

Elbrus Climb Information

THE CAUCASUS MOUNTAINS rise between the great plains of Russia and the mountainous territories of Trans-Caucasian. They extend for 1200 km from East to West, between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. The mountain system includes dozens of peaks over 4000 meters high and about 2000 glaciers.

THE CENTRAL CAUCASUS is the heart of the Caucasus, the highest and most fascinating part of the entire mountain system and the one with the most difficult access. Closed off to the west by Mt. Elbrus and to the east by Mt. Kazbek, the divide is quite articulate and complex and branches off to the north and south into a series of buttresses. Here lie the most famous rock faces in the Caucasus system scattered over the regions of Mt. Elbrus, Mt. Bezengi, Svanetia and, in the easternmost part of the central Caucasus, of Digoria, Karaugorn and Tsey.



PRIELBRUSIE or the area around Mt. Elbrus is the most frequented area in the Central Caucasus. Many lateral valleys converge in the main valley where the Baksan River flows, and lead to the most famous and beautiful mountains in the Caucasus range, such as Mt. Donguz-Orun (4468 m), Mt. Shkhelda (4320 m), Mt. Chatin (4368 m), legendary Mt. Ushba (4710 m), and Mt. Elbrus itself (5642 m), the highest peak in Europe. The Prielbrusie area is easily reached from Mineralnye Vody.

MOUNT ELBRUS dominates the countryside of the Central Caucasus like a two-headed icy giant. In fact it has two peaks that correspond to two different volcano vents: the western peak (Zapadnaya) is the tallest one, while the eastern peak (Vostochnaya), 5621 meters high, still has a gigantic crater 250 meters in diameter. The entire mountain is covered by an immense sheet of ice that takes up 145 square kilometres and in some zones is 400 meters thick. From the col that divides the two peaks the white slopes of the mountain descend gently, splitting up into tongues of ice and crevasses lying in the many striking valleys that radiate from the mountain. A circular lava massif, it has a diameter of 18 kilometres and more than 70 large and small glaciers flow from its slopes.

THE FIRST person to climb the mountain was Russian Killar Khashirov in 1829, as part of a military scientific expedition. 39 years later British climber Douglas Freshfield climbed the East Peak and in 1874 the higher summit was reached by F Crawford Grove.

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THE APPROACH to Mount Elbrus is from the villages of Terskol and Cheget in the Baksan Valley to the village of Azau where there is a cable car station. A road snakes uphill across the left side of the south-eastern spur of Elbrus and continues to the Old Vista station and the Bochki Barrels, also known as Garabashi. The route continues upwards on permanent glacier in the direction of East Peak on an easy inclined snow slope. After half an hour there is the National Park Hut, newly built in 2010. The angle steepens slightly (35°) where you bear left and meet a row of rocks where the Priut-11 Hut can be found and a new one above it. The original Priut Hut was built in 1938 but was burnt down in accident in 1998.

DANGERS - There are no major crevasses or objective dangers on the main route, but weather is very temperamental and visibility can drop very rapidly. Sudden storms and extremely cold weather are common. It is easy to become disorientated and wander off route, and there are many stories of frostbite and hypothermia injuries on the mountain every year.

Altitude is high enough to require good acclimatisation and an increased liquid intake. Though the standard route is not technically difficult, crampons are required and an ice axe is preferred. Some patches on the open slope in the early part of the season can be icy, requiring the use of a rope with inexperienced climbers.



Elevation of main huts and points

Azau Valley	2350m
Old Vista	2900m
Glacier Lake	3300m
Bockha Barrels (right)	3900m
National Park Hut	4050m
Priut – 11 Hut	4157m
New Priut Hut	4350m
Pastukhov Rocks	4670m
Saddle	5416m
West Summit	5642m



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THE NORMAL SUMMIT ROUTE is a long climb over a moderate incline that requires good acclimatization but has no technical difficulties. However, despite the apparent simplicity of this route, it can be dangerous. The altitude, variable weather, frequent violent storms and low temperature transforms the ascent into a real high altitude adventure! The average time is from eight to ten hours for the ascent and about four hours for the descent. Crampons and ski poles (or walking axes) are necessary for this climb. In autumn, winter and spring the face between the Pastukhov rocks and the col is covered with ice.



THE ASCENT OF WEST PEAK (Standard Route, South Face) follows the broad slope to the left of the snow-covered row of rocks as far as the small rock islands known as Pastukhov Rocks. Continue straight up for 400 metres towards the East Peak, gradually bear left and traverse until reaching a huge basin below the West Peak. This leads to the saddle or col and is a good place to rest and eat (5-6 hours from Priut-11). Head west and to the left side of the saddle, ascending the steeper snow slope on a rising traverse to the rocks of the shoulder of the West Peak and a short distance up to the plateau. Cross the broad plateau and easy ground to gain the summit.

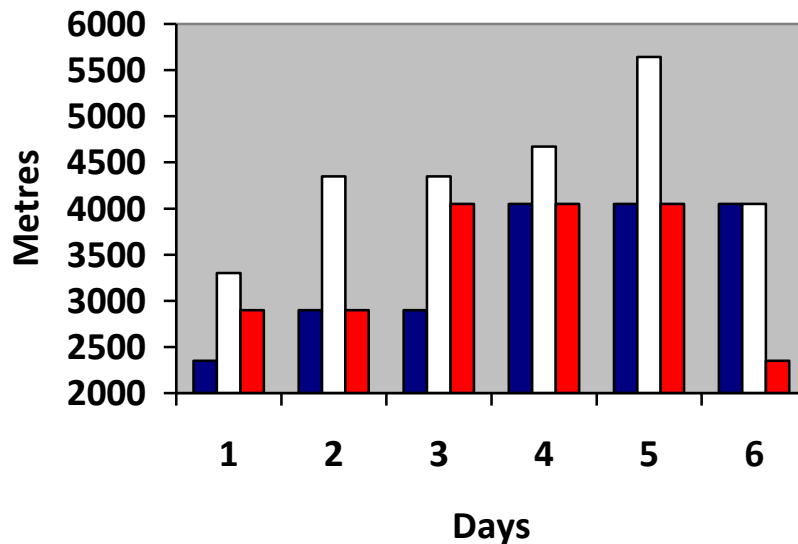
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Plan of acclimatisation

Day	Description
1	Azau – Lake – Old Vista
2	Old Vista – Priut Hut – Old Vista
3	Old Vista – Priut Hut – National Park Hut
4	National Park Hut – Pastukhov Rocks – Nat. Park Hut
5	National Park Hut – summit – National Park Hut, or rest
6	National Park Hut – Azau, or second summit attempt



Elevation graph showing start of day, maximum elevation and sleeping height for our proposed route.



■ Start of day altitude □ Max altitude reached ■ Sleeping altitude

Acclimatisation analysis

The red sleeping altitude bar shows that our programme allows for two nights at 2900 metres and three nights at 4050m, with daily hikes going high. This follows the protocol of climbing high and sleeping low and gives optimum preparation for going to the summit. We regard this as safe and practical. During the three acclimatisation days when sleeping in the valley at 2300 metres, we will hike up to maximum of 3300 metres.

In the event of bad weather or other reasons to prevent summiting on day 5, the team can remain at 4050 metres for one further night before attempting to summit again on day 6. It is not realistically possible to summit and descend to the valley floor all in one day because the snow rattracks and cable cars will have stopped running.

During the ascent it is advisable to read our document *Trekking at High Altitude* and keep a log of how you feel on the AMS scorecard. It is important to stay healthy, eat and sleep well and increase liquid intake for a safe expedition.