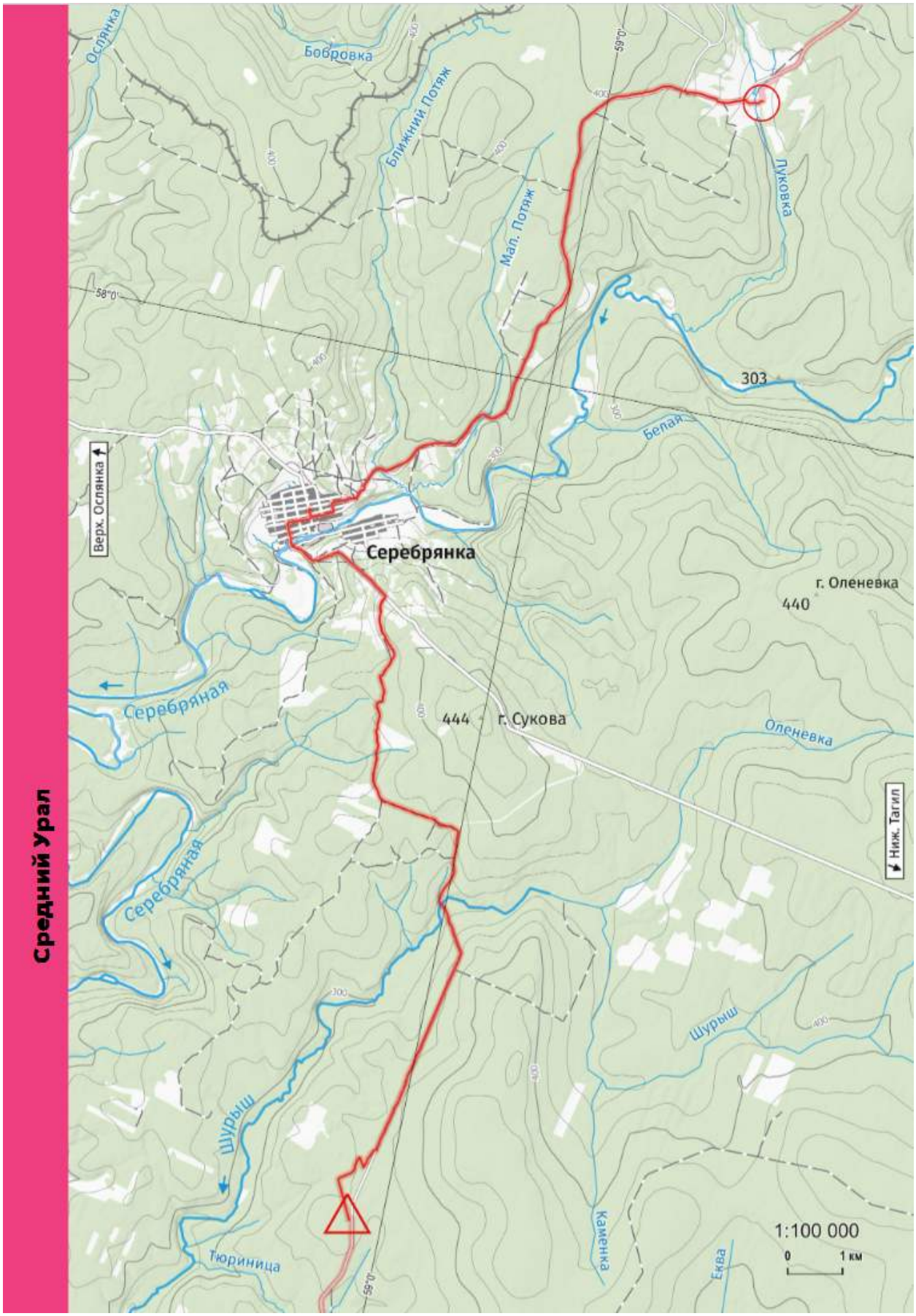
2.Use special products – aerosols that kill mites. The products containing the substance alphacypermethrin are especially good. I often observe how ticks themselves fall off, having traveled about half a meter on the treated pants.

3.Listen to your body. If in doubt, check. Every evening, I inspect myself and my clothes thoroughly.

4.Get vaccinated and keep boosters current. Vaccines don’t protect against Lyme or other tick-borne diseases, but those aren’t as swift or devastating as encephalitis.

Uncomplicated rules that allow me to go alone in the spring in the tick peak through the Urals. And it should be noted that one of the main fears and dangers of this stage is that a tick can burrow into a place where I can't get it alone, and I have to go out to people, and sometimes it's more than one day's journey. Well and in any

case a lot of diseases carried by ticks, no one canceled, so the only possible solution was to observe zero tolerance to ticks on the route. And today it was violated.



The Middle Urals

Oslyanka

Bobrovka

Blizhny Potyazh

Maliy Potyazh

Lukovka

Verkhnyaya Oslyanka

Belaya

Serebryanaya

Serebryanka

Sukova

Olenevka

Shurish

Kamenka

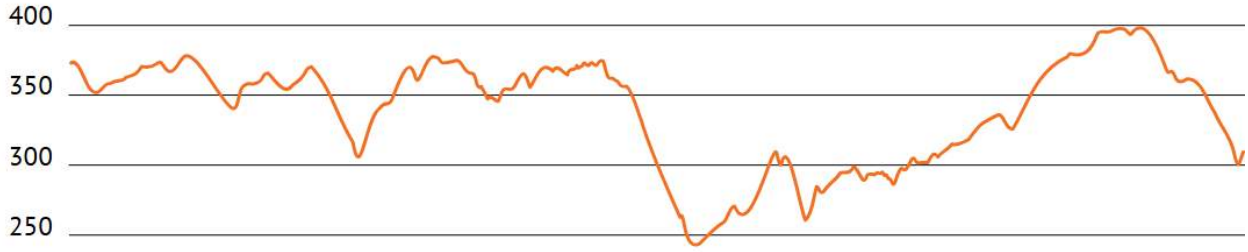
Turinitsa

Yekva

Day 42

Slope of Peak 386 – Serebryanka village – Lukovka River

34 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1298 km



June 11, 2021

I left at 6:30 AM and hobbled on my ruined sneakers to Serebryanka village. By 11 AM, my supply drop arrived: food and fresh, squeaky sneakers. It took some effort to squeeze my feet – swollen and splayed from the broken shoes – into them. A few days of discomfort, and they'd adjust. For now, I'd endure.

The drop was delivered by Daria Maslova, her husband Nikolai, and their son Tikhon from Nizhny Tagil. I'd arranged it easily online. With no post office in Serebryanka, I'd searched social media for locals involved in tourism, asked for help, and everyone responded. The first volunteer got the job. This trick never fails – don't hesitate to ask for help; people are usually glad to give it.

On the descent into the village, I was met with an unpleasant surprise: a massive dump. Though I'm used to trash around Ural settlements, this one – right at the main entrance – was the worst I'd seen. The contrast was jarring.





Dump at the village entrance

Ahead lay a cozy old village nestled in a river valley among spruce forests. But at my feet: a *Box with the 10th supply drop* dump. The bitter irony? The village sits on the Serebryanka River, which – according to some – was Ermak's route through the "Stone" (Urals) into Siberia. Ah, how we honor our history.

My mood soured, but I descended into the village. It was charming, with crumbling old houses, carved window frames, and a restored historic church. It could've been a gem of the Middle Urals – if not for its foul welcome.

Beyond the village, I climbed the spurs of the Rassypnoy Kamen Ridge, where the first bedrock outcrops of this leg hinted at the approaching "High Middle Urals."



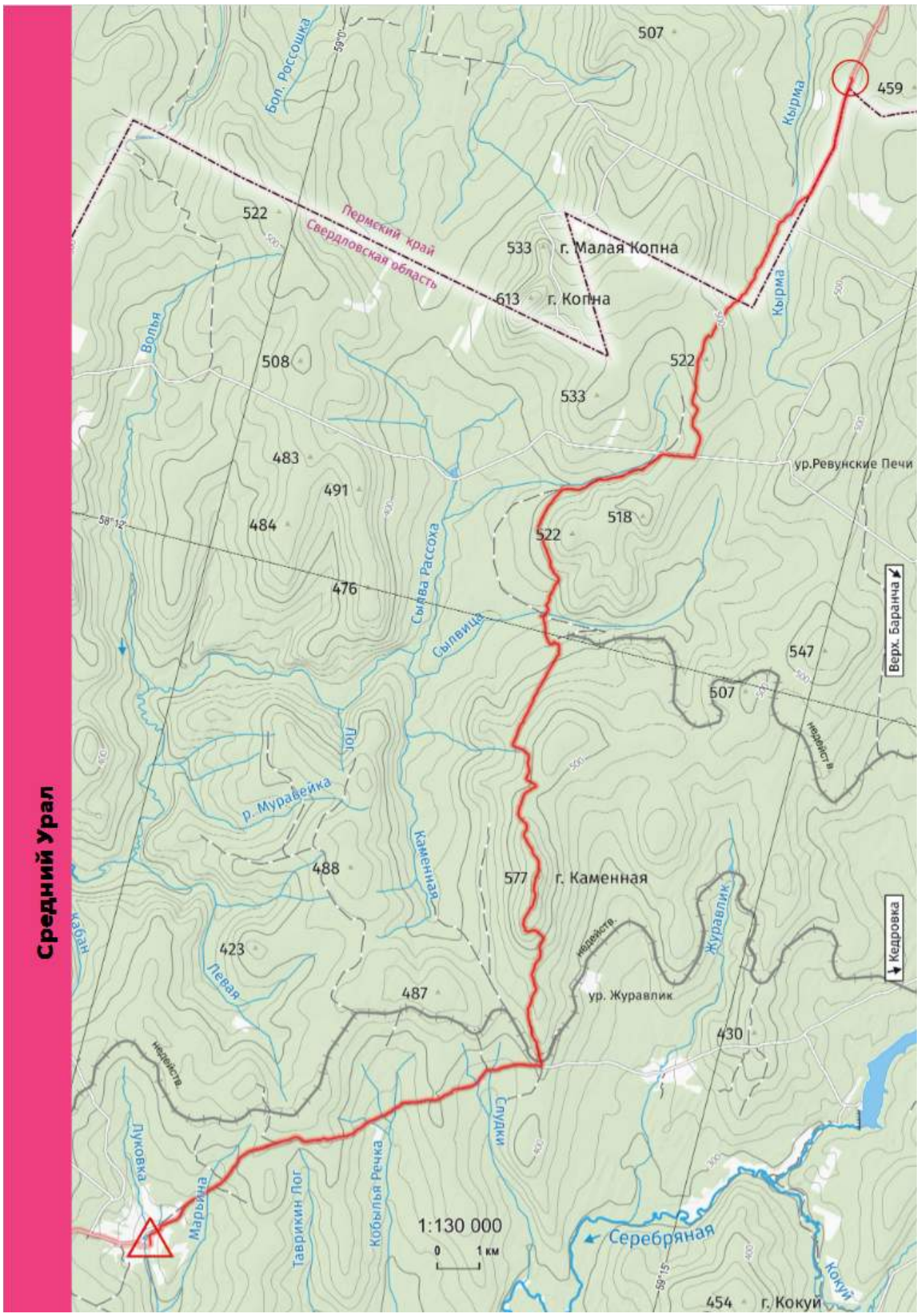
Serebryanka village



Dawn on the Lukovka River

After the village I followed an old forest road, marked on maps as the Serebryansky trakt. I stopped for the night in a picturesque meadow tract of the Lukovka River. It was possible to go further, but maps with space images said that further there would be only forest, and the soul for the last days was hungry for open spaces and sunset-perfect minutes. And my feet in new sneakers should have been given less strain. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to wear this pair of shoes before going out. And I hadn't fully taken into account that my feet were getting bigger on this route, even though I'd taken a size larger than usual.

The sunset was simple, like the surrounding landscape, but still charming. The unhurried Lukovka River, framed by lush grass, spruce trees on the horizon, and clouds of midges endlessly dancing their mating dance. I spent the last hour and a half wandering among them, though, as often happens, only the final moments of sunset made it into my photo book.



The Middle Urals

Bolshaya Rossoshka *Volya*

Kirma

Permskiy kray

Sverdlovskaya oblast'

Malaya Kopna

Kopna

Revunskiye pechi

Verkhnyaya Barancha

Silva Rassokha

Silvitsa

Log

r. Muraveyka

Kaban

Levaya

Kamennaya

Zhuravlik

Kedrovka

Lukovka

Maryina

Tavrikin Log

Kobilya river/rechka

Sludki

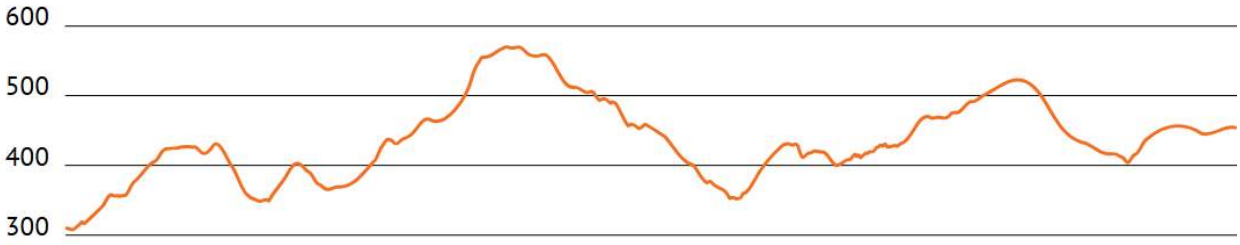
Serebranaya

Kokuy

Day 43

Lukovka river – Mount Kamenaya (577) – Peak 461

44 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1342 km



June 12, 2021

Yesterday, before going to bed, I started to reread Nikolai Rundquist's book "100 Days in the Urals" about the first transural tourist expedition he and his companions made in 1991. The book plays now for me in completely different colors, I can understand the words and thoughts of the traveler much more deeply. Although I have to admit that there is a big gap between us: we follow the same path, but the situation around us is fundamentally different.

One of the expedition's biggest challenges in 1991 wasn't distance or terrain but the collapsing Soviet Union. This becomes clear from the first pages, where Rundqvist describes a side quest to Ukraine just to secure canned meat for the journey. The book is a remarkable textual monument not only to tourism but to an era, captured through a journey across a disintegrating country.

Today, I face none of those problems. My meals are modern, varied, and freeze-dr My clothing is durable, warm, and lightweight I always know my exact location, thanks to excellent maps. I receive daily weather forecasts and text my family. Yet I still understand Nikolay perfectly – because those endless kilometers are walked step by step, the same way.



Lazy Self-Portrait



Black Woodpecker

Before bed, I'd read too much Rundqvist, and something unusual happened: I rarely dream, but that night, I became a participant in his expedition – walking beside him, clearing paths, solving problems.

Morning came too fast. The further north I went, the shorter and shorter the night got. The sun rose very close to the very spot where it had hidden yesterday. Remembering the night cold in the lowlands and realizing that all the grass around me is charged with tons of morning dew, I showed weakness and did not come out of the tent at dawn. I only opened the canopy and photographed "self-portrait of a lazy ass."

Beyond the dream of my great predecessor, another important nighttime event occurred: I got cold. And it worries me. My standard gear, which I've used for years, shouldn't leave me shivering in a dry sleeping bag on June nights. What will happen near the Arctic Circle in late August, during prolonged bad weather?

I need to consider a warmer sleeping bag for the polar leg and an extra insulating layer.

The day’s hike had three distinct phases. The first 15 km continued along yesterday’s road – easy, quick, and forgettable, with a tailwind practically pushing me.

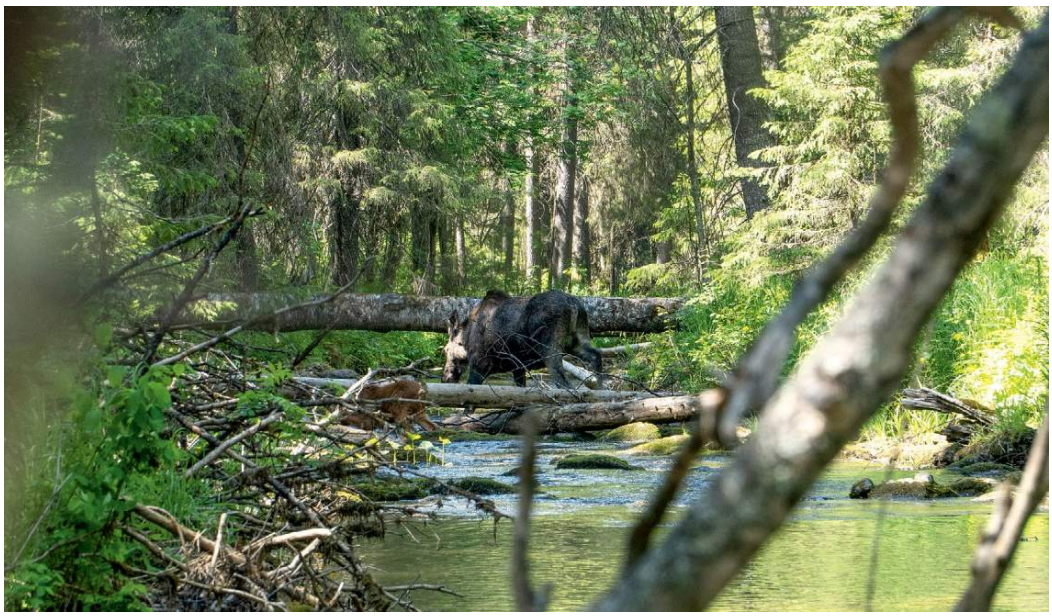
At one of the crossroads the road went further straight ahead, and I had to turn at right angles towards Kamenaya Mountain, and very quickly the path turned from a road to a direction decorated with bushwhackers, thickets, and marshes.

For 10 km, I fought through this jungle, exhausting myself but consoling myself that it was good training for the wild section beginning in a few days.

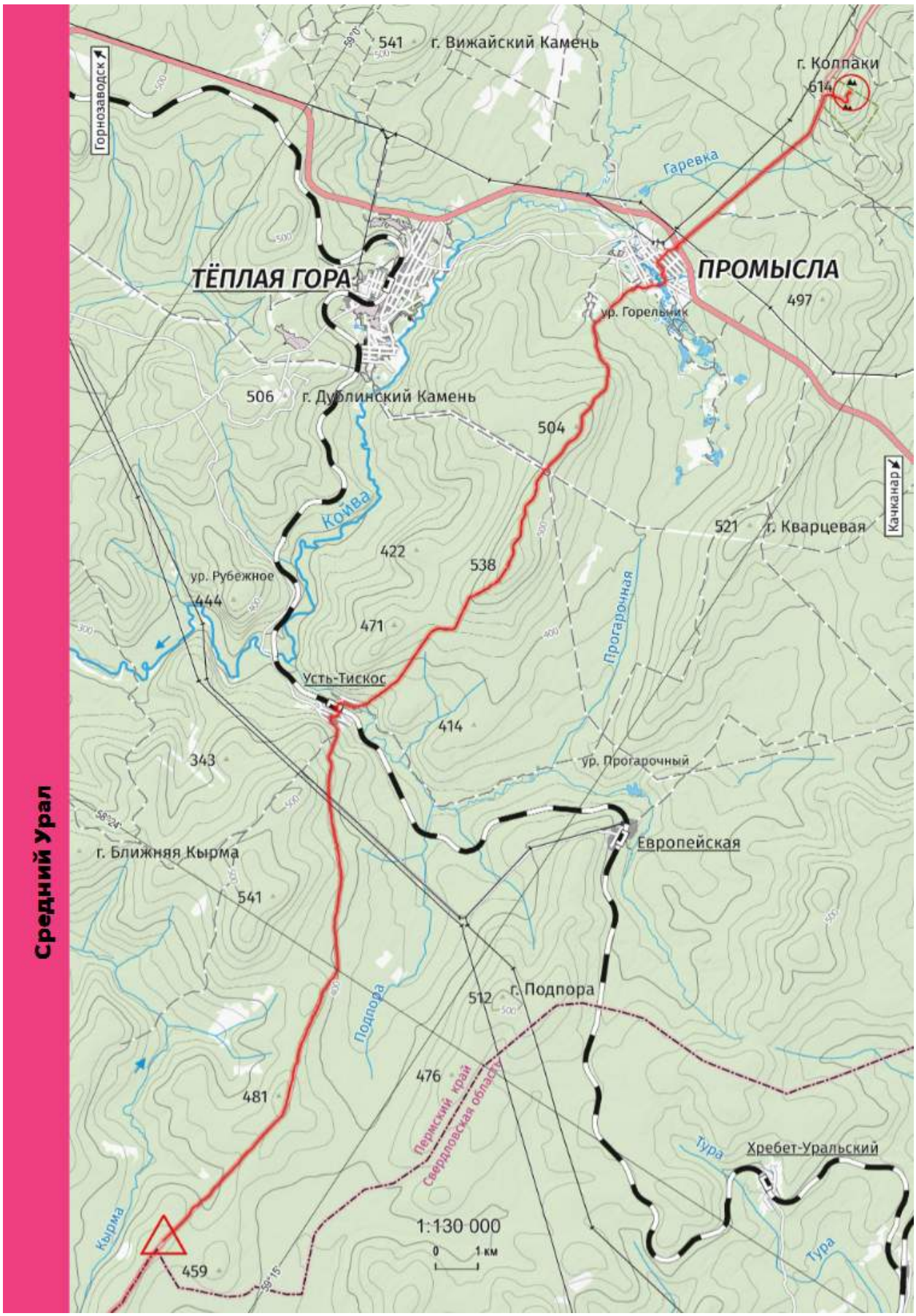
The third phase was a mix of the first two.

The most striking event was meeting moose in the wild part of the route. I was walking along a clearing, going down to the river, and right in front of me, not more than 20 meters away, in the window formed by the river and the clearing, a moose solemnly walked by, followed by a small red-haired moose. Of course, I didn't have time to get my camera, but not wanting to miss the opportunity, I threw my things and started to follow. In this situation I had the sound of water and the elastic headwind on my side. But no way! While I ran and climbed these 20 meters, the moose family had already gone far away with an easy gait through the lumber and river debris. An attempt to catch up with them along the river bank was accompanied by an inevitable crack of breaking sticks, and, of course, it drew my attention. In a second there was no one anywhere. And I was left to content myself with photographing the view of the moose from behind. And thank goodness for that. This was the third moose sighting on the trail. When will there be a bear? I want and don't want this encounter.

I spent the night in a deep secondary forest, without views and without any hope for beauty. I was generally satisfied with the results of the day: despite the long and difficult section, I got through almost double the norm, and if we take into account that I managed to cut off about 5 km, then double. My legs are in a good condition, probably due to the small kilometers of the previous days. Ready to keep going at the same pace!



Moose and moose calf



The Middle Urals

Vizhayskiy kamen’ *Gornozavodsk*

Garevka

Kolpaki

Teplaya mountain

Promisla

Gorelnik

Dublinskiy kamen'

Koyva

Kvartsevaya

Kachkanar

Progarochnaya

Progarochniy

Ust'-Tiskos

Rubezhneye

Blizhnaya Kirma

Podpora

Kirma

Yevropeyskaya

Permskiy kray

Sverdlovskaya oblast'

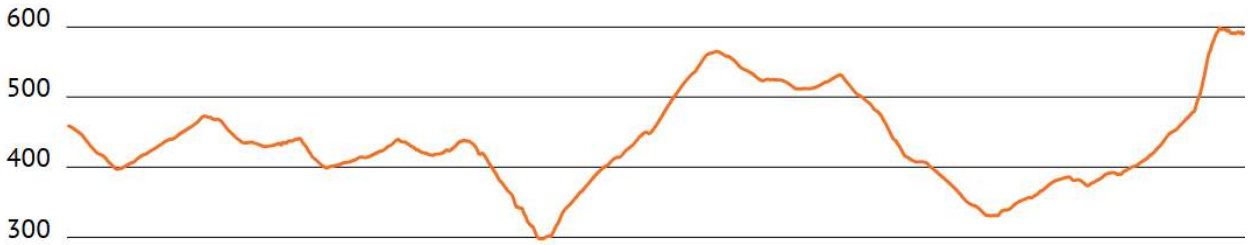
Tura

Uralskiy ridge

Day 44

Peak 461 – Ust-Tiskos village – Promysla village – Mount Kolpaki (614.7)

38 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1380 km



June 13, 2021

Today was a long forest day with a big mountain cherry at the end of the route. But about everything in order. As the morning showed, last night I was overly optimistic about the condition of my legs. I came out of the tent and realized that they were not in the best shape, because of yesterday's windstorms and long kilometerage. Perhaps there is some limit on the distance, after which the body does not recover overnight. I've been trying to find these limits for a long time, but I haven't managed to do it yet. And apparently I won't be able to do it in time, there is nothing left till the end of the "road" part of the route. It took at least half an hour to get up to the working mode of walking. My right knee was bothering me, on the left leg I felt pain under the knee and ankle. But gradually I got better and walked at a brisk pace

The first notable stop was the tiny Ust-Tiskos railway station and its village. The settlement was unremarkable – dark, sagging fences, plain houses – and would've been just another map label if not for a shard of old beauty at the station: the ruins of a water tower, built from dark, handsome stone, with steel ladder fragments inside stamped with the Demidov name.



Ruins of the water tower

I badly wanted to climb to the roof and peer through a window but talked myself out of it. One mishap, and the journey could end ingloriously here.

The first thing that struck me about the water tower was its incongruity with the surrounding landscape. Built more than 100 years ago, it stands in the middle of the taiga in a godforsaken corner of the Urals. As usual in such cases, the question arises as to what made people make beautiful and long-lasting things then, and now they make them as simple and disposable as possible. And when did this transition happen? I remember an abandoned building of a coal mine in the polar settlement of Halmer-Yu. Built in the hardest post-war years, in the most difficult natural conditions, it was also not devoid of beauty and decoration. Why? And why now everything is made of siding in such places and looks as unaesthetic as possible?

After the village there was another forest pass, which took me to the village of Promyslava, famous throughout Russia for the fact that the first Russian diamond was found near it. But it seems that the quality of life of today's Promyslans has not been affected in any way for the better.

This settlement was memorable for one more thing – a completely unusual accent in its name. In general, I have long noticed my ability to place accents incorrectly in unfamiliar settlements, and lately, in order not to make a mistake in the accent, I even use this method: the first time reading an unfamiliar name, I put the accent the way I think it should be, and it most likely means that I was wrong, I should put it differently.



Chertov Palets rock on mount Kolpaki



Sunset from Mount Kolpaki

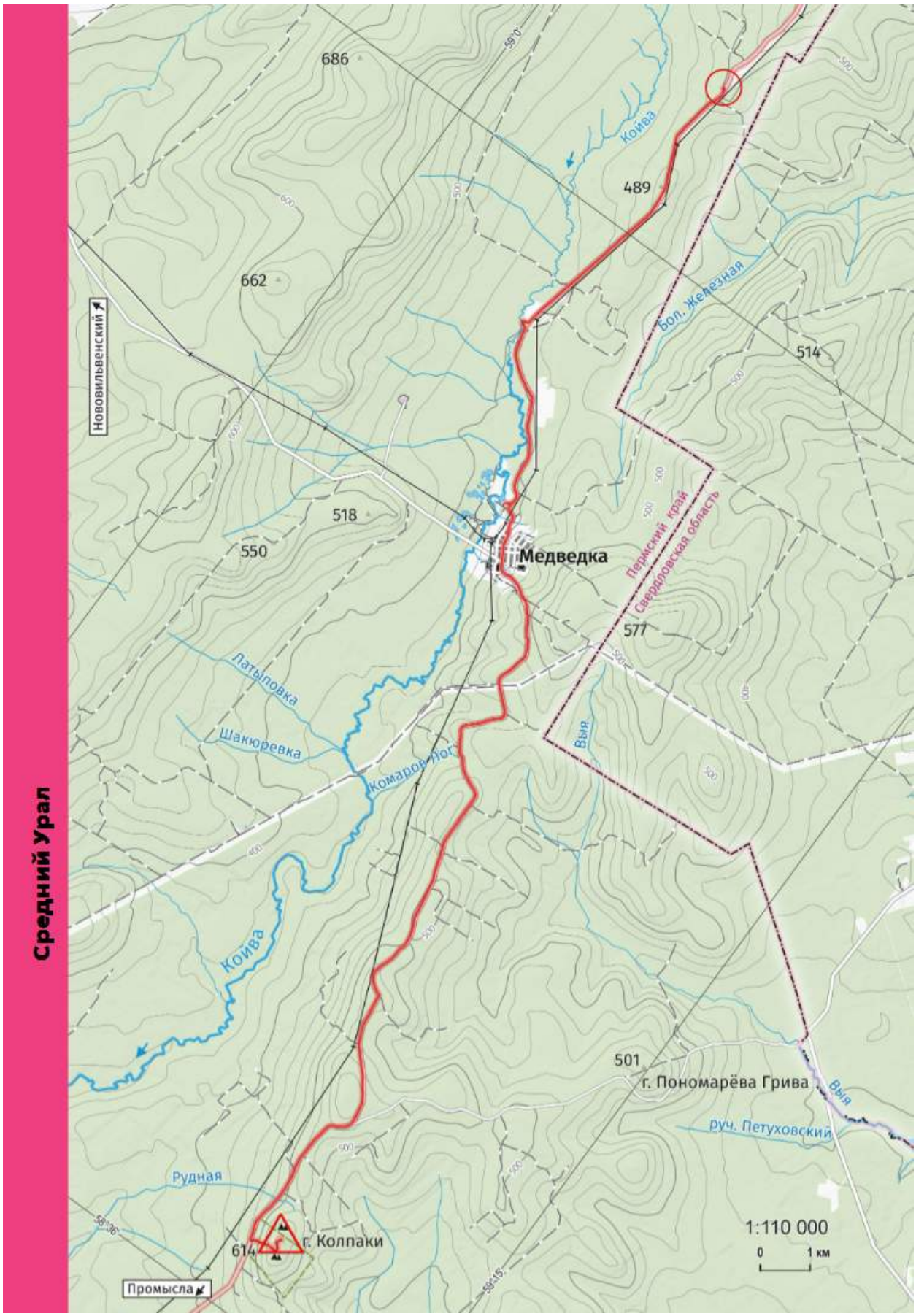
By evening I finally reached the viewpoint – Mt. Kolpaki. It was a momentous event, which I had been waiting for and was a bit worried about. It is a harbinger of the end of the inhabited part of the route and the beginning of the wild part. Soon the

active roads and settlements in the Urals will end and I will disappear into the wilderness.

Kolpaki is famous for its rocky crest towering above the forest and its accessibility. A mere kilometer's hike lifts you above the trees, with views of the Middle Urals' highest peaks: Mount Oslyanka, the Baseg Ridge, and Mount Kachkanar.

The rest of the time before sunset was spent in incessant climbing on the rocks, looking for a beautiful angle. As the sun was setting, I could not find anything interesting among the teeth of the ridge, but I was pleased with the view of the Chertov Palets rock, illuminated by the evening soft sunlight, towering against the background of the vast Middle Urals forest

The sun disappeared behind the horizon, and I wandered into the tent, set up right there, near the summit, among the windfalls, full of firm determination to take my photograph at dawn.



The Middle Urals

Koyva *Novovilvensky*

Latipovka

Shakurevka

Komarov Log

Medvedka

Permskiy kray

Sverdlovskaya oblast'

Bolshaya Zheleznaya

Viya

Petuhovskiy

Ponomaryova griva

Koyva

Pudnaya

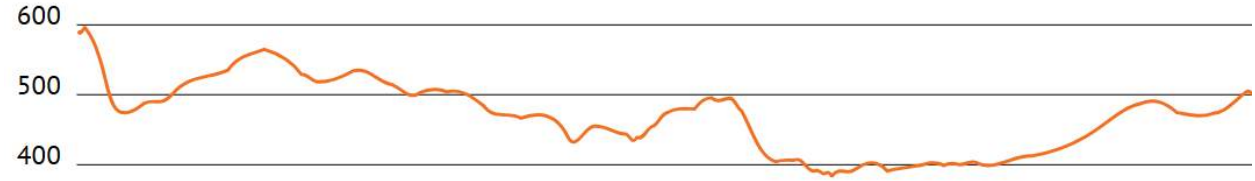
Promisla

Kolpaki

Day 45

Mount Kolpaki (614.7) – the village of Medvedka – an unnamed shoulder of a dusty road

31 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1411 km





Dawn on the background of Mount Kachkanar

June 14, 2021

Today was a very busy day. The goal was to wait from dusk until I could capture the dawn. In such latitudes in the middle of June it means that one has to go bed at best at 12 AM and then wake up at 3:20. And it can be worse! I'm trembling at the thought of what's coming: me full steam ahead towards the North, while the day and my sleep deprivation keep expanding with every new kilometer. Even here, in the Middle Urals, I've kind of forgotten about my flashlight, and soon I will not need it at all for a long time. I already imagine the moral discourse: should I choose a comfortable rest, so the incredibly important part of a successful expedition, or to take a chance at capturing a beautiful scenery to better represent Ural. My only hope is for a poor weather to occur so I would fully rest and not be plagued by doubts.



The never-ending forests of the Middle Urals

This day I watched the sunrise from a cliff with my visitors: the fellas from Perm decided to wake up at the crack of dawn and drive through 250 kilometers to spend this moment with me. Such a strong support is vital in expedition. It was a big pleasure.

Although the same cannot be said about the sunrise itself. At first the horizon over the Kachkanar got swollen in purple, which highlighted dozens of packers on the top of the mountain. Later on, the sun came out and stayed there for few minutes among the clouds and then instantly vanished. Only after 30-40 minutes it finally broke through the clouds and fully appeared, while loosing its early charm. Me and the guys were sitting on the cliff, lazily taking pictures with our cameras. I was looking at them, such youthful and talented folks, and thought how brilliant they are. What a promising future awaits our country. Then we bid each other farewell and I wearily hobbled towards my tent to get some breakfast, prepare the equipment and continue my journey to the North.

All the remaining day was dedicated to overcoming a hard rocky road and dust. I'm talking about humongous clouds of dust under the scorching and blinding sun, which made me cough dry and cover up my face every single time a lumber truck would continuously drive by. I was walking and thinking if the forest ahead was still intact considering the never-ending



The cliffs of the Kolpaky mountain



stream of trucks from there. It would have been so nice to change the route a couple dozen kilometers more to the west and continue the path through the second highest ridge of the Middle Urals – Basegi. But there is a reserve and I didn't bother to solve this issue beforehand, not to mention I would have to reorganize another route (оригинал: забpоска) elsewhere, not through the Srednyaya Usva. And this would have been a complication and extension of one more stage of the route. So I kept moving and biting the dust, dreaming of forest and mountains which should show up very shortly.

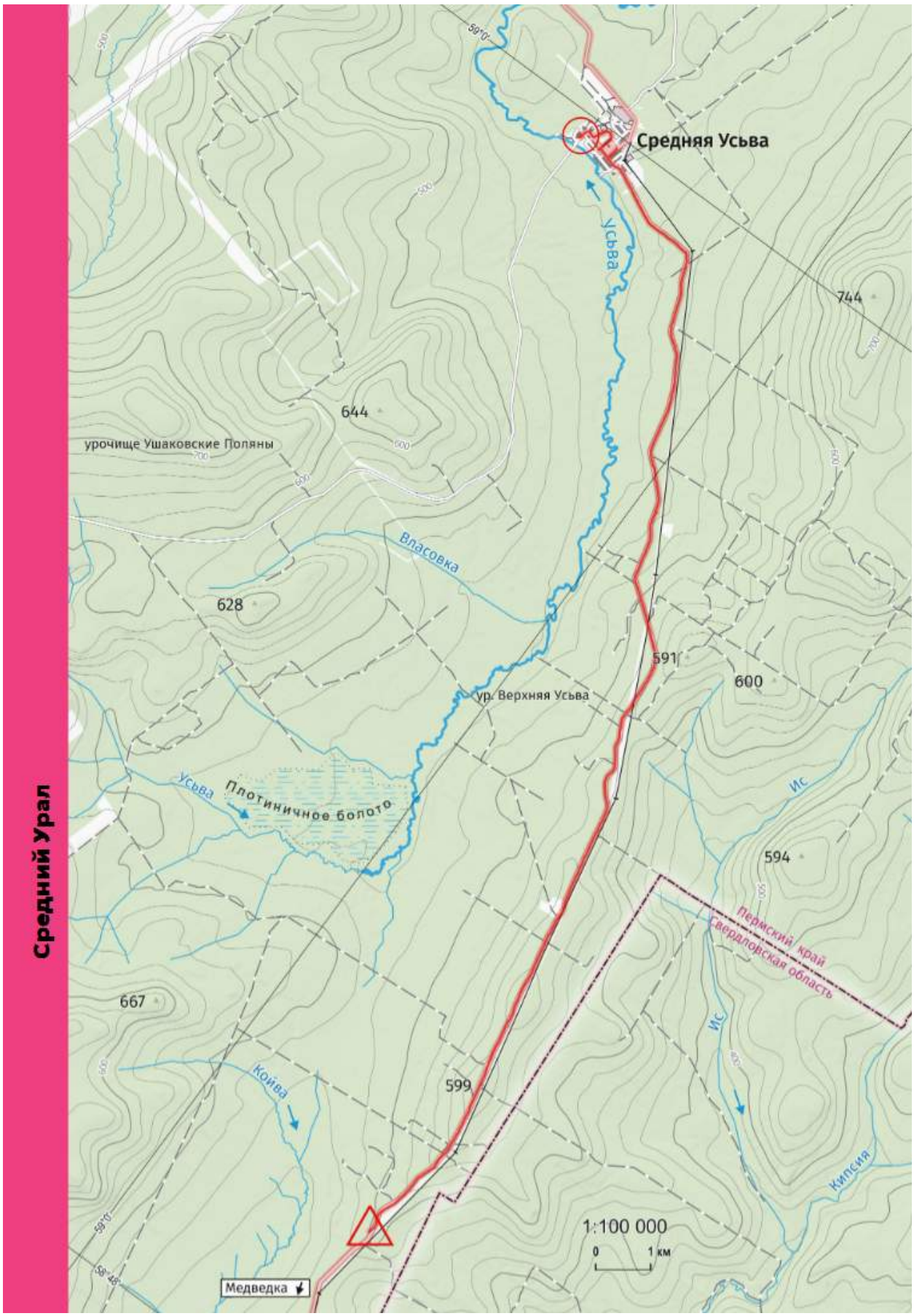
In the morning, I understood what should I do. The road to the settlement Srednyaya Usva, in which my next camp is located, was somewhere 50-55 km long. I can buckle down and cross this path in a day, and on the next day allow myself a full day-off, as I didn't have one for more than two weeks. On the other hand, I might

break down the route on two smaller sections and walk only half of the day. I decided to pick the latter one, as I already knew how hard and disastrous the long road can be for my legs.

This evening, while examining and performing a routine foot care, I was thinking about how my small childhood dream may finally come true. I remember desiring for my feet to be like Mowgli's – rough and scratchy ones, so I could maybe sharpen a knife on them. I even tried to walk barefoot more often. And it seems that, at my age of 37, my wor starts to pay off. To be fair, though, I'm walking in running shoes, but feet still become more tough and rough day by day, strengthening w crust on the most rubbed parts. Ur a place where dreams come true.



On the road leading to the Srednyaya Usva



The Middle Urals

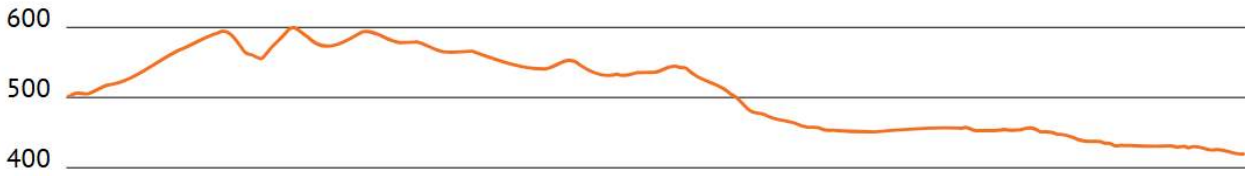
Srednyaya Usva *Usva*

tract Ushakovskie Polyany	*Sverdlovsk region*
Vlasovka	*Perm Region*
Verkhnyaya Usva	*Koiva*
The Damming swamp	*Kipsiya*
the river Is	*Medvedka*

Day 46

An unnamed shoulder of a dusty road – the village of Srednyaya Usva

26.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1437.5 km



June 15th, 2021

Just as I planned, today was the rest day. I overcame the last mileage to the Srednyaya Usva until lunchtime. This settlement can be viewed as a dead end in the Middle Ural's taiga: there's no more public roads forward, only for logging trucks. If one would try to find parallels between this and the Southern Ural, then the former can be compared to the settlement Verkhnearshinsky – an also crucial entry point into the forest and mountains. Another similarity with Verkhnearshinsky to add is that I, once again, have to spend my night all alone in a guest house. During my annual ski race at the mountain Oslyanka this winter I agreed on leaving my camp hub to have a sleep-over in a small hostel of the local tourist and businessman Alexander Kovalenko.



The river Usva



Mount Oslyanka's massif at sunset

Unfortunately, Alexander himself is not present: he's water rafting somewhere in Caucasus. This means that I'm a full-fledged and the only owner of these apartments. I spent the whole day occupied with equipment, laundry, repairment, organization of the returned gear and the pole at the settlement's center from which the free Internet is distributed.

Now for the important part: I took a call with Karelin Vladislav Georgiyevich, a living legend of tourism on Urals. He's the first and probably the only one who traversed the whole tourist route system of Urals from the Pay-Khoy Range to the Mugalzhar. I had a chat, got his blessings and guidance to keep my feet intact. He said that he observes my journey. What should I add? This is very important and heartwarming to me.



By the nightfall I went to the settlement to get some shots. It seemed clear to me that the settlement as pretty new just by looking at it. There were no ancient

decorated houses. Everything is plane and same. Lots of abandoned and collapsing houses, even several panel two storey buildings. No doubt that this place has lasted better times – and it still lasts.



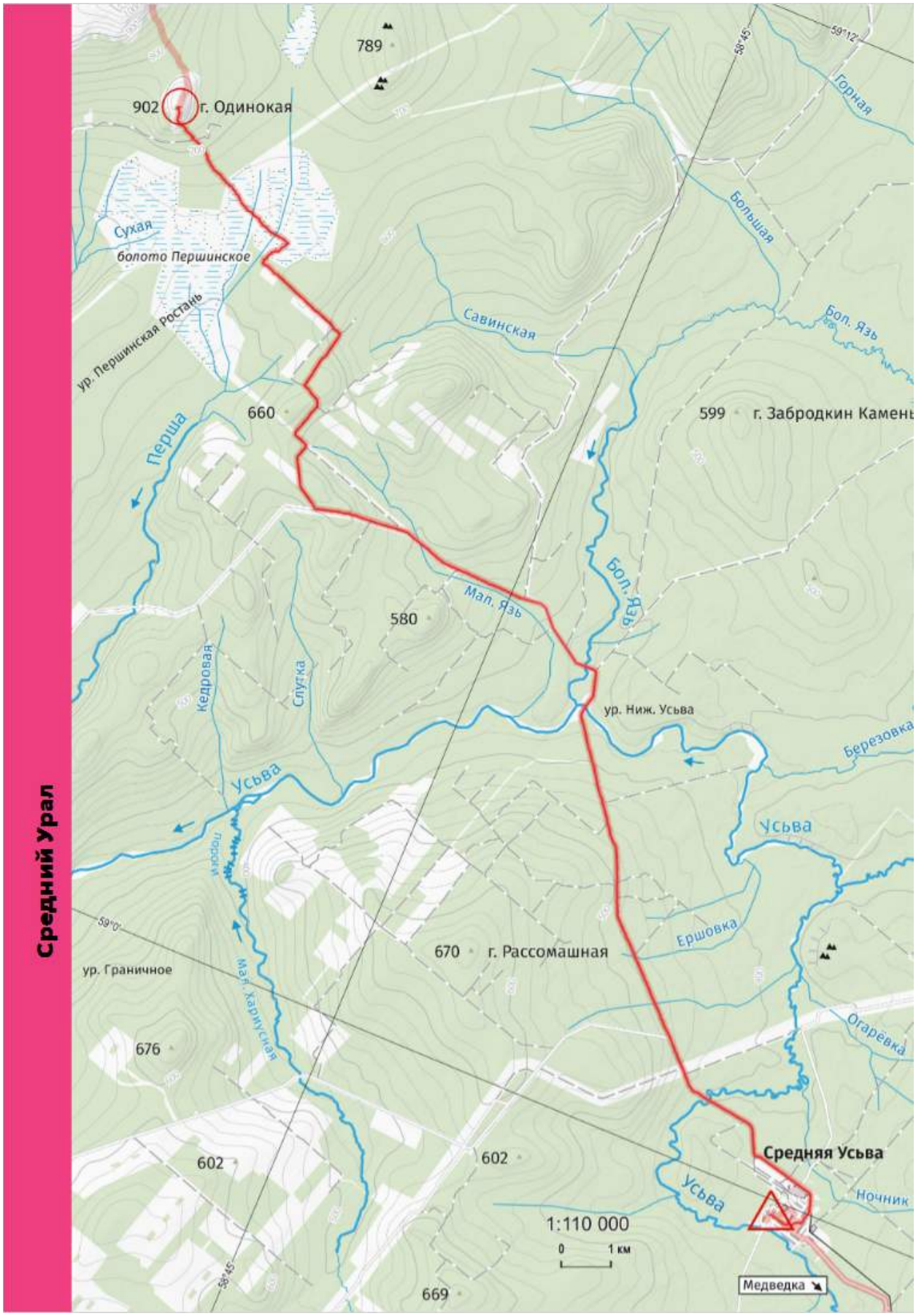
I mindlessly roamed for kilometers straight, which were not accounted for the route, so I could find an interesting angle of the sunset to no avail. Just at the last moment when the sun almost touched the distant mountains an idea struck me. At the outskirts of the settlement there were some collapsed two-storied buildings. They can be seen from anywhere, and in combination with countless cables they ruin the view on faraway mountains. But if I climb them, I may kill two birds with one stone. I made it just in time. Through the shaky, rotted wooden ladder placed by someone else I climbed on the roof. Here it lies before me – the High Middle Urals, guarded by palisade of fir taiga, in the sunset colors. Dark, far and so unique compared to anything I have witnessed through the past few weeks.

Actually, I have a joke about the Middle Urals and its highest point. It goes like this: if it appears to you that the project Thousanders of the South Ural is too hard to implement, try to begin with the project Thousanders of the Middle Ural. Due

to this part of Ural having only one mountaintop more than 1000 meters long, there shouldn't be too much problems with accomplishing the task.

It's exactly this territory, the northern tip of the Middle Ural with such mountain ranges as Baseg, Kachkanar and Oslyanka, which I call the "High Middle Ural." In this modest in terms of length part mountains become significantly higher, passing through the forest as tundras and sharp cliffs. And tomorrow I should get there. I look forward to it.

One more event happened this evening: some tourist came up and told me that he wants to accompany me to the Oslyanka. Well then, lets go forward together tomorrow.



The Middle Urals

Mountain Odinokaya *Sukhaya*

Pershinskoe swamp

Pershinskaya Rostan

Savinskaya

Bolshaya Yaz

Persha

Zabrodkin Kamen Mountain

Malaya Yaz

Kedrovaya

Slutka

Nizhnyaya Usva

Berezovka

Usva

Yershovka

Malaya Hariusnaya

Rassomashnaya Mountain

Granichnoe

Ogarevka

Srednyaya Usva

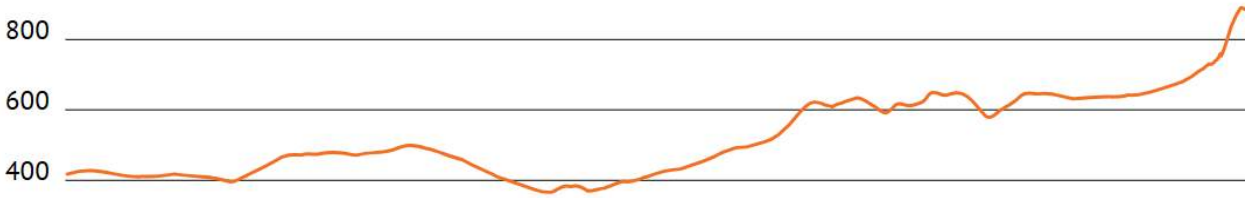
Nochnik

Medvedka

Day 47

Srednyaya Usva settlement – Nizhnyaya Usva tract - Pershinsky marshes – Lonesome Mountain (902.2)

34.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1472 km



June 16, 2021

I keep inspecting my condition, especially the legs. In no way I am (I'm certain I'm not) a professional doctor, but it seems that if you sleep in a more comfortable environment, on a soft bed, then your legs would ache much more. I don't know how to properly interpretate it, just stating the experience.

In the morning, I was greeted yet again with dust, dozens of trucks, and within half an hour I looked like I didn't have a shower at all. I was walking non-stop, in a hurry to just escape the logging base and get a breath of fresh air.

After somewhere 20 kilometers I met up with the fellow with whom I planned to cooperate yesterday. His name is Andrey Borisow from the Kachkanar city. He drove his car while it was possible, and then waited for me on the wayside. We continued our path together. Andrey was walking quite fast, didn't slow me down and wasn’t too talkative. In other words,



In the Pershinsky swamp

he was quite a pleasant companion to have. The logging road still lasted while getting dirtier and more broken. The road brought us to Pershino's swamps, which stretched out near the southeast foot of Oslyanka's massif. As unfortunate as it is to state, loggers are starting to approach the mountain.



Mountain Odinokaya

Once the road has finally ended, the long-awaited beauty has finally took its place. First it were swamps with their own unique charm. The refreshing our feet

water with its squishing and squelching surface, the crooked and sparse forest through which the sharp top of the mountain Odinokaya was peeping. Then the hill started slowly going up, the surface hardened and we reached the end of the forest to be greeted with a fragrant meadow, covering almost the whole place with snow-white petals of chervils. The top is just a short distance away. The first rocky peak after so many days walking from Taganay.

We came to the place where on old soviet maps has been marked a hut. The building has long since disappeared, but a large amount of garbage and wire nets from iron beds strongly indicate that this was once a place where people lived in shelter. I deliberately targeted this place because if the hut was built at the foot of the mountain, then there should be water nearby. The water source wasn't marked on the map, but I had no doubt that it was located somewhere near me. Not long after we found its exact location. A couple of dozen meters away in a thick overly green grass there was a small hollow, from which streamed a pour, cold spring water. It’s just what I need. I didn't want to use a warm, dark, swampy water for dinner and breakfast. After all, I had planned to climb up and spend the night on the summit. I planned to climb up and spend the night on the top, among the kurums, with a view of the Middle and Northern Urals.



The first camp at the top of Odinokaya

I loaded up to the fullest. You usually need 3 liters of water for a comfortable overnight stay, or better 4.5 liters, then you cannot deny yourself anything at all, plastic bottles I have with me. I have plastic bottles with me just for this purpose.

After a lunch break, a small section of the forest – and there they were, my native kurums, which I've already missed quite a bit. Like a big ladder like a big ladder, they take me to the top of the Lonely Mountain. This mountain is remarkable is remarkable, it seems big when approaching it, but when you go up and see its elder... its older neighbor, the highest point of the Middle Urals, Mt. Oslyanka, you realize that it is just a kurum hill. But from it a great view of its giant neighbor. It's the third time I've been to its summit, and it's the first time and the first time I've ever had a full view. There's no doubt about it. I'm going to spend the night on it, try to shoot something at sunset, which is going to be just above the summit of Oslyanka.

I found a not too flat, but very soft, mossy area 50 meters from the summit. I set up the tent and lay down to rest. There is still a lot of time before evening, and I don’t have to hurry, as the daily norm has been exceeded by 10 km. I'm already at the top, what more could I want.

I have a great view of the Kosvinsky Kamen and Konzhakovsky Kamen. This is already the Northern Urals, and then, if you go clockwise, there is Kachkanar Mountain at the East side, in the Middle Urals. I spend the night at the very border of the two Urals. The mood is great, if nothing happens, the sunset could be very beautiful, there are a lot of mountains around me that can be photographed in its light. I've been lying in the tent and just enjoying it, finally the dust on the roads is gone, I haven't seen ticks for a few days now, no ticks, no mosquitoes, the taiga and the mountains at my feet, and the soft tundra under my back. How I've missed it! Today must be one of the happiest days of the route.

I was saved from possible serious trouble by my unfulfilled debt, for the Middle Urals would soon be over, and I had not yet hidden the second silver token. I couldn't figure out where to leave it, and now I'm almost out of the territory of this part of the Urals. On reflection, I decided that the top of Odinokaya was a good place for it. I got out of the tent and went up to overcome the propagating laziness. When I

climbed up, I noticed that the horizon in the west had darkened. I listened anxiously and somewhere, I think, while trying my best at catching the sound, I heard a faint thunder. It was still a long way from clouds, but the weather today was the one kind that brings thunderstorms, and that danger could not be ignored. Without letting the clouds out of sight, I found a place to hide the token. In the kurum chaos the attention was attracted by four conspicuous slabs of stone lying in horizontal layers on top of each other a few meters east of the the summit. I decided to make a cache under them. I hid the treasure in a crevice on the south side between the bottom and the second slab. Then I covered the gap with two flat stones. Hopefully, whoever's looking for the treasure will be careful and not drop the token into the kurum.



An indent between lower and second slabs

Having finished the important matter, I turned my eyes again to the west and sadly noted that it looked as if today on Mountain Odinokaya would be reenacted an almost biblical story called “The Expulsion of Oleg and Andrei from Paradise.” It wasn't just a cloud approaching from the west, it was as an army fron darkness. It significantly closed the gap in 20 or so minutes, and yes, there was clearly something rumbling and sparkling. When I got to the top, I tried to shout to Andrew.

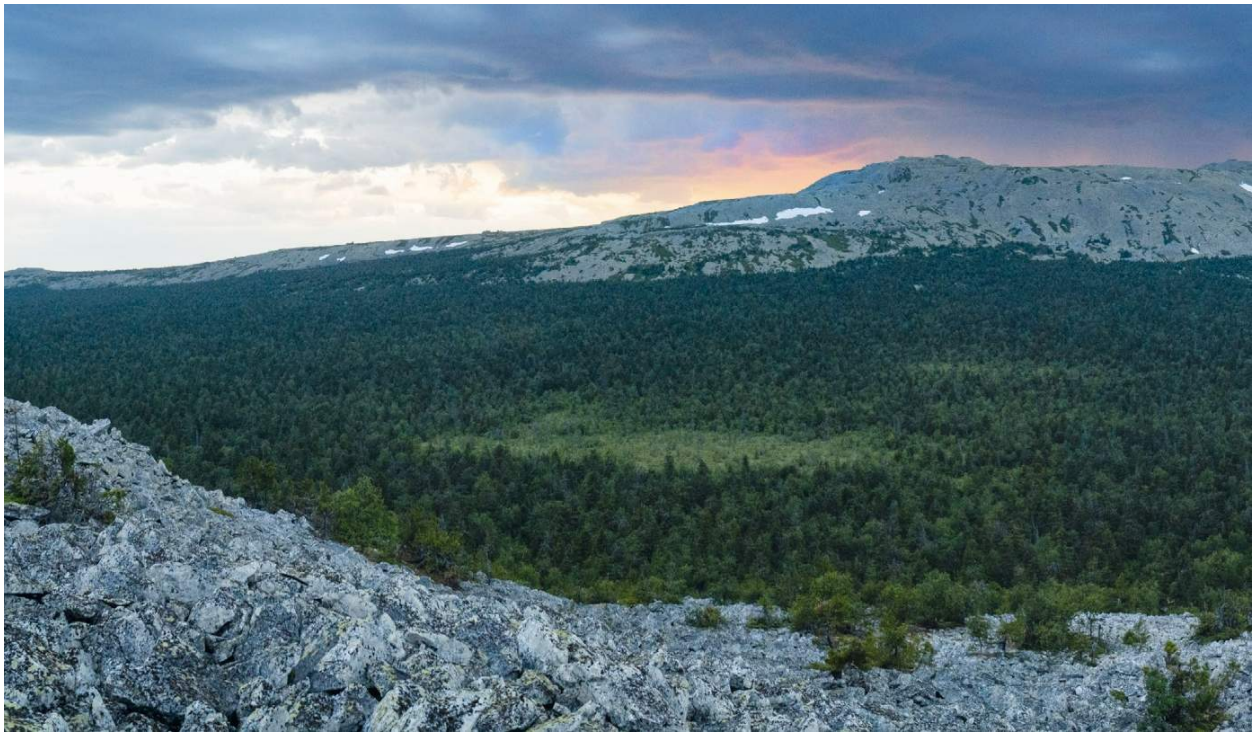


The second camp

He had set up his tent a little lower, about 200 meters away. Not immediately, but I managed to shout to him. Then without fuss, but hastily I assembled the camp which took about ten minutes. I went up again and realized that the speed of the clouds was much faster than I expected. A white wall of rain covered almost the whole horizon in the west and was no more than 10 km away from my mountain. I stood there for a while mesmerized by the approaching force. As it is often the case before a storm, the world was enveloped in an unsettling silence; the air around me became still and clammy. The sound of thunder rumbled me out of my mesmerized stupor, so I grabbed my backpack and began to make my way rapidly down to the northeast, deciding to drop a hundred or two hundred meters to the level of the forest and stand there on the edge of the last kurum terrace.

As it is often the case, I was a minute or two late. I had already set up the inner tent and unfolded the outer one when a wall of rain por down on me. The gnarled birches rustled alarmingly, a squall came, lifting and tearing out canopy of my hands. I held the inner tent with one foot and struggled with the outer part of it for some time. Already soaked through, I was finally able to attach it too. There was an issue though: in the dusk and bustle I mixed up the position, and the entrance of the inner tent and the awning did not coincide. But there was nothing to be done, so I squeezed

in and within seconds the downpour turned into a real storm. The wind bent the neighboring trees, hail pelted the canopy. And I wondered at the time what that strange rustling sound was over the mountain. The world around me was filled with bright flashes going one after the other and an unending rumble of thunder.



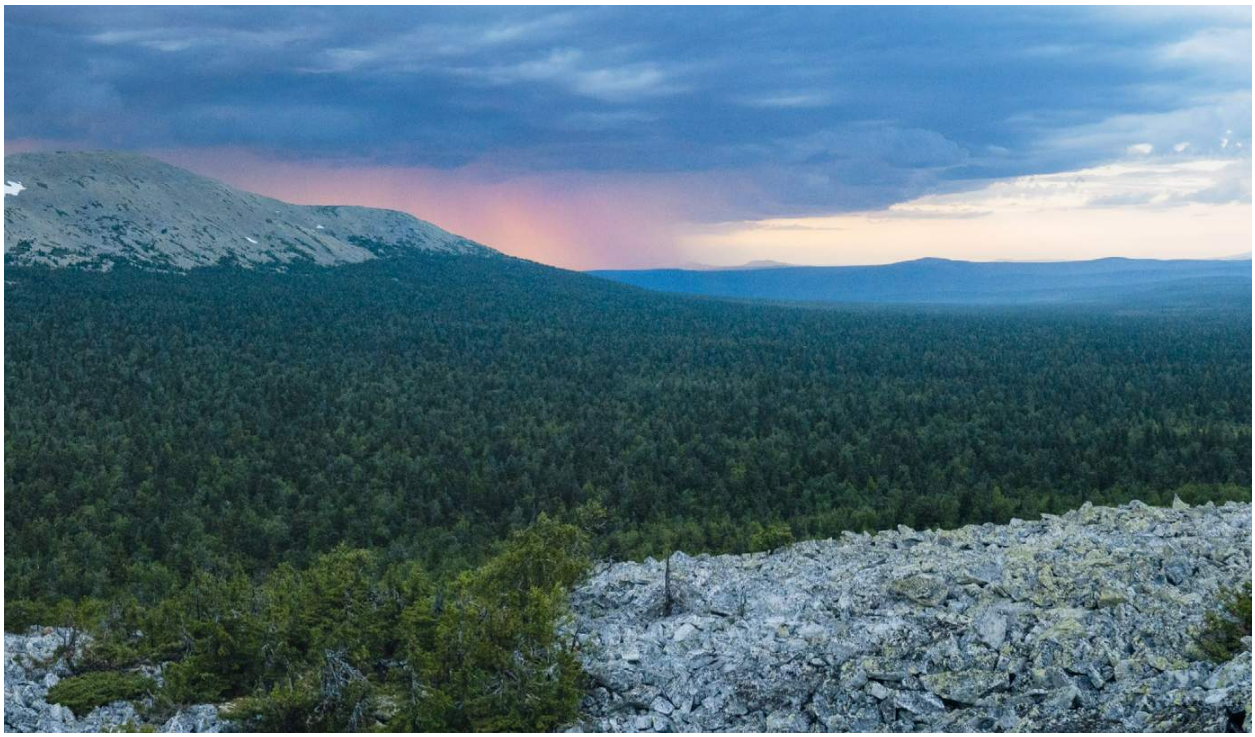
Mountain Oslyanka after thunderstorm

The tent, hurriedly placed, moreover with a wrong awning, began to fill with water. Without changing my clothes, I sat in the center on a hermetic bag, held the tent and waited for the rampant elements to end, because it could not last long.

Turns out, it was exactly the case: in about fifteen minutes the downpour changed to a light rain, and in another half hour it was over. The storm front went to the north-east, towards the Konzhakovsky Stone. I looked anxiously to the northeast. Oh, if only it does not scorch anything there. It would pour out all the water there on the western peaks, and there it would come with a dry thunderstorm – a classic starter pack for a forest fire.

It was beautiful all around me again. The horizon had cleared, and the colors were soft pink before sunset. I grabbed my camera and went back upstairs, to shoot the fleeing front and wait for the sunset. Over Oslyanka there was a dark cloud illuminated by the low red sun, with flashing lightning. I wandered around the kurum

for about an hour looking for shots. To my regret, I didn't find anything worthy. Then I decided to write a new publication, in addition to the one already sent, to tell about the new unexpected results of the day. The Internet connection on the mountain was very weak, I had to look for a place where the signal would be constant to write the text and, while sitting on a wet rock, slowly, one drop at a time, transmit the photos. As it turned out, it was early for me to start summarizing the epic results of the day. Having plunged into the fulfillment of my creative duty, very late in the day I noticed with surprise that the rumblings of thunder came not from the front, where the thunderstorm had gone, but from behind, literally from the back. As I turned around, I was astonished to find a few hundred meters away that a black cloud was creeping up to the summit.

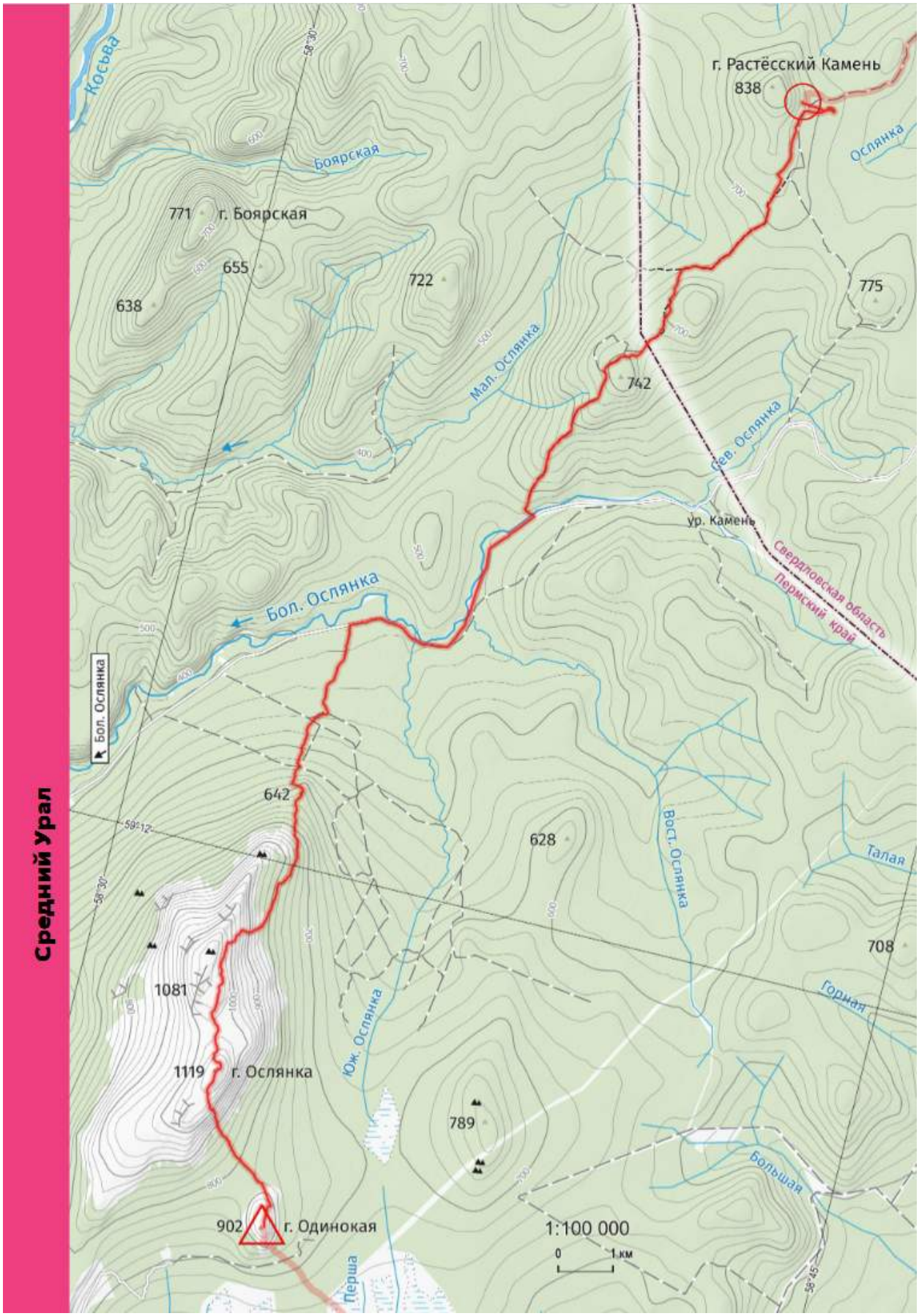


I looked at my phone: the photos hadn't been sent yet. I buttoned up tighter, made a retreat route to the tent, which was about five hundred meters away from me on a wet and sloping kurum, and waited for the data transmission to finish. Very slowly and tensely under the thunder and flashing of lightning the minutes stretched. The end of the transmission coincided with the first rare drops of rain. I jumped up and, without delaying a second longer, ran downstairs. Two hundred meters later, the second wall of water caught up with me. Somewhere a little ahead and to the left,

about a hundred meters away, lightning struck the rocks, deafening me with crackling thunder, then another and another. Oh, this commitment to write daily about the expedition in as much detail as possible. Until recently it had been exhausting for me, but today it was actually dangerous.

I, wet and annoyed by so ridiculously exposing myself to near danger, jumped right back into the tent. The thunderstorm was not the only threat waiting for me. Running through the wet kurum along with clouds is not a good idea either – it's a situation where you’re risking to be left without legs. But it's done. The tent is already properly pitched, well stretched and now it is effectively protecting me from the water flowing from the sky. Who would have thought it would turn out to be such an interesting day. I wish everyday would have been as memorable.

Nevertheless, one should never forget one important rule of traveling through the mountainous and wooded areas of the Urals, where there are loaches with tundra and forest zones. You can stand at the top in the viewing area, but you should always be ready to pack up very quickly and go downstairs, whether it's day, evening, night or morning. Thunderstorms are a real, fortunately not too frequent, but danger. This risk should not be neglected.



The Middle Urals

Osva *Mount Rastessky Kamen*

Boyarskaya

Bolshaya Oslyanka

Oslyanka

Perm Region

Malaya Oslyanka

Talaya

Northern Oslyanka

Southern Oslyanka

Kamen

Mountain Odinokaya

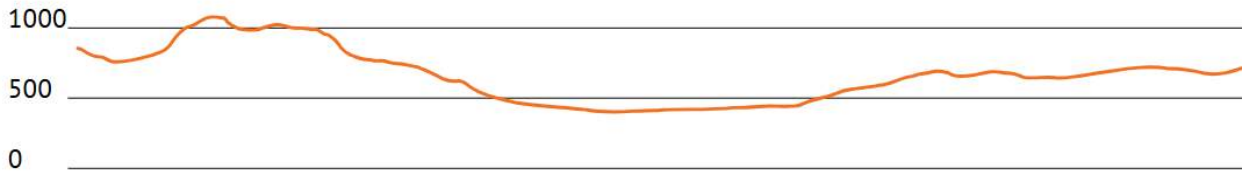
Sverdlovsk region

Persha

Day 48

Lonesome Mountain (902.2) – Oslyanka Mountain (1119.4) – Rastessky Kamen Mountain (838.1)

30 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1502 km



June 17th, 2021

I woke up half an hour before dawn, opened the tent flap and realized that something beautiful was going to happen!

Almost the entire sky was covered with clouds, and rain drenched the tent all night, but there was a narrow strip of clear sky in the corner of the horizon where the sun should have appeared.



Dawn from the Lonely Mountain

Very soon, everything happened, and by that time I was already on my feet, dressed, and on the rocks. The sun came out at the right shoulder of the Kosvinsky Kamen in a blood-red ball, illuminating the low dark clouds in half of the sky with crimson flashes. Unfortunately, this beauty did not last long.



At the top of Oslyanka mountain

The sun quickly ran through a narrow open strip and disappeared under the clouds. A light rain started to fall again, and I hurried back to the tent and slept for a couple more hours with a sense of accomplishment.

When I woke up for the second time, I opened the canopy and saw the world wrapped in low wet clouds. Oslyanka, which stood open at dawn, was almost completely wrapped in a snow-white veil.

There's nothing to do, we packed up and went. I chose the straightest possible line of ascent to the top, without unnecessary sideways movements on the wet kurum.

At the top, there is a chilly wind and a whitish nothingness on a flat, plateaued peak. It's not very impressive in good weather, and even more so when the visibility is 50 m. I didn't want to linger for even a second. I bid farewell to Andrey, made the report photo at the top – and then faster to the north, faster to pass the bulk of the peak and hide in the warm forest. To be fair, I must say that it's a sin for me to complain, the second wet day for the entire journey is just an extravaganza of sunshine and luck.

I descended from the Oslyanka, almost reaching its northern tip, and through the water-soaked forest I came out onto the old road leading to the abandoned village of Kamen. The road, which has not been used for a long time,



The seed drill under the Rastessky Kamen mountain

was struck by its safety, smooth, flat and in places very well laid out in the direction of movement with wooden beams. I thought sadly that she was so good because modern lumberjacks hadn't gotten to her yet, but there's no doubt about it – they will certainly come.

After about 5 km, with a creaking heart I left this beautiful road and, having crossed the Severnaya Oslyanka River, began to climb to an unnamed peak. Very soon I realized that the “creaking” of my heart was not unreasonable. I came out on an old road, which cannot be called a road, but rather a path: almost completely overgrown with dense undergrowth, littered with windfalls, so much so that sometimes it was much more convenient to walk side by side through not the cleanest forest than along it.

Having risen from the river valley, I came out onto flat, open spaces. The wide meadows, overgrown with thick, juicy grass, are also not easy to walk through, the

grass grabs your feet, wraps around your shoes, slows down movement like water in a river, but, of course, this cannot be compared with the windbreaks of the dirty second river forest. Things went faster, the weather improved, the Oslyanka appeared from behind, and in front there was an array of peaks that could not be confused with anything in the Northern Urals. The Kosvinsky Kamen and the Konzhakovsky Kamen. Compactly located on the horizon, they served as clear landmarks of where I needed to go, where rest and another drop were waiting for me.

I walked and wondered where such vast open spaces came from here, in the middle of the forest, and closer to the end of the running day under the mountain Rastessky Stone (838.1), I think I found the answer. In the middle of the clearing, from a distance, I noticed a strange artifact that seemed alien in these places. As he got closer, he discovered a horse-drawn rake that had once served in the last century for harvesting hay, and was abandoned in the middle of the forest. It's hard to say whose mowing it was. Perhaps the inhabitants of the deceased villages, the village Rastess, mowed here, or perhaps prisoners harvested hay here for the subsidiary farms of the colonies, which were once scattered in large numbers in these forests.

The final part of the day did not go as easily as one would have hoped. I approached the slope of the Rastessky Stone mountain, the place where I planned to spend the night, without water. I haven't seen her since I crossed the Severnaya Oslyanka River. Instead of giving a well-deserved rest to my legs, which had been worn out during the day, I went in search of life-giving moisture. There was a hut on the map under the mountain, so I decided to look there.

The search did not end with the desired result. Having wandered through an uncomfortable, overgrown forest, I did not find a source of clean water. I had to go down below the hut and collect standing water in the marshes from which the Oslyanka River originates. The water was murky and teeming with writhing, swimming creatures. But I didn't have the strength or desire to wander in search of a spring, so, judging that boiling all this rather large fauna for a long time would definitely kill, I returned to the camp.

I set up the tent in an absolutely wonderful cozy place – under a birch tree with a view of the Kosvinsky and Konzhakovsky mountains. It was done with the hope that in the evening, or rather in the morning, at dawn, there might be something beautiful. The view consisted of four lines. The foreground was a meadow dotted with snow – white flower umbrellas, the foreground was a pointed spruce wall, the third was mountains compactly located next to each other and towering over the forest, and it was all topped with a sky with pleasant cumulus clouds. The sun was supposed to rise behind the mountains in the morning, which could create an interesting picture. Looking forward to this, I had dinner with bulgur with dried freeze-dried beef and additional boiled “meat” of local origin.

Such a beautiful and rarely visited section of the route between the Middle and Northern Urals, which I walked along today. Here you can make an interesting tourist route that will connect Oslyanka and Konzhakovsky Kamen.

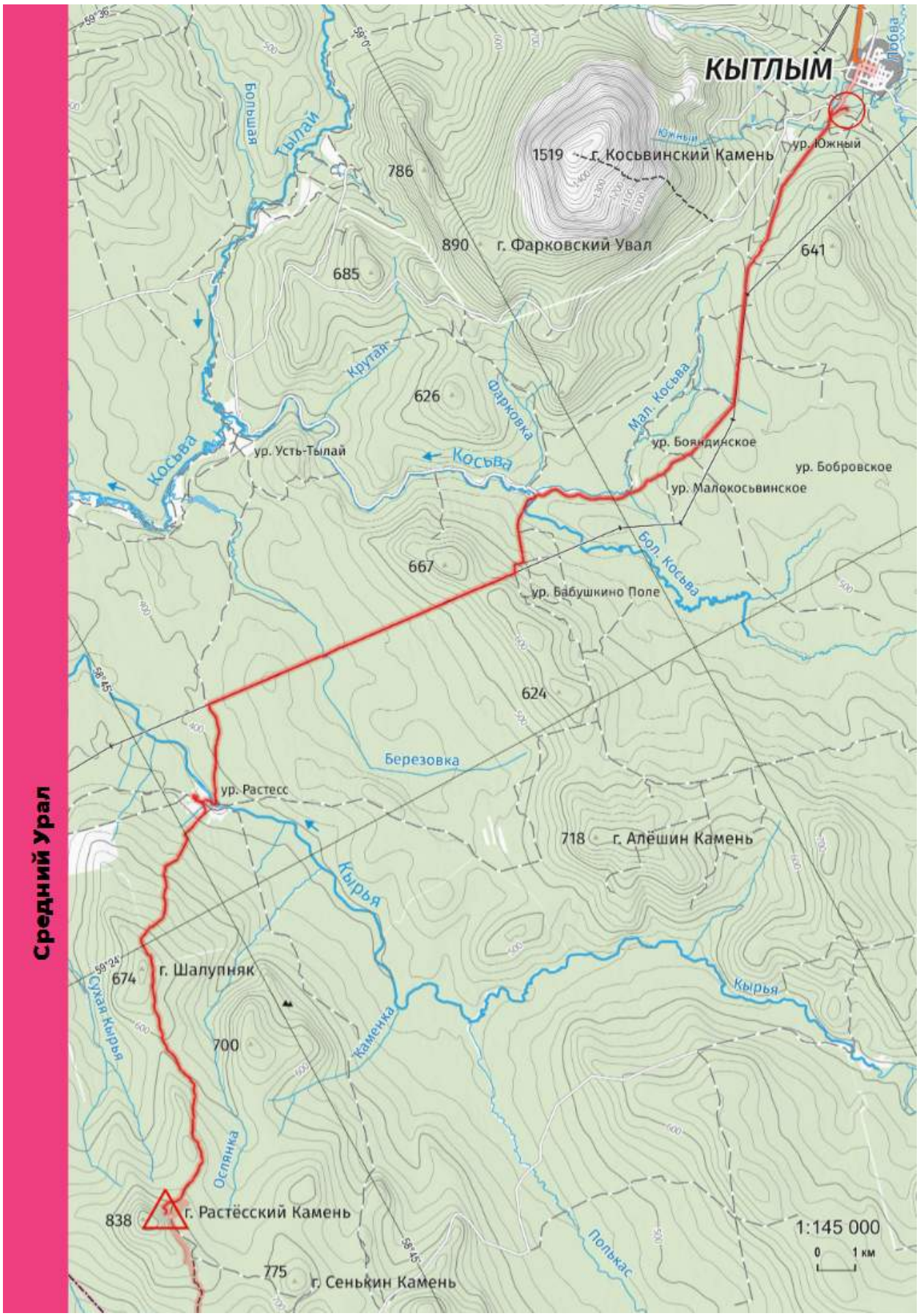
And yes, I have a new entertainment in the evenings. Once I set up camp and get under the tent flap, I start the game “Destroy the evil spirits.” I'm cleaning out the sleeping place from the clouds of biting and bloodsucking creatures that manage



Overnight with a view of the Kosvinsky Kamen and Konzhakovsky Kamen

to crowd inside while I'm setting up the tent. I'm doing this with delight, and I'm not doing anything else until I'm done. There is even its own gradation of game mobs. The most widespread infantry is the midge. It is killed very simply, with one blow, you can swipe your hand across the canopy, use, so to speak, weapons of mass destruction. It is more difficult to cope with horseflies. They loudly fly into the tent, madly rush around the enclosed space of the tent, like angry buzzing bombers. You can swat them on the fly or drive them into a corner, where there is no room for maneuver, and then their song is sung. There are flies that are so arrogant that they manage to dodge the punishing hand, and sometimes even sit on it. Even after a powerful blow, they can get up and fly further.

The most elite troops are small midges, four times smaller than the “infantry.” She has teleportation abilities. As soon as I put a pinpoint blow in the place where the midge had just been, it turns out to be 10 cm away from him in a split second. I go into battle with her last, it's the most exhausting. There are still ants, but I don't touch these hard workers, but let them go free. During the evening, several rounds of the “big battle” can take place, because it is only necessary to open the canopy for a short time for household needs, as the tent is full again.



The Middle Urals

Kytlym *Kosvinsky Kamen*

Farkovsky Uval mountain

Krutaya

Farkovka

Boyandinskoe

Ust-Tyl

Kosva

Bobrovskoe

Malokosvinskoe

Babushkino Pole

Bolshaya Kosva

Berezovka

Alyoshin Kamen mountain

Rastess

Sukhaya Kyrya

mountain Chalupnyak

Kyrya

Mountain Rastessky Stone

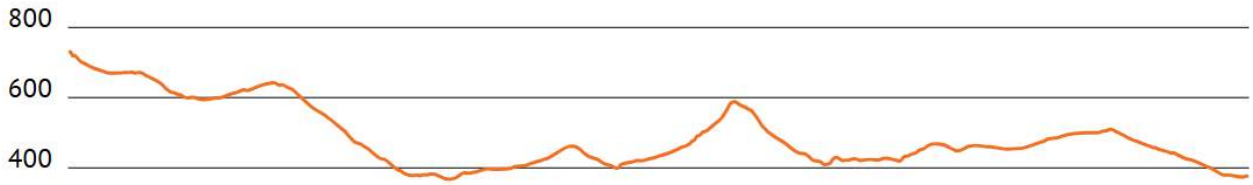
Polkas

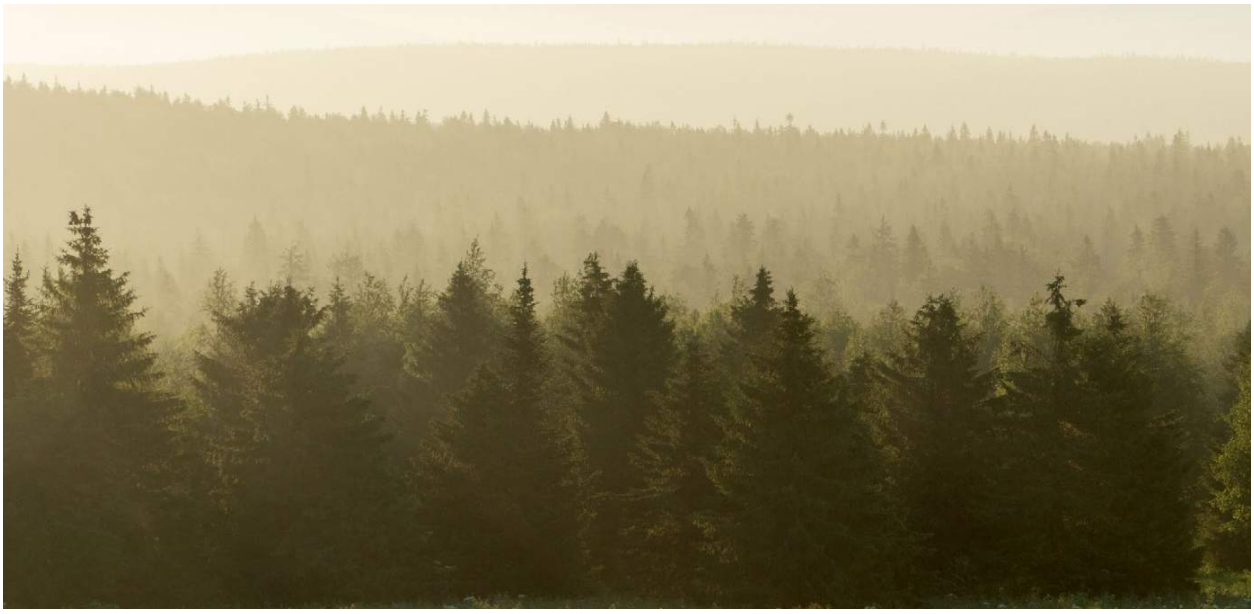
Senkin Kamen Mountain

Day 49

Mount Rastessky Kamen (838.1) – Rastess tract – Kytlym settlement

45 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1547 km





The dawn that dissolved the mountains

June 18, 2021

The hope of dawn was not fulfilled. The morning turned out to be the opposite of yesterday. When I got up at four in the morning, I was annoyed to find that the horizon was clearly covered with gray clouds due to the height of the mountains towering above it, against which the peaks became completely invisible, merged with them. I squinted sleepily for a while and couldn't figure out where they had gone. To clear my conscience, I waited for about thirty minutes until the sun passed through the clouds and came out from behind them. But nothing fundamentally changed. The forest and the world around were flooded with bright morning golden light, which completely dissolved the mountains. With a feeling of utter dissatisfaction, I layed down to sleep.

When I finally woke up, I ate quickly, packed up, and set off. It was going to be a long day. The first half of the day, before lunch, I walked along the same

overgrown road yesterday, with old clearings and clearings. It was uncomfortable and even traumatic to move. A deep, waterwashed track, hiding under a canopy of thick grass, tried to put a stone or a hole under its feet. After 7 km, he began to descend from under Mountain Shalupnyak into the valley of the Kyrya River and on the 15th kilometer of the way he came to one of the iconic places in the history of Russia, the symbolic and practical importance of which is difficult to overestimate.



The meadow of the Babinovsky tract

A vast clearing near the river, bathed in the midday sun, with crumbling remains of log cabins, mounds of foundations and sagging fence posts – that's the Rastess tract. It was once an ancient large village, lost in the mountains of the Urals. But it was not the settlement itself that once existed that caused me a feeling of some awe, but a narrow clearing, barely discernible between a spruce palisade, entering the clearing from the northwest and passing through a narrow road through the tract

It was along this narrow strip that the land of Russia grew into Asia, and here, at the end of the 19th century, the first Russian land road was laid by Artemy Babinov, a man from the town, connecting the European part of Russia with Siberia. The road was named after its creator, the Babinovsky Tract, and for several centuries remained the only official road crossing the Urals. Thousands and millions of migrants to Siberia followed it to the east.

I was standing on this road, and I was filled with a very special feeling, as if I were touching with my tired feet an important and lost history of the country. I stayed in the tract for about an hour. I wandered through the spruce forest, looking for an ancient cemetery. As a result, I found several dilapidated graves and a pair of antique cast-iron gravestones, very similar to those at the cemetery in the village of Verkhny Avzyan in the Southern Urals. Apparently, the technology and fashion for tombstones were similar in the industrial areas of the Urals.

Some strong impressions were caused by reading the inscriptions on the tombstones. Here is one of them: “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. The bodies of A.P. Sibiryakov's children are buried here. Babies Nadezhda, born on September 23, 1901, died on December 23, 1901, and Mikhail,



View of the village of Kytlym and cliffs Perviy, Vtoroy, Tretiy Bugor

born on September 21, 1902, and died on March 25, 1903.” The harsh and merciless living conditions in the mountainous northern taiga did not spare the children in the first place. And somehow it became especially sad, I remembered my little ones who stayed at home.

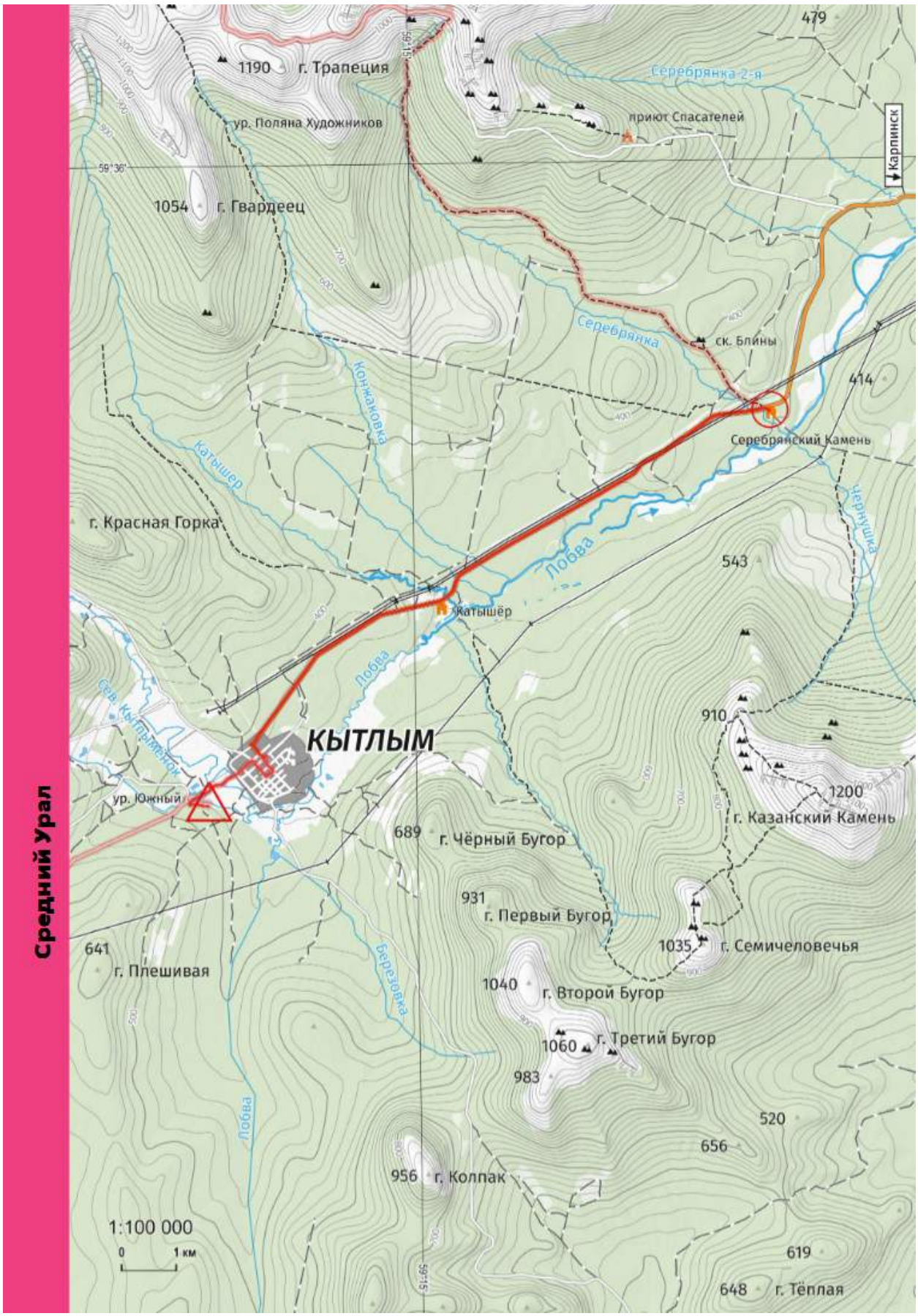
After having lunch on the banks of the Kyrya River, I spent the second part of the day walking first along the power line, then along the road, bypassing the Kosvinsky Stone, getting closer and closer to this domed kurum giant.

In the evening, I went out to the village of Kytlym and decided to stand a kilometer away from it, to hide from unnecessary gazes in the dreaded dumps surrounding the village. The location was convenient: on the one hand, it allowed me to remain incognito, on the other – after walking just a couple dozen steps, I found myself on top of the dump and had a good view of the village and the mountains surrounding it. In case of good light, it was useful. But by sunset, clouds had gathered and covered the peaks with a reliable curtain. It was not for nothing that the military chose the Kosvinsky Kamen to build another object under it, the entrance to which was perfectly visible from the place of my night in Moscow. The highest peaks of the area, the first truly high mountains on the path of air masses to the east,

are often covered with clouds, delaying their course from the west and thereby creating additional camouflage.



Construction site under the Kosvinsky Kamen



The Middle Urals

Mountain Trapeziya *Serebryanka*

Polyana Hudozhnikov

The Artists'Meadow

Karpinsk

Mount Gvardeec

Serebryanka

Blini cliffs

Konjakovka

Serebryansky Kamen

Katyshor

mountain Krasnaya Gorka

Chernushka

Lobva

Kytlym

Mountain Cherniy Bugor

Mountain Kazansky Kamen

Mountain Perviy Bugor

Berezovka

Mount Semichelovechya

Mount Pleshivaya

Mountain Vtoroy Bugor

Mountain Tretiy Bugor

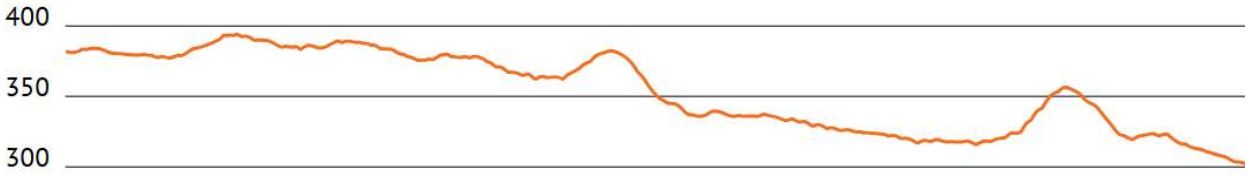
Mountain Kolpak

Mountain Teplaya

Day 50

Kytlym village – Serebryansky Kamen campsite

20 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1567 km



June 19th, 2021

Today was a very busy day, although it started out calmly. Realizing that I had to walk a little bit, I gave myself a longer rest in the morning, lying in the tent until ten o'clock in the morning. The plan was simple: I knew that there was a cafe with fast and unhealthy food in Kytlym, so I decided to wait for it to open and dilute the already boring monotony of the diet. That's what I bought: two large shawarma, richly flavored with mayonnaise, nuggets, large French fries, Coca-Cola fell inside, as if into a black hole. After that, I had to walk just over 10 km to the Serebryansky Kamen campsite, where I had planned a two-day vacation and a performance, as well as a meeting with my friend Alexei Bolotov, an extraordinary and passionate personality.

The village of Kytlym itself made an ambiguous impression, perhaps it can be divided into two opposite parts. The old one is large – from the era of mining, very dilapidated, built of wood, dark and inhospitable. It is clear that it is living out its life and could have turned into a tract in the foreseeable future if the military had not come and created the second part of the village – the closed one. A small enclave of bright multi-storey buildings, to which other infrastructure facilities, including shops and cafes, are attached. It is to the military unit and the facility being created under Kosvinsky Kamen Mountain that the village owes its se rebirth from rot and desolation. Construction has been going on for many



A stele at the entrance to the village of Kytlym

years, in addition to the military, there are many mining shift workers in the village. What will happen when the construction is completed is an open question.



The monument to those who died in the Civil War

These places are also due to the military and the asphalt road that I walked along today. Laid several years ago on the site of a heavily broken dirt road, it has made the southernmost part of the Northern Urals the most accessible and comfortable to visit. It leads to the center of an interesting mountainous area, the so-called Konzhakovsky mountain ring, which includes a number of peaks, the highest point of the Sverdlovsk region – Konzhakovsky Kamen, Serebryansky Kamen, Kosvinsky Stone, the First, Second, Third Hillock, Semichelovechyu, Sukhogorsky Kamen. These peaks are quite compactly located and are popular as sites for short, two- to three-day hikes from the center of the ring, where the campsite was prudently located, where I planned my vacation.

I walked along the asphalt and either with regret or with joy, in general, with mixed feelings, I pondered the idea that these were the last steps on asphalt throughout the Urals. Further north, there will be no asphalt or settlements before reaching Vorkuta. Very soon, the wild part of the journey will begin, without roads,

communications and shops. On the one hand, I really want to get there, it beckons with its unexplored nature. On the other hand, I'm starting to worry if I can even handle it.



With Alexey Bolotov

By lunchtime I was at the Serebryansky Kamen base, hugs with old friends – and quickly rest in the cabin. In the late afternoon, Alexey Bolotov, my good old friend, came running, he arrived a little earlier than me and managed to run a training session to the top of the Konjakovsky Stone. Initially, we planned to spend a few days with him together, but, as often happens, the work did not give us that much time. However, Alexey still came for a few hours, because we had an agreement that he would bring me a laptop that would free up the memory of electronics that were already almost full of photos and videos. The journey that my friend had to travel to fulfill his promise is remarkable. First, he drove from Naberezhnye Chelny by car to Ufa, then flew by plane to Yekaterinburg, rented a car there, came to my place, spent the night and made the same way back to get to work. When I think about this small

feat accomplished for the sake of the expedition, I doubt if my route could have taken place at all without the support of friends and family.

The rest of the evening was spent in relaxation, friendly communication, memories flowing steadily against the background of the long process of copying photos and videos to a laptop.

Day 51

Rest

0 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1567 km

June 20, 2021

I didn't sleep much because I was scheduled to perform this afternoon. I had been preparing a presentation and slides since five in the morning until Alexey could take the computer away.

At the noon, just as it was planned, the third meeting on the route began, now in the Northern Urals. Surprisingly, despite the fact that this corner is not the closest, there was a huge amount of people – around 30-40, which felt very pleasant and supportive. We were sitting outside in the sun. There were difficulties with the technical part, so the presentation, which I've been making for five hours, was not useful. Although it was still impossible to call this work completely useless – I could put the story in my head on the shelves. Everything went great, there were no random people at the meeting, everyone was involved and understood the Urals, it was a real pleasure to perform in front of such people.
The event lasted for three hours of stories and dialogues. I think this is a perfect embodiment of my idea of popularizing the Urals: when you not only walk kilometers straight, but also communicate, chatter, and learn something new yourself.



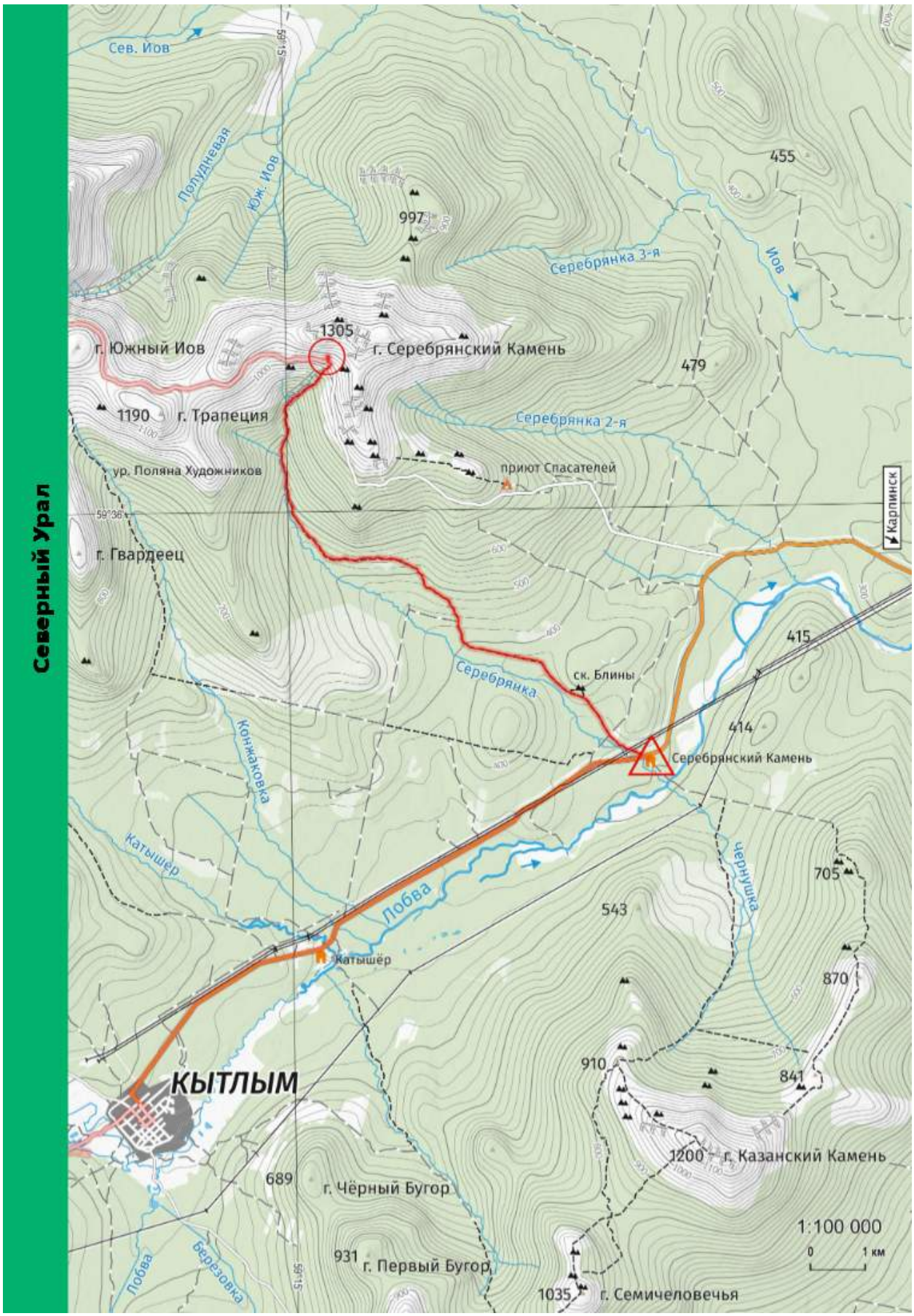
My presentation at the Serebryany Kamen campsite. Photo by Mikhail Reutov



With Alexander Podolsky

I rested the rest of the day. I had a nice chat with Sasha Podolsky, the owner of the tour. This man does a lot for the development of tourism in the Konjakovsky mountain ring area and, in my opinion, certainly deserves to be mentioned on the

pages of this diary as the example of an effective and positive combination of a commercial approach with a Volontarian one. I am very impressed that, having created a campsite, Alexander thinks not only about enriching himself, but also develops a network of routes, cleans them, rides snowmobiles through the winter, and comes up with new tourist locations. And all this is used by visitors of the area, regardless of whether they are campers or independent tourists. I have been watching his work on the development of the district for five years now, and it is visible. A difficult area with a harsh climate and high anthropogenic pressure is developing against all odds precisely thanks to enthusiasts like Alexander.
In the evening, tired of socializing, I felt exhausted, as if I had a bad cold, so at six o'clock in the evening I hung up the windows and went to bed.
I just should be cautious not to get the coronavirus. The news says the disease is raging across the country, and I didn't have time to get vaccinated in the rush of preparing for the route. That's what really bothers me. To slip through, to escape into the taiga from it. Just a little bit left.



The Northern Urals

Northern Yov *Poludnevka*

Southern Yov

Serebryanka

Serebryansky Kamen

Mountain Trapeziya

Polyana Hudozhnikov

The Artists' Meadow

Karpinsk

Gvardeyets mountain

Pancake cliff

Konjakovka

Lobva

Chernushka

Katyshor

Kytlym

Kazansky Kamen

Cherniy Bugor

Lobva

Berezovka

Perviy Bugor mountain

Semichelovechya mountain

Day 52

Serebryansky Kamen campsite – Serebryansky Kamen Mountain (1305)

13 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1580 km



June 21, 2021

The most important thing that can be said about this day of rest is that it did not change. I couldn't sit still and still went to the mountains. Although I woke up in the morning with a very clear desire to spend another day at the campsite. But what can you not think of from idleness, which I indulged in with gusto and abandon until lunch.

Sometime in the middle of the day, clouds appeared in the clear sky. Going to the river Serebryanka was the only place where I had Internet access. I checked the weather forecast. Forecasters predicted light rain in the evening, possibly clearing up in the morning and rain again tomorrow afternoon. I thought maybe it would be worth climbing Serebryansky Kamen Mountain today, try to shoot something at sunset and dawn, and run over Konzhakovsky Kamen before daylight tomorrow; to reduce walking time on long wet kurum slopes.



Another shoe change



Shooting a video about a taiga dress



Serebryansky Kamen Mountain Trail

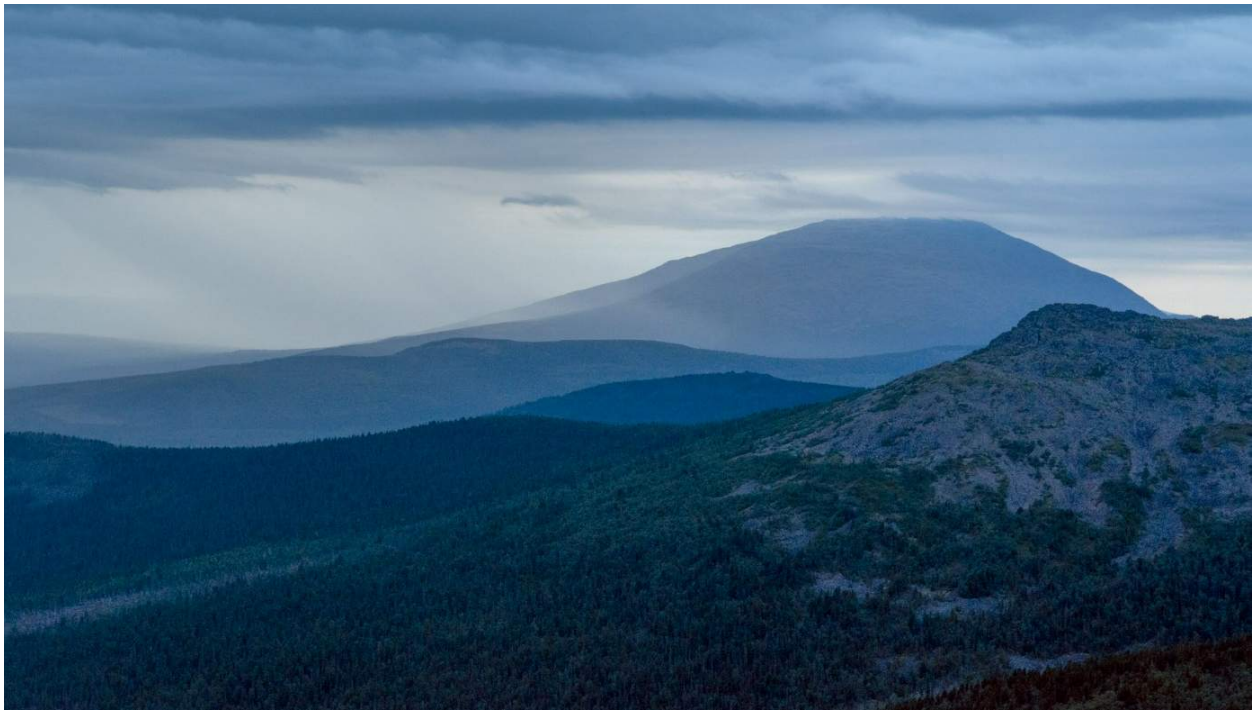
And this was one of those ideas where you kind of think that not everything has been decided yet. You need to weigh everything carefully, but somewhere deep down you know that's exactly what you're going to do. However, by yielding to some kind of your second self, you allow yourself to bargain inside. So I spent several hours thinking about what to do, looking at the overcast sky.
I went out at 5:20 p.m., and as soon as I walked a few meters under my backpack, rain began to fall. I came back, waited under the awning for a while, said goodbye to my friends, and off we go. Since I've already taken this step, it's not my way to turn. The rain subsided, then began again, but on the whole it did not interfere much, and maybe even lightened up a little.



Ascent along the riverbed of the Serebryanka

I was walking along a very picturesque, well-marked trail along the Serebryanka River, another childhood friend of Alexander. A small, almost dried-up river sometimes approached the riverbed, then ran away into a thicket of centuries-old cedars. At some point I came out from the tent on the almost

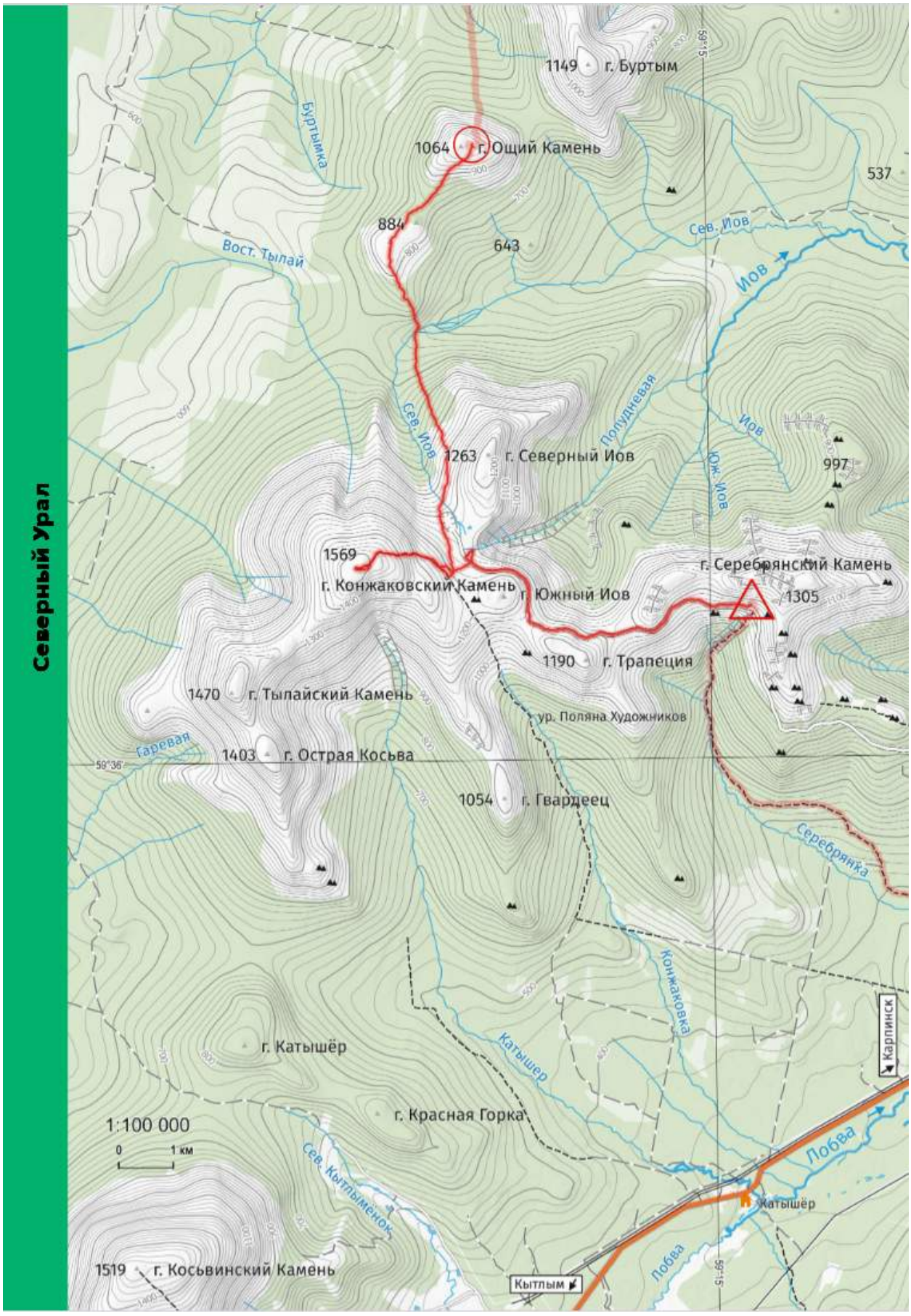
dry riverbed and walked along it among large stones and rocks through a cascade of waterfalls. It should be noisy and beautiful here during the riptide.



Gradually, the trail, becoming steeper and steeper, went to the right of the river gorge and led out of the forest area. And at that moment, I realized that I had done everything for a reason. Despite the clouds covering almost the entire sky, the view of the mountains was wonderful. Below, in the southwest, there was a bright golden streak of light, and against its background towered the dark, gloomy dome of the Kosvinsky Stone.

After coming out on the dunite road, he climbed a little higher up the mountain and decided to pitch a tent, abandoning the idea of climbing the crest of the Serebransk Stone. A weighty argument was the snow-white rain bands approaching me from the direction of the Kosvinsky Stone: the weather deteriorated very quickly. But they don't look for good from the good, I was quite satisfied with what I had already managed to remove. I set up a tent and was in a sleeping bag with the first drops of rain, looking out of a slightly ajar slit in the canopy as the world sank under water.

**This is what locals and tourists call the road leading along the slopes of Serebryansky Stone to the quarry where dunite is mined*



The Northern Urals

Burtym *Burtymka*

Oschiy Kamen Mountain

Northern Yov

Eastern Tilay

Poludnevka

Mount Serebryansky Kamen

mount Konzhakovsky Kamen

Southern Yov

Trapeziya

Tylaisky Kamen

Polyana Hudozhnikov

Artists' Meadow

Garevaya

Ostroya Kosva Mountain

Mount Gvardeec

Serebryanka

Konjakovka

Karpinsk

Katyshor

mountain Krasnaya Gorka

Lobva

North Kytlymenok

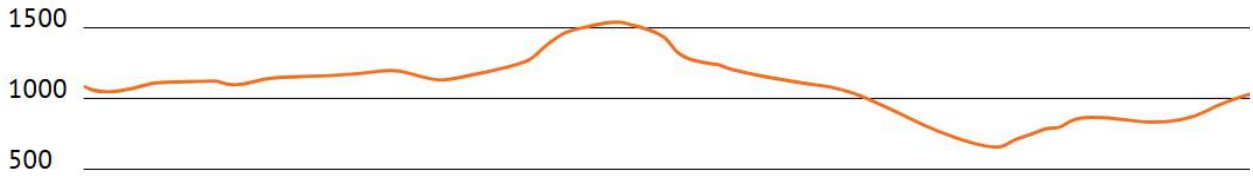
The Kosvinsky Kamen

Kytlym

Day 53

Serebryansky Kamen Mountain (1305) – Konzhakovsky Kamen Mountain (1569) – Oschiy Kamen Mountain (1064)

23 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1603 km



June 22, 2021

Yes! I was right twice when I took a chance yesterday. I caught a harsh sunset in the evening, and a gentle sunrise in the morning. Today was the shortest night of the year, I woke up with an alarm clock at 2:55 a.m., opened the tent flap and saw that the sky was clear, which meant I had to climb the ridge, because the sun was rising from the opposite side of the mountain. It wasn't easy at all, running uphill a few minutes after I woke up. I suspect it's not the best load for my health either, but what awaited me at the top was worth it.



Dawn over the Serebryansky Stone

I climbed onto the narrow rocky ridge of the Serebryansky Stone a few minutes before dawn and realized that there was still time. The tail of clouds, which brought yesterday's rain, appeared in the southeast, hiding it with a narrow strip sunrise. But this time the clouds didn't get in the way. Or maybe, on the contrary, they did it better. At first, for a brief moment, the sun appeared in a narrow. There

were cracks on the horizon, the sun shone a little and hid behind the clouds again. This delay gave me time to choose a better location to shoot from, which had a view on both sides of the ridge.

And finally, the clouds hiding the morning light remained below, and the extravaganza began. In a few minutes, the mountains changed from their eternally harsh appearance to something more friendly, illuminated by a gentle pink light. It was a beautiful and memorable moment, which, unfortunately, no camera can convey.

I ran on the rocks, took pictures, and screamed with joy. Of course, this is a clear embodiment of the idea that going up a mountain in bad weather is often a good idea. It is during dramatic weather that mountains can reward you with something especially beautiful.

I waited until the light turned golden, the last stage before it switched to the usual daytime light, and hurried down to the camp. Despite the wonderful morning, one should not forget that the forecast for the day is not the most favorable. Rain and clouds continued to be on the forecasters' plans.

After a hasty breakfast, I went down to Dunitovaya road, an infrastructure facility built here several years ago, around which there are ongoing disputes. On the one hand, this technological road, which runs along the slope of the Serebryansky Stone and leads under the Konjakovsky peak, greatly facilitates people's access to the top. And this is probably a good thing: there are a lot of mountains in the Northern Urals, and almost all of them are difficult to reach. What's wrong with one of the iconic peaks becoming more accessible? More people will be able to touch the beauty of the Urals. However, on the other hand, those who say that this leads to the cluttering of the mountain and fosters in people a consumer attitude towards nature are right. Do not forget that the road does not exist by itself, but appeared on the mountain along with the beginning of the development of the dunite quarry. Was it needed here, at an altitude of 1,100 m, right in the heart of the mountain? They say the dunite is not such a rare fossil that it is worth disfiguring a popular tourist mountain. As always, there are many questions, and, as usual, there is no one answer

to them. Thinking about all this, I moved very quickly up the road, approaching the peak of the Konjakovsky Stone wrapped in a cloud.

Leaving my backpack at the bottom of the road, I climbed onto the top light for the sake of showing off. And in continuation of my reflections, implemented in practice, I was amazed at the amount of garbage. A gas cylinder, a kettlebell without a handle, a mountain of plastic bottles, champagne bottles, and many, many more.

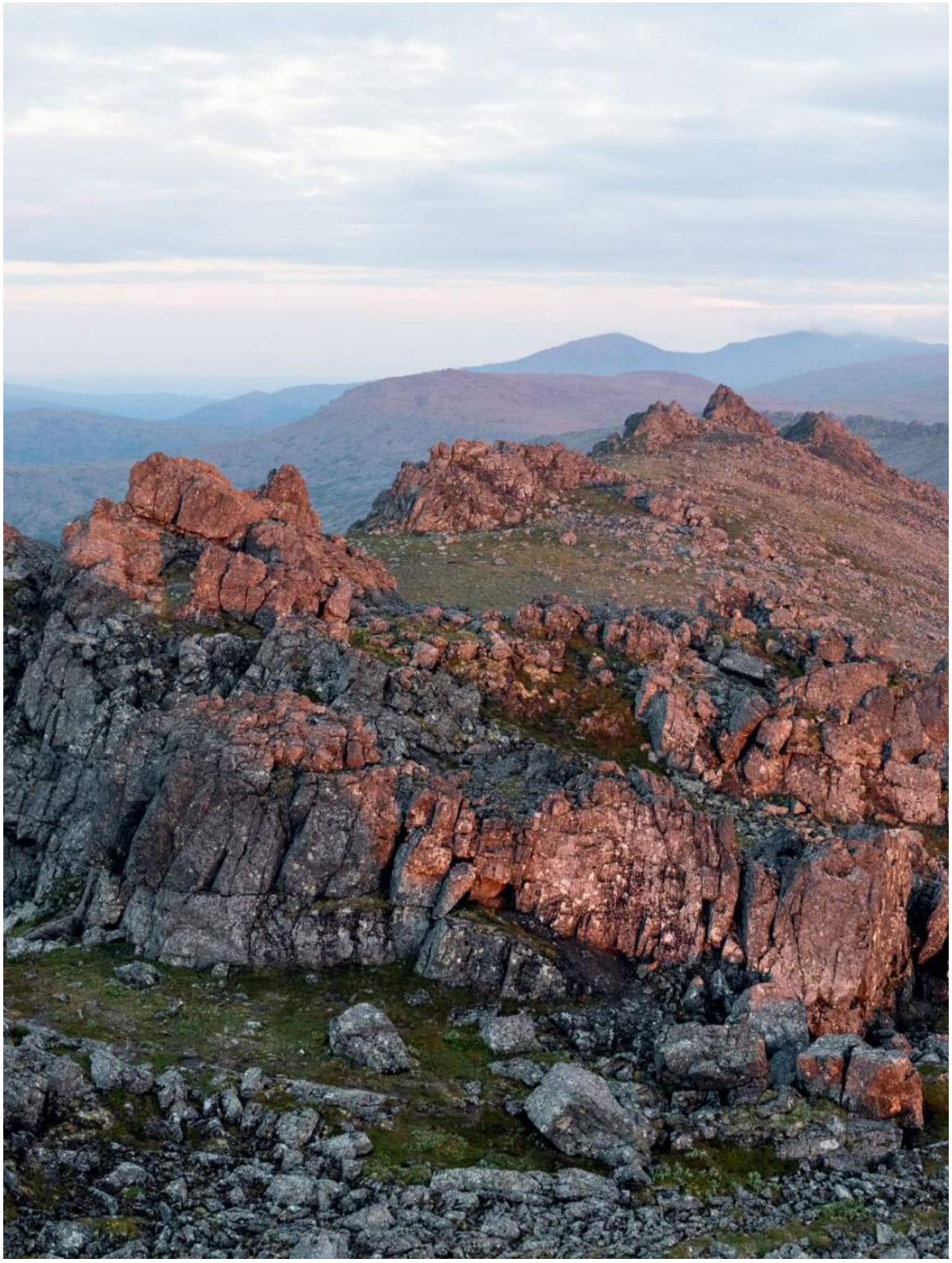


The top of the Konjakovsky Stone

This is, by far, the dirtiest peak on my way and, most likely, the dirtiest peak of the entire trans-Ural hike, because further people will have much fewer opportunities to bring something unnecessary into the mountains.
On the descent, the clouds parted a little, and I saw it, a painful ulcer on the mountain's body, a dunite quarry. It's still very young, just starting its life, but it is already ugly enough. From above, it was clear that no work was being done at the quarry, so I decided to go through it. I passed signs threatening explosive work, walked along the very edge of the quarry. It's still very small, about 5 m deep, and its development is only in progress. It's scary to imagine what it will look like when it

increases significantly. It will be a very significant place in the Urals, a place where the living and the dead, industrial and tourist coexist literally one step away from each other.

By noon, as promised, the sky was overcast with cloudy blue clouds that did not anticipate anything good in the foreseeable future, so, without wasting time, I began to descend north into the valley of the Severny Yov River. About 3 km of not the most pleasant kurum interspersed with yellow-brown cobblestones, as I suspect – dunite. And I found myself in a virgin taiga.



Konzhakovsky mountain range



It seems that the lumberjack's axe did not reach her, or it was a long time ago. Perhaps this was facilitated by the not very convenient location of the forest, on the saddle between the Konjakovsky Stone massif and the mountain of the satellite

Stone, on which I decided to spend the night. Being above the forest area, I saw numerous traces of logging, and only this site was devoid of them. Climbing a Small Stone on the kurums was the exact opposite of descending, and it's hard to say why: either the slopes were more pleasant to move on, or because climbing the kurums is always easier than climbing down, or maybe also because the sun came out. But I went up to the top of the mountain very pleasantly and comfortably – through the woods, through the kurum tongues, through the glades, camped and fell asleep. All due to an early start. But I didn't sleep long, the stuffiness drove me out of the tent after a couple of hours. By this time, the sky was covered with clouds again. And although there was a wonderful view of the Konjak hulk from the place of the overnight stay, there was no point in filming anything. A viscous haze bathed in bright light covered the horizon by three hundred and sixty degrees.

Towards sunset, not really hoping for its interven, I nevertheless climbed to the top of a nearby Stone. In the distance, to the north, the massif of the Main Ural Range was barely visible – my goal. Nearby, to the right, Mount Burtym, behind, to the south, Konjak, and between them endless bald patches in the forest, cuttings, cuttings, cuttings.



Dunite quarry



Overnight on the Blue Stone with a view of the Konjakovsky Stone

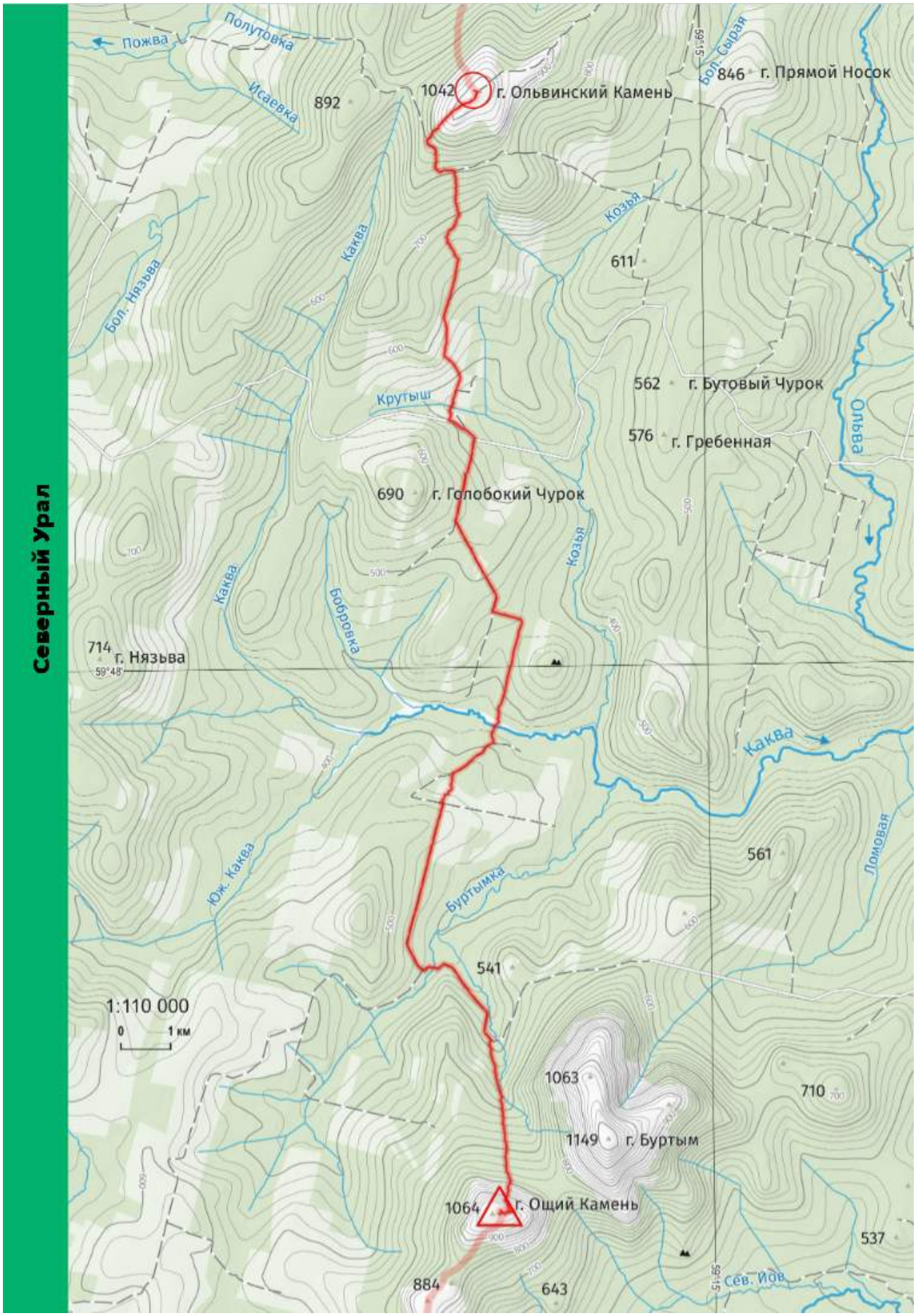
I didn't stay long at the top, and I didn't wait for sunset, because in the north there was a wall of rain approaching me, blurring both the forest and the mountains into white nothingness.

It hurried down. When both I and the rain were close to the tent, but from different sides, I noticed that the world was enveloped in a watery silence. There were no sounds left except for my footsteps and my labored breathing. However, it did not last long, very quickly the rustle of rain hit first the stones, and then the tent flap.

I summed up the day, of which, to simplify, there were two. First of all, I did well, I ran a fairly difficult section quickly, and I also photographed the morning beauty. Secondly, I'm not doing well – I managed to break my trekking pole on the way up to the overnight stay. Apparently, lack of sleep affected. The last half hour before setting up camp was a blur. At one point, at the top of the flat part, the stick was jammed between the stones. I lost my balance, fell on top of her with my whole body and bent my lower body almost 90 degrees. It was hardly possible to fix it in the field, so I broke it down. This is not a critical failure, but it is unpleasant. The stick

has become shorter and the grip on the surface has deteriorated. But sooner or later it had to happen.

Thunder is heard somewhere on the horizon. Where is the storm going? Hopefully not to me.



The Northern Urals

Pozhva *Polutovka*

Bolshaya Syraya

Isaevka

Pruamoy Nosok

Mountain Olvinsky Kamen

Kakva

Kozya

Bolshaya Nyazva

Butovy Churok Mountain

Krutysh

Mountain Grebennaya

Mountain Golobokiy Churok

Bobrovka

Nyazva

Hakwa

Southern Kakva

Burtymka

Lomovaya

Burtym Mountain

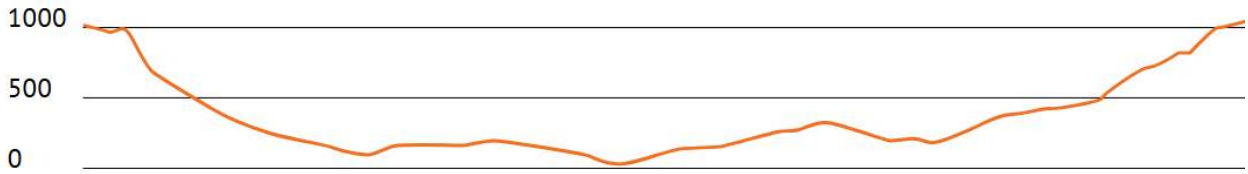
Oschiy Kamen Mountain

Northern Yov

Day 54

Oschiy Kamen Mountain (1064) – Golobokiy Churok Mountain (690) – Olvinsky Kamen Mountain (1042)

30 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1633 km



June 23, 2021

Yesterday, a thunderstorm did not take long to arrive at my peak. As soon as I finished dictating the events of the day and got into my sleeping bag with my head, a squall hit, bending the tent poles. The wind was followed by a new, even heavier rain with lightning and the sky tearing loudly overhead. It was too late to escape from the shoulder of the mountain, so I gave myself up to the elements, lay there, watched in fascination as the tent flap danced in the wind, counting the seconds between flashes and thunderclaps.

Fortunately, the rampage of the elements did not last long, the cloud flew through the top and went towards the Konjakovsky Stone, and my mountain was enveloped in clouds of steam: the stones heated during the day began to evaporate the moisture that had fallen. For the rest of the night, rain periodically drummed on the canopy.



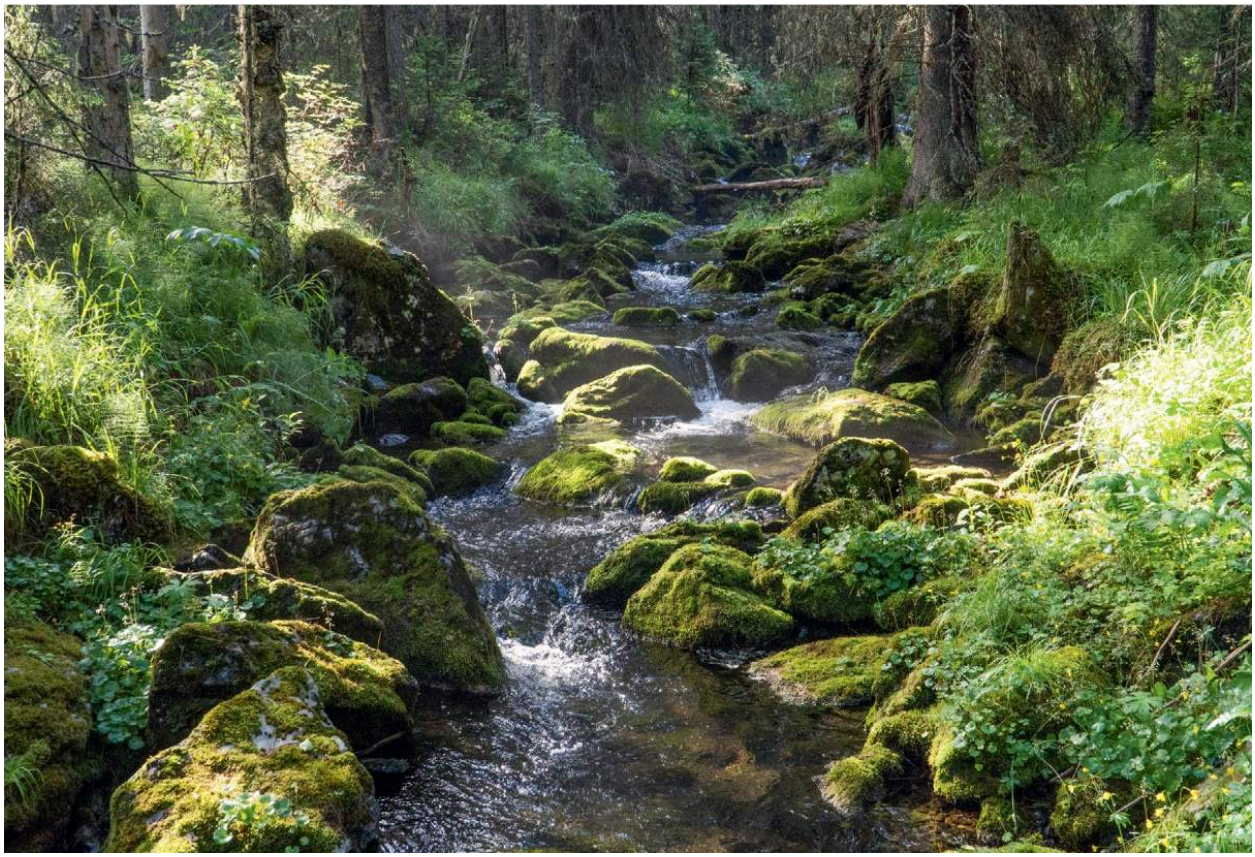
Mount Burtym

The morning was also cloudy, which, on the one hand, upset me – there was no dawn view of the giant neighbor, but, on the other hand, made it possible to compensate for yesterday's lack of sleep – I slept until six o'clock in the morning, which is also important.

From unpleasant observations, the Achilles on the left leg hurts again. I smear it with an anesthetic ointment at night, massage it before going out and after coming in.

When I started to descend from the mountain, it blew, and the Storm appeared in the gaps of the clouds. The day promised to be hot again. For the sake of interest, I noted to myself at what height the closed forest began, –850 m. If I don't forget, I'll measure the height of the forest in the valley of the Shchugor River, and see how far its edge drops in the north of the Northern Urals. It is noteworthy that if I were in the Southern Urals now, I would spend the night in the forest. The height of this Stone is 1063.8 m, 200 m below the tree growth zone there, in the south. In many ways, with the decline of the Ural mountain forest, both the complexity and the danger of the route are increasing. More kurums, it takes longer to get away from strong winds and thunderstorms down. If in the Southern Urals I usually need a few minutes to hide under a “second fur coat”, as the forest is

sometimes called, then in the Circumpolar Urals the bill can already go for hours and tens of kilometers, and even further north such an opportunity will disappear altoge ther.



The sources of the Burtymka River



The forest road

Having descended into the forest between Burtym and Oschim Stone through a comfortable forest, I went north towards the logging road. I have noted another striking and pleasant difference between the vegetation and the more southern parts of the Urals. The height of the grass in the subholtz zone, where the forest is still sparse, reached about a knee, whereas in the South I risked plunging into it up to my neck, which is extremely traumatic on a rocky sloping surface littered with fallen fir trees.

I walked along the right tributary of the Burtymka River, and then, descending lower, I got into a taiga fairy tale. Mossy, moist, with the rays of the morning sun breaking through the crowns, beauty. A small river bouncing and bubbling merrily over the rocks. It's lucky the lumberjacks didn't get to her. But they could.

After a few kilometers, I came to the clearings that I had seen from the top yesterday, and the rest of the day was more or less connected with the lumberjacks and the roads they had left. And it was not easy, their quality and condition changed like in a kaleidoscope: from quite good, comfortable to impassable, overgrown with trees, overgrown with young dense undergrowth or mud-filled areas. The memories of the day before were mixed into some kind of homogeneous overcoming. And then they split into separate memories only when I got off the roads and went to the Olvinsky Stone mountain. It became even harder: a bad dirty forest, full of potholes and windbreaks, but the goal was already close – 2 km away.

The first vivid memory of the evening: tired, exhausted by a cloud of cats, I fall on my stomach in the grass and greedily pull the thin flat icy stream of the spring with my lips. Being eaten by mosquitoes, I gather a supply of water and go up – to escape from the forest, to escape from the bloodsuckers to the tundra, to where the sun, wind and space are.

And really, it was worth staying in the forest below, and for me to feel the wet rock on my face, to see the distant mountains on the horizon, as it became much easier. I ran cheerfully to the top of the Olvinsky Stone, set up a tent under a small curum rise, which is the highest point of the mountain. (The Rock Garden on the Olvinsky Stone)



The rock garden on Olvinsky Cliff

The Olva Stone was pleasantly surprised by the prevailing shape of the surface: there were no kurums on it, as is most often the case with peaks above 1000 m in these places, but tundras with separate kurum outcrops. It quickly resembled the peaks that await me in the area of the Dyatlov Pass, in the central part of the Northern Urals.

Next to the overnight stay, I discovered a small rock garden – a section of an open kurum with a large number of vertically standing slabs. After taking a closer look, I came to the conclusion that, most likely, it has a natural origin.

I spent the rest of my time leisurely strolling through the tundra, having to walk five hundred meters from side to side to capture views from different edges of the mountain in the changing evening light. Although it was mostly pointless: the evening light was defeated by a thick blue haze that enveloped and hid all the important peaks. But I still couldn't resist, and I probably wound up at least 3-4 more km after I turned off the mileage countdown.

By sunset, I climbed to the top, it was a very pleasant quiet evening. The sun intelligently and calmly disappeared behind the clouds that covered the edge of the horizon, and I went to bed hoping for dawn. Already lying in the tent, looking at the map and recording a video about the route, I noticed that the Golobokiy Churok mountain, under which I passed today, is not alone in its name. There were several other names with the word “chunk” on the map. I decided to find out what it meant, I used the Rundqvist encyclopedia, where I read in the description of one of the mountains: “Churok (Komi) is a hillock, a towering uneven place.”

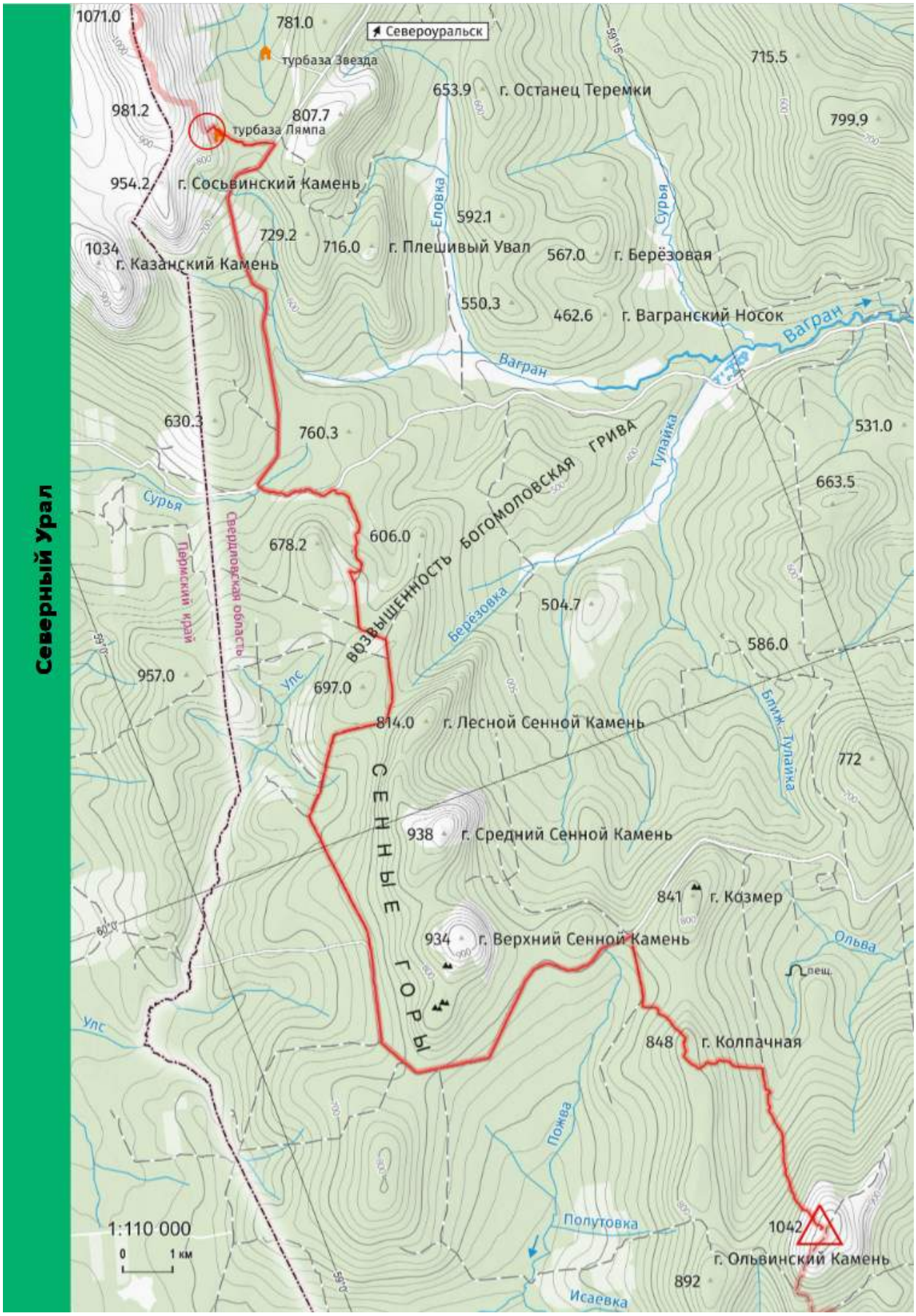
How rich the Urals are in designations! This, I can assume, speaks about the rich and stormy history of the development of our mountains, about the resettlement of peoples. Here's the simplest of examples. Just by looking only at one sheet of about 50×50 km of the map where I am located, you can find the designations: mane (Bogomolovskaya Mane, Tulayskaya Mane), mountains (Sennye Mountains, Kazmer Mountains), uval (Rowan Ridge, Baldy Ridge), sopka (Valentorskaya Hill, Osinovaya Hill), stone (Oschiy Stone, Konzhakovsky Stone), churok (Crooked Churok, Golobokiy Churok), sing (Cedar sing), ridge (Kvarkush ridge, Sosvinsky ridge), etc.



Parking at the top of the Olvinsky Stone

And this is only a part of the names of the mountainous terrain, and you continue further north and south, there will appear “tau”, “tash”, “ner”, “iz”, “syahl”, “tump”, “keu”, “nird”, “parma” – also terms, denoting elevations and their forms, already in the languages of aboriginal peoples. There are more “bumps” in the South... Urals.

I have always been very interested in the toponymy of the Urals. It is a pity that I have not yet come across separate generalizing works on the topic of mountain relief names.



The Northern Urals

Severouralsk *Zvezda campsite*

Ostanets mountain

campsite Teremki

campsite Lampa

Sosvinsky Kamen

Pleshiviy Uval Mountain

Berezovaya Mountain

Kazansky Kamen

Mountain Vagransky Nosok

Vagran

Bogomolovskaya griva hill

Surya

Sverdlovsk region

Perm Region

Berezovka

Uls

Near Tulayka

Lesnoy Sennoy Kamen

Mountain Sredny Sennoy Kamen

mountain Kozmer

mountain Verkhny Sennoy Kamen

Olva

Uls

Kolpachnaya mountain

Polutovka

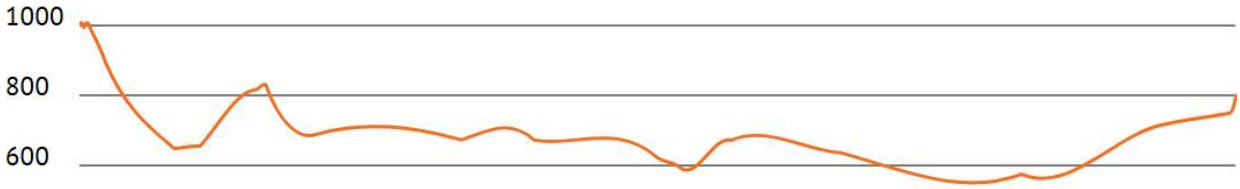
Olvinsky Kamen

Isaevka

Day 55

Olvinsky Kamen Mountain (1042) – Kolpachnaya Mountain (848) – campsite "Lampa"

40 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1673 km



June 24, 2021

The morning didn't go well right away. I got up on the alarm at 3:15, looked out of the tent: the horizon in the area of the Denezhkin Stone massif blazed orange-red, but there was no hope for dawn – all the same clouds that hid the sunset stood in a dense wall at dawn. At best, the sun would be able to overcome them in an hour and a half, but there was no point in that. Nevertheless, for the sake of calming my conscience, I walked to the rock garden, took a photo that I had planned yesterday, but without the rising sun between their teeth, everything was not the same. And I went to sleep.



Before dawn

I woke up for the second time at 6:00 a.m., forty minutes later I finished my meal and morning chores, and just at that time rain appeared on the horizon. It all didn 't look too pleasant, so in order not to pack a camp in the rain, I hurriedly left

everything in my backpack, put my camera in the same place and began to descend into the forest, to a clearing a few kilometers away from me.

As soon as I entered the forest, a large fat bird, either a capercaillie or a black grouse, flew up from under my feet and perched on a tree a dozen meters away from me. And I have a camera in my backpack: for once, maybe for the first time in the whole journey, I put the camera behind my back, and here is such a shot. Framed by spruce and birch trunks, a beautiful bird. If I take it in close-up, I'll get a great shot. I started taking my backpack off my back as smoothly as possible, the wings flapped, and my shot didn't take place.

Cursing, I threw the burden back on his back and walked on. And imagine my surprise and even rage when, after 100 m, I came upon a young moose with a red-haired moose calf, they were grazing peacefully between the trees and did not notice me. But the camera was in my backpack, and I tried to get it out again without being noticed, and I scared the animals again. The only thing that could be removed was the worried head of a moose in a web of branches.

Well, at least these failures have become a good and memorable confirmation of my rule, formulated in the phrase “If the camera is in the backpack, then it is in the backpack,” – instructive and visual, this is also important.

I hung the camera back on my belt, and immediately it started to rain. Well, at the end of the morning's misadventures, when I came to the clearing I was aiming for, I realized that it was absolutely impossible to walk along it. It's easier to move through the forest.

I turned uphill and passed through the top of Kolpachnaya Mountain (848), from which I had already descended onto a good logging road. This is where the 10-kilometer forest stage ended today. The traffic continued. Until evening, I walked along well-traveled roads with small crossings between them through the forest, first along logging roads, then onto the road leading to the golden isks, and to top off the day, to the tourist highway Severo-Uralsk – TMUR/ГУХ (The Main Ural Ridge) – Zhigalansky waterfalls.



The Raised Bird



Moose in the wilds



Overgrown road

The day seemed to have improved, and I didn't have any more setbacks, except for a heavy rainstorm that soaked me through a few kilometers before the small campsite where I planned to find shelter.

Exactly a year ago, I visited these places, made a traverse of TMUR, and shot a film about the ecological disaster on the Shemura. I remember back then I was struck by the picturesque location of the guest houses of the campsite “Lampa.” I was very glad that I was able to negotiate with the owner of the base, Igor Dudchenko, about spending the night and dropping off food through him.

The campsite is very small: the master's house, two small guest rooms, a sauna and the kurum slope of the Main Ural ridge, starting 5 m from the porch. When I arrived at the base, I checked into the master's house, Igor himself was not there. As agreed, a cask with a drop was waiting on the table, perishable food was in an ice spring flowing between the roots of a large spruce 10 m from the house, satellite Internet and electricity for charging equipment were in the house. Everything you need, and even a little more, is in the form of a warm, dry and soft bed.

In the evening, I talked a little with a couple of vacationers, they treated me to a cocktail. Nice, but a little weird people. Based on the weather forecast, the condition of the legs and the work that needs to be done to prepare the equipment for further movement, I decided to stay another day at the campsite. Tomorrow is another day off.

Day 56

Campsite “Lampa”

0 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1673 km

June 25, 2021

Seems like I haven’t mention anything about it, but I'm extremely worried. If we exaggerate a bit, we can say that only tomorrow, on the 57th day of the journey, my route will really begin. I came very close to the border of the inhabited Urals. There will be no manicured roads, no settlements, and no way to quickly exit the route in case of problems. Dozens, and sometimes hundreds of kilometers of wild territories around. The weight of the autonomous sections will increase 2-4 times, and the weight of the cargo that I carry will also increase. And the first test awaits me tomorrow.

Loaded with food for two weeks, I have to pass one of the most technically difficult obstacles in the Northern Urals, the 40-kilometer kurum giant – the Main Ural Ridge, or simply TMUR (GUH). I decided that an extra rest for my stiff ankles after yesterday's transition would not hurt.

Despite the fact that my legs need rest, I got up at three in the morning and was onthe slope of TMUR by dawn, and for good reason. The sun, bathed in cumulus clouds, rose over the Denezhkin Kamen massif, filling the intermountain lobe with amber.

Below, at the edge of the forest, I could see a small house with a green roof – my place of residence for these two nights. What a picturesque place, after all. I don't think I've ever seen a better location for tourist cabins in the Urals. If you go to the right, after a few meters you come to the slope of a mountain that lifts you above the forest, offering magnificent views. And the slope itself is remarkable – a cozy circus, lined with a small red stone scree! If you go to the left, a delicious spring flows out from under a huge spruce tree 10 m away. You can go in any other direction – the fabulous North Ural forest. An ideal place to get lost and take a break from society.

I spent the whole day packing and preparing the equipment. I pierced, blew out the air and sealed the freeze-dried meat with duct tape in order to reduce the volume of products, darned his pants, looked out the window at the incoming rains.

I talked to the neighbors a little more, and I must say, I overreacted a bit yesterday when I called them “a little weird.” Although they were actually very, very strange. This is the first time I've seen living adepts of a pure obscurantism. The elderly man and woman were eager to share and spread their beliefs to anyone who was willing to listen to them. There was a new timeline, and aliens, and coronavirus with all the conspiracy theories surrounding it. It was especially frightening that the woman, according to her, runs a library in one of the northern Ural cities. So, she works with children. I listened to all this and couldn't believe my ears, it's one thing to read all kinds of conspiracy theories on the Internet, it's another to see a lively, educated and quite, it seems, intelligent person carrying such a thing. It is precisely with the help of such people that numerous alternative anti-scientific theories are born around the Urals. The fact that the flat peaks of the mountains are ancient cosmodromes, and the Kurum char mountains, especially located in the middle of flat tundra surfaces, are the remains of destroyed cities dropped from ancient spacecraft, and so on. The issue of the formation and dissemination of pseudoscientific theories and conspiracy theories in the Urals has always interested me, and I try my best to combat them, explain and show the inconsistency of these ideas, and it's probably good that I met these people. It will be necessary to send the book as a gift to the library.

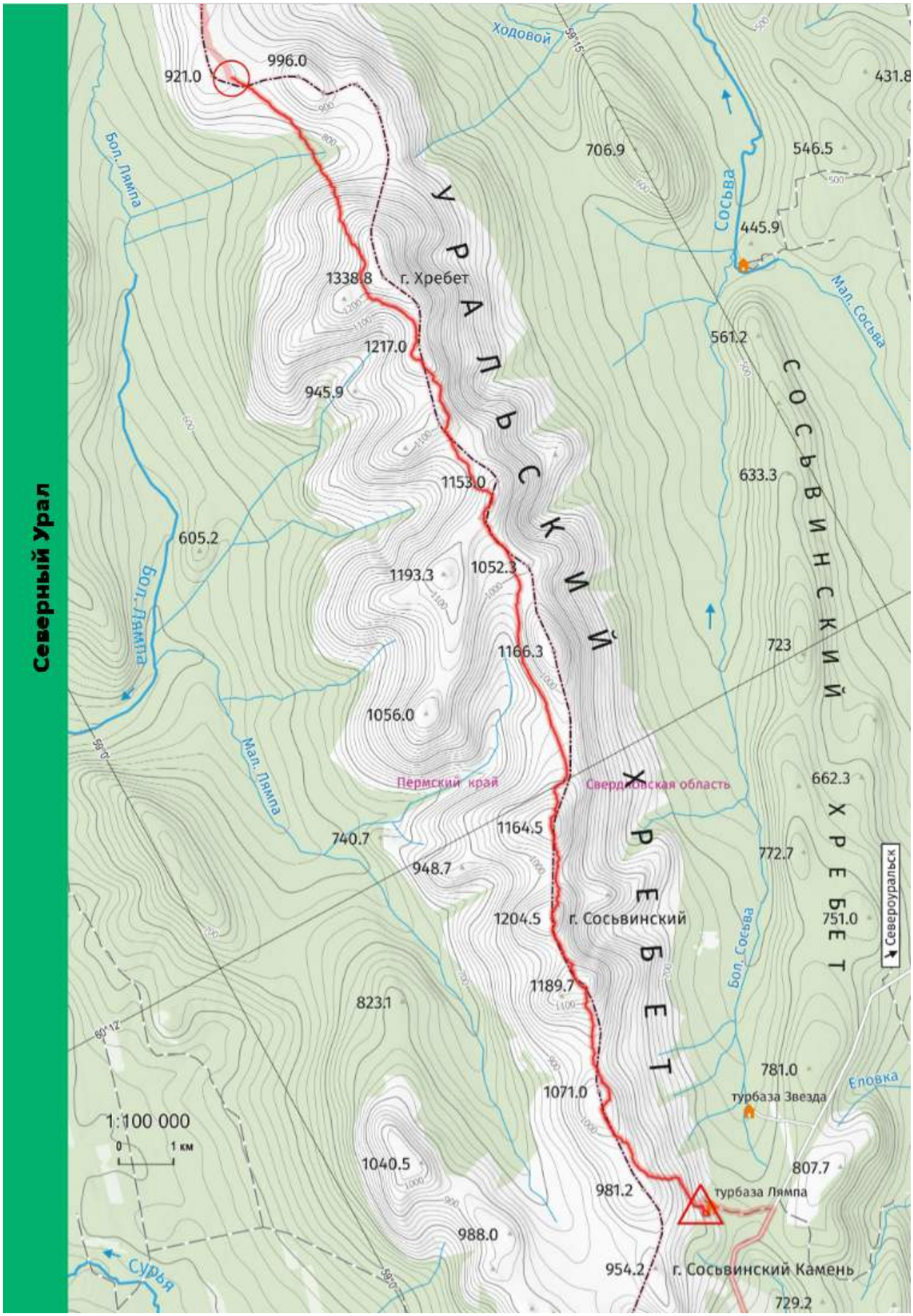


Dawn over the campsite “Lampa”

A heavy rain started in the afternoon and lasted for several hours. It's a good thing I didn't go on the route, it wouldn't have been good at all up there in such a rain on kurums.

In the evening, the owner of the campsite arrived, a stern, laconic, but efficient Igor – a miner from Severouralsk. We sat and talked. It turns out that these places, where the base was built, were previously used as a summer mountain ski camp. There was even a makeshift elevator. The location of the slope allowed skiing until the end of June, which was used by ski schools in Tyumen and Kirovograd.

I won't sit for long, I'll go out early tomorrow morning if the weather is good. Everything is packed, everything is ready for the journey.



The Northern Urals

Hodovoy *Severouralsk*

Bolshaya Sosva

Malaya Sosva

Bolshaya Lamp

Malaya Lamp

Perm Region

Sverdlovsk region

Yelovka

campsite Zvezda

campsite Lampa

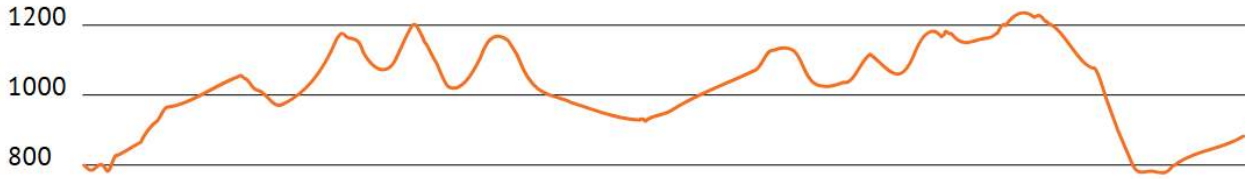
Surya

Sosvinsky Kamen

Day 57

Campsite "Lampa" – Sosvinsky mountain (1204,5) – Hodovoy pass

29 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1702 km



June 26, 2021

I woke up at three o'clock in the morning and didn't even get out of bed: the sound of heavy rain outside the window did not portend the start of a running day. I turned over the other side and fell into an uneasy sleep for another hour and a half.

When I woke up for the second time, I heard that the rain was continuing, but it became quieter. I went to the window and pulled back the curtain. The ridge was submerged in the sky, and if you listened carefully, the wind was howling somewhere up there. The forecast sent yesterday was coming true. What to do? Go around the TMUR on the bottom, through forests and clearings, or still go along the ridge? I really didn't want to throw this beauty out of the route, no other trans-Ural expedition had ever passed it. Rundqvist and Fronyuk went around from the east by car to Ivdel. Korzhaev walked under the ridge through the forest.

However, on the other hand, I know perfectly well how inhospitable and dangerous this mountain giant is during bad weather. Endless wet stone placers, on which you must be extremely careful; one slightly sharper degree of putting your foot on the stone – and you are flying down.



Kurum slopes of the ridge

The strongest winds, trying to blow off the ridge. Doubts, doubts, what to do. But time passed, and a decision had to be made. Looking at the sky again, I think I saw some gaps.

It's good that everyone was still asleep, I don't like goodbyes. Quietly opening the door, I went outside, said the already familiar ritual phrase: “Thank you kindly, home; I'm gonna roam some more,” – and began to climb.

My heart was very restless, one might even say it was scary. A noticeably heavier backpack with a 14-day ration did not help improve mood. I walked very carefully, not looking at the sides, only at my feet. I checked every step. And there's nowhere to look around, there's a hundred meters of visibility in the cloud.

But the devil is not as terrible as they paint him. Step by step, stone by stone, in a monotonous movement, slowly began to go back. There was no time to rest, and it was pointless in such weather, so it was raining quite calmly. For the sake of interest, I noted the time and distance, the navigator showed a speed of 2 km/ h, not bad! The small, narrow tundra tongues that were often found between the rocks helped a lot, and I tried to make the most of them. Having crossed the highest point of the southern half of the range, Mount Sosvinsky Kamen, and dropped two hundred meters, I even left the cloud zone for a while.

What a pleasure it is to look and see far away. But the pleasure was short-lived, and soon I began to rise again, entered the region again, and it began to rain again. This time I took me seriously, watering me steadily, confidently, for several hours.

The speed dropped, and slowly, with even greater care, I crawled along the kurums. The monotonous rain pattered on my hood, and I walked very carefully, paying attention and moving, as if in a trance. However, fatigue and steeper slopes were doing their job. My legs periodically fell off the stone, and every now and then, with enviable constancy, the lifeless expanses of the ridge resounded with screams of pain.



The top of Sosvinsky Kamen Mountain



Taking a breather on grassy areas

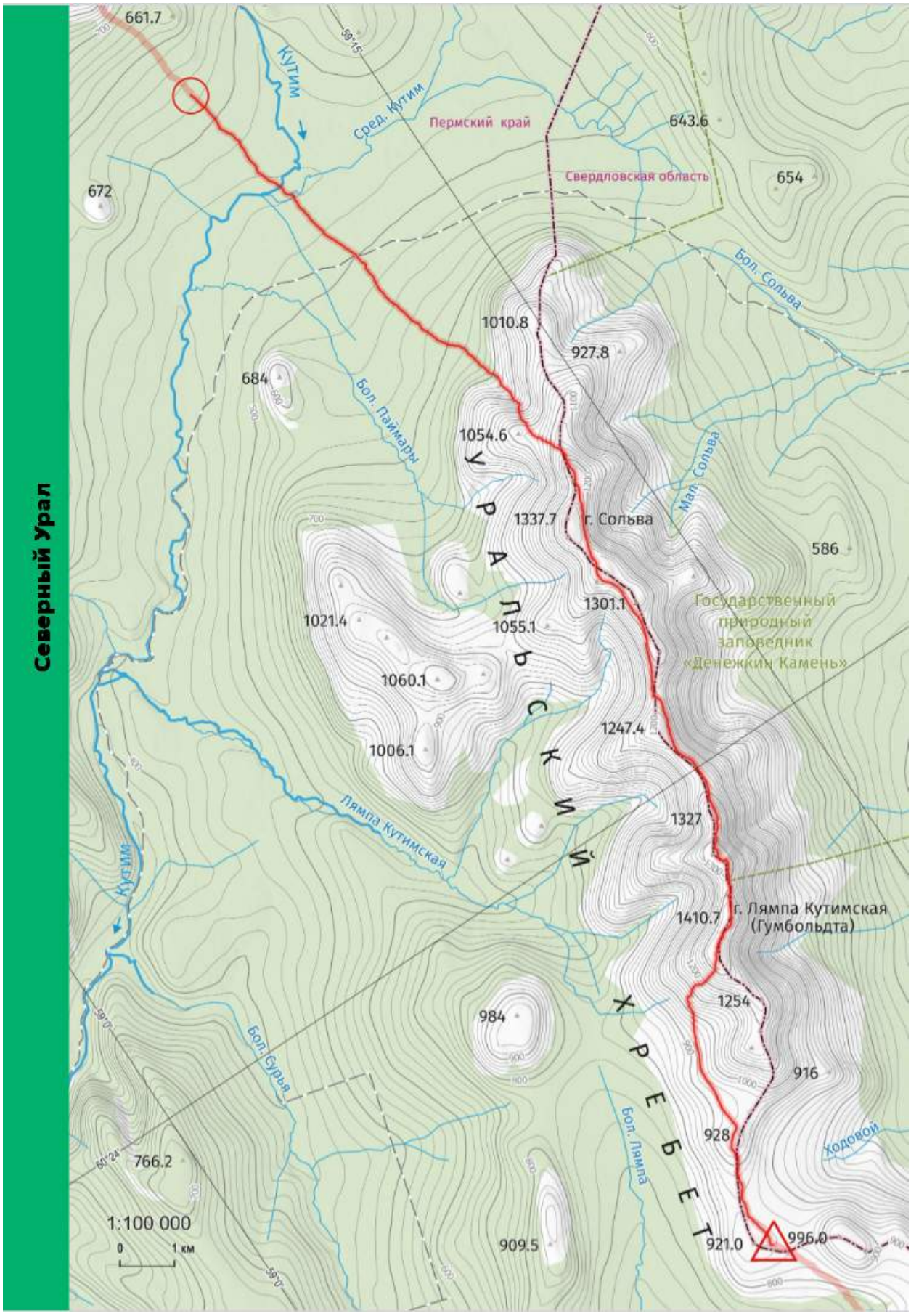
By evening, having covered the planned 25 km, I decided to cut the Khodoi pass in a straight line – the natural border of the two parts and the lowest point of the ridge, located in its center. I went down into the valley of one of the banks of the Bolshaya Lampa River, gathered water supplies and climbed back up the ridge along smooth grassy slopes, where I set up camp under the protection of a rare low spruce forest. I covered 29 km, which, in my opinion, is an excellent result. I did a great job today. Approaching the camp, I found the antlers of a reindeer, a pleasant correspondence meeting, I hope to meet this northern beauty in person soon.

After dinner, I set the alarm for 22:00 and fell asleep for three hours. I couldn't wait for the sunset, awake, but I couldn't afford to miss this action either.



The top of the Ridge Mountain at sunset

When I woke up at night, I noticed that I seemed to be extremely lucky. The clouds, illuminated in all shades of red, began to part, revealing the surrounding peaks here and there. I put on my wet, cold boots and hobbled to the kurum peak closest to the tent to take pictures. If the trend continues, it may be beautiful at dawn tomorrow.



The Northern Urals

Kutim *The Central Kutim*

Perm Region

Sverdlovsk region

Bolshaya Solva

Bolshiye Paimary

Malaya Solva

Mount Solva

“Denezhkin Kamen” State Nature Reserve

Mount Lampa Kutimskaya (Humboldt's)

Big Surya

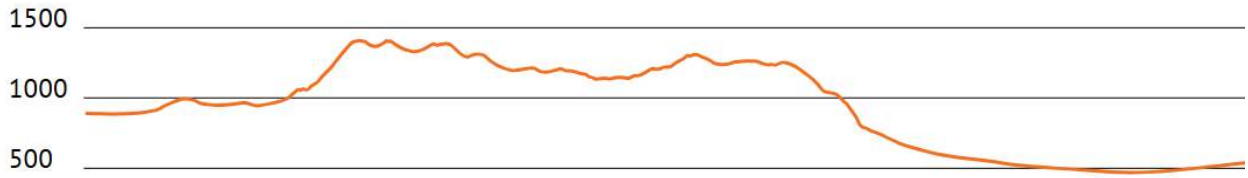
The Big Lyamp

Hodovoy

Day 58

Hodovoy Pass – Mount Lampa Kutimskaya (Humboldt) (1410.7) – Kutim River

30 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1732 km



June 27, 2021

It looks like I've developed an internal alarm clock. No matter how tired and sleepy I am, but at 3:00-3:10, by dawn, I wake up myself, until the alarm goes off, set in the evening. So it was today.

As soon as I opened my eyes, I looked out of the tent, and I liked what I saw. Many clouds of all kinds raced across the mountains, lay in the valleys, and floated through me, sometimes hiding or exposing the surrounding landscapes. In the background was a black mass of a Moneystone with cloud flags waving over the top.

I took the camera, got dressed, and carefully, slowly, trying not to strain my frozen legs, I went to look for camera angles. The next hour and a half passed in incessant movements, doubts and curses about the cloud of mosquitoes that surrounded me from all sides and mercilessly tried to



Sunrise with a view of the Denezhkin Stone

taste my blood. As soon as I started shooting the panorama, the hand holding the camera was covered with bloodsuckers and, taking advantage of my inability to shake them off, they drilled into my skin with pleasure.

The appearance of the sun had to wait quite a long time, the luminary was hidden by the slope of the nearest mountain. But I saw it coming: first, the kurumnaya peak, located on my right hand, lit up, and gradually the terminator began to move towards me. When the sun was only a few minutes away from going out, the slope of the ridge, from behind which I was waiting for it, was covered by a cloud.

But that, as it turned out after a few minutes, was even for the best. The sun, which was already quite bright and had risen high, was slightly dimmed by a cloud, like a darkening filter, and appeared as a large orange disk above the slope. Everything turned out great. A dark cloud overhead, a mountainside, the sun rolling out from behind it, in the background a huge Stone of Money and a fir forest still slumbering in the dawn twilight underfoot. That's why it's worth waking up at the crack of dawn.

When I came out of the tent for the second time, having slept for several hours after eating dawn, everything was wrapped in a dense veil of clouds. And if I hadn't been watching the sunrise with my own eyes, I would have thought: it's a good thing I didn't get up at night, I can't see anything anyway.

However, before the release, Tatiana Sergeevna's forecast came in, and it was encouraging, promising high, variable clouds with no precipitation. And so it happened, less than an hour later, as the clouds were torn to shreds by the wind, scattered to the sides, and a washed, sparkling clean and fresh world appeared to my eyes. In front of me was the huge lump of Lampa Kutimskaya (Humboldt), the highest point of the ridge, which I slowly climbed, trying to choose a path along the tundra bald patches of the Kurums, which became much easier as soon as visibility appeared. The “North Ural Manaraga” appeared before me in all its glory, as many people call Mount Shudya-Pendysh for the similarity of its relief with the circumpolar queen of the Ural Mountains. It stood to the north-west of the ridge, apart from everyone else, standing out with a charismatic crest against the

background of the kurum domed char mountains. I shouted greetings to her, I'm glad to see you again. On its slopes, I experienced the great beauty of an extremely frosty morning. Then, a few years ago, in early January, the thermometer dropped to -50 degrees at night, and my friends and I went skiing in the Northern Urals. And they climbed to the top of it by dawn in the dark. At the same time, I frostbitten the tip of my nose with a camera for the first time, and since then it has continued with enviable regularity at much lower temperatures. Now I often come back from a winter hike looking like a clown with a red spot on the tip of my nose. And the source of this good tradition is in these places.



Mount Shudya-Pendysh from the Main Ural Range

As I expected yesterday, the encounter with the deer was not long in coming. A small herd, about ten heads, galloped past about two hundred meters away. It was a very pleasant and exciting meeting, and I finally saw my old northern friends. There will be many more meetings ahead, but the first one after a long break is always especially exciting. Interestingly, this is the southernmost meeting with them in my practice.

However, like a real obstinate beauty, Lampa Kutimskaya once again did not want to show me its face. When I was one kilometer from the top and 200 meters below it, the world was once again and for the last time covered with a wet cloud. So

I had to climb to the top on a small hill, not seeing anything around. It's especially disappointing that this was my third ascent of it, and all the times it took place in a cloud. TMUR, of course, attracts clouds to itself like a magnet, being located in the path of the movement of air masses from the west by a large stone wall, so there is nothing surprising in my bad luck.

It is correct to say here that the peak now has the official name of Humboldt. It was renamed in honor of the German scientist on the initiative of the Sverdlovsk branch of the Russian Geographical Society in 2001. But I like the old name marked on the maps more, and I use it. I don't think it's right to rename mountains that already have their own names, especially when there are so many peaks around that don't have them.

As soon as we left the top, the weather began to improve, and the sun came out. On the one hand, it became incomparably easier to walk. On the other though, there the ridges did not please the eyes at all and did not promise an easy way. So much so that I even noted ironically to myself: “I wish I hadn't seen it.”

The hope for snowfields was not fulfilled either. A year ago, during the traverse of the ridge at the same time, I was greatly saved by snowfields stretching in long horizontal tongues along the eastern slope just below the watershed. It felt like a perfectly smooth road, but there were almost no snowfields this year. Apparently, the drought had its weighty word.

My eyes are afraid, but my feet are walking, quietly, not hurrying anywhere, up and down, from stone to stone, peak after peak, almost the entire rumble has been passed. In the initial plans, it was to go all the way and go down to the east, to the top of the Yelovsky Ridge, but when there were several kilometers left to the end of the ridge and the slope went down, revealing a view to the north, I looked at the map, calculated, thought things out and decided that it was worth trying to go to the northwest through the valley of the Kutim River to reach the White Stone Mountain. Changing the route promised to shorten the path by ten kilometers and a more interesting route, which I had not walked in the summer yet. It is important that the

descent was steeper, but much shorter, which was important for pretty battered and tired legs.

With the last of my strength, I went down to the valley of the Maly Poymary stream, where I caught my breath and had lunch. Emboldened, I entered the shade of the forest with the intention of trying to cross the river valley and reach the slopes of the White Stone Mountain, which would allow me to remove the NOISE from the side at sunset and dawn.

Swampy windbreaks are something that a person does not want to see after 20 km along the kurums, but they were the ones that were waiting for me at the bottom. Until the last moment, I refused to believe that I would not reach the White Stone. I fell, got up, walked on, and only when I fell twice in a row for twenty meters did I realize what stupidity I was doing. Lying on a damp, but soft and pleasant moss surface, I thought that my route has not yet been in such danger as it is now, and I personally expose it to it. Chasing a view point can cost me a lot. I sighed and took off my backpack. I set up the tent right where I had fallen, and, trying not to look up at the canopy of trees illuminated by the amber sunset, he began to repair his equipment.

And there was something to fix. I patched up another hole in my pants – evidence of a big fall on the kurum back in the morning. Only a miracle saved me from a serious injury that time: I slipped on a rock, flew down with my knee, scratched it, tore my pants, but still got off very well. Because there were sharp protrusions on the stone just a few centimeters away from it, and if I had fallen and kneed on it, the injury would have been much more serious.

However, that wasn't what bothered me that night. A fall, torn trousers – what a routine trifle compared to the pure horror, nightmarish



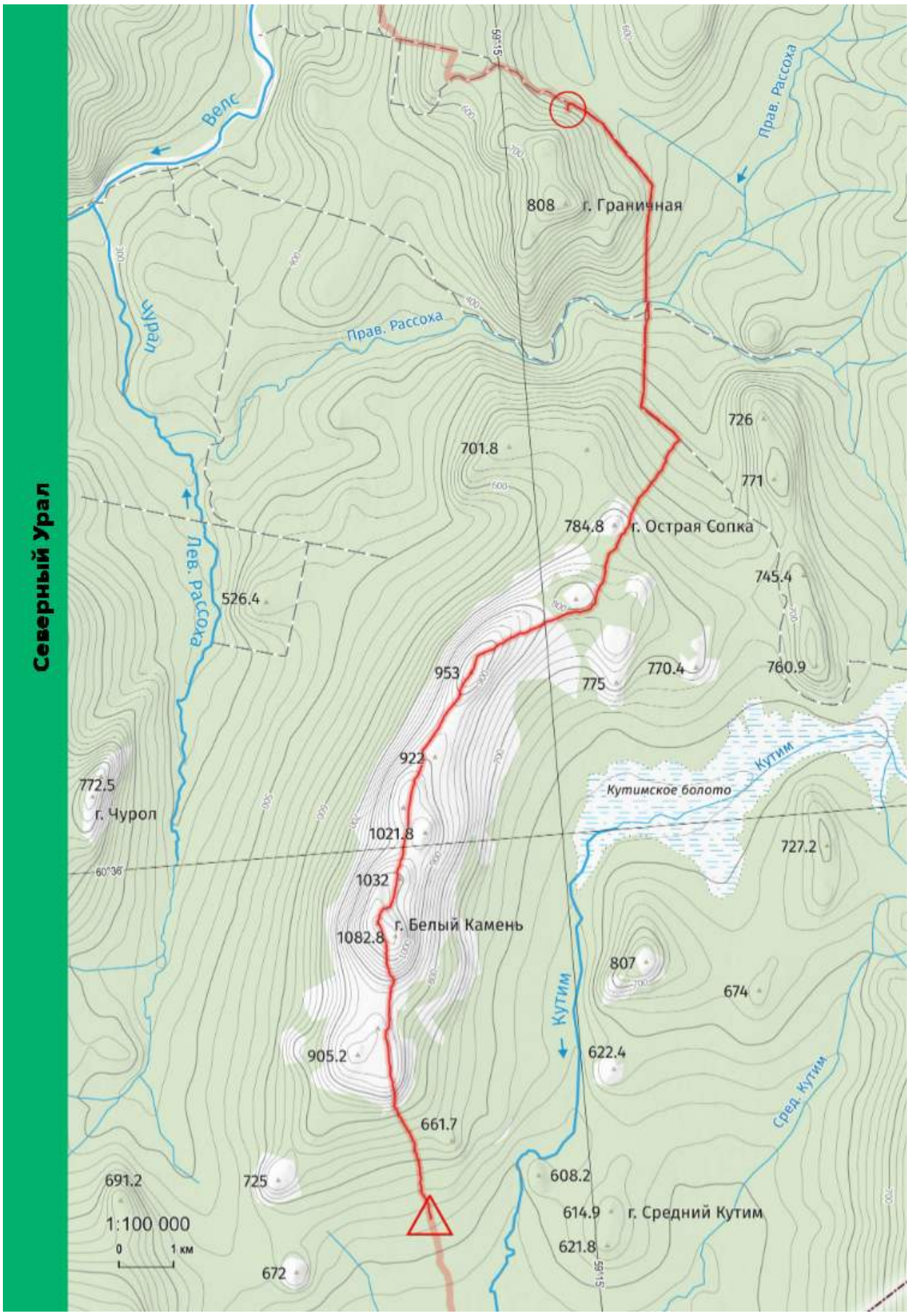
Kurum massif of the Main Ural range

waking dream that I encountered when I was already under the ridge. After another fall, accompanied by a dash, I noticed that both straps of my backpack were coming loose. It is difficult to imagine a worse breakdown on a long route. The amazing carelessness of the backpack designers was to create a bulky backpack into which you can load quite a lot of weights, and sew the lower and upper straps of the straps simply to the “foam” from which the soft parts of the straps are made. Moreover, they did not run the power line along the entire length. Of course, when the weight of the backpack became greater at the beginning of this stage, after several falls and jerks, the foam began to peel off. And this evening, there 's just a little bit left until the moment when I find myself with a “suitcase without a handle.”

It was strange that the manufacturer decided to save on a power sling in the backpack straps, but instead made very long slings on the belt, which hung twenty-five to thirty centimeters when the belt was tightened. I used them, cut them off and sewed them to the place of fastening the straps, spreading the load over a larger width. Time will tell if this will be enough. If not, then I will be able to stitch the straps with a sling completely, since I have a small supply of it with me for repair.

Exhausted, tired, and still consumed by doubts about whether I had done the right thing, I went to bed before walking the remaining 2 km to the ridge. I didn't set an alarm that evening. I didn't want to see what the sunrise would be like from under the canopy of the forest.

The main thing is that the Main Range is over. I was very afraid of it. And it seems that everything turned out great. It's like a big mountain off my shoulders.



The Northern Urals

Vels *Granichnaya Mountain*

The Right Rassoha

Ostroya Sopka Mountain

The Left Rassoha

Kutimsky swamp

Churol mountain

Bely Kamen

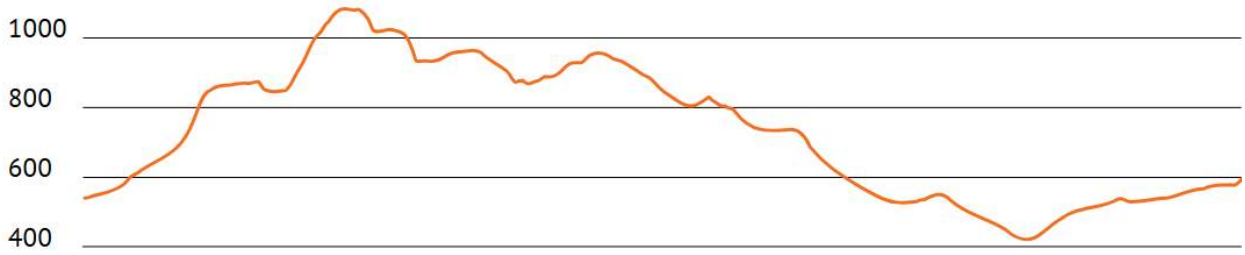
Kutim

The Central Kutim

Day 59

Kutim River – Bely Kamen Mountain (1082.8) – Granichnaya Mountain (808)

27 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1759 km



June 28, 2021

The weather outside the tent is pleasant. The sun is shining, clouds are streaming across the sky, and it is not obvious whether to celebrate or to tear the remaining hair on my head because of the lost opportunity. After a rest this morning it seems that yesterday I was hardly exhausted.

But it appears that way only while you are lying flat in the sleeping bag. As soon as you start to move, you feel the ache throughout your body. The morning inspection revealed that the GUH was not easy. Legs were especially affected. The feet are very sore, apparently, from having to jump for two days across the sharp rock edges. Knee hurts, there's a big abrasion and bruise on it. Achilles tendons are bothering me. I kneaded long and thoroughly, rolled everything I could reach with a foam roller, pain was relieved.



Traces of a forest fire on Bely Kamen Mountain

The remaining 2 km to the beginning of the kurum were challenging, and it supported me in thinking that I had done all right yesterday. When I reached through the woods and came to the open foot of the ridge, behind me the GUKH appeared in all its majesty, flooded with evil bright daylight. Oh, how beautiful it would be here at dawn....

Bely Kamen mountain is a rather large massif, but in comparison with yesterday's giant it seemed quite small and comfortable. It rose above the taiga by two kurum ledges. On the first one there were remnants of an old forest fire, a large area covered with black, dead crooked wood. It was both beautiful and horrible at the same time. On the second ledge was the main summit, a regular rock outcropping. In that winter route, which I mentioned yesterday, we couldn't climb it because of the strongest wind against the background of very low temperature. Probably, that's also why I was drawn here – to take this formal duty from the mountain.

Under the summit, on a soft tundra carpet, I took an unplanned rest, spread my things out to dry, lay with my cap over my face, and thought slowly, without hurrying, about whatever I had to think about. The view to the east seemed uninteresting at first glance, but if to use the General Staff map, the attention was attracted by a completely unimaginable hard-to-pronounce set of letters – the name of an inconspicuous, slightly prominent peak on the neighboring ridge. Its name was Yanyg-Ankvyllulnechakhl, which translates from Manxian as “big mountain with a stump”. I tried several times to pronounce the name quickly, without hesitation, but I couldn't. I also love the Urals for the fact that it would break your tongue and train your memory to memorize all these various geographical names scattered across its expanses.

A little to the south and farther away we could see the Shemur Range, its kurum flat tops and some forestless, different colored formation. It was one of the dumps of the open-pit mines, where they extracted copper cauldron...



Bely Kamen Mountain



Drying things off and lunch

A year ago, I went to the Ural Mountain Range with the intention of shooting it and showcasing it. I chose a difficult ridge traverse to show the consequences of quarrying in contrast. First, the clear, clear water, flowing off the untouched ridges, and then the Shemur Ridge and its disaster. Unnatural-colored streams of water coming out from under the dumps, burning all life in its path. burning every living thing in its path. Dead forest along the riverbanks, scorched grass, stones covered with a brown-rusty patina.

The most terrible thing in this story is not even the dead forest, unfortunately we pay little attention to such “trifles”, but what is happening to the rivers. Small rivulets, running south from under the quarries, flow into the large Shegultan River, dividing the river by color into two parts. From the mouth of the Olkhovka River, the water in the river becomes murky, whitish and dead, with no fish in it. The

concentration of dangerous chemical elements exceeds the maximum permissible norms by tens, hundreds, and sometimes thousands of times. And further Shegultan flows into the river Sosva, which also shows changes, Sosva flows into the river Tavda, Tavda flows into the river Tobol, Tobol flows into the river Irtysh, Irtysh flows into the river Ob, Ob flows into the ocean. Poison spreads along the rivers, as blood vessels, spreads along the eastern slope of the Urals and further across Siberia. And these rivers supply water to many settlements, and hundreds of thousands of human lives depend on them.

And this is only five years after the development of the new open pit, and they plan to develop it until 2035. And even after the ore runs out, as the example of the old Shemursky open pit, which has already been closed, shows, the negative impact will not stop, and may even increase, as there will be no one to watch the situation, and no reason to do so. After all, the profit has already been made.



The forest road

It is a shame that careers are a momentary matter, and rivers would have served faithfully and faithfully to children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But it seems that not now. I was lying, looking in the direction of Shemur with annoyance: a lot of noise was made last year by a movie shot at the quarry, several million people watched it, but, according to eyewitnesses, no visible changes for the

better have not come. It is a pity that there is no opportunity in this itinerary to go there and film it again, to show it. Not to tell about it would also be a crime. So let at least in this form this sad page of the history of the Urals remain in the centuries in the description of an eyewitness.

Further the whole day went mostly downward, with small sets on local peaks. I noted that the mountain slopes began to take more and more the classic North Urals look. Kurums and stretched tundras along the ridge tops, stunted but nice cedars and spruces on the forest border. From the unpleasant – the midges started to overwhelm me. Already seriously climbing into eyes, ears, mouth. So far I try not to put on mosquito net, delaying this unloved moment. I save myself by choosing more open, wind-blown places and moving fast.

Walking along the top, I admired the panoramas opening in a circle. It was right that I decided to go here instead of the forested Yelovsky Uval. Despite the whitish summer haze that hides a lot of things, the surroundings are still very dignified and majestic. If you move your gaze from the west counterclockwise, you will see Shudya-Pendysh, Kayuk Mountain, my mountain Bely Kamen, behind it Ural Mountain Range, passing into Yelovsky Uval, behind it the Denezhkin Stone massif. Farther south, distant peaks are lost in the blue, and it is difficult to recognize them.

Farther south, distant peaks are lost in the blue, but it is difficult to identify them. All in all we could see five or six ridges separated by wide valleys, about ten kilometers long, the bottom and sides of which are covered with dark coniferous taiga.

Having descended into the forest, in about 5 kilometers I came out on an old forest road, but quite suitable for driving. Had lunch there and rested a bit. I put the inner mesh part of the tent, took shelter in it from the blood-sucking cloud and took a nap.

I had to go out on the route in the afternoon when a stray thunderstorm came with the strongest, but fortunately short downpour. I chose a lower and thicker fir-

tree, covered myself with the outer tent awning and rested for another ten-fifteen minutes while the water raged around.

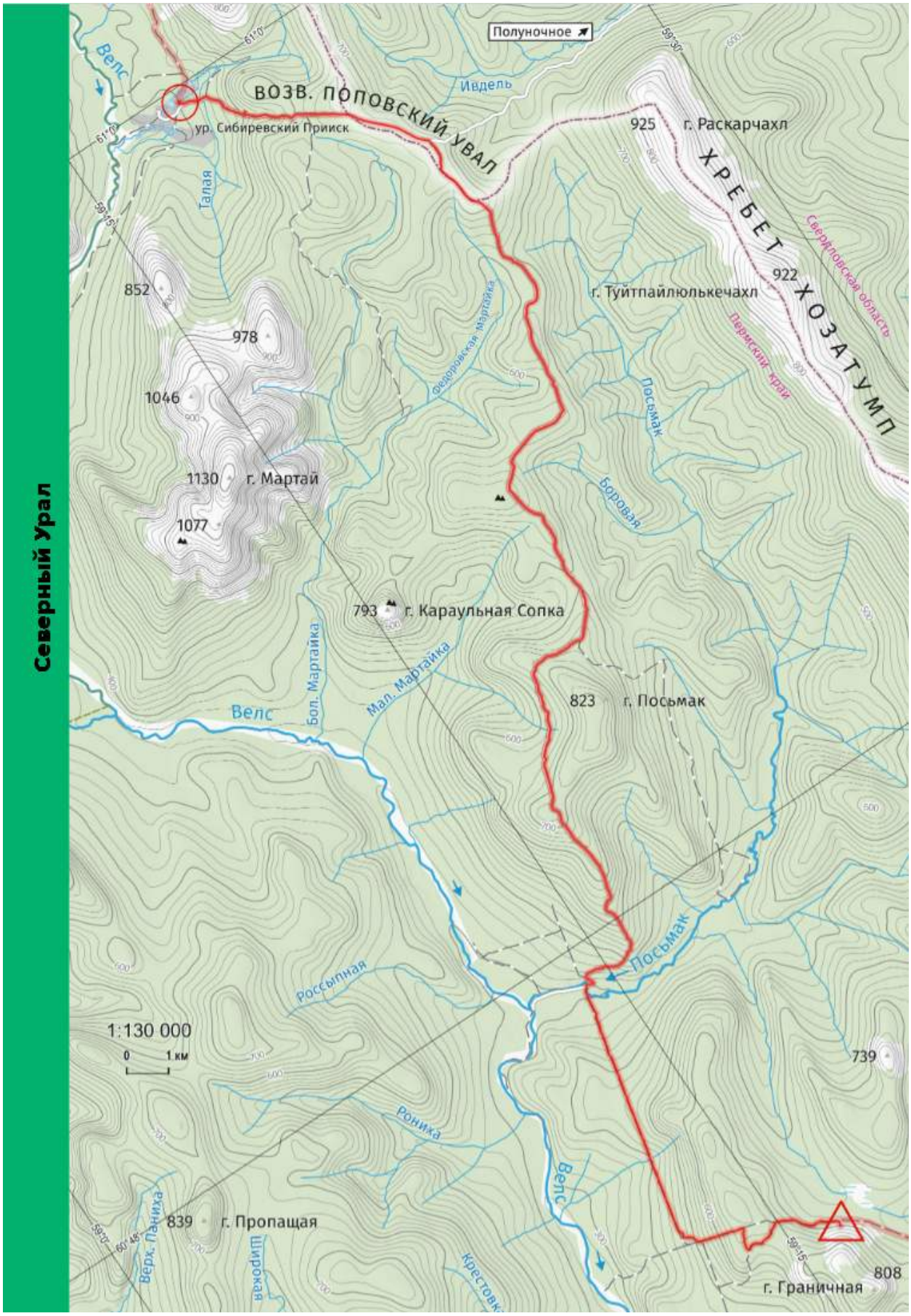
The rest of the day I walked along the road, where there were less fresh traces of equipment than fresh bear heaps. I camped overnight earlier than usual, choosing for it a kurum slope of Granichnaya Mountain. I could have gone further, but there were no more good viewpoints ahead. And this one had a good view of the valley and peaks going towards the dawn.

The clouds had finally dispersed, the evening world, watered with rain, sparkled with amber light and smelled of freshness, a light breeze was blowing, whispering something soothing in the crowns of gnarled cedars. And I was lying in an open tent, enjoying the peace, taiga and blue silhouettes of mountains all around. Still, the choice of the place of overnight stay is of great importance and no less important than the kilometer traveled.

And yes, an important observation: it is already possible to say for sure that the ticks are over. I met the last one on the approach to Oslyanka, on the border of the Middle and Northern Urals, and I haven't seen a single one for a week. This, of course, makes life much easier.



Evening in a tent on the slope of Granichnaya Mountain



The Northern Urals

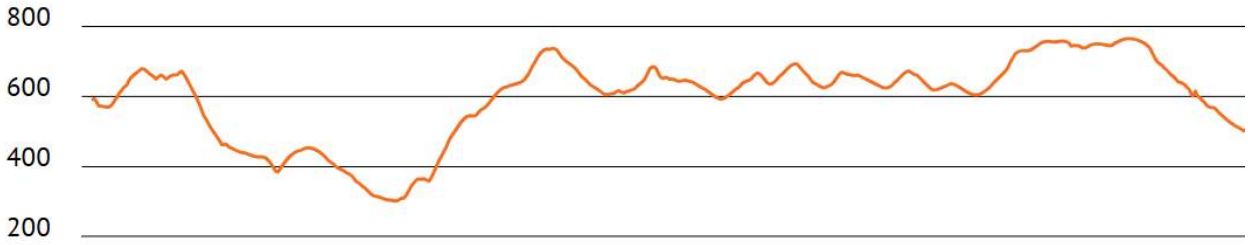
Vels River *Ivd River*

Polunochnoye
Sibirevsky Prinsk area
Popovsky Uval Elevation
Talaya River
Mount Raskarchakhl
Sverdlovsk Oblast
Khozatum Range
Mount Tuytpaylyulkechakhl
Perm Krai
Posmak River
Fyodorovka Martayka River
Mount Martay
Borovaya River
Mount Karaulnaya Sopka
Mount Posmak
Malaya Martayka River
Bolshaya Martayka River
Vels River
Rossypnaya River
Ronikha River
Mount Propadshaya
Verkhnyaya Panikha River
Shirokaya River
Krestovka River
Mount Granichnaya

Day 60

Mount Granichnaya (808) – the Posmak River – the Sibirevsky Mine

44.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1803.5 km



June 29, 2021

There was a storm again during the night. The sky was ablaze with fire, there was a downpour, but I was low enough, at the foot of the mountain, so I didn't feel particularly uneasy. I turned over to the other side, pulled my sleeping bag tighter to avoid the bright flashes, and continued my blessed sleep. The thick mossy bedding around the tent, lying on top of the rocks, collected the abundant rainwater and kept it from getting under me.

There was no dawn, so I slept soundly until five in the morning. In the established morning silence, during breakfast, I heard the sound of trucks working somewhere far ahead in the direction of my travel. They were probably cutting and hauling timber.



Morning mountains from the slope of Granichnaya

Very soon after returning to the road from yesterday, I made a mistake that cost me a lot of strength and nerves. The forest track that had mostly followed the old clearing yesterday, in line with my travel plan, suddenly veered sharply to the west and down into the valley of the Vels River. After walking a bit along it, I decided it would be better to return to the clearing and continue along it. This turned out to be a big mistake, as I realized later.

First of all, as I walked along the overgrown clearing, an icy shower drenched me completely in a matter of minutes, which, combined with the morning chill and the difficulty of maintaining a fast pace on the rough forest terrain, made me shiver with cold all over.

Secondly, the clearing soon began to descend, and the underbrush was joined by stones washed down by water streams, which further slowed my pace, adding falls and curses, which echoed through the forest. Fortunately, after about a kilometer, the clearing led to the road I had been following before. In the end, by shortening the distance by a kilometer, I had expended energy as if I had walked ten, and spent as much time as if I had walked five. Well, there's nothing to be done, such mistakes happen to everyone.



The road that turned into a river after the rains



The new road

Sitting on my backpack and throwing on my jacket, I rested and felt a little sad. Slightly off track from the unexpected difficulties in a place where I hadn't anticipated them, I looked at the sunlit tops of the spruces and wondered why I was going through all this suffering, why I was voluntarily subjecting myself to it. How nice it would be at home, on Bayryazhka. And I still hadn't even passed half the distance. But on the other hand, I had already covered almost half the journey, nearly 2000 km. It was too late to think about the "why" and "how"; I had to keep moving forward.

The road began to deteriorate again, and I started doubting I could complete the planned route for the day. But after crossing the Poysmak River, I came upon a completely new timber road that went exactly in my direction. I walked, unable to believe my eyes, expecting that at every turn the road would end, intersecting with a logging area, but no, it just kept going. This was especially pleasant and surprising because the satellite images I had with me showed the road as old and poorly maintained, more like the one I had been following before the river.

The road continued in my direction until it connected with another road, which linked the Siberievsky mine and the town of Ivdel. This was already an older, wider, and better-quality road. It was right around here, at the intersection, that I had planned to camp, but I still had energy, time, and there was no water at this spot. Moreover, I had spotted some open screes on the western slope of the Popovsky Uval Ridge on the map, which might offer a good view, so I decided to walk another 4 km and explore the screes for a possible place to camp.



The "Europe – Asia" sign on the roadside

On the descent, the situation began to change rapidly: first, I heard a distant rumble of thunder, then I saw a churning blackness swirling over the ridges to the west, promising nothing good.

Approaching the kurum slopes, I spent about ten minutes on reconnaissance. Their lower part was overgrown with sparse forest, which did not offer a good view, and there was no sensible reason to climb higher with a thunderstorm approaching. I decided to walk another 2 km and set up camp right at the most abandoned mine.

And so began the race with the rain. I was running towards the mine, and the thundercloud was racing there too. The suspense was thrilling – who would get there first.

What was my surprise and annoyance when I first heard the rattling of machinery, and then, cautiously peeking around a corner, I saw a camp on the shore of the lake. There was almost no doubt; in all likelihood, I had stumbled upon “black diggers” at work, re-washing the mine tailings in search of gold. Gold was exactly what had been mined at this site. Remembering that people perish for metal and that gold mining thrives on silence, I decided not to reveal my presence. I took cover in the terrain's depressions, moved to the edge of the mine, and set up camp on a platform sheltered by the tailings piles. The spot was good because I could observe the happenings in the camp by slightly raising my head over the tailings, but my tent remained out of sight.

Meanwhile, the rain was already very close. An unusual situation had developed – I could see three independent thunderclouds in different parts of the sky around me, spewing lightning and torrents of rain. And there was no doubt that at least one of them would certainly cover me very soon.

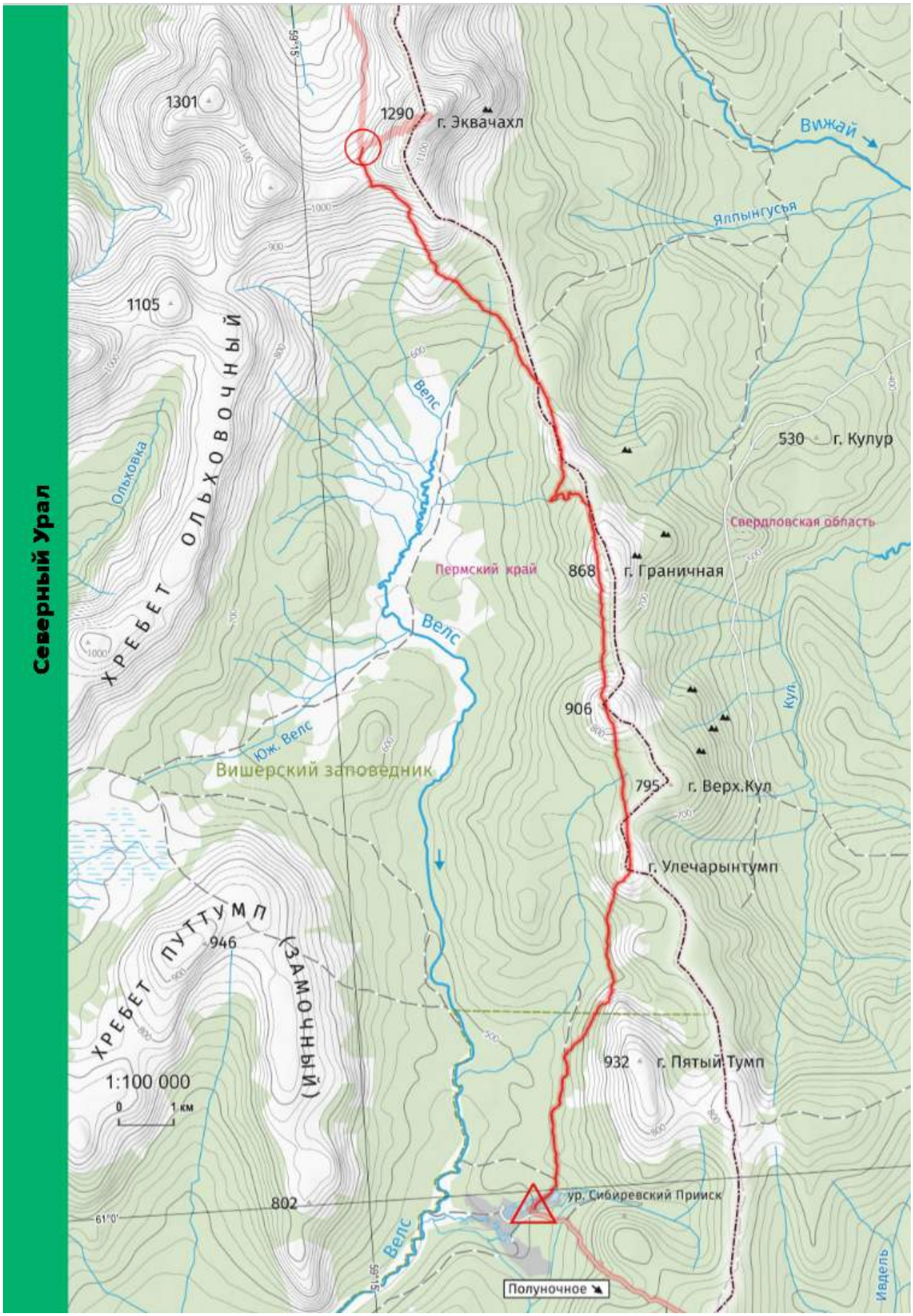
Remembering how I had incorrectly set up my tent in a hurry near Oslyanka, I decided not to rush and to do everything a little more slowly, but carefully. I finished just in time; with the first large raindrops, I threw my backpack inside, jumped in myself, zipped up the inner tent, and then the apocalypse began.

The elements struck with full force. For about two hours, everything was roaring, flashing, and a waterfall was pouring from the sky. An unexpected problem turned out to be the flat, hard surface of the tailings pile. As it turned out, it was only flat in appearance; very soon, water began to accumulate in the spot where my tent was pitched. I didn't notice it immediately, and by the time I saw it, some of the food packs that were in my backpack on the ground were already in the water. I had to urgently take everything out and move it to higher ground.

I fell asleep to the sound of the rain. I'm tired of these thunderstorms already. It seems like every single day there's a downpour and lightning strikes nearby. Probably, the heat contributes to their formation in the evening.



The "Europe – Asia" sign on the roadside



The Northern Urals

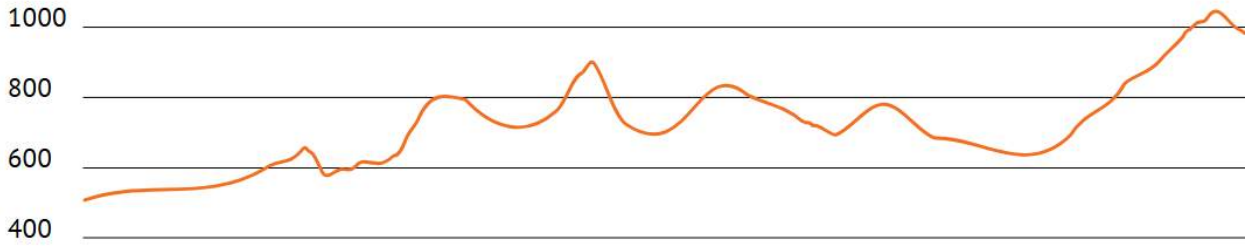
Mount Ekvachakhl *Vizhay River*

Yalpyngusya River
Vels River
Olkhovochny Range
Olkhovka River
Mount Kulur
Sverdlovsk Oblast
Perm Krai
Mount Granichnaya
Yuzhny Vels River
Vishera Nature Reserve
Mount Verkhny Kul
Kul River
Mount Ulecharyntump
Puttump Range (Zamochny)
Mount Pyaty Tump
Sibirevsky Prinsk area
Vels River
Polunochnoye
Ivd River

Day 61

The Sibirevsky Mine – Mount Ulecharyntump (809) – Mount Bolshoy Khapharnetump (905) – the Molebny Kamen Ridge

26 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1829.5 km



June 30, 2021

I woke up at 3:20, just before dawn, and since the sky had some clear patches, I decided to go on a photo hunt. The slow-moving northern sun was in no hurry to peek out from behind Mount Fifth Tump and illuminate the world. That worked in my favor, giving me about an hour to explore the area and find interesting angles.

I spent this time walking around the mine dumps, amazed by the sheer scale of the work done and the colors of the terrain. The rocks had a striking red hue, which might have been related to the gold extraction process in the quarry*. It looked both impressive and slightly eerie, especially surrounded by mountains and taiga.

The first to greet the new day in the area was the peak of the Ma Ridge, bathed in golden light from the rising sun, which was still far below the horizon. And then the beauty began.


The "black diggers" camp

The surrounding peaks reflected in the still mirror of a lake that had formed in the quarry. Mists drifted across the water, and the red mine dumps glistened after the night's rain. I ran across them, trying to capture the moment while staying mindful of safety and keeping an eye on a camp on the opposite side of the lake. The camp belonged to illegal prospectors, who were still asleep after a noisy night. I moved closer to

photograph the scene and confirm my suspicions – seeing the pumps drawing water into their camp only solidified my assumptions.

**Later, while discussing the color of the tailings with geologists and biologists, I heard two theories about the origin of the red color. One was that it is limonite, a rock that forms from the oxidation of iron-containing minerals. The other was that it is an alga from the genus Trentepohlia, which grows on rocky substrates and trees and belongs to the filamentous green algae. All the scientists agreed that additional research on the samples is necessary.*



The Sibirevsky Mine

Once I had captured everything I wanted (though the prospectors had greatly interfered), I packed up and set off. I first followed an old forest road, which soon turned into a repeat of yesterday's freezing morning shower. A few kilometers later, the road veered off in another direction, and our paths parted – likely for good, as I had no more roads or trails planned until the Dyatlov Pass.

As soon as I left the road, life improved. The annoying scrub forest and deep puddles, like small lakes, disappeared. In their place stood towering cedars, knee-high grass, moss, and blueberry bushes. Walking became much more pleasant and scenic, greatly easing the journey. It felt like stepping into a fairytale – nothing reminded me of the industrial morning landscape.



Gradually, and seemingly against logical direction, I shifted eastward and climbed about 100 meters up the northwestern slope of Mount Fifth Tump. On a map, this might seem illogical, but here on the ground, the forest dictated my route. As I traversed the mountain's sloped flank, I constantly encountered massive fallen cedars blocking my path. Each time I had to choose whether to go above or below them, I opted for the base of the tree, which led to a gradual ascent.

The forest grew sparser, fallen trees became fewer, the grass was lower, and the views through the gaps between the trees became more spectacular. Eventually, I emerged onto open rock-strewn slopes in the lower northern part of the mountain. From here, I could see my upcoming route – a chain of rocky peaks with difficult-to-

pronounce Mansi names that I had to cross, and in the distance, the twin-peaked beauty of Mount Ekvachakhl, the second-highest summit of the Molebny Kamen Ridge.

To the west, the horizon was also filled with mountains – surprisingly many still had snow patches. The elevations here were lower than in the southern Ural Mountains, where I had been before, yet there was no snow there, while here it was abundant. Perhaps the western position of these ridges meant they caught more snowfall in winter. Science suggests that this region is the rainiest part of the Perm Krai.



Taiga wilderness

For most of the day, I hiked along the eastern boundary of the Vishera Nature Reserve, collecting a string of low but picturesque peaks. I avoided deep valleys and reveled in the stunning forests and landscapes. Today was, without a doubt, the most beautiful and pleasant subalpine forest of my entire journey. Bright and spacious, with sturdy cedars, white-barked birches, and low grass interspersed with mossy clearings.



The dwarf willow

There was none of the towering grass that could swallow a person whole, like in the south, nor were there the thick thickets of dwarf willow found further north. Walking through sunlit, lush green meadows was pure joy.

That joy ended in the afternoon. First, the sky began to rumble as usual, cumulus clouds billowed, and the air became thick and stifling. I had just started descending into the last forested transition of the day, leading across the headwaters of the Vels River toward the Molebny Kamen Ridge. Losing elevation quickly, I found myself in a swampy lowland with dense, nearly impassable forest. Then, as I began climbing again, the forest changed to an impenetrable tangle of dwarf willow, which immediately asserted its dominance.



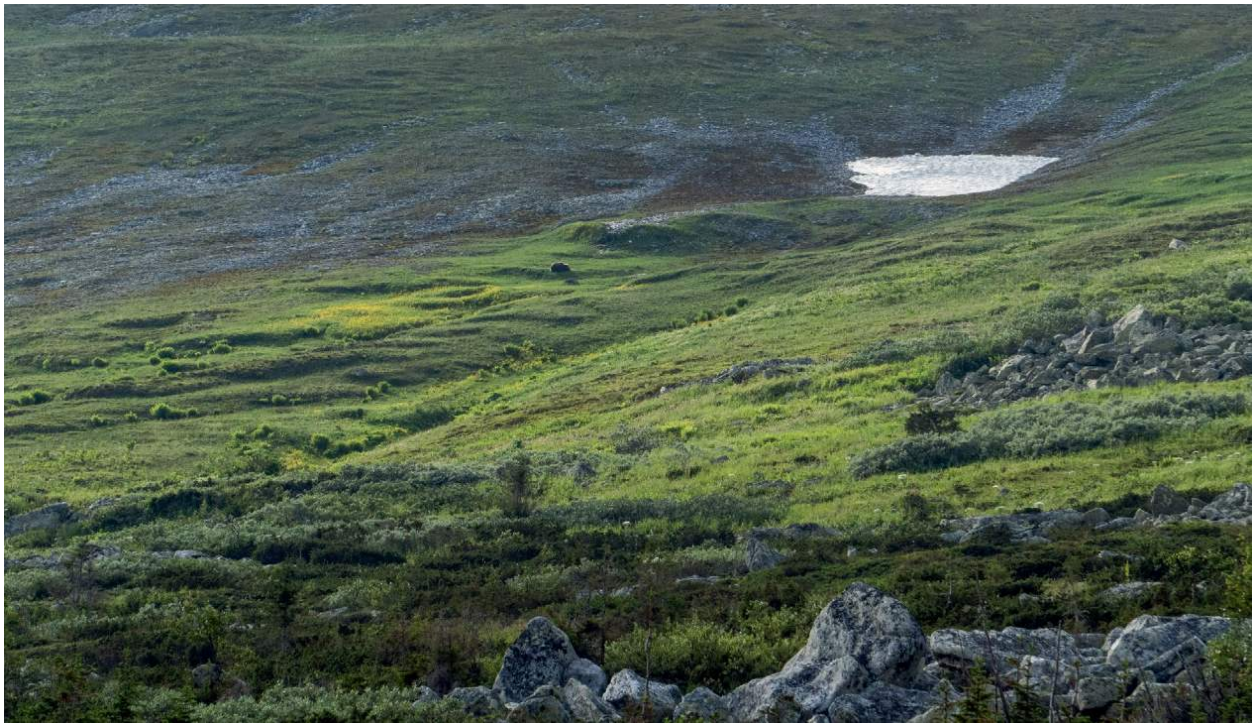
View of the upcoming route from the slope of Mount Pyaty Tump

I struggled through it, exhausted, tormented by thirst, horseflies, and midges, wiping stinging sweat from my eyes. My gaze was locked on the distant tundra saddle of the pass – devoid of dwarf vegetation, gleaming with a small snow patch, which meant one thing: water.

Perhaps this tunnel vision helped me notice it early. Or rather, I first spotted a large dark shape near the snow patch – out of place in this landscape. That made me wary. Experience, proven time and again, told me that if I saw something large and

dark on a snow patch in the heat of summer, it was very likely to stand up soon, revealing enormous claws and fangs.

I couldn't make out what it was with my eyes, so I used my camera. I took a picture, zoomed in...



The bear

By evening, I reached a high plateau with a view of the Husoyk Mountain, the highest peak in the area. The valley below was filled with dense mist, blending the peaks and ridges into one another. For the night, I decided to descend about 200 meters to a flat tundra clearing, set up my tent facing the valley, and settle in for the sunset, ready for a well-earned rest.

I had finally entered completely unexplored territory. For the next several days, every view would be new to me. That was both thrilling and exhilarating. Importantly, I had now crossed into the Vishera Nature Reserve. When planning my route, I was worried about the extensive reserve areas. Legally, they could have denied me passage, forcing me to adjust my route and abandon key parts of the Urals.

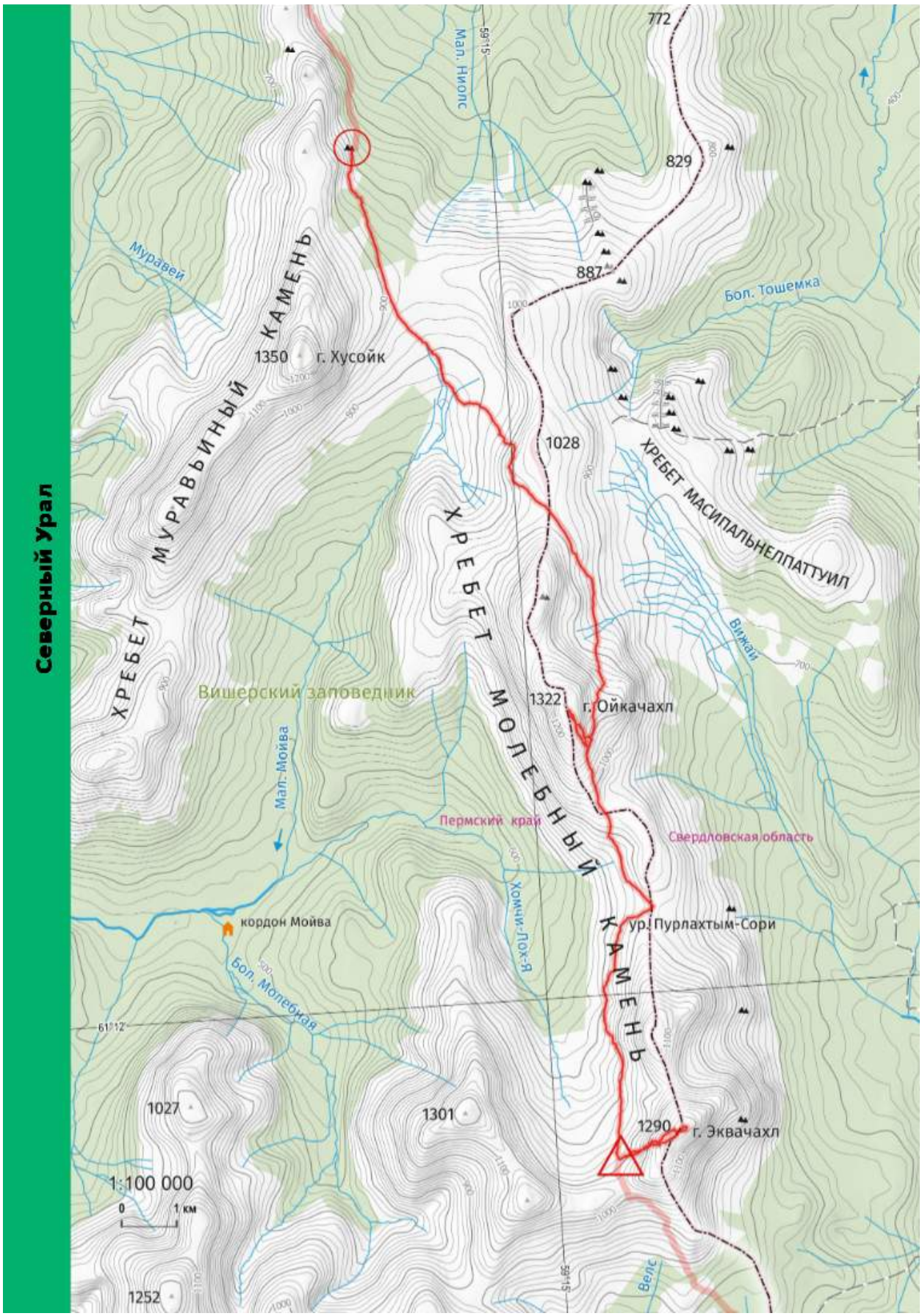
Fortunately, the management of both the Vishera and Pechora-Ilych Reserves accommodated me. They allowed me to pass through as a volunteer in exchange for photo and video materials. Sitting there at sunset, admiring the beauty of the

surrounding mountains, I shuddered at the thought of what would have happened if I hadn't received permission.

As for the sunset itself – it was a disappointment. The cursed haze was so thick that it swallowed the sun long before it reached the horizon, robbing the evening of any spectacular colors.



View of the Molebny Kamen Ridge and the valley of the Khomgilokhya River



The Northern Urals

Maly Niols River *Muravey River*

Bolshaya Toshemka River

Muravinyy Kamen' Range

Mount Khusoyk

Masipalnelpattuyl Range

Visherskiy Nature Reserve

Molebnyy Kamen' Range

Mount Oykachakhl

Vizhay River

Malaya Moyva River

Perm Krai

Sverdlovsk Oblast

Khomchi-Lokh-Ya River

Purlakhtym-Sori area

Bolshaya Molebnaya River

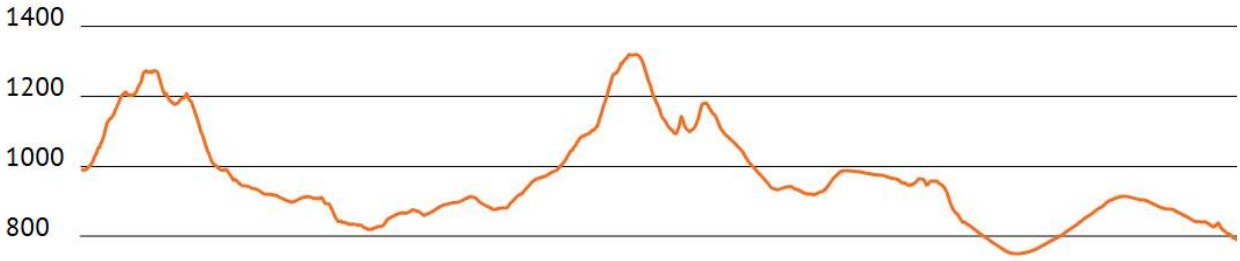
Mount Ekvachakhl

Vels River

Day 62

Molebny Kamen Ridge – Ekvachahl Mountain (1290) – Oikachakhl mountain (1322) – Muravyiny Kamen ridge

29 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1858.5 km



1 July 2021

The day started at night, having had the idea since the evening to go to the summit by dawn. It was obvious that the sun would be up on the other side of the ridge, and by the time it reached its ray-arms to me, all the prettiest stuff would be over. I decided that I would go out at night if the weather permitted.

I got up easily because I hadn't slept well. A strong wind was rattling the tent, it was stuffy and somehow uncomfortable, I had heavy, unremembered dreams all night, maybe it was the evening bear and the lack of understanding where it had run off to. I opened my eyes at two o'clock in the morning, looked through the door slit



Sunrise from the summit of Ekvachakhl

of the tent and realized that I had to go. There was an hour left till sunrise. It was 2 kilometers to the summit in a straight line and 300 meters upwards, which I managed to pass in the allotted time. However, it was possible not to hurry up, the sun was not in a hurry to please the Urals with its presence today, there was the same thickly smeared haze on the horizon. It took about an hour more until the sun had overcome it too.

I wasted no time, took a good look at the surrounding landscape and outlined the plan of the day. There was not much to choose from: either numerous kurum hills, clustered on all sides, or dwarf trees in the valleys below. It became obvious that the day would not be easy at all. Having carefully considered the first stage of the way from Ekvachakhla* to Oikachakhla**, I decided to traverse the valley along the narrow border of kurums and greenery.



Survey marker

The summit of Ekvachakhl itself was nothing remarkable, just ordinary stone rubble, except for one human artefact. I learnt with interest how the lower, usually embedded in the rock, part of a triangulation geodetic sign looks like. Found it broken out of its concrete base and just lying on top. The iron point was weighty, had a narrow centre and widened towards the bottom, and looked like a rook chess piece.

I went down to the tent, had breakfast and did a food audit, as I found that during the night flood at the mine some of the bags that were at the bottom of my rucksack had been filled with water. I went through and sorted the soaked rations to eat them first.

The first part of the way – 5 km of the Khomgilokhya river valley – I walked along its eastern slope, maneuvering between different kinds of troubles: dwarf pine thickets, kurums, dwarf shrubbery, choosing the way through tundra fields if possible, which in general I managed to do. Almost without falls I passed this difficult section and came to the Purlakhtym-Sori saddle.

This saddle is connected, like everything around it, with the life and beliefs of the Mansi people, who once actively explored these places. The flat tundra depression in the ridge, located between the Master and Mistress of these mountains, from ancient times served as a way of crossing and a place of offering gifts and gratitude to the spirits that inhabited everything around. This is how it translates, ‘Sacrificial Saddle’ or ‘Bloodless Sacrifice Saddle’. I didn't manage to see any traces of past rituals, though perhaps I just didn't know where to look. I only met a warning sign of the reserve at the top of the saddle.

**Ekvachakhl from Mansi language is translated as “old woman mountain” – Mistress.*

***Oikachahl from Mansi language is translated as “old man-mountain” – the Master.*



Purlachtym-Sori sacrificial saddle

The next important point on the way was the Oikachahl peak, the highest on the ridge, which I simply could not pass by. By this time, the wind, which was travelling around the ridges today, had driven low dark clouds into the valley, which began to cover the mountains. And the first, of course, was the tallest one. As I walked towards it, I watched how actively everything was changing up there. The mountain was opening up, then wrapped in a dark blanket. When I reached the base, I left my things and climbed up lightly. At first the ascent was on standard-sized kurums, but closer to the middle they were replaced by huge stones the size of a

minibus. I had a special pleasure, because on such a kurum slope the way from the routine of moving on stones turns into an interesting puzzle with elements of climbing, it is not easy to solve the problem and pass through the labyrinth beautifully, quickly and efficiently. And the more experience you have, the more beautiful the line turns out to be, the more fun you have.

On a rather flat top there is a small kurum hill – the highest point of the ridge. I climbed up and almost immediately retreated, as the wind was trying to throw me down. I could not see the views either, almost everything was covered with clouds. I sadly stated that the ascent turned out to be more for a tick, not my most respected format. And started to descend. Descent on a large kurum is always more difficult and dangerous than ascent.



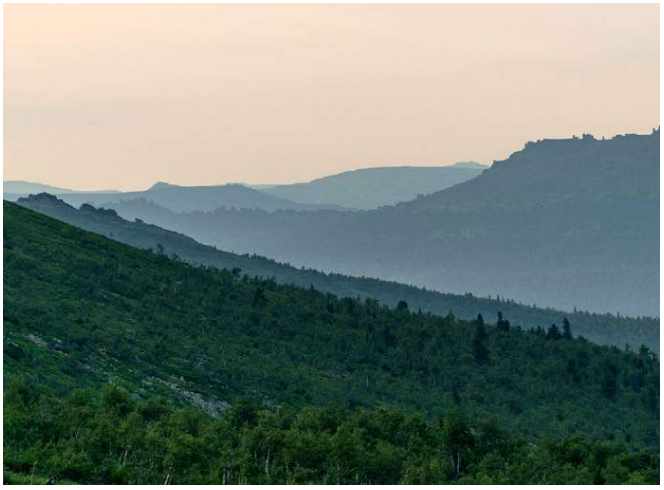
View from the Molebny Kamen ridge to the Malaya Moiva River valley and Husoik Mountain

Having rounded Oikachakhl from the east, I came to the summit 1028 with the intention to have a rest and lunch. But, as a misfortune, numerous springs, which were born by snowfalls on the eastern slope of the ridge, had long ago melted and evaporated on the western slope. And I, having relaxed from their abundance, did not collect the stock and was left without a single sip of moisture. The question arose as to what to do. To go, as I planned, along the ridge without descending to the valley of

the Malaya Moiva River, up to the pass between the ridges, or to try to descend to the valley and find water.

Analyzing the result now, in the evening, I think that I made a mistake, choosing the second option, deciding to descend to the headwaters of Malaya Moiva, which were marked on the map. Because, having dropped the height, I entered the valley and found myself in absolutely dry tundra, scattering under my feet. There was no hint of water around. And the most sensible thing would have been to go back to the eastern slope of the ridge to the snowfields, but I had already descended and I didn't want to climb back up the steep slope. Having found the point ‘hut’ on the map, I decided that there would definitely be water near the dwelling and went to it. I was not mistaken in my conclusions: there was indeed water there, but only in the form of a muddy swamp, with rotten, standing, rust-blooming water and terrible thickets of dwarf willow. I had to wade through all this inhospitable space to the bottom of the valley where the main channel of the Malaya Moiva River ran, where I fell out angry and dirty, wet and thirsty. I lost a lot of time and even more strength. On the bank of the tinkling brook, right by the water, plunging his weary feet into it, he had his lunch.

Wading through the thicket, I thought with pleasure that when I got to the water, I would finally cook a new food for the first time on the whole route – a freeze-dried ready meal. They were expensive, so I took them only for the second part of the transural route, for lunches. What was my annoyance when I opened the packet and found out that just now I had a vegetarian portion. My mood was already bad, and for a while it became completely disgusting. Still, no matter what I say, but the taste of food, its variety and volume is one of the most important factors of psychological stability for me. I am ready to carry a heavier rucksack, but eat more, more nourishing and tastier. This also gives me the opportunity to go further and more intensively in the day's treks.



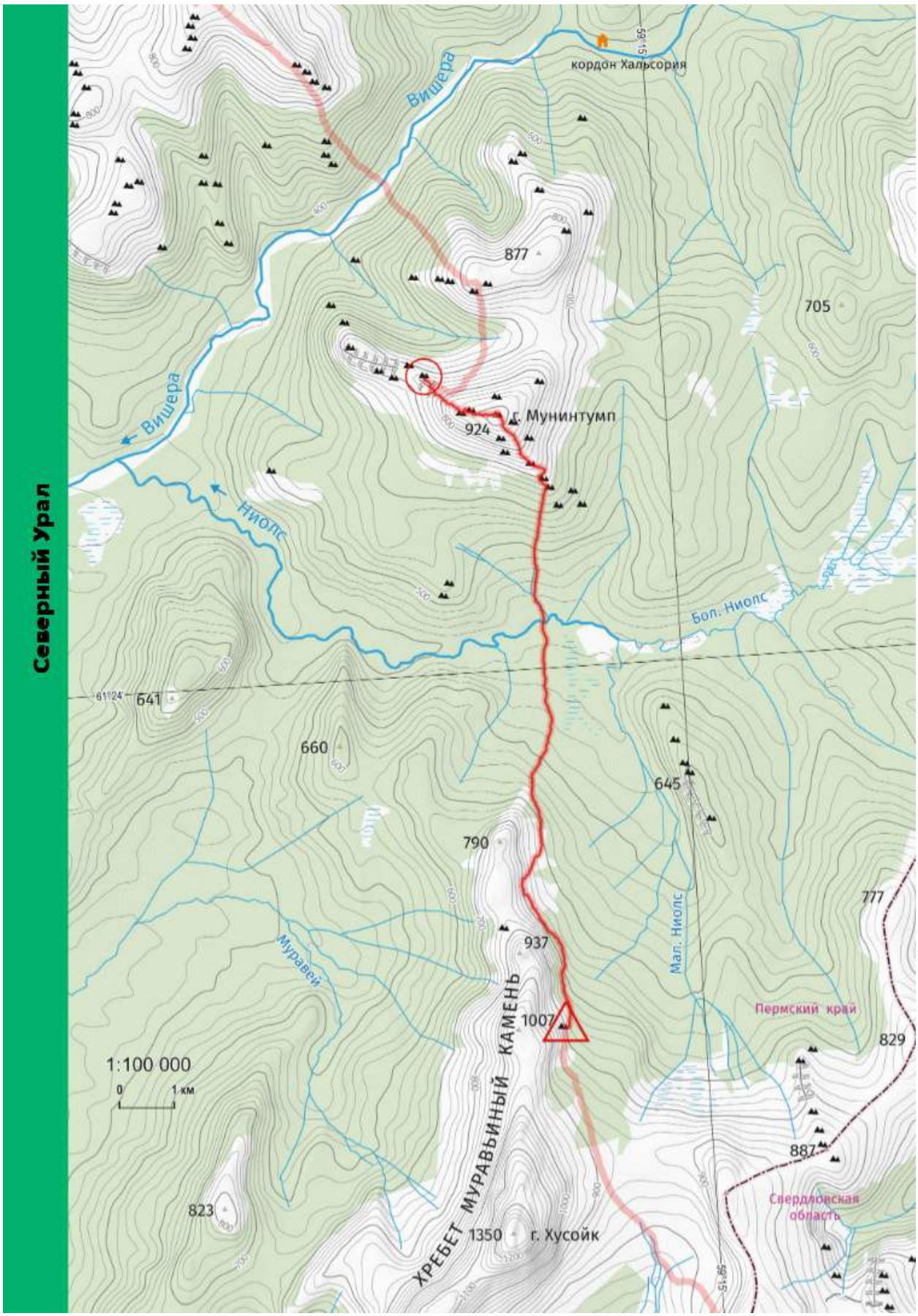
View of Mount Munintump

After lunch I had a little nap, which is always good for the psychological state, and dragged my rucksack further. There was only a short distance to go. I reached the pass and finally saw the place I had long dreamed of: in a day's trek on the opposite side of the valley Mount Munintump was bristling with rocks. I had heard a lot about it and seen photos of it, and to paraphrase a classic, it's no exaggeration to say that if you haven't seen Munintump, you haven't seen the Urals.

I had little energy, so I decided not to climb Husoik mountain, which was cluttered with kurums on my left hand, but to look for a place to spend the night with a view of my tomorrow's goal. In search of it I walked about 4 kilometres under the ridge and found an absolutely wonderful mossy platform on an elevation. There were bizarre ruins of kurums all around, Khusoik towered behind, Munintump in front, and the forest started under my feet.

The rest of the day was spent drying things, sweltering in the heat of the tent, tidying up. I studied and treated new abrasions and pustules. Worried about the rash on my body, especially in places of increased friction, around my lower back, on my thighs. Apparently, constant heat, sweat, clothes soaked in salt and becoming hard as sandpaper, insect bites – all this contributes to its appearance. It is unlikely that here, in hiking conditions, you can do anything about it. The only thing left to do is to monitor the condition. Large and disturbing areas should be decontaminated and sealed with plasters.

There are cumulus clouds on the horizon, the forecast for tonight and tomorrow is rain. I really don't want to, but what can we do?



The Northern Urals

Vishera River *Khal'soriya outpost*

Mount Munintump

Niols River

Bol'shoy Niols River

Muravey River

Malyy Niols River

Perm Krai

Muravinyy Kamen' Range

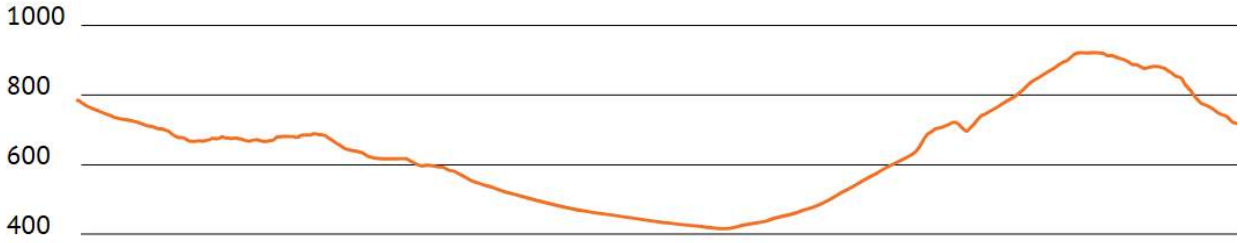
Mount Khusoyk

Sverdlovsk Oblast

Day 63

Muravyiny Kamen Ridge – Niols River – Munintump Mountain (924)

16 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1874.5 km





The first remnants on the ascent

2 July 2021

During the night, as is the custom of late, came thunderstorms and rain. Woke up this morning in a cloud, nothing left of yesterday's views, a white veil all around. I didn't hurry up, slept for a long time, slept off yesterday night climbing and got on the route at eight o'clock in the morning. The first part of the way I walked under the Muravyiny Kamen ridge through birch woods and wet meadows. On the whole, despite the bad weather, I was in good spirits, even happy. I thought about it and came to the conclusion that the practice of dividing the route into small sections helps a lot.



The moment there was visibility

There are many, many more days ahead, rain, cold, hardship, but I care little about that. I think only about today and a little about the next few days. I don't bother myself to think further than Manpupunyor. Today is a short day, not more than 15 km, and at the end of it will be the long-awaited Munintump. So why to think about something else, something distant and not depending on you yet. So I went in high spirits, as if I were going to a holiday.

When I reached the northern end of the ridge, I went deeper into the forest, crossed the Niols River and very soon started to climb Mount Munintump. Still at forest level again entered low cloud. If this were an ordinary peak from which it is customary to look out into the distance, at the neighbouring mountains, I would have been very upset that nothing could be seen, everything is covered by clouds, but when you are dealing with natural works of small sculptural forms, the mysterious fog in the middle of the day plays into your hands. It hides the harsh daylight, it gives you mystery. It creates a special atmosphere.

And so it was. As soon as I reached the border of forest and tundra, I was met by a stone guardian – I saw only his ghostly silhouette, heavy, powerful, waiting. Carefully, under the canopy of the low forest I crept past him and entered the rocky town. The rocky neighborhoods with towers, narrow streets, and massive cliff-

houses were scattered across the mountain. I climbed smoothly to the top, not forgetting to look at them.

There were some blue glimpses of sky overhead, which gave some hope for better visibility, so I decided to take my time and have lunch right on the top. I found water there in two puddles, filled up the reserve and, hiding in one of the rocky rooms of the summit bastion, started to have lunch. Time passed, but the clouds did not want to leave, moreover, somewhere nearby a thunderstorm began to rumble and rain began to fall. Not wishing to be caught in a thunderstorm on the summit, I decided to descend to the west, to the place where the main massif of rocks is, put up a tent and wait for the weather in comfort. And this is where the miracle happened!

I hurried down the tundra-cum-corn mishmash, looking carefully under my feet, but occasionally not forgetting to look around. And in one such lifting of my eyes I was surprised to see not a snow-white veil in front of me, but the teeth of rocks, shrouded in clouds, a couple of kilometers away from me. Here we go! That incredibly beautiful and my favourite moment when the clouds recede and expose some parts of the relief.

What happened next, I will never forget as one of the highlights of the route. I was running on the wet kurum, rain was coming from behind, thunder was rumbling, I had a camera in one hand and a camera in the other, trying to capture this moment in both formats – photo and video. And around me here and there rocks open up, clouds rush across the ridge at high speed. Everything is changing with incredible speed. I don't know how I didn't fall down and break my legs or break my equipment, but at that time I didn't think about this danger in the first or second place.



A quaint rock castle

The only thought was to get to the edge of the slope, to the bend, to keep it out of the frame, and to shoot beautifully these ever-changing views. After all, it could be that in a minute they will close and will not open for me any more on this route. I made it, I ran, I shot it. From behind it was rumbling and raining more and more, so I didn't delay, went down to the lower terrace of the ridge, found a more or less level ground with a view to the rocks, put up the tent faster and jumped in. It was just in time, as the rain was coming down in full force.

I was lying in my tent watching the view of the cliffs open and close. I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time when the weather changed. As soon as it stopped raining, I took my camera and went on exploring the western massif. I climbed the ridge for about two hours and went all the way to the west. The rocks were amazing, I had never seen anything like them on such a scale before in the Urals. Towers, stupas, fingers, needles – all of them, lined up in one row, stood in a wall. Most of all I was struck by the rocky castle, which was located in the central part of this ridge. Something very similar to gloomy Gothic architecture, as if walking through the narrow dark streets of an ancient fortification with turrets, narrow corridors, small caves-rooms. The rock, stretching from the castle in both

directions along the top of the ridge, created the feeling of a fortress wall and completed the image. So, admiring and marvelling at the fantasy of nature, completely enchanted, I reached the end of the ridge.



Western spur of Mount Munintump



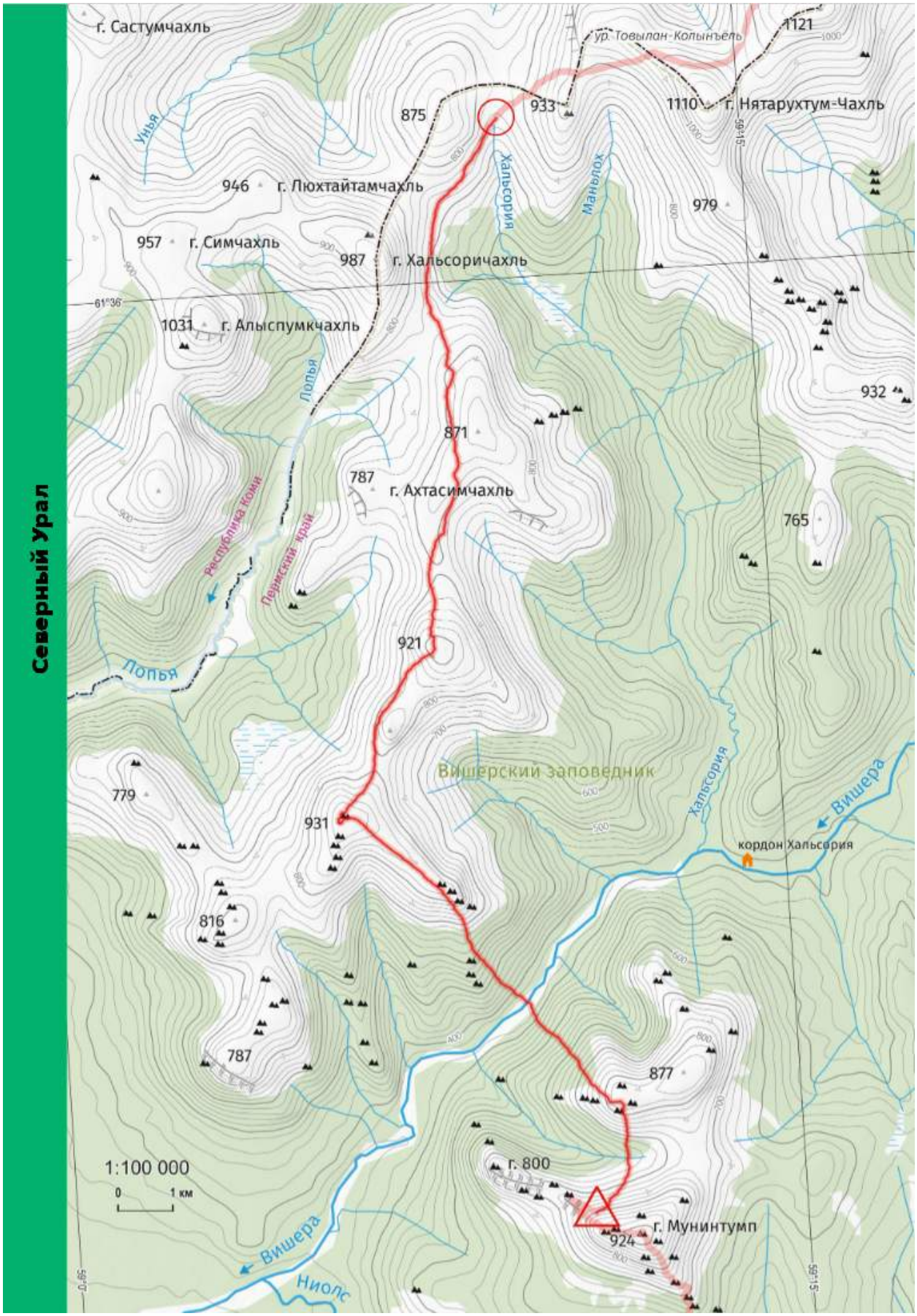
Vishera River from the mountain

However, this combination of bizarre rocks and constantly changing clouds had one big disadvantage: constantly every minute it seemed that I was seeing

something new and interesting, and I photographed, photographed, photographed. That way no memory and batteries would be enough.

On the way back, the mountains were covered with clouds, but I didn't care much about that today. I was worried about something else: in the breaks of clouds I saw the river Vishera – the main water artery of these places. It looked like a big and full-flowing river. Taking into account the rains that had been coming periodically lately, I was worried whether I would have any problems in passing the river. However, this is tomorrow's question, and I will solve it tomorrow. And now I have a well-deserved rest. To lie in the tent in dryness and warmth, to ointment and massage my left leg, which hurts after several fresh falls in the forest and on stones.

In the tent under the measured hissing of the gas burner, cooking dinner, I pondered whether these rocks were a masterpiece of the Ural nature. I really wanted to give them that definition, but decided not to. It is a very beautiful place, worthy of attention, but not a masterpiece. At some point it seemed to me that in this place the concentration of unusualness, beauty, pretentiousness was too high. And it began to bore and distract me. In a true genius natural masterpiece, in my opinion, everything should be harmonious and concise. I will have masterpieces on my way, and I will definitely write about it, if I reach it.



The Northern Urals

Mount Sastumchakhl *Tovylan-Kolyn'yol area*

Un'ya River

Mount Nyatarukhm-Chakhl

Mount Lyukhtaytamchakhl

Khal'soriya River

Man'lokh River

Mount Simchakhl

Mount Khal'sorichakhl

Mount Alyspumkchakhl

Lop'ya River

Mount Akhtasimchakhl

Komi Republic

Perm Krai

Vishera Nature Reserve

Khal'soriya River

Vishera River

Khal'soriya outpost

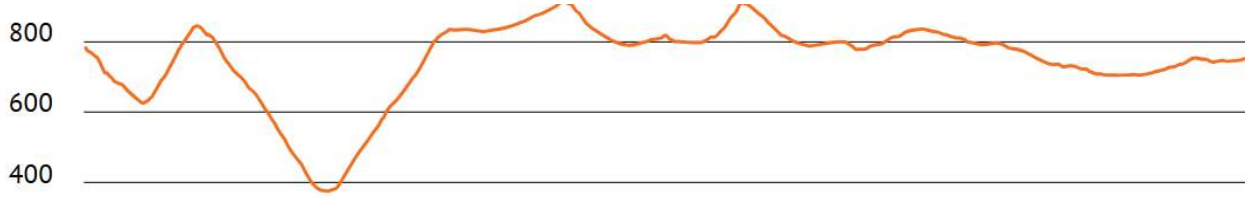
Niols River

Mount Munintump

Day 64

Mount Munintump (924) – Vishera river – Lopiinsky Kamen ridge – Khalsoria river

26.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1901 km

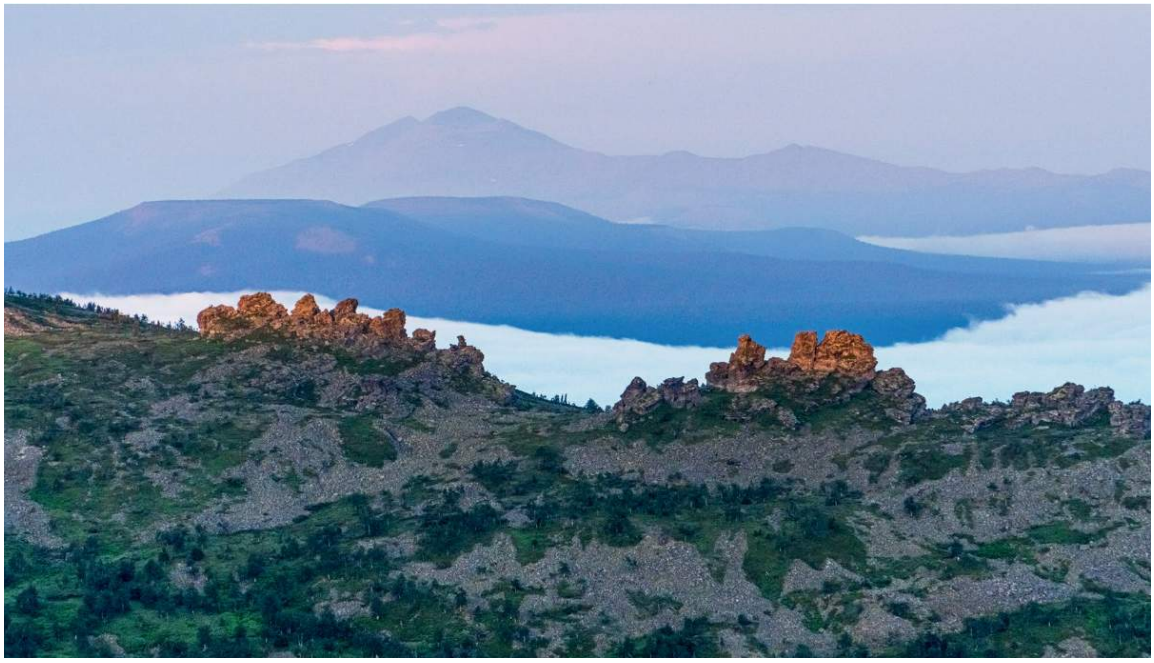


3 July 2021

Turns out I ran so much last night that I fell asleep and didn't even close the tent entrance. Maybe that's what woke me up at midnight. And I was presented with an absolutely marvellous and promising picture: the sky had cleared and was already turning pink with the imminent dawn, the rock castle was being stormed by night mists.



Night view from the tent



View to the south from Mount Munintump

The sleep was removed like a hand, I began to think feverishly how to make the most effective use of the opening opportunity, where to shoot the mountain from. I decided that I should go to the neighboring peak and shoot Munintump from the side. Before doing so, I made myself get a couple of hours' sleep. Interestingly, as usual, the internal clock worked perfectly, and I woke up again for the second time and a couple of minutes before the alarm. I put my things in my rucksack and at 2:30 started to descend into the valley separating the peaks. Literally five minutes after leaving I entered the grass area and within five seconds, I was soaking wet. But the pre-dawn colours filling the sky drove forward and didn't let the regrets of another icy shower any chance of taking over the mind. Only forward, only to make it to the top in time to find a good view. In fact, at this moment there was a race with three participants: I, breathing heavily, was climbing up, the sun, flooding everything with colours, was hurrying to come out from behind the horizon, and the mists, silently swirling, were filling the valleys and trying to cover the top of the mountain. In this race no result was guaranteed by my will – only one third, the other two components did not depend on me in any way, and there was a pleasure in this natural lottery. You never know what the outcome will be, or if it will be at all. The more valuable it is.

Climbed up on time and in the right place. The summit turned out to be full of bizarre and variously shaped remnants. Just ten minutes after leaving the forest area,

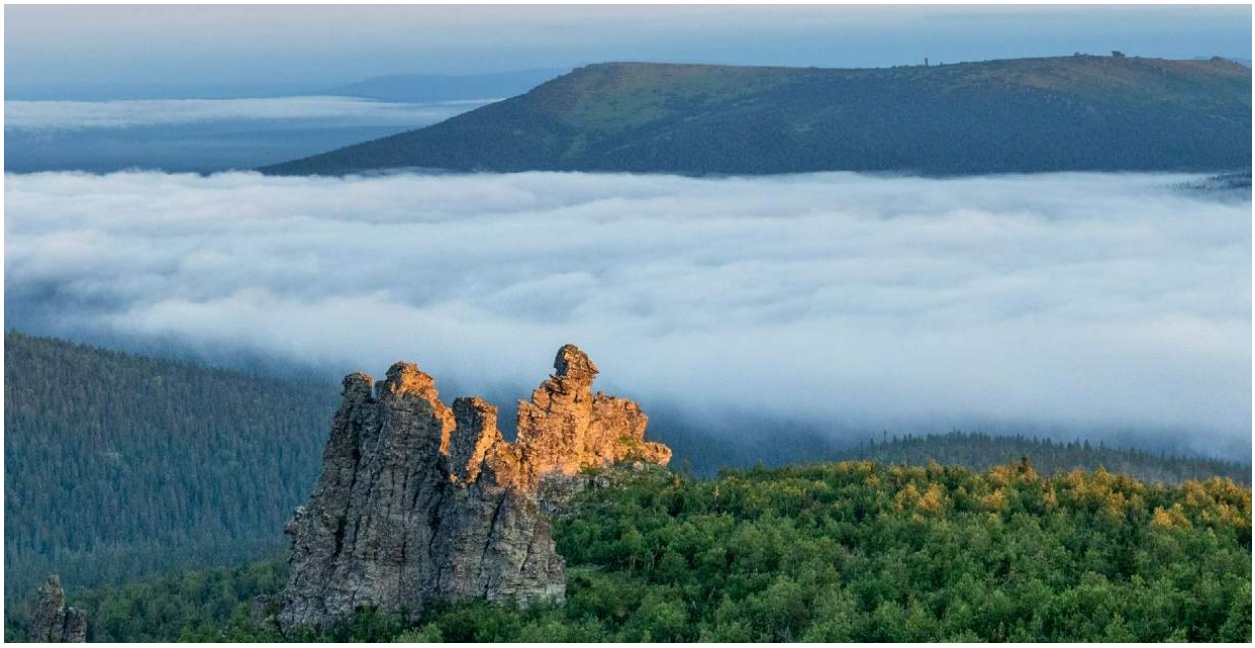
the sun appeared in the north-east. The fog was floating, coming from the valley to the mountain, then retreating back. And I was running around the top, climbing on the remnants, looking for new angles and shooting.

Then I sat on the tundra slope, chilled, wet, blown by the morning dawn wind, had breakfast, still shooting and was infinitely glad that despite the negative weather forecast, everything happened as it happened. The rocks lit up at the right moment, the mountains lined up at the right angle, and this kurum giant part of the Northern Urals saw me off in full parade.

From the summit there was an absolutely marvelous multi-dimensional view of the previous day's route, the enormity of Ant Ridge looming. The view of the bizarre cliffs of Munintumpa was less favorable than yesterday, but the cliffs were illuminated by the wonderful colourful sunlight, which gave an excellent and new picture.

And on the opposite side of the valley, to the north, lay already quite different mountains, as I call them to myself – "the boring Northern Urals". The kurum giants, such as Konzhakovsky Stone, GUKH, Molebny Kamen, were over, the tundra ridges began to be gentle, without deep depressions and sharp elevations, not pleasing to the eye with extreme mountain relief, but allowing to go fast and far and in a great number decorated with stone remnants, which stand out in the best way on the gentle forms of relief. Many people think that the story with "bolvans" – rocky remnants of the Northern Urals – is limited to the Man-pupunyur ridge. This is certainly not true; there are many similar rock formations in the central part of the Northern Urals. To name just a few: Mount Otorten, the Yanypupunyör ridge, Mount Pura-Munit-Ur, Mount Munintump.

And then, of course, there's Lopi's Thumb. It was clearly visible in the morning clear air on the opposite side of the valley, although it was about 6-7 km between us, standing as a boundary pillar between two such different Northern Urals.



Lopiinsky Palets ostanets in the background



Vishera River

First, however, I had to pass the Vishera River valley and climb these tundra ridges. I started my descent into the sea of fog, swaying at my feet, not without excitement as to how I would cross the river. It turned out that I was worried in vain: the Vishera seemed even less full-flowing than yesterday's ford through the Niols, only wider by two or three times. Sporo made this crossing through the taiga valley and left the cover of the forest with relief. Now all the way to Manpupunyor I will not

enter the taiga and descend from the ridges. One could say that the most difficult part of this stage was passed.

By association – no one can be lucky all the time – I had to approach the highest point of the ridge, the summit 931.9, and a cloud came over it. I knew that there was a so-called Arch among the rocks on it, so I climbed, searched in the cloud. Found some rock with a big hole, maybe this is it. But to be honest, after the wonders of Munintump it did not impress me at all, so I hurried on, because nobody cancelled the bad forecast.

In the second half of the day I walked along comfortable tundra, interspersed with rare outcrops of kurums. The way was rather monotonous, it is difficult to remember anything remarkable, except for two moments. Somewhere near the northern slope of the peak 921.5 I came across the remains of an aircraft. Fuselage elements and fragments of blades were scattered and almost overgrown with grass on the area of several tens of metres. I am not too well versed in technology, so I could not determine the exact type of aircraft. The second thing that I remembered was the end of the day: while going round the top of Halsorichahl, I got into a vast thicket of dwarf birches and willows, and it was probably the most difficult and exhausting part of the day. If I had known what was waiting for me at the bottom, I would never have gone there, I would have been better off going over the top. But I made a mistake, I believed the path drawn on the map, and it cost me a lot of strength, abrasions and peace of mind. If there was a trail, it was long overgrown. The law of meanness, which started on Lopiinsky Kamen, continued here too – bad weather in the form of thunderstorm and rain caught up with me in the wilds. Dark clouds came from behind the ridge and the sky rumbled, not auguring anything good. I had to gather all the strength I had left in the evening and run for quite a long time to the first level ground that would allow me to set up camp.

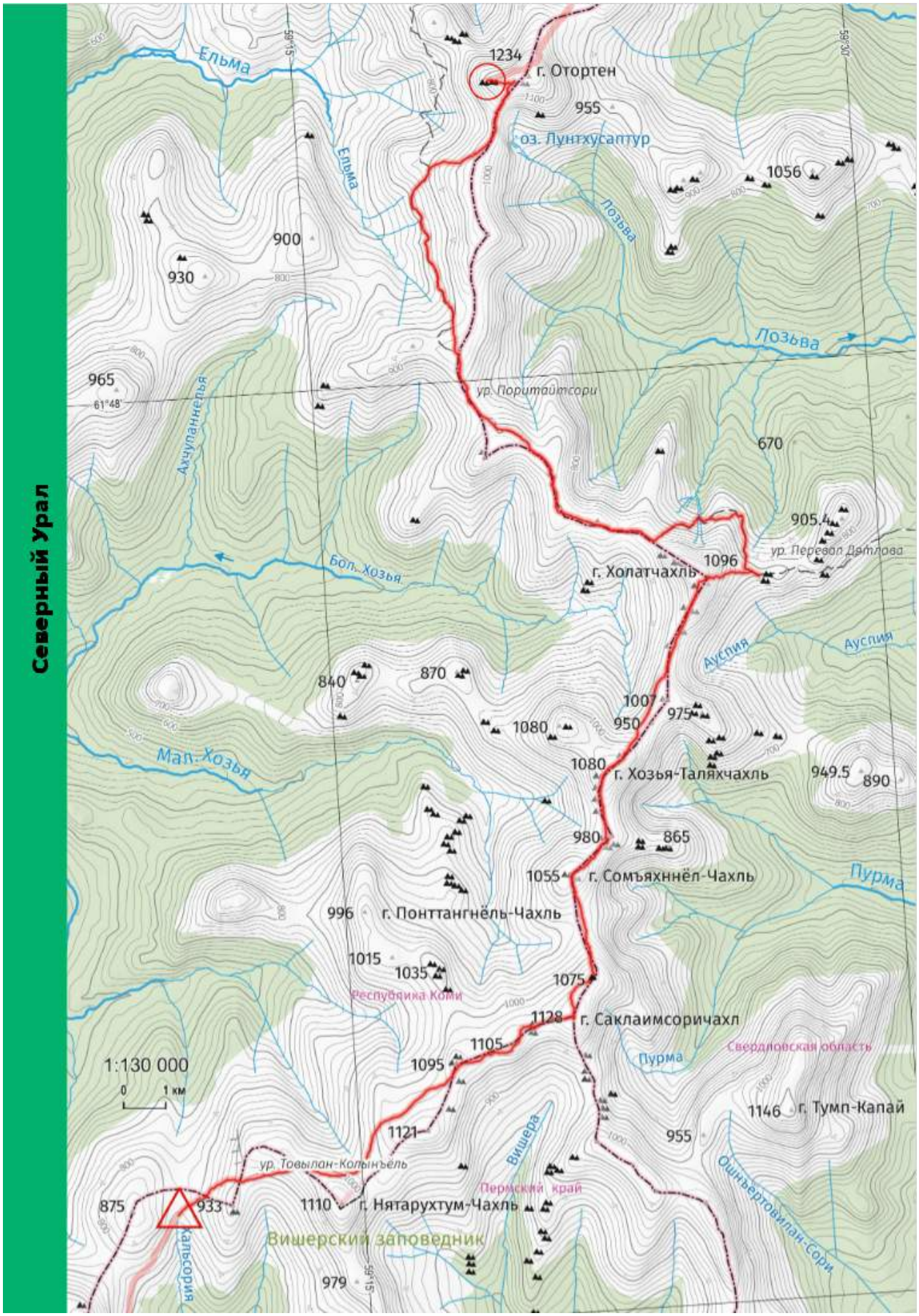
Caught up with the thunderstorm, in the last minutes managed to escape from the thicket, run across a small stream and stand among the bushes of the stenak on a flat hard surface with a good view into the valley of the Chalsoria River. The scenario was the same from time to time: just before I could put up the tent and take

shelter in it, it started to rain and rumbled in a way that I don't think it had ever rumbled on this trip before. Not a second passed between the flashes and the sound of the sky being torn apart. One time it was so close and strong that I jumped up in my sleeping bag. Apparently, I was in the very epicentre of the storm, and the lightning was striking somewhere very close. Fortunately, it didn't last long, the storm clouds moved on, leaving me with a long, slow rain, drumming on the tent canopy. The time was still early, a little after lunch, I was lying in my sleeping bag, and the drizzling rain was putting me into a kind of trance, half-asleep. a dream, not reality. I lay like that until evening, and only the need to empty some of my body's containers and fill others brought me out of this strange state.



Overnight stay under Halsorichahl mountain

After dinner, did the legs. Had an operation with blood and without anaesthesia. The toenail of the big toe on the left foot has been troubling for some time. It seems to be starting to grow into the meat. It's not acute yet, but it's constant and debilitating aching. And it bothers me a lot. Today I finally decided to get into that spot with clippers and trim it there, inside, under the skin. It didn't bleed. But the pain is less, tomorrow, when the damaged skin has calmed down, it will be clear whether I did everything right.



The Northern Urals

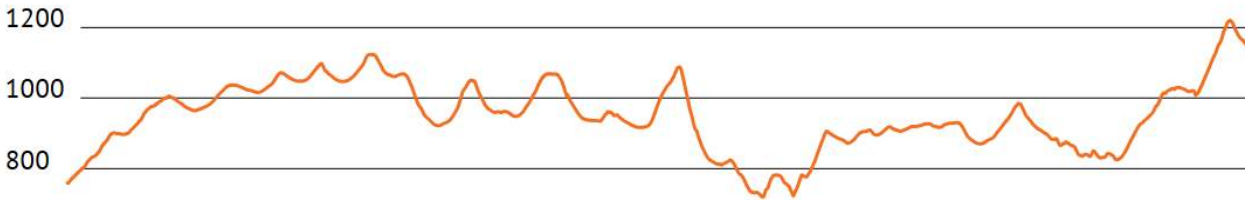
Yelma River *Mount Otorten*

Lake Luntkhusaptur
Lozva River
Lozva River
Akhchupannelya River
Poritaitsori area
Bolshaya Kozhya River
Mount Kholatchakhl
Dyatlov Pass area
Auspia River
Malaya Kozhya River
Mount Kozhya-Talyakhchakhl
Mount Somyakhnnyol-Chakhl
Purma River
Mount Ponttangnyol-Chakhl
Komi Republic
Mount Saklaimsorichakhl
Sverdlovsk Oblast
Mount Tump-Kalay
Tovylan-Kolynyol area
Vishera River
Perm Krai
Oshnvertovilan-Sori
Mount Nyatarukhm-Chakhl
Khal'soriya River
Vishera Nature Reserve

Day 65

Khalsoria River – Mt. Saklaimsorichakhl (1128) – Mt. Mount Kholatchakhl (1096) – Dyatlov Pass – Mount Otorten (1234)

48 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1949 km



4 July 2021

A long, hard and not always enjoyable day, but all in order. Got up early, out the door at five in the morning. And it was as if even at first the weather was questioning which way to head. There was a clear sky overhead and views all around. But very soon a strong wind pulled the clouds in, and I was plunged into a thick, whitish nothingness. This part of the day was almost unforgettable. Tundra smooth landscapes, interspersed occasionally with small kurum fields, stretched endlessly and monotonously. Only GP navigator helped me to move efficiently taking into account the irregularities of the relief in such conditions, and I had to compare with it every minute. I was walking and thought how difficult and hard it was to overcome the Urals for my great predecessor, Nikolay Rundqvist and his team in 1991. How often they lost their way, went the wrong way, simply did not know where they were. When you read the book, sometimes you think that they are always wandering around, such experienced travellers, masters of sports. However, everything changes when you find yourself in such conditions, and if you did not have a small box in your hand, which every second with accuracy to the metre shows on the map location, it is still unknown where you would have gone and where you would have wandered. Of course, a compass is still very important and you should know how to use it, it is vital, but in this endless tundra monotony, where you can see only fifty metres around you and it is absolutely impossible to get attached to the large relief forms marked on the map, it is very easy to make a mistake. You won't go back, but you'll get lost in all sorts of unpleasant places.

The first striking object on my way was the summit of Saklaimsorichakhl, a monument to human ambition and what the Ural Mountains do to it. This mountain would be quite unremarkable if it weren't for the fact that its borders meet at a wedge. Firstly, the watersheds of three great Russian rivers. The water flowing down its slopes to the north-west by numerous streams gathers into the river Unya, flowing into the Pechora, carrying its waters to the Barents Sea, in the south-west the river Vishera is born, carrying its waters through the Kama and Volga to the Caspian Sea, and to the south-east goes the river Purma, through a polygamy of estuaries changing names, getting bigger and bigger, reaching the river Ob and the Kara Sea. So, we can say that the mountain Saklaimsorichakhl is the mountain of three seas. Secondly, the borders of three regions – the Perm Krai, the Sverdlovsk Oblast and the Komi Republic – converge on the mountain. Thirdly, it is the border of Europe and Asia, and fourthly, it is the northernmost point of the Vishersky Reserve.



Mt. Saklaimsorichahl

And of course, these facts could not pass human ambition. When I got to the top, I found a cemetery of tasteless monuments, assembled from anything, already broken by winds and snows. In general, I had long ago formed the impression, and on

this expedition it was only strengthened, that there was some unspoken competition going on in the Urals under the tentative name “Who will put up the ugliest monument made of brown substance and sticks”.

Everyone participates in this event: travelers, regional administrations and commercial companies. If you climb any of the significant peaks of the Urals, you will find plenty of this frankly shoddy junk. However, there are places of special anomalies, and the summit of Saklaimsorichakhl is one of these places. It is especially offensive for representatives of the tourist community – people who make interesting expeditions, cognitive projects, but are remembered in many ways by such ridiculous garbage left on the tops of mountains. And sooner or later we will have to clean it all up. I didn't stay on the top for a long time, it was dank, cold and aesthetically unpleasant to observe all these shattered, crumpled, broken monuments of human pride, so I hurried down.

Real Ural monuments – stone remnants – began to appear abundantly on the ridge. They majestically floated out of the cloud in a variety of bizarre shapes and hid back. In general, if you look at the map, you can see that there are a lot of destroyed remnants scattered along the ridge, along its lateral spurs. Even Varsanofieva herself, traveling here, described these places and their forms with delight.



Mount Holatchahl from the south

By noon, when I had already covered two dozen kilometers and reached another important point of the route, Mount Kholatchakhl, the weather suddenly improved. The clouds lifted and I could see the summit, which is not giving rest to a lot of people. To my delight, I saw it from the side from which almost no one can see it – from the south. From the saddle to its summit stretched a string of low, bizarre remnants. It was obvious that there used to be a rocky ridge, but time, wind, water, and sun had done their work, and only these small rocks remained.



Dyatlov Pass

Here, at the foot of the summit, I had a choice to make. Turn left, to the east, to Dyatlov Pass, or right, to where I needed to go. Frankly speaking, there was no desire to go to the infamous pass, the place was not notable for anything good, and it added me an extra 5-6 kilometers to the way. However, I decided that I should express my opinion about this place in the movie I was shooting, so, having climbed to the top of Kholatchakhl, I turned to the right. When I came to the edge of the mountain, I saw from above a scar cutting the spur of the ridge – a wide road rolled up by mountain lovers. It started somewhere there, in the forest zone, passed through the outcrops of bedrock, went to the remnant with the commemorative plaque and further beyond the mountain on which I was standing.

The descent was not easy, steep, kurum, and I was on tired legs. I waddled from the last strength to the rock with a sign, established in memory of the death of

Dyatlov's group in 1959. I hid behind it from the wind and decided to cook the second lunch. Already in the sun. Today I had my first one also under the protection of the remnant, but in clouds and cold.

While I was cooking, I read the diary of the visit, hidden under a rock. Frequent references to bears caught my eye. Numerous descriptions of cases when a bear found and ate the luggage hidden on the Dyatlov Pass. Or how a female bear and her cubs would come out to the mountain modules set up further along the ridge, as soon as people left them, and start looking for scraps. All the described cases were potentially dangerous and alarming. So far I have not heard of bears attacking tourists in the Urals, but in Siberia, for example, in the Ergaki Nature Park it has been a big problem for several years. And it was hikers who caused it by leaving poorly-made campsites or simply throwing away food leftovers at the campsites. All this led bears to associate humans with easily accessible, quick, convenient and nutritious food. After that it was not long before the first attacks on the tent or on the person carrying the food were imminent. If the situation with waste and abandonment on the route to Manpupunyor continues to be the same, the wild and at the same time crowded nature of the route may make it one of the most dangerous in the near future.



Manpupunyur on the horizon

Having had lunch and a little rest, I gathered my thoughts and formulated my attitude to such a Ural phenomenon as the Dyatlov Pass. I think I will disappoint many fans of the mysterious and unrecognized, but I am not at all interested in what happened there in February 1959. It is unlikely that we will ever know, and there is no point in guessing. And I am actually very offended that a place that is generally unremarkable, except for the tragic event, has become almost the most famous place in the Urals on a global scale. It is particularly annoying that this fame and its constant growth is largely due to the desire to make money on the tragedy. Books are written and sold, and when they stop selling, new versions for new books are put forward, movies are filmed, expeditions are organized, inquisitive minds strive to get into these not the safest and most hospitable northern forests, which often ends miserably. People continue to die. This adds even more fuel to the fire, and all this bacchanalia of blood grows and grows, feeding itself, and there is no end to it in sight. Meanwhile, there are an infinite number of really interesting and beautiful places in the Urals that are worth talking about.

Bear is a very good energizer, it works even in cases when it is not near you, but there is a possibility of its appearance. Having read the warnings about brazen leapers, I decided to walk to the mountain modules set under the Otorten mountain, which is about as far as I had traveled that day. And it was not easy, towards the end of the route I felt that I had very little strength, but the beautiful place of overnight stay under the charismatic peak on one side and bears on the other side encouraged me and made me go on.

As I approached the modules, I noticed the flags of drying socks fluttering in the wind. Both modules turned out to be occupied by a tourist group. And, interestingly and tellingly, one of the two modules had its door broken off and was standing next to it. As the guests told me, it seems that a bear did it in search of food. Not without regret I left the corner of civilization, nestled right on the edge of a deep kar, above the lake Lunthusaptur, which means “lake of the lonely goose” in Mansi, and started climbing Otorten.

Since there is no possibility to rest comfortably, I'll go where it's as beautiful as possible. And I was not mistaken, I had been on this peak only once, a long time ago and in bad weather, so I had a rather vague idea of what was up there. Except for the famous rock gate, I didn't remember anything special. And as it turned out, there was a lot to see in the golden evening light. A lot of bizarre rocks, distant views and the first glimpse of Manpupunyur. Stepping out to the top, I saw the pillars! There were almost 50 km between us, but they were distinguished quite clearly on the gentle slope of the ridge. A very joyful meeting.



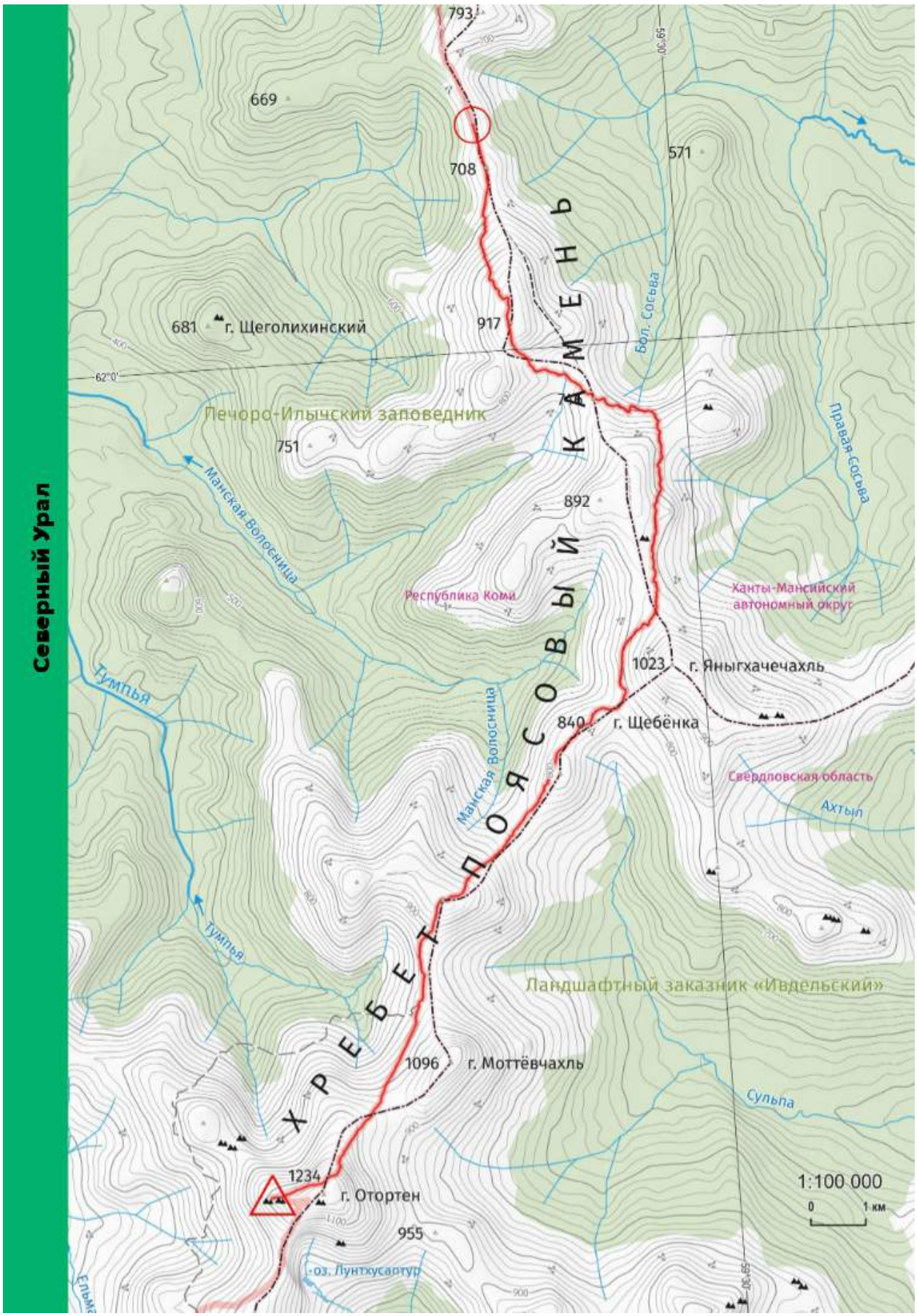
Rocky outcrops on the summit of Mt. Otorten

But not everything was so easy at the top, there were two more trials waiting for me there. First, as soon as I climbed up, I was taken by surprise by a strong icy wind. It seemed to blow through everything: my warm clothes, tent and rocks. I searched for a long time for a place to put my light house, to find at least minimal protection from strong gusts of wind. Where there was a calm, there was no flat place, and where there were at least some minimal platforms for the tent, it was mercilessly blowing. But he who seeks will always find it. When I put up the tent, I realized that I was completely exhausted. Shooting the sunset was out of the question until I had eaten. Quickly, using the sublimate left from the schedule ahead, I had dinner and ran to look for angles. Here the second and final test for today was waiting for me. Time was short, the sun was falling behind the horizon rapidly, I continued to freeze mercilessly and could not find anything interesting to photograph. There were a lot of beautiful rocky things around, but all this was not collected in the frame, which was incredibly annoying and made me run one hundred meters after another.



Sunset in the stone gateway

Eventually the evening was saved by the Otorten Gate, a bizarre rock outcrop about 7 meters high that forms a gate at a certain angle. The big red sun sat right in their gate, giving us an unusual shot. Having returned to the tent, I prepared the fifth hot meal, I don't know what to call it. A second dinner, probably. Fortunately, being ahead of my schedule allows me to eat more, recover better, and reduce the weight of my backpack. I swallowed it all without noticing. A hard, long, eventful day came to an end. Almost 50 kilometers through the mountains – it's no joke. The main thing is that my legs don't fall off tomorrow.



The Northern Urals

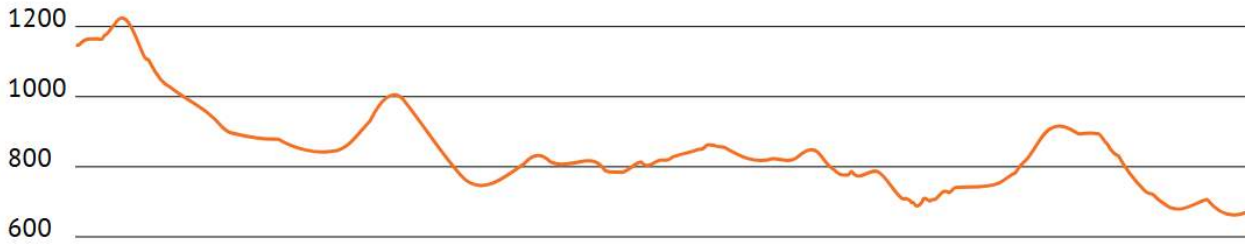
Mount Shchegolikhinsky *Bolshaya Sosva River*

Pechoro-Ilychsky Nature Reserve
Pravaya Sosva River
Poyasovyy Kamen Range
Manskaya Volosnitsa River
Komi Republic
Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug
Mount Yanyghachechakhl
Tumpya River
Mount Shchebyonka
Sverdlovsk Oblast
Akhtyl River
Tumpya River
Ivdelsky Landscape Sanctuary
Mount Mottovchakhl
Sulpa River
Mount Otorten
Lake Luntkhusaptur

Day 66

Mount Otorten (1234) – Europe-Asia Mountain module

27 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 1976 km



July 5, 2021

Yesterday didn't go without a trace. Missed the dawn, only by a few minutes, but the fact itself is notable. Probably overdoing the exertion yesterday. However, by and large the dawn was not much different from the sunset, it felt like I closed my eyes for a moment, and when I opened them, the sun ran backwards and came out a little away from where it had set. And still the same icy wind. Despite everything, put on what I had on and went to take off. Wished good morning to the stone goblins guarding the mountain and the gate to the other world, took a picture of the stone dragon ready to devour the young sun. By the way, this is approximately how the aboriginal peoples, who have inhabited these places since ancient times, treated this natural monument.



Otorten's quirky security guards

Then I did another important thing. A long time ago I made a wish that I would hide another treasure – a silver token “Northern Urals” – in the place where I would see Manpupunyur for the first time. And so the time has come. I hid the treasure in a small outcrop of bedrock near the gate. If you look at the photo, this place is in the right part of the frame. Just below the illuminated part there is a crack covered with four flat elongated stones. The second one on the right is removable, behind it the treasure is hidden. And I really hope that the one who finds it, puts the stone back in place, restores everything as it was before him.



Otorten Gate at dawn

After doing my morning duty, slept for a couple more hours and leisurely set off. The descent from the mountain and the passage to the so-called place of Rubble, to the next mountain modules went smoothly. It was hoped to find a stationary solar panel in the module, but the modules were occupied. The commercial tourist group, despite the late time – 10:20 – was just waking up and was in no hurry. I was admittedly surprised at the leisurely pace of the hike. After saying hello, I went to the next modules, located 16 km further down the road, without giving up hope of recharging.

Unmet expectations is probably one of the major drawbacks of mountain modules. Yesterday I walked record kilometers intending to spend the night in a module and ended up in a busy one, same picture this morning. I think a lot of groups build their route with plans to use a module in mind, perhaps even sometimes borrowing from security and going just to them, but given the popularity of the trail many of them end up at the walls of an occupied lodge. I'll never forget the storm on the Vologda Fringe in July 2019. Heavy downpour, winds raged for three days, and all those days groups of hikers stretched in and out to the modules. We ran out of seating on the second day, and they kept coming and coming. If there had been no modules, they would have simply gone down to the forest area and, quite effectively sheltered there, waited out the bad weather.

The Shchebenki tract itself is also interesting for our Ural history. It is a huge kurum heap in the middle of a fairly flat tundra ridge. When looking at them an unprepared or just too impressionable person often gets an analogy with the remnants of some unknown industrial activity in his head, because they are very similar to rock dumps near mines and quarries. Hence numerous pseudo-scientific theories about ancient civilizations and similar nonsense. But an attentive observer, at least somewhat familiar with geology, when considering them will notice on the tops of the “dumps” outcrops of bedrock. To put it simply, the remains of rocks, the gradual destruction of which formed this kurum peak. Of course, on the tops of dumps created by mythical ancient civilizations, as well as in modern man-made ones, no rocks can be found. But human imagination multiplied by stupidity knows no barriers.



Mount Shchebenka



Road along the ridge, mountain modules "Europe – Asia"

After lunch, yesterday caught up with me and I realized that I had borrowed too much strength and health. My knees ached, and in general I felt bad. Fortunately, the mountain module at the place called "Europe – Asia" was already visible. I went

down to it and was happy to find that it was free. Nearby there was another one, a new one, but it was closed, a note was stuck on the door glass asking not to break the door.

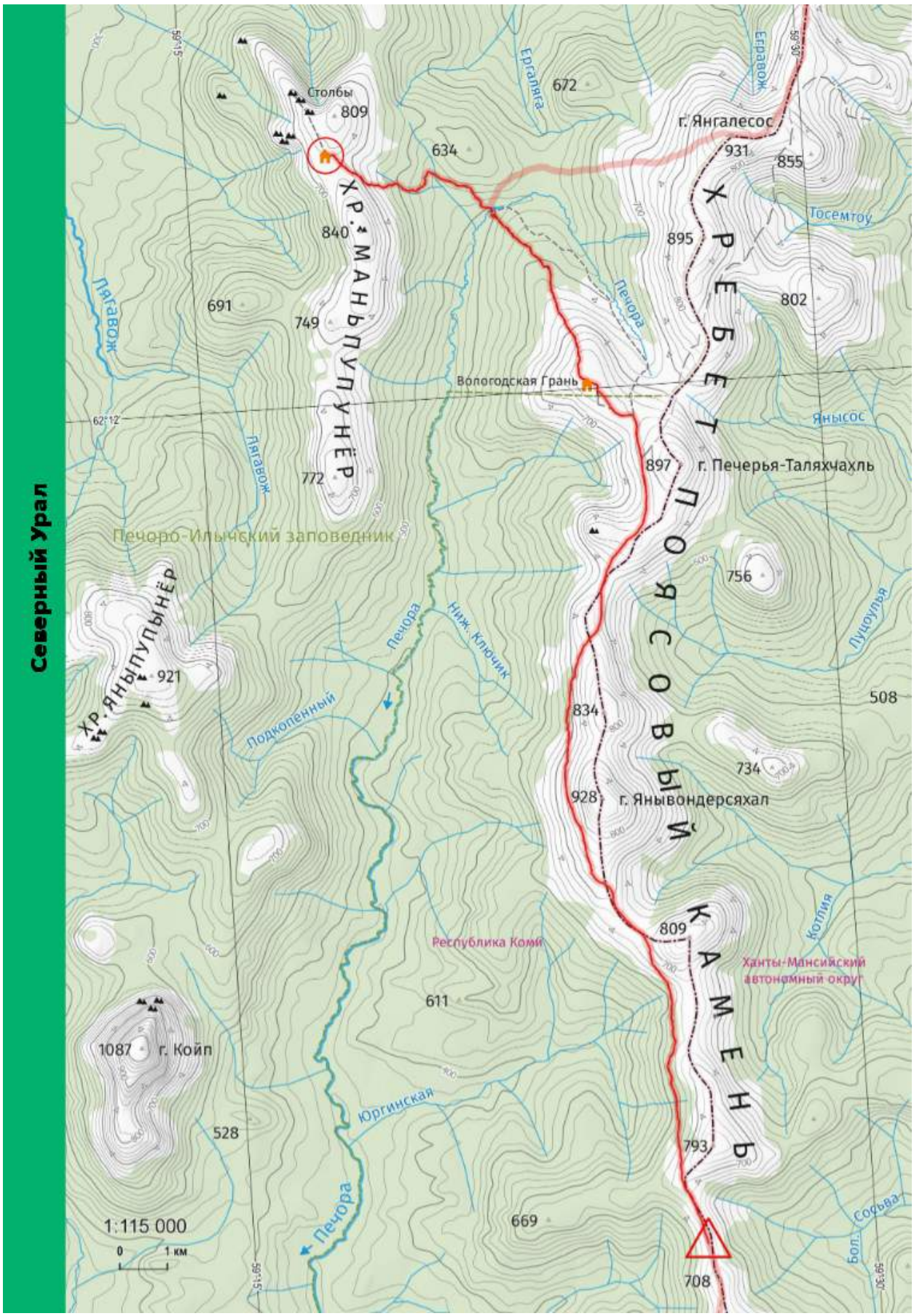
I couldn't rest at once, as I had been walking on the top all day, water supplies were running low, so I had to go in search of it. The arrow near the camp pointed westward and down toward the forest. We had to descend about five to sixty hundred meters, losing the path and then finding it again. In the end, having wandered a bit in the belt of bushes, I found numerous outlets of the brook. I refueled and went up for a well-deserved rest.

Toward evening, a group of hikers who had met in the morning reached me. While the leader was deciding what to do and where to be, a couple with a child began to settle in the module. Frankly speaking, it was pitiful to look at their exhausted 17-kilometer crossing faces, heavy mountain boots and big backpacks. We exchanged a few words and they complained that they had been carrying raw potatoes for several days and then threw them away, as there was nothing to boil them in anyway. When the tourists had settled down, the leader came in and announced that he had decided to go further and spend the night in the forest below.

He said that the module was occupied by unknown people and the water was far away. So I was left alone again that evening. On the one hand, it was a little sad, I wanted to exchange a few words with someone, but on the other hand – my health was not the best, so I tried to take advantage of the comfort. Lie down and rest. I curtained the windows with whatever I could to dim the bright light filling the module, and tried to sleep. The northern nights were short and bright. No rest from the light, it's truly exhausting. I think for the northern territories we should invent a light-tight tent, maybe black in color. So you can sleep in peace.



In the evening on the doorstep of the mountain module



The Northern Urals

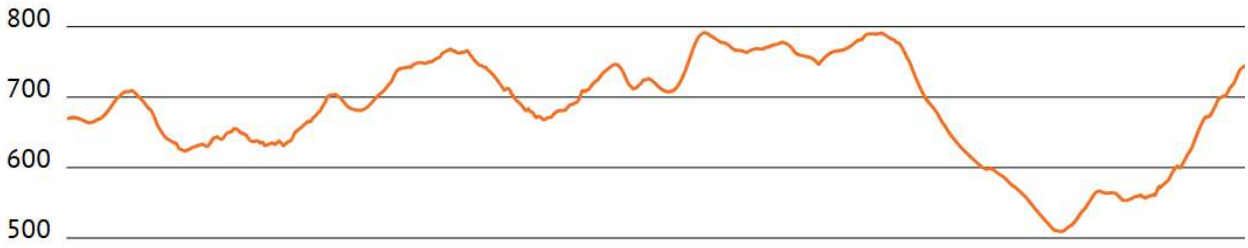
Pillars *Yergalyaga River*

Yegravozh River
Mount Yangalesos
Tosemtu River
Lyagavozh River
Manpupuner Range
Pechora River
Poyasovoy Kamen Range
Vologodskaya Gran
Yanysos River
Mount Pecherya-Talyakhchakhl
Pechoro-Ilychsky Nature Reserve
Yanypupyner Range
Pechora River
Nizhny Klyuchik River
Lutsoulya River
Podkopenny River
Mount Yanyvondersyakhal
Komi Republic
Kotlya River
Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug
Mount Koyl
Yurginskaya River
Bolshaya Sosva River

Day 67

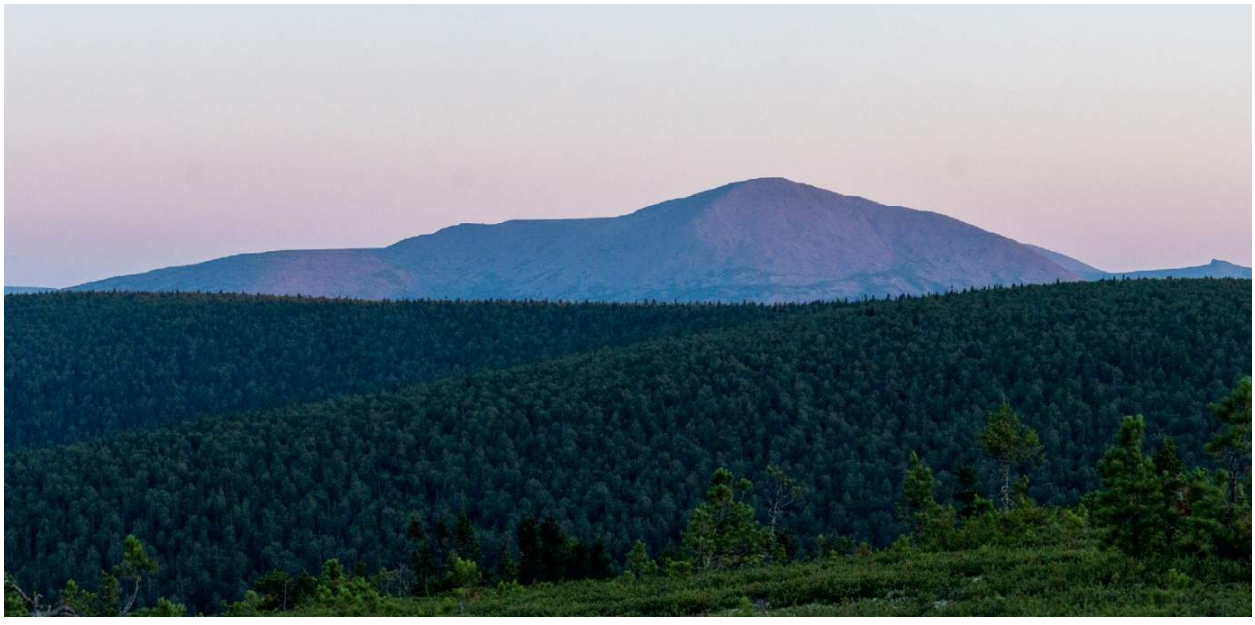
Mountain module "Europe – Asia" – Vologda Fringe – Manpupunyor

31 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2007 km



July 6, 2021

The weather continues to stand, dawns look like sunsets, the sky is blue overhead, and I am walking briskly along these gentle tundra boring ridges. Only the beautiful Koyp, from Mansi – "drum", stands out in the west with outstanding and charismatic forms of relief. The road is rolled, and in the depressions rolled into mud and ruts, winds from peak to peak. It would be wonderful if the protection zone of the Pechoro-Ilychsky Reserve, which I am approaching, would be extended on it, and movement by cars would become impossible. I know, there are such plans, I hope they will be realized.



Coyp Mountain at dawn

In the mornings, the tundra and summer forest are full of bird life. Every now and then, alarmed mother grouse scatter from underfoot, running down on the wing, pretending to be wounded. And their big chicks are trying to fly away, so far they

manage to do it for two or three meters, but it is a clear progress compared to what it was in the beginning of June. I remember them still very small, as often scattered and flashed under my feet tiny gray lumps at the beginning of the way. How afraid I was to step on them and crush them inadvertently. And now they are almost full-fledged birds. A little more time will pass, and they will fly away, and the tundra nurseries will be empty until the next spring.



An anxious mom

After 3 km, having descended into the forest, I met yesterday's group. How sincerely sorry for them! To deprive people of such a view, sunrise and sunset for the illusory convenience of water proximity. I would like to ask, why did you come to the mountains, friends: to drink water or to admire the view? However, these are thoughts to myself, and having wished good morning, I go leisurely to the poles. My main goal today is to overcome these three dozen kilometers without breaking a sweat, to make sure that yesterday's pain in my knees does not return.

And so it turns out: it was easy enough to walk 20 km to the Vologda Fringe – a small patch of civilization and relative comfort in the middle of taiga and mountains. The Vologda Edge is the main entrance to the mountainous part of the Pechora-Ilychsky Reserve, and it is here that the overwhelming number of tourist groups who want to get to the poles come. Here they spend the night, and then under the supervision of a reserve employee they enter the territory, cross the Pechora River valley and climb up to the neighboring ridge, to the pillars, passing 10 km. On this harsh, open to all winds and weather, located right in the middle of kurum placers, there are several mountain modules, one is occupied by inspectors and guides, the rest are given for accommodation of tourists. There is a summer kitchen,

solar panels, and as if there should even be satellite internet, which, as usual, does not work.

The unusual title “Vologda Fringe” is historical. It refers us to the ancient administrative division of Russia, previously the borders of three provinces – Vologda, Perm and Tobolsk – converged here. Between the European on their border was cut a sagebrush, which was so called – the Vologda border, and it can still be found on Soviet maps. Although, of course, its traces have long been erased on the ground.

Having said hello to the reserve inspectors, I hurried to go further, because the goal was to get to the poles faster. But first I had to visit the camp of volunteers, located between the ridges on the bank of the Pechora. They have my reservation, a plastic barrel delivered by helicopter to the ridge. Inside are things, food, gas, maps, and a new pair of shoes. The cozy camp was located on the left bank of the river, tents were set up on a clearing between trees, near the river was the central part of the camp, a stationary shelter with a hearth and a large table. As I understand it, this is where the evening life was raging. But at noon the camp was empty, only the kitchen duty officer was preparing dinner. I found the reservation, checked that everything was OK, and hurried further up.



Cordon Vologda Fringe

From the volunteer camp, a wooden plank began – exactly what these young people are doing here. At first, the path winded through the dense coastal grass, then led to a good wooden bridge over the Pechora, and on the left bank began to climb the ridge. And though it was not finished yet, the boards were nailed with big gaps, the speed of movement increased considerably. Quite soon I started to meet people working on the trail. It was obvious that it was hard for the guys and gals: the daytime stuffiness, hard physical labor – all this was reflected on their faces. Everyone was busy with their own work, someone was carrying boards, someone was sawing them, nailing, piling. The noise of the construction was heard throughout the forest.



Dmitry Kirillov at work

At the very edge of the path, on the front line, I met Dmitry Kirillov, next to him I saw a sledgehammer for driving iron piles. Short, thin, wiry, with a heavily tanned and overgrown stubble face, Dmitry was working on an equal footing with everyone else. This was his project and his brainchild. And all those mountain modules, which I met from Mount Otorten to the Vologda border, were also created and installed by him. I saw him two years ago here. The trail was much smaller then, but now it reaches almost 3 kilometers.

They recorded a short interview for the movie on the spot. There is no point in recounting it in full on the pages of the book, here are just a few points.

The idea of the improved trail was born six years ago, when Dmitry flew by helicopter over the Manpupunyur ridge and saw the entire tundra around the poles with ATV wheel tracks and human paths. Then he thought about how to save the miracle of the Ural nature and what he could do for that. First, the path leading from

the cordon of inspectors to the poles was paved. Then they started laying a three-kilometer wooden deck from the Pechora River to the beginning of the ascent to the ridge along the lowland and swampy part. Earlier, in wet season, tourists walked to the poles ankle-deep in mud, constantly trampled new paths, bypassing the mud, the route from the Vologda border could take up to 10-12 hours, now the time of movement has been reduced many times.

For the first three years the trail was created on the profits received by Kirillov's tour company – "Northern Urals", the last two years the state grant support was added, which allowed to speed up its creation considerably, and by 2022 Dmitry plans to complete the project. Another area of infrastructure creation was the development and installation of mountain modules along the most mass tourist route of this part of the Urals – from Dyatlov Pass to the Vologda Frontier.

I looked at this sweaty, dirty man and felt respect. How much effort, time and money he put into preserving nature and at the same time making these places more accessible and comfortable for people. And with regret he remembered how much dirt is poured on him there, on the "big earth". This is often the case with those who do something with their own hands for other people. Most people find it difficult to understand enthusiasm, and immediately look for self-interest. We agreed with Dmitry to meet tomorrow at the volunteer base. The flooring soon ran out, and I walked for some time on planks thrown in the mud – and this despite the dry year. I can imagine what happens here in June or after the rains. But now the trail began to go up more steeply, the forest became lower and thinner, and soon I was out in the open.

Below me lay the wide valley of the Pechora, overgrown with taiga, on the opposite side the buildings of the Vologda granite glistened faintly with glass, and ahead of me a lonely cottage, situated on the saddle of the ridge, – the shelter of the Reserve's staff, where they were waiting for me.

There were two residents on the cordon – Vladimir, an inspector of the protection department, and Svetlana, a guide. Vladimir's job is to catch stowaway

violators of the reserve regime, and Svetlana conducts excursions to the poles for those who are officially on the territory.

We were well received, drank tea with sweets and enjoyed watermelon. It turns out that Volodya Pestrikov and a group of helicopter tourists brought it here especially for me. What happiness! It was watermelon that I lacked for its completeness. In general, there are three main official ways to Manpupunyur, according to the three elements. The most difficult – on the ground, on foot, from the river Auspia on the eastern slope of the ridge to the Dyatlov Pass and further through the Vologda face to the poles, about 100 kilometers on foot. Part of this route was traveled by me in the last three days. Easier – by water, from the western slope along the Pechora River by motor boat, then exit to the ridge and walk to the poles 25 km. And the most expensive and fastest – by helicopter. An hour or two in the air, and you will have only 1 km to walk to the giants. It is not surprising that there is enough work on the plateau in high season.

Now for the first time in the last few days I had nowhere to hurry, the pillars had stood for millions of years and would wait for a few more hours, so I drank tea mug by mug and enjoyed socializing with nice people. The plan was simple: to go to the plateau an hour before sunset, the best time for shooting. In summer, the sun sets just between the remnants, which makes for a great picture for the evening guest. Ironically, most tourists visit this place in the afternoon, at the most unsightly time. It would be logical and profitable for the reserve to come up with an “evening abo nement” – allowing visits to the plateau at sunset. But unfortunately there is no such thing yet.



The Remnant Shaman

Together with Svetlana we went to the poles, as planned, in the evening. We walked along the snow-white paved path, and in a few minutes I saw Him. I love this moment here! From behind a bend in the tundra slope, the head of the first remnant – the one they call Shaman – began to grow. With each step it grew, towered and very soon appeared in all its majesty and beauty, followed by six more statues lined up in a row. I have been to these places several times, but still every time this meeting stirs my soul.

If you remember, on Munintumpa I was thinking about a brilliant natural masterpiece. And here, in my opinion, it is Manpupunyur that is such – and maybe the only – masterpiece in the Urals. It is beautiful and simple, nothing superfluous, nothing distracts your eye. The surrounding relief is as if specially selected to emphasize the vertical beauty of the rocks. There are no sharp rises near or on the horizon. Just the poles, the tundra, the sun setting between them, the wind – and a small weak man beside him. Genius in simplicity – this is where the phrase is best epitomized.

I needed to be alone, of course. I asked Svetlana to leave me, solemnly promising not to leave the trail, to which I received a favorable consent.

The sun was setting, the dark rocks flashed scarlet colors, I wandered between the rocks, enjoying the moment and the solitude. It's good with people, but it's better with the rocks and the sun. I worried a lot about whether I would be able to make a beautiful photo of this place, without it a book is not a book. And now it's done.

Today I have exchanged the second thousand kilometers on foot, which is also an achievement, and although the most difficult thing is still ahead, I didn't want to think about it at all, and it's not good for me. I just enjoyed the moment.

As the sun went below the horizon, I slowly and a little solemnly walked back to the house, where everyone was already asleep.



Manpupunyur Pillars at sunset

Day 68

Rest

0 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2007 km

July 7, 2021

With difficulty slipping through the dream, I slide my feet off the bed, fumble for my shoes, trying not to make any noise, put on whatever is warm, and leave the house. It was two o'clock in the morning, and dawn would break in an hour. And it would seem that everything I needed for the book, I took off, where and why else to go, after all, it is necessary to rest. However, the annoying thought “And if I miss something beautiful” itches somewhere inside and pushes forward. It's always hard to go like this in my sleep, on an engine that hasn't woken up and hasn't started working at full power. Slowly I reach the poles. There are clouds on the horizon, the sun is delayed, and when it comes out away from the ridge, it seems that there is nothing to shoot. Everything is the same as yesterday, only dimmer in the evening.

I am sitting under a pole, sheltered from the wind, and I think: did I come for nothing? I already have a parade photo; I can't shoot it better and more interesting today. What to do? Maybe try to shoot its opposite. That's an idea! I run to the opposite edge, go down the slope a bit, and there it is. I think I've come for a reason. Atypical view of Manpupunyur from the opposite side. There is another illustration for the book. The day was not wasted.

The second time I woke up when the sun was already shining in the window with a festive mood. First of all, it's a well-deserved day off, I don't have to go anywhere far. Secondly, it's my birthday. It's been 37 years since I was born. There is a certain exciting contradiction in these two joyful events – a day off and a birthday. The thing is, I have a tradition that I have honored for several years now. It is summarized as “die on your birthday and be born again.”

It consists in the fact that I don't celebrate it, as most people do, with friends and family, and in general I try to limit congratulations received on this day as much as possible, but I take my backpack and go to some difficult, beautiful and intensive

route, where I have to give my best, and sometimes even give more than I can in order to complete it. And the main thing is that there is no connection. I just give myself something bright and memorable for my birthday, which money can't buy, and escape from the increased human attention, pompous words and the need to say something in response.

So, if I recall, within the framework of this tradition was the following. 2014 – traverse of the Narya Ridge. Once in one of our conversations, Andrei Kuzmin, a great expert of the Urals, traveler and writer, said that it was impossible to traverse the Nary Mountains in one day. It sounded like a challenge and an idea of a good birthday present for himself. That's when this tradition was born. The Nary ridge is one of the wildest and most difficult ranges in the Southern Urals, especially in the middle of summer. Tall grass, bushwhacks, rocks, vast kurums, deep valleys and stunning views. I passed it that day in 18 hours and 25 minutes, the length of the route along the ridge was 52 km.

The year 2015 was a break in a tradition that had just begun. I was still working in the police at the time, and the SCO and BRICS summit was taking place in Ufa. However, this event did not go easy for me in terms of physical exertion. I had to spend about a week on my feet for 20 hours a day guarding a sewer manhole on Karl Marx Street.

2016 Krak Ridges Traverse. Beautiful and distinctive ridges in the central part of the High South Urals, ideal for walking. They were traversed in the following sequence: Kraka Ridge – Surtandy Ridge – Akbik Ridge – Malaya Kraka Ridge – Bolshaya Kraka Ridge – 53 km in 12 hours and 33 minutes.

2017 – the first stage of the Ural Bars. The year of birth of the tourist project. I set myself the task to climb all seven peaks included in its first stage as quickly as possible. I climbed in the following order: Mount Iremel, Mount Bolshoi Kumardak, Mount Rassypnaya, Mount Yalangas, Mount Kurtashtau, Mount Kushai, Mount Masim. The walking time from the start on Iremel to the descent from Mount Masim (without taking into account the time of traveling by car) was 34 hours and 20 minutes; the total time (walking + time of traveling between the peaks by car) from

the start on Iremel to the descent from Mount Masim was 45 hours and 41 minutes; walking kilometerage from the start on Iremel to the descent from Mount Masim (excluding the distance covered by car) – 156.3 km; automobile kilometerage (excluding walking) from Mount Iremel to Mount Masim (excluding the road from and to Ufa) – 373 km.

2018 is the second stage of the Ural Bars. Having started to pass the first stage at speed, it was logical to continue this with the second stage. For my birthday I gave myself a 141-kilometer route along the string of Malinovaya Mountain – Yalangas – Inzerskie Zubchatki – Maly Kumardak – Mount Bashtur – Mount Sinyak – Mount Iremel. The route was covered in 31 hours and 36 minutes.





View of Manpupunyur from the north

2019 Great South Ural Hike. I kept the pleasure of completing the project "Thousanders of the Southern Urals" for my birthday, of course. The previous year I systematically collected the missing peaks so that by July I would have a logical and

beautiful straight line through most of the High South Urals, which I could take as one route and close the project. I called this trek the Big South Ural trek, went out on July 6 and met my 35th anniversary near the Yamantau mountain. For six days 270 km of wild territories were passed along the following thread: Yusha ridge – Yamano-Shiktash kurum river – Mashak ridge – Bakhty ridge – Tyulyuk settlement – Yagodny ridge – Avalyak ridge – Urenga ridge – Lake Zyuratkul. In the route 30 ascents to the peaks above 1000 m were made. The project was completed.

2020 – route Zlatoust – Taganai – Karabash. I have already written about this "Ural story", where hell and paradise neighbor next to each other. That year I decided to combine it all in a single route, to show how closely opposites can coexist in the Urals. Starting from the central farmstead of the Taganai National Park, I passed through the Big Kurum River, the Two-Headed Sopka, the Rejection Ridge, the Kruglitsa, the weather station and came to the town of Karabash, finishing on the dead Poklonnaya Mountain. The route amounted to 70 kilometers in 20 hours.

And here it is 2021 and I have a day off. In the preceding days I was thinking in all seriousness whether I should break off today, walk for 24 hours and pass double the norm. Fortunately, I prudently decided that at 37 I should be smarter and not jeopardize the fate of the whole project because of a nice tradition. Especially since this whole summer season passes under the above-mentioned principle about dying and being born again.

Having had a divine breakfast of scrambled eggs and finished watermelon, I said goodbye to the hospitable hosts and went down to the volunteer camp. Today, in addition to resting, I had to go through my things, leave the unnecessary ones and send them home through Dmitry.



Another change of shoes

The meeting with the trail builders was repeated in reverse order. Kirillov was on the front line – pounding piles and laying decking, volunteers were bringing construction materials. Emptiness prevailed in the camp again, just what I

needed. I quietly went through things until lunchtime. Tatiana Sergeevna repaired my first sneakers.

My first sneakers, in which I started the route, were repaired by a bootmaker, she put pieces of leather on top of the torn places and sent them back. I put them on again with pleasure, they were very comfortable, probably the most comfortable ones I had. I decided to go in them, but to take the ones I had come here in just in case. Ahead of me was a difficult section of the road of 200 kilometers. One could say, Terra Incognita. From Manpupunyor to the Shchugor River. Places very rarely visited by tourists, covered mostly by forests. I found little information about them and, looking at these endless green expanses hidden by taiga on satellite images, felt some anxiety. This part of the journey would be the most taiga and wilderness I had ever traveled.

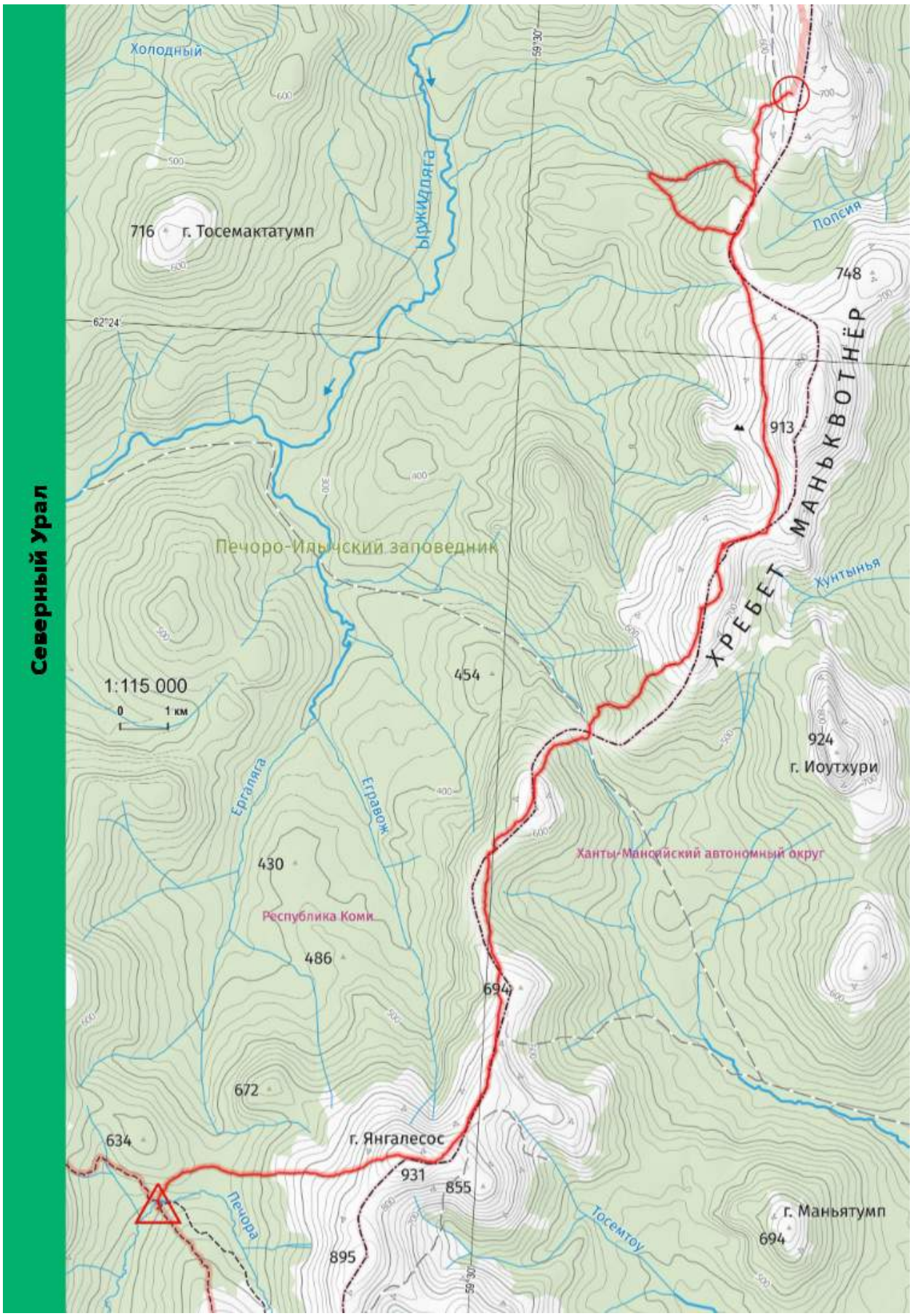
The news from the Subpolar Urals also caused anxiety and the necessity to make decisions already now. My sixteenth reservation with food and things to the camping site “Neroyka” was strongly delayed, there was a non-zero probability that it was lost or stuck somewhere on the “big land” waiting for a helicopter flight to the village Saranpaul. At this time of the year delivery of cargoes there was possible only by air, by helicopter, and it was two flights a week. Both options did not bode well, and a decision had to be made now. I had one reservation left, which had returned home from the village of Kuzino. I decided to ask Tatiana Sergeyevna to send it also to Saranpaul in case the first one was lost. Besides, since I was always ahead of schedule, I had a surplus of food. I had traveled the previous section three days faster than I had planned. I decided to take the remaining sublimates with me just in case. They don't take up much space in relation to the total volume, but if something goes completely wrong with the sixteenth trip, I will have some meat reserve, which is important.

In the end, with additional rations and a second pair of shoes, the backpack turned out to be heavy.

The rest of the day was spent in idleness, socializing with the inhabitants of the camp, in the evening I steamed in the camp bath. My left leg was aching again, be

damned: both Achilles and knee. These periodically occurring pains disturb rather not by their presence, but by their psychological impact. You're secretly waiting for the leg to hurt more, which doesn't add optimism, considering how much I still have to go through. On the other hand, the pains have accompanied me since the first days of my journey and are not getting stronger, which gives me a discreet hope. So, at the crossroads of these two thoughts, trying to take care of my legs, rubbing, kneading, smearing with anesthetic ointment at night, I walk along the Urals.

Already before going to bed came good news from the “big earth” – from Tatiana Sergeyevna. Today we have collected the necessary sum to send the wards of the charity educational fund “Markhamat” to the mountains. This morning, I took advantage of the occasion and asked to support the collection in honor of my birthday. Great news! At least one of the goals of the expedition has already been accomplished. It wasn't for nothing. Thanks to all who responded.



The Northern Urals

Kholodny River *Mount Tosemaktatump*

Ydzhidlyaga River

Leka Lopsiya

Pechoro-Ilychsky Nature Reserve

Manyankvotnyor Range

Khuntynya River

Yergalyaga River

Yegravozh River

Mount Ioutkhuri

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Komi Republic

Mount Yangalesos

Pechora River

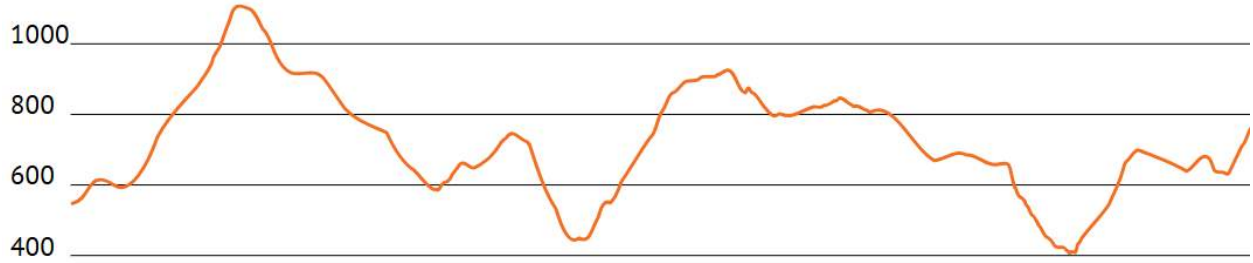
Tosemtu River

Mount Manyatump

Day 69

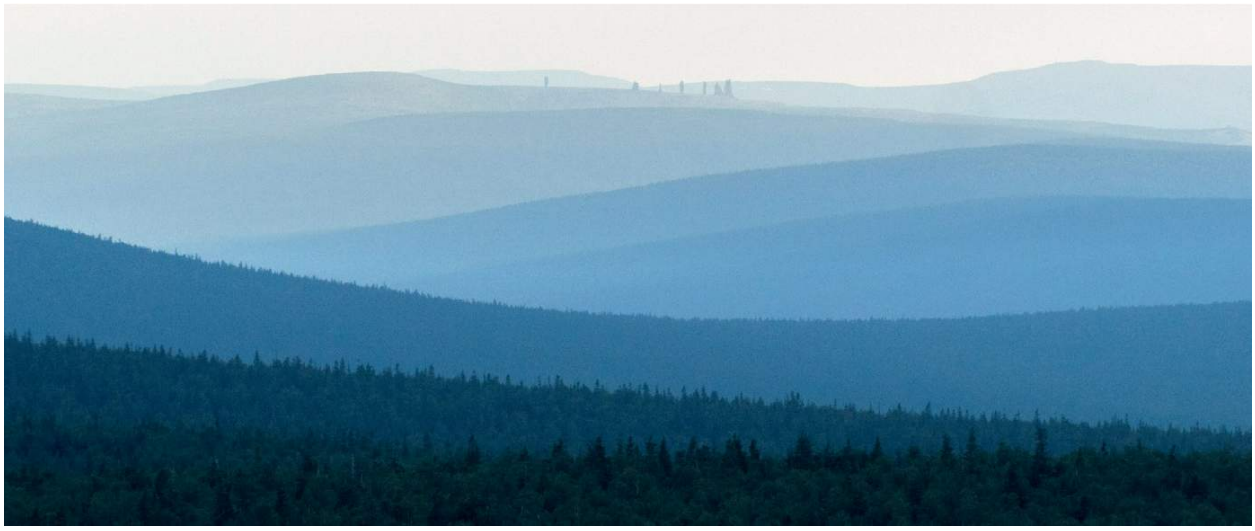
Manpupunyor – Yangalesos mountain (931) – Man'kvotnör ridge – Yanykvotnör ridge

46 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2053 km



July 8, 2021

I left the hospitable volunteer camp still sleeping at the seventh hour of the morning. I crossed the Pechora on a new wooden bridge, got off the trail and started to climb the Yangalesos mountain (931.8) through the bright forest filled with life and morning light.



One last look at Manpupunyur

After about 3 km the forest ended, and I entered the shrub zone, which everywhere surrounds open tundra areas in this part of the Urals. I got there very successfully – on a narrow strip of slope with a minimum number of willow thickets. To the right and left everything was densely overgrown with this whitish curse, and I was walking through dwarf birches not higher than my knee and could not be happy.

The summit of Mount Yangalesos is not remarkable for anything except its name. Flat, with outcrops of kurums and mosaic of tundras, I crossed it without delay

and turned to the north. Soon another good fortune – I clipped an old all-terrain geologic road, up in the tundras it was barely readable, but it's hard to overestimate its importance ahead below. Despite the fact that it was possible to walk equally efficiently in any direction both on and off the road, I tried not to lose this sometimes barely visible trail among mosses and rocks. As soon as I entered the zone of sparse woods and crooked forests, I really appreciated this clearing cut by geologists.

The three-kilometer forest passage up to the top of the mountain 645.4 followed the border of the reserve. I marked the view from this nameless peak separately. Pillars of Manpupunyur are lined up in a column in an unusual way for an observer. One can go here from the Vologda face in one day. For sunrise and sunset. Take a good telephoto lens and shoot an interesting shot.

At the very top I met many traces of geologists' work, ditches dug, abandoned and almost rusted shovels. And no less traces of bear presence. As soon as I entered the forest, I started to see snags on fir-trees and snacks. I tried to walk loudly, shouting, tapping sticks. The only problem was that there was a strong headwind blowing all day, driving back my sounds and smells.

Oh these new species! For four days my eyes were deprived of them, walking through places I'd already been. And at last, when I came to the Mankvotnir, I – like a hound dog, who, smelling the trail, loses peace – felt that beyond this rise there would be something new, something not yet seen, and joyfully ran forward. Faster and faster to rise, to look into the distance, to see new mountains.

But the ascent did not end, slowly and exhaustingly crept forward through tundras and bushes. It would have been time to have a rest, have lunch, but I kept going and going, because it is unthinkable to get up for a rest with a backward view. Only forward. Finally, having passed the summit of 804.6 from the east, the slope began to descend, and I saw what I missed so much. All the same as all the previous few days, gentle kurum mountains, as if islands in the boundless taiga, but new! In front of me lay the second half of the Mankvotnir ridge, separated by a wide, willow-filled depression. Behind it was the Yanykvotnir ridge, and another forest crossing led to it. To the left and a little to the back was the peak Ioutkhuri (923,6). It was

probably the most interesting of all nearby peaks – sharp as a knife, as far as this epithet is applicable to kurum mountains.

After lunch I walked again through tundra and bushy expanses to the north. After a few kilometers I turned back towards Ioutkhuri and was surprised to notice that from this angle it looks like a twin to Koip. Two charismatic peaks for many kilometers around.

Coming to the forest passage to the next ridge, in the west in the distant blue haze I noticed a peak, the crest of which was richly decorated with stone remnants. A check with the map – and yes, it was Torreporreiz! Alluring and inaccessible! Planning my route, I wanted to pass through it, but was firmly refused by the reserve. On the one hand, it's not a big deal, judging by the few photos from the mountain, its stone remnants do not represent something out of the ordinary, there are many of them scattered around the surrounding peaks. However, on the other hand, there is a challenge that Nikolai Rundquist threw to all Ural people in his book “100 Days in the Urals”, writing the following: “...whoever has not been to Torreporreise has not seen the Urals!”. This is certainly a challenge, and of course I accept it. But not this time.

Having descended into the forest area, I again found myself on the road between the ridges. Or rather not a road, but a grassy, but quite smooth enough to walk on. Again, I began to see bear tracks – the same as on the last forest crossing. This time there were many piles of droppings and holes of excavated roots. The grass around me was crumpled and trampled up and down. The fresh headwind was still blowing, bending the trees, rustling the leaves, and I walked on and felt that the leaper was somewhere close by.



Mount Iouthouri, view from the north

At some point the clearing widened into a linearly extended clearing in the direction of travel, and at the edge of the widening stood a low but spreading birch tree. It blocked my view to the left, I passed it and at full speed, seven to ten meters away, met a bear's ass swarming in the grass. It was a dangerous situation, we had gotten very close to each other without wanting to. I stood up straight. Careful step back, another step. Before the bear noticed me, it is necessary to divorce the dangerous proximity. At this time smoothly began to extract the anti-bear gas cylinder from the pocket on my belt. The third step – a treacherous crunch of a branch under my foot, the bear turns around and with extraordinary ease, which you would not expect from this heavy animal, stands on its hind legs. How big he is when he stands human-like! I raise my hands with sticks and shout!

The bear, having made a somersault, turns around, and in a second nothing but my frantically beating heart reminds me of this meeting. The second in the route, and so close. I have long ago noticed that you can make as much noise as you want, shout, indicate your presence, but for some reasons unknown to us the bear may not care about all this.

I regret one thing – I could not take photos.

The adventure did not end here. Walking a couple more kilometers, I came to a swampy pass point between the ridges. The source of the Lopsiya River ran to the

east from it, and an unnamed tributary of the Ydzhidlyaga River ran to the west. Yesterday in the camp of volunteers Dmitry Kirillov shared information during the evening conversation. They flew several years ago by helicopter over this place and saw several beautiful high waterfalls on the unnamed tributary. He said they were about a kilometer away. The idea to walk and shoot something not yet filmed looked very tempting, and, despite the already considerable fatigue, I turned off the route and began to descend the steep slope. When I came to the brook, I walked along it for the promised kilometer, I didn't find any waterfalls, continued down, went 2 km, the valley widened and leveled out, the movement became even more difficult because of the thick lush grass hiding stones, logs and scour holes. The third kilometer I walked, falling down every now and then, overcome by flies and mosquitoes, and cursed myself and Dmitry in addition for anything in the world. It was high time to admit to myself that there were no waterfalls here, the relief of the valley was absolutely not the one where they could appear. But how difficult it is to admit one's mistake!

And only when the fourth kilometer of descent started, I decided that it was enough. I went up sharply to the side of the valley and came back to the road in a kilometer from the beginning of the descent. Angry as a dog, having gained more than +15% extra kilometers to the route of the day, I went further. Once again I noticed that I was literally physically disgusted to walk where I had already walked. The feeling of useless repetitive work makes me sick.

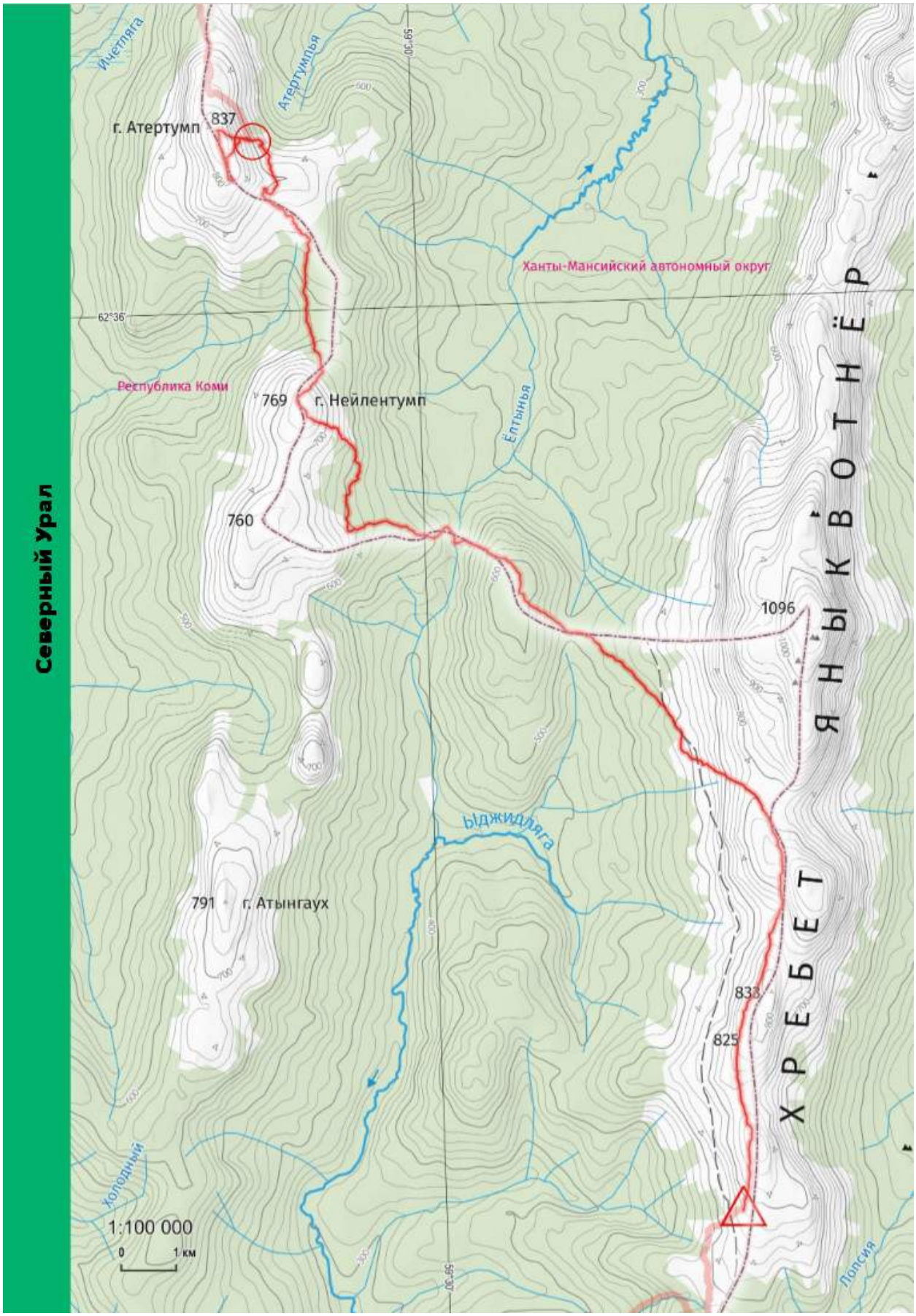
The exit to the Yanykvotnir ridge took the last of my strength, the clearing disappeared into thick willow thickets. I waded through them with the fierceness of a man who wants to finish this long hard day as soon as possible, put up the tent and take a horizontal position. On top of that, the clouds began to thicken. Rain patches appeared on the horizon, and somewhere else far away the first thunder rumbled. Proceeding from the great probability of getting into a thunderstorm, I decided not to go to the ridge, but to stand lower, as soon as I would get out of the bush zone and find a more or less suitable site for the tent. I found such a tundra spot among already low bushes and stone scatterings.



Inaccessible Torreporreiz

I spent the rest of the evening relaxing. I admired the sunset profile of Torreporreuse, which had become even closer. In the south I could see all my way and the distant, barely visible in the haze, pillars of Manpupunyur. If the terrain had been more vertical, they would surely have been lost, but on these endless smooth frozen mountain waves they stood out like lighthouses in the middle of a stormy sea. In the evening light under variable cloud cover, the mountains numbered as many as nine planes separating me and the remnants. They differed from each other by some minimal shades, but created great depth and beauty in the overall picture.

The sun sat in the cumulus clouds, a thunderstorm with rain ran away further, a rainbow appeared in the sky. And I was lying in the tent and “smoking the map”, where these waterfalls were. I didn't doubt that Kirillov had seen them, I doubted only that he had shown me the place correctly. Both south and north of the tributary where I went, there are two more of them. It is not difficult to confuse. I hope I can go back and find them someday.



The Northern Urals

Ichetlyaga River *Atertumpya River*

Mount Atertump

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Komi Republic

Mount Neylentump

Yoltynya River

Yanykvotnyor Range

Ydzhidlyaga River

Mount Atyngaukh

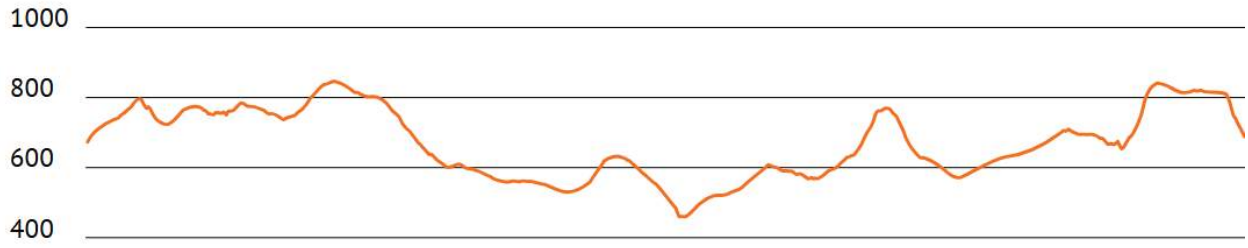
Kholodny River

Lopsiya River

Day 70

Janykvotnor Ridge – Mount Neulentump (769) – Mount Atertump (837)

33 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2086 km



July 9, 2021

I had a long sleep today, trying to recover after yesterday's march of almost 50 km. I went out on the route at 7:20, such late outings, in addition to a good rest, have the opposite, dark side, or rather, stuffy. Immediately from the tent I got under the rays of the mercilessly scorching high sun. There were no clouds, so it became clear: the day promised to be exhausting.



View of the Janykvotnor ridge

I climbed up the ridge, wading through thickets of dwarf birch. Although it was not higher than my knee, it caused a lot of inconvenience, covering the surface with a solid carpet, covering rocks and unevenness, clinging to my legs. And if to walk on it 100 meters is not so difficult, then when the count goes to kilometers, it is quite a worthy opponent. In such large volumes it appeared on my way

approximately from the Dyatlov Pass. And now it will accompany me to the very end of the route.



Willow thickets

Very soon, when I climbed up the slope where I had spent the night, a view of the main massif of the Janykvotnor ridge opened up before me. The view was quite impressive: six kurum peaks piled one above the other. I wish I could be here at sunrise and sunset, and not in this whitish haze that eats everything. But yesterday there was neither energy nor opportunity. If it hadn't been for the ghostly waterfalls and the thunderstorm, I could have spent the night with this wonderful view. But what's to regret now, things worked out the way they did.

After about 8 km of the way, having reached a small saddle on the ridge, I arranged a council of war with myself. What should I do? Should I go up to the main summit, marked on the maps as 1096.0, or should I go westward, slowly descend from the ridge towards Mount Neulentump?

On the one hand, it seemed right to climb the highest point of the ridge, but on the other hand, the idea of saving my strength didn't seem like such a bad thing. I asked myself what I would get in return if I went up the mountain. It would be one more peak in a list of many dozens, one could say, just a check mark. And I would also definitely lose a lot of time and energy. And what won't I gain? The world is

flooded with bright daylight mixed with haze. I won't get any beautiful and interesting shot or video fragment, that's for sure. Moreover, I have to go to the west anyway; right after the highest point the ridge will start to turn to the east, turn into the Pasnor ridge and then completely disappear into the endless taiga. For me it is much more effective to pass this part through a chain of small open peaks with taiga passages between them. As a result, I took the left and started descending. And almost immediately I got into a living hell.

I remember when I was preparing for the route, I looked anxiously at the vast dark green expanses separating the ridges. My imagination pictured impassable taiga thickets, but it turned out that there was something else to be afraid of. Not dark green, but light green. Willow, hiding you from the head, grabbing everything protruding and holding tightly, stagnant rotten water under it, tall grass, all trampled by bears, numerous ditches, stones hiding in the thickets. This is exactly how the North Urals hell looks like. And as a cherry on the cake – wasps' nests, periodically encountered on the way, hanging right on thin trunks and branches. And if I was morally prepared for dwarf trees, but this was the first time I'd ever seen wasps in this form.

After a couple of endless kilometers I came to the yesterday's road, which did not add anything to the speed of movement, except only the hope that even lower, when the belt of bushes gave way to the forest, it would help me. And it happened: as soon as I entered under the shade of taiga, the grass became low and sparser, and the road began to read much better. The speed increased. Through a small forested peak, through two swampy lowlands I came to the slope of Neilentump mountain (769,5), where the whole morning hell was repeated again, only now in reverse order, while moving upwards. And to the hornets' nests were added a squadron of heavy bombers in the form of gadflies. It's been a real curse for many days now, but today especially, as the previous days I had been walking along the tops, where the wind reduced their activity.



A wasp's nest in the thicket.

As soon as I entered the thicket, they surrounded me in a dense cloud. Their negative impact can be divided into two areas. First, they bite. They prefer to sit on the back in the area of shoulder blades and shoulders. They bite painfully, and it is not always possible to reach them from the first attempt, especially when you already have to balance in willow thickets, holding on to branches. Second, the psychological impact. Perhaps even more severe than the bites themselves. The incessant buzzing around me, the shadows flickering in the background, the constant mental pressure of waiting to be bitten – and when it goes on for hours, it's exhausting. Sometimes in a rage I start waving my arms. I slap myself on their favorite spots, not knowing whether there is someone there or not, just as a preventative measure. These bloodsuckers will make anyone nervous.

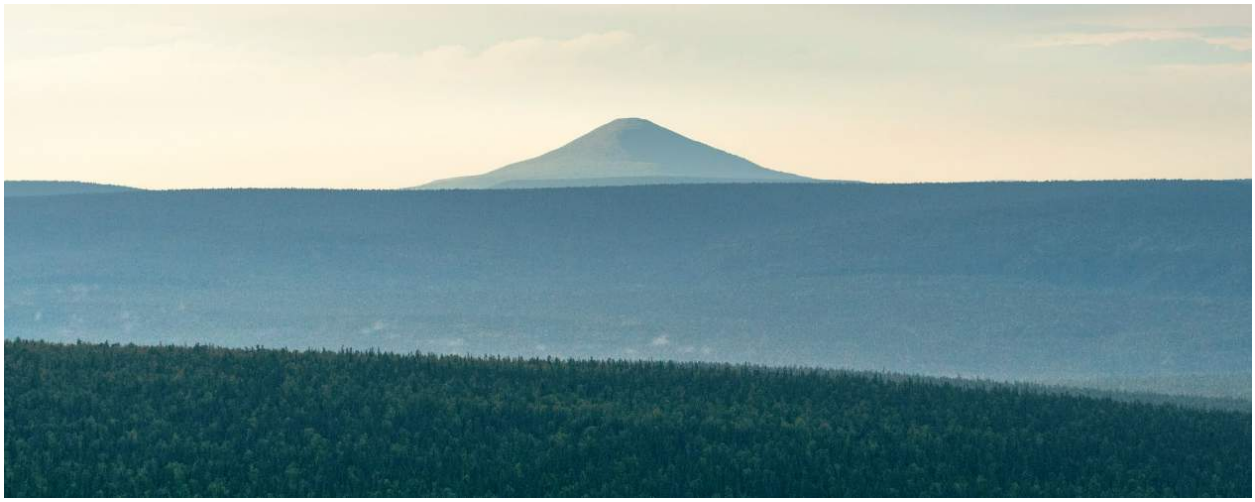
After climbing under the mountain, I finally got out on the slope and climbed up the small unpleasant kurum to the top. Oh what a bliss, the firm strong wind beats in the chest, refreshes, shoots down the flying squadron and gives moments of calmness. At the top, at the place of the summit tour, another gaudy, assembled from some building materials monument-cenotaph to a dead tourist – a lover of off-road travel. The plaque reads: “Kasikhin Pavel Alexandrovich, 19.04.1980 – 29.03.2017.

To the memory of a friend who developed the route and in 2016 passed on off-road vehicles along the Ural Ridge from the village of Pripolyarny to the town of Ivdel, is dedicated...".

The monument, as it often happens, is not designed for the harsh northern mountain conditions, the entire upper part with the "Europe/Asia" sign is broken, somehow pitifully tinkling, hanging from the wires. A sad monument, turned to garbage on a lonely taiga peak in the middle of deserted expanses. I wouldn't want to be in this guy's shoes with this kind of immortalization.

At the top I rest, drink tea and look at the surroundings. In the east, where I came from, the wall of Janykvotnor, passing into Pasnor, is darkening. A little to the north is an interesting lonely peak, very similar in shape to the cone of a volcano. Having studied the map I came to the conclusion that it is Neroyka (798,4). The name is identical to the Oikachakhl I met in Vishersky Reserve. Only the designation of the geographical term – mountain ("ner") – is in front. And the name "oyka" – old man – is in the second part of the word. If everything well, there are other "old men" – oykas – waiting for us.

Straight to the north, the closest peak to me is Atertump (836.9), where I decide to spend the night. To the west and much farther away is Sotchemjoliz. One of the highest peaks in the area. It would be possible to pass through it and get to the Shchukayoliz ridge, but it is the territory of the reserve. I'll have to stick to its edge.



Remarkable cone-shaped peak on the horizon, presumably Neroyka (798.4)

Looking closely at the top of Atertump, I notice a construction wagon, a girder. Immediately an idea is born: maybe I should spend the night in it? Especially since I have more work to do up there. To try to find greetings from my predecessors. The thing is that here, on Neilentump, my route for a short time again starts to coincide with the way Rundqvist's expedition was going, I am just reading about these places described by my predecessor, and this is what he writes: “Atertump has two peaks. The first one is a small but large scree cone. Sanya found a stick in the tour and left an expedition badge. The second one, the northern one, is a complete antipode, a huge grassy hill...”. Further there is a description of the adventures of the team on the mountain, but it is not important now. The eye clings to the mention of an “expedition badge” hidden at the top of the mountain. Now that would be incredibly cool to find it after almost 30 years. That would be very iconic. Yes, a lot of time has passed, but it is not for nothing that the same book says that this is one of the wildest, hard-to-reach and rarely visited places in the Urals. It is so, and the probability that somewhere there, in the tour, lies a relic is high. I should definitely go up there and look for it.

Descending again, I take another dose of misery on the three-kilometer trek to Atertump. This is the third visit to the zone between forest and tundra today, and each time a new attack is added to it, like in some game where the further you go, the higher the difficulty level. This time, entering the zone of low tundra and bushes, I find a complete lack of water. There is no sense to go up without water, and there is no wish to go down and go through bushes again. Stubbornly, from the last efforts I traverse the slope in hope to find water, numerous kurums mockingly murmur streams, but there are no exits to the surface. I try to break the stones and reach the water – in vain.

I can see that geologists have worked very actively here, huge ditches cross my path, there is water in them, but it is standing and has some kind of absolutely undrinkable appearance. So I go on and on. On top of all the misfortunes an evening thunderstorm is added, I see a wall of rain approaching in a wide front from the east and south, I hear thunder. Almost under the wall of rain I notice a small white spot on

the kurum, about a hundred and fifty meters up, it is a snowfield, it is water. So, it is possible to make a camp. Almost in the same place from where I saw the snofield, I found a small sloping, but at least without protruding stones, and put up the tent. Thunder rumbles, the wind bends bushes around me, and I lie in the tent and dream of drinking water. I am waiting for the first, most powerful storm to pass.

The thunderstorm soon moves on, leaving a fine, nasty rain, I take plastic bottles and go to the snowfield. How ugly it is. Almost transparent, the last few centimeters of snow on black rocks. There is hardly any water, I fill the bottles with snow, I will have to melt it. I cook dinner in the tent from the muddy liquid made from the snow. There is nothing to do, at least I should boil it longer.

Toward nine in the evening, the clouds that had engulfed the world around me parted a little. In the soft sunset light, the falsely volcanic cone of Neroyka looks magnificent. The top of my mountain is still in the clouds, but I decide to take a risk and climb up – to look for treasure. Not to leave this question for tomorrow. There's a non-zero chance that at sunset the mountains might open up.

Slowly, from the last strength I climb up the kurum slope, into the dense gloomy cloud and get into a completely different, some surreal world. I wander along the lifeless flat surface of the peak, now and then meeting different artifacts of geologists' work. Some dug depressions filled with water, abandoned tools, pipes. All this is very reminiscent of the highest point of the Southern Urals, Yamantau Mountain (1641), on its flat tundra top there is also a lot of scattered debris from the once active drilling rig.

I get out on the road, which brings me to the culmination of this chaos – the gully. Out of the thick cloud it appears unexpectedly close, at first barely distinguishable, but with each step more and more distinctly towering dark, some terrible and completely inappropriate to the place hulk. A big, tall, black, covered with planks and tore to shreds tol. The perfect setting for the denouement of some horror movie, a real villain's dwelling. I am a big boy and do not believe in scary fairy tales, but when I opened the door tucked under the roll of tol, I entered the

darkness of the dwelling not without some shudders. In the light of the lantern, breaking the twilight, there was an unusual mess.

On one side, many things were chaotically scattered, on the other, some items spoke of a hurried departure and possible plans to return. There was decayed food on the table, the bunks were made up with beds, and clothes hung on hangers. I wonder what made the workers leave everything and abandon this dwelling?

The floor in the corner of the dwelling had a big hole in it; apparently some animal, either a wolverine or a bear, had been here before me. On the table I found a Playboy magazine from 2008. I pondered for a while whether to take it with me; it was weighty and some of the pages were sticking together. I decided to limit myself to a couple of pages, an interesting read on the road is never a bad thing.

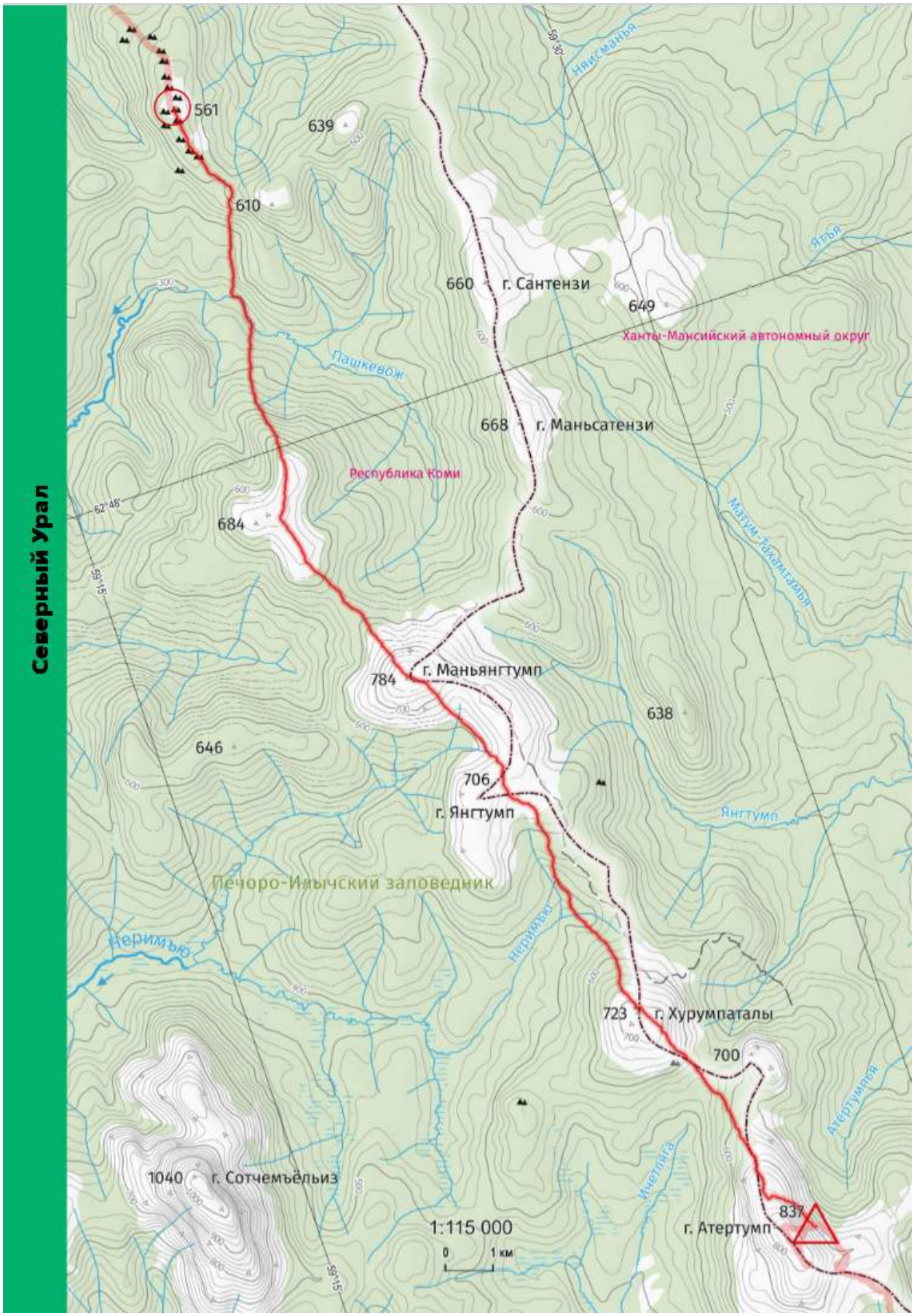


A dwelling at the top of Mount Athertump

Leaving the abandoned dwelling, I went further to the summit. It was just as Rundqvist had described it: a kurum cone, as if piled on top of the tundra (but we know that it was not true), appeared out of the cloud just like the dwelling, suddenly and in full force. Climbing up, found a folded tour. I searched for the artifact for about 30 minutes in the bitter cold wind, but fortune did not smile on me. Either the badge had been found by someone else, or had fallen so deep I couldn't reach it. The gaps between the stones on which the tour was stacked went deep down into the

kurum. Or maybe the summit tour was somewhere else 30 years ago. It's a pity, but at least I tried, and my conscience is clear.

So, frustrated, not having found the badge, not having spent the sunset, but barely dragging my feet, I returned to the tent and forgot myself with a well-deserved sleep. In the night a thunderstorm came again and hit the mountain somewhere near me. However, it is already so habitual that I am much more relaxed about thunderstorms and flashes than at the beginning of the thunderstorm season.



The Northern Urals

Nyiasmanya River *Mount Santenzi*

Pashkevozh River

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Mount Mansantenzi

Komi Republic

Mount Manyangtump

Mount Yangtump

Yangtump River

Pechoro-Ilychsky Nature Reserve

Nerimyu River

Mount Khurumpataly

Mount Sotchemyoliz

Ichetlyaga River

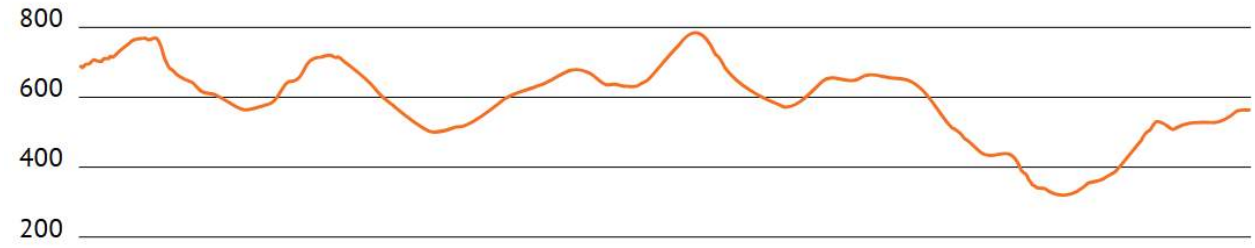
Atertumpya River

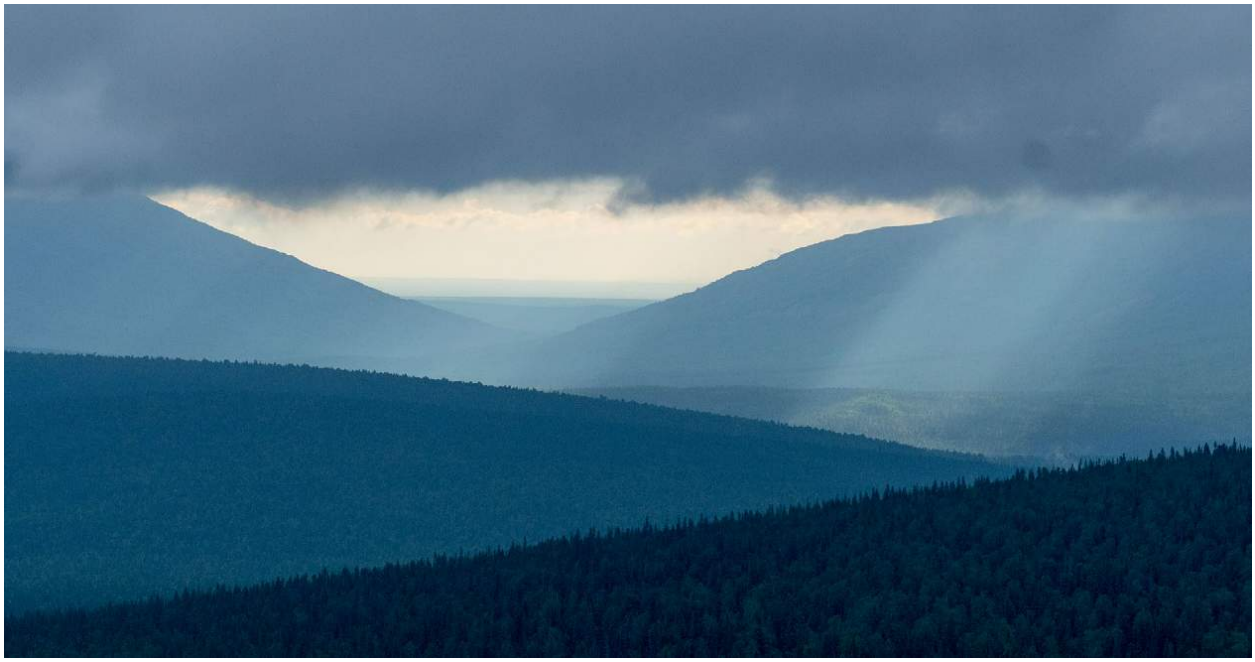
Mount Atertump

Day 71

Mount Athertump (837) – Mount Khurumpataly (723) – Mount Manyangtump (784) – summit 561.2

32 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2118 km





Good weather in Asia

July 10, 2021

I've noticed that lately I've been sleeping more and going out later on the route. I think this is caused by general fatigue accumulating in the body. Today I lay in the tent until an unthinkable eight o'clock in the morning. Read a book, looked at the eastern horizon. Here, on the mountain, above me low clouds covered the top, and there, in the east, in the gaps between the ridges, the world was flooded with golden morning light. It was a clear day in Siberia.

On the slope of Atertump pretty quickly came to an old geologic road leading in my direction, walked along it. The road is a big word for it, but it was the trail of an

all-terrain vehicle that left shallow but readable prints on the shallow kurum. It was constantly branching, going off to the sides, rounding and returning to its general line, it was obvious how well the rover had ridden here. I wonder what geologists were looking for here. I remember that in his memoirs Rundquist wrote that there was a high level of radiation on the mountain. Wasn't it the source of the radiation they were trying to find here?

In general, of course, these trails, on which I walked both today and yesterday, are far from ambiguous. I cannot help but admit that they make my way much easier, but, on the other hand, I feel like I am not in one of the wildest and seldom visited territories of the Urals, but somewhere on a construction site. The workers have long since left, but their footprints, abandoned garbage, fallen off tires from the wheels of the all-terrain vehicle ugly the landscape to this day. I was walking and thought what is more important for me: comfort or pristine. I decided it was the latter, at least now, in the morning. It is not certain that I would have answered this question as convincingly in the evening, dragging my feet and dreaming only of getting to the tent.

Today my route was mostly through the forest and summit-islands, towering above it with tundra-cum-crusted patches. The first of them was Mount Khurumpataly. Not without a shudder I started to descend to the saddle leading to it, but contrary to expectations I did not meet any willow bushes. I passed through the pleasant, open, wet from the night rain forest like a red-hot knife through butter and went up the mountain on comfortable kurums. Khurumpataly left a pleasant impression. Mossy tundras covering most of it, mixed with kurums and small, but beautiful rocks on the top in the form of a pile of huge blocks.

The next summits were Yangtump (706) and its younger sister, Manyangtump (784.5). The descent to the saddle and passage to the beginning of the mountain was easy through the same marvelous park forest, but on the mountain we had to work hard. About 500-meter-long belt of willow trees was not friendly at all. My speed dropped, the wind, tangled in the branches, reduced the pressure, I sweated a lot from the efforts, and all this inevitably attracted to me another attack – a cloud of midges

that flew to the feast. Groaning, I slowly made my way through the thicket, orienting myself on the tops of distant pointed spruces, chose the nearest ones and walked towards them.

This has been worsened by another problem: since yesterday afternoon I have been having problems with clean water. All I met on the way were either small snowfields or dead boggy puddles. It was from such water that I had to make lunch after climbing up to Yangtump. I took the tent canopy out of my backpack and without putting it up, climbed inside, as in one huge mosquito net, so I rested under the thin but exhausting hum of gnat clouds.

It may seem unexpected, but the problem of clean water here, in my opinion, is quite acute. And even when on my way I meet beautiful, tinkling streams flowing down the fabulous mossy stones from under the mountains, I do not forget for a second that most of them originate not from under the ground, after filtration, but from the upper bogs or standing puddles, on which I have been climbing recently. Deer, bear, birds – all their waste products are in this water. I try to boil the water or look for places where it is clearly coming out of the ground. Although I have to admit, it doesn't always work. Often I have to go for self-deception, taking advantage of the irrational sense of purity felt when looking at running water. Perhaps the fact that I didn't bring a lightweight drinking filter with me is one of the main omissions when preparing for the route.

Between Yangtump and Manjangtump, I found myself in a small depression in tall grass. As I waded through it, I kept coming across trails trampled by a bear. It was an unpleasant sensation to wade through the tall grass, which hides a lot of things from view, and to be constantly afraid of meeting a bear. It had been a long time since I'd seen such grass, so I was more nervous than usual. I shouted and tapped sticks more often. This time, however, our paths diverged, though perhaps very close – you never know unless the bear wants to tell you.



At the top of Mount Khurumpataly

At the top of Manyangtump, however, another, more welcome and long-awaited meeting took place. When I got to the top, I found myself on a narrow path, a light wind blew in my face, soft moss sprang and ate up the sounds. My gut told me that I should be more attentive, this stitch was not for nothing, and yes, already on the descent, having crossed the highest point, I noticed the tips of horns down the slope, behind the next ledge. A moment – and I am already lying on the tundra carpet, trying to silently throw off my backpack. I take out my camera, which is in a case on my belt, and start crawling forward. The magnificent horned sogzhoy* is still far away, and I need to get as close as I can without scaring it away. The wind is in my direction, and that increases the odds. The deer is worried, raises its head, looks in my direction, and in these seconds I squeeze into the moss, trying to merge with the slope. And here I am at the bend, no further to go.



Meeting a deer

I was taking pictures, I could see that the deer was worried, often raising its head and looking around. It takes about a minute, and at one moment it once again lifts its head from the moss and looks at me, our eyes meet,

and I realize there's no point in hiding anymore.

**Sogzhoy is a wild reindeer.*



A deer against the backdrop of Mount Neroyka

I stand up abruptly to my full height, hoping that the animal will be frightened and run away, which will add dynamism to the situation. Yes, it happens just as I wanted it to, and even better: the animal starts to run up the slope, past the cone of Neroyka. I take photos and video like a cowboy, two-handed.

Satisfied, I went back for my backpack. I think I've managed to capture another important image, which is necessary for a full-fledged story about the Urals. A lone deer grazing on a tundra peak is exactly what I need, and I had already started to worry. Not a single meeting after the fleeting and distant one on the UM. Earlier, in the XIX century, according to travelers' memoirs*, their range reached the Southern Urals, approximately to the places where I started my route. Further on, from the central part of the Subpolar Urals, numerous herds will begin, but, of course, meeting a herd does not compare emotionally with meeting a wild proud and lone animal.

On the descent from Manyangtump I could see the way ahead – the huge Manhambo Range, barely visible on the horizon. There, if all goes well, I should be there by tomorrow evening, and in the meantime a lot of pristine forest awaits me. I “smoked the map”, rested a little on the soft tundra carpet and decided to try to reach the unnamed peak 561.2, richly decorated on the map with rock icons.

**According to the descriptions of S.V. Kirikov, the forest reindeer reached as far as 52 degrees north. In 1890, it was observed near the village of Annovka in the present-day Zilairsky district of Bashkiria. The last sighting was described in 1939 near the farm Shulka, Zilairsky District.*

The mountain was far away, more than 15 km, but rocks in the taiga, towering above the forest, are extremely important for a person with a camera. I decided to be patient and walk to it.

At first the descent from the summit was comfortable, the slope was gently descending, and even when the forest started, the grass was low at first, interspersed with mosses. The steepness and cleanliness of the slope were ideal for movement. At about 570 m height I crossed the boundary, mosses ended, grass began to grow, and

it became more difficult to walk. And after a couple of kilometers the slope began to descend sharply into the valley of the Pashkevozh River, and the speed completely dropped, on my way stood elastic rowan trees and spruces, spreading their sharp branches. Numerous fallen trees and stones covered with moss were under my feet. Grabbing branches from one tree to another, I waded from one tree to the next through the brushwood all the way to the river.

The further way to the summit was almost unmemorable, except for the story about the Japanese fans and the fact that the path was as bushwhacky as the descent to the river. I had a secret psychological weapon. Some audio files, lectures on Japanese culture. For a long time I haven't listened to anything interesting on my phone, saving battery charge, but today I decided that I had enough charge until the cordon of the National Park “Yugyd va”, where the next reservation is stored, there should be electricity there too. So I allowed myself 30 minutes to listen to an interesting lecture. And time flew by somehow quite imperceptibly; the taiga routine was replaced by the distant and ancient culture of the country of the rising sun.

At the top, after a little wandering among the rocky remnants, I found a place for a tent right on the rock. I set up camp with a great view and, since it was still a few hours before sunset, went wandering around looking for a place to climb to take a picture of my tent standing on top, against the background of the forest and distant mountains. The rocks pleasantly surprised me with their unusual and absolutely wonderful shape resembling stacks of pancakes. In some places they were puffed, in some places they were hole, and sometimes they were folded into whole small houses with passages, rooms and floors. However, climbing up to somewhere else suddenly proved to be a challenge. From the outside they looked like big layered staircases, but once you got closer, it became clear that the steps were high and overhanging negative ledges. I didn't like the prospect of falling and getting injured in this remote corner of the Urals, so I gave up the idea and went back to the tent to watch the sunset. On my site, right next to my sleeping place, I found an old triangulation tour, made of wood and already mossy. After so many years on this peak, it looked like something natural and didn't look strange at all.

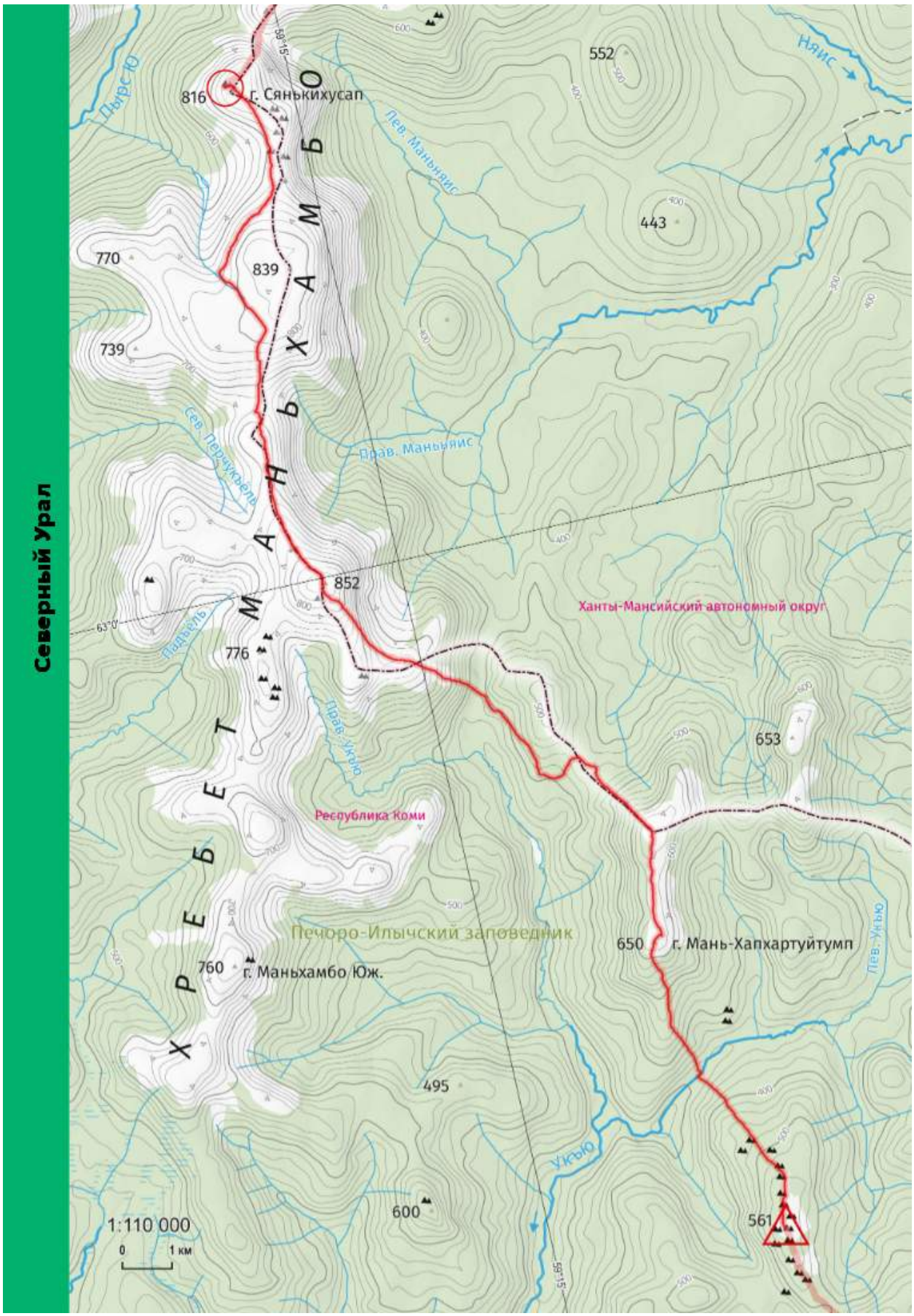


Top of the mountain 561.2

While waiting for sunset, I cooked a second dinner and took a good look around. From the main prominent peaks on the horizon behind me in the south, touching the dark clouds, stood the kurum hulk Sotchemyoliz (1039,9). It always amazes me: when you start the day – the mountain is still ahead, and when you finish it – it is already somewhere far behind. You seem to be so small, a point among the ocean of taiga, and your steps are quite small, but step by step, step by step – and one by one the giant mountains dissolve in the haze behind you. The magic of small but constant deeds, one can say.

In the west, 20 kilometers away, the Shchukayoliz ridge stood as a wall. The sun setting over it cast a bright golden light on everything and did not allow us to see the relief elements on its slopes. It's a pity, there should be a big glacial cirque right across on the ridge. If the weather permits tomorrow, I will look at it at dawn.

Sat up until sundown, waiting for the beautiful light and longing for home. It was so lonely in these endless forests. I felt even more homesick when I received a message from Tatiana Sergeyevna on my satellite tracker that she and the daughters had gone to my parents' village. How I would like to be there now, with them, and not here, in company with a cloud of mosquitoes. But I had to be patient, if I didn't finish what I had started, then what was the point of everything that had already been done?



The Northern Urals

Pyrs Yu River *Mount Siankikhusap*

Levy Manyannyais River

Nyais River

Manyankhambo Range

Severny Perchukyol River

Pravyy Manyannyais River

Padyol River

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Pravaya Ukyu River

Komi Republic

Pechoro-Ilychsky Nature Reserve

Mount Many-Khapkhartuytump

Levaya Ukyu River

Mount Manyankhambo Yuzhnaya

Ukyu River

Day 72

Peak 561.2 – Manh Khapkhartuitump mountain (650) – Manhambo ridge – Siankikhusap mountain (816)

33.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2151.5 km



July 11, 2021

Didn't sleep well, hard flat rock is not the best surface for a comfortable rest, even if you have an inflatable mat. The wind was making noise in the tent canopy all night.

There was no dawn, the sun rose into the clouds on the horizon, so I slept until late.

Although it doesn't seem quite right to talk about seven or eight in the morning as a late exit anymore. I've noticed that my travel schedule is shifting to late exits and late arrivals for overnight stays. It is related to the fact that in conditions of a long summer day it is inconvenient to leave too early, right after sunrise, and, accordingly, to come to the place of overnight stay by two or four o'clock in the afternoon. It is too long before sunset in this case, and it is necessary to make a lot of efforts, firstly, to entertain oneself at this time, and secondly – not to fall asleep. Because, having fallen asleep during the day before sunset, it is very hard to get up for it afterwards. Another thing – dawn, for me it is easier to interrupt my sleep and go out to photograph it, and then lie down and still sleep for a few hours.

As I supposed yesterday, the Shchukayoliz ridge, illuminated from the east, appeared before me as a circus, as if a huge hole in the side of a large cruiser, furrowing the ocean of taiga.

I found the first cloudberry! It is still green, but the fact itself is remarkable and joyful, I hope I will soon be able to eat this northern treasure, I love it, and perhaps it is the most insurmountable obstacle for me in the Urals.

From the mountain I descended to the Leviy Ukyu river, to the place where the stream cut the ridge and which on the map is meaningfully marked as “rapids”. It is an interesting and beautiful place, there is not much water in the river now, the rocks in the riverbed are exposed, small ledges, water holes, along the banks there are rocks of ten to fifteen meters.

It's scary to imagine what happens here in the spring, in the floods. Always when I think about it, I dream of going and seeing it, but at the same time I realize that this is the most difficult time to visit – spring thaw. The snow is no longer holding, water is everywhere, rivers rumble with streams and turn into insurmountable obstacles. Probably, I want to because it is extremely difficult to access. I have with me an e-book describing a ski and water trek in the Polar Urals at this time, I plan to start reading it when I get to the places described in it*.



Leviy Ukyu River

By noon I climbed to the summit of Man Khaphartuytump, among the low wind-damaged trees there were the same bizarre rocks as yesterday, but smaller in size. On the second, northern summit of the massif, which has an elevation of 672, a large stone tour is stacked on the rock. There don't seem to be many rocks around suitable for its construction, or they are hidden under a layer of moss covering everything. In any case, someone had to work hard dragging the stones and laying them out on the almost two-meter-high rock. There is a spruce stick stuck in the tour,

unfortunately there is no note. I had lunch there, on this rock, which slightly elevated me above the tops of trees, with a view of the main goal of the day – the Manhambo ridge.

**"On Boats Through Snowy Mountains" by Stanislaw Jelachowskiy.*

Its kurum hollows at the top were visible, they stood out in a lighter color. I am looking forward to them, Mankhambo is 150-200 meters higher than my summit, but this is enough in the conditions of the northern part of the Northern Urals for the forest to recede and the tundra expanses to begin. And I've had enough of forest passages for the last few days, and I want space for my eyes and wind for a deep sigh. But first I have to pass the last five-kilometer taiga section. On the descent I notice that on the last summits I passed, the belt of willow trees was replaced by a belt of mountain ash and low gaunt fir-trees growing densely at different angles. It was not very pleasant either, but still incomparably easier than willows.

Through a nice forest with a little marsh below, I came to the kurum slopes of Manhambo and not without pleasure began to climb them. The kurum is medium sized, secure and comfortable as a ladder, finally no moss and bushwackers on the climb, isn't that bliss. While still in the forest, I realized by the rumbling and swaying tops of fir trees that the wind had gone wild on the flat ridge. Well, that's what I wanted.

Manhambo impressed me. I tried to remember and failed: it seems that I had never met such ridges on my way. It was wide, flat, and everything was mixed up: kurums, low cedars, tundra gaps, flowers, willows and – the most remarkable thing – very interesting, unusual piles of stones. They lie on top of each other in various bizarre combinations, creating a sculpture garden.



At the top of Manhambo Ridge

Things went faster, my feet habitually raced along the kurums, my eyes and mind, not bothering me and not distracting me from my thoughts, began to choose the most convenient line of movement on their own, taking into account the tundra gaps, and the wind – elastic, cold – picked me up and began to push me in the back in a friendly way. I passed through the highest point of the ridge, nameless 852.5, about which there is nothing to say except that it is the highest here.

Towards the end of the day I made my personal little geographical discovery near the mountain 839.2. While preparing for the expedition, studying satellite images, I noticed a small suspiciously flat and round white surface. The photo was a winter one, and it was difficult to make out what was there under the snow. I assumed it was a lake. And today, having slightly deviated from the line of the route, I went to check it out. And the reality exceeded expectations. In a deep ravine, developed by the left tributary of the river Pirsyu and, apparently, earlier by a glacier, there was not only a lake, but also a potentially large waterfall. Now, in the middle of a dry summer, a small brook was left of it, skipping merrily down the rocks. But the size of

the washed stone bed did not allow to doubt: in big water something grandiose and beautiful takes place here. The mysterious ‘big water’!

The last kilometres to the summit of Mount Siankikhusap I walked with all my might. Kurum outcrops did not please my tired legs any more, and with a slight decrease in height the tundra between the stones was replaced by dense birch shrubbery, the struggle with which took away the last remnants of strength. But there was a great desire to reach the northern end of the ridge, intrigued by Rundquist's description of these places and the comparison with the destroyed Manhattan after the nuclear bombing.



The Lost Lake

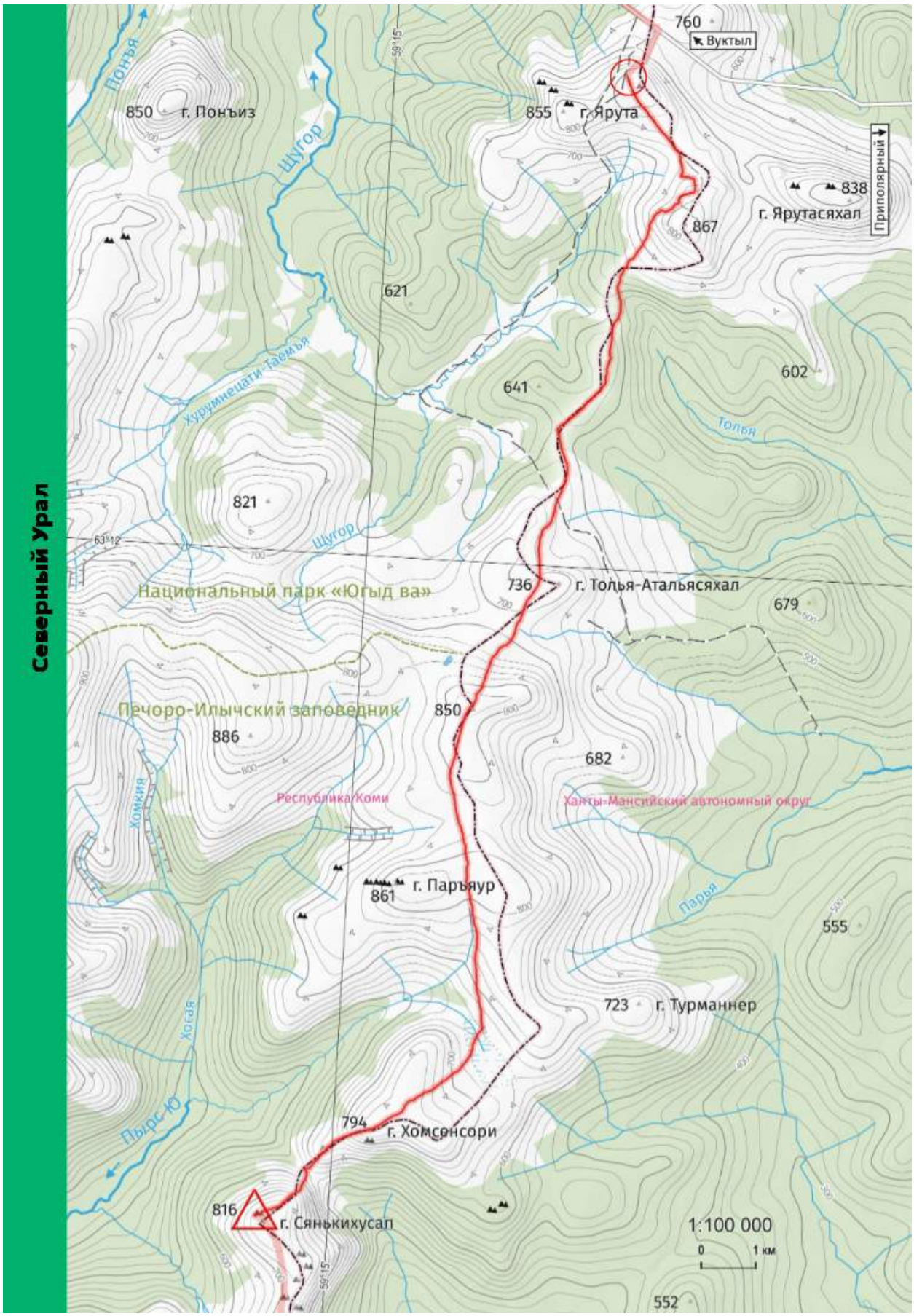


Overnight stay at the summit of Siankikhusap

When I got to the top, I looked around. I don't know whether I have a weak imagination or whether my great predecessor's imagination was too vigorous. The only thing I saw when I looked south, at the path I had travelled, was a neat little rocky town, with streets, cosy one-storey houses, and certainly no consequences of a thermonuclear explosion.

I camped for the night under the protection of a rock wall. The wind was fresh and already cold in the north, so the additional protection was useful. I wandered around a bit more, climbing the rocks in an attempt to photograph something interesting. There were a lot of mountains around me, everywhere I looked – kurum giants. Behind and a little to the left, the Pasneur and Janykvotnor ridges stretched out in a long rocky ridge. Ahead and to the right is the Molydjiz massif, higher, huge and gentle, covering and overwhelming everything. It looks beautiful, and there is even some play of light in the breaks of clouds. But it's all wrong. Luckily, the sun took pity on me and soon hid in the clouds, stopping my creative torment, I only had to get into the tent, wrap myself warmly in everything I have. Have dinner. Dictate my diary and go to bed. The voice diary entry was very revealing. Slurred language, big gaps, pauses. I had a hard day.

Oh, I almost forgot. Important story. I finally met ripe blueberries for the first time – on the south-eastern slope of Manhambo. I picked a handful of them. I don't know how it managed to get there before the others. But it's remarkable. It means I'll soon be eating berries.



The Northern Urals

Ponya River *Mount Ponyiz*

Vuktyl

Shchugor River

Mount Yaruta

Mount Yarutasyakhal

Pripolyarny

Khumurnetsati-Tayemya River

Tolya River

Yugyd Va National Park

Mount Tolya-Atalyasyakhal

Pechoro-Ilychsky Nature Reserve

Khomkiya River

Komi Republic

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Mount Paryaur

Parya River

Khosaya River

Mount Turmannyor

Pyrs Yu River

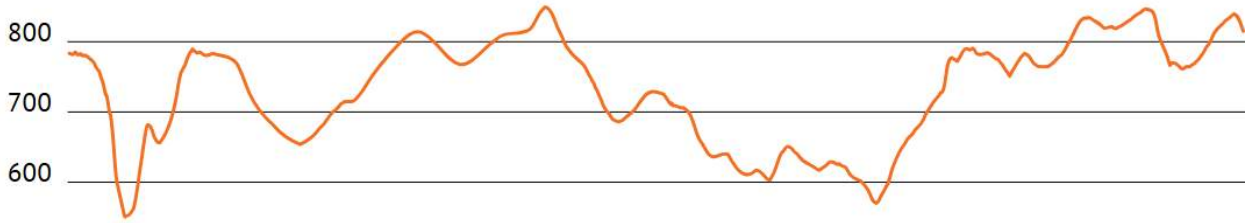
Mount Khomsensori

Mount Siankikhusap

Day 73

Mount Siankikhusap (816) – Mount Homsensori (794) – Mount Yaruta (855)

30 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2181.5 km



July 12, 2021

I crawled out of the warm cosy sleeping bag at two o'clock in the morning with difficulty. I put on all the clothes I had and went out into the cold northern wind. I looked around and assessed the chances to see a beautiful dawn as extremely low. I returned to my sleeping bag and with a clear conscience, without undressing, slept until six o'clock in the morning.

I got on the route at eight o'clock. Not having time to stretch my legs, which had frozen overnight, I immediately started descending into the deep saddle between the peaks Siankikhusap and Homsensori, for which my legs almost immediately expressed their displeasure. It's hard to imagine a more traumatising view of the slope than steeply downhill. Perhaps only willow thickets can rival it in their foot-destroying properties.



The rock town at the summit of Siankikhusap



At the top of Homsensori

About 200 m of vertical descent on big kurum rocks led to the bottom of a narrow saddle with a small cosy lake. It was the second one in two days and, according to the map, there was another one just below it. It was just like a lake land! I specially noted this point, as it is not quite typical for this part of the mountains. The ridge up to the Subpolar Urals is not famous for a large number of standing water bodies, water, as a rule, immediately goes into rivers and flows to the foot of the mountains, where there are many lakes.

From the saddle, I went steeply upwards again, through a maze of large rocks and dwarf trees. It was as if I had never left the Manhambo Ridge, the same bizarre rocks, the same landforms that I had loved so much yesterday.

Finally, after overcoming the waterlogged valley of the source of the Homsensori River, the unusual rocky forms gave way to boring mountain tundra. And I must admit that I met it with some relief, tired of the surrounding riot of forms. After all, these kilometres were accompanied by constant hesitations and doubts: to pass by or to make a detour, and then more and more, and there is an interesting remnant in the distance on the left, I should go to it too. I made endless zigzags

walking along the ridge. It was not like boring mountain tundras. Took an azimuth and went forward with 100 per cent efficiency.

Climbing to the top of Tolya-Atalyasyakhal, I was surprised by what I saw, at first, I couldn't even believe my eyes. Telposiz was looking at me from behind the shoulder of the nearest mountain. Without a doubt, it was the one.

Anyone who has ever seen its summit from the south, a black two-headed wall decorated with snowdrifts, will definitely not forget or confuse it. It is the only one of its kind in the Urals, and here, in the edge of gentle ridges, it is an indisputable dominant. I was surprised that there were more than 80 kilometres between us in a straight line, and I could see it very clearly. I said hello to the mountain and told it that I would reach it soon, but for the time being I had to concentrate on my immediate problems, and turned my gaze from the horizon to my feet, to the forest valley. I had to make the last forest crossing at this stage of my journey to the massif of the Yaruta kurum peaks, beyond which the gas pipeline's technological road was to be already in sight.



Forest crossing to the massif of Mt. Yaruta

It was not without a shudder that I entered under the canopy of the taiga. Frankly speaking, I didn't want to find myself again so soon among the thickets and the labyrinth of spruce trees bristling with branches. However, everything went

perfectly. As soon as the first few tens of metres of the spruce forest were overcome, the forest expanded and became literally a park: wide spaces between low trees, covered with not too soft, elastic mossy carpet, on which it was a pleasure to walk.

Despite a pleasant walk through the forest and easy terrain for a day's travelling, the ascent to Yaruta was not easy. When I reached the trail of the all-terrain vehicle on the plateau of the ridge, I fell on my backpack and rested for a long time. I thought about what to do next.

It was the fifth day of this stage of the journey, the planned rest at the cordon of the Yugyd va National Park was only 10 kilometres along the technological road. Should I make an effort and reach the cordon today or stay overnight at Yaruta? Rest in a normal house, bath, new food or a tent blown by the chilly winds, a late departure, an early rise with a view of the mountains. A tough choice indeed. After a bit of hesitation and arguing with myself, I chose the mountains after all. I will still have time to lie down on a bed, but whether will I find myself in these places in good weather ever again? Weather in the Ural Mountains is a valuable thing, and you can't waste it.

As I approached the northern end of the mountain range, I came across people. It was very unusual and somehow obscenely banal. It was as if there were no hundreds of wild kilometres behind me. Several men of unsporty appearance in working overalls were walking along the ridge, talking about something and, apparently looking at the map in the phone, looking for signed peaks on the horizon. Without thinking, I turned right and went away under the protection of the slope. I don't think they saw me. Good. There was no desire to interrupt my mountain solitude so abruptly.

When I looked for protection from the fresh wind, I found it under the shelter of small bizarre rocks, fortunately different in shape from the familiar ones from the Manhambo ridge. They were also small and fanciful, more like the rocky outcrops of Mount Otorten, made of narrow, crumbling plates, jutting out in different directions at sharp angles.

Having put up the tent, I decided not to have dinner in it, but, having taken all necessary things, to walk a couple more kilometres to the summit, to spend time waiting for sunset and eating.

The summit was not remarkable at all, so after having dinner, I went wandering around in search of something interesting. On the north-western slope I found rocky outcrops, just in the direction of sunset, and called them ‘Three gargoyles’. I spent an hour and a half wandering between the rocks, trying to get an unusual angle in the changing light. At the same time I was looking at an intriguing view of the jumble of ridges to the west. I had to make an effort and pull out a map to pick out individual objects in it: Saranyiz, Tonder, the lonely charismatic mountain Ponyiz and many other ‘izes’ dissolving in the evening light.

The leisurely northern sunset made me nervous. The sun laid on the horizon and lay there, immovable, indefinitely. It would seem that it should be gone by now, but no. The Ural was bathed in red sunset colours, and it felt as if it would never end. All the more it was a shame that I could not get anything worthy to shoot. I was searching among the rocks, but the shot did not turn out. But I spent a lot of precious forces at their foot. All this led to sad thoughts.

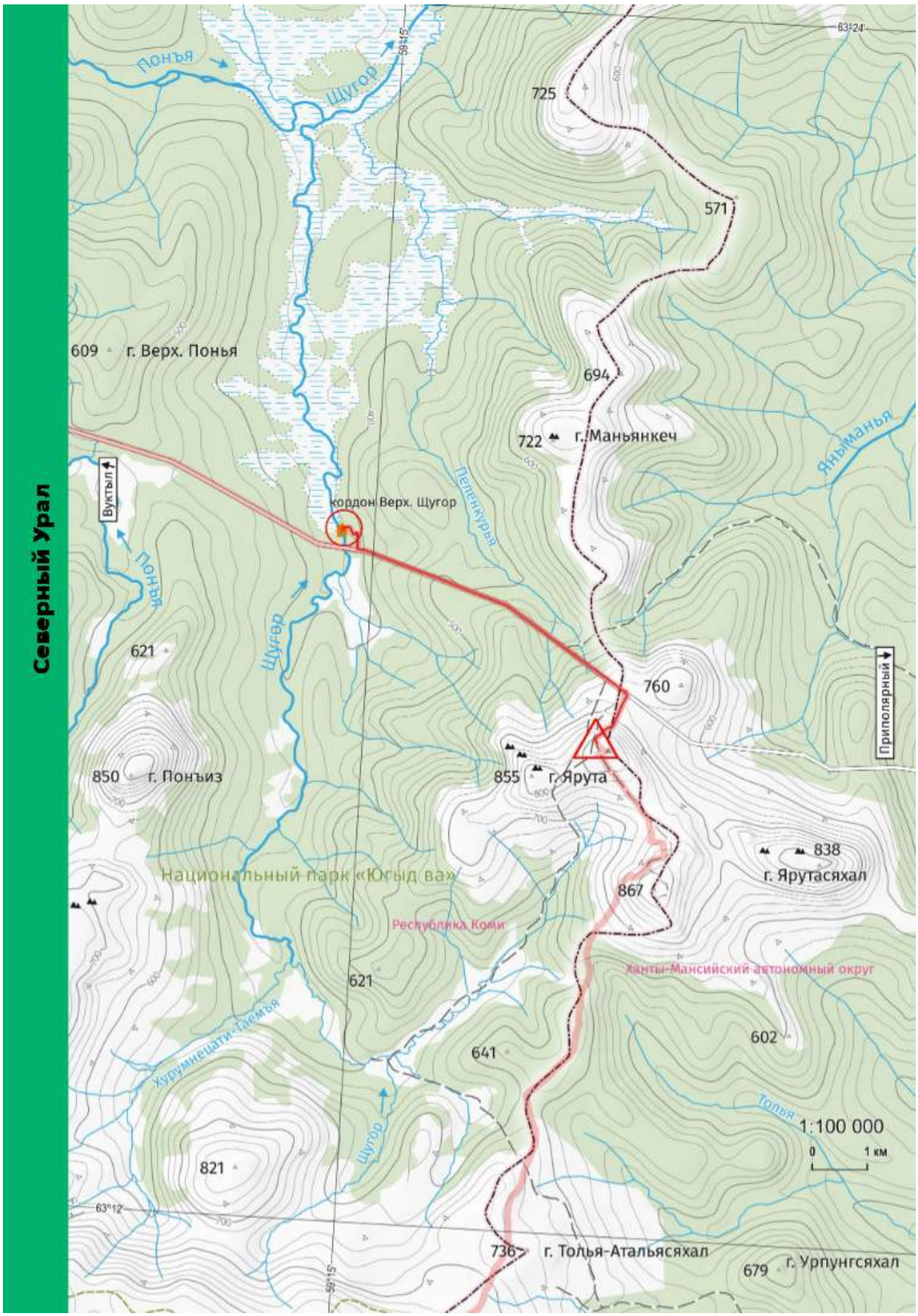
About how good it would be after 30 kilometres through the mountains to come to the place of overnight stay, put up a tent, climb into it and rest for twelve-sixteen hours. Instead of constantly going somewhere, waiting, searching, thinking, freezing.

As soon as the sun touched the horizon, I walked back to the tent, barely moving my legs, angry and disappointed. I thought with annoyance that there were only a few hours left until the sharp, nasty sound of the alarm clock would tear me out of the saving shroud of sleep into the dawn. In the tent, I hurriedly climbed into the cold sleeping bag and, not wanting to lose a single minute of sleep, wrapped myself up with my head and plunged into darkness.



Sunset on Mt Yarut

But the overexcited brain, as if mocking the tired body, refused to sink into sleep, replaying over and over again the thoughts and events of the day. The last thing I thought about and fell asleep afterwards was the idea that there was no point in going this route just for the sake of going through it. It is absolutely necessary to make every effort to bring from it as much ‘ore’ as possible, from which history will be forged later. Yes, it is difficult, but from the experience of past treks it is obvious: if you don't overcome yourself now, then it will be a damn shame that you were somewhere and didn't take that shot, didn't make that video....



The Northern Urals

Ponya River *Shchugor River*

Mount Verkhnyaya Ponya

Mount Manyankech

Yanymanya River

Vuktyl

Verkhny Shchugor Outpost

Pelenskurya River

Mount Ponyiz

Mount Yaruta

Pripolyarny

Yugyd Va National Park

Komi Republic

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Mount Yarutasyakhal

Khumurnetsati-Tayemya River

Tolya River

Mount Tolya-Atalyasyakhal

Mount Urpungsyakhal

Day 74

Yaruta Mountain (855) – Siyaniye Severa gas pipeline – cordon of the Yugydva National Park

8.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2190 km



July 13, 2021

It is very difficult to get up for the dawn when you can't see it, and today it was hindered by a kurum wall a few hundred metres away from me. Waking up on the alarm clock, I argued with myself for a long time in the half-sleep and even almost convinced that nothing worthy of my attention was going on there. But some reflections on the tent and rocks still pulled me out of the cosiness of the lodge, and I hobbled up the kurums on stiff legs.

When I climbed up, I was disappointed that I had missed all the most interesting and beautiful things. At the bottom there was a narrow strip of open sky filled with honey amber light across the horizon. Apparently, the sun passing through it was what made me crawl out into the dawn after all. But the moment was lost, and now that golden patch was only a reminder of my weakness.

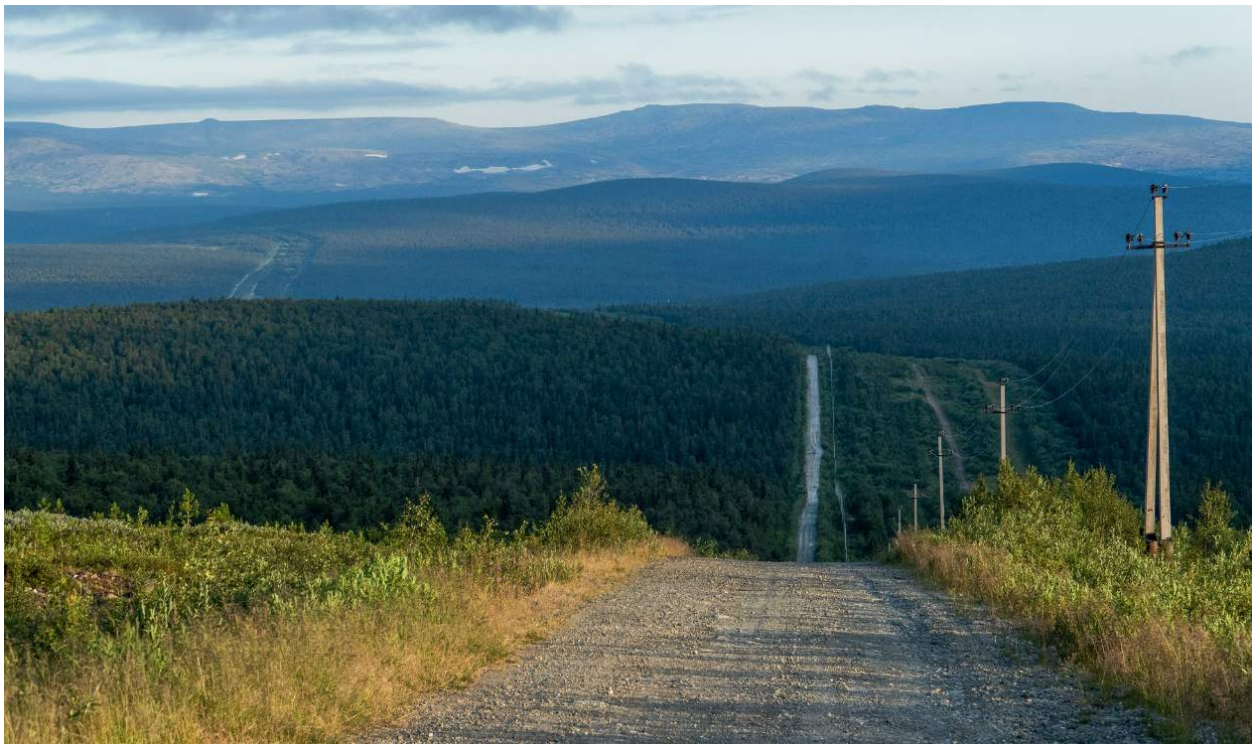
Down below the mountain, in the green taiga, there was a bright line of a road. That's what I needed.

When I returned to the tent, I had a quick breakfast, packed my things and set off.

Another reason why I decided to spend the night on the mountain was the desire

to pass the road very early, in the night hours. It was connected with the experience of my predecessors. Two transurals – Sergey Korzhaev and Kirill Fronyuk – faced a typical problem in their routes on this road: they were detained by guards. At first it was a question of removing the unauthorised visitors, but then they

managed to negotiate and they were taken to the Pelenyor Pass by car. This option did not suit me on principle, even innocent 20-30 kilometres of the route, overcome by car, would destroy the whole idea of it. And I would not be able to say without reservations that my route was travelled on foot. I decided to pass the road as early as possible, and if someone suddenly appeared, to hide in the bushes on the side of the road.



Road along the gas pipeline

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this technological road for tourism in the Urals. Laying along the Siyaniye Severa gas pipeline, it is the key to the vast territory of the northern Urals. If it were not for its creation, the roads that could be used to reach the mountains by an ordinary car would have ended much further south, at the level of the towns of Ivdel and Krasnovishersk. And most of the Northern Urals, especially its northern part, would have been extremely difficult to access. However, there appeared a road crossing the ridge from west to east, from the town of Vuktyl to the village of Pripolyarny, and now, if a number of ‘buts’ are observed, one can easily get to the area of Mount Telposiz. It is possible to reach Vuktyl from the European part of Russia by a car. The head office of the Yugyd va National Park is also located there.

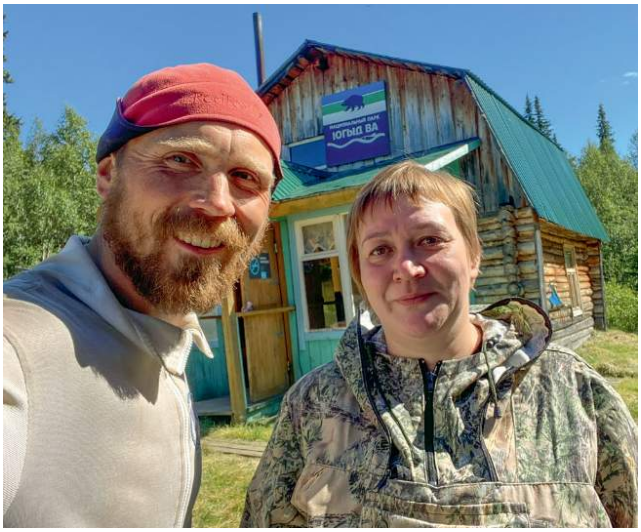
From Vuktyl further towards the Urals, an ordinary person is unlikely to get through. Entry to the territory is limited by strict security measures, but you can use the services of the national park, and they can take you to the mountains. However, to be fair, it should be noted that, based on my experience, the strict security measures at the gas pipeline are primarily for outsiders. Local Vuktyl residents drive along the road quite freely; it is considered popular to cross the ridge by car to fish and drink vodka on the eastern slope.

Once I got out of the Pelenyor Pass in a hitchhiking car full of drunken Vuktyl policemen. There I heard stories about how Vuktyl people like to have a rest in the mountains.

An unpleasant surprise was the fact that while thinking and stomping my feet on the dense dusty road, I did not notice or hear a truck with workers catching up with me. Nothing bad happened, they even offered to drive me the last few kilometres to the cordon. However, the very fact that I didn't hear the big car was remarkable. I drew the appropriate conclusions. And of course, I refused the offer.

Having reached the Verkhny Shchugor cordon of the Yugyd va National Park with great pleasure, I immediately went to bed on the wide shelves covered with thick and soft mattresses in the guest house. A well-deserved rest began.

A few hours later, the gas pipeline caretaker dropped by and brought my barrel with some supplies, food and things. It was interesting that he found Kirill Fronyuk on his route during his shift. Such is the succession of transurals.



With Natalya Shalagina, Head of the National Park

In the afternoon, guests arrived – the head of the national park, Natalia Vasiliyevna Shalagina, who brought lard and vegetables and took away photos for publications. It's nice when for your sake and for the sake of your project a person is ready to drive four hours one way along a dusty mountain

road. It means that you are doing something that matters to people. And what can motivate better than realising the importance of a deed? We sipped tea, discussed the news. The guests, who were, in fact, the hosts, left, and I was left to enjoy the solitude again.

In the evening, I stoked the banya (Russian type of sauna), did laundry, read books, and indulged in some well-deserved idleness. The only embarrassing thing was the perfectly cloudless sky overhead. Am I right to waste days of good weather? Wouldn't I regret it later, on the route, because I would have to go further on the tops, on the ridges? And this way in good weather and in bad weather is fundamentally different.

Day 75

Rest

0 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2190 km

July 14, 2021

No, I'm sure I'm doing the right thing. Maybe tactically I'm losing days of good weather, but strategically it's more important to rest and recover. I've got a tough section ahead of me. And now even the easy ascent from the river bank to the cordon house is difficult for me. My legs are tired and need rest. So that I decided to stay one more day. To give my legs a complete rest, to repair equipment, to sort out products, to read more about the upcoming part of the journey. In general, there is enough to do, even if I don't need to go anywhere.

And I have more and more food. Three more packets were added to the additional rations taken at Manpupunyor. That was the number of days faster than the last stage. I had taken nine days' worth of food with me, but I ran in six days.

At first glance, it might seem that this is the result of poor planning, but it is not. I'm very lucky: I don't get sick and I don't sit still in bad weather. And I couldn't have known in winter when I planned the route what condition I would be in after 2000 kilometres, so I calculated with a safety margin. Now I don't need it, and that is good. Moreover, I do not need these rations at all. So far, neither the first nor the second bookings sent to Saranpaul have arrived. If everything goes according to the worst scenario, these extra rations that I carry with me from the pillars will come in handy.

All day long I've been fixing gear. I repacked food. I left what I could buy in Saranpaul at the cordon. First of all, cereals and pasta. Freeze-dried meat, candy, combined and additionally dried. I tried to reduce the weight of my backpack without losing anything extra, because at this stage of the journey, together with standard items and food, I was sent a boat, which I used during the first days of the expedition.

I have the Shchugor, a wide and deep river, in my way. If the weather doesn't change, it will be as hot and dry as before, I probably won't need the boat. However,

one or two days of heavy rains are enough, and this obstacle may become insurmountable for a long time. Not wanting to take any chances, I am carrying a means of overcoming it.



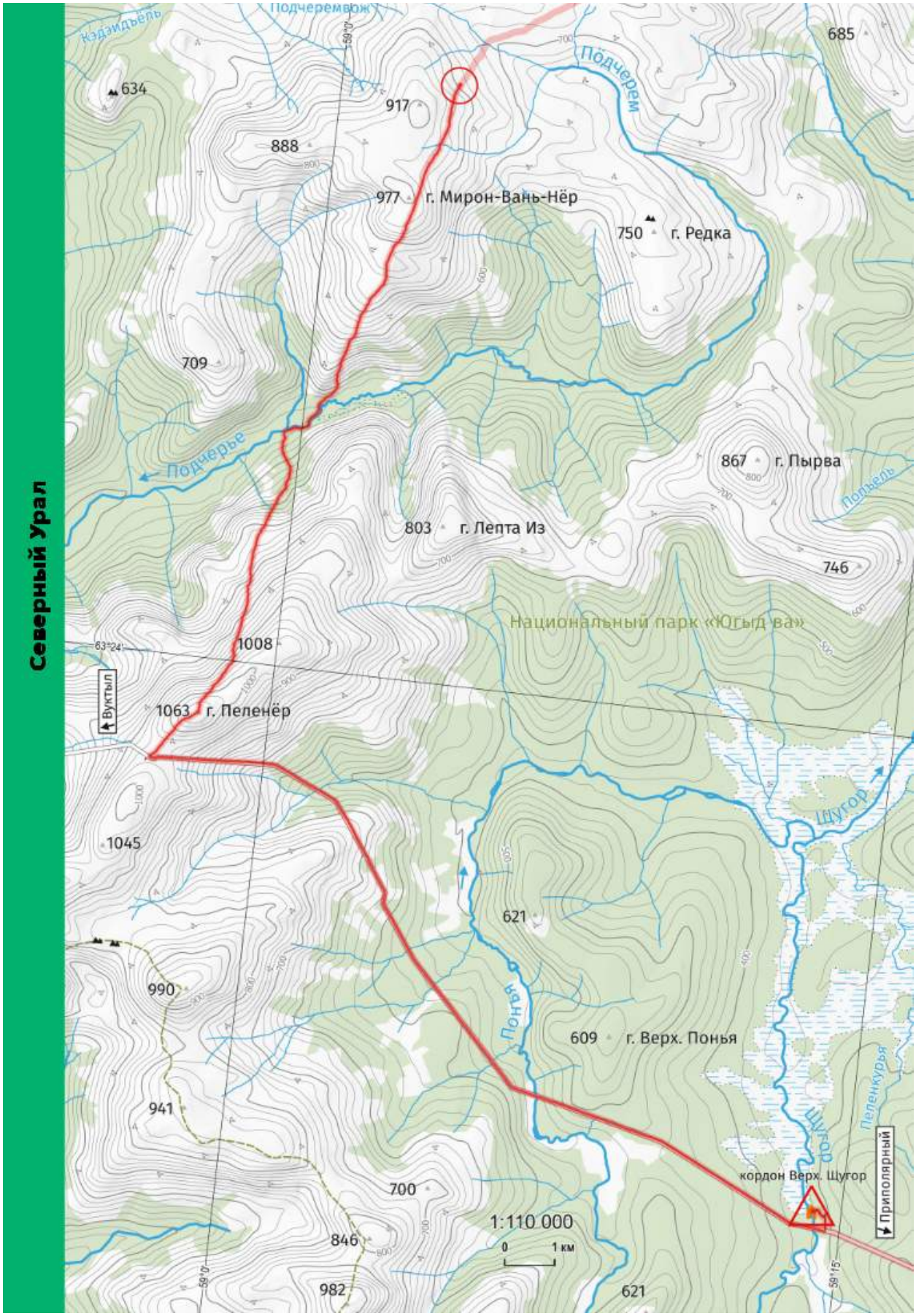
Shchugor River near the cordon

The guards came in a big SUV – brawny guys with guns. They wanted to know who I was and where I was going. I showed them the boat, told them I was going down the river. Since this is the most common story here, the answer seemed to satisfy them.

In the evening a large group of tourists from the Caucasus came to the cordon. I met them as a host. I showed them where to stay, took them to the river, ate all the most unhealthy city food. The guests were puzzled by the view of the river, it really did not look like a rafting river, it was obvious that the first time they were waiting for a difficult half-swim half-walk. Well, that's how it is in the Urals in summer – unfortunately, water is not guaranteed in the mountainous part. For me, though, it is, of course, a blessing.

I went to bed as soon as possible, as I decided to leave much earlier than usual to cross a large section of the gas pipeline road in the dark. I laid in my sleeping bag,

tossing and turning, listening to the voices of my neighbours and feeling vaguely anxious about tomorrow.



The Northern Urals

Kedeidyol River

Podcheremvozh River

Podcherem River

Mount Miron-Van-Nyor

Mount Redka

Podcherye River

Mount Lept Iz

Mount Pyrva

Popyol River

Yugyd Va National Park

Vuktyl

Mount Pelenyor

Shchugor River

Ponya River

Mount Verkhnyaya Ponya

Verkhny Shchugor Outpost

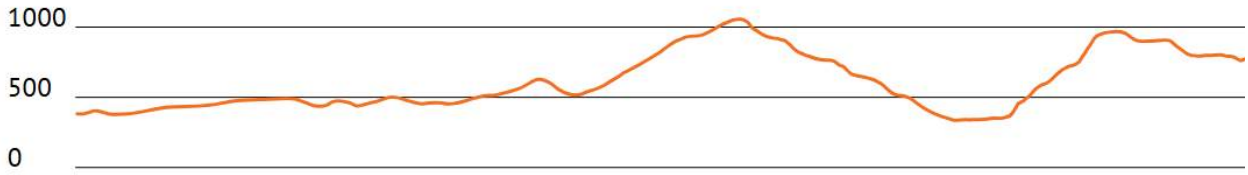
Pelenskurya River

Pripolyarny

Day 76

Cordon of the National Park 'Yugyd va' – Pelenyor Pass – Podcherem River – Miron-Van-Nyor Mountain (977,4)

36 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2226 km



July 15, 2021

I went out, as I had planned, at one o'clock in the morning, still in the predawn twilight. On the way I moved as carefully as possible, remembering the unwanted meeting with the shift workers the day before yesterday, and did not switch on the light. I turned my head and listened desperately. Twice I had to jump into the dense forest thicket wet with morning dew and wait for cars to pass by. In general everything went smoothly. It took 4.5 hours to reach the Pelenyor Pass, covering 19 km.



The Pelenyor Pass

According to the traditional law of misfortune, the cloudless weather that had stood during my holidays changed to cloudy weather. From the west, where bad weather comes to the Urals most often, a cloud front was slowly approaching, which deprived me of dawn and gave me great anxiety. I really didn't want to be up there in the clouds, but there was nothing I could do about it.

The road, which was tolerable in the valleys, became disgusting as soon as I started climbing the ridge: stones, deep potholes, steep gradients. And along it, in some places not covered with soil, were rusty gas pipes. As people who often visit these places said in private conversations, the gas pipeline is old and worn out, and there are always some accidents on it. So increased safety measures for travelling along it do not seem unnecessary. I remember once officially entering the gas pipeline through a guard post, and before giving permission, we were given a short lecture on safety in the lecture hall, what to do and where to run to if something explodes near us. It seemed excessive at the time, but when you look at the pipes, it doesn't seem exaggerated anymore.



Having climbed to the pass, to the height of 933 metres, I breathed a sigh of relief. Wild territories begin again, and there is no danger of administrative problems. This is, by the way, the highest car pass in the Urals.

From the pass I headed northwards. I had travelled this way before and had a good idea of what was ahead of me. After the summit of Pelenyor I started to descend down the vast kurum slopes to the Podcherem River. Here, because I had already travelled this way, I had found an adventure. Remembering how tired I had been the last time, I decided to cheat and take the westward route, passing through a forest high up on the slope.



View from Mount Pelenyor of the route ahead



Rusty gas pipes

I don't remember such a nasty and traumatic forest. I called it trap forest. It looked promising from the outside. A flat, slightly sloping surface covered with thickets of ferns, sparse trees – everything foreshadowed an easy walk in the park, but very quickly became a survival. It turned out that under the canopy of plants was not soil, but kurums overgrown with moss. Every step posed a real danger, feet now and then fell into the holes between the stones hidden from view. On the move it was extremely traumatic. Cursing everything, I slowly, with falls, made my way to the Podcherem River for a very long time.

From the river I had to gain all those lost metres from Pelenyor again, which was also not very pleasant. The way up was challenging. Last time in these places at about the same time of the year I met some bears grazing on Miron-Van-Nyor Mountain (977.4). I had to scare them away. This time everything went well. Having met no one, I dragged my heavy backpack up to the top. And, having reached the first water, I got up for lunch. However, taking into account the fact that the walking day started at one o'clock in the morning, the lunch had every right to be both dinner and a stop for the night. It almost turned out that way. Not planning to get up for the night,

but to protect myself from the annoying biting gnats, I put up the inner canopy of the tent. I had lunch and fell asleep for three hours.

After waking up, I dragged the camp 1.5 km forward, to have a more advantageous view of Telposiz, in case there was a sudden dawn or dusk, and then finally continued my well-deserved rest.

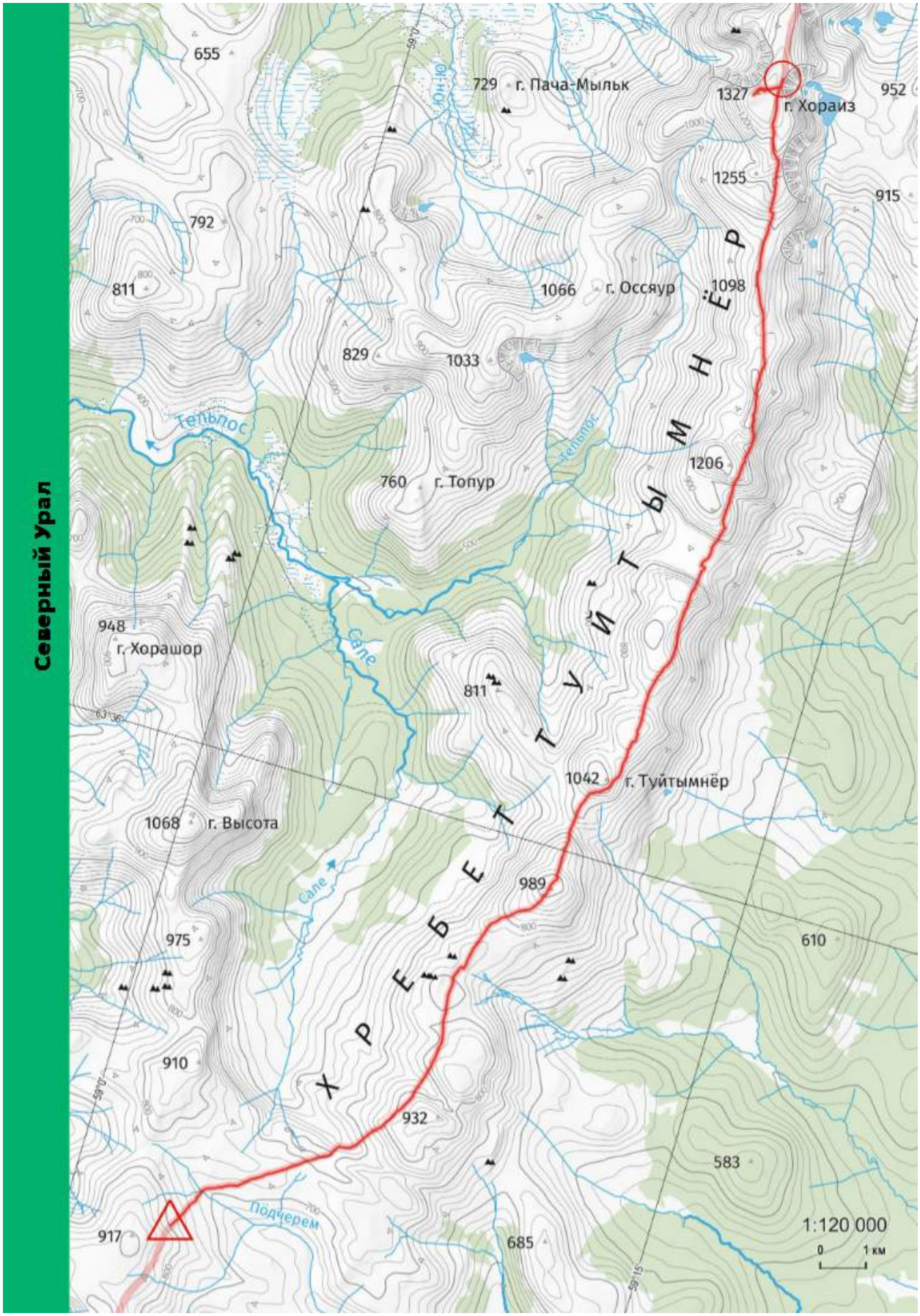
I have to say that the rest was good for me, my legs recovered, and I was walking well today, if it wasn't for the heavy backpack. With the extra food, boat, two pairs of shoes and all the other stuff, the backpack was quite heavy. Probably the heaviest of everything on the way. This became most noticeable in the evening when I dragged it up the last mountain. It was especially funny when Tatiana Sergeevna informed me at the evening communication session that finally both shipments with food had arrived in Saranpaul. I have a lot of food now. I'll have to eat four meals a day to lighten my backpack faster. On the whole I am more than happy with it.



Overnight stay with a view of Telposiz

All day the clouds swirled above me, coming and going. In the evening I looked at Telposiz from my tent and prayed to all the local gods and weather

forecasters too that it would not be covered by clouds. Telposiz is one of the gems of the whole route. I really need it in all its splendor.



The Northern Urals

Mount Pacha-Mylk

Mount Khoraiz

Mount Ossiaur

Telpos River

Mount Topur

Tuitymnior Range

Mount Khorashor

Sale River

Mount Vysota

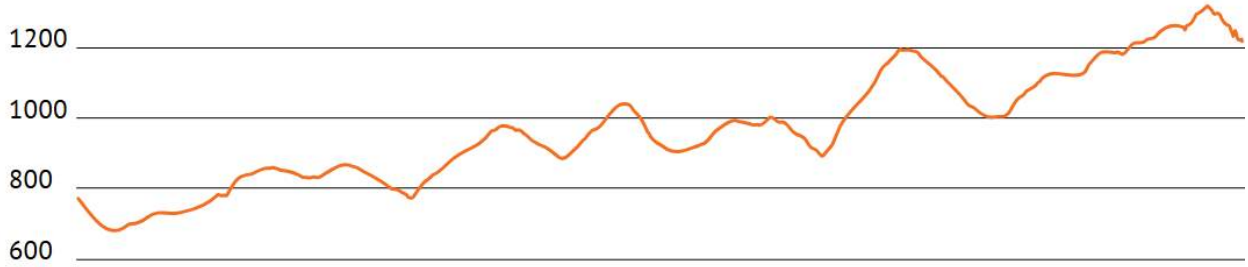
Mount Tuitymnior

Podcherem River

Day 77

Miron-Van-Nyor Mountain (977,4) – Tuytymnyor Ridge – Khoraiz Mountain (1327,6)

35 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2261 km



July 16, 2021

The night was very warm and peaceful. I slept long and deeply. I fell asleep in an open sleeping bag with an open tent canopy and woke up by dawn. I went to the route at 5:30 and walked cheerfully along the tundra. As I wrote above, this section is familiar to me. The Tuytymnyor ridge, on which I walked all day, is a wonderful stone road over forests and bogs. Covered with tundras and kurums, it extends clearly to the north, up to the Telposiz mountain. This is the last part of the way before the Circumpolar Urals, where I walk along the top, along the ridge. Very soon the tactics of movement will change, and pointed peaks, karas, ridges will drive me down, but for now I am walking along the top and enjoying the spaciousness. Nothing stands between me and the distant, faraway vistas.

The places are also remarkable because they are unusually rich in wildlife. I have already mentioned about bears yesterday, but today I met four moose in the first couple of hours after leaving the area. A couple of moose were brought to their feet and frightened away a few hundred metres below me. A couple of them – right on the ridge on my way. One of them even turned out to be more or less good: having noticed its huge



A moose encounter

horns towering above the tundra from afar, I habitually fell on my stomach, threw off my backpack and crawled towards it, trying to squeeze into the slope as much as possible. Unfortunately, the camouflaging possibilities of the terrain were over very quickly, and I found myself on a flat, viewable piece of tundra.



The moose was lying with its face towards me and seemed to be looking carefully and warily in my direction. Without stopping, smoothly I crawled and crawled, holding the camera in my hand, ready to start filming in case the animal got worried. However, the one's carelessness knew no bounds. I managed to crawl another hundred metres under its gaze and got seventy metres closer to it. Even I did not have the nerve to crawl further to the moose. I lurked. I picked up my camera and started taking photos. Eh, how I miss a telephoto lens at such moments. After a while the animal got worried, got to its feet and, frozen, continued to look at me attentively. I couldn't think of a better arrangement, so I took pictures and then stood up to my full height myself, which naturally prompted the moose to move. Slowly, proudly, not in a hurry he went down into the willow thicket, and I kept shooting. The more shots, the more chances to get something worthy.

However, the encounters with animals did not end there. As soon as I moved away from the moose, I met wild deer. A small herd ran in the distance and disappeared behind the slope. A little later, a small fawn came out to me, walked beside me for a while, then also disappeared behind the folds of the relief.

I had no sooner said goodbye to the deer than I nearly stepped on a huge red hare. It was behaving strangely. It was not too bothered by my presence or annoying poking with the lens. After posing in one place on the kurum, the hare took its time and lazily jumped a few metres further and waited for me again.



Tuitymnyor Ridge

The whole photo session ended with the fact that I simply got bored of photographing it, so I moved on. And the carefree lazy hare remained resting among the kurums.

On the northern slope of the peak 1042.9 I stopped for lunch. And there was nothing remarkable in this fact, except that it was there that I had a misfortune. Though everything had been going to it for many days already. Every time, lifting the mosquito net from my face to the visor of my cap and walking like that, I thought that someday I will definitely lose it. And today I did. I realised it an hour and a half

after lunch and a rest stop. Having realised what had happened, I thought about the probable return for a short time, almost immediately coming to the conclusion about the pointlessness of this step. Looking for a green net in the green tundra for 6 kilometres is an infinitely hopeless task. Then I imagined what was waiting for me down in the valleys of the Shchugor and Torgovaya rivers, I sighed heavily and went forward. I had only myself to blame for this situation. Immediately I wrote a message to Tatiana Sergeyevna that I should ask her to take a mosquito net to Neroyka together with food. Probably, in Saranpaul it is possible to buy or find this piece of equipment.

Towards the end of the day, very small clouds started coming over the ridge, unloaded by heavy showers. Several times I managed to escape from their path, but in the area of Mount Khoraiz one such black wet cloud caught up with me. I had to take out a canopy and hide under it.



Carefree hare

Looking at my watch, I decided to stay here for the night. The place was quite remarkable – a border transition zone between the relief of the Northern Urals and the Subpolar Urals. It was here that the gentle slopes of the kurum ridges began to break off with vertical karas – evidences of glaciers' work. If one climbed up the

slope, one could get a wonderful view of Telposiz, which was reached by a flat ridge road with rugged and sharp edges.

I set up camp a little way down the slope at the top of one of the first karas. There were blue lakes below, water nearby, and a herd of deer grazing in the neighbouring area. It was an ideal spot.

In the evening, I went on a photo hunt. I covered another three kilometres and went to the summit of Khoraiz (1327.6), the second highest peak on my way. On the summit I found ruined remains of a triangulation tower made of logs. I am always amazed and respectful of the labour of topographers and geodesists to drag these logs up so far from the forest zone.

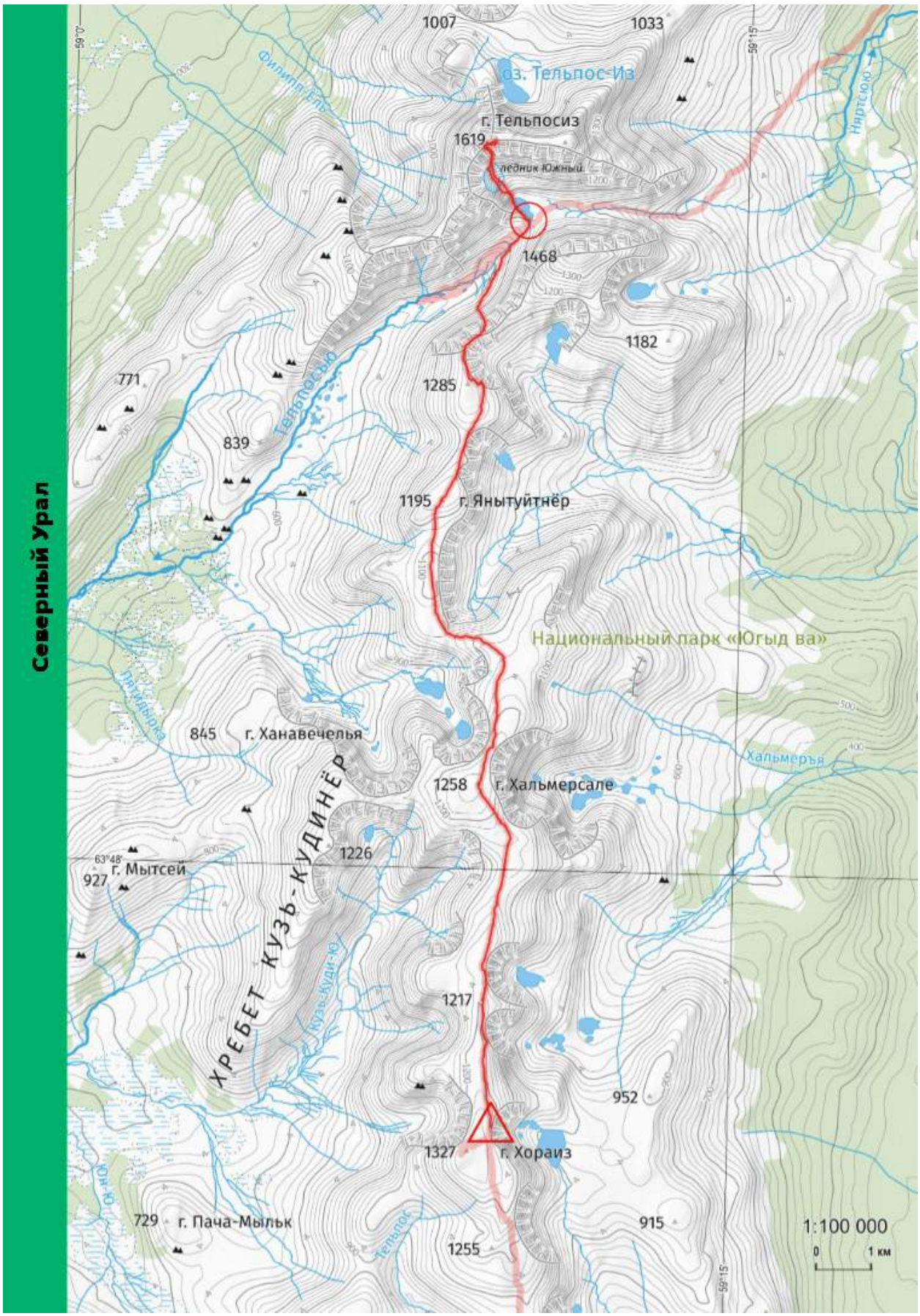
On the descent from the summit I witnessed a heartbreaking scene. My attention was attracted by some pitiful sounds. Looking closely, I noticed a lonely fawn running past me on the kurums a little lower down the slope. Where it was running and why it was screaming so pitifully, I thought, sat down on a rock and watched. Very soon I found the answer.

On the other side of the slope, a young deer with a fawn of the same age appeared. It was to her that the baby ran, mooing pitifully. However, the young deer did not seem to be ready to have another baby. Abruptly turning round, she made a detour and ran down with her offspring, not reacting to the pitiful cries of the second baby. She walked away into the forest, the lone fawn standing among the rocks, looking at her and seemingly crying. An infinitely sad scene. How my daughters are there, far, far away, beyond the many ridges, rivers and forests...



Lonely fawn

After walking around, without waiting for sunset, I decided to go to the tent, as another problem had been added to the pile of problems and issues. It was old, but, fortunately, it had not bothered me so far. Something in my spine stuck in the area of my shoulder blade. A sharp pain radiating into my neck – how many days I had spent with it in my life. It usually came to me in my daily city life and bypassed on routes, but today it found me here too. Maybe the body thought it was already routine and allowed it to arise. I don't know. Anyway, it was an alarming and unpleasant warning that spoilt my mood completely in the evening. So I hurried to the tent to lie down, rest and hope that the next day would bring me good weather and allow me to climb Telposiz.



The Northern Urals

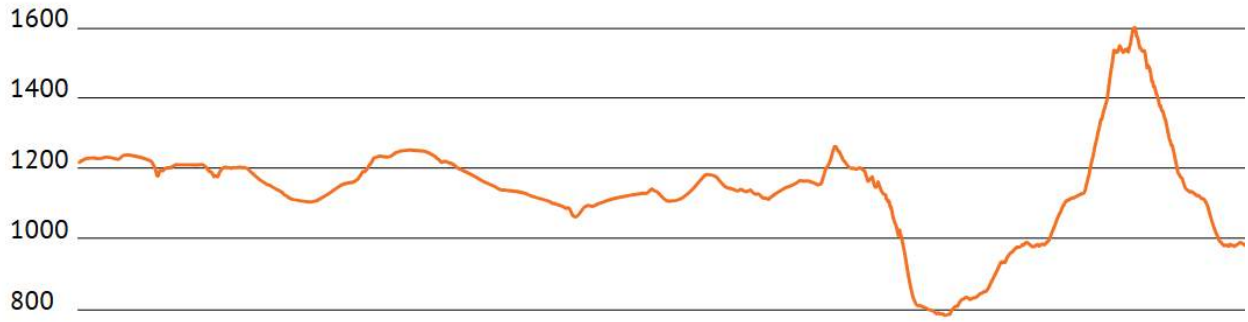
Filipp-Yol River *Lake Telpos-Iz*

Nyartsyuyu River
Mount Telposiz
Yuzhny Glacier
Telposyu River
Mount Yanytuitynyor
Yugyd Va National Park
Pyatidyraka River
Mount Khanavechelya
Mount Khalmersale
Khalmerya River
Mount Mytsey
Kuz-Kudinyor Range
Kuz-Kudi-Yu River
Mount Khoraiz
Yun Yu River
Mount Pacha-Mylk
Telpos River

Day 78

Mount Horaiz (1327.6) – Mount Halmersale (1258) – Telposiz River – Mount Telposiz (1619)

26.7 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2287.7 km



July 17, 2021

Without lifting my heavy head, I unzipped the tent flap at two o'clock in the morning. I saw the crimson colour of the sky above Telposiz and realised that I would not have to sleep again that night. In a hurry I drank a glass of heated warm water and in 20 minutes I was already walking under my backpack towards the sunrise. The idea was simple: to save strength and not to make extra laps with the camera at dawn, to pack up the camp and move for the remaining hour before the sun appeared to a new location, 2-3 km ahead, to get a different perspective from the sunset one. Have breakfast there after sunrise.



Sunrise

And so it happened. I managed to approach a large circus filled with a vast snowfield, or maybe a glacier, with a perfectly well-defined end moraine and a lake. The sun rose above its left jagged edge in a big orange disc against the background of the side spurs of Telposiz, the Uuta Range and God knows what other mountains, darkening with vague silhouettes in the distance. The world was filled with a rich golden colour, Telposiz seemed to be drowned in a drop of amber. It was one of the most beautiful dawns in a very long time. Interestingly and tellingly, the valley of the Shchugor River was filled with swirling mists, which meant that those groups who were on rafting today were deprived of the happiness of touching this unearthly beauty together with me. Overnighting at the top, although harder and less comfortable, is often much more beautiful.

I was torn between two needs: a keen sense of hunger demanded to stop and load up on calories, a keen sense of beauty urged me to go ahead, as long as this long northern 'golden hour' lasted, to admire and shoot. I decided to compromise. Very quickly boiled another glass of water, poured boiling water over the lunch sublimate. Scalding and hurrying, ate the contents of the bag, not forgetting a noble piece of lard. And hurried on. The light stayed richly golden for a long time, more than an hour. It flooded everything around and transformed the tundras, rocks, kurums into something else, previously unseen, giving them some special, solemn mood.

One more thought drove me forward: the forecast for the second part of the day predicted rain, and the idea to have time to see and shoot as much as possible was firmly in my head, because today I had one of the most beautiful places in the Urals on my way – the southern spurs of Telposiz and the headwaters of the Telposyu River.

I walked along the plateau-like surface of the ridge, the edges of which were flanked by numerous steep semicircular karas. It was a very interesting place for the Urals, the likes of which I had never seen before. With a certain degree of conventionality, I could say that it was a corridor leading from the mountainous and kurum part of the Northern Urals to the Subpolar Urals, famous for its alpine forms

of relief and numerous traces of glaciation, which these numerous karas around me were.

After six hours on the trail I reached the summit 1285.5 – the place where the route along the ridge ended and I was to descend to the Telposyu River valley. From this summit one of the most remarkable, in my opinion, views of the highest point of the Northern Urals – Telposiz opens. The mountain is a dark wall, cut by couloirs, marked by snow-flakes, and at its base there is a valley of marvellous beauty, the edge of a turquoise lake with floating ice floes is visible. A river starts from the lake, rushing through the rocks in torrents and waterfalls, filling the valley with the sound of fast-running water.

As luck would have it, just as I was arriving, a cloud caught the top of Telposiz and covered it. It was very upsetting, the sky was blue all around, you could see everything except the most important thing, without which everything else was meaningless. I tried to wait, but the time was passing and the cloud did not move, I had to start descending with regret. From the summit of 1285.5 there are two variants of descent: to the west, along gentle kurum-tundra slope, or straight to the north, more difficult and dangerous, but short, along scree couloirs with outcrops of small rocks. I chose the direct option. The weather was dry, I was alone. I can safely let down stones from under my feet and not worry that they will fly on someone. At the bottom, the slope is clearly visible, you can see that there is no one in the valley.



Ridge in the "golden hour"

If a group is going to descend, it would be better for them to go down the longer western slope. This will avoid the danger of rockfall.

Once in the alpine meadows below, among the chaotic remains of ancient moraines and small blue lakes, I rested again, had a more substantial breakfast and went up along the Telposiu River. Today was again the day of moose: the headwind, which drove away my scent, and the noise of waterfalls, drowning out my footsteps, created good conditions for observing the animals, which are very numerous here. Right in front of me, about a hundred metres away, three young moose passed by without lurking or bothering me, not paying any attention to me at all.



The foot of Mount Telposiz

In the background, a little further away, deer were grazing on a snowbank. Life in this secluded corner of the Urals is traditionally bustling.

I walked up to a large turquoise lake with small ice floes floating in it along a system of small waterfalls. When I got to the shore, I came to a crossroads, sat down and started to think what to do: to go to the mountain or not. Initially the plan was to pitch a tent and have a good rest after a very early departure. The minimum plan for the day had already been fulfilled, and I was tired, and caution suggested that I should go to the mountain rested and full of energy, as the ascent promised to be difficult. On the other hand, rain was promised in the afternoon, and in confirmation of this there were more clouds around, and the cloud clinging to the summit finally broke off and flew away. Above me towered the open rocky wall of Telposiz.

After a few minutes of deliberation, self-examination, weighing the pros and cons, I decided that I should go. As long as there is a view and weather, I should do it. It is not only uninteresting but also dangerous to climb up during rain in poor

visibility conditions, taking into account the difficult terrain of the mountain. And it is impossible not to climb Telposiz in the transural route.



Before setting off, pitched my tent above the lake, on a small rounded hill. The best view in the area. I went through my gear, taking everything I needed for the difficult solo ascent. Food, water, first aid kit, communications, navigation kit (navigator, compass, map), extra clothes, light, photo equipment. And went to the top.

Telposiz has two peaks: the eastern (1617.5) and the western (1619.8). The eastern one is lower and more accessible. Most of the climbing is done on it. From the southern side, where I was, it is accessed by a tundra-kurum slope, in the upper part of the slope it turns into a snow bank. Then from the eastern summit one can go to the highest, western summit along the one-and-a-half-kilometre long ridge of the mountain. I was already quite tired for such a long trek, and I'm not sure I had that much time for this indirect route before the weather turned bad. Having carefully examined the slope, I planned a direct way to the western summit through the South Glacier. This way was objectively more dangerous and difficult, but much shorter.

On the snowfields along the lake shore I noticed a line of deer tracks heading towards the mountain, which meant only one thing: there must be a herd on the glacier below the wall. With anticipation, trying not to reveal anything about myself, I approached the top of the final moraine and carefully looked out.

I saw a large circular circus filled with snow and ice, a round turquoise lake in its centre – and no one alive. A little upset, I stood up to my full height and at that moment I heard the sounds of stones falling from the left. Looking closer, I noticed a young deer running towards the glacier. While looking at it, I caught a glimpse of tiny brown spots on the opposite slope. I took a photo and enlarged it – deer! A small herd of 15 heads was lost on the vastness of the glacier against the background of stones lying on top of snow. At first the deer behaved calmly, but as I approached, they became anxious. They raised their heads and stood on their feet. The problem was obvious: the herd was too far away for me to shoot something beautiful, not just grey dots on the snow. However, I didn't want to lose such an interesting moment, so I decided that I should try to disturb the deer so that they would run to the place I wanted, along the lake and down. Then, perhaps, I could fit them into the beautiful relief in the photo.

I would have disturbed the animals anyway, they were grazing on my path and there was no way to separate, but to correct the direction of their retreat, I did not go straight at them, but moved to the left, making it clear that I should run to the right, towards the lake. A second – and the static picture turned into a dynamic scene. Having lined up in an arrow, the herd ran not to the place where I needed, but higher, along a longelongated snowdrift leading under the top of Telposiz, and disappeared between the rocks. Damn it! Not only they ran not where I wanted them to go, but also climbed up to the place where they can throw stones at me while moving! But there was nothing to do, I had to go and hope that the deer would run away from there before I was under them. I continued the way to the mountain. In about ten minutes I saw the herd moving away into the valley under the slope of the mountain. Well, at least that's it.

There is an interesting story connected with the name of the Yuzhny glacier I was walking on. On topographic maps the glacier is called Yuzhny Glacier, but in the Catalogue of Glaciers of the USSR it is called Govorukhin Glacier. And the real Yuzhny Glacier, according to the catalogue, is located about 10 km to the south, on the Moroya River. Today I passed over this place along the ridge. However, it is very likely that Yuzhny Glacier, like many other small glaciers in the Urals, has already melted. So, perhaps, the glacier I walked on today is now really the southernmost glacier in the Urals. And one of the most beautiful. True, comparing memories from three years ago, I couldn't help but notice that it has melted a lot over the years.

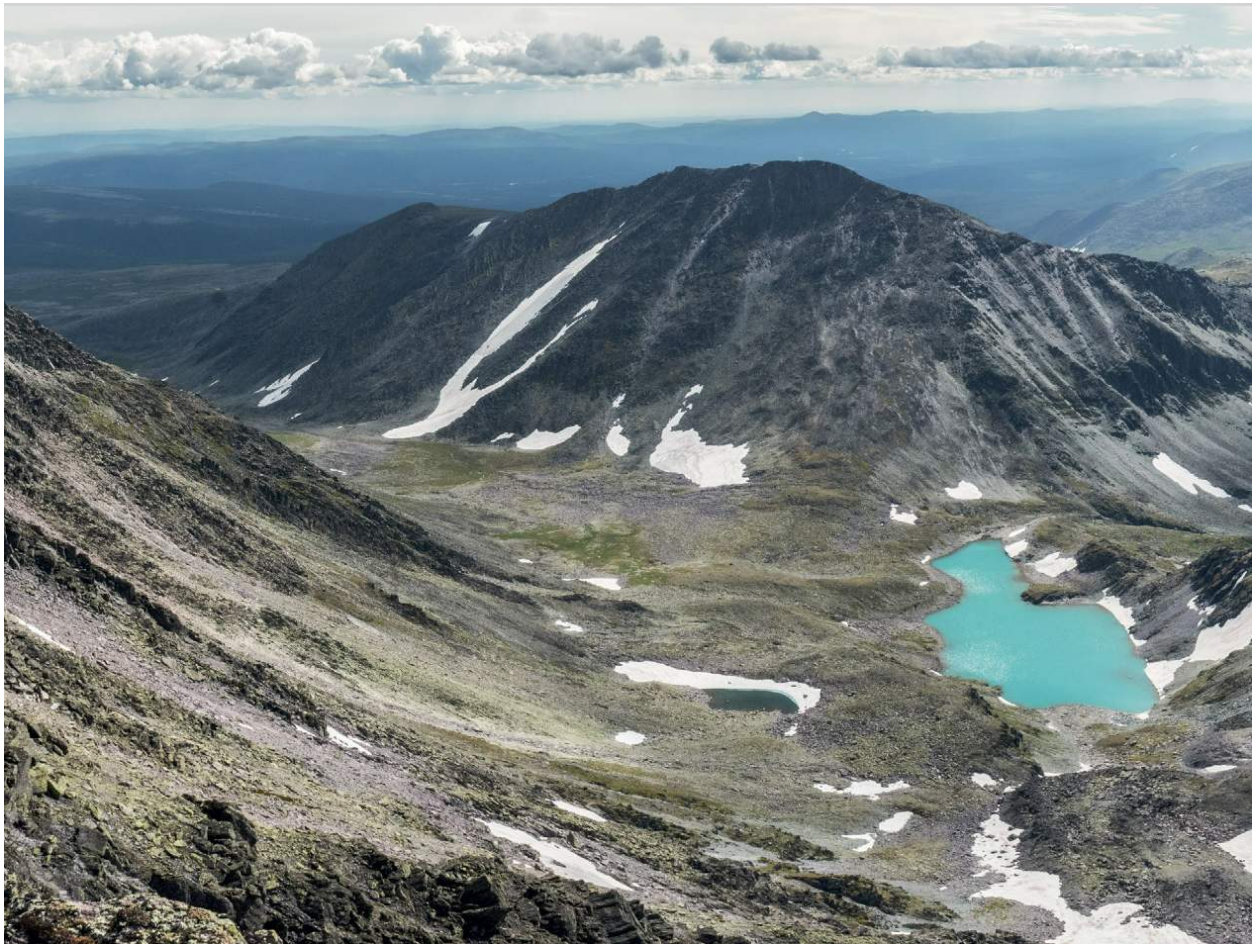
After the glacier I came to a scree slope, not too pleasant, but up it was okay to walk along it. Coming under the broken rocks at the top of part of the cirque, I tried to go around them on snowdrifts, but quickly realised that even though the rocks were alive, it was still much safer than to go in my running shoes on dense firn, going steeply downwards and ending with rocks. There was a hope that the snow would melt by the middle of the day and it would be possible to knock out steps in it, but it was not justified. I climbed out again on the rocks and with maximum caution, trying not to drop anything on myself, climbed on them. The last couple of hundred metres before reaching the ridge were the most unpleasant. If at the bottom the way up was easy to read, then on this part of the way the rocks became bigger and turned into a ruined maze, through which you had to look for a way up. A labyrinth with dead ends, live blocks hanging on by fair means, and precipices. My instinct, experience and common sense led me to the ridge. I met the kurums of the northern slope with relief. I marked the place where the descent started with a tourniquet so as not to miss it. And I ran upwards along the big unmovable kurum blocks. Here it is!



Uphill scree slope

The highest point of the third part of the Urals and in good weather! From the top there is an amazing view to the south – my way. You can see the whole ridge all the way to Pelener. And right under my feet is a turquoise lake framed by snow-white glacier. And a little further is the second turquoise lake and barely visible dot of my tent.

In the north, the mountains of the Subpolar Urals are lost in the blue haze, the silhouette of the Sablinsky Ridge is barely recognisable. And the silver strip of the Shchugor – the border of the two Urals. In the east is the ridge of Telposiz and the eastern summit.



View from the summit of Telposiz Mountain

I looked at the crest of the mountain and remembered an amazing incident that taught me a lot. Last time, coming here from the eastern summit, climbing the rocks, I unexpectedly met a bear at the very top among the lifeless rocks. Apparently, the bear had climbed higher, where the wind blows and there are no annoying gnats. Fortunately, then it had a place to go behind the rocks, on the other side of the mountain, which it did at once. It would have been quite unpleasant and very dangerous for it to be an obstacle to its escape. Since then I do not rule out meeting this animal anywhere in the Urals.

I didn't stay on the summit for long, clouds were blowing around, persistently reminding me about the weather forecast, and also the thought of descent was pressing on my nerves. Descent in such ascents is often more difficult and traumatising, so there was no opportunity to relax and waste time. The task was not even half done yet.

As I expected, the descent was problematic. On the way up, it is better to see where and how the stones are held on, but on the way down I was often forced to load the slope at my own risk. A couple of times I got unpleasantly kicked by a rolling stone and twisted my leg. It took me 50 minutes to ascend and over an hour to descend.



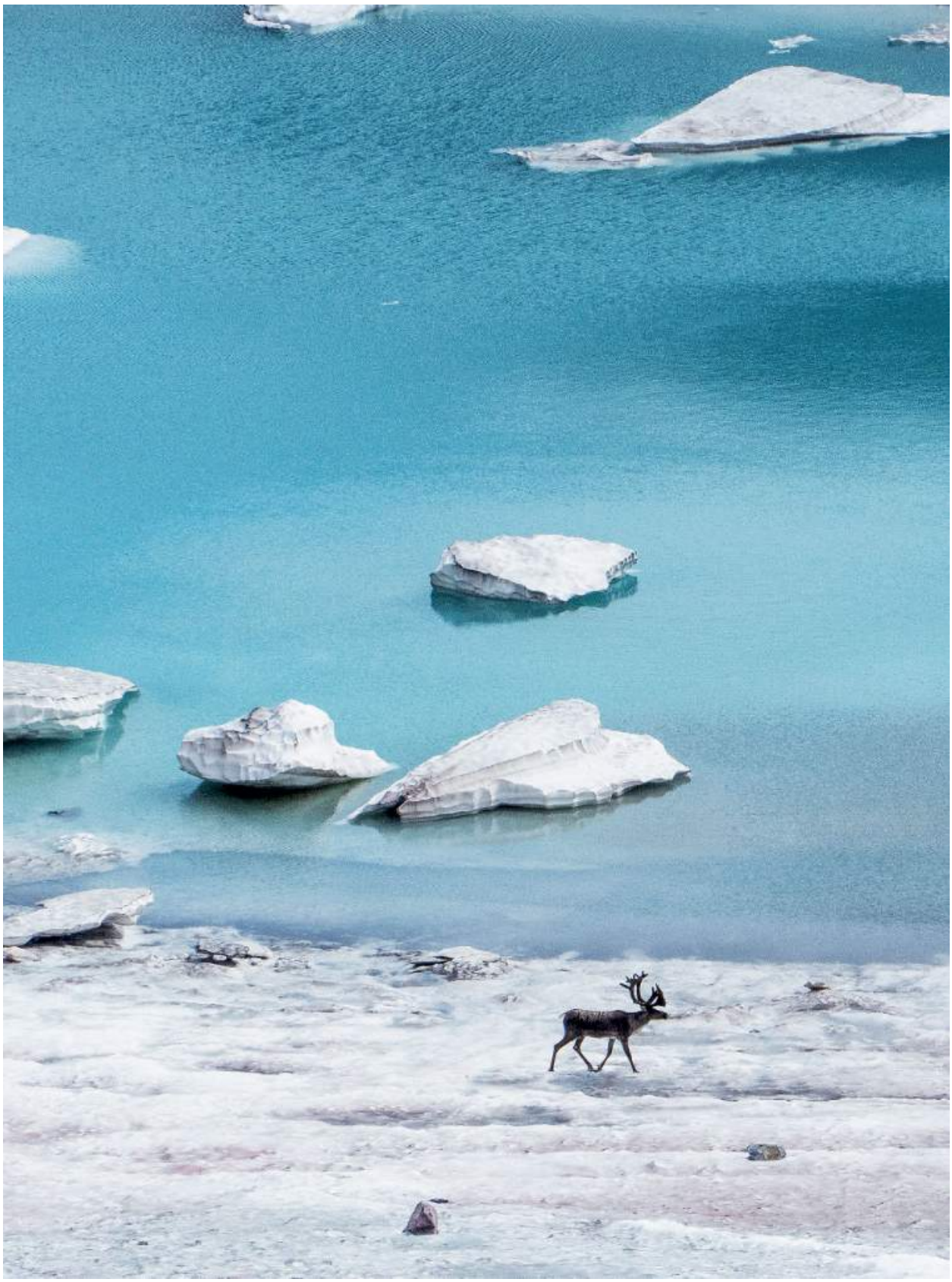
On the glacier I was barely dragging my feet, the emotional tension had taken its toll, but it was removed as if by hand as soon as I approached the glacial lake. As a reward for the ascent, a beautiful young deer with gorgeous antlers appeared right at the water's edge. I grabbed the camera hanging on my belt and managed to take a photo of this beautiful creature.

It was hard to wish for a better end of the climb, but as it turned out, that wasn't all.

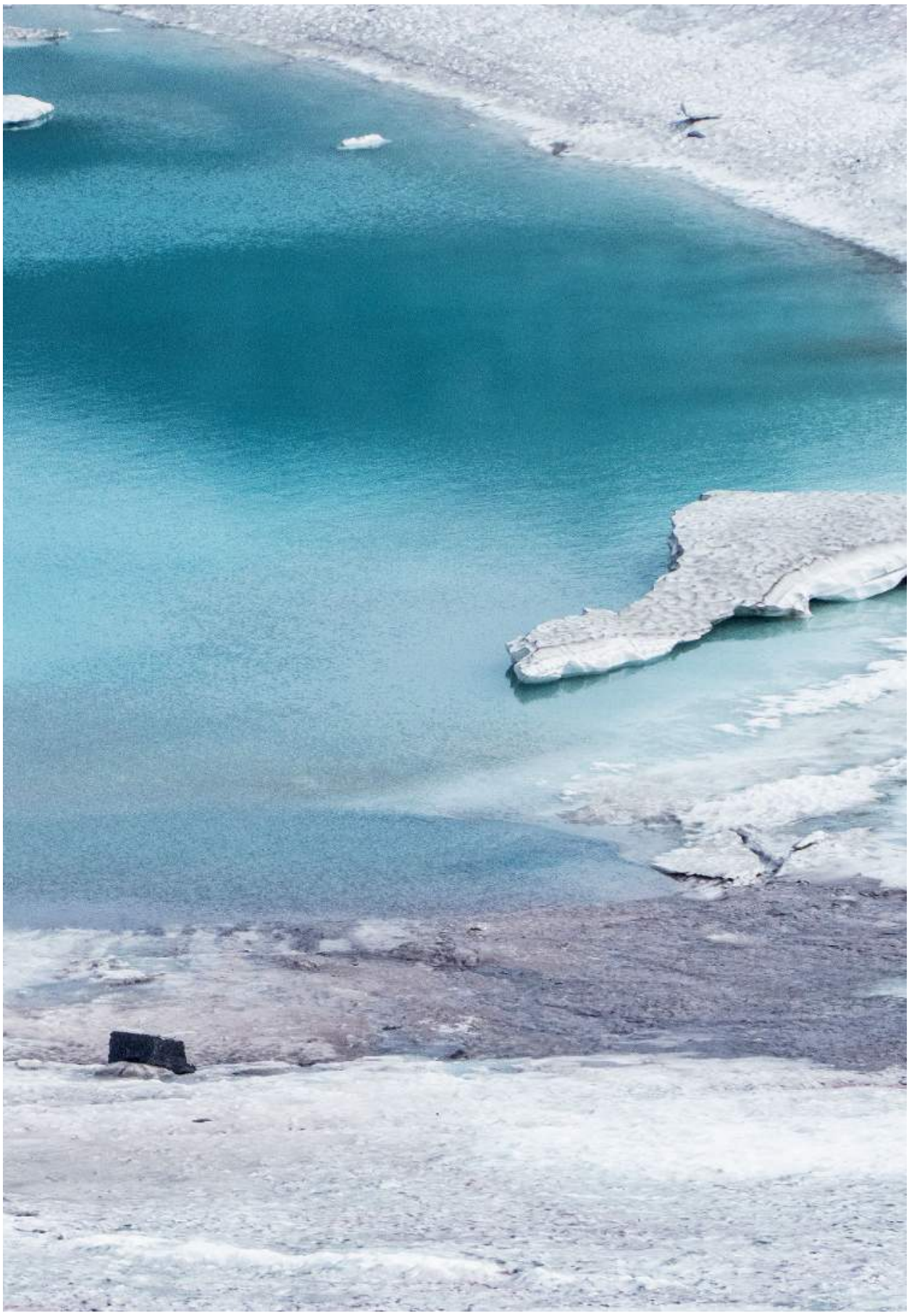
When I reached the tent, I went to rest with a sense of accomplishment, deciding that I would not take another step today.

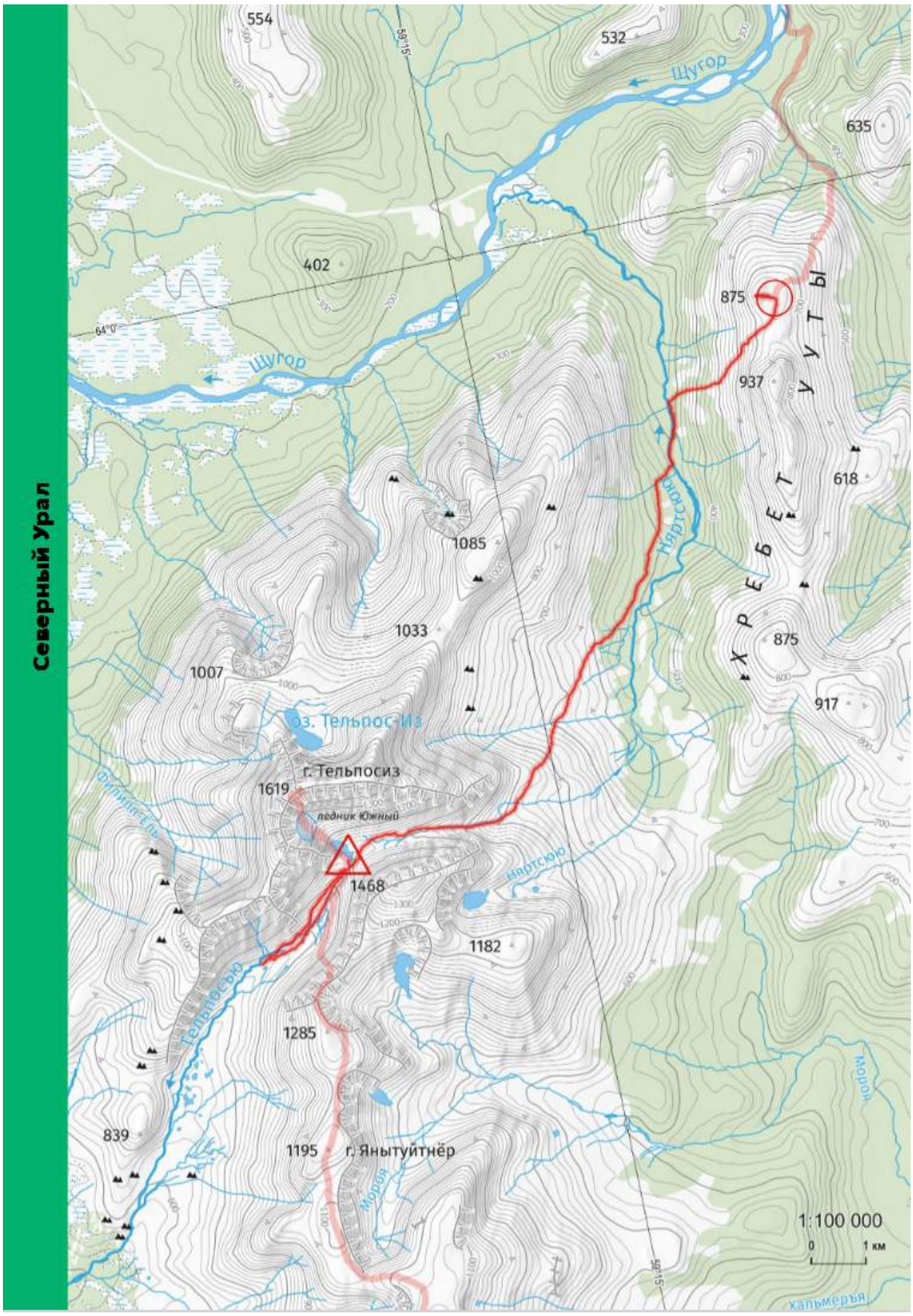
Good news came from the “big land” from Tatiana Sergeyevna. Tomorrow, if the weather permits, a new mosquito net will be brought to me by helicopter. It turned out that a helicopter with tourists was flying to the Telposiz mountain area, and they were accompanied by friends – Alexei Yakovlev, Grigory Sapegin, and Alena Maltseva. They asked if I needed anything and got a list: a mosquito net, ketchup, a bottle of Coca-Cola. I can only hope that the weather will allow it.

The rest of the day was spent in idleness. I watched as the weather turned bad, as Telposiz plunged into the clouds.



Deer on the Yuzhny Glacier





The Northern Urals

Shchugor River *Nyartsyuyu River*

Uuty Range

Lake Telpos-Iz

Mount Telposiz

Yuzhny Glacier

Filipp-Yol River

Telposyu River

Mount Yanytuitynyor

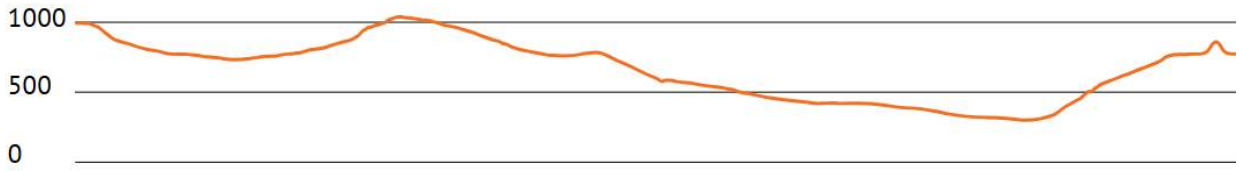
Moroya River

Khalmerya River

Day 79

Telposiz Mountain (1619) – Nyartsyuyu River – Uuty Ridge (summit 875.1)

23 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2310.7 km





Sleeping under the mountain

July 18, 2021

It struck so hard I almost fell off the mat I was sleeping on. No separation, a flash – and the sky immediately cracked. A flash – a bang, and multiple echoes between the mountains. And so over and over for about forty minutes. Once again I found myself in the epicentre of a thunderstorm. In the narrow valley the wind was blowing, the tent was bent. It was pouring down in a wall, flooding everything around. The most unpleasant thing in this situation was that although I was at the bottom of the valley, I was still on a hill, in the wind and, most likely, on the way of the storm cloud, judging by all appearances, rising up the valley from the south-west. Where was this cloud, where was it going and when would it leave? The questions were important, and it was especially exciting that I could guess the answers to them

only by indirect signs, because it was impossible to see anything in the darkness that enveloped the world.

Not willing to guess, I crawled deeper into my sleeping bag and tried to sleep. It was too late to run somewhere anyway, and I wasn't even sure where to go. But it was difficult to fall asleep. My back was even more troublesome than another thunderstorm. The spasm, which had been tormenting me for the third day, did not let me lie on my back. It made me constantly wake up and look for the only possible position on my side. When I fell asleep, I rolled over onto my back, and it happened again and again.

In the morning, angry and sleep-deprived, I woke up in a cloud, visibility around the tent was 50 metres. I was angry that with such cloud cover it made no sense to hope that people would arrive by helicopter. I contacted the guys via satellite tracker. They informed me that the forecast for the second half of the day was positive. Everyone was ready for departure, just waiting for the cloud cover to lift.

There were some good things about the night rain – I didn't have to go to fetch water for breakfast. The kettle that was outside was about half full.

The long hours of waiting for the good weather and guessing at the clouds began. Everything in the valley was bubbling like a pot. The clouds were stretching, opening up distant views down to the south-west, and then closing everything again. However, it did not make much sense, the top of Telposiz and the valley were covered by a higher tier of clouds, and I should not have waited for a helicopter until it stretched.

Unpleasant hours of waiting, filled with doubts. Time was passing, and I was lying there, and there were no guarantees that the time would not be wasted in vain. It is always like that with helicopters: very convenient and fast when there is good weather, but very nerve-wracking because there is often no weather in the mountains. Hours passed, messages flew in both directions. At eight o'clock in the morning, the helicopter took off, but, as Telposiz was still clouded, it went further away, to the Shchugor River, to the rock gates.

By ten o'clock in the morning I had completely lost my peace, walking around the tent like a caged animal. At some point, tired of idleness, I decided to do some useful work. Having analysed the results of the night downpour, I sewed two additional straps on the tent from the ends and darned all the holes on my trousers. Then I went to shoot the waterfall. I hid among the rocks, watching deer crossing the valley and passing by my hill every now and then.

At noon I packed up the camp and backpack. I decided to send a check message and, if the answer was not positive, to move on. Soon I received a message that they would be flying out to me in an hour.



Meeting with Gregoriy Sapegin and Alyona Maltseva

An hour passed, and then a second began, when finally the satellite tracker beeped nervously, the display lit up with the message: “We're flying to you, we'll be there in 25 minutes.” It seemed like luck; there was a window over the valley! Minutes flowed on for what felt like an eternity. I strained my eyes painfully towards the west, eager to see a moving dot in the sky as soon as possible. I wanted to capture it against the backdrop of the valley.

First came the hum of the engine, then a point of the rotorcraft appeared against the bright clouds. But before it could take shape as the silhouette of a helicopter, it turned south and disappeared behind the mountain peaks. The sound vanished as well. Strange; it seemed I would have to wait a little longer. Pilots are unusual people who live by their own laws, incomprehensible to us pedestrians.

A few minutes later, quite unexpectedly, ahead of the roar of engines, the aircraft burst into the valley above the spot where I had walked in the mountains yesterday, made several circles, and landed 5 kilometers away from me by the banks of the Telposya River.

Immediately, a message came from Alexey Yakovlev that the helicopter could not fly any higher and that I needed to descend. How infuriated I was at that moment. Cursing everything and everyone (myself first and foremost, for embarking on this adventure), I started my descent. The extra kilometers drove me mad, especially after imagining many times that the fast-flying machine would easily deliver a lot of delicious and nutritious things directly at my feet.

Another message came: the guys ran out to meet me in order to reduce the helicopter's downtime. I took off faster. The main thing is not to miss each other.

Somewhere in the middle of the way, on a dry clearing by the river, I met the messengers: Grigory Sapegin and Alena Maltseva ran out from behind a moraine hill. How glad I was to see them! We had never met the guys in person before, I knew them only from the “Crown of the Urals” project, they were implementing it and completed it. How nice it was to meet living and kindred spirits in this lost corner!

We exchanged a few short phrases. Every now and then, Alexey's excited voice came from the radio, telling them to hurry up. I passed them photos for publication, took a mosquito net, a bottle of Coca-Cola, ketchup, and a chocolate bar. I posed for Grigory a bit – he takes pictures the old-fashioned way with a film camera. Farewell hugs, and our paths diverged. The guys would be in Troitsko-Pechorsk in a few hours. And I still had to make up for lost time – to cover the planned mileage.

Grabbing my backpack, without losing a second, I headed east along the planned route. In fact, today turned out to be half a day, but the days are long, northern, so I walked briskly with the intention of making up for lost time by evening. The climb quickly ended, and I began to descend along a narrow valley squeezed between the mountains. Again, places began that

I had not seen before. Ahead, a few kilometers away, the valley of the Nyartsyuyu River opened up as a bright expanse. I walked along the smooth, glacier-lined rocky bottom, like a pavement. The stones were fresh, multi-colored, without grass or lichen, this indicated that snow apparently lies here for a long time, not allowing plants to take root. On the slopes, on the descending snowfields, I met two small herds of deer. I never cease to be amazed at the wild life around Telposiz; nowhere in the Urals have I met so many wild animals as here.

After a few kilometers, the sides of the side valley ended, and I came out into the wide, spacious valley of the Nyartsyuyu River. The river was visible below, on its right bank towered the Uuty Ridge with a noticeable sharp dome of a kurum peak in the north.

I sat by a beautiful, heavily eroded rock, sheltered from the wind, and thought about how to go on. Not an easy task. There were three options. To go through the spurs of Telposiz, going around the forest that filled the valley, along the tops. I didn’t like this option because I would have to jump down the kurums a lot. I was tired and didn’t want to do it. The second option was to go down to the valley and try to go through the forest along the river to where it flows into Shchugor.

I didn't like this option because I would have to walk a lot through the forest and I would definitely miss the sunset. But the weather seemed to have improved, and I really wanted to admire the surrounding landscapes; tomorrow there would be no such opportunity. The third option – to cross the forest valley along the shortest path and climb the Uuty ridge – seemed to me the most promising and interesting. So I decided to do it.



Nyartsyuyu River Valley

And after about an hour I strongly regretted my decision. The forest, which from above seemed like a noble dark coniferous taiga, met me with impassable thickets of willow growing over swamps. This new obstacle very quickly sucked out the remaining reserves of strength. As an addition to the main misadventure, very soon I was surrounded by a dense cloud of midges. What happiness that I have protection from them again! I put on the mosquito net I had brought, and a small miracle happened, making me forget for a few minutes about the hardships and adversities of the journey. Alena, handing me the net, said that she learned of my request when she was already ready to fly, there was no time to buy a new one, so she gave hers. And here is the picture. I, a dirty and smelly man who hasn't washed for a long time, am making my way somewhere in the wilds of the Northern Urals through thickets of dwarf willow, surrounded by a cloud of midges, knee-deep in mud, and the intoxicating aroma of clean, shampooed women's hair hits my nose. An incredible smell from somewhere in another world, from where there are smooth roads, cafes, a soft, clean bed, a shower and many beautiful people. A smell that could not possibly be here, but nevertheless miraculously appeared.

Soon the swamps by the river ended, and slender, low birches and firs appeared. I forded the Nyartsyuya River. For some time I walked along its bank. The water in the river was below the knee, but the marks on the trees, left by the spring ice

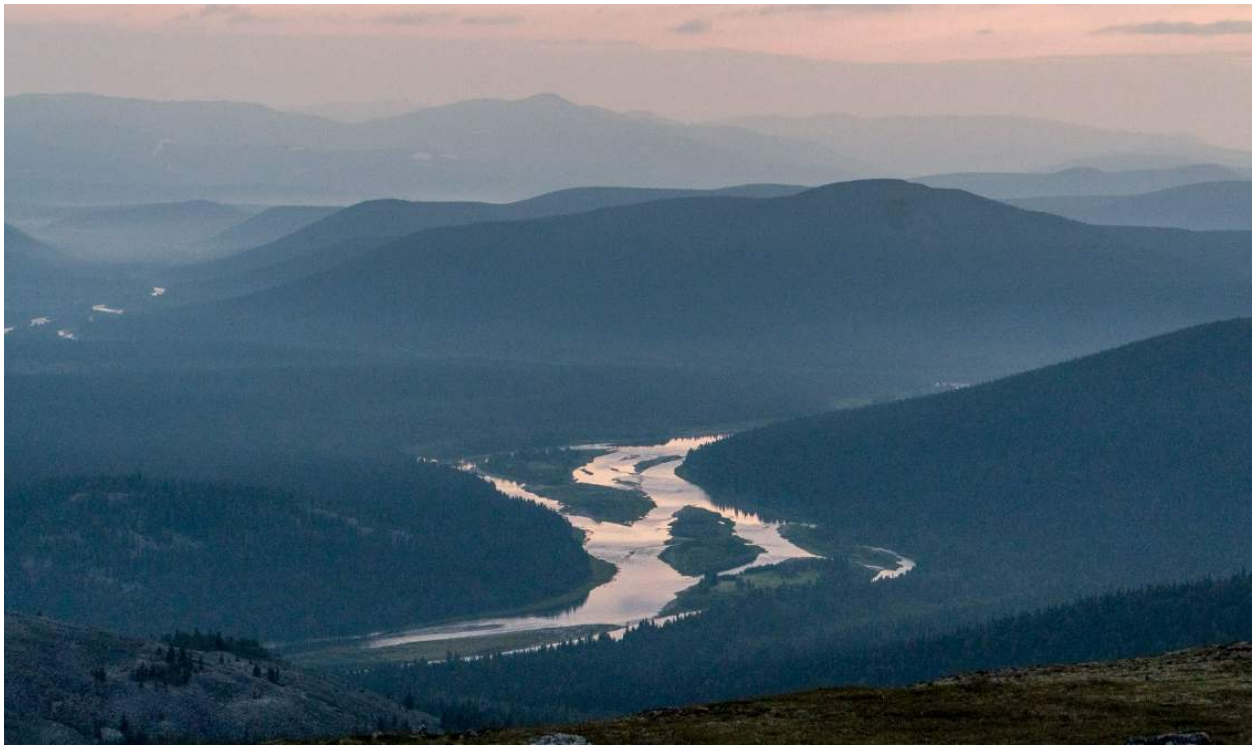
at a height of 2-3 m above the water, clearly made it clear how formidable this calm small river can be during the flood. From the river there was another short walk through the forest, and the saving scree slope began to lift me up. How pleasant it was to walk along the scree stairs! No glaciers, no scree slopes of destroyed rocks. Only stones, firmly standing in their places. Having risen above the forest zone, I surrendered myself to the cool breeze, fell on a tundra clearing between the stones, and let it drive away the annoying bloodsuckers. I lay there and admired the view. Yes, I made the right choice of route. The view is wonderful. Telposiz rises like a jagged wall, most likely few have seen it from here. The photos taken today will be even more valuable.

I pitched the tent on a vast tundra plateau under the protection of a small kurum elevation and Mount 875.1 – a peak that looked like a pointed dome from below. I was very clearly aware of the illusory nature of the protection of these elevations, so I chose heavier stones to stretch the tent. It can blow quite a bit here.

I went to see off the sunset to the neighboring peak. I took food and a stove with me. I climbed to the very top. Exposing my face to the rays of the setting sun, I admired the surrounding landscape. Telposiz towered behind me in the southwest,



Telposiz from the Uuty ridge

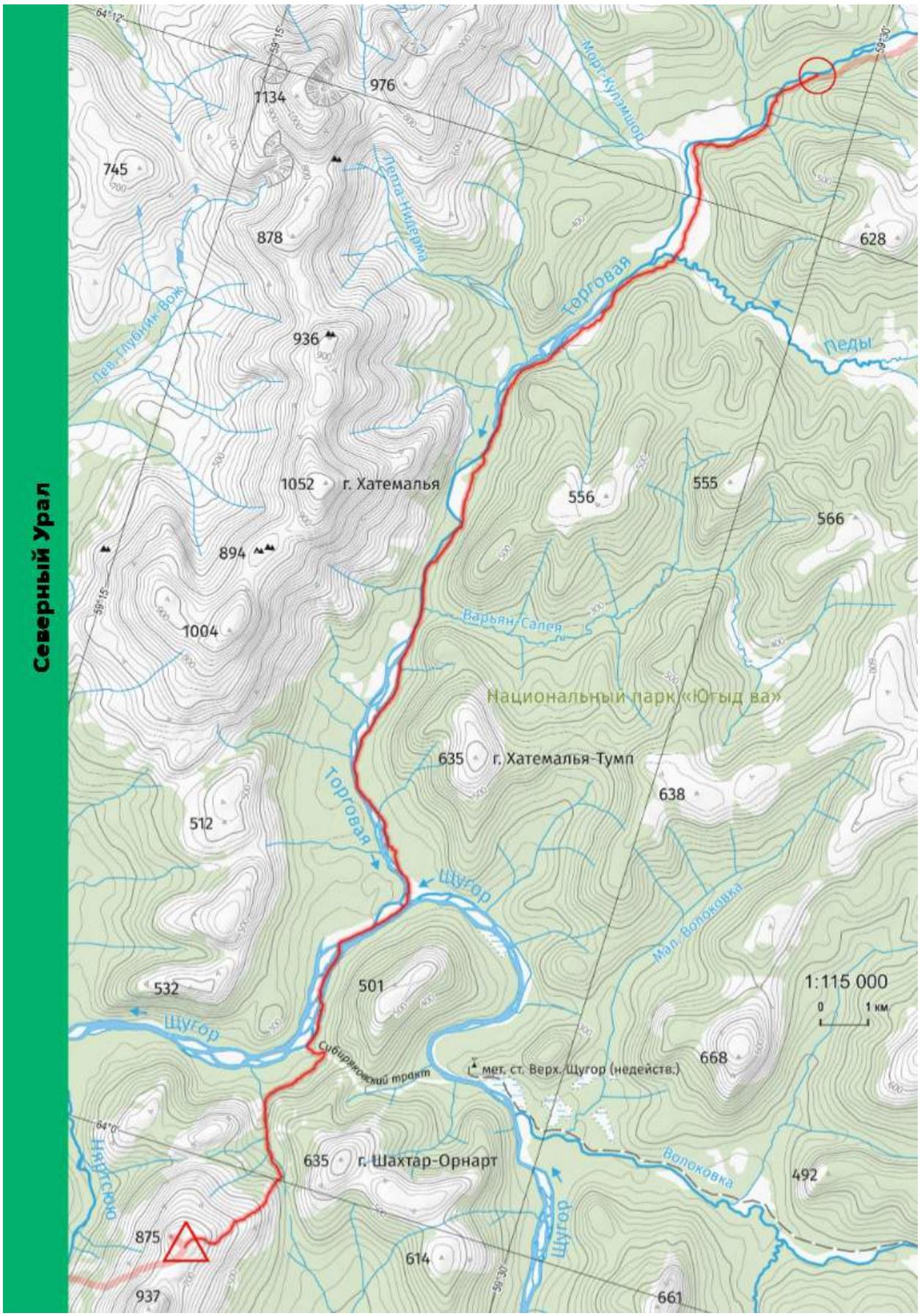


View of the Shchugor River

both of its peaks were visible surrounded by lower ones, the massif looked even more grandiose and left no doubt who was the main one here. Shchugor twisted beneath me, the taiga surrounding it was already engulfed in twilight, and the river glowed with the silver of the sunset. Starting from the Chusovaya River, which remained far to the south, this is the largest water obstacle on my way. It is for its overcoming that I carry the boat. Will I need it, I will find out tomorrow. And beyond the river, in the north, in the sunset haze, new ridges towered, which I had not yet walked along. This is already the Subpolar Urals, it does not yet resemble the mountains that we are used to seeing, there are no pointed peaks, cirques, cliffs. These are all the same gentle kurum ridges. However, a couple of days will pass, and they will give way to alpine relief forms. There is not much time left to wait.

I seasoned my dinner with a fair portion of ketchup. And I was absolutely happy about it. How I missed it! After all, seasonings and additional sauces, which do not give anything in terms of energy, but diversify the taste of a not-so-great choice of food, are very important. At least for me. When it is hard, bad, lonely, the taste and variety of food is one of the few available joys. It is not worth neglecting it.

The sun went into a haze on the horizon. It immediately became colder. Wrapped in clothes, I hurried down to the saving warmth and comfort of the sleeping bag. The day was long, nervous, but wonderful. I can rest a bit.



The Northern Urals

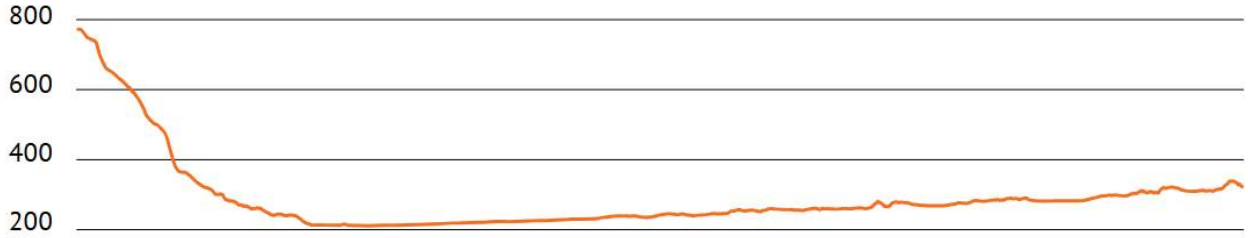
Lev. Glubnik-Vozh *Lepta-Niderma*

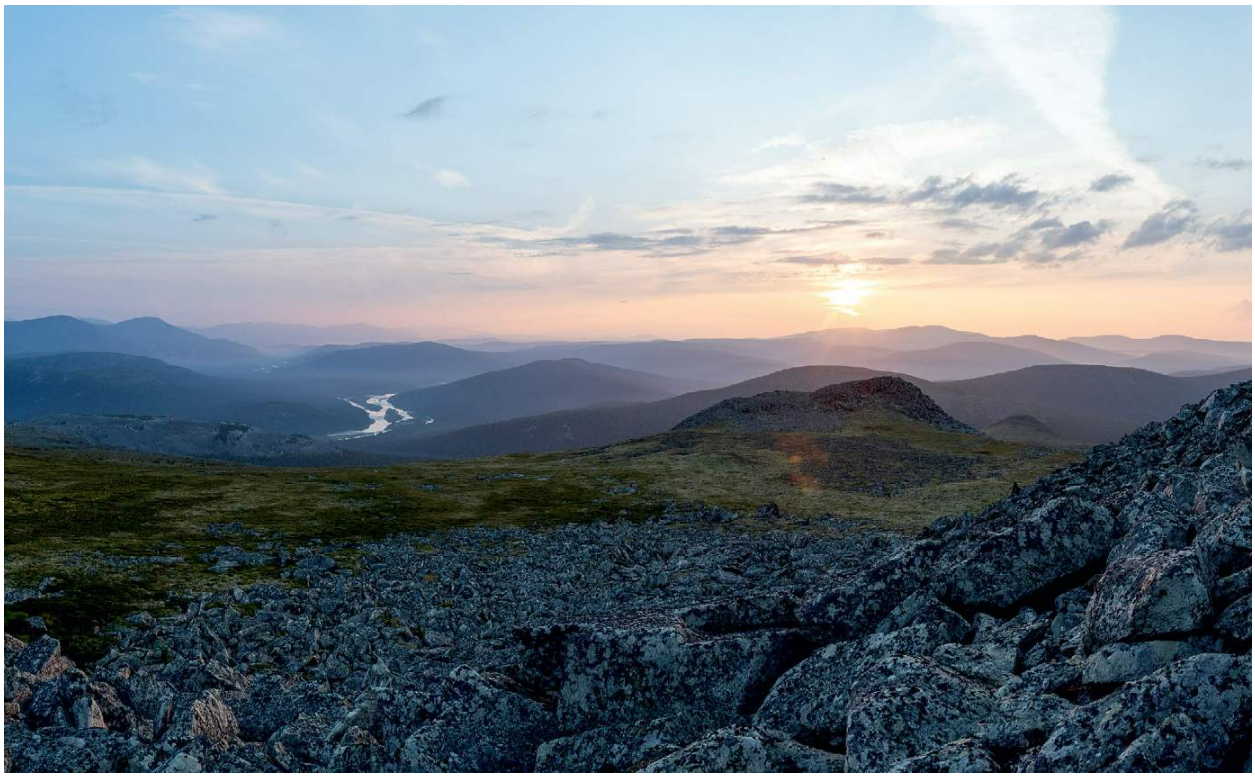
Mort-Kulemshor
Torgovaya
Pedy
Khatemalya town
Varian Saleya
Yugyd Va National Park
Khatemalya-Tump town
Torgovaya
Shchugor
Mal. Volokovka
Sibiryakovsky tract
Nyartsyuyu
Shakhtar-Ornart town
met. st. Verkh. Shchugor (inactive)
Volokovka

Day 80

Uuty Ridge (peak 875.1) – Shchugor River – Torgovaya River

36 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2346.7 km





Dawn from the Uuty Ridge

July 19, 2021

The night was warm and calm. Woke up ten minutes before dawn.

Contrary to usual, the place where the sun was supposed to come out was practically no different in color from a large section of the visible horizon. The cottony haze that enveloped the lower part of the sky evenly dispersed and distributed the morning light.

I had to wait for dawn in a cloud of mosquitoes. I sat on a soft mossy tundra carpet, waiting for the sun to appear. And then, not from behind the horizon, but a

little higher, apparently from behind an invisible dense strip of clouds, the first red dot appeared. Then it turned into a strip, the strip began to increase, expand, and the light in the sky began to acquire the features of a ball. As often happens, with the appearance of the first rays, air masses began to move. A light breeze, gently touching my face, ran about its daily business. The world around began to fill with delicate color. Ahead, where I had to go today, mountains, half-dissolved in this light, began to pile up one above the other, and below, playing with colors, Shchugor woke up.

I really wanted to sit and admire this gentle, quiet beauty and not rush anywhere, but at such moments you can't waste time. You need to take as many angles and views as possible while there is light.

Perhaps this is some kind of "photographer's curse": you can't calmly enjoy, you have to run exactly when it is least appropriate.

I got up and ran to the opposite slope, about two hundred meters away, to take a look at Telposiz, illuminated by the morning sun. Like yesterday, and the day before yesterday, the summit in the morning hours was covered by a small cloud, caught on its pointed ridge and hiding it. The slopes of the mountain were more gentle, more relief than yesterday at sunset, but without the top the summit looked flawed.

After taking a couple of shots, I ran back and a little to the right, to the scree hill. And so I ran back and forth all dawn, looking for something to photograph. I'm sure that when I have to write a book, I'll thank myself for the variety of illustration options.After the sun had finally set in the sky, I tried to sleep a little more. I suffered for about an hour and a half. The tent immediately warmed up, it was unbearably stuffy and hot in the sleeping bag, and without a sleeping bag, bright direct rays shone into my eyes.

I set out on the route at 7:30. I hadn't even managed to walk a kilometer when I flew at full speed into a small clearing with finally almost ripe cloudberries. What happiness! To gather a handful of these pink berries, already beginning to turn into amber, and throw them in your mouth at once.



The first ripe cloudberry on the route

Feel how you are filled with a bright, juicy and unusual taste. There is no tastier berry in the Urals than cloudberries, especially when they are, like today, slightly unripe. Reddish-pink. It is in this state that they are the sweetest. A little time will pass; they will become amber and acquire a slightly sour taste.

I went down to the forest line along the longest, north-eastern spur of the ridge. If you remember, in the south of the Northern Urals, on the descent from Oshchy Stone, I measured its height and wanted to do this in the extreme north of this part of the Urals. I looked at the navigator – 420 m. This means that in 450 km traveled to the north, the forest has dropped by about 430 m. A little less than one meter per kilometer! The forest will continue to go lower and lower, revealing the slopes of the mountains, until it completely dissolves in the endless tundra.

At the exit to Shchugor, I had to get lost a little and find myself an adventure. It was quite easy to get to the river along a well-trodden game trail running along a small unnamed tributary, but, about a kilometer before reaching the mouth, I turned into the forest. I had to make my way through notable windfalls and the tall grass that covered them.

I cherished the hope of finding traces of the old Sibiryakovsky tract, which once passed through this place. The road was created in the last quarter of the 19th century by the talented entrepreneur A. M. Sibiryakov, crossed the Urals along the ancient route from Pechora through Shchugor to the Ob River. This road, named in honor of its creator, operated only in winter, represented a wide clearing in the forest. It ceased to exist in the last years of the 19th century due to the construction of railroads in the south through the Urals.

However, having arrived at the place marked on the map, having wandered well among a series of small clearings, one after another, densely overgrown with

tall grass, he was unable to find any traces of the former road. He tried to do this on the shore, but the dense uryoma also hid all possible traces, which was generally not surprising. Having come up empty-handed, I found myself on the bank of the great border river Shchugor, and the bitterness of unfulfilled hope very quickly gave way to joy and new concerns.

I was as happy as a child who had just gotten to swim. A clean and warm, wide and shallow river. At the bottom, multi-colored stones and myriads of dancing rays – reflections of the waves. Behind me, over the river and the forest, the black bulk of the Telposiz wall rises. I have finally passed the third part of the Urals. It remains to cross to the right bank and set foot on the territory of the Subpolar Urals. It is clear that this is a fairly conventional border, but the human brain loves signs and conventions, nothing can be done about it.



Ford across the Shchugor River

At first, I walked along the grassy left bank, then at the rapids I crossed to a large island dividing the river into two branches, walked along it, and when

the island ended, I had already waded across the main riverbed. I was definitely lucky, I didn't need a boat, the water in the deepest place was no more than 80 cm. I walked a couple more kilometers along the bank to the mouth of the Torgovaya River, here I had to leave Shchugor and walk along its tributary. But first, lunch and rest. Having undressed, I washed my clothes, laid them out on the sun-warmed stones. I swam, sunbathed, enjoyed my well-deserved rest. With a grin, I imagined how surprised the rafters would be if they suddenly appeared from around the bend of the river, and here I was naked. However, the river was quiet and deserted. I was alone.

After a rest, inspired by the easy crossing and anticipating that the difficulties of this day were behind me, I entered the waters of the Torgovaya River. My legs immediately felt that its water was colder, which is understandable, because before meeting Shchugor, the Torgovaya River passes more than twice as short a path, simply not having time to warm up.

The anticipation of ease was based on the thought that there should be either a road or a path along the river. And I just need to find it and walk along the shore, slowly entering the Subpolar Mountains. Nikolay Aleksandrov, one of the most experienced tourists in the Urals, consulting me before the route, wrote this: “The path along Torgovaya is not difficult, there is a path along the river. You need to look for it (as it is drawn on the map) on the eastern bank, although it is possible that it is now overgrown.” Nikolay Rundkvist also described in his book a path along the river. My hope was based on this.

But here’s the problem: no matter how much I searched for this path, I could not find anything even remotely similar to it. There was forest or floodplain meadows thickly overgrown with grass everywhere. In the end, having lost my way quite a bit, I decided to go along the bank to more stingy taiga places, maybe I could cut the path there.

I walked straight through the water and along the rocky bank. It was uncomfortable to walk, my feet sometimes fell on small sharp edges, sometimes slipped off large sloping stones. In one place on a narrow rocky coastal strip right by

the water, I came across a fairly fresh fire pit. Knowing that people had been here recently cheered me up a little.

Going around one of the many islands on the river along the left channel, I came to a place where the riverbed had almost completely dried up due to the summer low water. Water remained only in the deepest places in the form of puddles. In the transparent depths at their bottom, silvery fish 20-30 cm long were hovering, rhythmically swaying their fins. Out of curiosity, I put my hand in the water, and everything in the puddle immediately began to move. Locked in a limited space, possibly doomed to die, the graylings darted about like maddened torpedoes. However, to be completely honest, I don’t know what kind of fish they were. I have a very vague idea of what a live grayling looks like, I have never caught it and have only seen it already cooked, cut into pieces and salted. For some reason, it seems to me, or wants to seem, that these were exactly them.

I have a complicated relationship with fish and fishing in general, which invariably raises questions from people who follow my travels. Why doesn't he fish?! The question is completely logical. Especially since I grew up and was largely formed as a person on the water, on the shore of the Pavlovsk Reservoir. My grandfather was an avid fisherman, he caught everything that floats, and took me with him as a child. It didn't work out. As soon as I got older, my interest in fishing completely disappeared. Maybe I was too restless, or maybe I was clumsy for this business. I can't even remember now. The second reason why I don't fish is my typical style of walking in the mountains and rivers. I rarely spend the night near the water, even during a rafting trip, if possible, I try to take a backpack and climb higher to get the best view. During the day, I prefer to walk aggressively, without stopping, which is also not conducive to fishing. In the evening, I have long since given up on a fire at the bivouac, I have a clearly defined ration and the amount of gas needed for cooking. And in these calculations, there is no room for fishing luck and unplanned expenditure of valuable hiking resources, water, gas, salt, time. That is probably why I don't fish.

Although I understand that if I make a route that exceeds my ability to carry food, I will have to start fishing. For now, no, definitely not on the Trans-Ural route.

About 10 km after starting to move along the river, I came to something like a path, or rather even a trace in the form of a flattened path, followed it, and became more cheerful. It would seem that it was just flattened grass, but the speed increased, and the labor costs decreased. After all, it is better to see where you put your foot, and you have to spend less energy on the brain, orientation, constant choice of path. True, you can't relax completely at such moments either, you can imperceptibly go far and in the wrong direction. To myself, I call this phenomenon “the magic of the path.” And this magic is not at all kind, many times it has cost me time and effort. It consists in the fact that, having reached a more convenient for movement linearly extended surface, a road, a snowmobile track, a path, a clearing, an animal track, you seem to become dependent on this line. You lose vigilance and can easily run in the wrong direction, and even when you understand that the direction of the path differs from the desired one, it can be very difficult to convince yourself to leave it, there are a lot of excuses to continue moving. Often this ends with extra kilometers. Fortunately, this time I was not afraid to go in the wrong direction, the noise of the river was constantly heard on the left, serving as an excellent landmark.



Telposiz from the Shchugor River



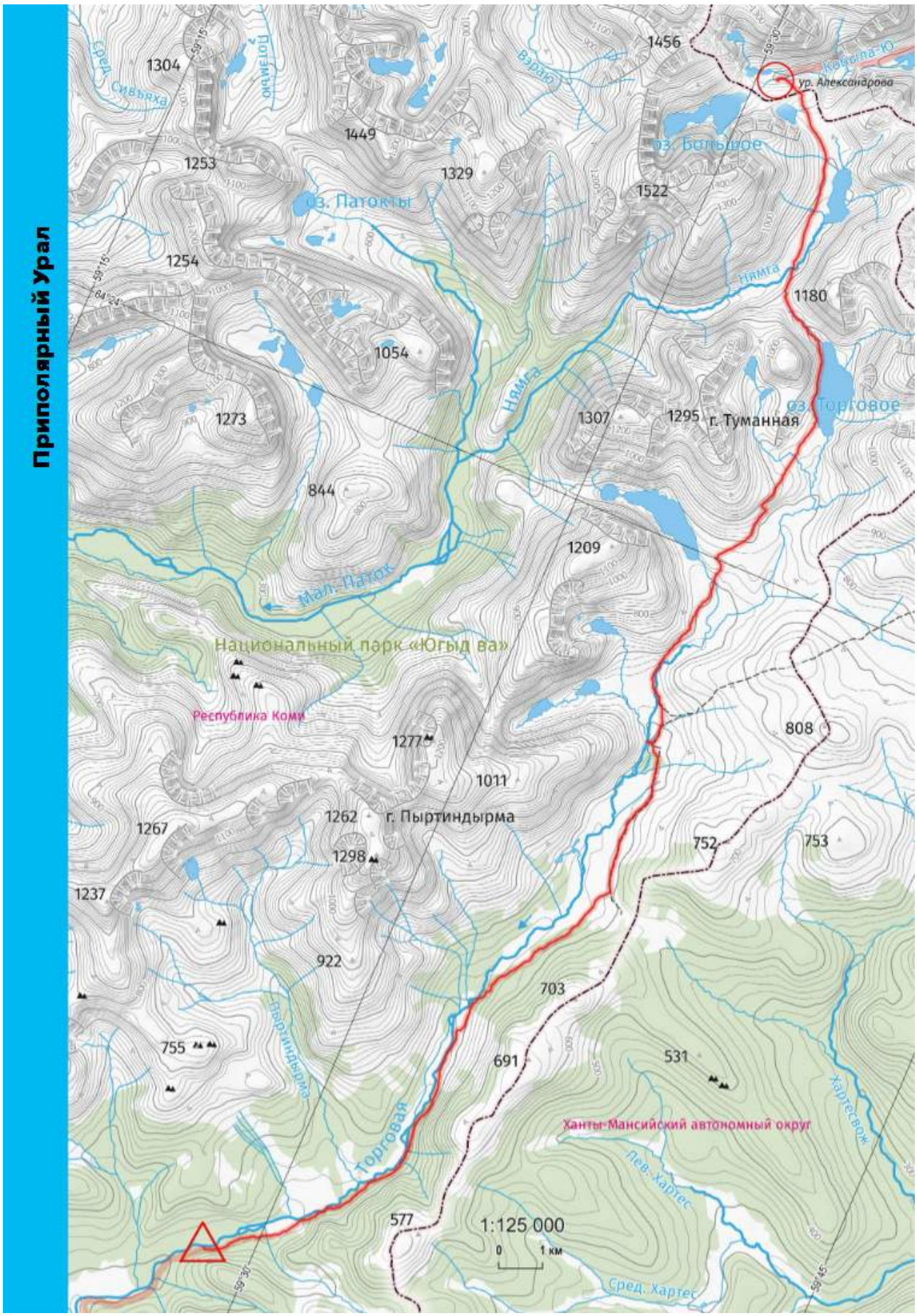
Overnight stay above the Torgovaya River

At first, following the trail, I doubted its human origin, it could well have been left by some large animal, a bear or an elk, the trail meandered, got lost, was found again, but always went in the right direction. However, when after a few kilometers it led me to another fire pit, there were no doubts left: this was a human trail and they were going the same route as me.

Of the notable things on the route: in the afternoon there was only the traditionally littered with technological garbage work place of geologists, crowned by the skeleton of an all-terrain vehicle. I have already lost count of how many times I have met these abandoned workers of the taiga and tundra on my hikes. They stand without windows and engines, rusty, but still strong, like monuments or tombstones to the history of the rapid development of our mountains in the twentieth century. I look at them with mixed feelings: they seem like trash, but they command respect.

I stopped for the night, as I like, on top of a small cliff overlooking the river. This was one of the most inconvenient stops during the entire route. The mossy brow

of the cliff bent the tent at a very uncomfortable angle, the things stuffed into my legs and the backpack did not change the situation for the better much. But there was a view of the river and the mountains that had been piling up along the right bank all day. The best you could wish for at the end of a day in the taiga.



The Subpolar Ural

ur. Aleksandrova *Patotny*

Yamga

Tumannaya

Torgovoe

Yugyd Va National Park,

Komi Republic

Pyrtindyrma

Lartesvozh

Torgovaya

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous district

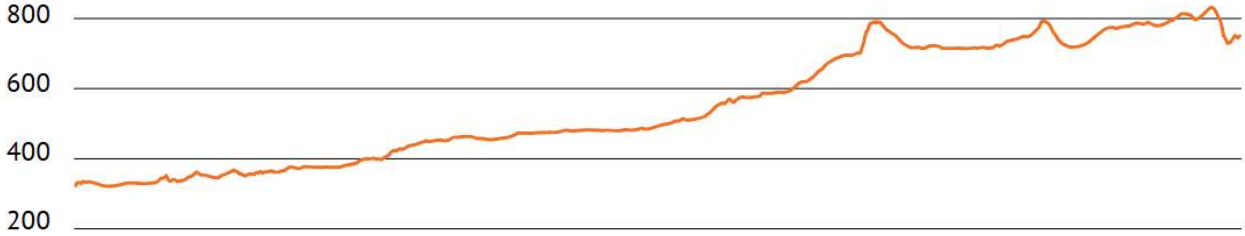
Lev. Hartes

Sred. Hartes

Day 81

Torgovaya River – Nyamga River – Kobyla-Yu River (Aleksandrova tract)

40 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2386.7 km



July 20, 2021

Woke up 15 minutes before dawn. Tired, beaten by falls in the past days, the body obeyed poorly, was somehow numb and had not rested at all, resisting the disgusting position of the tent all night. However, opening the flap, I saw that the dawn was turning red in the light clouds above the river in the upper reaches. I dressed in a hurry and in a few minutes I was on a moss carpet.

Below me, the scarlet river, reflecting the sky, was rustling, framed by dark taiga, and in the distance, on the horizon, mountains towered. There were no such angles on the entire route, so the moment was all the more valuable. I waited for the first piece of sun to appear above the horizon, the first ray to stretch to my face.

I took a few photos, enjoying the moment. It looks like another exhaustingly hot, hard day awaits me. Yesterday I forgot to write about this: to all the misadventures of the way I had to add the heat and stuffiness, which under the forest canopy, in the grass, pressed me mercilessly, taking away my strength. Today, judging by the weather, a continuation awaited me.



Dawn over the Torgovaya River

I crawled back into the tent and indulged in pleasant idleness for another three hours. I read a book, dozed, studied the route, ate breakfast leisurely.

At 6:10 I got on the beaten path and, as if on rails, rolled forward. First along the mossy high bank, then, having descended, through the sparse mixed forest. I began to come across numerous crooked birches, many fallen ones, and, interestingly, the fallen trees were fresh, with still green foliage – apparently, a hurricane had recently passed through here. Well, a good reminder of the need to choose a place to spend the night in the forest more carefully. True, a rather belated reminder: the forest on my way became thinner and thinner with each kilometer, and perhaps this was my last night among the trees. Today I must leave this zone, enter the tundra and mountains.

In place of the forest, which was comfortable to walk through, vast grassy glades began to appear – a real curse. Densely overgrown with grass, abundantly filled with icy morning dew, for my broken, tired legs, just beginning to diverge, they were deadly. Floating along them, as if on an icy river, I was shaking from the cold and swearing at the whole taiga – a funny sight and a good preventative measure against meeting bears.

And only the trail of an unknown group of people-predecessors brightened up the loneliness. It was obvious that it was laid by experienced people, it went logically. It was as if I was moving with them, and this gave me strength. I will have to try to find this group* upon my return and say thank you. After all, not many people walk through these places.

However, all good things come to an end sooner or later, the trail went into the river Uryoma and disappeared. I don't know, maybe they crossed to the other bank. Having wandered around the river thickets, but still not finding it, I got out onto the bank and went on by myself. And then, once again checking the map, I thought: what if I move away from the river and go up the slope, there is probably less grass there. I began to gain altitude and literally after a few dozen meters up and a couple of hundred meters to the side I found myself on a divine tundra carpet. It would have been a real joy, but the trail disappeared. Sometimes it is worth thinking with your own head and not giving yourself over entirely to the "magic of the trail."

**As I was able to establish later, the saving trail was left by a group of four people led by Mikhail Posrednikov, who had made a hike to Mount Telposiz as part of the "Crown of the Urals" project a few days before me.*



The first alpine landforms on the way

After 15 km of travel, the forest finally parted, and I came out into the open swampy tundra. By this time, the mountains were covered with dark low clouds, it felt like I would soon be unable to avoid meeting the rain.

How I wanted the forest to end as soon as possible, to go out into the mountains – and how unfriendly they greeted me. Ahead, over their peaks, thick wet darkness swirled, clouds of midges swirled above me, and under my feet the waterlogged tundra, interspersed with willow thickets, squelched. Where are you, my blessed forest?! Fortunately, at last, where it was marked on the map, I found an all-terrain road. It could very conditionally be called a road – a track in the tundra, differing from them only in color and the absence of continuous thickets of dwarf pine. But even this direction gave great advantages in movement and encouraged me.

A fine nasty rain began; I raised the hood of my jacket, exposing it to the measured tapping of drops, and immersed myself in myself. I thought about the forests that remained behind me, from the very south to the north. How they were born from the steppes and how they now go into the tundra. It seems that these two opposites – tundra and steppe – have quite a lot in common. And by the way, on the Zilair plateau there were also many larches, like now around me. Only there they were incomparably larger and more spreading.

These thoughts led me to the question of how the southern forest differs from the northern one for a person not burdened with extensive biological knowledge. Everything seems to be similar to one degree or another.



I remembered the early summer days: how I lay on the ground among the grass under the canopy of trees, I remembered the seething of life that was happening around me. In any corner of the forest, wherever you looked, someone was crawling somewhere, doing something. Mainly, of course, busy ants. Here, in the north, there is none of this, no ants, no swarming microcosm underfoot. Wow, that's a striking difference. I miss ants here in the north, somehow it's lonely without them. But the midges are a good substitute for them, persistently trying to crawl under my net, which, unfortunately, no longer smells of cleanliness.

After lunch, the weather began to improve. It seems that I am incredibly lucky, and I will still see the alpine forms of the Subpolar Urals today. The rain clouds thinned out, windows of blue sky and sun appeared. Soon another surprise: I noticed people camping on the bank of the Torgovaya River. I looked in – they turned out to

be fishermen from Saranpaul. The appearance of the camp corresponded to the purpose of the trip: crumpled, gloomy faces, empty bottles,



The source of the Kobyla-Yu River

a column of cigarette smoke. It was obvious that their morning had not gone well. I did not linger, having exchanged a few words, without taking off my backpack, I went on.

And the weather was simply incredible! The sun began to peek out, clouds were racing overhead, and I was racing along with them across the expanses of the tundra, and even a dwarf birch tree, grabbing at my legs, could not slow down my rapid step. Where did the fatigue go, where did the pain in my legs go?! That's for sure: the psychological state is no less important than the physical!

In the side valleys, pointed peaks finally began to appear. In order to take a picture of an important object on my way from above – Lake Torgovoe – I climbed about 150 m up one of the scree spurs of the mountain. The lake was surrounded on three sides by kurum peaks, and lay at their feet like a smooth, wide saucer. The view was a bit disappointing,



Peak 1522

I should have climbed even higher, to one of the peaks, then the view would have been, most likely, more advantageous, but there was no time for this. Having descended, I went out to the shore and walked along it.

Torgovoe Lake is notable for the fact that it is the deepest and one of the largest lakes in the Subpolar Urals. It is famous for its grayling fish stocks. It received its name from the Russian merchants who organized trade with the peoples inhabiting the Urals on its shores.

Having walked along the reservoir, I climbed a low tundra pass to the Nyamga River, had lunch for the second time with a gorgeous view of the new valley and began to descend to the place where I always dreamed of visiting, after many years ago I read Nikolai Alexandrov's story “I will definitely return there.”*

Along the Nyamga River, I climbed past the amazingly beautiful turquoise lake, crowned by the rocky peak of 1522, and came to the sources of the Kobyla-Yu

River in a side dead-end valley, where the dramatic events unfolded in the distant 1994, described in the story.

And this is this place! How many times, rereading the memoirs of Nikolai Aleksandrov, I imagined these wild, harsh places!

**The story tells how in 1994, the Ural traveler Nikolai Aleksandrov, during an autonomous solo transition from the Polar Ural railway station to the Vishera River, suffered a hip injury due to a fall on a snowfield, almost immobilized, spent a week in a tent, then was able to get to the workers' settlement of Neroika.*

It took about an hour to reconstruct the last meters of the traveler's path before the injury, to find the exact place where his tent stood in the photograph. And although it was not a comfortable place to spend the night, I could not deny myself the pleasure of pitching a tent there, exactly on the same small, relatively flat area among the pile of stones. And with pleasure, with a new level of immersion in the text, under the “stream-noise” that Nikolai heard during these days, I reread his memories again. Here is another dream come true on this route!

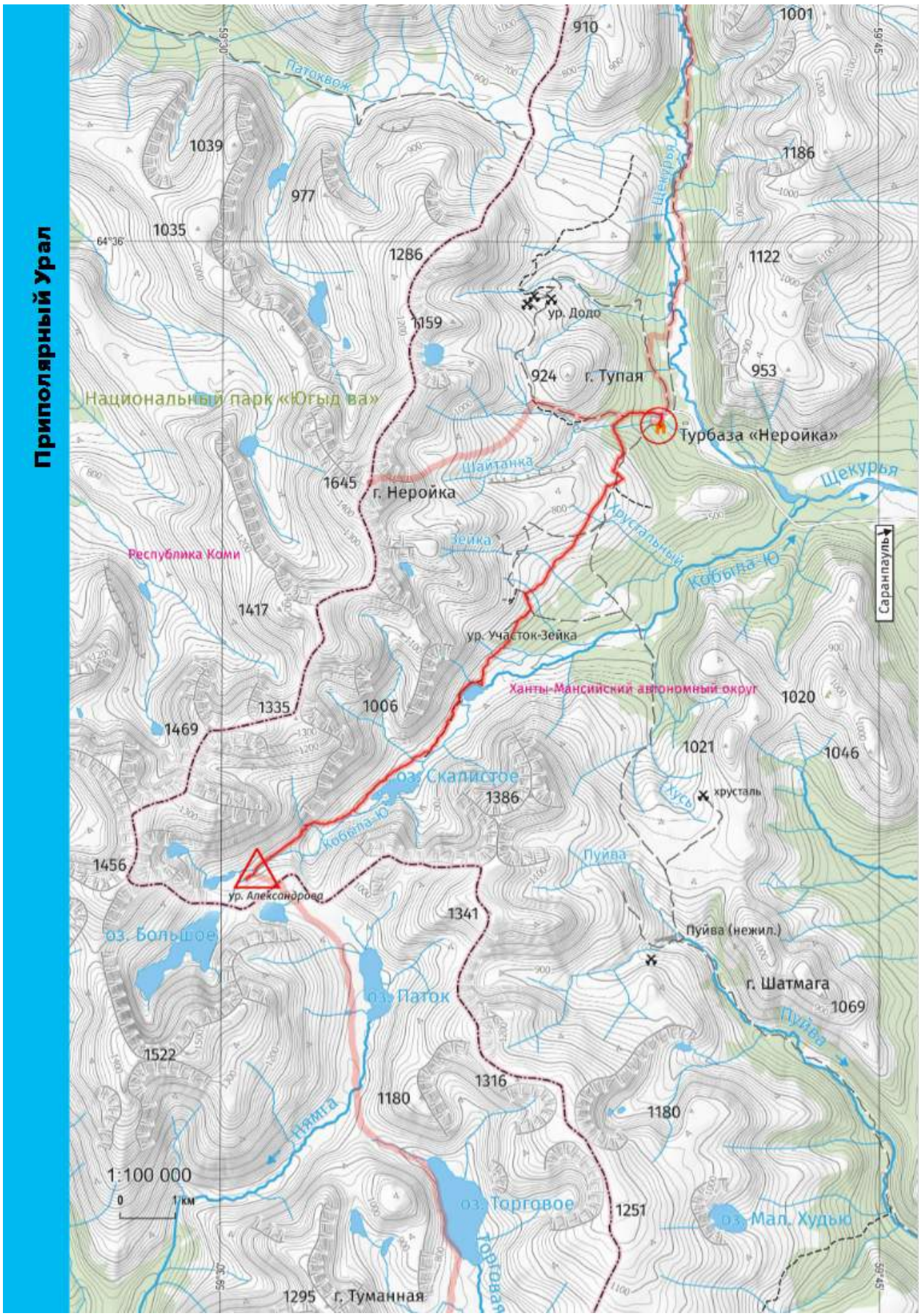
Having rested in the tent, I could not sit still and, while the sun had not yet completely hid behind the mountains, I went to explore the valley. I climbed through a series of small waterfalls falling in a narrow stone trough to Lake Bolshoye, which gives rise to the Kobyla-Yu River.

A wonderful place, on one side a view of a vast water mirror, squeezed between the steep walls of peaks 1522 and 1456. On the other – a view down into the valley, where another large lake stretches out, and my tomorrow's path, steeply going down to the green forest, visible in the distance. If I had not had a long-standing idea connected with the events from the story, I would probably have spent the night here.

Below to the left of me, about five hundred meters away, a high waterfall was roaring and foaming, now diving into the rocks, then appearing again. However, I had no strength left to go to it. I decided to leave this beauty for tomorrow. I hurriedly went down to the tent and assumed a horizontal position, giving my legs a well-deserved rest.



A tent set up in the place where N. Aleksandrov's tent stood



The Subpolar Urals

Yutyd Va National Park *Kami Republic*

ur. Alexandrovo

Sur. Dodo

Tupaya

Neroika

Mare Yu

Yumga

st. Zeika plot

Tourist base "Neroika"

Kobyla-Yu

Shekurya

Saranpaul

Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug

Skalistoe

Patok

Puyva

Tumannaya town

Puyva (non-residential)

Shatmaga town

Torgovoe

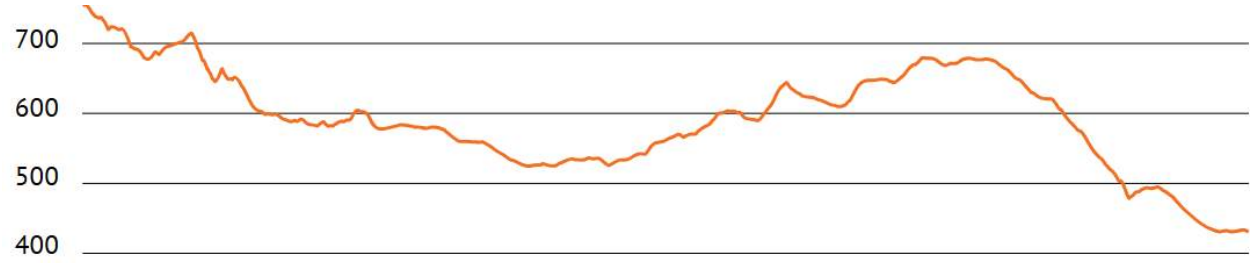
Mal. Khudyu

Torgovaya

Day 82

Kobyla-Yu River (Aleksandrova tract) – Neroika tourist center

15 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2401.7 km





Sunrise from the Kobyla-Yu River Valley

July 21, 2021

I woke up to the sun shining into the tent from the valley below. It's hard to come up with a better angle for sunrise if you're spending the night somewhere in a deep, dark gorge sandwiched between mountains. You can't miss such luck. Almost immediately, I switched to walking mode with a camera, went down the slope to the river, jumped a little on the wet stones, took some pictures.

And my legs aren't that good, and my general condition is also bad. Yesterday's long walk wasn't without consequences. However, the weather is still excellent, we need to take advantage of it, so I decided to be patient in the evening



and climb the highest point in the area – Mount Neroika. With such thoughts, I packed up the tent and set off as quickly as possible, especially since a well-deserved rest awaited me at the end of it. Of course, I didn't even remember about the waterfall I had left for the morning.

Descending from this side valley, I kept thinking about Alexandrov: what it was like for him to walk, crawl, hobble here with a broken hip joint. It's not easy for me, a healthy person, but what about him? How did he manage to go down the steep slope. Over stones, rocks, thickets of dwarf willows. The great strength of life and a clear goal, the awareness that there, below, 15 km away, help saved him. I think so.

I also remembered my predecessor Kirill Fronyuk, he also had a hard time here. He was unable to cross the Kobyla-Yu River, which had risen due to prolonged rains, and was forced to make his way down the river, along its right bank, along an inconvenient mountain slope. To the bridge, which, as it turned out, had also been

washed away. Then wait for the water level to subside. This is a difficult place, oh, it is difficult. It is all the more joyful that I am passing it in good weather.



Lake Skalistoye

A few hours after the start of the journey, I was no longer so sure that I wanted to climb Neroika today. The path to it promised to be difficult, and the little strength left after all these days of travel melted away faster than I was used to. Some kind of leaden fatigue fell on my shoulders, fettered my legs. I would not be surprised if it turned out that it was my brain that was secretly sabotaging my plans, realizing that somewhere very close, down below, rest awaited it and my body. Doubts were added by the clouds that appeared out of nowhere, beginning to cover the surrounding peaks.

Near Lake Skalistoye, I came out onto a well-trodden path and rushed down it. The closer I got to the exit of the valley, the more traces of human presence I

encountered: garbage, fire pits, numerous ditches dug by geologists looking for rock crystal. A sad sight against the backdrop of magnificent lakes and peaks.

Having reached the slope above the Neroika base, I decided not to go up the mountain, since it was completely covered with dark clouds, but to go down immediately. I had planned a two-day rest there, so I decided that I could go tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, when the weather improved.

From above, the goal of my movement over the past few days was clearly visible. Among the dark forest that filled the bottom of the valley, the roofs of houses rose like a coveted oasis, and work trailers turned yellow. All the difficulties of the path seemed behind us, just go down the mountain. However, as often happens, the last meters turned out to be the most difficult. Having run down to the benefits of civilization, I made a mistake in my haste, went off to the side along the old road, which very quickly first turned into a direction, and then completely disappeared on the nasty slope, steeply descending into the valley of the Shaitanka River. I had to go down like a monkey, holding on to thin tree trunks, sometimes not touching the ground with my feet. But this test ended, like any other on my way, I went out on the technological road leading from the quarry to the village, and very soon I found myself among people.

Having found the head of the extraction, Alexander Butnikov, in one of the yellow trailers, I drank tea with him, took both supplies that were stored – the main one, the one that I had collected myself, and the emergency one – sent by Tatyana Sergeevna in pursuit.

I stayed at the Neroika tourist center, in a large, completely empty house with many rooms. In addition to this old building, which, apparently, remained from the past, there were three small modern one-room log houses, a trailer, a bathhouse, and a fire pit in the center. A very small tourist center, but I did not need more: a soft bed, a table, a gas stove and warm water.



Garbage and fire traditionally coexist side by side



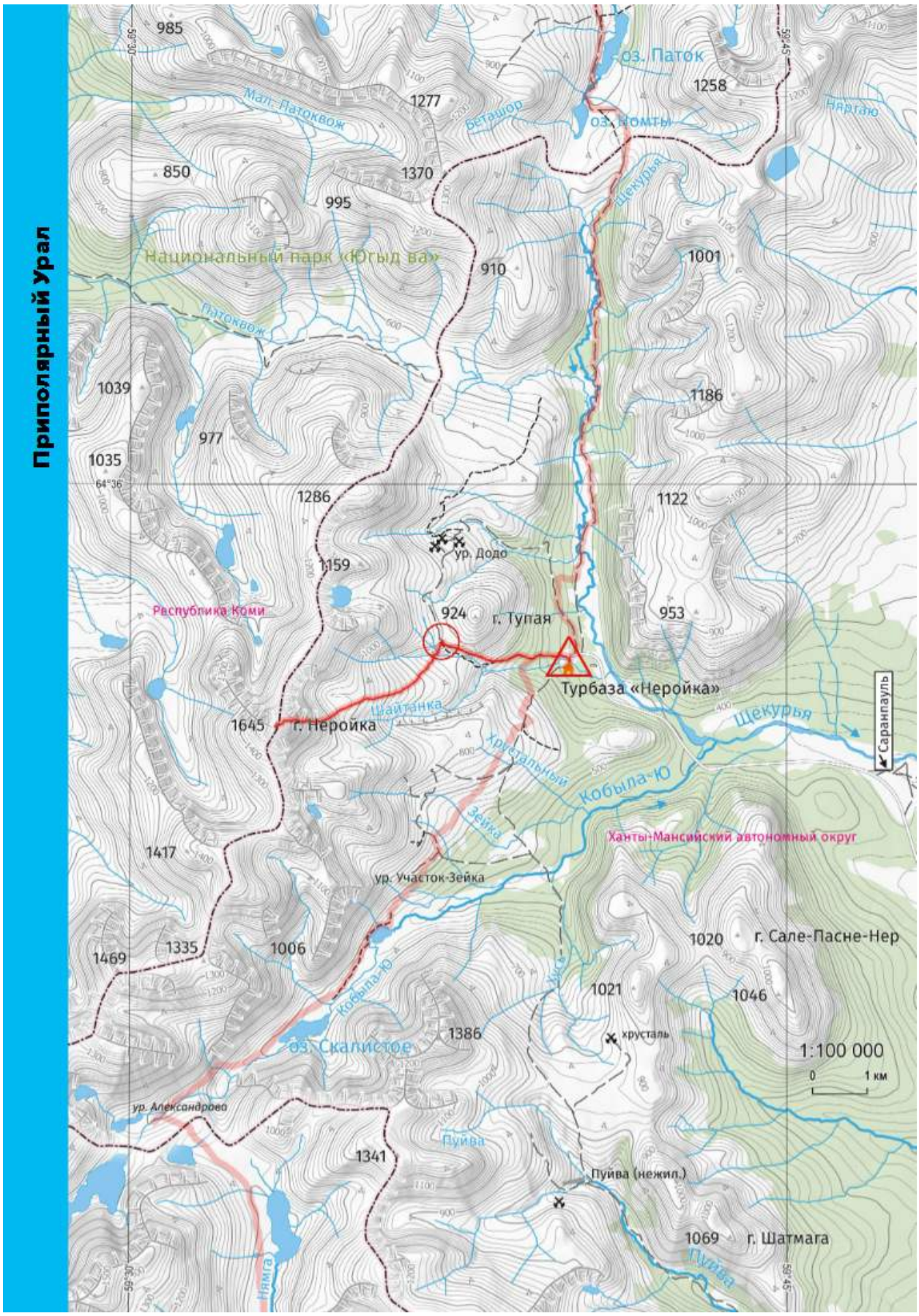
Workers' settlement and tourist center "Neroika"

Except for a bit of satellite Internet, and that was also there – complete happiness.

The fly in the ointment was that soon above all this magnificence the peak of Neroika, freed from the clouds, rose like a sharp peak, unambiguously making it clear that perhaps I had traded a great sunset for a comfortable night's sleep. In order

not to get upset, I went into the house and spent the rest of the day in a horizontal position.

Summing up the day and this, already the 15th section of the journey, I congratulated myself that I had finally entered the Subpolar Urals, and this is not just a formal statement of a geographical fact, as happens when crossing the borders of other parts of the Urals. Starting from the second half of yesterday, the relief changed dramatically. Now the Urals are not a linearly elongated system of relatively flat kurum goltsy, but a chaotically twisted labyrinth of ridges, rocky peaks, cirques, plateaus, passes, rivers, lakes. And as a consequence of this, the tactics of my movement have radically changed. If throughout the previous part of the route I tried to either cross the mountains along the way, or simply go along the linearly elongated ridges, since below there was taiga, swamps, windfalls, and above there was the expanse of tundra and kurums, now my path has become more classic for mountainous terrain. Throughout almost the entire remaining route, I will go along the valleys of the rivers flowing between the mountains, cross the ridges along the passes, make radial ascents to the peaks.



The Subpolar Urals

Lake Patok *Small Patokvozh*

Lake Nomty

National Park “Yugy Nakh”

Dodo tract

Komi Republic

Tupaya town

Neroyka town

Neroyka tourist center

Shchekurya

Kobyla Yutract Zeika plot

Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug

Sale-Pasne-Ner town

Kobyla Yu

Aleksandrovo tract

Puyva

Puyva (non-residential)

Shatmaga town

Saranpaul

Day 83

Tourist base "Neroika" – Mount Neroika (1645.3) – slope of Mount Tupaya (924.2)

10 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2411.7 km



July 22, 2021

The rest day began "for the repose" – with the dismal howling of the wind, rain and clouds covering the mountains almost to the base. So much the better, I decided, there is no reason to fuss and worry, since the weather is not flying, I will lie down and rest. I wrapped myself tighter in a blanket and fell asleep.

After waking up, I devoted most of the day to preparing equipment. There was plenty of things and food, since two deliveries had arrived at once, so I carefully repacked everything, re-sorted the food rations in order to take the most delicious products, and send back what did not show itself to be very good. So, I put aside for return the bags of quinoa and the freeze-dried dish "Pasta with salmon." I could not force myself to eat quinoa, I will have to admit that the experiment was a failure. And I simply did not like the taste of fish pasta, and in conditions when there was an abundance of food, I did not hesitate to refuse it. I decided to leave the boat as well. The rivers on my way will now be mostly mountainous, and the possibilities of using a packraft to overcome them are greatly reduced.

I walked around the workers' settlement for a while. Life used to be in full swing here, several hundred people lived here, there was a school and a kindergarten, it was the first settlement in the Subpolar Urals. The culprit was piezoquartz, found 5 km higher, at the foot of Mount Neroika. The deposit was called Dodo and the valuable mineral, necessary for industry, was mined in adits. Now the scale is more modest, workers live in trailers. The remains of wooden houses are falling apart and rotting. Mining is already carried out using the open-pit method. The tourist center and workers' settlement are connected to the large village of Saranpaul by a 90-

kilometer gravel road. During floods, the road can become impassable. The presence of a road leading directly to Mount Neroika could have made it one of the most accessible peaks of the Subpolar Urals, if not for one “but.”

It is difficult to get from the “mainland” to the village of Saranpaul in spring, summer and autumn, and it can be even more difficult to leave. During the periods mentioned above, this can be done in two ways – by air and by water.

By air, the throughput is limited by the small number of seats in the helicopter, the needs of the local population, who have a priority to go on vacation and return from it, and the weather. By water, the throughput is greater, there are scheduled ships, but by mid-summer, as a rule, the water level in the rivers drops, and passenger transportation stops.

In winter, there is a winter road to the village of Saranpaul, allowing you to get there by car, so the tourist center is mainly used by locals in the summer, and snowmobilers in the winter. Towards evening, the weather began to clear up, the peaks opened up, and I was overcome by anxiety and some kind of itching in my legs. I went out onto the porch more and more often and looked up towards Neroika. And all sorts of thoughts were born in my head about how to get there, up there, and not ruin my day off.

Around 5 p.m. I decided to go down the mountain, set up camp at its base, go to bed early, get a good night's sleep, then in the morning, having photographed the mountain at dawn, go up. It would have been a great plan if I had realized it,



Mount Neroika, view from the foot



The summit of Mount Neroika

but, as they say, a bad head gives no rest to the legs. As soon as I approached the foot of the mountain, looked at its majestic profile and the sun, striving to set behind it in the cloudless sky, the plan was forgotten. I hid my things under a rock and climbed up. There were four hours left until sunset, the summit was 4 km long

and 800 m of elevation gain, and I decided that I had enough time to enjoy the end of the day there, at the top.

The ascent to Neroika was interesting and varied. First, tundra, then kurum fields, turning into a steep kurum slope, made of different-sized stones, already on the ridge – small rocks, quite easy to walk in dry weather. It took a total of one hour and forty minutes to reach the highest point, starting from the road from under the Tupaya mountain. The top of the mountain is a relatively flat kurum patch with the remains of a triangulation tower and a small garbage dump.

The sun, which seemed to be setting at the foot of the mountain, was not like that from the top and flooded the mountainous country spread out before me with a bright white light. I had to wait another two hours for good light, admiring the profiles of familiar and unfamiliar peaks. And there was much to admire. In the south, in the distance, Telposiz was visible between the mountains, it was too early for me to say goodbye to it a few days ago! In the west – for the first time I saw it so clearly



Sablinsky Ridge from Mount Neroika

and immediately recognized it – the pointed peak of Mount Sablya. To the north, in the direction of my further path, there were many mountains, and all of them were unknown to me from this angle, except for one – the beauty Manaraga, proudly

towering over the others with a slightly turned jagged profile. No matter how hard I peered, I could not find the highest point of the Urals – Mount Narodnaya, it should certainly have been visible from here, but in the jumble of peaks of the Research Ridge it could well have been lost, not having a particularly expressive profile.

The sun was very slowly going down, a light but piercingly cold breeze was blowing, so I entertained myself as best I could while waiting for the evening light. I walked from side to side, jumped, furiously waved my arms, trying to warm up, sorted out and cleaned up a small summit garbage dump. I found a bottle of unfinished vodka, brought the liquid as a gift to the ancient Mansi gods, headed by old man Oika, and took the vessel.



Trash collected at the summit

I put numerous broken glasses, rusty but still not giving up their positions tin cans, candy wrappers and many other hard-to-identify trash in my backpack.

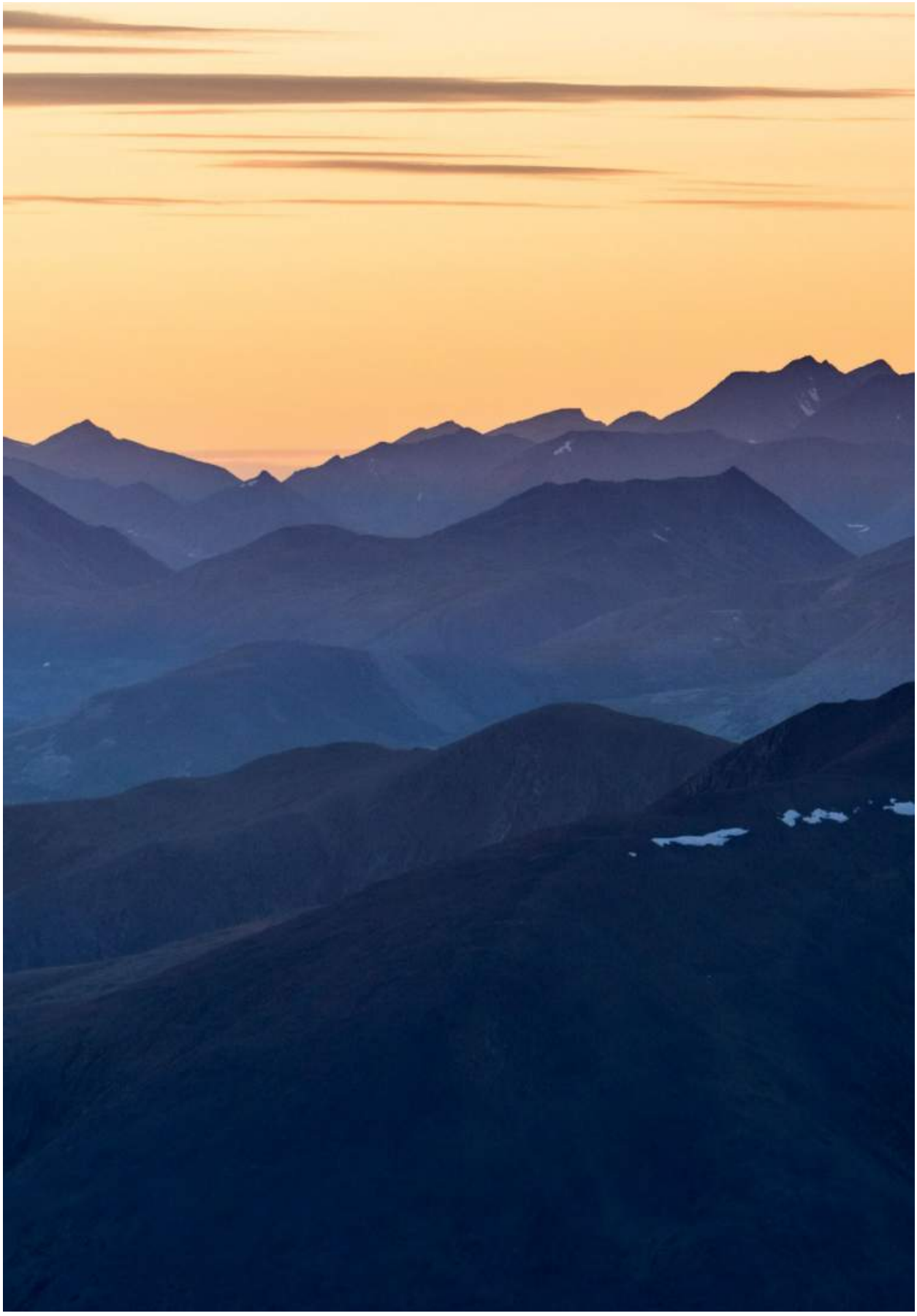
Time dragged on very slowly, the light changed very smoothly, but I still waited. The sky turned amber, the mountains plunged into inky shadow, their borders and profiles became more clearly visible. And the shadow of Neroika rushed to the east like a long pointed pyramid. This view compensated for all the time and effort required for the ascent. The only thing that upset me was that the sun was setting north of the Sablinsky ridge. If it had set there, it would have been more interesting. But overall, there is no reason to complain: the evening gave me many excellent shots and memories. How good it is that my head does not give my feet rest. Having waited until the pointed peaks of the neighboring mountains flared up like crimson stars and went out, I began to descend.

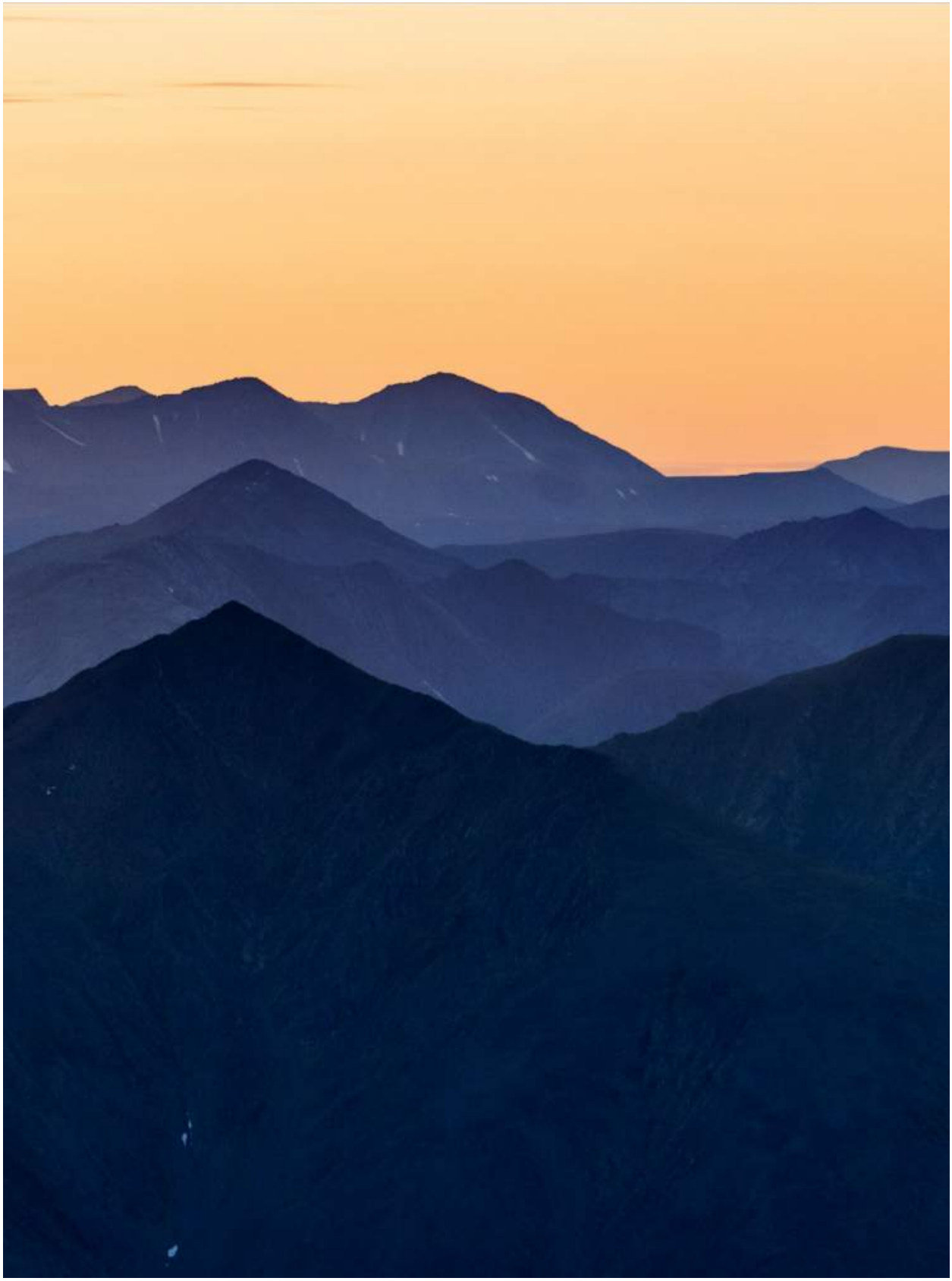
The descent was even faster than the ascent, which does not often happen on such steep kurum slopes, all because I came out in a small couloir on an extended snowfield and descended along it for almost a kilometer. I arrived at my things after midnight, tired, but happy. I climbed up the slope to the shoulder of Mount Tupaya,

pitched a tent and hurried to lie down when there were two or three hours left before dawn and on the opposite side of the horizon from the sunset a crimson glow had already begun to form.

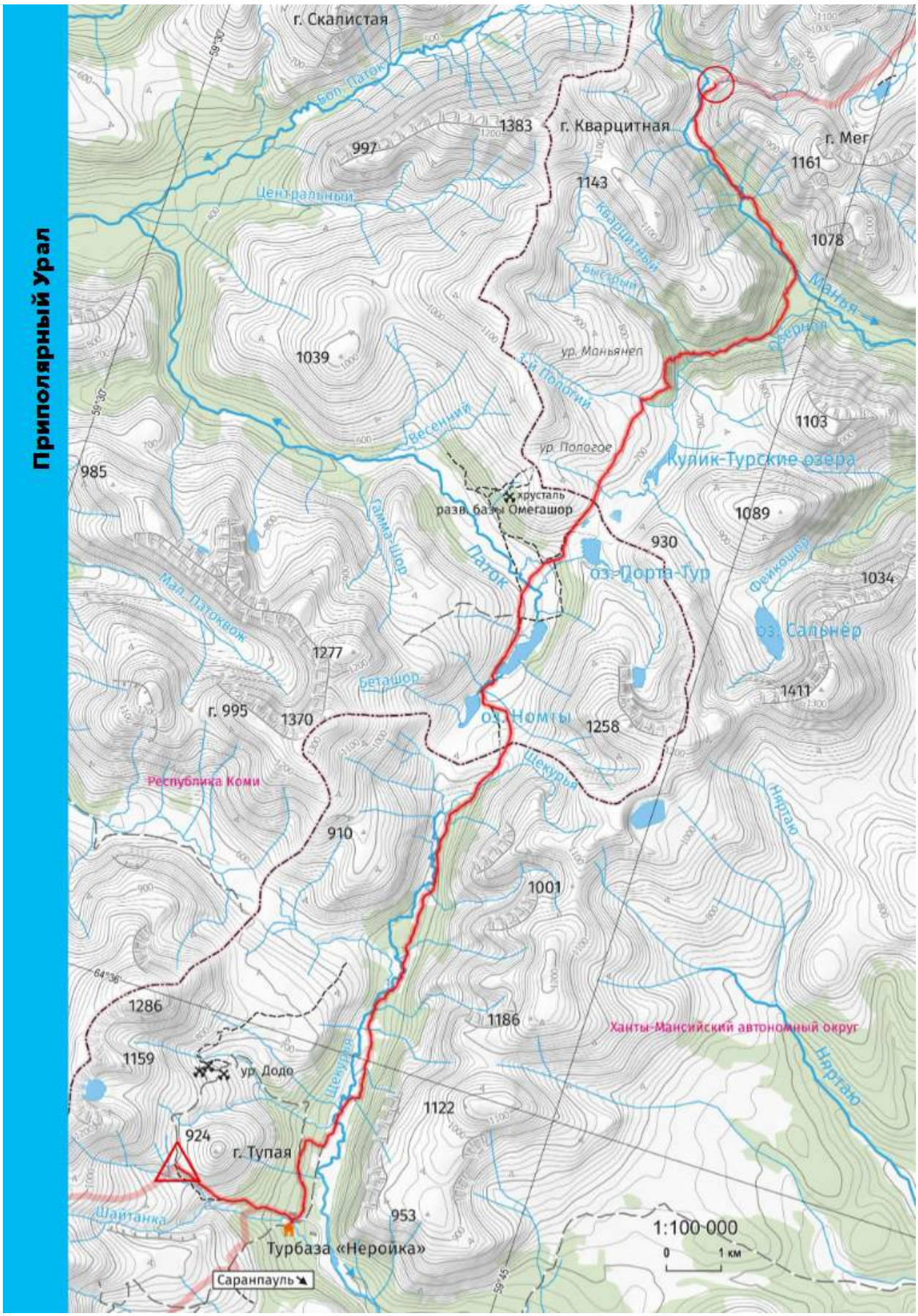


The last ray of sun on the neighboring peak





View of the Subpolar Urals from Mount Neroika



The Subpolar Urals

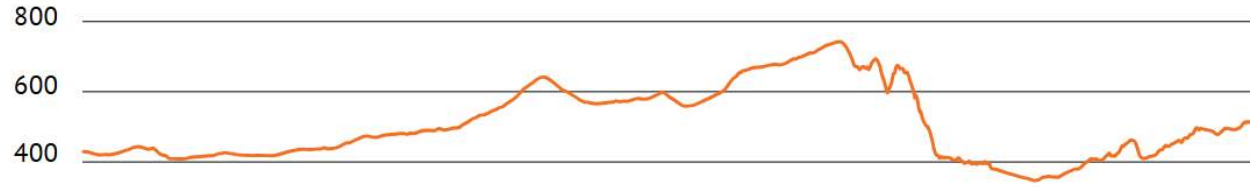
Mount Skalistaya *Mal Patokvok*

Zima-Shor	*Belashor ob*
Mount Kvartsitnaya	*Komi Republic*
Kvartsitny	*Tupaya town*
ur Malyanel	*Salner*
ur Pologi	*Nyadtak*
Patok	*Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug*
Kulik-Turskie vzepd	*Tourist base "Neroika"*
Soz Portv-Tur	*Saranpaul*
Feikashor	*Kartayu*

Day 84

Slope of Mount Tupaya (924.2) – tourist center "Neroika" – Lake Patok – Ozernaya River – Manya River – Vodopadny Stream

31 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2442.7 km





Mount Neroika at dawn

July 23, 2021

After sleeping for only three hours, I pulled myself out of this blissful state by force at dawn. The sun rose where I expected, and, as I expected, painted the pointed peak of Neroika red. Without putting on shoes, I made a couple of small circles around the tent on the soft tundra carpet, took them off and hurried to go back to sleep, feeling that I was greatly borrowing from my health by breaking my sleep in this way.

The second time I got up, when the sun was mercilessly roasting the tent. At the quarry, located less than a kilometer from me, the working day had already begun. I really wanted to go to it and to the abandoned ancient adits, located a little to the south. But I had neither the time nor the confidence in the safety of these man-

made adventures. The sky, while I was sleeping for the second time, was covered with high clouds, the forecast was for worsening weather, so I hurried to go down. Pack my things, say goodbye to everyone who had met me so hospitably, and set off. All goals, except, perhaps, rest, were achieved, and nothing else kept me in this tiny fragment of civilization.

Before leaving the village, Andrey Bystrov, a local old-timer who had climbed Neroika many times and in his youth worked on the Parnuk plateau, the key place of my route in the coming days, volunteered to accompany me. It was the passage through the plateau that caused me the greatest anxiety, so, taking advantage of the opportunity, I once again discussed with Andrey in detail the best way to descend from it.

The first half of the way I walked along the road along the Shchekurya River, which crosses a low watershed to the source of the Patok River. And such grace overwhelmed me on this section of the path! It was easy to walk, the sun was shining not too hot through the prism of thin clouds, a light breeze cooled the skin and drove away the midges, mountains were all around, lakes glittered with waves... I could not resist and screamed at the top of my lungs: “Ural, thank you! That you love me!” He screamed and immediately fell silent in fear. I hoped not to jinx it!

And then he laughed at himself – how telling. Even I, a materialist to the core, am affected by the grandeur of nature, the awareness of my insignificance and vulnerability compared to it. From somewhere in the depths of my consciousness, superstitions, fears, and faith in something greater than the laws of physics rise up. It is understandable why so many legends and myths exist, and why so many magical creatures inhabit the mountains of peoples who constantly encounter them. I think this is a kind of defense mechanism for the psyche. He screamed again to dispel the gloom, and went on.

By midday, the road ended, going in the direction of the abandoned mining village of Omegashor, and I began to climb to the pass on the Ozernaya River. This was the key place of the day, as I understood at the preparation stage, difficult to pass and beautiful. And my expectations were fully justified. Having approached the

Manyanyol tract along a quite comfortable slope of the valley, I ran into a deep canyon formed by the Ozernaya River. Somewhere a little to the right I heard how cascades of waterfalls fell down.

The slope was densely overgrown with low, dense bushes and went down at a steep angle, its lower part was not visible. There was no desire to climb through such wilds directly. I had to wander around the tops for some time in search of a suitable place for descent. Having found the most, as it seemed to me, logical and gentle descent, I entered the thicket of trees and almost immediately found a plastic bag, and after several dozen meters I found myself on an old, heavily overgrown, in places already turned into a ditch, but still legible path. Apparently, I had accurately determined the best place to move down. I went down along it to the river valley, where a small clearing of huge ripe cloudberries awaited me as a reward.

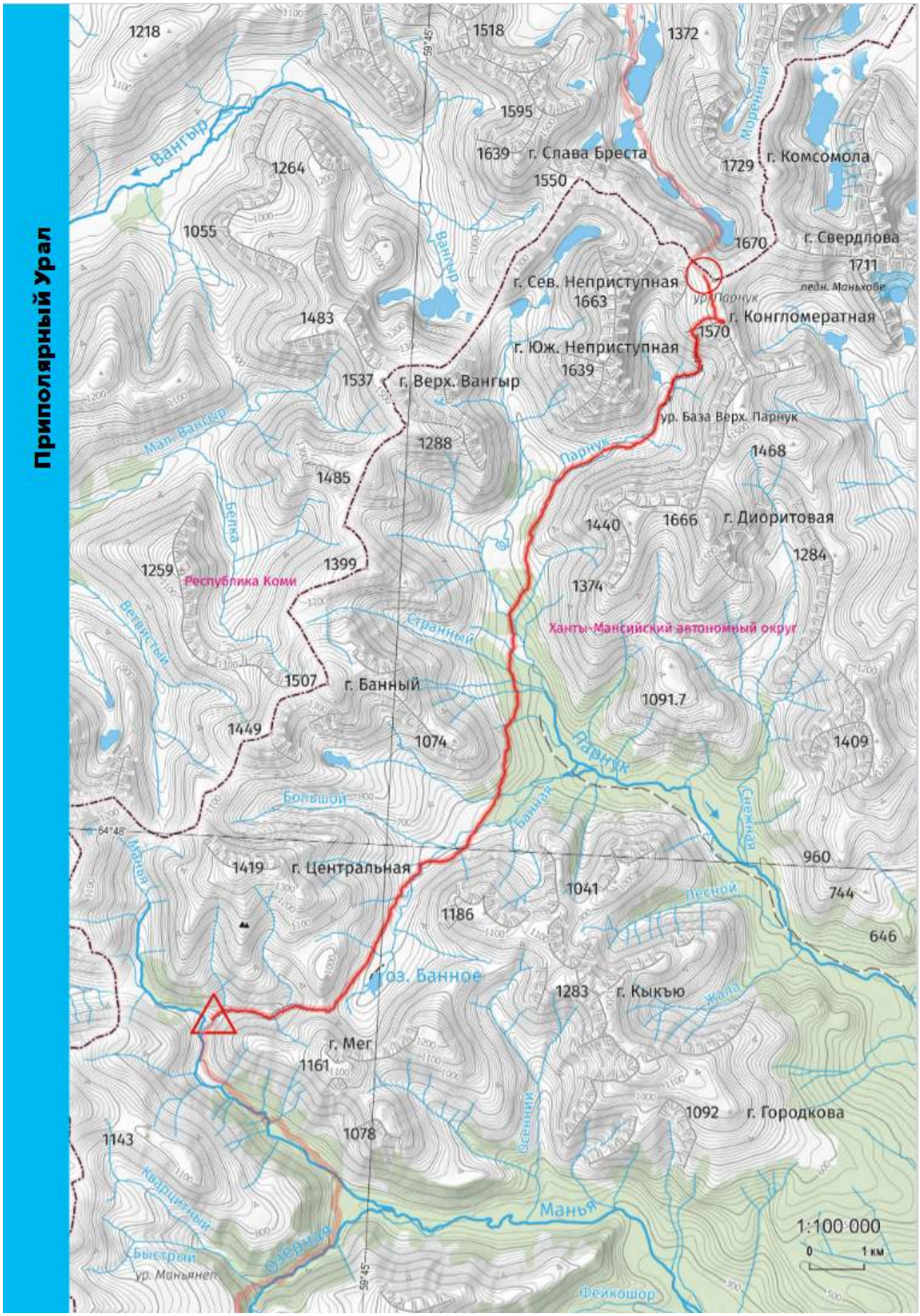


Ozernaya River Valley

The forest section of the route began, along the Ozernaya River I went down to the Manya River, from which I began to climb up, sometimes along the right, sometimes along the left bank, through an uncomfortable forest and high, grassy and cut by ravines banks. As I was making my way through the thickets, I wondered if it would not have been easier to cross over to the Vodopadny Stream over the southern shoulder of Mount Kvartsitnaya. But I will never know.

Another interesting thing: I met a group of tourists from Nizhny Tagil, going in the same direction as me. They had already set up camp on the river bank, and the smoke from the fire was spreading far, far across the valley, and that was where I came out. It was nice to exchange a few words, to understand that I was not alone here, and to hurry on.

The last kilometers I walked along the treeless tundra-elfin part of the valley, stopped for the night at the entrance to the narrow valley of the Vodopadny stream. Tomorrow morning, I will have to climb rocks and steep grassy slopes, but that will be tomorrow. In the meantime, I can stretch my legs. Do a self-massage, have a delicious breakfast and maybe even listen to something, some audiobook or lecture – as a reward for good work.



The Subpolar Urals

city Slava Brest *city Komsomol*

Bankyr

Bolshoy

city Sverdlova

Gur. Baza Verkh. Parnuk

city Sev. Nepristupnaya.

Moscow Dioritovaya

Conglomeratnaya

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

city Verkh. Vangyr

p. Central

city Yuzh. Impregnable

Pos. Bath

Komi Republic

Kykju town

Vetvit

Mano

Bystvi

Gorodkova town

Sur. Manyanei

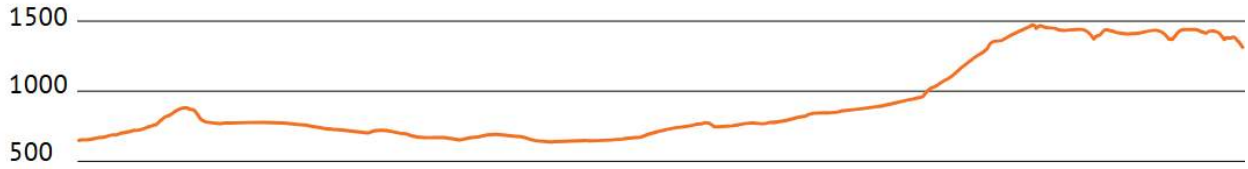
Sheikoshor

Banny

Day 85

Vodopadny Creek – Bannaya River – Parnuk River – Parnuk Plateau

22.3 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2465 km



July 24, 2021

I slept for a long time, did not get up at dawn, since I was deep in the valley and there was nothing to shoot, but despite this, I woke up completely exhausted. As if there was no rest at the tourist center, although, perhaps, there really was none.

I left at 7:30, began to climb up the stream with the promising name of Vodopadny. Once again, I was lucky that the weather was quite dry and the water level in the rivers was low, since I almost immediately got into a narrow stone gorge and was forced to walk along it, right along the stream bed. Of course, it would have been possible to go higher, along the mountain slopes, but it would have required much more strength and time. Steep grassy slopes with rock outcrops and dense willow growth are not the best surface for movement, and in the morning dew it is also very dangerous. On the wet grass you can slide down no worse than on ice. I went along the riverbed, making my way through rocky gorges, climbing right on the water to small ledges. The stones, lying freely on the bedrock at the level of my head and even higher, clearly showed what a stream rages here in high water.

About a kilometer later, the stream began to turn left, and I found a more convenient slope leading to the pass and higher up to it. It was more gentle than those slopes that I had walked around at the bottom, but even on it, when I made my way through the grass and willows, it was not easy. However, what waited for me at the top made me forget all the hardships of the beginning of the journey. The ascent ended, I came out onto a flat platform of the nameless pass 803.5 and found myself on a small ledge, as if on a balcony. It offered a truly wonderful view of the wide green valley, still bathed in soft morning light, where lakes formed a beautiful necklace, giving rise to the Bannaya River. Along a small riverbed stretched a strip

of round lakes, ending in a large lake of the same name as the river. And below, opposite the exit from the valley, rose charismatic peaks, to which I was heading.

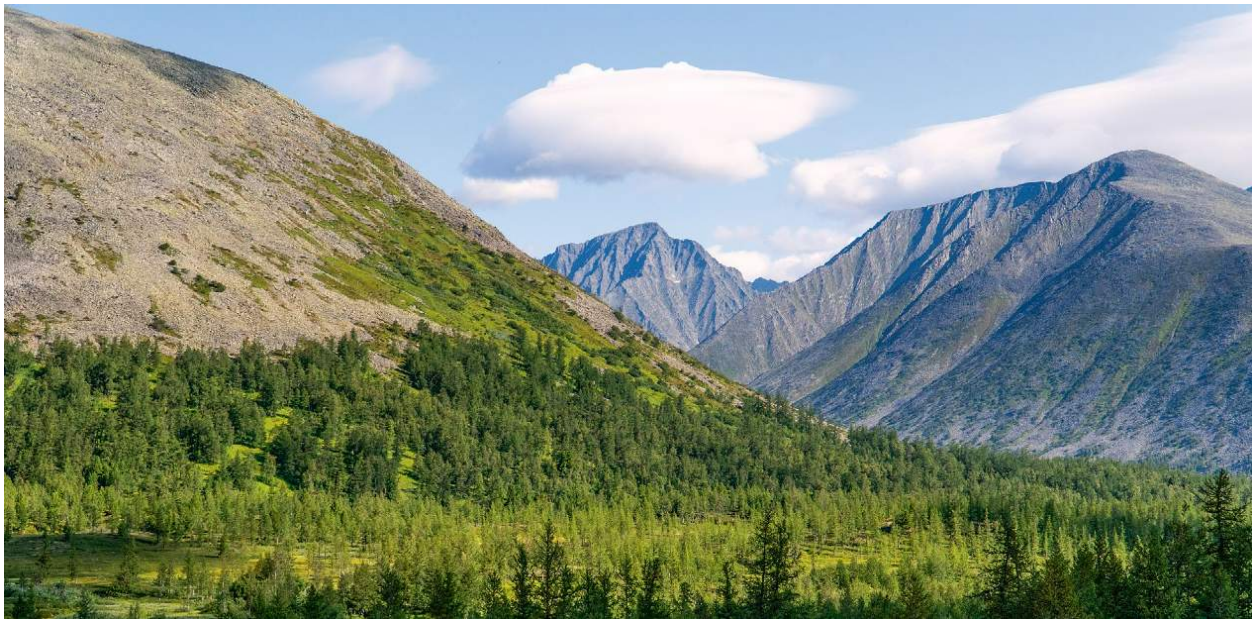
This would have been an ideal place for the last night! Only yesterday I did not have the strength for this. I need to remember this place for the future.

On the descent, when I was walking along the Bannaya River, I met a bear for the third time on the route. And this meeting could have been quite ordinary, there were about 200 m between us and the bed of a small river, if not for the animal's behavior. The bear was lying on a tundra slope near a sparse larch forest and resting. I was planning to cross the stream and go to the left bank at about this place, but in view of newly discovered circumstances, I decided to do it downstream and not disturb the animal. It became restless on its own, stood up and began to peer intently in my direction. As is known, bears have poor eyesight, this is compensated for by a good sense of smell and hearing. It was unlikely that he saw me, but he definitely felt something. Then I decided to give him a sound signal, it had worked well in the past. I began to blow hard into the whistle hanging around my neck. And to my unpleasant surprise, the bear went toward the sound. Not very confidently yet, he did not go directly to me, rather he walked along the slope from side to side at a slight angle to it, but I saw that the distance between us was decreasing. Then I tried to shout, it also did not work, he slowly decreased the distance.

Such encounters, in addition to considerable excitement, also have a certain beneficial effect on the traveler – they relieve fatigue, increase the speed of movement on the most difficult mountain surfaces. So I, not wanting to bring to a dangerous closeness with the animal, hurried to continue moving down.



Bannaya River Valley



The Inaccessible Ridge

Luckily, a few moments away from me, there began a sparse forest and a jumble of ravines and ancient moraines. I planned to go around them, crossing to the flatter opposite bank of the river. Hiding in them, I quickly walked through this section, climbed a little up the open slope of the mountain and carefully examined the place where the bear was walking. I exhaled with some relief: he was there, had not crossed the natural border – the river and was not following me yet. He was simply grazing, eating something plant-like on the bank.

And ahead, between the slopes of the valley, the Nepristupny ridge appeared in all its grandeur. Dark, cut by couloirs with steep rocky slopes, it stood like a formidable guardian of the valley. Near it, a little to the south, was the Parnuk plateau, not yet visible to me – the shortest, most direct and relatively easy route to the highest part of the Urals. However, first I had to walk through the forest, leave the Bannaya River valley and go out into the Parnuk River valley, and climb up to the mountains. About a kilometer from the place where I met the bear, I crossed to the left bank of the river and walked through the forest that filled the valley along its upper border, trying to go as deep into the wilds as possible. By lunchtime, I reached the slope of the Nepristupny ridge, had lunch and continued to slowly gain altitude already to the plateau, impatiently awaiting a meeting with him.

And I must say, this meeting did not disappoint. The wide valley, narrowing with each kilometer, led me to a narrow dead end, squeezed between steep rock walls. On the left, the ridge of the Unapproachable rose with pointed peaks, on the right, Mount Diorite (1666.3), ahead, a large cirque, crowned by Mount Conglomerate (1570.2). It was along the slope of this cirque that I had to climb. On the left, a slightly more gentle slope covered with grass was visible, turning into ruined rocks in its upper part. According to the map, the path to the Parnuk plateau ran along it. The weather added drama to the situation: dark clouds had gathered from the southwest by midday, which did not please me at all. A phrase from Nikolai Alexandrov, who had walked in these places many times, was spinning in my head when we discussed the crossing of the plateau. He said: “And remember: under no circumstances should you descend into the Povsyan-Shor valley in conditions of limited visibility in the clouds.” And of course, as soon as I approached this place, the weather began to deteriorate. I was wondering whether it was worth going to the plateau today, or to spend the night at the foot of the mountain waiting for bad weather.



Ascent to the Parnuk Plateau

However, the closer I got to the lifting slope, as is usually the case, it became more and more flat, visually more gentle, and, standing at its beginning, I decided to go up. After all, if people had lived and worked there for years, then I would definitely find a patch of land where I could hut myself and hide from the bad weather. Especially since I saw people descending from the plateau. Inspired by the meeting with tourists and the opportunity to learn in detail about the routes of descent from the plateau, I ran up.

The trail turned out to be excellent, wide and well-packed, winding smoothly along the mountainside. It is understandable – for many years, many human and horse feet trampled it down every day.

Imagine my surprise when, about halfway up the mountain, I met not a tourist group, but “pensioners” barely walking, often resting, bent under the weight of their backpacks. They did not look like a tourist group at all. We got to talking, and it turned out that they were independent diggers. A week ago, they had flown in a helicopter right to the top of the plateau, had lived there all this time, chipped stone,

looked for quartz crystals. Their backpacks were loaded with them. In the coming days, as soon as the weather settled, a helicopter was supposed to fly to the Parnuk River valley and pick them up. Apparently, it is profitable to dig minerals, since it allows you to fly over the Urals by helicopter.

While I was wasting time talking, a rain cloud had crept into the valley from which I had come. The last part of the path, laid through the destroyed rocks, was already in the rain. However, when I came out on top, the cloud had flown away, in some places even the sun began to peek out, I, taking advantage of the break, hurried to climb to the top of Mount Konglomeratnaya – a small kurum elevation above the plateau. The higher I climbed, the more breathtaking the view became. On all sides I was surrounded by peaks of peaks, and from the only depression between the ridges the jagged saw of the queen of the Subpolar Urals – Manaraga began to grow. Such severe beauty took my breath away, and if during the ascent I was thinking of going down immediately, without delay, while there was still weather, now I definitely decided to spend the night at the top. After all, if there is even a small chance to take something beautiful in the evening or morning light, I simply have no right to ignoring it.

And there was a chance, the sky by this time had divided into two parts, the border of which passed approximately above me. In the east it was light and the further the brighter, it was clear that somewhere there, at the foot of the mountains, the sun was shining. In the west, the mountain tops were covered with darkness. And it seemed to me that the clouds were flying from the south to the north, which gave some hope for the victory of good weather. However, not entrusting myself completely to the hope for the best, I hurried down quickly, towards the green tundra clearing in the middle of the plateau, on which some buildings were visible and next to which old workings were visible as light spots.

And I did the right thing, in 10-15 minutes the situation changed for the worse, the world around me was shrouded in grayness, and about ten kilometers away a snow-white wall of rain appeared, definitely approaching the summit. At the workings I met one of the two remaining diggers at the top.



We exchanged a few words, he showed me how and where in the mud they extract quartz.

To be fair, I could not answer my questions about the origin and value of this mineral, but he said that in the neighboring workings, under the protection of its walls, another digger, a former geologist, had pitched a tent and was hiding. He advised me to ask him. Seeing the rain that had almost reached the mountain, feeling the increasing pressure of the wind accompanying it, I decided that this was a good idea. I found the tent that I had been told about, and greeted its occupant on the run. Not far from it, at the bottom of a pit about three meters deep, I found a flat area with a small puddle nearby. So I stood there.

I managed to pack up the tent and jump inside at the last moment – with the first drops, knocking out large bubbles on the surface of the neighboring puddle. At first everything was bearable, I could hear the wind howling above, but here, under the protection of high stone walls, there was only rain. I cooked myself a second dinner and dozed off for a couple of hours. When I woke up, the rain had eased a little, turning from a downpour into a fine, dense drizzle. Looking out into the street, I discovered a problem. My pit, at the bottom of which I was standing, began to turn

into a pool. The puddle located nearby grew larger and began to flow under the tent. The unenviable situation was quite obvious: if the rain continued – and there was nothing to indicate otherwise – I risked ending up in water.

Gritting my teeth, I crawled out of the tent and went in search of a suitable place to spend the night.

And – a miracle! – as soon as I walked a little, the rain practically stopped, and in the direction where the descent from the plateau should have been, the outlines of the surrounding mountains even began to appear.



Parnuk plateau

I could not pass up such a chance, decided to approach the pass and, while there was visibility, to reconnoiter tomorrow's descent route. This question, as I wrote earlier, worried me a lot, since this was the most difficult pass on my entire route, and I had heard and read about about five different options for descending from the plateau. I had to figure it out myself and find the safest, most accessible line of movement for a single person. So it would be stupid not to take advantage of the window in the weather. Approaching the edge of the depression, in which I had seen the profile of Manaraga before the rain, I found a cairn of stones marking the pass.

Down went a completely passable slope, made up of large stones and destroyed rocks. I could see about thirty meters of it. Inspired by the ease of the start, I decided to go down a little, to look around further. In the meantime, the rain began again, but this worried me less.

For about a hundred meters everything went well, with the proper level of skill and caution, descending along the side of the cirque was acceptable, until I reached an interesting place – a huge inclined stone that had fallen from above and formed an arch. Having passed under it, I came out onto a not very high, ten meters, cliff with sloping shelves leading down. Rainwater was flowing down the cliff, and it all looked very bad. Having stood there thoughtfully, I decided to turn back. Descending alone along wet rocks exceeded all limits of reasonableness. It was necessary to look for another way. There were no other safe options for descent nearby, this line was the only one, but a little further to the left in the veil of rain, it seemed, a scree slope was visible. I decided to check it out.



First stop in a mine working

Having climbed back to the pass, I started climbing up the edge of the cirque, and after about 200 m the rocks that made up the side of the cirque ended, giving way

to a large kurum that went down. It seems that Andrey Bystrov told me about this route option yesterday.

I climbed down, and yes, after about two hundred meters of movement on large, sometimes weakly holding stones between the outcrops of small rocks I saw the entire slope, descending to a turquoise lake at the bottom of the cirque. There were no more impassable sections along the entire path down. My heart was relieved, I had found a solution to this problem, and now it remained to solve the second one – to find a new place to spend the night.

I found such a place not far from the pass, right in the middle of large kurum placers – a small flat area protected by stones.

Having gone to get my things, I made a small detour and looked again at the tundra clearing near the workings. Apparently, there used to be a miners' camp there, the amount of household garbage and the frame of a wooden tent spoke eloquently about this. It's crazy, once upon a time here, at an altitude of 1500 m, almost on the roof of the Urals, people lived and chopped stones. How did they live here? It must have been very hard, but beautiful. Unfortunately, as in most such places, the workers and geologists left behind a complete mess. And it will take many more years before anyone thinks about the cleanliness of such unique places.

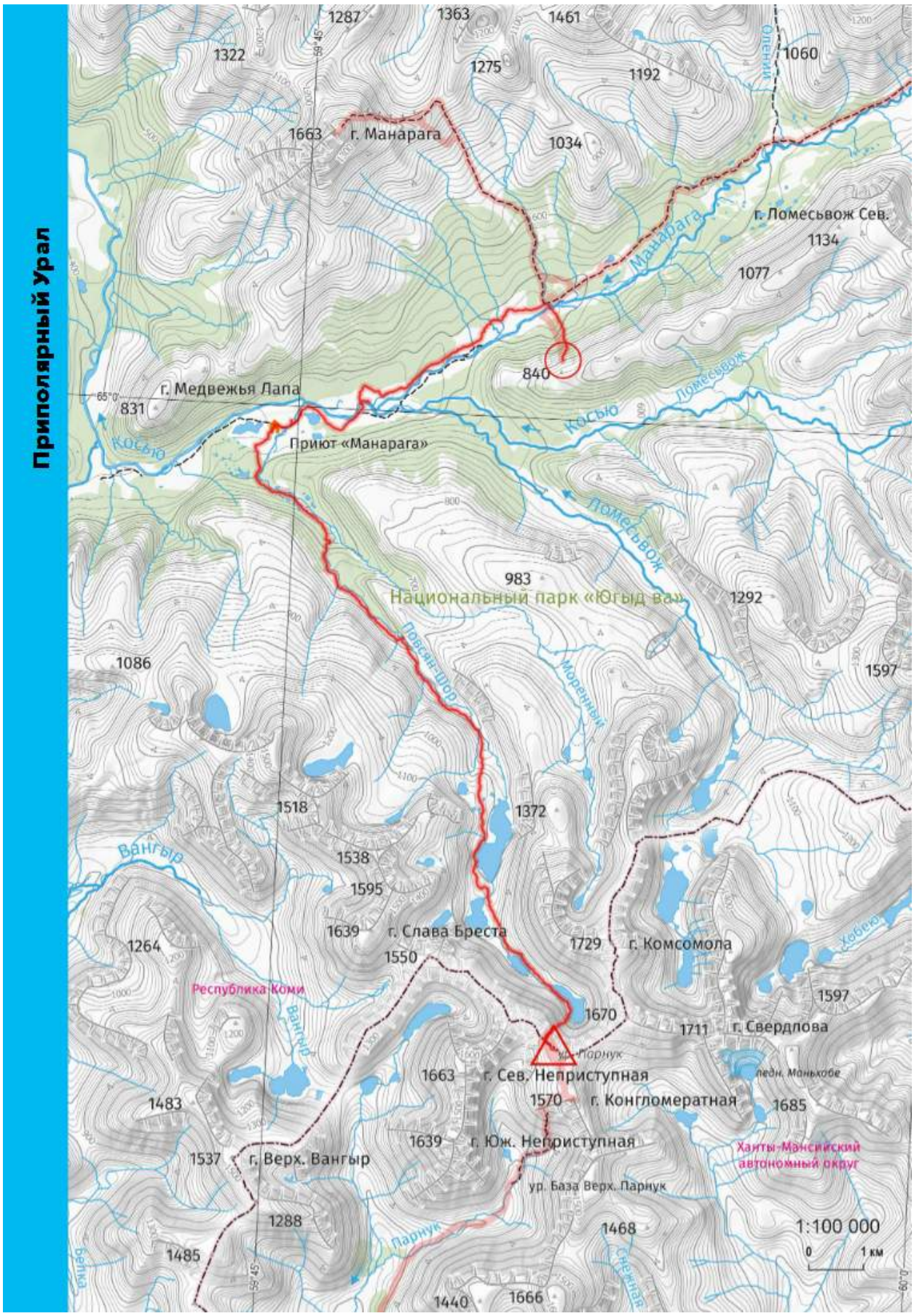
I also dropped by my neighbor's tent to get acquainted, to find out a little more about the stones that are mined here. An elderly but strong man invited me into the tent, put on some tea, and we got to talking. The owner of the house turned out to be Andrey Bezukladnikov, an experienced tourist and former geologist. Andrey said that this quartz is valued by collectors because of the presence of the mineral rutile inside, which looks like thin gold threads. The stones mined here are sold for a lot of money, which pays for the effort, time, and the cost of the helicopter. Andrey said that he had been to these places not only as a digger, but also as a tourist. In the summer of 2005, as part of a sports group, he completed a route of the highest (6th) category of difficulty, within the framework of which traverses or ascents were made to such iconic and highest objects of the Subpolar Urals as Mount Neroika, the Nepristupny Ridge, the Parnuk Plateau, Mount Sverdlova, Mount Komsomola,

Mount Zashchita, Mount Mansinyor, Mount Narodnaya, Mount Manaraga, Mount Maslennikova, Mount Sabre. The list of peaks and the route line were delightful, five of the seven highest mountains of the Urals in one route, a traverse of the jagged Nepristupny Ridge, which I admired today, an ascent of Narodnaya along the wall of the cirque – all this was impressive. I had not heard of this route before, so I made a note to myself of the need to find the report and read everything in detail. The route leader was Nikolai Pavlovich Demenev.

The rain started and stopped, it was getting late, and no matter how good I was feeling in my senior colleague's tent, I had to go outside, pack up the camp and evacuate it from the pool. As a farewell gift, Andrey gave me a small crystal with shiny veins of rutile. I promised him that I would keep it in Ufa, in the “Embassy of the Ural Mountains”. We said goodbye warmly, and I went into the wet cloud.

The water in the pit increased, I quickly threw all my things into the backpack, without disassembling the tent, picked it up and walked to the new overnight location. It was not a very smart decision – to walk on wet kurum with a sail wriggling in the wind in your hands. However, my disgust with the daily process of assembling the tent was already so great that it overpowered the voice of reason. Fortunately, everything ended well, and I got off with only very frozen hands. The temperature dropped noticeably by evening.

The main thing was that the way down was found, this gave confidence in the future. And everything else was fixable. I climbed into my sleeping bag, cooked dinner, wrapped myself in all the dry clothes I had, reread the description of the descent with the further plan of movement for tomorrow. And went to bed, a long difficult day came to an end, and, it seems, I did a great job.



The Subpolar Urals

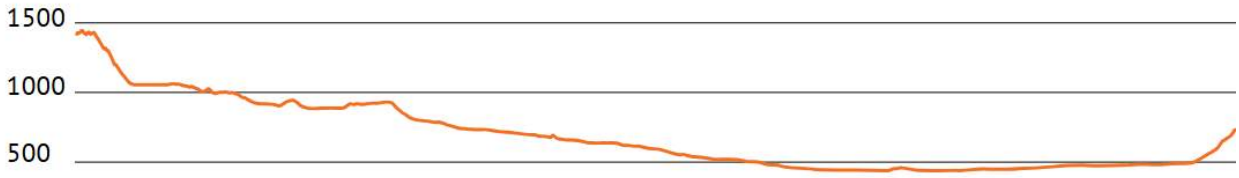
Manaraga *Bearpaw*

Shelter “Manaraga”
Komi Republic
Yugyd Vaz National Park
Povsyan-Shor
Lomesvozh North
city Slava Brest
Komsomola
Vangyr
Northern Nepristupnaya
city Sverdlova
city Konglomeratnaya
city Verkh. Vangyr
city Yuzh. Nepristupnaya
Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug
ur. Baza Verkh. Parnuk
Parnuk

Day 86

Parnuk plateau – Povsyan-Shor stream – Manaraga tourist base – peak 840.1

27.7 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2492.7 km



July 25, 2021

It was a tough night – windy and cold. No matter how much I wrapped myself up, I didn't warm up until the morning. I tossed and turned in my sleeping bag, anxiously listening to what was happening outside. Until about five in the morning, raindrops pounded the canopy, then they were replaced by a familiar rustle that hurt my frozen fingers. It started snowing. It's hard to imagine a worse weather scenario for descending from the plateau. It's a good thing I scouted out the route yesterday!

A separate morning pleasure was putting on icy, completely wet socks, and then sneakers. Yesterday I mentioned that I was fed up with the process of assembling and disassembling the tent, but the only thing worse than that is the daily morning need to pull dry, unrested feet out of the sleeping bag and put on wet, dirty socks. And so on every day – an inexorable routine ritual that marks the beginning of difficulties. I am sure that if I successfully reach the end, I will be asked what was the most difficult thing in the hike. In the mind of the questioner, it will probably be rocks, rivers, windfalls, but no, this is not the most difficult. All this was, is and will be, but it is always different. But this exhausting daily routine ... How sick I am of it!

All night, the growing tension, constant thoughts about descending along the icy cirque covered in snow pushed me out of the tent earlier than usual. I wanted to solve this problem and get to the forest zone. And there, no rain or snow is scary. At six in the morning, as soon as it got light, I quickly packed up the tent and headed towards the pass. Visibility was about twenty meters, wet snow began to fall from the sky in showers every now and then, but, fortunately, it was not strong enough to cover the rocks. It fell and melted, which made the path easier. If I had not known

where to go, in such conditions, looking for a path would have been much more dangerous than yesterday.

However, first, before moving down, I decided to do one more important thing. Lying in the tent, I thought that the Parnuk plateau was an ideal place to stash the fourth treasure – a silver token with the profile of Manaraga. My train of thought was as follows. The Subpolar Urals are not very long, I have already covered almost half of its territory. Further on there will be the most interesting, but also the most frequently visited part. I do not want the token to be easy for any group that accidentally ends up in the area to take. And the Parnuk plateau, it is, like an elbow, nearby – a one-day walk from the main tourist routes, but getting there is not so easy. But if someone gets there, they will get not only the token, but also great pleasure from the beauty of the plateau. Thinking about the location of the cache, I went through several options and settled on the rock arch I found yesterday, along the more difficult descent.



Arch on the descent from the plateau

I headed to it first. I hid the token at the right corner of the arch, if you stand facing it along the descent path. In the crack between a vertically standing square

stone and a flat stone that fell on it, thus forming an arch. I blocked the crack with a small stone at the place of the blocking, so that the plastic bag would not stick out.

I climbed back up, went along yesterday's route and began to descend. I overcame the kurum upper part without problems, with maximum caution. Very carefully, controlling each step, without sudden movements, trying to have three points of support at any moment and holding on with my hands, I went down to the area of the outcrops of the bedrock sloping rocks and mossy bald patches.

Visibility was no more than 20 m, and from below, from the bottom of the circus, thanks to some kind of air swirls, large wet snowflakes flew into my face.

I got a little lost in the area of the main exits. Yesterday, this part of the descent seemed simple from above, but, finding myself in the middle of sloping wet rocks, I revised my opinion. I had to look for a way in this labyrinth, running into “no-goes” a couple of times, returning to the top and looking for bypasses. However, the lower I went, the better the visibility became and the easier it was to plan a long-term descent line. And then, approximately in the place where the rocks ended, the slope became less steep and kurum fields appeared again, I finally came out of the cloud. I saw a lake lying at the bottom of the cirque, and the path I would take to get to it. The only difficulty foreseen was a wet and not very large kurum, which in itself is unpleasant, but allowed me to breathe freely. The Parnuk plateau is passed! The devil turned out to be not as scary as I imagined, especially if you know the right way and go in dry weather. The ascent to Telposiz from the glacier was, in my opinion, more dangerous.

Having looked around and with relief admired from below the steep black stern cliffs of the cirque surrounding me, I hurried down the valley in the hope of being able to warm up and dry out, and perhaps even spend the night at the Manaraga tourist center, located 15 km below, at the confluence of the Kosyu and Manaraga rivers.

However, it quickly became clear that the walk down the valley would not be easy. Narrow, squeezed between the mountains, it could not please with a large number of flat tundra surfaces. At first, for several kilometers, there were only wet,

cascading kurums, then the lakes began with swampy banks, the same kurums and dwarf willows and birches, which became higher and curlier with each meter down. Since we had to walk constantly down, from the very morning the load on the legs, knees, ankles were maximum. And at some point, on the next step, a sharp pain pierced my left knee, which scared me no end. It felt like something was jammed inside the knee joint. Having sat down on the backpack, I very carefully straightened my leg, gave it a rest. Massaged it well. I sat for a while and very carefully went on, paying maximum attention to what was happening in the knee. This severity and impassability of the valley had its reverse, bright side. Around me, landscapes of remarkable beauty unfolded. The narrow, cliff-crowned sides of the valley rose high into the sky. Up the valley, where I had come from, the Nepristupny Ridge towered with its sharp snow-capped peaks, and the smooth, rocky edge of the Parnuk Plateau was visible.



Valley of the river Povsyan-Shor

The entire valley was filled with the noise of the river and waterfalls, and had gathered a necklace of five large and many tiny lakes, reflecting the mountain peaks in their surface. And below, there it was – Mount Manaraga, wrapped in a cloudy veil.

The weather began to change, and blue windows appeared in the sky every now and then. This gave me hope that Manaraga might open up. I walked down and kept looking at it, and when a bend in the valley hid it from me, I hurried to pass it quickly and meet its gaze again. By this time, I had clearly realized that if I planned to write a book about my journey, it simply could not be without a photograph of Manaraga. Any other mountain could be sacrificed, but this beauty, a symbol of the Subpolar Urals, and in many ways of the entire Urals, simply had to be in close-up in the book. However, she only teased me, either slightly raising the clouds, giving hope, or pulling them down again, lowering them even lower.

I went out to the Manaraga tourist base, quite tired, after lunch, under a slight drizzle that had begun to fall again. And I found myself in complete confusion, in the warmth, dryness and in the midst of a large number of bustling strangers. This was not how I had imagined this short respite.



At the base, either a small get-together or a festival without spectators was taking place, dedicated to the work of Vladimir Vysotsky and the 25th anniversary of something else. I was clearly out of place, but still found the nerve to hang my wet clothes on hangers by the stove and drink tea for a couple of hours until the tent and clothes dried.

There was no point in thinking about spending the night; in the short time spent in the circle of strangers, I was already more tired than from the Povsyan-Shor Valley, especially since Manaraga itself would not take a photo. And I could not lose the opportunity to take a picture at sunset and sunrise for the sake of spending the night in warmth. The exchange was too unequal. I got ready and went out into the rain that had started again.

A tourist base is a strong word: one house, a small bathhouse, a toilet and a gazebo – that's the entire complex of buildings, lost deep in the mountains. Supply only by air. The history of the emergence of this place is remarkable and is associated with a tragic event. It was built by a local entrepreneur in memory of his deceased

son, transferred to the balance sheet of the National Park “Yugyd Va”, but continues to support and provide. The park itself would never have been able to build such a base in such a remote corner at its own expense.

While I was sitting in the warmth and consuming the host's carbohydrates and fats, I thought out a plan for further action, how to get a photograph of the mountain with the highest probability. And I began to implement it. I went along a well-trodden tourist path under Manaraga, waded across the river of the same name and climbed up the steep tundra slope, to the opposite side of the valley to the mountain. Once a couple of years ago, I had already tried to photograph the mountain from this place, but then I was unlucky with the weather. Today I decided to give myself a second chance. Especially since the weather continued to swirl, giving timid hope. The peaks opened for a few minutes and then immediately closed – all, except Manaraga.

The last hundreds of meters of the thirty kilometers of the path of this day were especially difficult. Puffing heavily, I climbed up and thought how good it would be now in the warmth, dryness and with Vysotsky's songs. What did I forget on this wet tundra slope. I found a place for a tent to match the last hundred meters – right on the slope there was a small, rocky outcrop that formed a ledge. I stood on it. It was a strange and extremely inconvenient place to spend the night. But what a view it offered!



Overnight with a view of Mount Manaraga



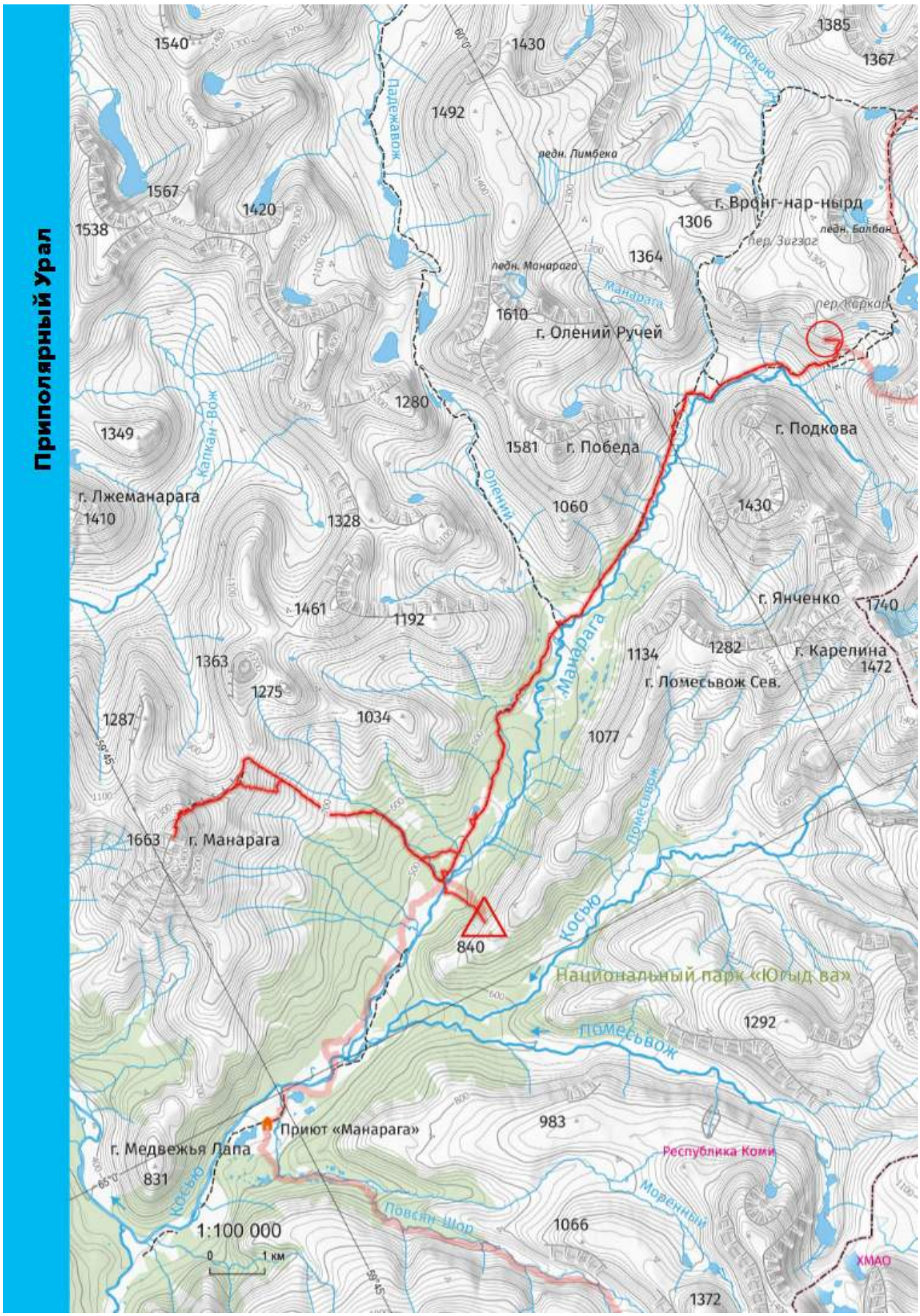
Maslennikov Peak at Sunset

Manaraga stood right in front of me, a few kilometers away, in all its grandeur and power. Between us, the river wound like a silver snake, taking the gaze up the forest-filled valley to the highest peaks of the Urals and down to the Kolokoleni

massif, which sometimes opened and sometimes closed. A couple of smokes curled up near the river bank, and next to them were the colorful dots of the tents of the tourist camp, of which there is a never-ending stream here in summer. They did not see even a fraction of the beauty that was available to me, they fed mosquitoes, breathed in smoke and looked at the trees blocking the sky. True, they slept on level ground, but was that why they had come such a long way?

It was about two hours before sunset, I climbed into the tent, opened the entrance and cooked dinner, not taking my eyes off Her for a second. And she continued to tease me. Every now and then the blue sky appeared around, but the summit itself, the bear's paw, was hidden by a black impenetrable cloud. So we looked at each other until sunset. So she did not take pity on the lonely traveler who wanted only to touch her beauty with his gaze.

Lying in the tent, I paid special attention to my legs today, massaging them. I couldn't get the problem with my knee that happened during the day out of my head. Fortunately, it did not return, and in general, throughout the day, despite the high loads, there was no more pain. However, this was a wake-up call that should not be ignored. I decided to warm up better in the morning, not to start descents, not to put a lot of strain on my legs while they were cold.



The Subpolar Urals

Kapkan-Vozh *Falsemanaraga*

Padejavo

vedn. Limbeko

Limbekoy

Oleniy Ruchey

Vrang-nar-nyrd

Podkova

Pobeda

Manaraga

Bear Paw town

Kosyu

With. Yanchenko

Lomesvozh North

Karelina

Yuryd vaya National Park

Shelter "Manaraga"

Pavlo Shar

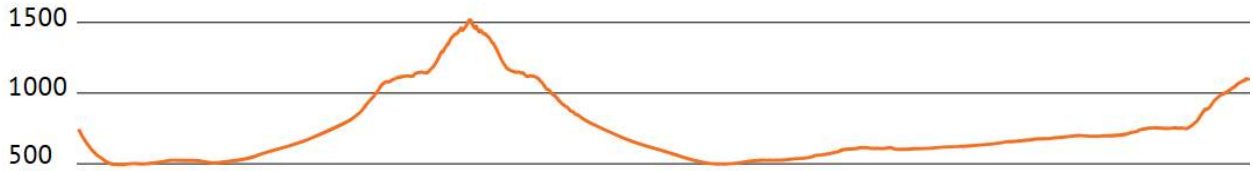
Komi Republic

Moraine

Day 87

Peak 840.1 – Mount Manaraga (1663.5) – northwestern kar of Mount Narodnaya

35 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2527.7 km



July 26, 2021

Despite the fact that the tent was pitched crookedly and I even had to use food bags to level the floor, I slept surprisingly well.

Having woken up at dawn, I did not even open the flap – the measured noise of the rain in the tent spoke eloquently of the hopelessness of the situation. As a result, I slept until seven in the morning and woke up in a cloud. In some ways, this was even better than the endless whirlwind of the sky and the tense wait for a window over the mountain. I had almost come to terms with another defeat in this game of "staring" with Manaraga. I did everything I could, but staying longer on the route was no longer acceptable. I began to cook breakfast and slowly got ready for the journey.

However, as often happens in the mountains, in less than an hour the clouds lifted, and yesterday's view appeared before me again: mountains, blue windows in the sky and Manaraga tightly holding the clouds with its rocky ridge. This shifted the time of departure, it seemed that any minute now – and it would open, but the clouds were moving everywhere, except for the place where I really needed it.

At nine o'clock in the morning I began to descend. Remembering yesterday's excess, I did it extremely slowly and carefully, so much so that the descent along the tundra slope took, if not more, then certainly no less time than the ascent on the remnants of yesterday's strength. And since yesterday the thought has been haunting me: to go or not to the top of Manaraga. On one side of the scale lay the most important Ural peak, without which the trans-Ural route would be incomplete, on the other side – fatigue, as well as the rejection of climbing to the summit "for show", because it is in the cloud and nothing can be seen from it.

Meanwhile, in the valley of the Kosyu River, where I descended, the sun began to bake. And I decided to give one last chance for the mountain to get onto the pages of the book – to wait a maximum of two more hours in the swamps that had dried up in this hot summer,



Mount Manaraga, view from the trail

from which a view of the mountain opens up. If it does appear, then go up, if it doesn't, go further. I laid out my things to dry and began to wait. And waited! I sat it out! About an hour later, the cloud veil went up, and the jagged peak of the mountain opened up almost completely, the clouds continued to fly over the mountain and cling to it with their lower edges, but the entire relief of the peak was visible. This lasted only five minutes, but it was enough for me to take a photo for the book. Then I collected my things, hid them off the tourist trail and went to Manaraga. If I promised, I must fulfill it.

It was already approaching midday, so I hurried as best I could, I had to get to the top as quickly as possible and go on without delay.

At the exit from the forest zone, already approaching the Studenchesky Pass, I saw a group of tourists ahead, also going up. It was very useful, now I had an additional incentive and a guide for faster movement. I set myself the goal of

overtaking them and rushed forward on the fuel of excitement and sporting anger. I like to use competitive incentives to accomplish my hiking tasks, and although there is only one participant in this competition – myself, it still works. I caught up with the group at the pass.

The kurum-rocky part of the route began from the pass, marked right on the rocks with blue paint, the markings led to the first tooth of Manaragi – a part of the summit ridge, accessible without the use of climbing equipment, but not the highest point of the mountain. First, a long, slightly less than 1.5 km, run with a smooth climb, then a steep kurum takeoff, and already under the very summit a labyrinth of small rocks, in some places suspended by a rope. At the very summit, as is usual, there is a garbage dump, garbage brought here by tourists and left as a memento, some memorial plaques that have nothing to do with the summit and even an advertisement for an Inta taxi.

For those two and a half hours that I climbed the mountain, there was hope th clouds would rise, but no. I rose in a thick cloud, the hope for better weather did not come true, I sat in the fog for a while. What a wonderful view of all the highest peaks of Urals should open up from this pedestal, but not this time. And I hurried down. As soon a I descended onto the shoulder of the mountain, the summit immediately opened up. Oh, this mountain is not simple, Manaraga is obstinate instead.



Top of Mount Manaraga

At the foot of the mountain, I came out onto the main circumpolar tourist highway, abundantly marked with snow-white napkins, and hurried forward with a quick step, intending to climb the Kar-Kar Pass and, perhaps, cross to the foot of Mount Narodnaya.

I didn't have much strength left, but the tourist groups I met shared it with me all day long and kept me in good shape. A couple of people I met said that it was thanks to my films and publications that they ended up on this trail. What can I say? This is probably the best thing a traveler can hear about his work.

Towards evening, already quite exhausted by the monotonous stretch with a lingering climb, I approached the Kar-Kar Pass – one of the two classic routes from the Manaraga River valley to the Balbanya River, from Mount Manaraga to Mount Narodnaya. I started to climb its first steep step, while simultaneously thinking about where to pitch the tent.



View from the slope of Manaraga to the north-east

The answer to this traditional main question of the afternoon began to be born when, having already gained a fair amount of altitude, I looked back once more. A magnificent view to the south-west: a memorable, charismatic angle on Mount Pobeda and a little further on the menacing, bristling under the dark clouds Manaraga. A wonderful view that you want to take pictures of both at sunset and at dawn. If you climb to the pass, you will most likely no longer have such a view. Then I looked at the huge car itself, at the entrance to which I was located, studied its

slopes and decided that it would be an unforgivable waste of time and effort to descend from the opposite side in order to begin the ascent to Narodnaya the classic way tomorrow. It seems that at the edges its slope is relatively gentle and consists not of rocks, but of scree.

A plan was born quickly: to climb higher along the northern slope of the kar, find an even more advantageous view of the Manaraga Valley, and pitch a tent on one of the visible grassy ledges. In the morning, do not go to the pass, but climb the opposite, southern slope of the kar and go along it to the vast plateau under the summit of Mount Narodnaya.

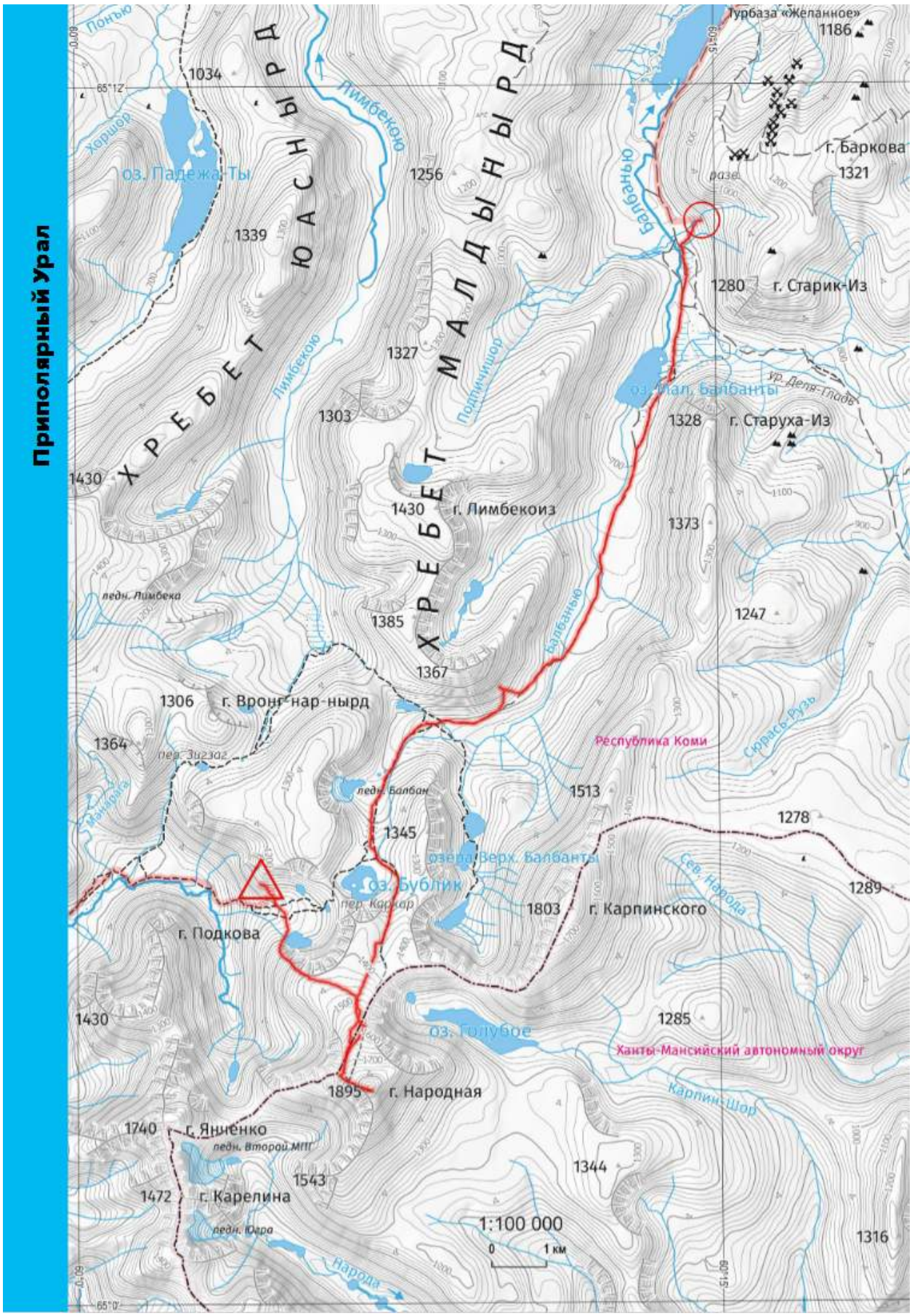
From where there is a direct route to the “roof of the Urals.” Such an unconventional option for climbing was supposed to shorten the route to the summit almost twice and make it more interesting.

I did not manage to fully implement the cunning plan. I chose the best view of the mountains. But finding a normal site for the tent did not work out quite well. The best I found was much worse than even yesterday's option and threatened to send any thing that fell out of the tent flying down the slope. However, the view – gloomy, majestic, like a living personification of the expression “Gray Urals” – made me put up with any inconvenience. I put my things under, leveled the floor as much as possible and with a sense of duty accomplished and even exceeded, I indulged in rest. Sometimes I lazily pulled back the tent flap and took one or two shots of the changing mountains.

In the evening, Tatyana Sergeevna sent a message that her daughter Katya, at not quite four years old, had learned to row a large rowboat and could already swim several hundred meters on her own. When I read such messages, I understand that I simply cannot fail to reach the finish line, I have no moral right not to finish this project. After all, I have missed so much time and important moments in the life of my family, and only the fulfillment of the goal can give meaning to this sacrifice.



Campsite on the slope of the north-western ridge of Mount Narodnaya



The Subpolar Urals

Harshor *Yuasnyrd ridge*

Limbekoiz

lady. Nimbeka

Vrong nar-nyrd

Limbekaya

Maldynyrd ridge

Subpichishore

Limbekoiz

Sochnedied

Komi Republic

Top. Balwanty

Karpinsky

Podkova

Yanchenko

Karelin

Narodnaya

Narbda

Zhelannoye tourist center

Barkova

Starik-Iz

Balbanty Dena-Glava

Starukha-Iz

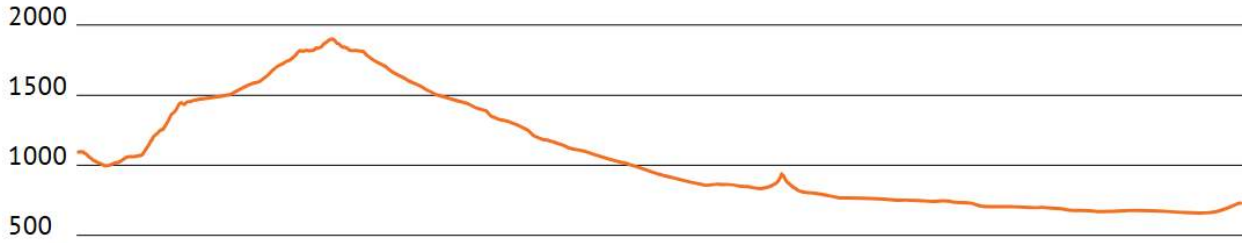
Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug

Karpin Shor

Day 88

The northwestern cirque of Mount Narodnaya – Mount Narodnaya (1895) – the valley of the Balbanyu River

28 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2555.7 km



July 27, 2021

The morning was raw and white, and my tiny tent was like a speck of dust stuck to the wall of a huge cauldron in which clouds were boiling. They were everywhere: below, above, all around, inside. Everything was moving and swirling; rain would start, then snow would fall in large, sparse flakes. Sometimes, through breaks in the clouds, the edge of the cirque would appear, whitened with snow from about the 1400-meter boundary. This meant one thing: the summit of Mount Narodnaya was covered in snow, but how much of it was there – that was the main question.



Morning, view from the tent

I lay in the tent for a long time, waiting for the weather to improve, but it never did. I set out at 8:20. If I still had doubts yesterday about whether to go to the summit of Manaraga in the clouds, I had no such doubts with Narodnaya – a trans-Ural route without all the highest points of the five parts of the Urals is unthinkable.

After crossing the cirque, I started ascending the southern slope, heading directly for the summit. The climb was quite steep, with large and sometimes unstable kurums, but overall, the going wasn't bad. The weather would tease with unexpected sunshine through breaks in the clouds, then a few minutes later would start pelting me with snow. At one point, both weather phenomena merged. A sunlit "blind snowstorm" began – an unusual and very beautiful sight, especially in July.

I reached the pre-summit plateau relatively quickly; it gains elevation very gradually over about a kilometer, leading to the final ascent to the summit. From there, it was clear that the snow increased with altitude, and as I approached the start of the steeper climb, the amount increased radically. This was not encouraging at all. The path to the summit lay through piles of large stones, and kurum covered in fresh snow is very dangerous. The stones become extremely slippery, and on top of that, you can't see where you're stepping. The risk of falling increases many times over.

I moved upward very slowly and carefully along the edge of the cirque's vertical wall in near-zero visibility. My hands froze first, but I wasn't in a hurry to put on warm mittens, saving them for the descent. Closer to the summit, the snow between the stones in places began to reach up to my knees. The wind picked up and periodically brought snow squalls that obscured the path with a white sheet.

I passed the cross installed just below the summit. Honestly, religious symbols installed in the mountains simply at someone's whim irritate me. After all, for me, the mountains are also a temple, but I don't paint them on the walls of religious institutions.

One more small climb, and there it was – the roof of the Urals! A small area covered in a white blanket of snow and clouds. And perhaps it's for the best that everything was covered in snow today. The abundant trash, which is always

disappointing, wasn't visible. Right now, the summit of Narodnaya is the highest-altitude dump in the Urals; there's no other way to describe this pile of junk. Perhaps after finishing the trans-Ural trek, I'll find the time and strength for a separate clean-up expedition, to dismantle and haul everything on the summit down to Inta. I've had such plans for several years now, even preliminarily discussed with the national park administration.

I didn't stay long on the summit – a couple of photos, a few seconds of video for the film, and then down, quickly down, before my wet, snow-covered ankles started to freeze – back to the zone of cloudy and rainy, but still, summer.

Contrary to pessimistic expectations, the descent was faster and easier, greatly aided by an extensive snowfield I hadn't noticed on the way up. It covered the stones, and I could half-run, half-slide down it quite quickly and safely.

On the plateau, roughly where I had hidden my backpack, at the edge of the cloud cover, I began to meet the first climbers coming up the classic route. It was already noon; these tourists weren't in a hurry to reach the top. Although, perhaps they had been waiting for the weather to clear up.



Summit of Mount Narodnaya

Descending into the tundra via a filled, never-melting snow chute, I ran on without stopping. The path was familiar, a trail marked with signs ran along the valley and was supposed to lead me to the “Zhelannoye” tourist base by evening. The proximity of warmth, electricity, and a sauna after such cold days pulled me like a magnet.

However, as soon as I warmed up a bit, a persistent and rather unpleasant thought appeared in my head. If I go to the tourist base, I won't be able to see Narodnaya from there, and it might reveal itself today or tomorrow morning. And what kind of book would it be without Narodnaya? Right – a bad one!

The lower I descended into the valley, the more the weather improved; black clouds swirled behind my back, and patches of blue sky peeked through breaks in them overhead. The problem was only one thing: just like yesterday, the clouds clung tightly to the highest point of these lands, which I needed to photograph. Remembering the experience of previous days, I decided there was still a chance, so upon reaching the slope of Mount Barkova, I stopped to camp for the night.

From the chosen spot, there was a potentially good view of Mount Narodnaya; it seemed to crown the valley, blocking it like a massive black bastion. The angle would have been even more interesting from the shoulder of Mount Barkova, but I had no strength left, so I settled for a small tundra hillock. It was soft, and water, chiming in a series of small waterfalls, was located a couple of dozen meters away. A perfect place to lie in the tent, look at the mountain, and wait.

The view from the tent was remarkable not only for the highest point of the Urals; next to it rose the third highest peak in the Urals – Karpinsky Peak. Closer to the observer was the charismatic rocky Old Woman-Iz, opposite it – the saucer of Lake Maloye Balbanty, and on its shore – the chums of the reindeer herders. And this is one of those cases where people became just as much an element of the landscape as the mountains described above. Most likely, these were the southernmost reindeer herders, nomadic in the Ural Mountains. And year after year, decade after decade, century after century, they come and set up their camp in the valley of the Balbanyu River beneath Mount Old Woman-Iz. Even Ernst Hoffmann, in his epoch-making

work for the Urals, “The Northern Urals and the Coastal Range Pai-Khoi”, published a drawing of these places in 1856, and it depicts this very camp surrounded by the described mountains.

When I see such a connection through time, the unchanging nature of certain phenomena, I begin to understand the Urals better. I deeply love and value such things.

If we are to talk about important Ural stories, we cannot overlook another one – unfolding for almost a hundred years around Mount Narodnaya. You could call it a toponymic riddle left for us by the topographers who mapped the mountain and gave it its name. The crux of it is the question of where the stress correctly falls in the mountain's name: Is it Naródnaya or Národnaya? Sometimes it seems to me like a joke from the discoverers – to give the highest peak of the Urals an ambiguously pronounced name and leave no written evidence of the logic behind its choice. However, if you delve a little into the history of the issue, the answer becomes more or less obvious.

The mountain was discovered and named in 1927, on the anniversary of the tenth year of the October Revolution, during the North Ural Complex Expedition of the USSR Academy of Sciences and Uralplan by the geologist A. P. Aleshkov. There is no doubt that the choice of name was influenced by the Národa River, which originates at the foot of the mountain, and, essentially, that concludes the arguments for the version with the stress on the first “a.”

The following arguments support the second pronunciation variant. Firstly, although Aleshkov himself never explicitly stated in writing where the stress should fall in the mountain's name, recollections were recorded from people who knew him, and also knew the head of the expedition, B. N. Gorodkov.



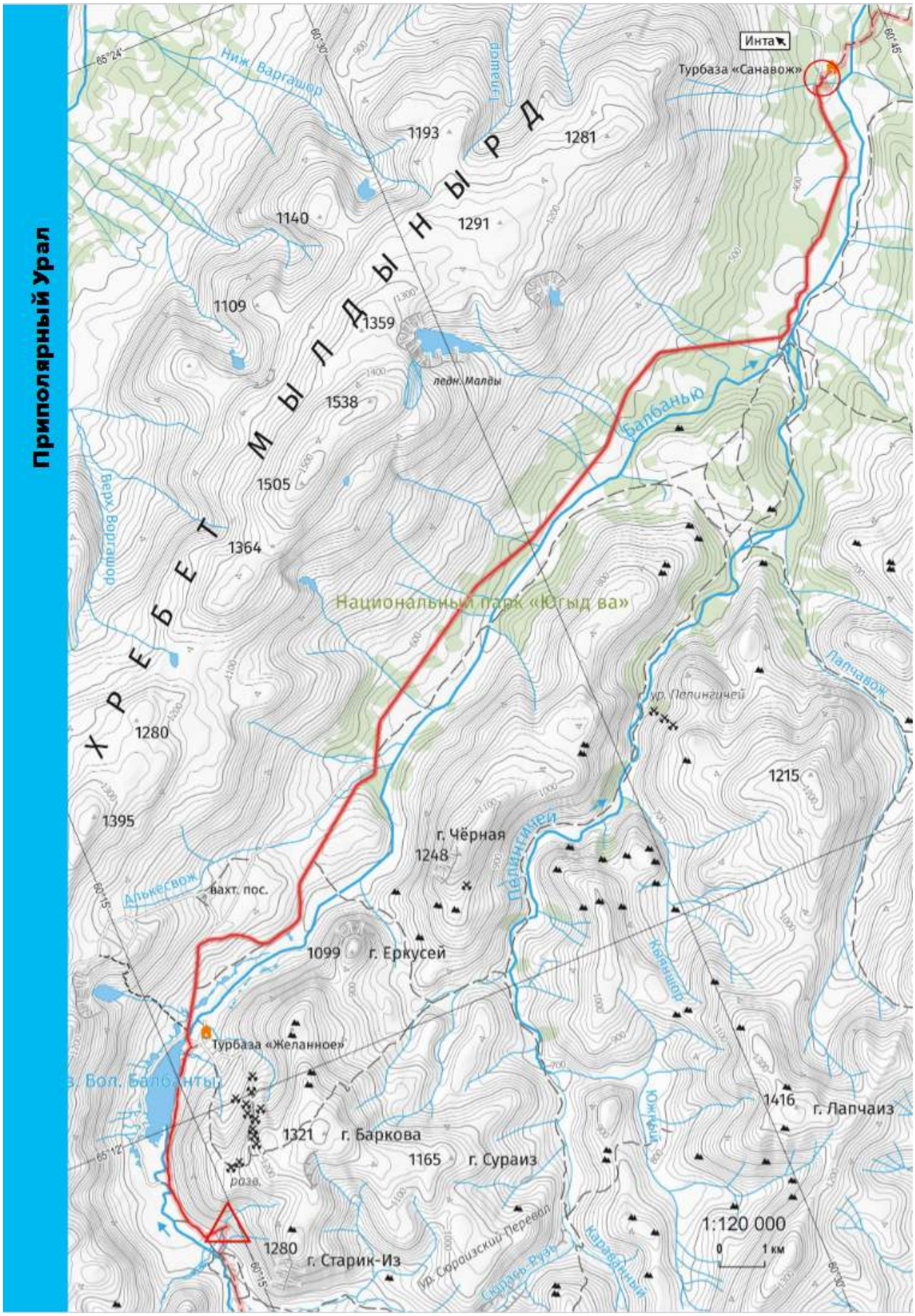
View from the tent of the Balbanyu River valley

They all assert that the mountain's name was derived from the word “naród” (the people). This very question was the subject of a dedicated article by Academician P. L. Gorchakovskiy, published in 1963 in the “Proceedings of the All-Union Geographical Society” – “On the Name of the Highest Peak of the Urals, Mount Narodnaya.” Secondly, the mountain was discovered and named in 1927, on the anniversary of the October Revolution. Besides Narodnaya, the expedition measured the heights and mapped Mount Karpinskogo and Mount Didkovskogo, and, after researching this mountain region as a whole, gave it the name “The Ridge of the 19th Century Researchers of the Northern Urals.”

Putting myself in the shoes of the discoverers, it's hard to imagine a situation where an expedition maps mountains and ridges, naming them after prominent scientists, political leaders, and explorers, but names the highest mountain in the Urals after a small river originating on its slopes. However, naming the highest peak of the Urals in honor of the people of the country fits perfectly into the logic of choosing names for new peaks.

In my opinion, out of respect for the will of the discoverers, and also out of respect for myself as a representative of the people in whose honor the mountain is named, it makes sense to call the mountain Naródnaya. Which is what I do.

Evening came, and Narodnaya still did not reveal itself to my gaze. Setting my alarm for dawn, I burrowed deeper into my sleeping bag and went to sleep.



The Subpolar Urals

Nizhny Vargashor River

Telashor River

Inta

Sanavozh Tourist Base

Myldynyrd Range

Maldy Glacier

Balbanyu River

Yugyd Va National Park

Pelingichey area

Lapchavozh River

Alkesvozh River

Shift Settlement

Mount Chyornaya

Pelingichey River

Mount Yerkusey

Kyanshor River

Zhelannoye Tourist Base

Lake Bolshiye Balbanty

Mount Barkova

Mount Suraiz

Yuzhny River

Mount Lapchaiz

Mount Starik-Iz

Syuraizsky Pass area

Karavanny River

Syuras Ruz River

Days 90, 91

Rest

0 km covered during two days. Total distance covered – 2590 km

July 29 and 30, 2021

So, I'm at the Sanavozh cordon, I have a long rest. I decided to stay here for two full days. Firstly, there is no weather, the mountain peaks are covered with dark clouds, every now and then it starts to rain. Secondly, ahead is the key, penultimate stage of the expedition, the longest and one of the wildest. About 400 km along the southern part of the Polar Urals. Every time I think about it, I feel anxious, and I have been thinking about it constantly for the last few days. I am sure that it is on this section that the fate of the expedition will be decided. I hate this feeling of anticipation, it is as exhausting as the road, I really want to pack my backpack and quickly get involved in the battle, but I have to cool my ardor with cold calculation. Remind myself that in these two days I have the most important task: eat a lot, sleep a lot and solve all existing and potential problems with equipment. A lot will depend on how I prepare and rest. I shudder as I look at the two large plastic barrels with food and gear. It’s hard to imagine how I’ll fit all of this into my backpack without the straps finally coming off. Inside the stash are 19 daytime food sets, an autumn sleeping bag, lightweight EVA boots, new sneakers, two large gas cylinders, a large dry bag made of thick material for carrying things outside, various small items, and a new backpack. Fearing that all of these riches wouldn’t fit into my old backpack, I asked my friends from the Sport-Marathon store to send me a new one, larger in volume but just as light. Which was done with characteristic efficiency. However, now, looking at the new backpack, I seriously doubt that it will help me. Although it is more capacious, it is divided into many compartments that eat up most of the effective volume. I try to fill the new backpack with things, I fill it to the brim, an impressive pile remains outside. What I was afraid of. It seems that such a volume cannot be crammed into it. Grocery sets do not fit well in the pockets, if I try to use them, then, apparently, I will have to disassemble the products into smaller parts.

In this case, they will lose their tightness. Any good lingering rain can leave me with soaked cereals, which is unacceptable. How I hate all these complex, multi-pocket backpack designs! disassemble the food into smaller parts. In doing so, they will lose their hermeticity. Any good, lingering rain can leave me with soaked cereals, which is unacceptable. How I hate all these complex, multi-pocket backpack designs!

With a heavy heart, I fill my old backpack with things. It has only one large compartment, which allows you to pack the contents as tightly as possible. Food takes up 2/3 of the volume, then the kitchen, gas, bulky and light clothes, a bag with small items in the hermetic bag fits in the upper part. That's it, there is no more space. The tent, sleeping bag and boots remain unpacked. But, as I wrote above, I have another dense, reliable hermetic bag, I pack the sleeping bag and tent into it. I tie it to the outer edge of the backpack with ties. I pull the boots with side ties.

I decide to send the cap, massage roller, and a few extra batteries home. It seems like a small thing, but now every gram and centimeter of volume is important. I carefully crawl under the straps, stand up to the plaintive creaking of the backpack suspension. The weight is impressive, the center of gravity is pulled back by the additional dry bag at the back, I have to compensate for it by leaning my body forward, but it seems I can walk, the main thing is that the straps do not come off. Well, in general, this is for the first two or three days, then, I hope, the food consumption will allow me to move things inside.



Trying on the loaded backpack

I spend the rest of the day in idleness. I walk a little, go to Marina's for lunch, not forgetting to eat at my place, and additionally stitch the backpack straps with coarse threads. I try to break in my sneakers.

Sneakers are another acute problem that I encountered today. There is no point in going further in the ones I walked the last part of the way; they will definitely not survive the hardships of the route. Tatyana Sergeevna, at my request, urgently ordered another pair of exactly the same sneakers. The name, the size – everything matches except the color. And what was my surprise today when, having put them on, I realized that they were very tight for me not only in width, but also in length.



The Balbanyu River at the border

Moreover, I am inclined to think that these are not changes in the foot associated with heavy loads, but rather the difference in shoe sizes. There is nothing to be done, I will have to endure and wear them in: either the sneakers will take the shape of my foot, or my foot will take the shape of the shoe.

The weather continues to play on my nerves. Sometimes the clouds part, revealing nearby peaks, sometimes everything gets delayed again and it starts to rain.

In addition to the general anxiety before a long and unknown stage of the journey, there is also anxiety about the state of the rivers. I have descended quite low, here the rivers are already much wider and more full-flowing than in the area of the highest peaks.



Another change of shoes

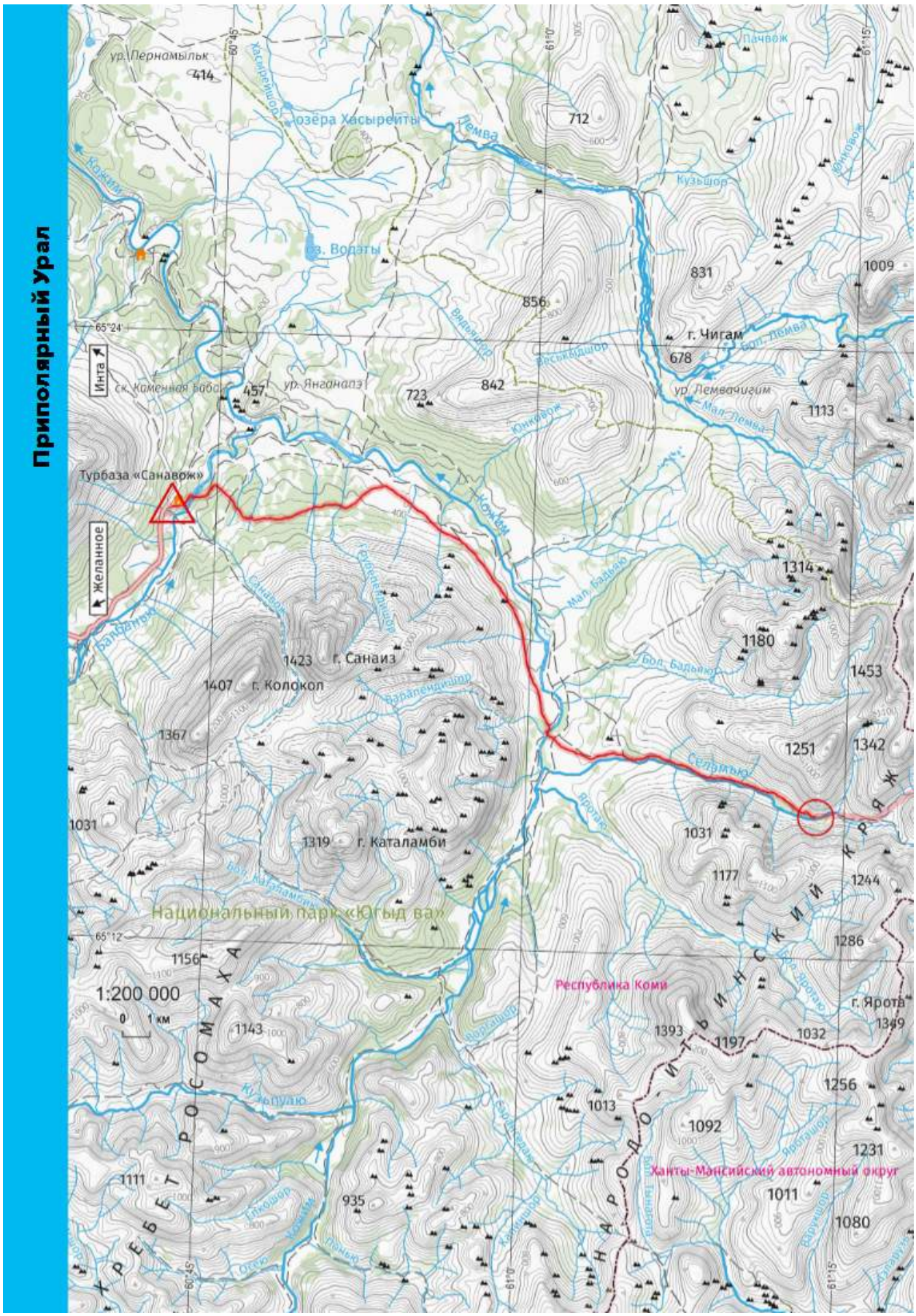
I am worried about heavy precipitation in the upper reaches, which could make the Balbanya and Kozhim rivers insurmountable. For now, the water level in them is low, and this somewhat calms me down.

Having finished all the urgent matters, except for breaking in my sneakers, I took a short walk around the outskirts of the cordon. There are remnants of past activities everywhere: abandoned equipment, roads of varying degrees of overgrowth. The Sanavozh cordon was previously a base for gold miners. For many years they dug up the beds of local rivers, extracting the precious metal under the leadership of the legendary Vadim Tumanov. There was an airfield and many other infrastructure facilities here that are now hard to imagine in the Ural Mountains. Now all this is falling apart, old huts are being sawed up for firewood. At the present stage, such a large workers' settlement is not needed in the national park.



And around there are high mountains growing out of the forest. In the north is the Maldynyrd ridge, in the south beyond the river is Mount Sanaiz and the Wolverine ridge. They rise more than a kilometer above us. I look at them, and the thought flashes through my mind: maybe, if the weather is good, we shouldn't go around this massif along the bottom, but go through it. However, remembering the weight of the backpack and the length of the upcoming route, I put my fantasies in place. Especially since the massif is hidden by clouds. We'll see it tomorrow morning.

In the evening, I went to bed early in order to leave at dawn. Impatience, gloomy thoughts about the upcoming long and difficult journey, doubts about water, sneakers – all this weighs on me and does not allow me to fall asleep for a long time. And then vacationers from Inta arrived. To fry shashlik, drink vodka, yell. My mood is terrible. I can't wait to get out.



The Subpolar Urals

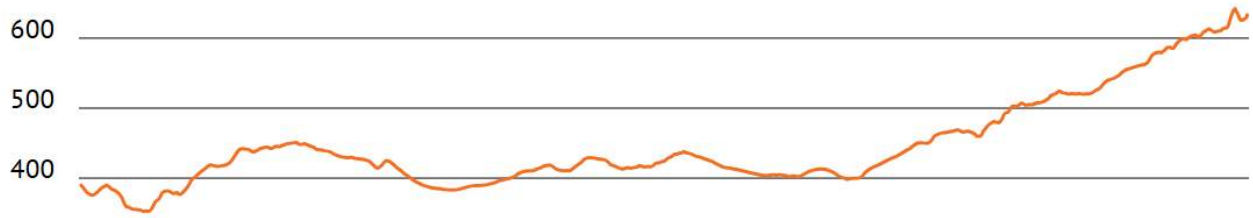
Pernamylk area *Khasyreyshor River*

Khasyrety Lakes
Lemva River
Kuzshor River
Pachvozh River
Yunkovozh River
Kozhim River
Lake Vodaty
Inta
Kamennya Baba Cliff
Yanganape area
Vyadyashor River
Veskyydshor River
Mount Chigam
Bolshaya Lemva River
Lemvachigim area
Yunkovozh River
Malaya Lemva River
Sanavozh Tourist Base
Zhelannoye
Balbanyu River
Sanavozh River
Grubependishor River
Malaya Badyayu River
Mount Sanaiz
Mount Kolokol
Varapendishor River
Bolshaya Badyayu River
Mount Katalambi
Seleniumyu River
Yarotayu River
Bolshaya Katalambiyu River
Yugyd Va National Park
Rosomakha Range
Kuzpuayu River
Vorgashor River
Komi Republic
Bolshoy Yarotayu River
Mount Yarota
Narodo-Ityinsky Kryazh
Sarangedayu River
Kapinshor River
Bolshaya Tynagota River
Yarotashor River
Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug
Varukshor River
Telaruz River
Yepkoshor River
Kozhim River
Ponyu River
Oseyu River

Day 92

Sanavozh Cordon – Kozhim River – Selemyu River

33 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2623 km



July 31, 2021

I left the base at six in the morning, Alexander Lyskov came to see me off, which was nice. Although for me this is unnecessary, I like to start and finish the route alone. I need to collect my thoughts, get into the running mode, empty farewell conversations only confuse.



At the start at the ford across the Balbanya River

The ford across the Balbanya River was no problem, the water was no higher than the knee, but now I have boots. And this means that I don't have to immediately and irrevocably wet my still dry and new sneakers. True, I had to spend time changing. I thought for a long time about whether to take boots with me to the northernmost part of the route. On the one hand, I rarely use such footwear on hikes, it takes up space, takes time and does not guarantee dry feet during intensive

movement. On the other hand, I am worried about the weather, the possibility of prolonged cold rains and snow.

On such days, low sneakers that leave the ankle open are not the best footwear for movement. I will remember for the rest of my life one October 24-hour race “Ring-24”, then my team and I spent almost a day in the forest, first in the rain, then in the snow. And one of the participants, who was wearing low running sneakers, by the end of the race almost lost the ability to move his ankle, the joint, covered in snow, froze so much that physical activity could no longer warm it up. I remembered that incident and drew conclusions, so the boots from that stage of the route are now with me.

After the ford, I came out onto a fresh forest road, and everything went awry very quickly. I was so eager to move forward, so inspired by the beginning of the journey, that I missed the fork. I should have turned left and followed the road closer to the Kozhim River, but I went straight ahead, along an older road, which after a kilometer led to an already overgrown mine – most likely, a gold mining site. That's where the road ended. At that point I should have returned to the main road and walked along Kozhim without incident, but I continued the mistake I had started – I went straight along the northern foot of Mount Sanaiz. I was lured by a rare, easily passable larch forest, but very quickly a deep moss carpet was added to it, taking a lot of energy, and then the forest ended and flooded hummocky swamps began, taking an indecently large amount of energy and peace of mind. And only in the evening, having immersed myself in studying satellite images with annoyance, I realized that in fact the entire first 10 km “off-road” ran parallel to a good road, we were separated by 2 km to 200 m.



River Kozhim

It was a little longer, by about ten percent, but much more convenient. It was not on the General Staff map downloaded to my navigator. And I had enough sense to look at the satellite image carefully only at the end of the day. Well, again a good reminder of one of the most important rules of orientation: “Don't run faster than your head thinks.”

In the afternoon, I crossed the Kozhim River, one of the fastest rivers in the Subpolar Urals. Fortunately, as with Balban, fording was not a problem. And this meant that the path to the high mountains was open to me. Further large full-flowing rivers, requiring long detours in case of high water, were not expected within ten days – two large stones off my shoulders. And the mountains were already piling up very close, high, but slightly different. This was no longer the Research Ridge, along which and along which I had walked the previous days, it was replaced by the Narodno-Itinsky Ridge. It is these two enormous elevations that make up the bulk of the Subpolar Urals. The mountains were still high, but their outlines had smoothed out, the pointed peaks had disappeared. The Alpine relief forms for which this part of the Urals is famous had ended.

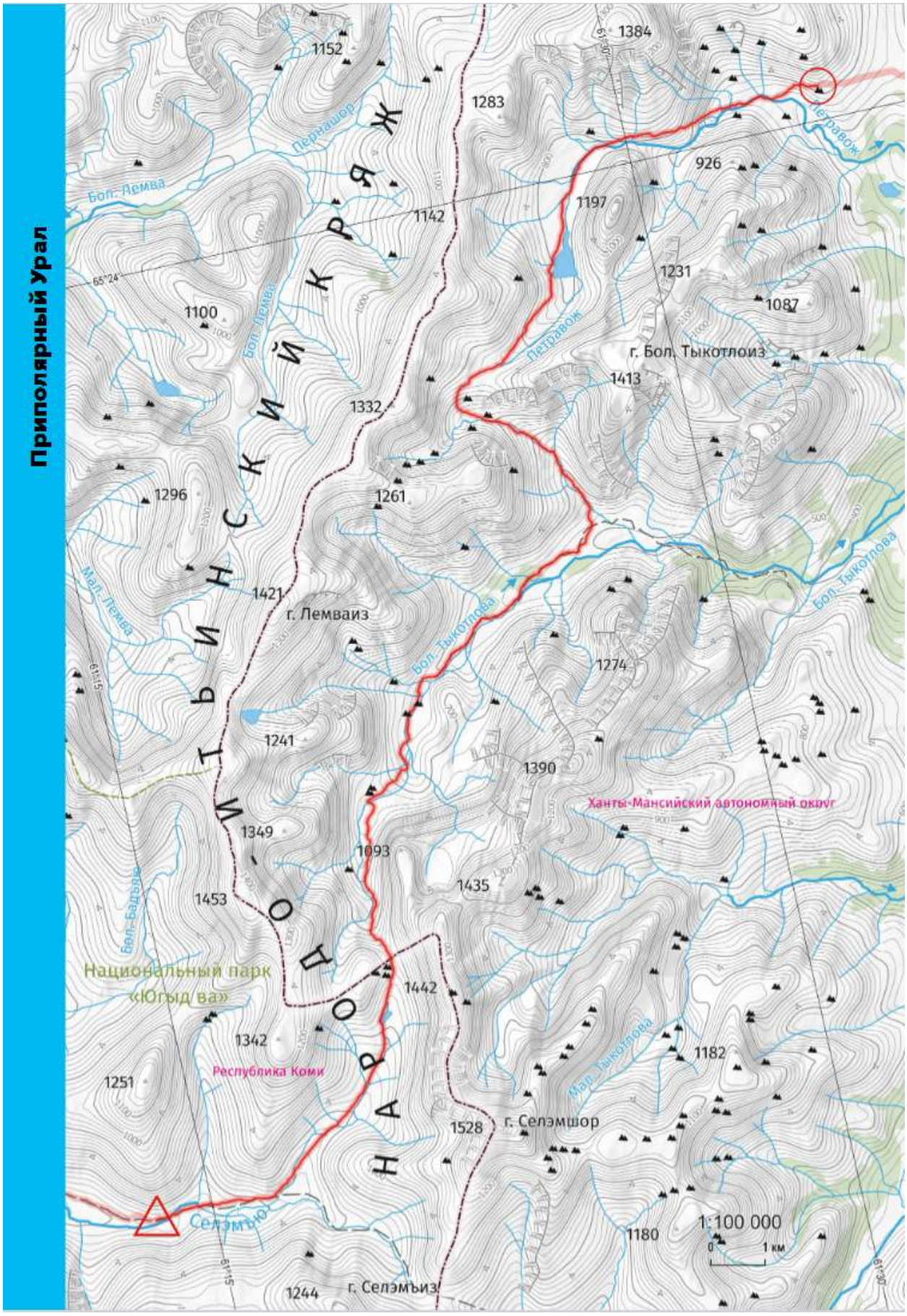
Kozhim became the line dividing the day into two parts. After having lunch and even sleeping for a couple of hours, I went up along the Selemyu River, which was supposed to lead to the mountains. And on this part of the path, luck finally smiled upon me. I had about 10 km to go to the mountains, and what I saw was not at all inspiring. Up to the mountains themselves, the slope gradually rose, swaying in the wind like a sea of dwarf birch. Here, below, it was not ankle-deep, as I had become accustomed to on the ridges, but reached my knees, and in some places even my waist. The second half of the day threatened to be no easier than the first. However, quite unexpectedly, I came to an old geological road. A barely discernible trail in the birch thickets significantly simplified and accelerated the movement. I followed it the rest of the day to the places where the tundra began.

I stopped for the night with a good view of Mount Sanaiz, which was already so far away from me. It is hard to believe that in the morning you woke up on the other side of this giant, and in the evening it already dissolves in the evening haze somewhere far behind.

My sneakers began to rub. I pulled them off my feet at the end of the day, like a medieval torture shoe. This, of course, is not surprising, but I really wanted to believe in a miracle. Apparently, I still won’t be able to walk the Urals without blisters.



Campsite with a view of Mount Sanaiz



The Subpolar Urals

Bolshaya Lemva River *Pernashor River*

Petravozh River

Narodo-Ityinsky Kryazh

Mount Bolshaya Tyketloiz

Malaya Lemva River

Mount Lemvaiz

Bolshaya Tyketlova River

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Bolshaya Badyayu River

Yugyd Va National Park

Komi Republic

Malaya Tyketlova River

Mount Selemshor

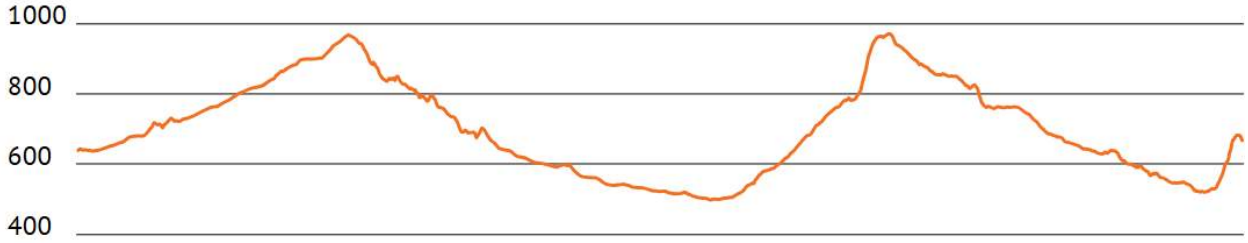
Selemju River

Mount Selemiz

Day 93

Selemyu River – Bolshaya Tykotlova River – Petravozh River – 834.6 mountain slope

34.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2657.5 km



August 1, 2021

I woke up from the noise of the tent flapping anxiously before dawn. I crawled out into the sky and bitterly stated that, as the weather forecasters promised, one good sunny day was over. Clouds were already swirling around the mountains, and the world was shrouded in grayness. The rainbow, sparkling in the place where Mount Sanaiz was yesterday, looked even brighter and more impressive against this background. With this bright stroke, the dawn colors ended before they had even begun. It seems that doubts about the advisability of climbing the highest point of the Narodo-Itinsky Ridge – Mount Selemshor (1528.9), which I had to pass by in the first hour of the journey – resolved themselves. I decided not to go into the cloud for the sake of appearances.

I was surprised to find that my body ached and ached. How quickly I forgot that this could happen. It's strange, either two days of rest are having such an effect, or the backpack is too heavy, with its center of gravity shifted back, or maybe all of it together. I had a leisurely breakfast and got ready in a hurry, because I felt that at any moment a rain cloud could appear from any corner of the valley. I didn't want to pack my backpack under the water falling from the sky. I left at 6:30.

After a couple of kilometers of smooth ascent, the willows and birches ended, and the smooth, as if trimmed tundra began, which was a pleasure to walk on.

Suddenly, an unexpected encounter. I looked up from under my feet and saw a furry muzzle about fifty meters in front of me. A bear?! No, too small. I looked closer – a wolverine. What a meeting! While I was thinking about all this, my hands did

their job themselves. With a practiced, thousand-times-repeated movement, he took out his phone from the pocket on his backpack strap, transferred it to his left hand, and turned on the video mode. He reached for the camera on the right belt.

As luck would have it, the camera was removed and closed in an additional hermetic bag because of the light rain that had started. At that moment, the animal, as if sensing that a photo hunt was starting for it, ran up the slope. Cursing, he was filming the animal for the movie and at the same time struggling with the camera with his other hand. Soon it ended up in his hand. He managed to take a few shots after it, but, unfortunately, nothing interesting came of it, as the review of the material showed later.



Descent into the Bolshaya Tykotlova Valley

Under the beginning of a fine and unpleasant rain I crossed a gentle pass into the valley of the Bolshaya Tykotlova River. This is where the really bad weather was! If before this the visibility around me was tolerable, more than a kilometer, then standing on the pass, I found myself on the edge of thick cloud cover. Below me the entire valley was filled with snow-white, quickly and chaotically moving clouds. In their gaps, dark gloomy peaks appeared and then immediately disappeared. All this looked extremely uncomfortable and promised new hardships. Having wrapped

myself up tighter, I began the descent. I walked and lamented that I could not see a thing, no more than 20 m, and, apparently, there was something to see in the upper reaches of the Bolshaya Tykotlova. Soon a rocky trough began, developed by the river. Not without difficulty I crossed to the left side of the valley. And there, unexpectedly, an all-terrain road, powerful, traveled more than once. It very quickly led me to the former geologists' camp.

The sight was depressing, everything was abandoned: tractors, drilling machines, trailers. With great caution, so as not to stub my foot on something sharp, I wandered around the workers' settlement with disgust. Judging by the documents, calendars, and other artifacts, people lived and worked here about ten years ago. And as if in one moment, they abandoned everything and left.



Abandoned equipment

A terrible sight, a monument to the Russian disregard for its land. I imagined how decades would pass, maybe hundreds, the wooden parts of the trailers would rot, be broken by the winds, and their numerous contents – metal objects, plastic – would scatter across the surrounding mountains for all eternity. This is what real “dirty bombs” with a timer look like. And we plant them ourselves.

A few kilometers below, having crossed into the valley of an unnamed left tributary of the Bolshaya Tykotlova, following in the footsteps of geologists, I came across a two-handed stretcher with cores stacked in it. It was both funny and scary.

Sitting down next to them to rest, I entertained myself with fantasies of how it all happened. Here people were carrying a stretcher with the fruits of their labor. Then a leader appears from behind a hill, shouting at them to drop everything, it's time to leave... Or not a leader. Maybe a bear. Or maybe, like in some science fiction movie, a flash – and all of humanity evaporated, the stretcher fell with a dull roar onto the rocky tundra, and remained lying there as a monument to unfinished work. It is difficult to understand what makes a person abandon the results of his labor in the middle of the tundra and leave.



Narodo-Itinsky Ridge

However, thoughts about the mysteries of the human soul did not occupy me for long, the weather began to improve! Sharp, rocky sides of the valley appeared in the breaks in the clouds. And I hurried forward and up, to the next pass. It was difficult to predict how the clouds would behave further, but while there is an

opportunity to see more beauty and see where and how to go among the rocks on the pass, you should take advantage of it.

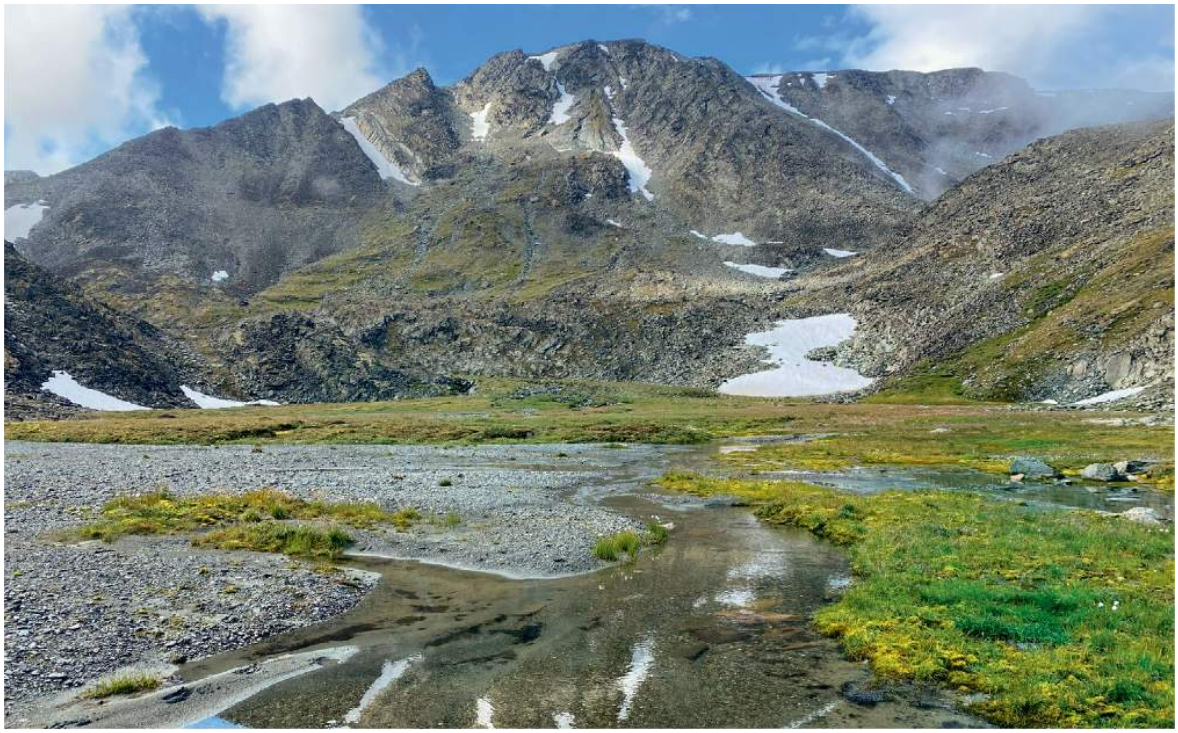
And there was a lot to see around. Yesterday, it seems, I gave up on alpine relief too early. The mountains were given a special charm by wisps of clouds lingering between the jagged relief, sometimes hiding the scree part of the slope and creating the impression of a dramatic pile of rocks. Everything around was constantly changing, and I, forgetting about fatigue, enchanted, quickly walked up the valley and soon came to the nameless peak 1332.8. To the right of it, a snowfield with traces of deer hooves went into the depression of the pass. I followed it up to the Petravozh River valley.



The valley greeted me with a gentle, even slope, the rocks pressed down, apparently by a glacier, alternated with areas of tundra, and everything would have been wonderful if it weren't for the bears. The first meeting took place about two

kilometers from the pass. I noticed them first, about a hundred meters away. Three dark spots grazing on the green grass. A she-bear and two cubs. Not wanting to tempt fate, I abruptly turned in the opposite direction to the left side of the valley, intending to increase the distance and try to pass unnoticed. I failed to do this, very soon the she-bear became restless, stood up on her hind legs and began to peer in my direction.

Realizing that I had been discovered, I screamed and started knocking with my sticks. A moment – and three brown, leisurely clumps of fur rushed in the opposite direction from me, to the right side of the valley, demonstrating how surprisingly easily and quickly bears can move along scree slopes. A couple of minutes passed, and I could barely make out the clubfoot family among the rocks several hundred meters above me.



Peak 1332 and the pass to the Petravozh River

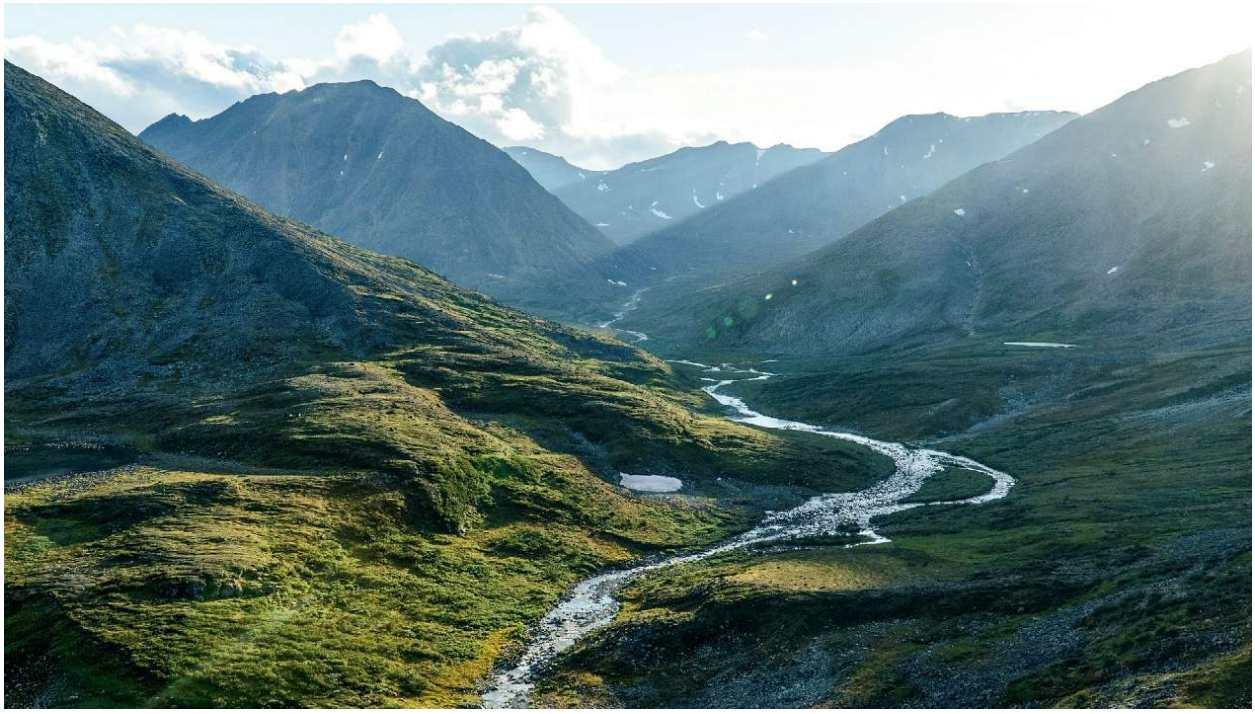
I should have breathed a sigh of relief here, but the Petravozh Valley had more than one surprise in store for me. Having walked no more than a kilometer down and approaching the beginning of a large lake, I noticed a second large bear. It was clear that this animal was on business. It was moving somewhere purposefully, without stopping, sniffing the stones as it went, up the valley, cutting me off from the narrow,

gentle isthmus between the lake and the steep pile of large kurums. This animal looked much more dangerous than the caring and restless mother I had met at a considerable distance. Hiding among the kurums and willows, I watched it for some time. Having made sure that it did not notice me (perhaps it was going to eat the cubs), I changed the route for the second time and began to climb the kurum slope blocking my path. The rocks were large and mobile, but the boost of energy that comes from meeting a bear helped me climb up without much effort, which cannot be said about the descent, when visual contact with danger has passed.

However, that was not all: after 7 km, at the exit from the valley, I met a third bear. Fortunately, everything ended easily and simply with him. By that time, I had almost no strength left, so when I saw him about two hundred meters away from me, without thinking for long, I screamed at the top of my lungs, blew a whistle, and the bear turned around and retreated.

Having reached the place where the third bear was grazing, I looked around. The valley along which I was walking widened and connected with the large valley of the Voivis River. Below, dense thickets of dwarf pine were visible, and even lower – larch forest and a large lake.

Three bear encounters at 10 km versus the previous three at more than 2500 km were alarming. Thinking about it, I didn't want to spend the night in the valley and be in the way of the animals. Something was drawing them up, there were these five, there would be others. Looking around, I noticed a steep rise to the left side of the valley. Judging by the map, there should be a flat area at the top. Climbing higher is a good way to reduce the likelihood of an encounter. The climb was very difficult, there really was very little strength left by the end of the day. But what I saw at the top compensated for all the difficulties.

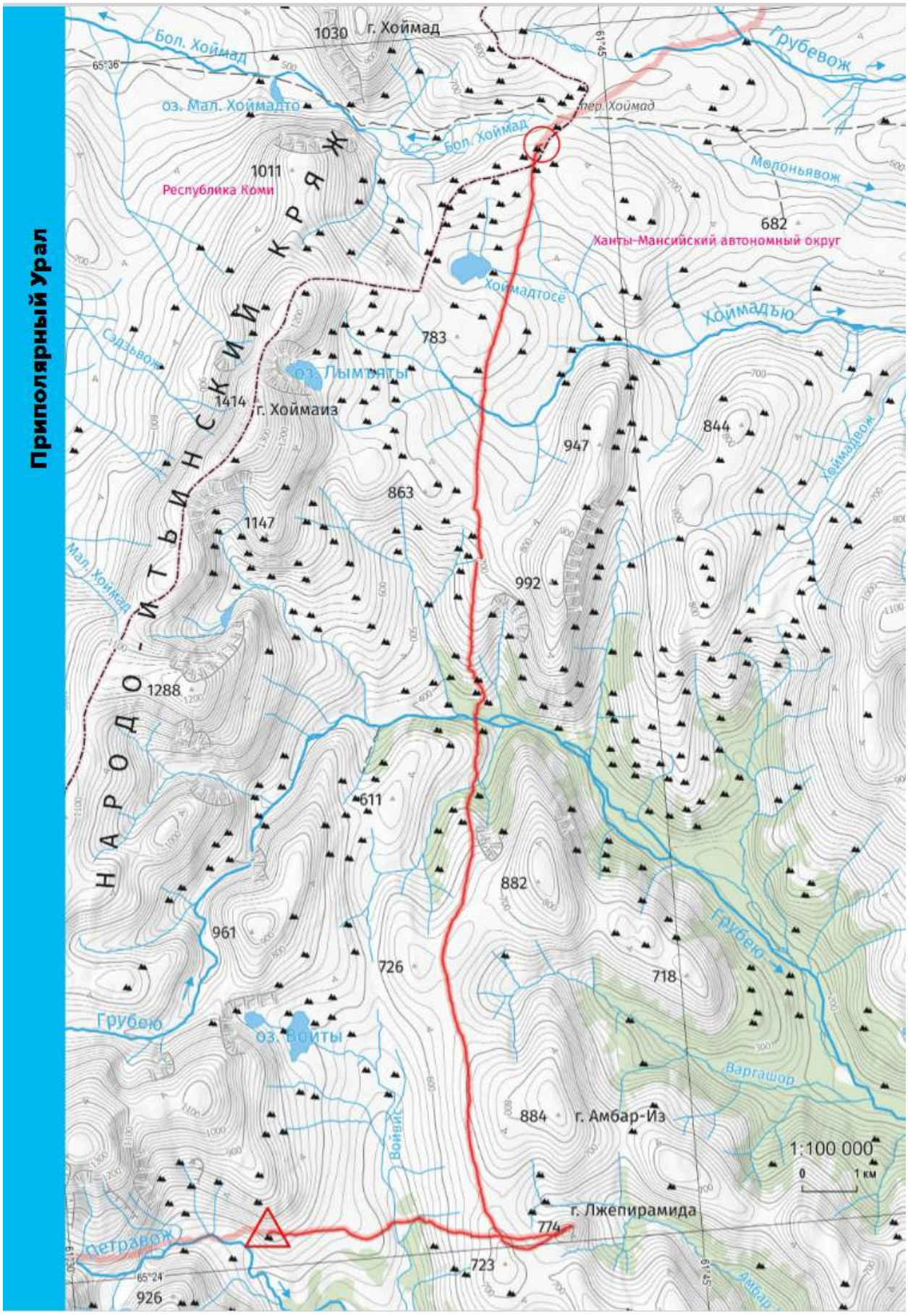


Petravozh River Valley from the East

Backwards there was a wonderful view of the path we had traveled, below in the setting sun the river sparkled, running among the dark steep peaks of the Narodno-Itinsky ridge. Ahead there was a view of the place I had wanted to get to for several years and had finally arrived. Down there was a gentle, comfortable descent, all I could do was rest with the hope that tomorrow the weather would be good.

I spent the evening walking along the plateau, walking from edge to edge, trying not to miss the good sunset light that was constantly changing thanks to the clouds walking in the valley.

Today my feet were especially cramped, perhaps these were echoes of uncomfortable shoes.



The Subpolar Urals

Bolshoy Khoymad River *Mount Khoymad*

Grubevozh River

Lake Maloye Khoymadto

Khoymad Pass

Molonjavozh River

Komi Republic

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Lake Khoymadtosyo

Khoymadju River

Sedzivozh River

Lake Lymyaty

Khoymadju River

Mount Khoymaiz

Khoymadvozh River

Malyy Khoymad River

Narodo-Ityinsky Kryazh

Grub River

Lake Voyty

Voyvis River

Vargashor River

Mount Ambar-Iz

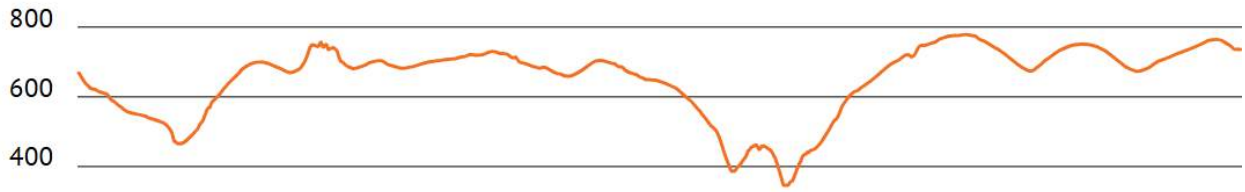
Mount Lzhepiramida

Petravozh River

Day 94

Mountain slope 834.6 – Izhepiramida 774 – Khoymad pass

30 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2687.5 km



August 2, 2021

This story began over a year ago, in May 2020. I remember the headline of an article in a very popular, but not very selective in its choice of news, online publication. It read: “Ural tourists have discovered a huge pyramid in the mountains: it is several times larger than the Cheops pyramid.” The publication contained a story from the head of a commercial company organizing trips to the mountains, Evgeny Svitov, about how, while studying satellite images of the Subpolar Urals, they discovered a pyramid that exactly repeated the shape of the Egyptian one, but was several times larger. It also reported on the incredible inaccessibility of the area, which is either 400 km on foot or by helicopter, of course, as I assume, with the help of a travel company – the discoverer of the miracle. Other traditional cliches were also mentioned, migrating from one obscurantist Ural story to another.



The way north across the Grubeya River

Following the appearance of the first news, a tsunami of similar publications about the incredible pyramid in the Urals rolled through the country's tabloids. I must admit, this was a red rag for me. The dominance of such obscurantist stories, which are multiplying every year in the Urals, has long worried me.

However, this story did not become a difficult challenge. Having found the mountain on maps and satellite images, it immediately became clear that the pyramidal shape of the mountain is a very big stretch. With a certain combination of light and shadow in the photograph, which does not convey the entire relief of the area from above, you could really see three faces, but as soon as you looked at the topographic maps, the entire pyramidal shape crumbled without a trace. The first acquaintance with information about the discoverer revealed that this was not his first “sensational discovery”, there were others, strangely advertising the company at the same time.

I published an article and a short video on this topic. In response, I received a lot of criticism from the adherents of everything unknown, led by one simple thought: “If you are so smart, go and show all this on the spot. Anyone can sit in a studio on a couch and reason.” The fact that the pyramid itself was also found “on a couch” did not bother them.

Time passed, I began to prepare for my Ural expedition and while laying out the route I noticed that its line passed only a few kilometers from the lzhepiramidy. It would have been strange not to take advantage of such an opportunity.



Peak 774, lzhepiramida



The Grubeyu River

Today I got up at 3:30, had breakfast and, looking warily at the rare clouds wandering around the valley, hurried to the summit of 774, visible above the opposite slope of the valley. It was extremely important to see the mountain and take a picture in full scale, not in the clouds. Having broken through the willow thorns surrounding the Voivis River, I climbed the gentle slope of the ridge and finally saw the lzhepiramidy in full height.

It was even a little offensive, no intrigue. In front of me lay a completely ordinary kurum summit, having nothing in common with the pyramidal shape. Along the edges of the mountain, two streams went down, their many years of work and sawing the summit out of the body of the ridge.

It became clear why the organizers of tours to the mysterious mountain prefer to land by helicopter not on a convenient platform at the very top from the west, but go from the east, from the angle from which the mountain at least somehow resembles a pyramid. And people pay hundreds of thousands of rubles for this attraction. The mountain did not stand out in any way from the surrounding peaks, it was also funny that, having carefully examined the surrounding ridges, you could find and, with a certain amount of imagination, declare two or three more mountains to be pyramids.

After the lzhepiramidy, there was a pleasantly monotonous walking day. First, I went down for a long time and smoothly along the spacious comfortable tundra to the Grubeya River valley, then climbed about the same distance and walked along the tundra to the Khoymad Pass. It was as if I found myself in a straight and relatively flat corridor, limited on the left by the peaks of the Narodno-Itinsky Ridge, on the right by a ridge that has no name on the map. The only place that made us work hard that day was the descent to the Grubeya River.



Khoymad Pass and Grubeiz Peak

Having dropped to 350 m, I found myself in a stunted but difficult to move forest, consisting mainly of larches and thick, tall willows. I had to climb and push through the stubborn thickets, remembering the willows on the Yanykvotner Ridge.

I stopped for the night with a wonderful view of tomorrow's route. In the foreground in front of me, in a swampy depression that gives rise to two rivers (the Bolshoy Khoymad, running to the west, and the Molonyavozh, to the east), lay the Khoymad Pass – one of the most convenient places to cross the Urals in this area. The first mentions of this route were made by the traveler Antal Reguli, who explored the ridge in the middle of the 19th century and walked along the Urals from Yekaterinburg to Pay-Khoy. In the middle ground there is a wide tundra space, dotted with rocks that have fallen apart and small kurum peaks. In the background there are peaks, headed by the last significant peak of the Subpolar Urals – Grubeiz.

An interesting fact that I recently learned from the book by A.K. Matveyev “Up the River of Oblivion”: it turns out that Grubeiz was called by reindeer herders the same way as the highest point of the Polar Urals – Payer, only it had the prefix

“Southern.” Previously, there were two “masters of the mountains” in the Urals, and now there is one, and I will reach it, I hope, within 7-10 days.



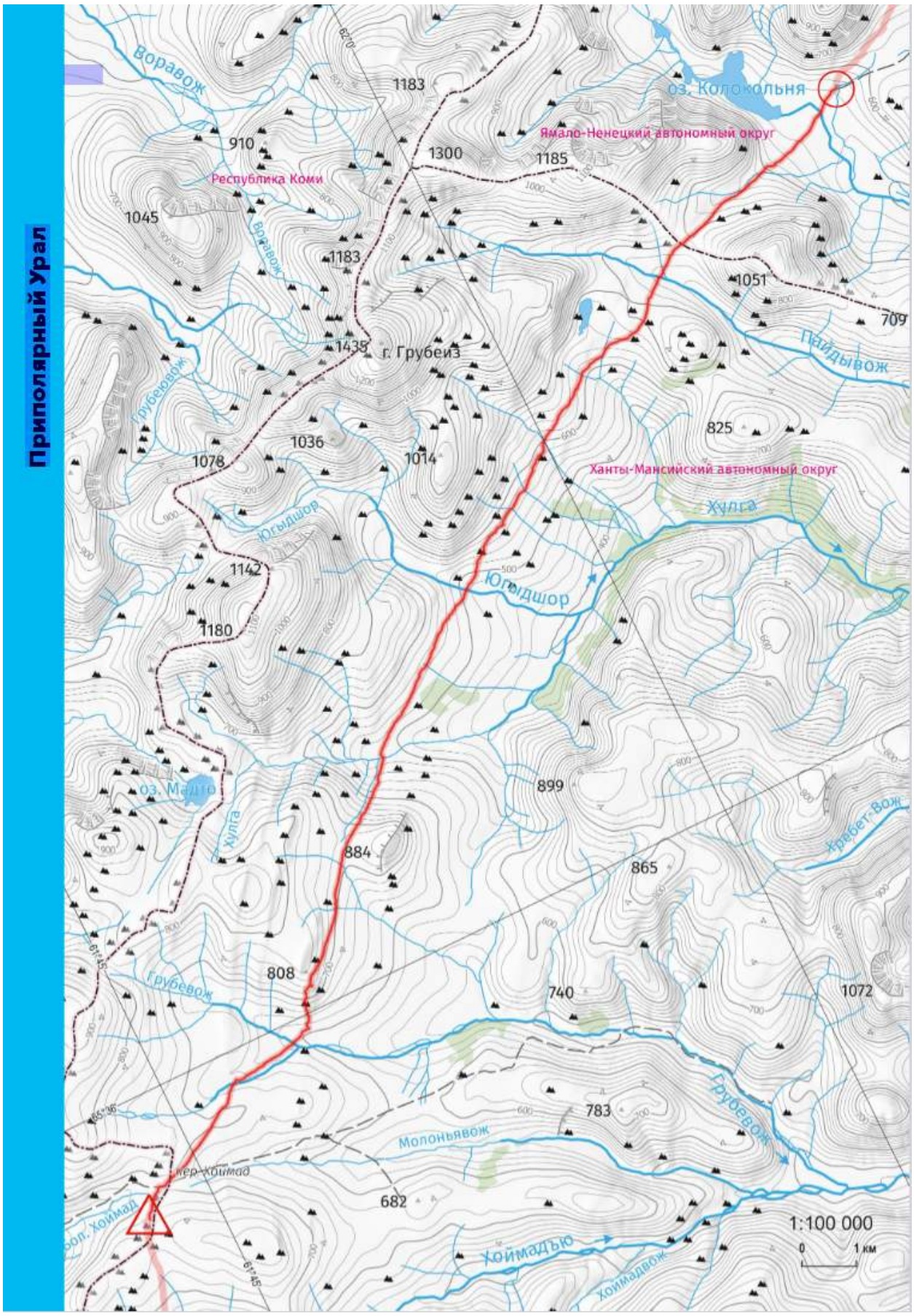
Since I left very early, I got up earlier than usual for the night, at five in the evening, and this became another test of the day. Having quickly completed all the urgent camp chores, I suffered from idleness until sunset, which was supposed to happen in five hours.

But I found time to pay more attention to my feet. The situation with them is probably the most dramatic during the entire route. By the end of the day, my feet are very tired, and I left the massage roller that I carried and used to Sanavozh, in order to save weight and space, now I bitterly regret it. On my right foot, there is a large, torn to shreds callus, in the conditions of the wet tundra there is no point in gluing it. I carefully trimmed the torn pieces of skin, left it open to dry until the morning, and then we'll see.

The main problem that worries me most is my toenails. Because my boots are pressing, I noticed blood under the nail on my right foot. If dirt gets into the wound, more serious problems may begin, which in the long run may put an end to the route.

Armed with a cutting and biting tool, I performed an operation on the nail to remove the extra sharp parts cutting into the skin.

There was no sunset as such. Only the Grubeiz massif slightly reddened on the horizon. All hope for the morning.



The Subpolar Urals

Voravozh River *Lake Kolokolnaya*

Komi Republic

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Voravozh River

Mount Grubeiz

Paidyvozh River

Grubeyuvozh River

Yugydshor River

Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug

Khulga River

Lake Madto

Khrebet-Vozh River

Grubevozh River

Khoymad Pass

Molonjavozh River

Bolshoy Khoymad River

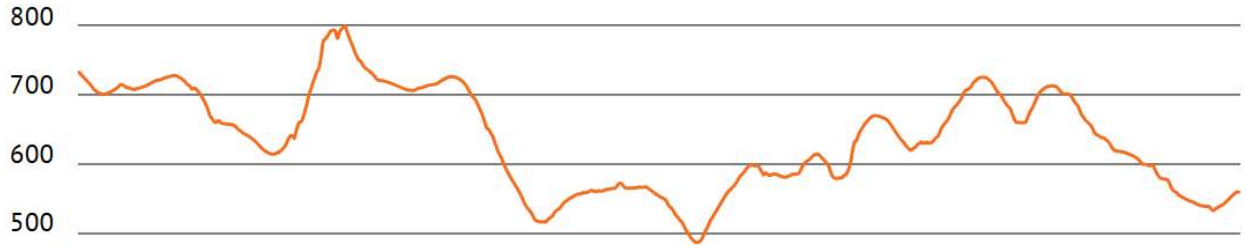
Khoymadju River

Khoymadvozh River

Day 95

Khoimad Pass – Khulga River – Paidyvozh River – Kolokolnya Lake

27.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2715 km





An unusual rock outcrop at dawn

August 3, 2021

I would really like to call this Murphy's Law, but objectivity requires that I call it the usual changeability of the weather in the mountains. Today was a wonderful bright morning, and only in the north-northeast, in the place where the sun was supposed to rise, clouds were swirling over the peak of Grubeiz, hiding both the mountain and the moment of sunrise itself. Which, if you think about it, is completely logical, because the highest peaks of the region attract and hold clouds.

It still turned out beautifully: first, the edge of the clouds enveloping the dark peaks turned golden, then rays of light struck upward from it, and only about fifty

minutes later, the yellow, not newborn sun appeared and busily ran across the sky about its business, flooding the tundra and rocks around me with light.



Numerous rocks and peaks along the way

And I, on legs that had not rested overnight, ran to take pictures, trying to find as many interesting angles as possible between the remnants.

Not everyone notices, but there is a big difference between the sun appearing from behind the horizon and the sun coming out from behind a high obstacle, be it a mountain or clouds. And the color of these sunrises is different, and the size of the luminary, and the emotional perception of the moment. When the sun rises above the horizon, in my opinion, it already becomes a little tired, lived, some very subtle magic of the birth of a new day is lost.

I set out on the route at 6:20, under the already high and scorching sun. From the first steps, it was as if I had immersed myself in viscous and warm jelly. Not a single gust of wind disturbed the calm of the air. If it weren't for the hum of the mosquito cloud and my heavy breathing, the tundra world surrounding me would have plunged into complete silence.

Having assessed my condition, I decided not to go to the top of Grubeiz. It was a difficult decision: I really wanted to, but I was very tired, my finger from yesterday's operation hurts, and I needed to slow down a bit, walk slowly for twenty to twenty-five kilometers, maybe take a half-day break. Either I give my body a rest, or it will demand it itself, and this could happen at the most inopportune moment.



With such sad thoughts, gloomy, I was smoothly and heavily gaining altitude through the tundra, when suddenly I received a boost of much-needed energy. Coming out from under the southern slope of Mount 808.2, intending to go around it from the east, I noticed a dark spot against the green background. Another bear, and right in my path! Without thinking twice, I decided to go around it via the summit. It was perfect for this, having an unusual appearance: two heavily destroyed parallel ridges, creating a corridor covered from the bear's side, leading up and to the side. It was under their protection that I decided to go. About halfway up, I looked out into the depression between the rocks and anxiously noted that the clubfoot was not wasting any time, slowly poking around in the bushes, moving towards me, coming even closer. I took a photo of it, zoomed in and noticed two more small brown lumps a little further away. This discovery calmed me down a bit: a mother bear with cubs

would hardly hunt a person when there was plenty of food. There was no point in endangering her offspring. However, I was worried about the shortening of the distance, this was a direct danger to the offspring and me. It was unlikely that she did this consciously, most likely, she simply did not suspect that I was nearby.

I decided to report this using a proven method. I blew a whistle, shouted, and banged my sticks. And what a miracle: the mother did not even raise her head – she continued grazing as she was, busily searching for something in the thickets. I did not like this behavior at all, I went up the mountain even faster, again going under the protection of the rocks. Having made an additional.detour to the side, went under the summit. Started to carefully examine the slope. There was no one where the brown family should have been. Where did they go? I would have preferred to see them and understand the situation. Worried, I ran on and only after crossing the deep channel of the left tributary of the Grubevozh, as if through a conditional border, exhaled. It seems they had parted ways.

This encounter was a very illustrative example, illustrating the simple idea that bears are always different, you can expect anything from them. And that there is no guaranteed way to scare them away.

So, if you remember the first encounter with a bear on the route, on the slope of the Molebny Ridge, I whistled a whistle, and the bear hastily retreated. The next encounter with a bear, which occurred in similar circumstances, was near the Parnuk plateau and took place according to a different scenario. I started whistling, the bear went in my direction, showing interest. I had to retreat behind the bend in the terrain. And today the third reaction option is complete ignoring of me and the whistle. It's lucky that I noticed them in advance and went around. Meeting a she-bear with cubs in the bushes through which I planned to pass would have been very dangerous.

Any artificial stimulation of the body borrows from it and then demands compensation, and this is what happened with the adrenaline that sped me up when I met the bear. After about five kilometers, when the danger had passed and a new one had not yet appeared, I felt a complete loss of strength, too early for the usual walking fatigue. Not even half of the planned route had been covered. I had to make

a long rest stop with a small snack. I really wanted to eat a full meal, as I did in such situations on previous stages of the route, having surplus food due to being significantly ahead of the schedule. But for now I was deprived of such a resource. The stage had just begun, there were no free products.



The mother bear who didn't care and two cubs



One of the sources of the Khulga River on the slope of Mount Grubeiz

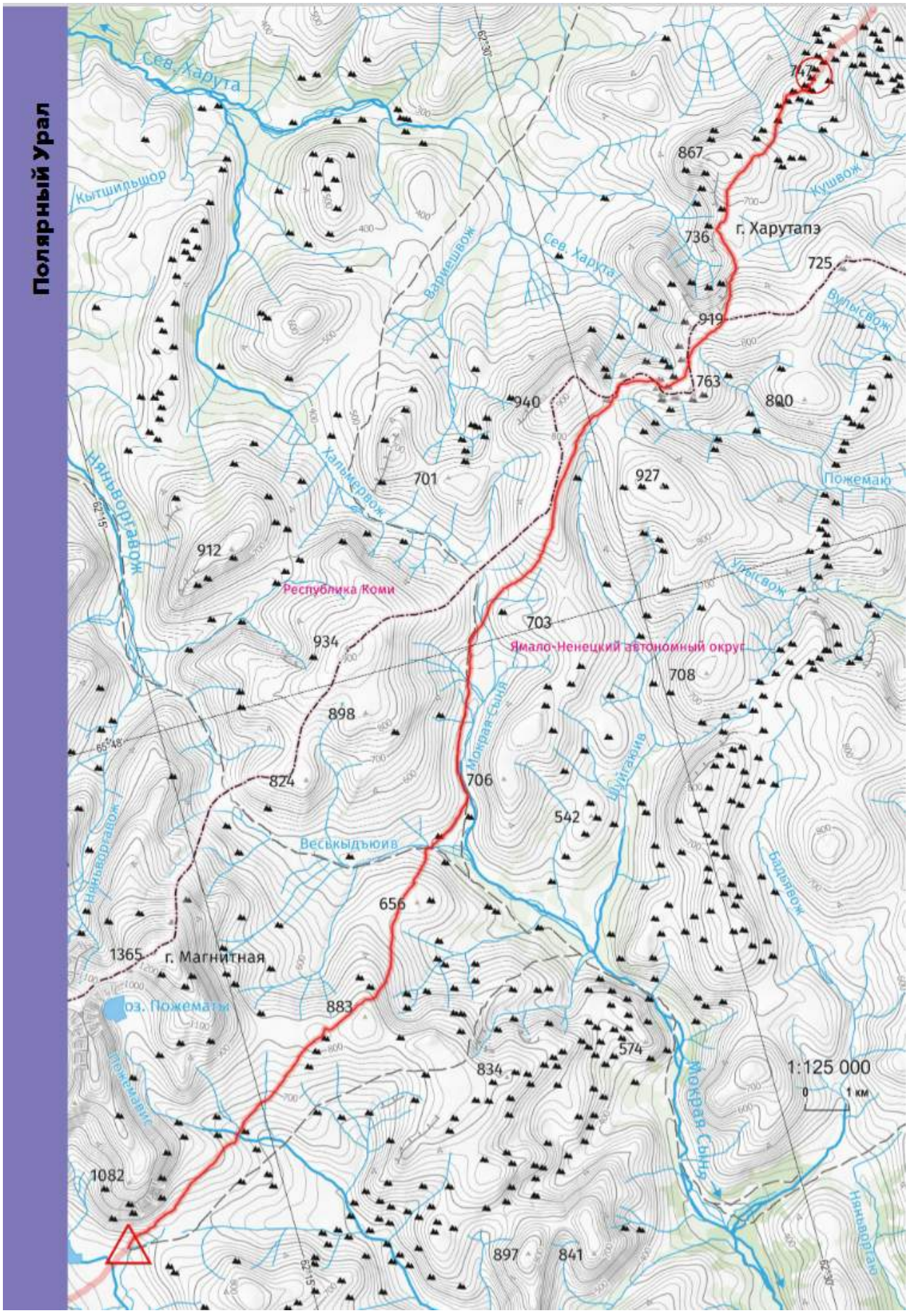
there was none. Perhaps, if all goes well, in a few days I will be ahead of my schedule by three or four days and then I will be able to use the surplus, but not yet.

The remaining walking day passed without incident, moving through tundra of varying degrees of hardness and swampiness, crossed the deep bed of the Khulga River, which means I entered the Polar Urals. Somewhere here, the boundary of the

two parts is conventionally measured along this river. And my route became truly “trans-Ural”, because I define this term for myself as a partial or complete passage of five parts of the Urals. And as soon as the first kilometers along the Polar Urals were passed, these requirements were met.

I reached Kolokolnya Lake with my last strength, the day's journey was very difficult. So difficult that, having wandered to the place of the camp planned on the map, I did not look for a good viewing place for it. I pitched a tent right where I dropped my backpack, climbed into it and, despite the fact that it was only four o'clock in the afternoon, I hardly left my house anymore. I felt some kind of painful weakness, as if I even had a fever, which worried me a lot. I fell into a half-sleep and stayed there until nightfall. I hoped not to get sick.

And bad news came from home, Olya was sick, Tatyana Sergeyevna was sewing up, all this was very pressing.



The Polar Urals

Severnaya Kharuta River *Kytshilshor River*

Kushvozh River

Mount Kharutape

Variyeshvozh River

Severnaya Kharuta River

Vulysvozh River

Nyanvorgavozh River

Khalmervozh River

Pozhemayu River

Komi Republic

Ulysvozh River

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Mokraya Synya River

Veskyydyuiv River

Shuyganyuiv River

Badyavozh River

Mount Magnitnaya

Lake Pozhematy

Pozhemavis River

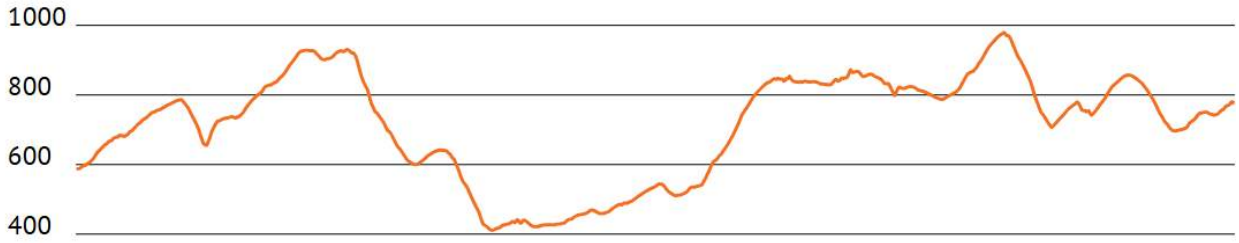
Mokraya Synya River

Nyanvorgayu River

Day 96

Kolokolnya Lake – Veskydyuiv River – Peak 812 – Mount Harutape (736) – Rock City on Peak 747

36 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2751 km



August 4, 2021

In total, I spent more than 14 hours in the tent, by the morning my health had improved so much that I even read a little of "100 Days in the Urals" – the part where Rundqvist describes these places. How they suffered for five days under heavy rains, how their rivers overflowed their banks and everything was bad. I read it, and even somehow it became easier. I have a blue sky above my head. I am alone, I do not adjust to anyone, I do not depend on anyone. I go as I want. Pleasure, and that's all.



Dawn near Kolokolnya Lake. The lake is not in the frame

I set out on the route at six in the morning, the weather was excellent, the breeze drove away the midges, the sun was hot, visibility for many kilometers. This was especially pleasing, since the forecast that was given to me yesterday promised

cloudiness with rain. But today I crossed into a new part of the Urals, and – what is pleasant in view of this fact – not only did the name change from Subpolar to Polar, but the relief itself changed. The huge Narodo-Itinsky Ridge, consisting of high and steep mountains, near which I had been walking for the last few days, ended, and just a few kilometers after spending the night I came out into gentle, less high mountains covered with tundra and many small rocky outliers. It would have been a shame to miss this change in relief, walking in the clouds.

The relief changed, and I decided to change my tactics too. All day I tried to stick to the slopes or tops of the ridges, going around the swampy, overgrown with elfin trees lowlands. It felt like I was back in the Northern Urals, with its wide tundra ridges.



Remnants in the area of the source of the Pozhemayu River

Even more deja vu was caused by the outliers in the area of the source of the Pozhemayu River, very similar to the rocks of Mount Yaruta or the area of Mount Otorten. I had lunch among them, I wanted to spend more time here. I even thought about staying overnight. The sun, already shining with an angry bright light, was not at all conducive to photography, but I still decided to go further, to the next rock city, located 10 km away. Paths. I didn't know what would happen there, I only saw a map

with many conventional signs indicating rocks, I hoped that it would be no less interesting than among the first rocks.

The last part of the route was along the western edge of the ridge, along the peaks of the Voikar-Syninsky massif, it was an interesting and new sight. Only in the very south of the route, in its first days, did I come so close to the clear and isolated edge of the Urals. The peaks are relatively flat and gentle in the direction of movement, flowing with tundra one into another, abruptly ending to the west with cirques and rocks. And there, below, a few more low hills and a flat, endlessly blue horizon – the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, sparkling with ribbons of rivers and eyes of lakes. The mountains along which I walked today – what is this, if not a stone road over impassable, swampy polar territories. This is exactly what I saw in my dreams, looking at the Ural map hanging on the wall.

This is how A. N. Aleshkov, one of the leaders of the Uralplan expedition of 1925-1926, described this ridge: “The Voikar-Synya massif presents a majestic sight on a clear, sunny summer day… The impression of the grandeur and power of a single, whole and monolithic body is absolutely exceptional and incomparable with any of the other corners of the Ural ridge; it will remain indelibly like this in life”*. It is interesting, of course, from where the discoverer was looking, what kind of view he was describing. Perhaps he observed the ridge from the west, from the tundra, then maybe. But I, being on it, did not see anything particularly indelible. Oh, these enthusiastic epithets in relation to the mountains, very subjective, but thanks to their power remaining for centuries. Although this ridge is one of the longest, and perhaps the longest in the Polar Urals. It goes from its southernmost border to Mount Payer, and this is more than 150 km. And as I understand, looking at the map, it is not uniform, there are rocky areas on it, and plateau-like, and tundra gentle mountains. Perhaps it all depends on where and what part of the ridge you look at.

By evening I reached the next rock city. And it seems I was not mistaken, the view of the remnants and the background, the mountains and the valley of the Northern Chigimkharuta River, is excellent. The sun would not let me down at sunset and sunrise, but the gloom gathering on the horizon hinted that it had its own

plans for the sunset. Below, under the mountain, a reindeer herders' camp was visible – two snow-white tents surrounded by sleds. The camp meant that I was finally entering the inhabited part of the Urals, now there should be many reindeer herders on the way. I probably won't visit these people, they'll stay a little aside, but you can count on meeting them soon. And that very often means additional new food and interesting conversation.

**Matveyev A.K. Peaks of the Stone Belt. Names of the Ural Mountains. Second edition, revised and supplemented. Chelyabinsk: South Ural Book Publishing House, 1990.*

I pitched a tent under the protection of rocks right on the nameless peak 747, in a small rock castle with streets, towers, and rooms. Despite the fact that I had very little strength left, while the evening sun was shining, I went to explore the peak, look for angles and hide the last memorable silver token.

I wandered between chaotically scattered small rocks, up to five meters high, trying to find interesting associations. The rock that resembled a chicken leg in shape stuck in my memory the most – maybe hunger is playing such games with me. Although I had lunch twice today, I weighed the speed of movement and came to the conclusion that I can allow myself additional calories on good and long walking days. After all, in fact, today I walked almost double the norm – 36 km, and the diet was planned for 20 km. So, you need to eat for two, if you go twice as fast.

By the way, I don't think I've written about this yet, but starting from Neroika, my planned transitions, based on which my food ration was compiled, were reduced from 25 to 20 km per day. And the actual ones have remained practically unchanged, which is incredibly pleasing. So now it is easier for me to exceed the norm, and the surplus of food began to form even faster.

I wanted to hide the token on the “ham”, but I could not climb it. I went looking further, found a rock resembling the old woman Shapoklyak in a hat and with a sharp nose. I climbed it, but also no, it is too easy – someone could accidentally end up on top.



Chicken Leg Remains

In the end, I chose the third remnant, unlike anything else, but with a beautiful, recognizable shape. It was easy to climb up the slab stones that formed a kind of staircase, but it seemed unlikely that anyone would need it, unless, of course, they were a treasure hunter. I left a silver token with the profile of Mount Payer on its top, weighing down the package with small flat stones.

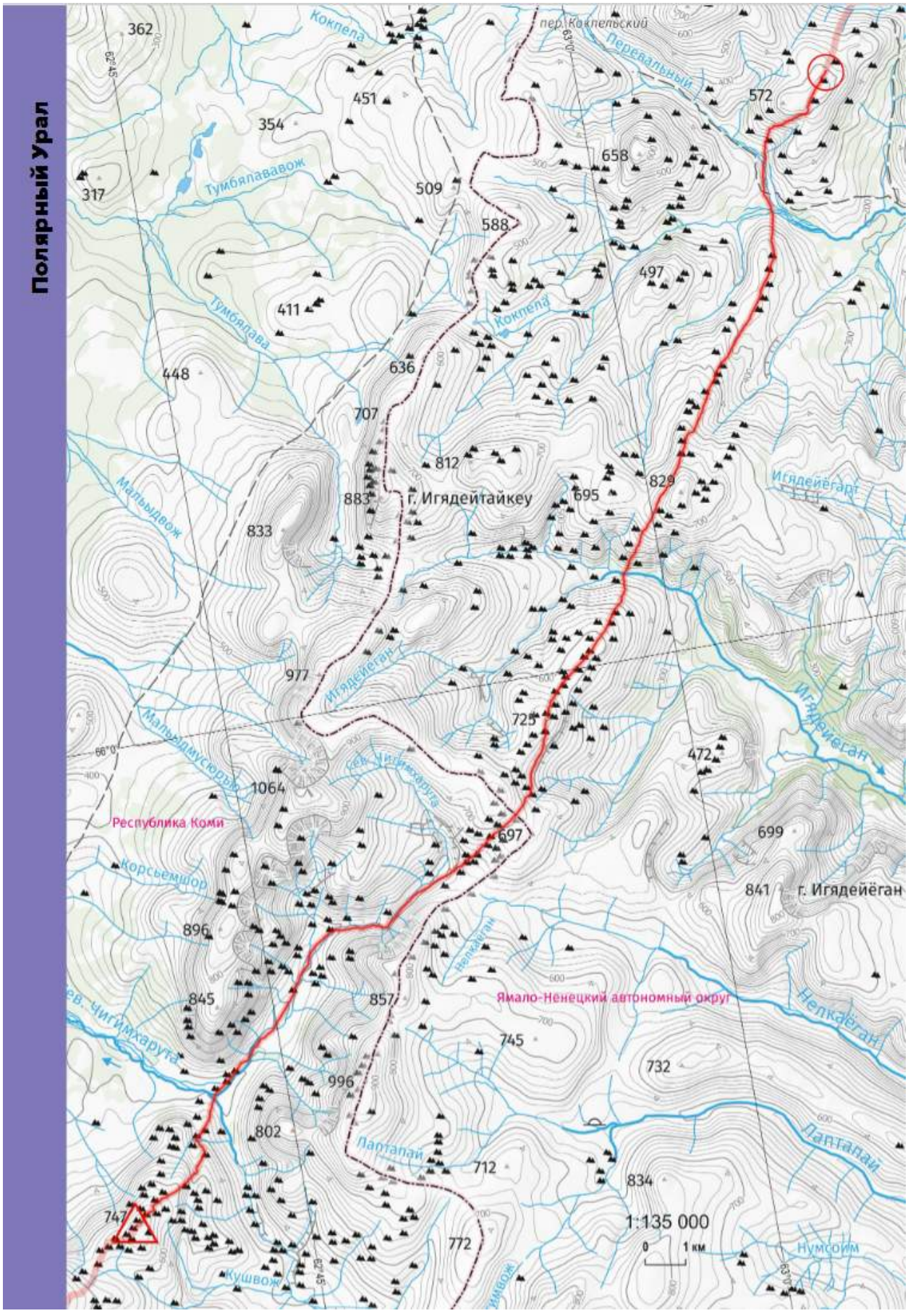


The very same remnant on which the treasure is hidden

Unfortunately, as I had feared, the sun set in the gloom, leaving me without a sunset. A little disappointed, I went to my tent to sum up. And there was something to sum up. Overall, I was very pleased with this day. Firstly, I successfully walked around all the dwarf pine and swampy areas along the tops. Secondly, I stopped in the first kilometers of the path and stuffed the dry bag, which was outside the backpack, inside. This immediately made the journey easier – the shifted center of gravity of the backpack took a lot of energy. Thirdly, I guessed to take the insoles out of my sneakers. And why didn't I do this right away? It became much easier to walk.

Maybe that's why I walked almost twice the norm today on more rugged terrain than in previous days, and I was not that tired.

The only fly in the ointment today is the information from the “mainland”: my latest delivery has not arrived to Salekhard, more than two weeks have passed since it was sent. There is still time, so I am not too worried, but just in case, I have started to think of alternative options. Fortunately, they also exist.



The Polar Urals

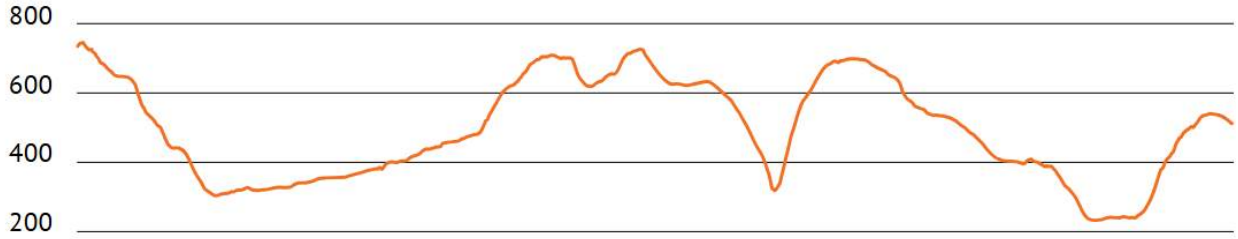
Kokpela River *Kokpelsky Pass*

Perevalny River
Tumbyalavavozh River
Tumbyalava River
Malyydvozh River
Mount Igyadeytaykeu
Igyadeyogart River
Igyadeyogan River
Malyydmusyuryu River
Severnaya Chigimkharuta River
Komi Republic
Korsyemshor River
Nelkayogan River
Mount Igyadeyogan
Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug
Nelyayogan River
Levaya Chigimkharuta River
Laptapay River
Kushvozh River
Numsoim River

Day 97

Rock city on the top 747 – Northern Chigimkharuta river – Rock city on the top 725 – Igyadeyogan river – Kokpela river – slope of the top 572

38.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2789.5 km



August 5, 2021

A difficult, contradictory night. On the one hand, I listened to the wind all night, how it rustled and howled in the rocks above my head, on the other hand, it was stuffy. Apparently, I chose a good place for the tent, and the wind did not reach me. I had a bad rest.

I got up at dawn, but even this magical time disappointed me today. The crimson glow of the rising sun right opposite the Igyadeytaykeu mountain massif almost immediately sank into the gloomy clouds that began to cover the sky. Only for a few moments did the sun appear in a narrow window above the horizon and then hide. Having decided that everything was heading for rain, I hurriedly had breakfast, got ready and set off. After all, it is better to walk on dry ground than on wet ground – a simple truth of camping life.

Having descended into the valley of the Northern Chigimkharuta River, after a couple of kilometers I met a herd of reindeer at a short distance. And although the expected rain had started by this time, I lingered for a few minutes, admiring their movement. Along the side of the valley, accompanied by the cries and barking of dogs, a large living avalanche, smoothly flowing, enveloping the unevenness of the slope, was moving, apparently, in the direction needed by the reindeer herders.

The river valley turned out to be very convenient for movement. Watching it from the mountain, I was afraid of the vast bush thickets, but, fortunately, in vain. Maybe the reindeer were working, I don’t know why, but almost its entire area was covered with tundra. In the narrowest part of the valley, in the bottleneck between the

river and the kurum slope, I found an interesting reindeer herding artifact – a sled broken against a stone. Every day there are more and more traces of nomadic life. And so it will be, this story should reach its apogee at the northernmost edge of the Urals, where life is in full swing in the summer. But we will talk about this in due time.



Valley of the Northern Chigim Kharuta River

Having climbed out of the valley onto the ridge, I realized that I had been very lucky with my overnight stay yesterday. This place was marked in my navigator as a "small rock town," and on the map, like the overnight stay, it was strewn with rock icons. However, visually it bore only a distant resemblance to what I had photographed yesterday evening and this morning – a vast area with small heaps of kurums in the middle of the tundra. There really were rocks here once, thousands and millions of years ago, but they had long since crumbled. What a bitter disappointment I could have expected if I had decided to walk to this place for the night.

By the end of the walking day, I crossed the deep valley of the Igyadeyogan River, climbed another indistinct peak, and from there I saw the Karovy massif – a huge ridge from which the new relief and color of the Polar Urals begins, and which I should photograph if possible. A dilemma arose: what to do? On the one hand, I had reached the planned overnight stay and was very tired. On the other hand, the view of

the ridge was not ideal, we were separated by about 15 km and small mountains between the Kokpela and Pogurey rivers, and there was still time before the evening light.

At first, the scales leaned towards the first option, I even left my backpack and went to look for water, but its absence in the immediate vicinity tipped the scales in the other direction, and I went on. Fortunately, I went on. Because after a couple of kilometers, coming to the descent into the valley, I saw a camp. And since the area is not a tourist area, idlers like me rarely drop in and distract reindeer herders from work, then the chances of eating fresh meat, bread and drinking tea with sugar increased significantly.

The main thing was to find a reason to visit. I had a reason, I wanted to find out about the road in the Pogurey River valley, which I had to follow further.

As soon as I started to descend to the camp, the alarm went off – dogs began to bark loudly. Work was slowly in full swing next to one of the tents, a tall, thin man and a boy of about twelve were cutting reindeer skin into thin strips, tying it up and stretching it between two vertical poles. Two girls of about five or seven were milling around.He said hello. He asked about the road, demonstrated his knowledge of the life and customs of reindeer herders, assuming and guessing that they were making a new tynzyan*, and told them a few words about himself. It was obvious that the people were busy with work and that I had come at their expense at the wrong time. Feeling this, he was about to take his backpack and, having said goodbye, move on, but Yuri – that was the man's name – unexpectedly put down the strips of leather and invited him to drink tea.



Yuri Artanzeev with his daughter

The offer came so unexpectedly that at first, I even refused, but then I came to my senses and agreed. It seemed rather comical, but the opportunity to eat normal meat and talk to people was worth much more than the inconvenience.

**Tynzyan is a lasso woven from four strips of raw deer skin.*



Cirque massif

Oh, what a magical hour it was! Boiled venison, bread, condensed milk, butter, cookies and lots and lots of tea. All of it melted in your mouth and fell somewhere down into the void. The hardest thing in such situations is to stop. We sat at a small table on skins, talking about the weather, about the way of life and the life of reindeer herders. The family turned out to be Khanty, from the village of Muzhi, the owner of the tent was Yuri Artanzeev, the foreman of the 10th reindeer herding brigade.

Everything was simple and familiar in the tent, a small domesticated avka reindeer was tied at the entrance, skins, blankets and pillows were along the edges of the dwelling. To the right of the entrance was a dining table. In the center was a hearth with smoldering firewood, and above the hearth on the slats were pieces of drying venison. I had visited the reindeer herders many times before, but this was the first time I had come across a dwelling without an iron stove. When I asked him why, Yuri explained that the stove was in the winter sleds left in the foothills, and there was no normal firewood in the mountains, so there was no need for a stove.

The owner's eldest daughter, in a beautiful, but apparently everyday dress, was ignoring us and picking fly larvae out of the reindeer meat. She had come for the summer holidays and would soon be back at the boarding school, my father said. I asked where it would be better – here, on the nomad camp, among the mountains, gnats, without internet or warm tap water, or in the village. She answered that, of course, in the camp. I really didn't want to leave.

Finally, Yuri suggested that I take some dried reindeer meat with me, like the one his daughter was making. I immediately refused, following good tradition, and then changed my mind and agreed. These solitary travelers are strange, the owner probably thought to himself, but he didn’t show it.

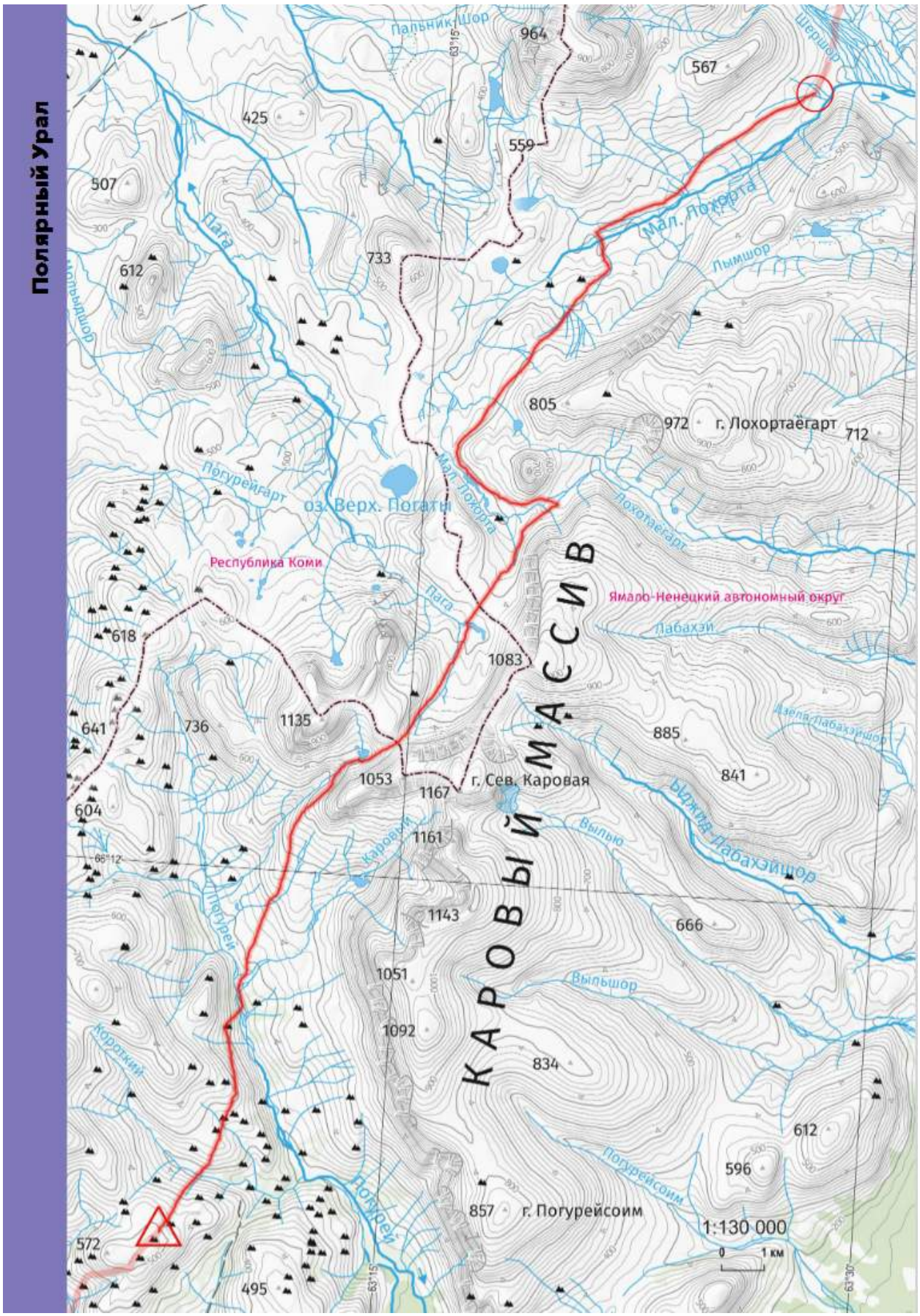


And he handed me a large plastic bag of light, dry meat. Scattering sincere gratitude and barely dragging his full belly across the tundra, which seemed to hold half a reindeer, he left the camp.

Despite fatigue and copious libations, I somehow very easily ran up another mountain, perhaps the charge of positivity from communicating with pleasant people played a role, and fast carbohydrates, of course. Similar to my mood, the weather also improved, the sun came out, the clouds scattered overhead. I set up camp on the descent to the Pogurey River, separating me from the Karovy massif. I took the best place in the auditorium just in time for the start of the performance. It was important for me to be here in the evening, because during the day in bright light the color of the mountains is poorly conveyed. And it is here on my way that it changes from gray to brown. Ahead of me are several days of Ural Martian landscapes. And their first messenger is the Karovy massif. This ridge lay before me and fully justified its name, bristling with numerous kars with sharp steep slopes that cut up its entire slope.

No special apocalypse happened at sunset, but the main thing is that I was able to take a panorama of the mountains for a future book, this is important. Showing important places in the Urals, where something changes radically, focusing attention on them. This will help the reader better understand the ridge.

Despite the fact that no more than two hours had passed since the reindeer herders' meal, I prepared a planned dinner for myself and ate it with pleasure. After all, it is better to carry food in yourself, and not on yourself – a simple truth of camp life.



The Polar Urals

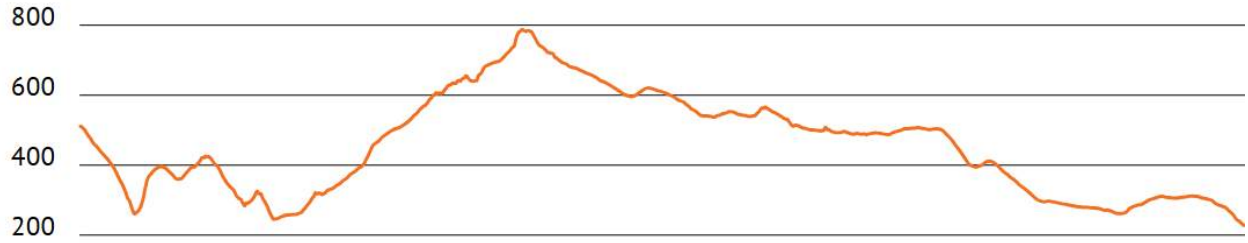
Palnik-Shor River *Shersor River*

Paga River
Malaya Lokhorta River
Malyydshor River
Pogureygart River
Lake Verkhnye Pogaty
Malaya Lokhorta River
Lokhortayogart River
Mount Lokhortayogart
Komi Republic
Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug
Labakhey River
Cirque Massif
Mount Severnaya Karovaya
Dzyolya-Labakheyshor River
Ydzhid Labakheyshor River
Karovyy River
Vylyu River
Pogurey River
Vylshor River
Korotky River
Pogureysoim River
Pogurey River
Mount Pogureysoim

Day 98

Slope of peak 572 – Pogurey river – Petersburg pass – Paga river – Malaya Lokhorta River

39 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2828.5 km



August 6, 2021

For the second day, I have been sleeping terribly – it's stuffy. But today I can't blame it on the lack of a refreshing breeze. The tent arcs have been bending under it all night, it hasn't gotten any easier. I can't open the flap to let in more air either – there is a monotonous hum of a mosquito cloud behind the wall.



Dawn

I met the dawn on my feet, the sun was rising behind the wall of the Coro massif, the backlight and deep shadows in the corries made it look like an ordinary dark flat block half the horizon. Not what you expect from a morning in the mountains. Fragile flowers came to the rescue, very gently trembling in the wind in the fresh rays of the sun.



The Pogurey River Valley in Smoke

When dawn broke, it became clear why the massif looked so particularly low-contrast, as if dissolving. Smoke had drifted into the valley overnight. The mountains, clearly visible just yesterday, about ten kilometers to the east, were now only silhouetted in the white-blue haze. Siberia was burning, and that was no surprise: if the mountains were in such hot, dry weather, then even less moisture was penetrating the ridge to the east.

The beginning of the day turned out to be very similar to yesterday, clouds began to creep in before reaching the nearby peaks, and a herd of deer appeared on the neighboring mountain. The movement also began with a descent to the river, and we also had to get lost in the labyrinth of bushes and local ravines. However, as soon as we stepped onto the left bank of the Pogurey River, the coincidences ended. The "Ural Mars" began. I rose slightly above the river, and the vegetation began to end abruptly, first brown stones appeared among the tundra, then the tundra disappeared, and a lifeless, heavily rugged rocky slope of a brownish-reddish color began. It is interesting that on the other side of the river, the slope at the same height and higher was covered with bushes and tundra with protruding gray stones. And here, if you do not look at the blue sky, you could shoot a film about the red planet closest to us.

Along one of the many tributaries of the Pogurey, I first came to a lake, vaguely shaped like a heart, and then to the uncategorized Petersburg Pass, the second name is Nadezhda. I looked down into the valley of the Paga River, where I had to go, and decided to wait a bit. Below in the north, the mountains were shrouded in some kind of particularly dark smoky haze, the mountain peaks were already covered with clouds from the west and east, and only above me the sun was still shining.

the mountain peaks were already covered with clouds from the west and east, and only above me the sun was still shining. I had lunch right on the pass, spread out a rug, covered myself with a sleeping bag and gave myself over to a pleasant afternoon of doing nothing.

I noticed that the weight of the backpack had finally become acceptable. Today, for the first time, I walked until lunch, almost without stopping to rest. Before that, from the moment I left Sanavozh, the movement pattern of “fifty minutes of walking – ten minutes of rest” had been established by itself. And today there was no urge to rest.

After a short nap, full of strength, I rushed along a wide, smooth valley, smoothly descending under a canopy of clouds mixed with smoke. The world around me became gray and dull, the peaks disappeared, and the second half of the day would have been as inexpressive as the landscape around me, if not for the meeting that became one of the brightest moments of the entire expedition. Entering the valley of the Malaya Lokhorta River, making my way through the tundra and dwarf pine forests, I saw people and tents on the opposite bank. At first I thought they were tourists. But, looking closer, I noticed sleds. Apparently, these were shepherds who had left the camp closer to the herd and were spending the night next to it. Most likely, they were standing next to the road, I decided, and, turning perpendicular to the line of my movement, I headed towards the people. And then everything was like in a bad horror movie, and if I had not been familiar with the traditions of the peoples of the North, I don’t know how I would have reacted to everything that was happening.

I found myself right at a set table. Five men were sitting on the grass, surrounding a bloody carcass, their faces and hands were stained with blood. In their hands were knives, with which they quickly and confidently cut off pieces of meat, and then sent them into their mouths.



Pass to the Paga River

A short and polite dialogue took place.

– Hello, enjoy your meal, – I said.

– Good afternoon, – they replied. – Will you eat?

– With pleasure, – I answered without a second thought.

Although I am not a big fan of raw, still fresh reindeer meat, I decided not to offend the hospitable hosts. And in general, it is interesting.

I sat down next to them and joined the meal. They greeted me very well, it turns out that they had already been told about a strange tourist walking in the mountains. Each offered to try what they thought was the most delicious thing in the fresh reindeer. First, a piece of liver went into my mouth. Then the still warm meat. And finally, apparently, the eldest offered to try a special delicacy. They brought a rusk, dipping it in a stream flowing nearby to make it softer. Right in front of me, they chopped up a leg bone with an axe, removed the brain, put it on bread, generously salted it and presented it.



Delicacy

The taste of this wet piece of cracker with still warm bone marrow and salt was specific, but the experience was interesting. Although I haven't drunk vodka for many years, I didn't refuse a shot in this case. It seemed a good idea to add a little disinfectant for the purpose of preventing gastrointestinal diseases.

I stayed with the hospitable reindeer herders for about half an hour, we talked and exchanged news. I learned about the road, I was right – it was right here, cutting through the thickets of bushes. Having said a warm goodbye and refused the offer to stay overnight, I went on. The plan was to walk a few more kilometers.

How glad I am that I finally started meeting reindeer herders. The route blossomed with new colors and interesting facts. Approaching the Polar Urals, I was looking forward to it. In my opinion, the reindeer herding culture in this part of the mountains is no less valuable and interesting than the mountains. And sometimes even more so. Judge for yourself, there are only four reindeer herding nomadic peoples in the Urals: Nenets, Komi-Zyryans, Mansi and Khanty. These are some of the most nomadic peoples in the world, in one season they travel up to 2000 km behind their countless herds of reindeer. In summer they go north, to the shores of the

Kara Sea, or up into the mountains, in autumn they migrate back to the south, and by November-December they reach the forest zone.

In the lives of these strong and open people, in an amazing way, perhaps like nowhere else in Russia, the traditions of the past and the achievements of modern civilization are intertwined.

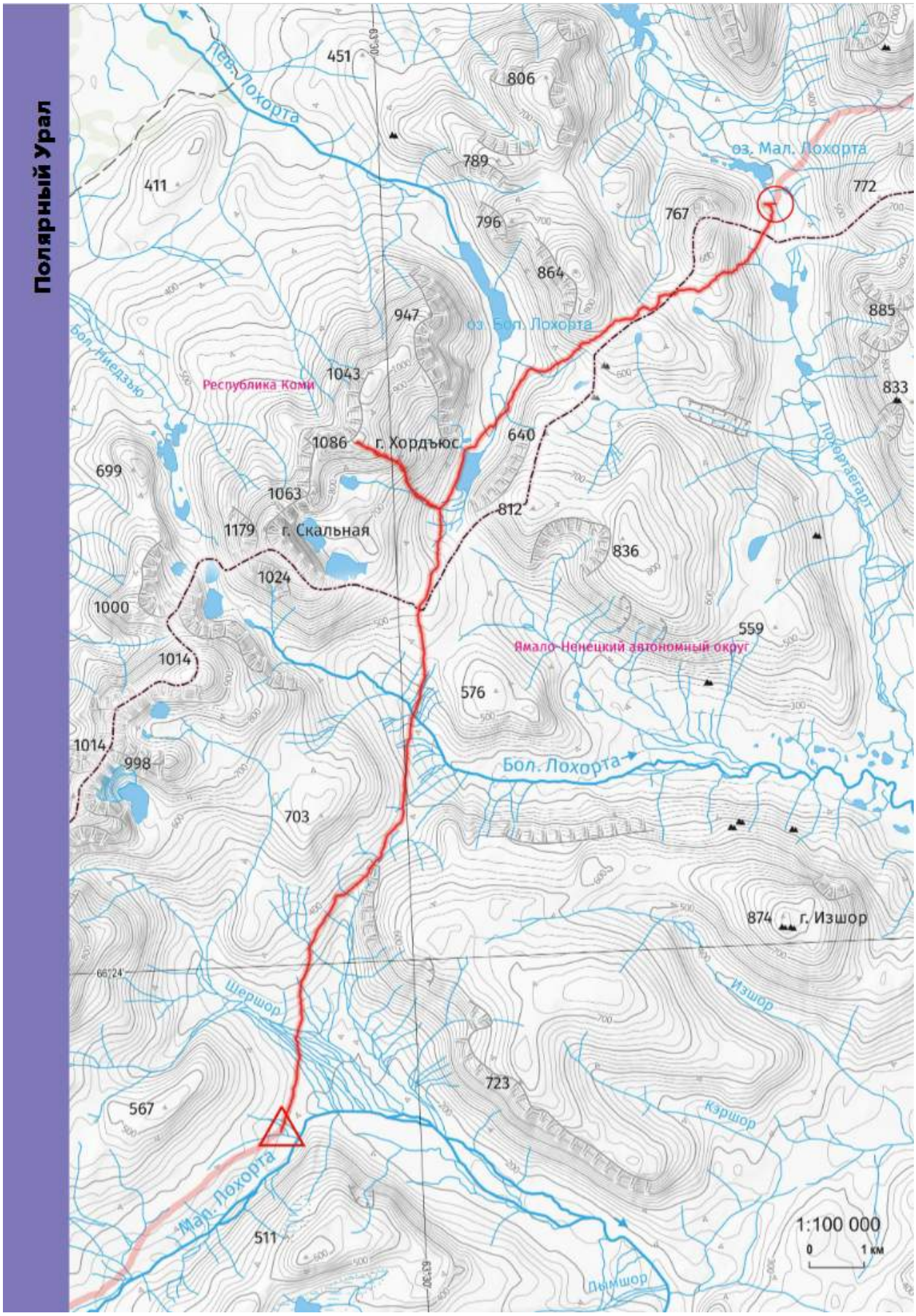
On the one hand, they travel*, as their ancestors did, on wooden sleds pulled by reindeer, live in tents, wear skins in winter, eat raw meat and do many, many other things that an ordinary person “from the mainland” may seem, firstly, wild, and secondly, incredibly interesting. On the other hand, these are quite modern people, they have phones, satellite dishes and cartoons in the tent in the evenings, young people maintain social networks, and often next to the cargo sleds you can see ATVs, which get along very well with the wooden ships of the tundra. They complement them, make the work easier, but they still cannot completely replace them. Finding yourself in a camp, it is as if you find yourself in another world, but you do not feel completely alien in it, a traveler always has something to talk about with the hosts, and sometimes you can ask for help. And this is valuable.

I stopped for the night at the bend of the Malaya Lokhorta River, 6 km from the reindeer herders' camp. The river and the road went to the east, and tomorrow I had to go to another valley, to the north, to a small in length, but heavily indented ridge with alpine relief forms.

Before going to bed, studying the map, I was surprised at how many rivers in the area have the same name: Lokhortayogart**, Malaya Lokhort, Bolshaya Lokhort, Lokhortayegart, Lokhortayu, Srednyaya Lokhort, Pravaya Lokhort, Levaya Lokhort. I really wanted to look out of the tent and look at the heavy rainy sky and chuckle that there was nothing but “one big, continuous slob” around.

**Kaslja – to wander.*

***Lokhorta is translated from Nenets as “fast flowing, babbling.”*



The Polar Urals

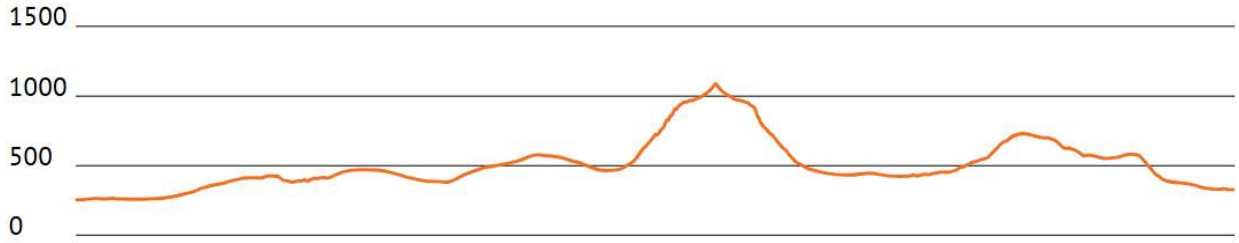
Levaya Lokhorta River *Lake Malaya Lokhorta*

Lake Bolshaya Lokhorta
Bolshaya Niedzyu River
Komi Republic
Mount Khordyus
Lokhortayogart River
Mount Skalnaya
Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug
Bolshaya Lokhorta River
Mount Izshor
Izshor River
Shersor River
Kyorshor River
Lymshor River

Day 99

Malaya Lohorta River – Bolshaya Lohorta River – Khordyus Peak (1086) – Srednyaya Lohorta River

28 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2856.5 km



August 7, 2021

It's amazing, I was walking low in the morning, at an altitude of only 230 m, and there are almost no bushes. The valley is like a rock garden, overgrown with a slightly unkempt lawn. Remembering the vast areas covered with bushes that had to be overcome when crossing the northern part of the Polar Urals and Pai-Khoi in past years, I could not help but rejoice at their almost complete absence so far.

Yesterday I planned to climb Mount Khordyus (1086), located in the northern part of the ridge, the most distant from the overnight stay. This is not its highest point, but it is in close proximity to it. The highest mountain is called Skalnaya and has a height of 1179 m. Based on my experience, confirmed by the map, I assumed that if the mountain is called Skalnaya, then, firstly, with a high degree of probability, it implies more difficult climbing during the ascent, and secondly, from an aesthetic point of view, it is better to look at it from the side.

I did not want to take a big risk and play mountaineering on a not very important peak of the route, it was enough to have Payer waiting ahead, and I wanted beautiful photos, so the choice fell on Khordyus.

I approached the bottom of the mountain quickly, since after a couple of kilometers I entered a wet cloud and nothing significant and beautiful, except for my own “great personality”, distracted me for 13 km.

Fortunately, I was lucky: when approaching the beginning of the ascent to the top, the clouds began to thin out. At first, visibility improved from 50 m to a kilometer below, then gaps began to appear overhead, peaks opened up. Having

suppressed the urge to run up immediately, I had lunch without rushing, waited until most of the mountain slope was clear, the path became clear, and headed up.

For the ascent, I chose the south-eastern kurum ridge of the mountain, above an extended snowfield leading to a cirque with a lake. And I was not mistaken in my assumptions: after just a few hundred meters, jagged peaks began to appear above the slope. Surrounded by clouds, as if dissolving in them, these pointed peaks looked amazing and completely alien, not like I was used to seeing the Urals over the past few days. As if I had ended up on the Parnuk plateau again, in the very heart of the Subpolar.

But I had seriously considered in the morning whether to go up or not, because with a high degree of probability the ascent could take place in the clouds and only for show. Fortunately, I went. And I was rewarded. This does not happen often, but it has happened in my hiking life: when you go up with a camera against all odds and get, maybe for five minutes, maybe only one frame, but something worthwhile! Most often, of course, it's the other way around: if you can't see anything, you can't see anything. The more valuable and memorable are the moments of luck.

I remembered Aleshkov's quote about the Voikar-Synya massif, written down four days ago, that was also him. Maybe these were the places the researcher was talking about? It's interesting: in different sources the length of the massif is determined to be from 150 to 200 km. And it includes mountains that are completely different in shape and appearance, and even clearly defined ridges. And the tundra gentle peaks along which I walked, and the Alpine-like pointed peaks that I observed today, and the plateau-like, cut-up red Martian landscapes that await ahead, – all this is united under one name.



Mount Hordyus

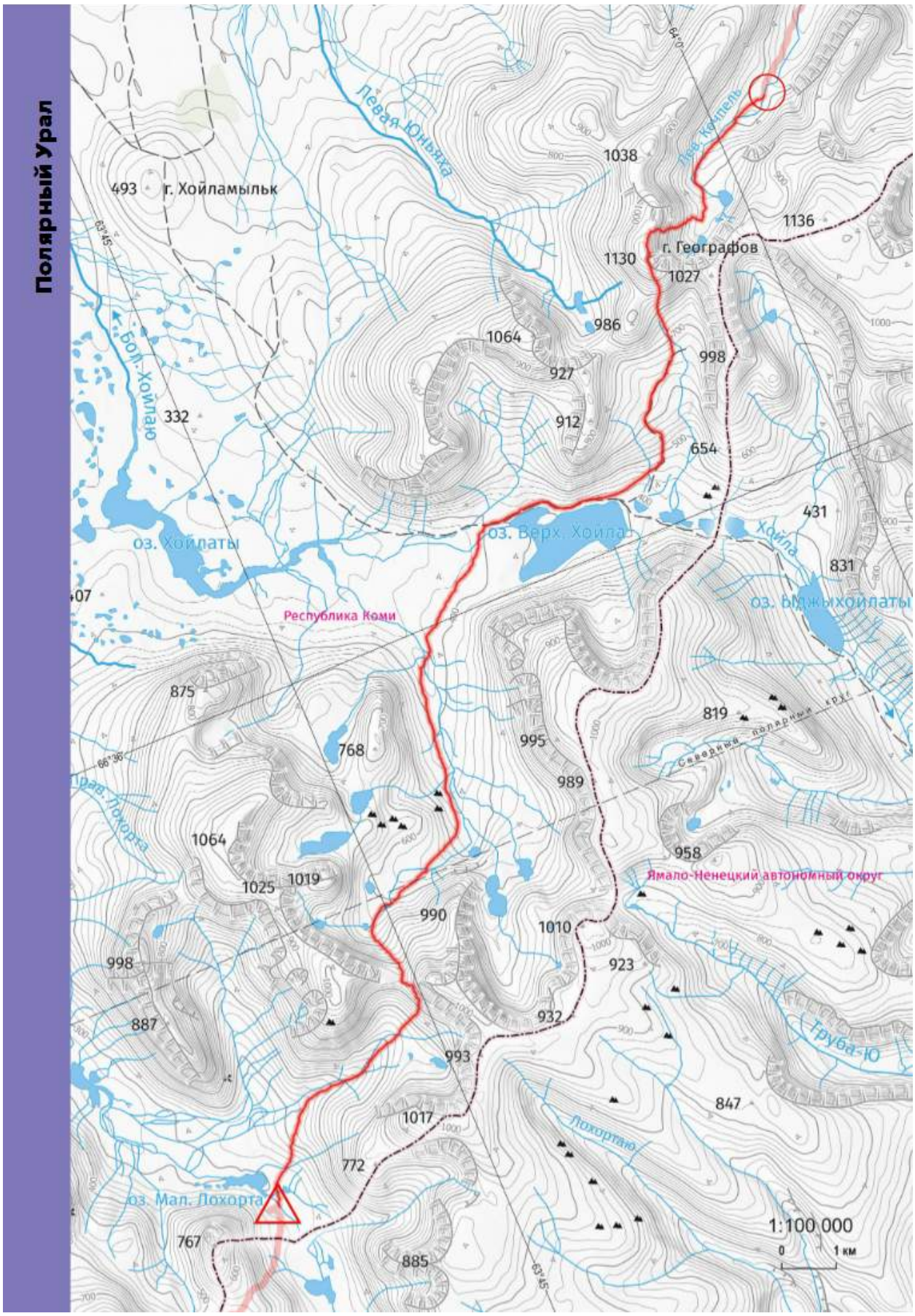


View of Mount Skalnaya

And this is as unlike the average person's idea of what a ridge should look like. There is no common relief, and why all this is united into one geographical object is not entirely clear to me.

Having passed the steepest section of the slope, having reached the gentle pre-summit climb, I got into a particularly wet cloud and did not come out of it again until the descent. At the top of the tour, a note from 2019, a team of tourists who made a 5th category of difficulty hike under the leadership of Lyakhovets S.V. A pleasant meeting, Sergey consulted me in preparing for the route, I used the track of their hike in planning. So I mention him with gratitude on the pages of this diary.

The second half of the day after the descent from the summit was not particularly memorable for anything, for exactly the same reason as the approach to the foot of Mount Khordyus. The clouds again covered me tightly, heavy fatigue fell upon me. I crossed from the valley of the Left Lokhort River to the valley of the Srednyaya Lokhort River, where I stopped for the night with a beautiful view of the cone-shaped peak.



The Polar Urals

Levaya Yunyakha River *Levaya Kochpel River*

Mount Khoylamylk

Mount Geografov

Bolshaya Khoylayu River

Lake Khoylaty

Lake Verkhneye Khoyla

Khoyla River

Lake Ydzykhoylaty

Komi Republic

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Truba-Yu River

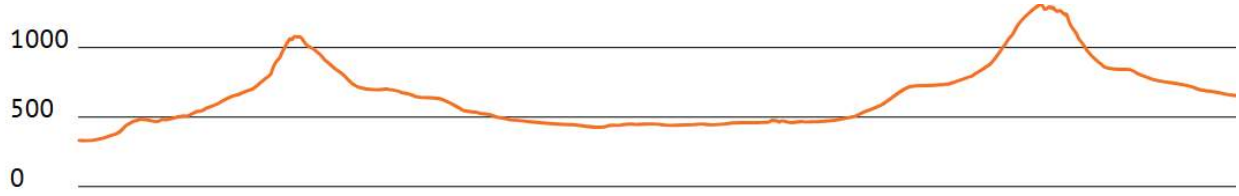
Lake Malaya Lokhorta

Lokhortayu River

Day 100

River Srednyaya Lokhorta – Srednelokhortinsky Pass – River Khoilavis – Geografov Peak (1130.9) – Left Kechpel Stream

29.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2886 km



August 8, 2021

The hundredth day of the journey! I was lying in my sleeping bag in the morning, looking at the tent ceiling fluttering in the wind and wondering what this means for me? One hundred days in the Urals... A treasured, important number, but when you are inside it, annoyingly ordinary, essentially no different from many previous ones.



Ascent to the Srednelokhortinsky Pass

One thing is for sure: I have raised my personal hiking standards so high that I look back on everything I have done before and realize how insignificant those routes were, and I look forward – provided that I manage to complete this project – and also realize that there is nothing comparable in terms of scale, there will be no

more in the Urals, and perhaps hard times await me for a man who has achieved his cherished goal.



A stone with unusual teeth-like formations

However, it is too early to talk about this, I drive this thought away.

Lately, more and more often, thoughts creep in about how I will finish the route, what to do, for example, at the top of Konstantinov Kamen, what I will say, how I will behave. It already seems so close compared to the path traveled, but if you count, then about two weeks. And during this time, anything can happen. Perhaps now is the most dangerous time: you relax, think that the job is done, and the path will punish you for your arrogance. At such moments, coming to my senses, I curse myself and force myself to think about the immediate goals. All thoughts about the finish are premature.

The third day, the clouds hide the surrounding peaks, it is a pity – I really wanted to see them, I have never been here before. For this very reason, I have been leaving later than usual for the second day, after eight in the morning, stalling for time in the hope that the weather will improve.

From the overnight stop, I just crossed the narrow valley of the Srednyaya Lokhorta River, began to climb up to the Srednelokhortinsky Pass, and very quickly found myself in the most lifeless places on my entire route. This is Mars, so to speak. Not a single particle of life, only bright brown slopes made up of different types of stones: from sand to huge boulders, some of these rocks bristled with unusual formations that looked like teeth.

I don't know what this phenomenon is called, but it looks beautiful and frightening. The clouds, hiding the views into the green valley, added lifelessness to the landscape.

I found the exit to the pass among the piles of living rocks and loose, sliding down sections not without problems. I had to be a little nervous, moving along the steep slope that broke off into a dark, swirling nothingness. There was a chilly wet wind and zero visibility on the pass, so without stopping I quickly began to descend into the valley of the Khoilavis River. I had to walk almost 10 km along a gentle lifeless slope in a light rain. Complete disgusting weather! If it weren't for satellite navigation, it would have been very difficult to navigate and choose the right passes today.

Having descended to Lake Verkhneye Khoilo, I had lunch and began to climb up to the Geographers' summit. Along the lake, right on the rocks, having compacted them, there was a geological road. It was clear from the scattered wheels of all-terrain vehicles and other scrap metal that it had not been easy to lay. Judging by the map, the lake was surrounded by picturesque peaks jagged with cirques, but these views were inaccessible to me. How annoying once again.



Ascent from Lake Verkhnee Khoilo to Mount Geographers



Abandoned core samplings

The road led to a plateau-like slope before the takeoff to the summit, to a completely classic, so often encountered on the way, site of geologists' work. Everything was abandoned: from stacks of boxes with extracted cores and drilling equipment to beds.

The ascent to Mount Geographers was not a problem, a smooth climb along medium-sized kurums led to the top. The summit is a pile of stones, the remains of a wooden triangulation tower and garbage. Some pig dragged a coconut up the mountain, ate it and threw the remains there. Nothing else of interest. In good weather, Payer and other mountains should be visible from the summit, but unfortunately, I was unlucky.

But the descent made me stop and think. To the east, in the valley of the Left Kechpel stream, a rocky living slope broke off into steep cliffs crowning a large cirque. In conditions of poor visibility and wet slippery stones, it was necessary to approach the choice of the line of movement down with special care. I had to freeze a little, studying the satellite images on my phone and comparing them with the track created in preparation for the route. In the end, I chose the right place. I began to descend the rocky slope, steeply going down and dissolving in the cloud, which after a couple of hundred meters began to flatten out and behind one of the bends led me into some kind of magical timelessness. Suddenly the wind died down, and a complete enveloping silence set in. There was nothing left in the world except my breathing and the light rustling of my boots being placed with the utmost care on the edges of the stones.



On the top of Geographers Mountain

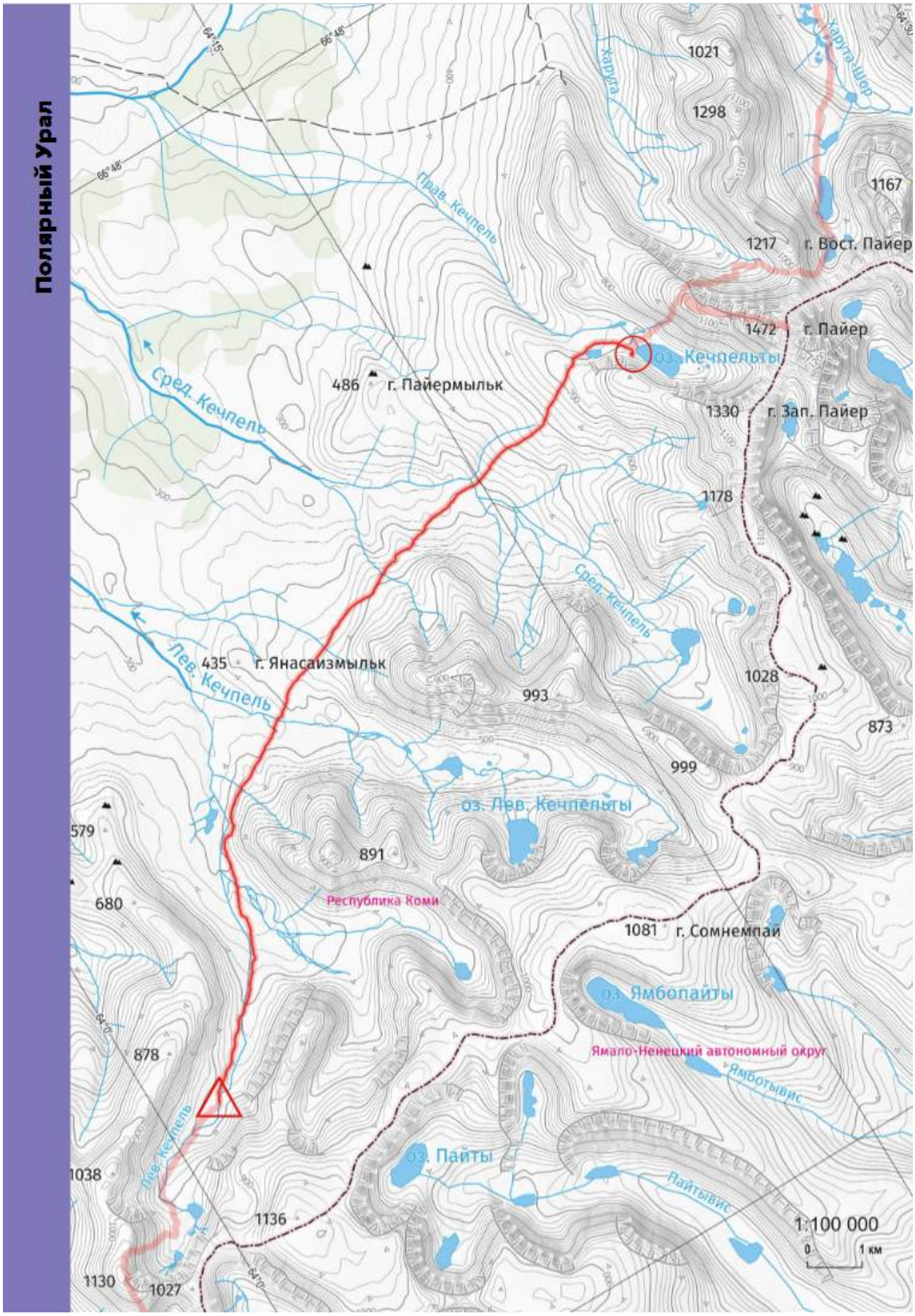
I realized with frightening clarity how alone and defenseless I was on this rocky slope. If something happened, if I stumbled, fell, broke my leg – that's it, no one would ever find me. To drive away the gloom and silence, I smiled and yelled something inarticulate at the top of my lungs. After all, I have a satellite tracker in my backpack, thousands of eyes are watching me every day, somehow, I'll hold out until help arrives. A tent and a sleeping bag on my back.

At the bottom of the cirque, I came to another place of work of the miners of the mountain wealth, first I began to see slats scattered among the stones – the surest indicator that they were working here, then a completely surreal rusty tank on runners grew out of the fog, and around it a layer of garbage smeared on the stones. The magic of loneliness evaporated.

Reached flat tundra areas and set up camp. Cold wet weather and two difficult passes sapped all my strength. Everything in the tent was damp, it felt like clouds with drizzle were flying right through it. Fortunately, synthetics keep you warm even when wet.

Taking off my sneakers, I discovered that my toes were starting to rub on top, something that had never happened before on this route. Shoes continue to give me unpleasant surprises. There's nothing to be done, all I can do is be patient and keep going.

Good news: today I crossed the Arctic Circle, which means I've entered the Arctic Circle.



The Polar Urals

Kharuta River *Kharuta-Shor River*

Pravaya Kechpel River

Mount Vostochny Payer

Mount Payer

Lake Kechpelty

Mount Payermylk

Mount Zapadny Payer

Srednyaya Kechpel River

Levaya Kechpel River

Mount Yanasaiymylk

Lake Levaya Kechpelty

Komi Republic

Lake Yambopayty

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Yambotyvis River

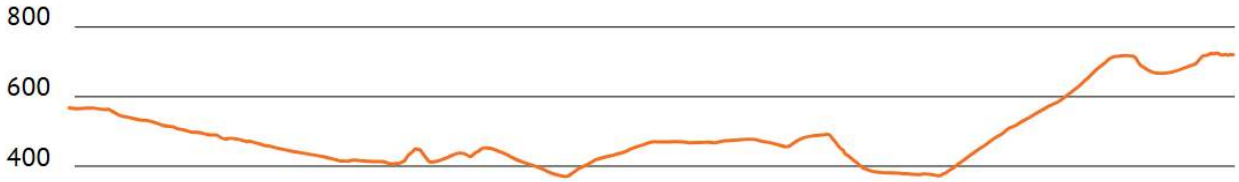
Lake Payty

Paytyvis River

Day 101

Left Kechpel Stream – Kechpelty Lake

19.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2905.5 km



August 9, 2021

It drizzled all night, which did not help keep the tent and gear dry, but in the warm autumn sleeping bag I received in Sanavozh, there was still plenty of warmth and dryness. Perhaps that's why I slept well for the second day in a row. The stuffiness had gone, but the warmth of the bed remained.



A gloomy morning in the valley of the Left Kechpel Stream

The tent and gear did not become any drier after two morning mishaps – for the first time in a hundred days, I dropped the burner with the pot. The first time I simply spilled hot water inside the tent. The second time, I dumped the water with meat outside, onto the stones and moss. I gathered what I could back into the pot. It seems that fatigue is accumulating and causing mistakes. Fortunately, I still have a small stock of dried venison from Yuri, so I'm not left without protein in the

morning. The venison has proven to be excellent, diversifying my diet, despite having a distinctive taste and smell that probably wouldn't appeal to everyone. I am sure that, for example, Tatyana Sergeevna definitely wouldn't eat it. However, new sharp flavors are important to me right now, as they complement and diversify my menu very well. I eat venison simply like meat chips and add it to dishes.

Before heading out, I received a weather forecast from the “big land”, stating that things are not as bad as they appear from under the tent. Variable cloudiness with no precipitation is expected – less today and more tomorrow. This news inspired me and made me hurry to set out. After all, I was almost approaching the penultimate crucial peak of the route – the Mount Payer, the highest point in the Polar Ural.

And I really want to be there in good weather. Almost as if to confirm the favorable forecast, a disk of the sun, resembling an egg yolk, began to peek through the veil of clouds.



Thickets of willow shrubs

I quickly descended through the tundra almost to the foot of the mountains and crossed along them to the Middle Kepel River, on the left bank of which the tundra stage of the journey ended, and the ascent to Payer began, toward Lake Ketchpelty. Interestingly, during the transition at an altitude of 400 meters, I got caught in some impenetrable thickets of willows that were neck-high. I recalled the valley from the day before yesterday, where at an altitude of 230 meters there were almost no willows at all.

Evidently, each valley has its own conditions and microclimate affecting vegetation.

I walked toward the lake in a cloud, seeing nothing and looking nowhere. I plugged in my earphones and listened to a podcast about mountaineering in the hot, sun-dried, and windy mountains of Jordan. The contrast with the surrounding reality

was so great that it felt as if I were listening to a story about another planet. I got lost in it and didn't notice how I ascended to the entrance of the upper valley, at the bottom of which lay the lake. I returned to reality, looked around, and suddenly discovered that the clouds were beginning to part.

Without yet seeing the lake itself but noticing the peaks above it, I quickened my pace and almost broke into a run. No one knows how the clouds will behave – they may disperse or close in again, and missing the chance to photograph Payer against the backdrop of the lake is not an option. When I reached the view of the water, I slowed down in disappointment. The secondary peak, which bordered the valley and was marked on the map as 1330, was revealed, but the main peak stubbornly remained cloaked in clouds.

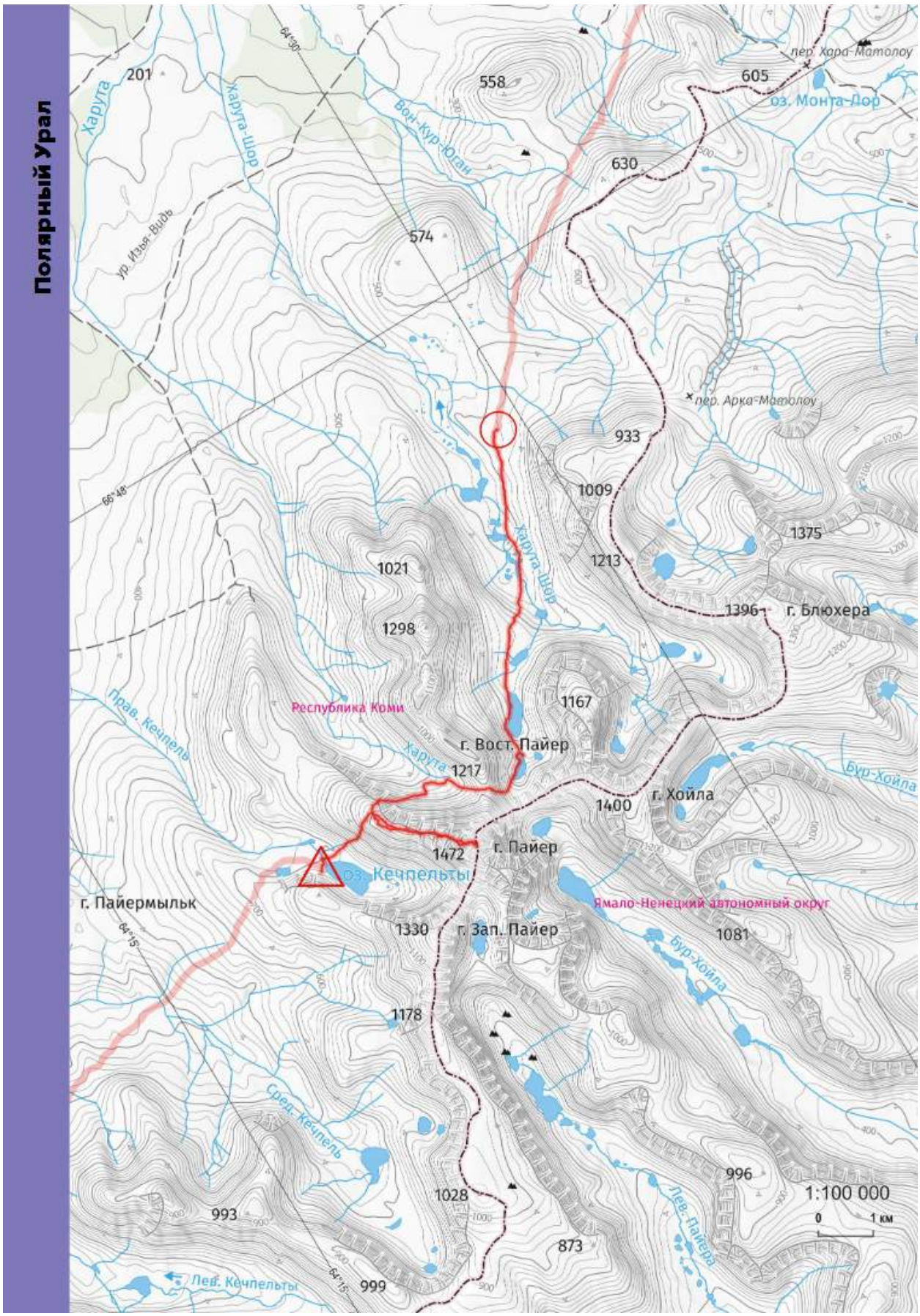
At the very lake, I found leveled spots with stone walls built around them. It was evident that tourists often camp there, either staying overnight or waiting for the weather to improve. I pitched my tent a little higher up, on a less convenient slope, but with a better angle toward the lake and Payer – so that I could watch the clouds right from my sleeping bag and dash out to photograph anything interesting if it appeared, even for a brief moment.



Campsite on the shore of Lake Ketchpelty

It was very early – one o'clock in the afternoon. I decided this: I would rest in the tent but not completely relax. If it gets clear in the second half of the day, then I will go to the summit today; if not, there is always tomorrow.

The rest of the day, clouds swirled around me, sometimes rising higher to reveal the sheer rocky and boulder slopes, and at other times filling the space, including my tent. Unfortunately, the master of the mountains, which is what Payer translates to, did not deign to show himself to me. At 7:00 PM, an updated weather forecast came in, indicating that visibility might improve tomorrow morning, which means that the exit could be very early. I went to sleep.



The Polar Urals

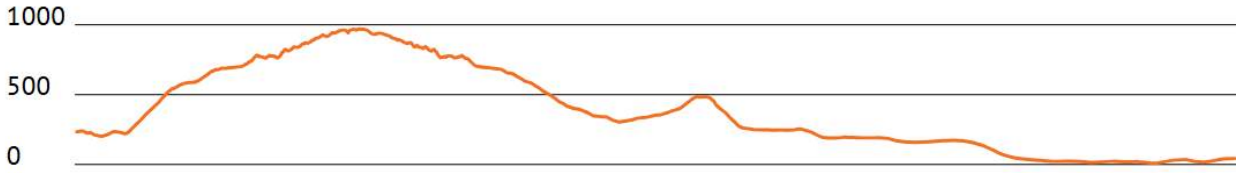
Kharuta River *Kharuta-Shor River*

Von-Kur-Yugan River
Khara-Matolou Pass
Lake Monta-Lor
Izya-Vid area
Arka-Matolou Pass
Mount Blyukhera
Komi Republic
Pravaya Kechpel River
Mount Vostochny Payer
Mount Khoyla
Bur-Khoyla River
Mount Payer
Mount Payermylk
Lake Kechpelty
Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug
Mount Zapadny Payer
Srednyaya Kechpel River
Levaya Payera River
Levaya Kechpelty River

Day 102

Lake Ketchpelty – Mount Payer (1472) – Payer North Pass – Haruta-Shor River

19.5 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2925 km



August 10, 2021

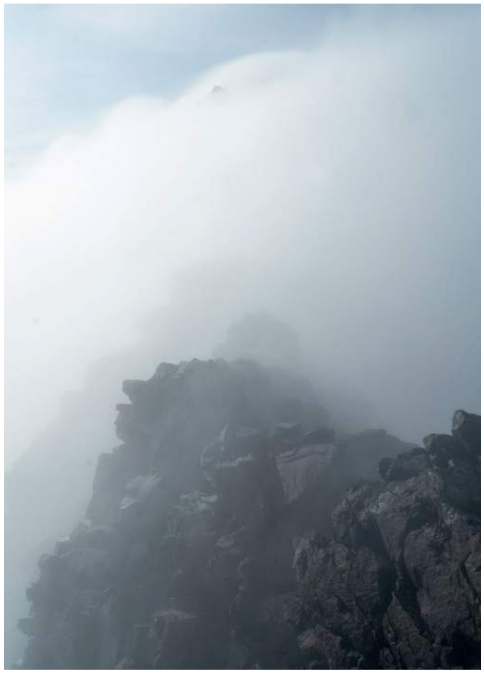
The night was chaotic and restless. I periodically woke up, opened the tent flap, and looked out, but contrary to the weather forecast, the valley was increasingly shrouded in clouds. I finally woke up at 4:30 AM in a damp, suffocating cloud. Drops of rain were trickling down the tent, and the world within a 10-meter radius was plunged into a white, impenetrable fog.

I lay there, pondering what to do. Just last evening, I was ready to wait for the mountain for at least a day. However, last night I received information about the latest resupply. It finally arrived safely in Salekhard, and now it needed to be transferred with the train engineers to the station 110 km away at the abandoned village of Polyarny. This was to be done by a colleague from Salekhard, Denis Mostovshchikov. The nuance was that he could manage this either on the 12th or the 14th of August. To make it to the station by the 12th, I would need to hurry and leave the area under Mount Payer today. If I wait until the 14th, I would have to ration my food and simply didn't want to stretch the route over two additional days. However, I also didn't want to head for the summit in such impenetrable cloud cover. A dilemma.

Since it was still very early in the morning, I decided to wait until noon. I kept the tent flap open despite the dampness and cold coming from the outside world, and long minutes turned into hours of waiting. I lay there, looking sadly outside, straining my eyes into the clouds for signs of improving weather. And after a couple of hours, I found them. The fog around me began to gradually lighten, and after a while, the first, still hazy window of blue sky appeared! It began! Apparently, the clouds were

covering only the slope of the mountain with a sufficiently thin layer, and above them was blue sky. That meant I should go. After all, in such weather, one can capture the most beautiful and unusual shots. I packed my belongings in 10 minutes and began my ascent. I decided to head almost directly, through a couloir that I had scouted in advance – it should lead me to a wide, sloping boulder field tapering toward the rocky ridge. I climbed as if through a minefield, surrounded by large, live stones, and tried to move very smoothly and deliberately to avoid causing anything to collapse on myself. It only takes one stone falling from 20-30 cm onto my foot, and that's it; the expedition would be over here and now.

Once I reached the slope, I found myself again in a dark cloud. Not quite what I expected, but there was no choice; I had to go up and leave it to the mountain to decide. After unloading my gear and securing it with stones, I took my backpack and the minimum items necessary for safety. Although the summit wasn't far, the path was objectively difficult and dangerous. If something were to happen and I lost the ability to move effectively, I needed to be able to await help. So I took some food, water, a compass, a map, a GPS navigator, extra batteries, a satellite GPS tracker, an additional warm jacket, gloves, a flashlight, and a first-aid kit. This is the standard list of items that I always take with me on ascents or other long radial outings.



A rocky ridge and the summit of Mount Payer in the clouds

The boulder field of Payer, gradually narrowing, led to a narrow rocky ridge about a kilometer long. This was the key to the summit. Before stepping onto it, I took a short break, hiding behind a rock and observing. Fragments of torn clouds raced across the wet rocky saw at high speed. The sheer walls, dropping down, dissolved into an impenetrable white mist. All of this looked dangerous and beautiful. But there was no doubt; I had to go. I had already drank my cup of uncertainty on this boulder patch at the beginning of the ridge three years ago, and compared to those

conditions, everything I saw today seemed like mild bad weather. Back then, in April, I turned back three times, and only on the fourth, overcoming doubts and fear, did I step onto the snow-covered rocks wrapped in whirlwinds of a snowstorm. That was the most challenging and dangerous ascent of my life in the Urals.

While I was resting, somewhere in the distance, above the swirling sea of clouds, a black, impregnable fortress appeared, resembling not even the summit itself, but just one of its sentinels.

How far and high it is!



The Summit of Mount Payer

This fleeting sight of the rock sobered me up and made me gather my thoughts. Very carefully, slowly, tower by tower, gendarme by gendarme, along the tops, along the narrow ridge, and where I passed beneath the rocks, I felt like I was using a stone saw. A thousand meters in one hour is a good speed; after all, Payer is not as frightening as one might imagine.

The summit of the mountain, after the ridge, appeared mockingly flat. It took some effort to orient myself in the cloud and locate it within the vastness. While searching, I found something in the stones that I never expected to see – a partially

decayed carcass of a deer. Around its neck was a woven cord. Even more strangely – was it a domesticated deer? How did it end up here, and more importantly, why?

The summit greeted me with a familiar sight. Disposable masks – symbols of the COVID era, partially decayed flags, rusty knives, and busts of long-deceased leaders. Seeing all this on Payer was particularly sad; this is not a mountain where random people visit, not the summit of Konzhakovsky Stone.

I understand that people invest meaning into such gestures and want to leave something of themselves as a memory on the summit of a beautiful and challenging mountain; for them, it may truly matter. It's a pity they do not understand the other side: as soon as they turn around and take the first step down, everything that remains at the top turns into dirty, partially decayed trash.

The descent from Payer was no less exciting and tense and did not go without a small incident. At one moment, while crawling under yet another rock, I failed to notice the overhanging stone arch above me, stood up, and hit my head against it with all my might. Everything went dark before my eyes, and it even seemed like there were stars flying around. Fortunately, there was nowhere to fall in this place.

A helmet is by no means an unnecessary piece of equipment on such routes.

After gathering my things, I descended to the northeast, below the North Payer Pass, where I stopped for lunch. As I was finishing my rest, it began to brighten rapidly around me. First, it became lighter, then the clouds parted, revealing a gentle rocky ascent to the pass and the mountain from which I had just descended.



The Lake on the Descent from the Pass

Not wasting any time, I grabbed my gear and hurried back up. I wanted to see as much as possible, as no one knows what the weather in the mountains will be like in an hour or two. And it was worth hurrying – soon I was enchanted by the view unfolding from the pass. It had been a long time since I had seen such beauty on my route. The fresh world, washed by the rains, sparkled with cleanliness and freshness. Below was a green lake surrounded by "Martian" rocks. Around, the peaks, bound by snowfields, waved white flags of clouds as if surrendering to the victor. It is moments like these that make it worthwhile to freeze in a tent, to walk somewhere in the rain and cold, because after any rain and bad weather, there will be particularly beautiful moments, the beginning of a new good time.

The lake beckoned with its beauty, and I, without resisting, descended to its shore. I spread my things out to dry on the rocks and, without much thought, jumped into the mirror reflecting Payer twice. The water was icy, but the feeling of freshness and cleanliness after many days of exhausting hiking was priceless, as were the memories of this beautiful valley.

Interestingly, I am often asked about the most beautiful place in the Ural Mountains, and I am sure I will be asked even more frequently after completing this trek. The question is understandable and logical, but, in my opinion, it does not have a definitive answer. I have passed so many lakes along my way, where beautiful

mountains were reflected, but I will forever remember this nameless place at the northeastern foothill of Payer as a site of incredible beauty. This is because of the circumstances: the challenging ascent in bad weather, the cold and gloom of the previous days of the journey, the bright sun today, my emotional uplift – after all, I have just overcome the last critical obstacle on my route. The Crown of the Urals has been assembled for the second time! However, if I had been here yesterday under entirely different circumstances, it is quite possible that I would have devoted just a line in my journal to this place, or it might not have even made the pages alongside many other lakes, rivers, and valleys that never received mention. There is no single most beautiful place in the Ural Mountains; there is only that place which was the most beautiful for you at that hour and day. That is the correct answer to the question about the most beautiful place in the Urals.

Half an hour later, my things were dry. I packed my backpack, said goodbye to the mountain, promising to return, and moved forward into the wide valley, decorated with blue lakes among brown hues. It was a little sad that due to the resupply, which was supposed to arrive the day after tomorrow, I had to change my route, leave the high mountains, and walk through their western, lower part. But I must honestly admit that only one thought occupied my mind: home, faster home.

The final part of the day presented yet another big and important surprise: emerging from the narrow valley squeezed between the mountains into the wide stony-tundra expanses, I noticed the Yeletska Station 30 kilometers to the northwest. I checked for a signal, and – oh wonder! – a full antenna and fast internet.

This was an incredible stroke of luck. The last time I called home, I heard my family’s voices in Kytlym, almost 1500 kilometers away. I dropped my backpack where I stood and made a video call. What a luxury and joy it was to see the faces of my loved ones!

However, that wasn’t all. Finding a connection on this particular day was a great fortune because tomorrow is my mother's birthday. Despite the fact that I haven't even covered the daily mileage yet, I decided to stay overnight right where I

had the strongest signal, and tomorrow morning I would congratulate my beloved mom. I am sure it will be the best gift for her.

In the evening, I watched a magnificent sunset; the sun set very slowly, filling the valley and painting the mountains and even the air with a magical warm light.

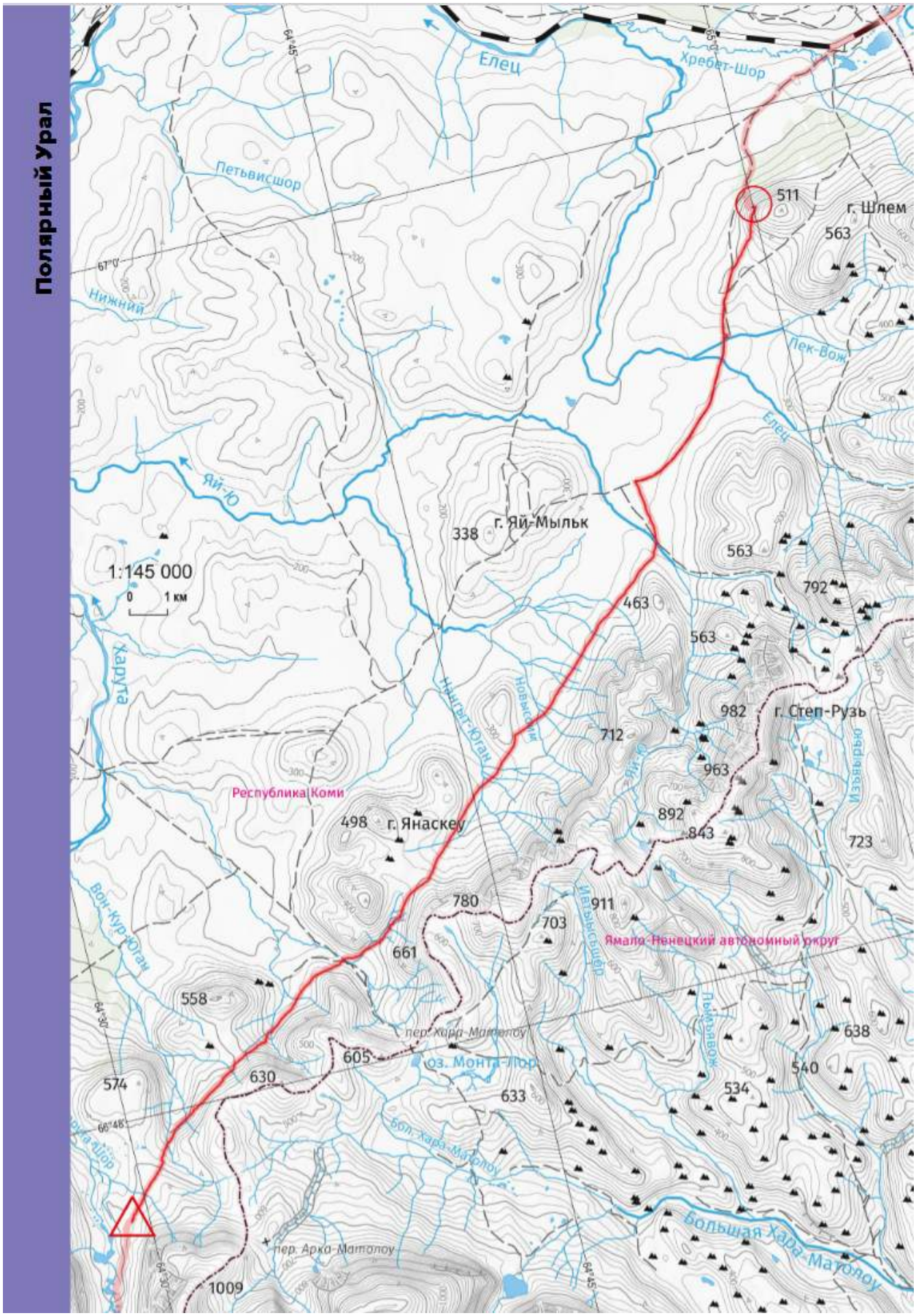
Interestingly, Payer did not entirely rid itself of the clouds; a small cap continued to hide the summit even at sunset.

A wonderful day, one of the best on the route.



The mountain Payer from the Payer North Pass





The Polar Urals

Yelets River *Khrebet-Shor River*

Petvisshor River

Mount Shlem

Nizhny River

Lek-Vozh River

Mount Yay-Mylk

Kharuta River

Novysoim River

Nangyt-Yugan River

Yay-Yu River

Mount Step-Ruz

Izyayyru River

Von-Kur-Yugan River

Ivtyysyshor River

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Lymyavozh River

Lake Monta-Lor

Lymyavozh River

Bolshaya Khara Malotou River

Khara Matolou Pass

Kharuta-Shor River

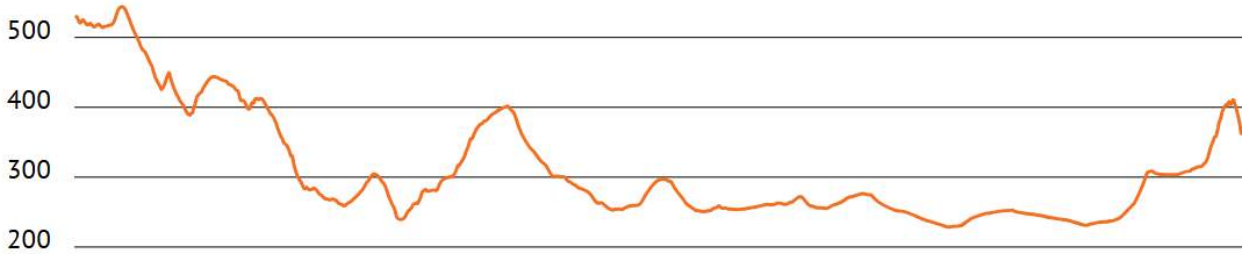
Arka-Matolou Pass

Bolshaya Khara-Matolou River

Day 103

Haruta-Shor River – Yai-Yu River – Peak 496

35 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2960 km



August 11, 2021

It's astonishing – I woke up today at dawn, and Payer was bare of its cloudy makeup! And somehow, it immediately lost half of its charm. Indeed, ambiguity and mystery often benefit not only people, but also peaks.

The dawn was quiet and peaceful, first the mountain tops were illuminated in pink, then the sun appeared in the north, slowly filling the entire valley with a soft, pleasant light. About half an hour after sunrise, clouds suddenly appeared over the mountain tops as if out of nowhere.



Mount Payer in the morning light

Evidently, the rays of the sun warmed the slopes, and the moisture that began to evaporate gathered into white fluffy veils. The master of these places again cloaked himself in mystery.

I walked all day along the low western foothills, predominantly covered in tundra and shrubs. The first kilometers were quite simple, but then the terrain became more rugged with thickets and marshes. It seemed there were no significant elevation gains, yet by the end of the day, I was quite exhausted.

Finally, I indulged in cloudberries to my heart's content, so much so that I felt a bit unwell for a while. I even had to lie down for a bit. This berry is truly remarkable: you pick ten, and your hand is already full of juicy polar sunlight. The main thing is to know when to stop.

For my overnight stay, I chose a relatively flat ledge on the southeastern slope of Mount Shlem, with a wonderful view of the boundary separating the Polar Urals into two parts. Looking back to the south from here, one could see the distant red boulder giants led by Mount Payer on the left. Here lies the narrowest part of the Ural Mountains, with only 15-20 km separating Europe from Siberia; compared to the Southern Urals, this is indeed quite little. In good weather, climbing to one of the dominant peaks in the center of the ridge, you could probably capture a panorama where two vast plains – the European and West Siberian – would fit into one shot.

A different view opened up when looking north from my camping spot. The color of the mountains was changing; they were becoming brown and gray again, as if more



One of the numerous snowfields on the slope of the mountain



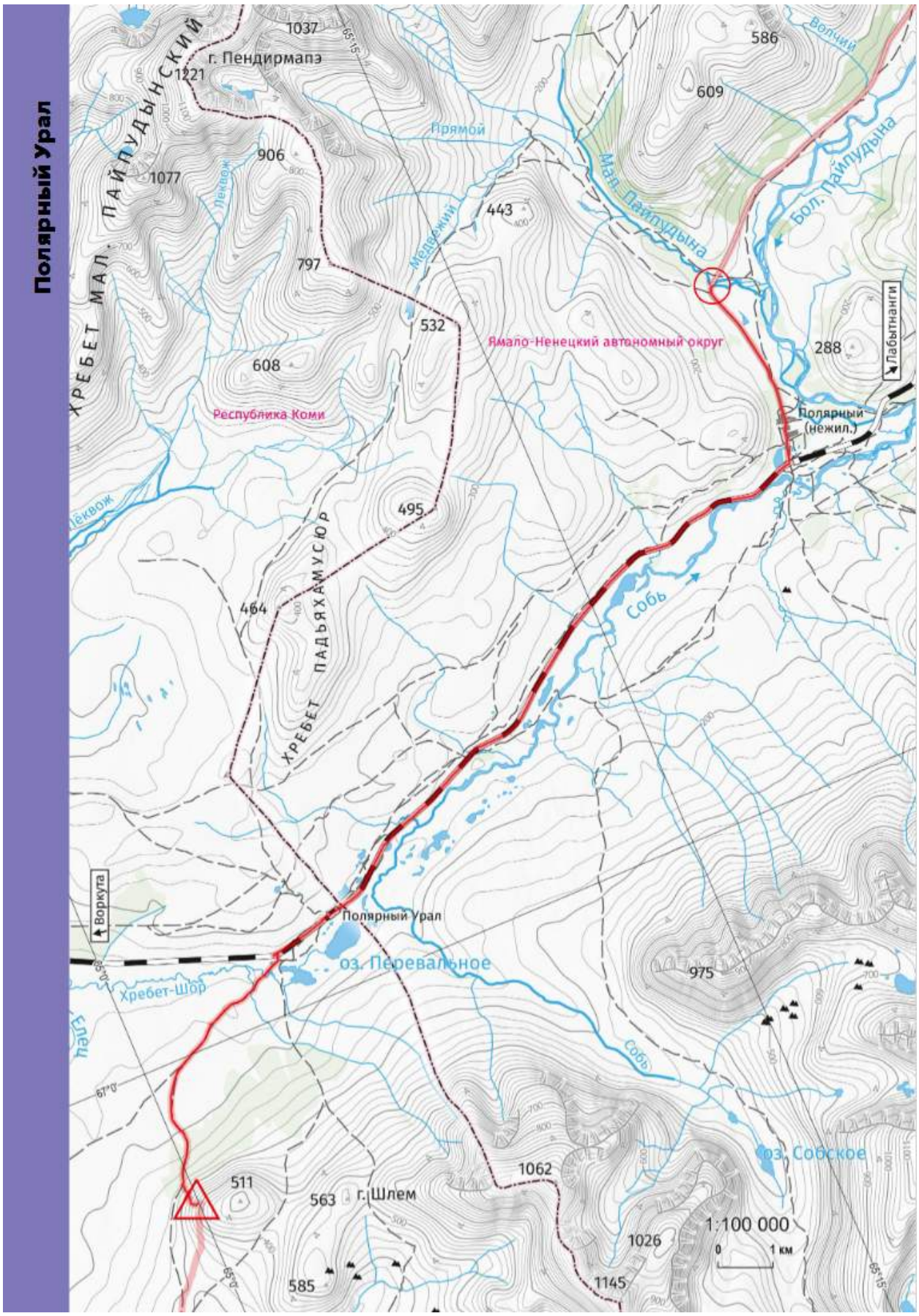
View to the North from the Slope of Mountain

rounded, with fewer sheer cliffs and cirques. The Urals spread out wider, reaching 70-80 km. The valleys of the rivers also became more spacious, and the passes – lower. These two parts are so different from each other that some geographers divide the Polar Urals into two separate parts – the Polar and the Subpolar.

The third view, which is important for the narrative and for the entire Ural region, lay at my feet in the foreground to the north. A vast valley, serving as the boundary for the parts of the Urals. The so-called Sob'–Elets Pass, which is the lowest part of the Polar Urals. To my left, in the sunset light, the Elets River sparkled as it flowed westward, belonging to the Pechora basin; to my right was the Sob', which carried its waters eastward into the Ob. Between them, there were only 5 km and a lake with the logical name 'The Pass Lake.'

People have traveled through this pass since ancient times; Nizhny Novgorod residents used to drag their boats over here for the Kamenny Stone. In the 20th century, a railway line passed through the valley, becoming the key to this part of the Urals. It has incredible significance for organizing hikes in the Polar and Subpolar Urals, as practically all routes in these mountains somehow utilize its capabilities. I spent the whole evening listening to the trains passing a few kilometers from me.

Mount Shlem, where I was located, is one of the first peaks visible from the windows of trains coming from the west. I remember admiring its profile many times and wishing to visit it someday. Today that wish came true, but, unfortunately, it must be acknowledged that the mountain looks most interesting from the train, from a distance.



The Polar Urals

Malaya Paypudynsky Ridge *Mount Pendirmape*

Volchiy River

Lyokvozh River

Pryamoy River

Malaya Paypudyna River

Bolshaya Paypudyna River

Medvezhiy River

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Labytnangi

Komi Republic

Polyarny (non-residential)

Padyakhamusur Range

Sob River

Vorkuta

Polyarny Ural

Khrebet-Shor River

Lake Perevalnoye

Yelets River

Lake Sobskoye

Mount Shlem

Day 104

Peak 496 – Polar Ural Railway Station – 110 km Platform – Malaya Paipudyn River

23 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 2983 km



August 12, 2021

I slept well until about one o'clock in the morning, then someone turned on the wind, and it began to monotonously flap the tent fly, disrupting my tranquil sleep.

I got up about forty minutes before dawn and saw the darkening silhouettes of the mountains, a mixture of clouds above me, and there, to the northeast, near the 110 km station, the Big and Little Pai pudyn ridges, the dawn beginning to blush. I took my camera and went out for a photo hunt.



Dawn over the Soby-Yeletsky Pass

I had to wait for dawn for over an hour; at first, the sun overcame the mountains, then the clouds. I sat on the soft, mossy tundra, warmed by a gentle southwest breeze, waiting and enjoying how, with the development of the sunrise, the colors of the necklace of lakes stretched out beneath my feet changed.

Finally, the sun broke through the clouds, splashing the world with bright light, and the mirrors of the water bodies flared up with gold. I greeted the sun, took a photograph, and, feeling quite satisfied, leisurely made my way back.

This is how it goes: you wake up an hour or an hour and a half before dawn, go somewhere, wait, then you spend a minute or two taking pictures – and then you head back. This is what it's all about.

The difficulties began right away on the first kilometer of the descent, as I stumbled into another impenetrable thicket of cloudberries. The entire slope was strewn with amber droplets, exactly the same color as today’s dawn; perhaps they were remnants of it. The juicy, ripe berries were calling out to be eaten. Remembering yesterday's overeating, I tried to control myself, at least leaving some of the berries behind. The only effective way to resist their magnetic pull was not to look down, but how could I not look on such a steep descent from the mountain?!



Crossing the railway

At the foot of the mountain, I found a dirty, marshy path winding among willow thickets, which led me to the railway. As soon as I climbed onto the embankment, a black column of smoke appeared from behind the mountain slope, followed by an extremely unpleasant screech, the clatter of wheels pulling freight cars. I hadn’t heard anything mechanical for thirteen days, only the sounds of wind and water, and suddenly, without warning, civilization burst into my life. I wanted to cross the road and hurry deeper into the mountains. However, not so fast; I still had to endure half a day.

Perhaps that is also why the 15-kilometer trek to the 110 km station was very difficult for me. The monotonous walking on the ties, which did not match the width of my stride, exhausted me greatly. When I arrived at the station, without much thought, I set up my tent right on the concrete platform, threw my sleeping bag and pad inside, and nearly missed the train I needed. A tourist, who was coming off the trail, approached me just before the train arrived. After lying in the tent for a couple of hours in a light doze, I completely lost track of time. The tourist informed me that a passenger train was approaching. With some anxiety, I dashed onto the platform and ran up to the front locomotive. A door opened overhead, and a strong male hand reached down from above with a plastic barrel that had a large label reading: "Chegodaev Oleg 110 km."

The train left for the west, and I was left once again alone with my happiness! It felt as if a mountain had been lifted off my shoulders, which had been pressing down on me for many days. All the supplies had been delivered, that unknown factor was gone, and I had completed the most challenging section of the route that had caused me the greatest concern in just thirteen days. Everything beyond this point was familiar and understandable; I had traveled this path to Konstantinov Kamen' three years ago.

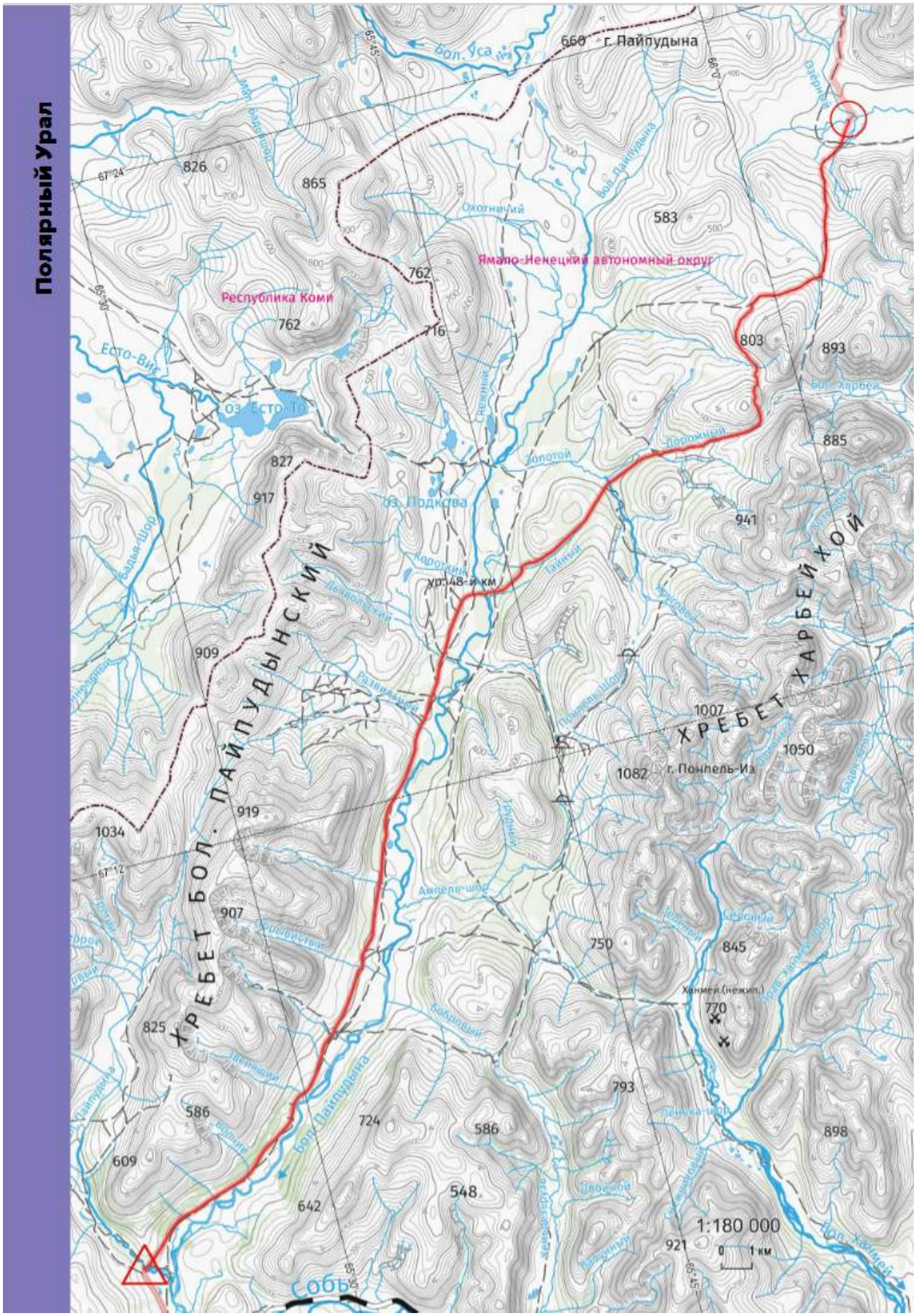
However, first, I needed to sort through the newly arrived items and food. In a hurry, I stuffed the contents of the barrel into my backpack, grabbed some things in my hands, and set out towards the intended overnight spot – a ford across the Maly Paypudyna River, located 3.5 km from the ruins of the village of Polyarniy – under the impending rain.

As I walked through its dirty, trash-strewn streets, looking into the dark empty windows of the crumbling houses, I remembered Rundqvist's description of what this place was like in 1991. How vibrant life was here. Thirty years have passed, and almost nothing remains of the important logistical center of the Polar Urals – only a few small trailers near the halt kept life alive.

All-terrain vehicles were parked everywhere, ferrying fishermen and tourists to the north. After leaving the village, I entered a wide valley bounded by high

ridges, filled with a full-fledged forest. It was very unusual to see such abundant vegetation after the bare southern part of the Polar Urals. The last time I saw so many trees was in Sanavozh, significantly further south.

There seems to be some unique microclimate here, perhaps less wind, more accumulated snow, and as a result, the trees do not perish. I set up camp on the right bank of the river, choosing a public campsite for this purpose. I had yet to use a dirtier place for an overnight stop throughout the entire journey. I sorted through the things and food. I repackaged ten days' worth of rations into seven but enhanced each day with a fourth meal. I burned the leftover food, maps, torn socks together with other trash scattered around the campsite in a sanitary fire, using an old fire pit. This was the first fire I had made during the entire journey, and it was clearly suited to the place – it was much cleaner afterward.



The Polar Urals

Bolshaya Usa River *Mount Paypudyna*

Ozyorny

Malaya Badyashor River

Okhotnichiy

Bolshaya Paypudyna River

Komi Republic

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Yesto-Vis River

Lake Yesto-To

Svezhiy

Zolotoy

Dorozhnyy

Bolshaya Kharbey River

Lake Podkova

Badya-Shor River

Korotkiy

Taynyy

Dyavolskiy

Krugovoy

Razvilnyy

Ponpel-Shor River

Kharbeykhoy Range

Dlinnyy

Badya-Yugan River

Mount Ponpel-Iz

Bolshoy Paypudynsky Range

Trudnyy

Ampel-Shor River

Zelenyy

Khanmey (uninhabited)

Pravaya Khanmey-Shor River

Obryvistyy

Tretiy

Vtoroy

Pervyy

Bobrovyy

Zvenyashchiy

Bolshaya Paypudyna River

Volchiy

Sob River

Dvoynoy

Valunnyy

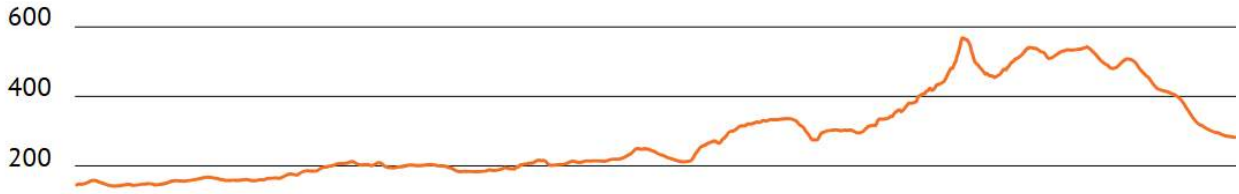
Snezhnikovy

Bolshaya Khanmey River

Day 105

River Maly Paypudyna – River Bolshaya Paypudyna – River Longot'yegan

51 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 3034 km





Migration of the Reindeer Herders

August 13, 2021

Usually, my sleep looks like this: I close my eyes and plunge into black nothingness, then in the morning I open them. Fortunately, I almost never have dreams, but not this night. I slept restlessly, plagued by some unpleasant stories that bordered on nightmares. The most memorable one was as if I were an artist standing on a balcony, with the square beneath me filled with a crowd of thousands. The time to perform has come, I open my mouth and realize that I don’t remember a single song; in fact, I can’t sing at all!



View of the Kharbeikhoy Ridge

Waking up, I reflected on what psychological processes could have triggered such dreams in my mind. I concluded that perhaps this was the first hint of impostor syndrome – a psychological state where a person cannot attribute their achievements to their own qualities, efforts, and abilities. Because the closer I get to the finish, the easier this entire expedition seems to me. I remember, before the start, I looked at the map and saw that jagged line of mountains stretching for thousands of kilometers, and it seemed to me that the idea of traversing it was almost unattainable. And whoever accomplishes this will be a great traveler, forever inscribing their name in the history of tourism in the Ural Mountains. Now, with less than 5% of the route remaining, I look back, and it no longer seems grand. Just a lot of days of work. No feats, no exhaustion, and no deadly adventures. Maybe it wasn't all that difficult... Perhaps my dream reflects these thoughts that have yet to fully take shape.

I lay in the tent for a long time, enjoying the horizontal peace, not hurrying to exit, understanding that I have more walking time than strength. The weather certainly wasn’t adding any motivation; since last night, a drizzle had been periodically falling, and the clouds, enveloping the mountain peaks, made it clear that the only thing I would be admiring today would be my inner world.



For most of the way, I walked on a road that is a monument to the era of exploring these lands. An excellent, smooth, well-graded road – the perfect path into the heart of the Polar Ural, if it weren't for one “but.” No one has been maintaining the road for many years, perhaps since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it remains ideal only up to the points where it is crossed by streams descending from the mountains. In the places where the road meets numerous brooks and rivers, often nothing remains of the embankment – just steep, washed-out gullies that have become riverbeds.

The crossings over rivers leave no fewer disheartening impressions. Now, when encountering them, the road veers off the embankment toward a ford, while enormous collapsed wooden bridges loom darkly nearby.

In a couple of decades, nothing will remain of it.

In the morning, I saw an argish – a caravan consisting of several sleds, on which reindeer herders travel from one camp to another. Unfortunately, it was far away, no less than a kilometer, on the opposite slope of the valley. I have encountered Northern nomads many times, but I had yet to see the movement of an argish live. It is especially disappointing that it is so far away. Well, maybe I will see it on this route since I am entering the most populated part of the mountains, where in every valley, you can meet chum and herds of reindeer.

The walking day passed drearily and without bright impressions. I walked the well-known route. By evening, on the descent into the valley of the Longot'yoghan River, as two years ago, I saw a large camp of the Zyryans. I stopped by, clarified how to find the path winding through the dense bushes, walked a kilometer away from the chums, and set up camp for the night.

Sitting in the tent, satisfied with the journey I had made, having crossed the milestone of fifty kilometers in a day for the first time, I prepared an extra portion of mashed potatoes. Just as I began to eat it, I heard the sound of a motor. Less than a minute later, five meters from the tent, a quad bike stopped, pulling wooden sledges loaded with plastic barrels of water.

A wonderful embodiment of a harmonious combination of progress and the traditions of the past. It turns out I had set up camp in a place where water is taken for the needs of a large encampment. Another brief conversation ensued, at the end of which I received a lucky “lottery ticket.” The driver introduced himself as Georgy Terentyev, the foreman of Brigade No. 1 of the reindeer herding team from Salekhard, and he informed me that it was his birthday today and invited me to his chum for tea.

The unfinished mashed potatoes were left to cool in the tent, and just five minutes later, holding the plastic barrels of water to keep them from flying around on

the bumpy tundra road, I raced towards the sharply peaked light chums standing out against the backdrop of the evening mountains.



The destroyed bridge over the Kurgovoy stream



Chum of Georgy Terentyev



Visiting the Reindeer Herdsmen

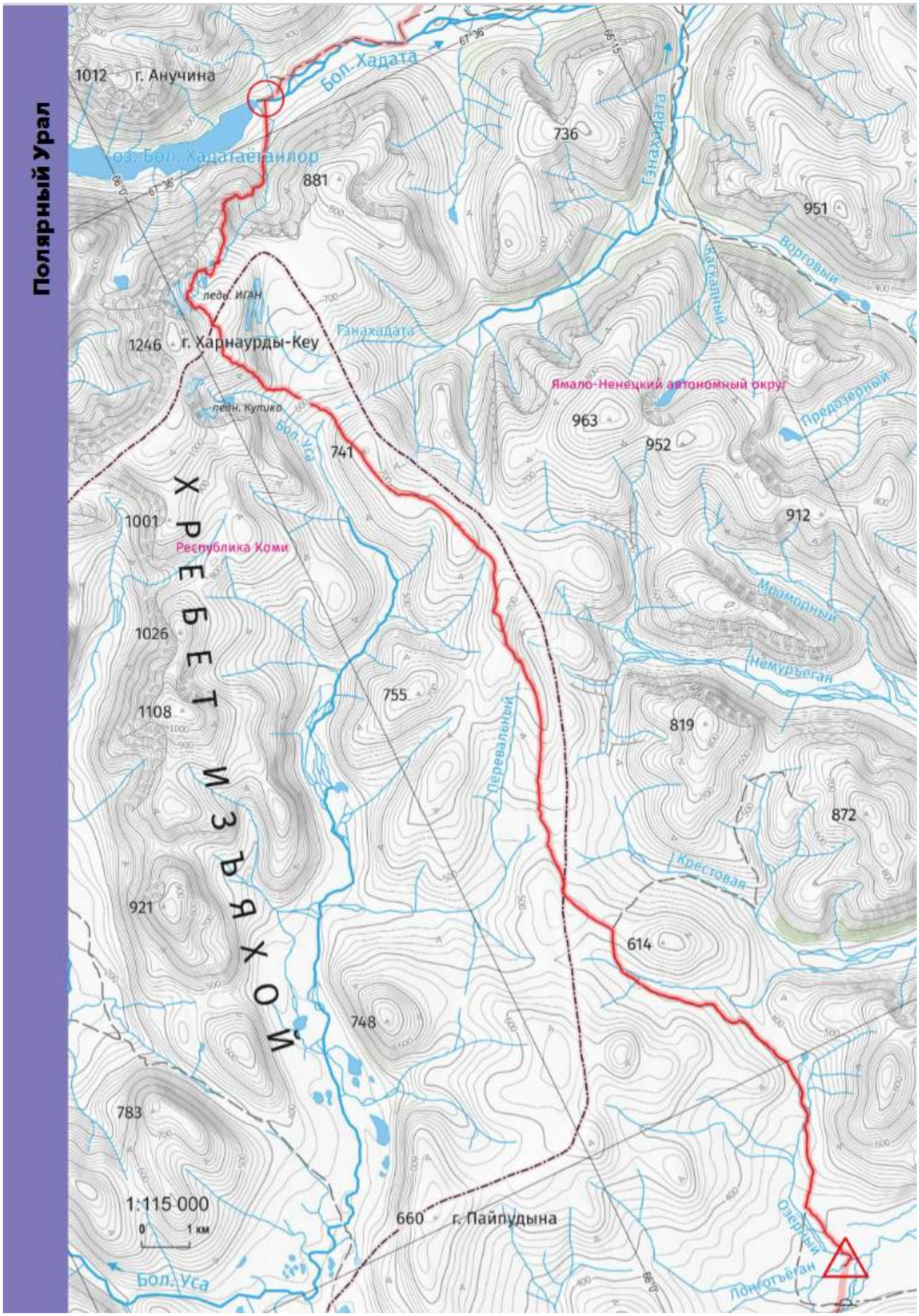
Half an hour later, I was lying on reindeer skins, and it was hard to believe the sharp change in my surroundings. Just a moment ago, I was spending the evening in my lonely tent, and now I was in a bright, spacious chum filled with the sounds of children, delicious aromas, and interesting conversations.

Having tea in a chum means plenty of reindeer meat, flatbreads, and other very tasty food. And, of course, rivers of tea.

I was surprised to learn that Georgy knows Marina Galkina; he took her to the Harnaurdy-Keu massif about ten to fifteen years ago, and somewhere there is a stream that, after those events, the reindeer herders call Galkina-Shor. Well, knowing from experience Marina's incredible charm, I can easily believe that she could be remembered for such a long time and that peaks, rivers, and passes could be named after her. Georgy asked me to send his regards to Marina, which I gladly promised to do since we talk to each other several times a year.

We stayed up late, and I really didn’t want to leave these hospitable people, but the road demanded respect and rest. I said goodbye shortly after midnight and, swaying under the weight of the food I had loaded, returned to my lonely dwelling.

Soon I too will hear the familiar children's chatter; I can hardly wait.



The Polar Urals

Mount Anuchina *Bolshaya Khadata River*

Lake Bolshoye Khadatayetanlor

Genakhadata River

IGAN Glacier

Vorgovyy River

Kaskadnyy River

Mount Kharnaundy-Keu

Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Predozyornyy River

Kulika Glacier

Bolshaya Usa River

Komi Republic

Mramornyy River

Nemuryegan River

Perevalnyy River

Izyakhoy Range

Krestovaya River

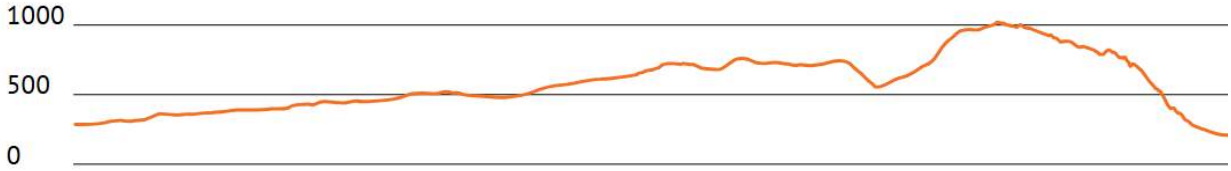
Mount Paypudyna

Longotyogan River

Day 106

The Longotyogan River – the IGAN Glacier – Lake Bolshoye Khadatayoganlor

36 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 3070 km



August 14, 2021

The weather continues to become gloomy, and so do I. In the morning, I felt as if I had a hangover; evidently, yesterday's excessive overeating and late bedtime did not do my body any good. I lay in the tent for a long time, lacking the moral strength to set out on the route. I finally gathered myself by nine in the morning.

The first half of the day was spent walking along the low, gentle tundra peaks, crossing from the valley of the Longotyogan River to the source of the Bolshaya Usa, under one of the iconic peaks of this part of the Ural Mountains – Mount Kharnaurdy-Keu (1246), which, according to some sources, translates as "the mountain from which the fawn fell", while others translate it as "the stone of the jumping bull."



Alpine profiles behind the Izyakhoy Ridge



At first, the clouds were high, and I could even see the peaks of the distant mountain range, as well as some very interesting charismatic sharp peaks behind it from certain heights. However, when I got closer, the bad weather took over, wrapping the ridge in a dense veil of clouds.

I wasn't very interested in the peak at 1246; I had already been there and didn't want to climb into the cloud for the second time just for it. However, I still had an unfinished business from my last visit: for some unimaginable reason, I had passed by the largest glacier in the Ural Mountains – IGAN (Institute of Geography of the Academy of Sciences). That was the glacier I hesitated about. Should I go or not? The glacier located beneath the peak seemed to be covered by clouds as well. Several times, depending on visibility and some emotional waves, I changed my decision. At

one moment, I convinced myself that there was nothing to do there, that climbing into this white nothingness would be a waste of time and energy, and at another moment, I persuaded myself that after all, the largest glacier in the Ural Mountains was important!



Igan Glacier

With that thought, I approached the ascent to the mountain. Somehow, I instinctively began to ascend without seriously considering the reasonableness of it. As expected, I found myself in a cloud with visibility of no more than 50 meters upon reaching the top. The only reminder that the glacier was somewhere nearby was the bamboo markers scattered here and there, apparently left by glaciologists who had brought them with them and abandoned them on the mountain. It wasn't until the

evening that I realized the oddity of the combination of a polar rocky desert and tropical bamboo. While I was there on the mountain, I took it for granted.

Fortunately, at that moment, I felt a sharp hunger and decided to have lunch while also waiting to see if the weather would change.

A small miracle happened: by the end of my meal, I noticed the silhouettes of rocks on the opposite side of the glacier. The clouds began to part.

At that point, I knew I couldn't waste a minute; one never knows how long this weather window would last. Tossing my gear into my backpack, I hurried toward the glacier.

And just ten minutes later, it fully revealed itself before me in all its grandeur. A wide band of firn, transitioning below into bluish ice, filled the entire slope of the ridge, framed to the north by pointed rocky peaks. The glacier was about 700 meters wide and more than a kilometer long.

And then I made one of the silliest decisions of the entire route. Standing at the upper edge of the glacier, watching the blue sky appear above and the rays of the setting sun washing over the mountains, feeling the light fade, I hurriedly made a wrong and dangerous decision. I began to descend directly to the foot of the glacier, traversing its body. From above, it didn’t seem too steep and didn’t appear to pose any problems at first glance. However, with my experience, I should have anticipated the difficulties and dangers of such a descent in running shoes. As they say, even an old woman can have a misstep.

I passed the upper part of the glacier without problems, but the lower I descended, the denser the snow became, first turning into firn, and then becoming simply bluish glacial ice. The slope, which had seemed so insignificant from above, became less comfortable with every step. The only things saving me from falling and sliding down were stones of various sizes, embedded in the ice, from crumbs to boulders, and small cracks. Very slowly and carefully, picking a zigzagging path down using handholds, while cursing myself thoroughly, I crawled to the end of the glacier. The only thought in my head was: “If I fell off the glacier two days before finishing, I would become the greatest loser in the history of the Ural Mountains!”

There was also a positive aspect to the dangerous descent: I reached the foot of the glacier just in time, as the sun had not yet completely disappeared behind the mountains, adding a golden hue to my photographs. In the last moments, managing to decipher the labyrinth of water streams and moraines, I emerged onto the high opposite bank and photographed a panorama of the entire glacier.

It was evident that the IGAN, like most glaciers in the Urals, was actively melting and shrinking. This was indicated by the fresh, recently exposed surface of muddy stones emerging from beneath the ice, actively eroded by melting water. Estimating the length of the area not covered by lichens and mosses at about half a kilometer, I guessed that not too long ago, ice had completely covered this territory. Now it had receded back into the cirque.

I was greatly upset by the numerous litters scattered on the rocks and ice, left after many years of glacier studies by glaciologists. Numerous stakes, traps, wire, boards, and other hard-to-recognize debris covered everything around with a uniform layer. It was puzzling how one could study an object for many years and treat it with such neglect.

I descended from the shoulder of the mountain, and a magnificent view of Lake Bol'shoye Khadata'yoganlor opened up before me, surrounded by pointed peaks and dark, enveloping clouds. It seemed that the sunny respite was short-lived. It was quite possible that this was the eye of a cyclone.

The mountains surrounding the winding lake impressed with their grimness and harshness, evoking the Polar Ural. In this landscape, there was even a peak resembling Manaraga.

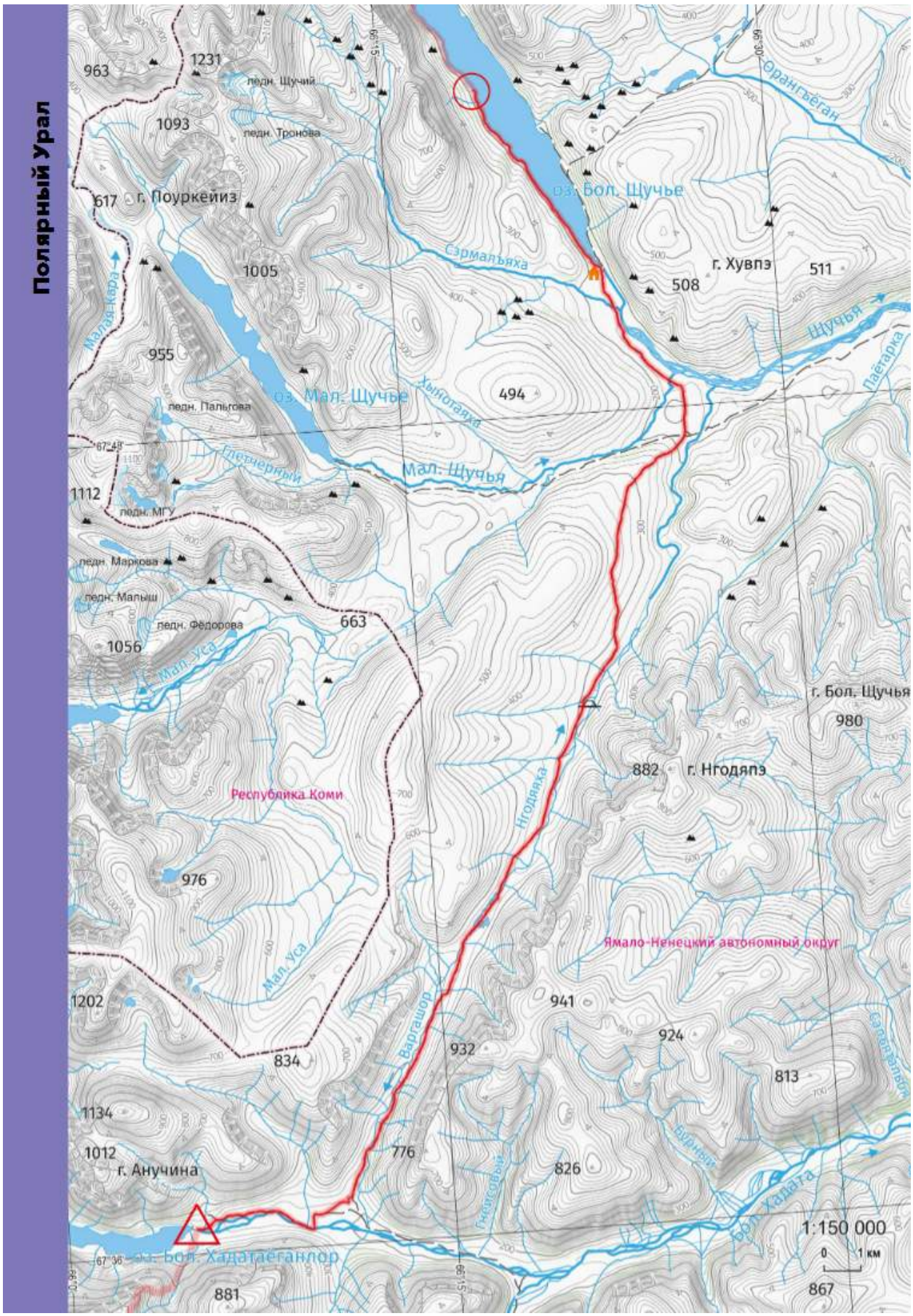


Lake Khadata'yoganlor

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to enjoy the view for long: to the west, in the dark end of the valley, pale streaks of rain appeared, and I faced a challenging and lengthy descent down steep grassy and boulder-strewn slopes. Therefore, after carefully packing all my water-sensitive gear, I hastened down.

A heavy downpour caught up with me at the bottom of the valley, snatching away the last small patches of dryness from my body within seconds. But that no longer mattered.

I crossed the river Bol'shaya Khadata, which flowed out of the lake, set up my tent, climbed into my warm, dry sleeping bag, and soon fell into a deep sleep befitting someone who had accomplished much.



The Polar Urals

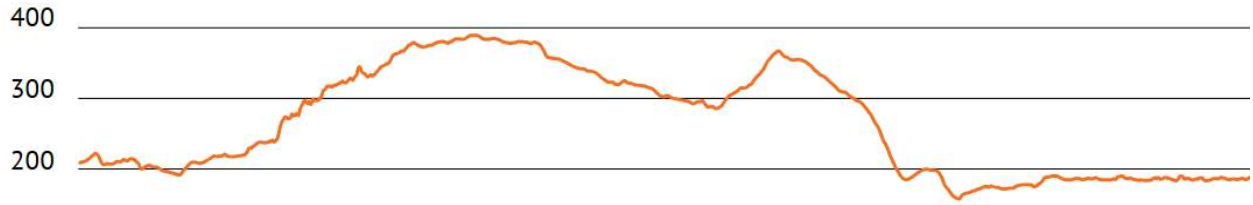
Shchuchy Glacier *Tronov Glacier*

Lake Bolshoye Shchuchye
Orangyogan River
Mount Pourkeyiz
Sermalyakha River
Mount Khuvpe
Malaya Kara River
Palgova Glacier
Lake Maloye Shchuchye
Khinotayakha River
Shchuchya River
Payotarka River
Gletchernyy River
Malaya Shchuchya River
MGU Glacier
Markov Glacier
Malysh Glacier
Fyodorov Glacier
Malaya Usa River
Mount Bolshaya Shchuchya
Komi Republic
Mount Nbodyape
Nbodyakha River
Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug
Vargashor River
Mount Anuchina
Gneysovyy River
Burnyy River
Bolshaya Khadata River
Salyatalbya River
Lake Bolshoye Khadatayoganlor

Day 107

Lake Bol'shoye Khadata'yoganlor – Vorgashor River – Ngodayakha River – Lake Bol'shoye Shchuch'ye

42 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 3112 km



August 15, 2021

It rained all night, and the winds were shaking the tent's fabric. The weather created all the conditions for me to take my time, rest well, and get a good night's sleep.

In the morning, I decided to re-listen to what I had recorded in my diary the evening before. The first minute of the recording was normal, but then my voice became increasingly slurred, quieter, and for about five minutes the recording consisted of some incoherent murmuring. It seems that the road really exhausted me yesterday. I had to dictate everything again based on my fresh memories.



Bad weather at Lake Khadata'yoganlor



At Oleg Venenko's Camp

Every evening, I have to spend a lot of time and effort summarizing, recording videos and audio for future use.

To be honest, this is one of my least favorite moments of the day – when I have done everything, and all that's left is to deservedly crawl into my sleeping bag and relax. But no, I have to sit down and dictate the diary, process the photos, and write a note about the day to send to Tatyana Sergeevna. Thus, for many days now, I've been trying to write the diary on the go during the day, in small fragments. Yesterday, I neglected this, and here's what happened.

Without waiting for the rain to stop, I set out on the route at 9:20. First, I approached the lake. The wind was freely roaming across its surface, racing through the narrow valley, raising white-crested waves and crashing them onto the shore.

Somewhere out there, behind the veil of clouds and rain, were yesterday's peaks. If I hadn't seen them yesterday, I wouldn’t have believed they were there. On the shore, there was a catamaran with a motor, and nearby were tents showing no signs of life. Standing on the shore, under the gusts of wind filled with raindrops, was not particularly pleasant, but some magical harshness of the moment and the place

held me there. I stood, breathed in the wind, turned around, and ventured further into the mountains.

As I had anticipated, once I moved away from the lake's surface by a couple of kilometers and descended a bit down the slope, the wind and rain significantly diminished. Perhaps the shoreline of the lake in this valley is the windiest and rainiest place.

About 5 kilometers later, I saw the chums, exactly in the same place as two years ago. At that time, I met their foreman, Oleg Venenko. We had a wonderful series of photographs featuring him. Later, I even sent them by mail to the camp, but I had no information on whether they reached the recipient. This was a good reason to stop by and find out.

Unfortunately, Oleg was not at the camp; he had gone to the herd grazing at the other end of the valley and was not expected to return for a couple of days. But thankfully, I was recognized, and they told me that the photographs arrived safely. They invited me to stay and wait for the owner. After I declined, they provided me with some bread, lightly salted muksun, and, most importantly, a whole fresh cucumber. Now, that was true wealth! Vegetables – this is what I miss most on the trek!

For the rest of the day, I walked along an all-terrain road through the valley, which connects the two rivers – Vorgashor and Ngodyaykha – and leads to Lake Bolshoye Shchuchye. This route would have been quite dull and unremarkable if it weren't for another encounter with the reindeer herders.



Crossing the valley connecting the Vorgashor and Ngodyaykha rivers



Lake Bolshoye Shchuchye

Passing by another nomadic camp and noticing no signs of life, I decided not to disturb the hosts and move on. However, the dogs did not allow me to do so

unnoticed, bursting into loud barking. From the tent, a woman's face quickly appeared; she looked me over and, a few minutes later, hurried towards me accompanied by a group of children under a light drizzle. We greeted each other, and she began to ask how I was doing, where I was going, and why.

This was somewhat unusual; I had not previously encountered such curiosity from women in the camps. But soon the mysterious behavior of the hostess was explained in the simplest way: just as we finished our ritual exchange of pleasantries and news, she insisted on offering me reindeer meat, sewing items, and skins. Upon receiving my refusal, she immediately lost interest in me, turned around, and hurried back to the warmth of the tent.

A bit later, while continuing my journey, I remembered that two years ago, right at this same spot, women had similarly offered me something for purchase. The young people here are not lost; in this camp, the entrepreneurial spirit is well developed. Perhaps this is related to the fact that the camp is situated on the road that tourists travel on their way to Lake Bolshoye Shchuchye in all-terrain vehicles, and these people can take a lot of goods with them.

Walking towards the lake, I hoped that at its nearest end there would be a cabin that had previously been used for the residence of inspectors of the state Gornokhadatin Nature Reserve, and now it stood empty for most of the time. I planned to use it for an overnight stay. However, upon reaching the site, I noticed trekking poles by the entrance.

It became clear that I was not the first occupant of this cabin today and, evidently, I would not be staying the night. Inside, I was greeted by a guy named Nikita from Penza, also a solo traveler, who was making a hiking and water route across the Polar Urals. We had a pleasant conversation, shared a meal, I dried my tent, and said my goodbyes. I didn't want to spend the rest of the day in idle chatter.

I decided to walk a few more kilometers, at least half the lake. However, I quickly began to doubt the correctness of my decision. I walked along the southwest shore, right at the water's edge. At first, the wind was not too strong, but gradually it began to pick up. Periodically, squalls hit, flattening the tall grasses and almost

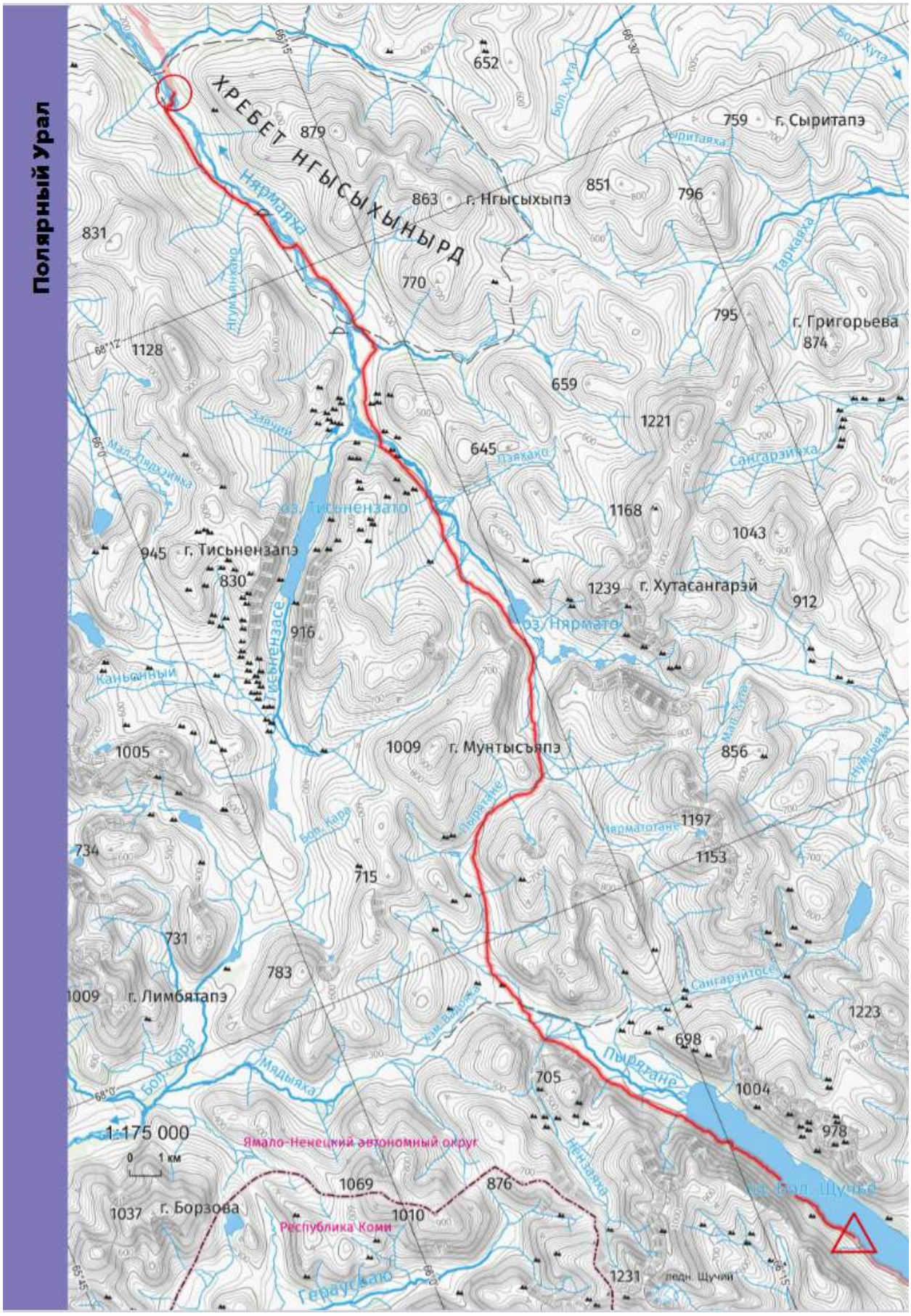
knocking me off my feet. Water whirlpools began to rise over the lake, the middle of the lake was covered in whitecaps, obviously indicating that it was blowing even harder and the storm was serious.

It became obvious that setting up the tent on the open shore or in the tundra was unwise, as the wind could strengthen even more at night. I decided to seek shelter from the wind, but it was nowhere to be found. In search of cover, I walked the last few kilometers and was almost in despair, seeing ahead a very narrow, rocky edge of the shore that transitioned into a steep mountainside. However, in the last hundred meters, I finally found a flat area, relatively well sheltered by thickets of willows. It was there, under their protection, that I pitched my tent.

The bushes did not fully block the wind, but they significantly weakened it. I spent the end of the day in the tent, only occasionally standing up and peeking out from the thicket to see if anything had changed on the lake. I did not want to accept that one of the key places of the route – the deepest lake in the Urals, one of the most beautiful – was hidden from me by bad weather. By nightfall, the storm had intensified, and I lay in the tent listening to the roar of the wind and the flapping of the shelter under its gusts. It was frightening to imagine what was happening in the darkness on the water.



The tent under the willow thicket



The Polar Urals

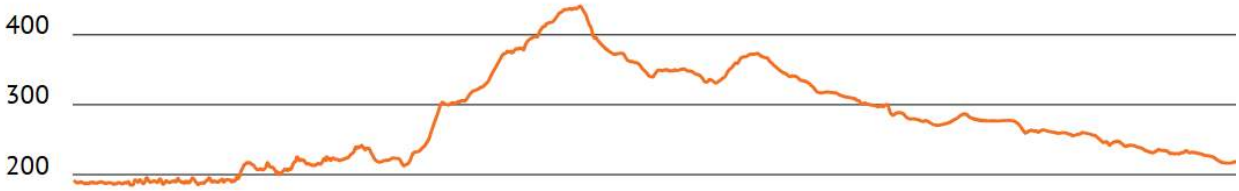
Bolshaya Khuta River *Ngysykhynyrd Range*

Mount Ngysykhypye
Syritayakha River
Mount Syritapye
Nyarmayakha River
Tarkayakha River
Ngumyankhako River
Zayachiy
Mount Grigoryeva
Peyakhako River
Sangareyakha River
Malaya Pyadkheyyakha River
Lake Tisnenzato
Mount Tisnenzapye
Tisnenzasyo River
Lake Nyarmato
Mount Khutasangarey
Kanyonnyy
Mount Muntysyapye
Numgyyakha River
Bolshaya Kara River
Nyarmatoganye River
Pyaryatanyo River
Mount Limbayatapye
Myadyyakha River
Khem-Vadoyakha River
Pyaryatanyo River
Sangareytosyo River
Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug
Nenzayakha River
Lake Bolshoye Shchuchye
Komi Republic
Gerausvayu River
Shchuchy Glacier

Day 108

Lake Bol'shoye Shchuch'ye - Riv N'yarmayakha

52 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 3164 km



August 16, 2021

Movement forward – since the very first day of my journey, I have been thinking only about it: forward and only forward, not a step back. However, today this idea reached its peak: I set out without even having breakfast; I had no appetite. I wanted to pack my backpack and go while the sky above was blue and the wind had died down, wasting not a second of hiking time.

In a hurry, in some kind of exhilaration, I walked the rocky shore of the lake, ignoring the layer of slimy algae covering it. As a natural consequence, during yet another leap from one stone to another, I slipped, fell, and hit my knee hard. The fall suddenly cooled my enthusiasm, delivering a silent but very clear message that nothing had yet been accomplished; any step I took on the last 100 km, just like the previous three thousand, could be the last for the expedition.



Lake Bol'shoye Shchuch'ye



A swampy area of tundra

The caution and slow pace didn't last long; I crossed the lake and, as soon as I entered the valley of the Pyratanë River, I felt the solid tundra beneath my feet and, once again, unconsciously began to pick up speed. I walked on and on, with some internal fury, throwing myself at obstacles and overcoming them, not allowing myself to pause. I trudged through the muddy sludge in the marshy areas, not wasting time on detours, charging into rivers without searching for a ford, cursing as I broke through extensive bush thickets covering the swampy tundra at the bottoms of the valleys. Now, looking back, I realize that I was behaving recklessly, letting my emotions take over, but the awareness of the goal's proximity and, at the same time, its inaccessibility here and now stripped me of common sense.

Fortunately, luck was on my side; the rivers were shallow, and in the thickets, I could almost always find a vorga – as the reindeer herders call the small paths that have appeared as a result of their centuries-old migrations along the same routes.

By lunchtime, I crossed into the valley of the N'yarmayakha River, where signs of reindeer herders became even more prevalent. Towards the end of the day, just below the mouth of the Tisnezatosë River, when there were no more than 20 km left before I exited the mountains, I unexpectedly stumbled upon what I called a "parade of encampments." Specifically, I first found myself deep within a reindeer herd, which was quite fortunate, considering until now I had only captured close-ups of solitary reindeer in my photo archive.

Then, very soon, I saw the first encampment a couple of kilometers ahead – then the second, about 2-3 km further – the third. And all of them had their herds. I

had often heard discussions about how there were too many private enterprises in the tundra, and here I was, witnessing it firsthand.

The problem is that reindeer primarily feed on tundra lichen, which takes many years, if not decades, to recover naturally. One of the main skills of a reindeer herder is to correctly and timely drive the animals from one place to another, preventing complete pasture exhaustion. When the herd is large but singular, it is easier to plan and coordinate its movement; however, when many independent encampments migrate across a small area of tundra, this becomes nearly impossible.

Perhaps nature will solve the problem itself – the tundras will become depleted, and the reindeer population will gradually decrease on its own – but, of course, those who have staked the economic well-being of their families on this industry will suffer.



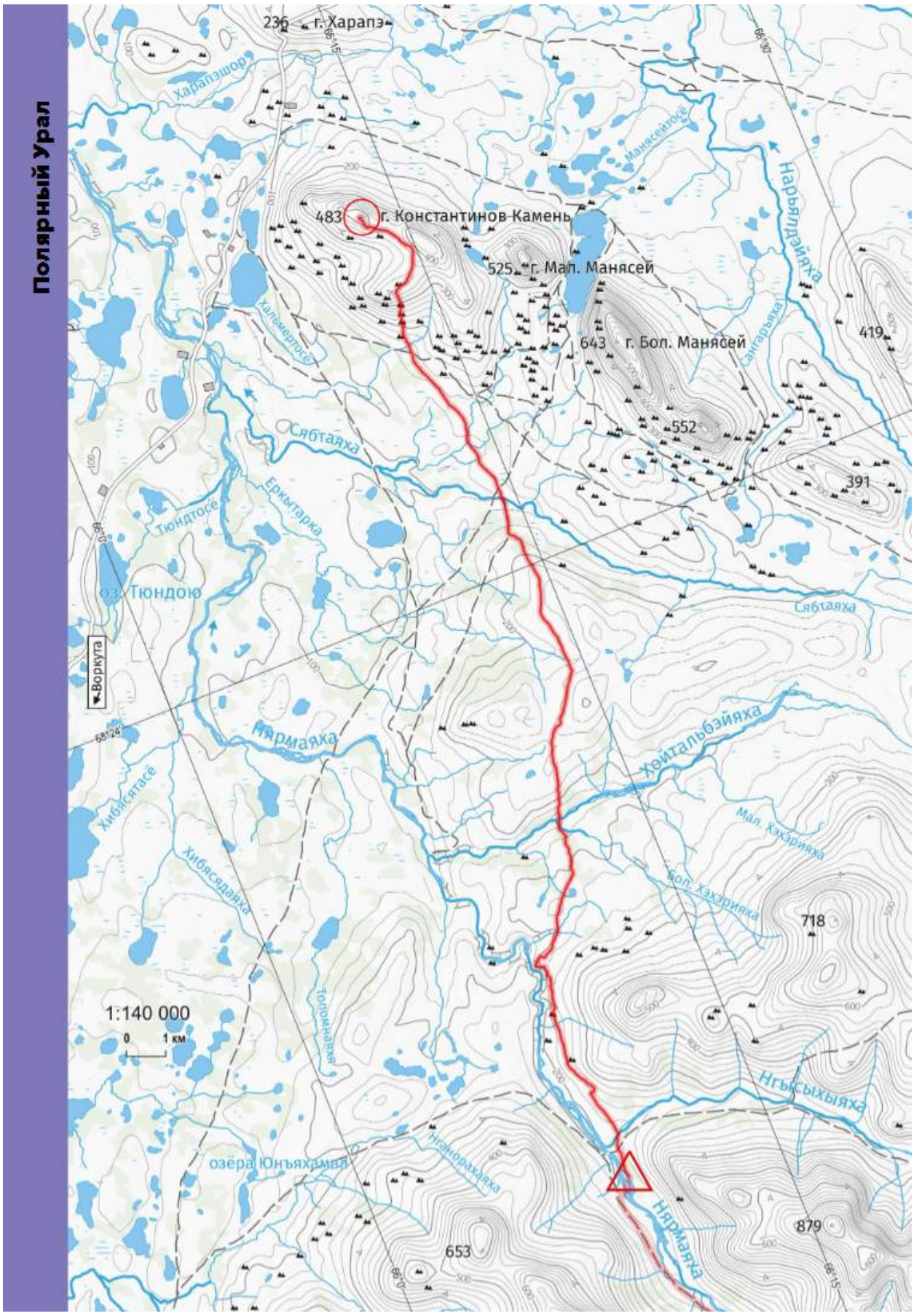
A Herd of Reindeer on the N'yarmayakha River

The end of the day was marked by the dilemma of when to cross the N'yarmayakha River. A road ran along the left bank through the lowland of the valley, making it convenient and quick to travel; however, with each kilometer I covered, I noticed that the river was becoming deeper and more voluminous. The right bank was overgrown with tall bushes, making movement quite uncomfortable.

I walked along the road, glancing anxiously at the riverbed, worrying that I might have to turn back and search for a ford upstream.

Ultimately, it was a powerful rain that appeared in the upper reaches of the valley and was inexorably approaching me that made the decision. Without giving it much thought, I jumped into the water and waded across the river at times up to my waist. It was not very pleasant; the strong, resilient current pushed me downstream and tried to knock me off my feet. Fortunately, everything turned out well.

I stood on a high, flat tundra bank with a view of the mountains. Despite the wind and the rain that occasionally swept in, I lay with the entrance open, feeling a touch of sadness in my heart as I looked at the dark peaks. Perhaps this would be my last night with a view of the Urals on this long journey. Soon, everything would change significantly; our paths would diverge. I would be swept away by a whirlpool of activities, ideas, and concerns, while they would remain here – greeting and seeing off travelers, silent and beautiful.



The Polar Urals

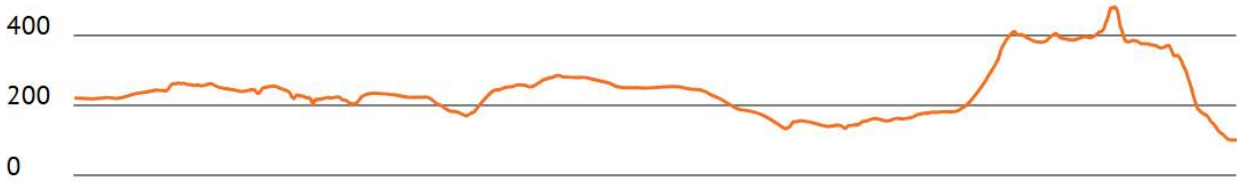
Mount Khara *Kharapeshor River*

Manyaseytosyo River
Naryaldeyakha River
Mount Konstantin Kamen
Mount Malaya Manyasey
Khalmertosyo River
Mount Bolshaya Manyasey
Sangaryakha River
Syabtayakha River
Tyundtosyo River
Yerkytarka River
Lake Tyundoyu
Vorkuta
Nyarmayakha River
Khibyasyatasyo River
Khibyasyadayakha River
Khoytalbeyyakha River
Malaya Khekheriyakha River
Bolshaya Khekheriyakha River
Topomnyakhya River
Yunyakhamal Lakes
Nganorakhayakha River
Ngysykhyyakha River
Nyarmayakha River

Day 109

N'yarmayakha River – Hoytalbeyakha River – Syabtayakha River - Konstantinov Kamen' Mountain (483.2 m)

30 km covered during the day. Total distance covered – 3194 km



August 17, 2021

The early morning greeted me with emotional swings: I felt joyful at times, sad at others, longing to run faster, yet not wanting to leave the tent at all, not wanting this journey to end. For the last time, I packed my tent and set off on the final leg, when from the northeast, the sunrise burst forth on the clouds in vibrant colors.

After a few kilometers, I left the foothills of the mountains and entered the hilly tundra. I was to cross almost directly for 30 km, reaching the final ridge of the Polar Ural, crowned in the north by Konstantinov Kamen' – a peak that was meant to be the finishing point.



Canyon on the N'yarmayakha River



Konstantinov Mountain in the Clouds

of my entire journey. Very soon, from the first hill, I saw my distant goal. On the horizon, the base of the ridge loomed darkly, contrasting sharply in color with the tundra and dissolving into a white cloud.

I passed along the canyon of the N’yarmayakha River, the bright blue river flowing far below in a narrow rocky bed, interrupted by numerous rapids and waterfalls. I was glad I had crossed to the opposite bank in time, as there was no way to even think about crossing here, and if I had descended below the canyon, it would have likely been too deep for wading.

For the rest of the journey, I traveled through uniform tundras with a view of my goal, which was almost completely hidden in the clouds. Finally, I could think about the finish. However, for some reason, I did not want to at all. After more than a hundred days savoring these thoughts had become the sweetest and most forbidden fruit for me, and now that it became clear that I would reach it, I lost the desire. I simply walked, listened to music, sat under the tent's cover in the rain, and it felt as though there was no point ahead, very close, to which I had been striving all these days.

I began to ascend the mountain in the clouds, visibility dropped sharply. I approached the last stone rise and looked up. Somewhere there, in the white nothingness, my goal was 300 meters away. I stood for a moment, abstractedly looking down at my feet, inexplicably patting a stone as if checking the reliability of the stone staircase leading to my dream, and took a step. A couple of minutes later, I

found myself on the flat stone summit of Konstantinov Kamen' Mountain. That's it! I did it. I had a dream – and now it was at my feet!

The funniest thing was that I hardly felt anything at that moment, and it stirred a storm of feelings within me. How could this be?!

I spent many years only daring to dream about this. Then, I finally made up my mind, prepared for several years, set off on my journey, walked thousands of kilometers, forbidding myself to think about this moment, and now it has finally arrived, and I don't care?! I stand alone on an ordinary, bare boulder summit, just like hundreds I have already crossed in the Urals, and I am just the same as I was yesterday and the day before. The wind blows, clouds drift through me, I'm freezing...

Evidently, it is true what they say: the journey is more important than the destination. What is truly important and valuable is everything that has come before this moment, all those millions of steps, breaths, sunrises and sunsets, moments. Each of them is individually no more valuable than any other, but when they all come together to form a unified story, they become something greater.

And then I sat down at the summit, sheltered from the wind, closed my eyes, and began to recall day by day this long, long route. The steppe peaks of the far south, the boulder rivers, the sunrise over the Chusovaya, the abandoned seeder in the mountains with a view of Kosvinsky Stone, the Gothic castle at the summit of Munintump, the exhausting yet beautiful taiga between Manpupuner and Shugur, the wall of Telposiz, the kind people who helped me, the snow-covered summit of Narodnaya, and further and further north...

And I felt happiness. Now, looking at any latitude on the map of the Urals hanging at my home, I will have something to remember.

I have crossed the Urals!

Я прошел Урал!



Epilogue

Well, my friends, we have traversed the Ural Mountains from end to end. While dictating my diary entries during my nights, on the go, and during breaks, I planned to conclude the tale of the expedition on the summit of Konstantinov Stone. However, I soon realized that this story continues. Until I process the vast amounts of information I have gathered into films and a book, it will not come to an end.

On that last day, I descended from the mountain, made my way to the road below, sat on my backpack for a couple of hours, caught a ride, and soon reached Vorkuta without any adventures. The next morning, I boarded the Vorkuta – Labytnangi train, and by evening, I arrived in Salekhard. I spent the night there and in just 2.5 hours on a direct flight, I rewound nearly 100 days of travel.

I will never forget the meeting at the airport. With a shout of “Papa!” three-year-old Katya dashed through barriers and security into the baggage claim area, jumping into my arms. Tears flowed from my eyes again, just like on the first day.

But these were entirely different tears – tears of a happy man. I hugged Olenka, inhaled her magical scent that only small children possess, kissed Tatyana Sergeyevna, drank champagne right outside the airport with friends, and immersed myself in the whirlwind of daily life.

Three years have passed, and now you hold this book in your hands. It has not been easy for me; compared to the creation of this work, the trans-Ural route seems like a walk in the park, without doubts or worries. I do not deceive myself with illusions about the literary perfection of this book; I do not believe many will read it cover to cover in one go. However, when it was conceived, I understood that this would be the case. This book is about something else; it is about the experience and a comprehensive reflection of the entire Ural day by day, step by step. In my opinion, this is its value. By reading or at least carefully leafing through it, a person will gain insight into the Ural Mountains and what they are like at each point along my route. And I hope that someone, inspired by the beauty and attentive to the shortcomings of the route, decides to draw their own line across the Urals – an even more beautiful,

logical, and swift one. And if that happens, even if it is just one route, I will consider the goal of this book achieved and that it was written for a reason.

I reach out to you, my friends! Go ahead, do it, traverse the Ural Mountains better! It remains a worthy goal!

What will happen to me now? With this expedition complete, I can breathe freely for a short while and begin to realize other large-scale projects in my mountains, so I hope this is not our last meeting in the pages of a book.

I continue onward in the Ural Mountains, and I look forward to seeing you on its paths!