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Published in the USA

European Journal of Contemporary Education
E-ISSN 2305-6746
2023. 12(1): 309-318
DOI: 10.13187/ejced.2023.1.309
<https://ejce.cherkasgu.press>

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Cherkas Global University Hiking Club (1996–2022)

Anastasiia A. Cherkasova ^{a,*}

^aCherkas Global University, Washington, USA

Abstract

This work examines the history of the Cherkas Global University Hiking Club.

The principal source used for this paper was the newspaper *Vestnik Leib-Gvardii* for 1996–1997. Use was also made of relevant materials of private origin and academic publications dealing with expedition activity at Cherkas Global University.

The findings revealed that the Hiking Club at Cherkas Global University was launched in 1996. Over the period from 1996 to 2022 inclusive, members of the teaching and administrative staff of Cherkas Global University completed nearly 100 mountain hikes, some of which included as many as ten overnight stops. Whereas the highest peaks ascended in 1996 did not exceed 1,000 meters above sea level (the Western Caucasus), as early as 1999 regular ascensions were also seen by peaks as high as 2,000 to 3,000 meters. Beginning in 2005, trips were also made to peaks as high as 5,000 meters (the Greater Caucasus – Mounts Elbrus and Kazbek). So far, staff members of Cherkas Global University have gone on hiking trips in the US, Norway, Georgia, Russia, and Armenia. These expeditions involved some research, its outcomes including several publications in top-rated journals and a number of rational proposals.

Keywords: Cherkas Global University, Hiking Club, history, period 1996–2022.

1. Introduction

The role played in the life of academic institutions by mass sporting activities is just about as important as the one played by the educational process. Doing sports tends to be given a great deal of attention by them, with a focus on creating proper conditions for both the educational process and sports training to be an integral part of life in them. As early as primary school, many educational institutions offer their students an opportunity to attend a club specializing in a particular sport, be it soccer or swimming. Apart from volleyball, rugby, water polo, and other sports, some universities are

* Corresponding author
E-mail addresses: a.cherkasova.la@gmail.com (A.A. Cherkasova)

now offering hiking, a sport that involves walking in a scenic mountainous area. This paper will examine the activity of the Hiking Club at Cherkas Global University.

2. Materials and methods

The principal source used for this paper was the newspaper *Vestnik Leib-Gvardii* for 1996–1997. Use was also made of relevant materials of private origin and academic publications dealing with expedition activity at Cherkas Global University.

The nature of this study is such that use had to be made of the descriptive and chronological methods in order to reconstruct the picture of the Hiking Club's activity in the period from 1996 to 2022.

3. Discussion

The historiography on the subject is represented by a set of publications on Cherkas Global University. The first such article, which summarizes the results of the 5-year activity of the International Network Center for Fundamental and Applied Research, was published in 2019 (Tarakanov, Ponomareva, 2019). In 2021, there came out an article describing the history of Cherkas Global University in the period 1992–2014 (Taran, 2021). A summarizing work on the history of the university was released only in 2022. Entitled 'Cherkas Global University (1992–2022): Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow', it was dedicated to the Organization's 30th anniversary (Cherkasova, 2022).

At different times attempts have also been made to describe the history of the university's publishing house, Cherkas Global University Press (Rajović, 2021; Cherkasova, 2022a), as well as the history of its shooting sports society, the Rifle Association (Cherkasova, 2022b).

Despite the attempts undertaken, the historiography on Cherkas Global University remains thin at this time.

4. Results

The first trips to the mountains in the context of military sporting events were made back in 1996, when members of the Military Historical Society were undergoing sport shooting training in the mountains. Chosen as the venue for the sporting activities was Mount Semenovsky Spire, which towers 998 meters above sea level (the foothills of the Western Caucasus in the vicinity of Krasnaya Polyana (home to the Rosa Khutor alpine ski resort, which hosted the Alpine and Nordic events of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi)). These trips were described in the article 'From the History of the Rifle Association in the Cherkas Global University (1992–2022)' (Cherkasova, 2022: 1048-1061).

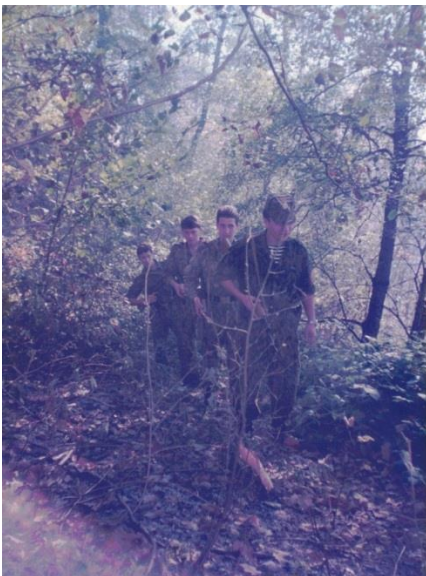


Fig. 1. Group of members of the Military Historical Society during a mountain field trip (November 17, 1996)

This period in the history of the Organization can be illustrated by the photo shown in [Figure 1](#) (taken from the *Vestnik Leib-Gvardii* newspaper) ([Budni i prazdniki, 1996: 2](#)).

Ascensions of peaks with a height of up to 1,000 meters took place in the period 1997–1998 as well ([Budni i prazdniki, 1997: 2](#)). Yet, as more experience was gained, ascensions also began to be seen by peaks that were more complex. Specifically, an attempt was undertaken in 1999 to climb Mount Achikhsho (2,391 meters), which would not be completed. A group, which included Aleksandr Cherkasov, Roman Nekhoroshev, and a few other members of the Society, attempted to climb the mountain head-on. They got to the cliff section, stayed there for the night, and then returned. Subsequently, Mount Achikhsho saw numerous ascensions. For instance, the period 2004–2005 saw as many as 15 climbs of the mountain with overnight stops, including in the winter months.



Fig. 2. Aleksandr Cherkasov on Mount Achikhsho in December 2003

Although most trips were made in the summer months, quite many were undertaken in other times of the season as well. Trip length varied from 1 to 10 days, and the height above sea level varied from 2,000 to over 5,500 meters above sea level. Some routes had a climbing difficulty of 4B, requiring the use of mountaineering equipment.

The multiple mountain trips led to a number of rational proposals. For instance, Aleksandr Cherkasov, who had spent more than one cold night sleeping in a sleeping bag inside a tent, once noticed that sleeping with his socks on would result in troubled sleep due to increased temperature and sleeping without them would get his toes freezing cold, resulting in troubled sleep due to reduced temperature. Eventually, Aleksandr got in the habit of sleeping with his socks halfway on his feet, with his heels left bare – this was the most comfortable option. This is how Aleksandr Cherkasov “invented” in 2005 a pair of half-socks to be worn during an overnight stop in the mountains ([Figure 3](#)).

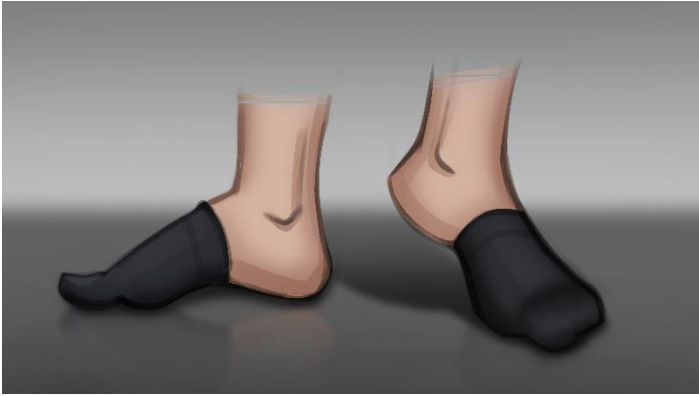


Fig. 3. “Cherkasov half-socks”

In August 2004, a group composed of Mikhail Maydan, Aleksandr Cherkasov, Roman Nekhoroshev, and a few others undertook an expedition to Mount Elbrus (5,642 meters). The plan was to complete the ascension in an extremely short time – go up and down in just 3 days. The group set base camp at a height of 4,200 meters (The Shelter of the Eleven). On the second day, they undertook a radial ascension of Pastukhov Rocks (4,800 meters), and all managed to reach the point. At 2 in the morning of the third day, the group began their ascension of Mount Elbrus. Out of the five participants, two exited the activity at the Pastukhov Rocks stage, and another two halted at the mountain’s saddle at a height of 5,300 meters, with only Mikhail Maydan conquering the peak on the first attempt.

It is worth noting that the group had trained pretty hard before undertaking their Elbrus climb. [Figure 4](#) displays one of the photos taken on a snowy trail on Mount Achikhsho in March 2004.



Fig. 4. Aleksandr Cherkasov on Mount Achikhsho in March 2004

Most of the winter photos were taken with sunglasses on, as the sun’s rays reflecting off the snow could lead to eye damage and it was problematic to move through the snow without them. Another important characteristic of those trips was that members of the groups would set out on the snowy trails without snowshoes on, which seriously complicated the trips, as they often involved wading through some very deep snow.

The hiking life consisted of several stages. These stages will be illustrated through the example of a climb of Mount Achikhsho that took place in 2007. The first stage involved arriving at the slope of the mountain (Figure 5). This was preceded by a period of preparation for the climb, which involved sorting out how much food to take with you, choosing the right time (weather) to do it, and splitting up the hiking gear among members of the crew.



Fig. 5. Mikhail Maydan and Irina Cherkasova, left, on the slope of Mount Achikhsho (September 22, 2007)



Fig. 6. Posing on Mount Achikhsho (Aleksandr Cherkasov closest to the camera) (September 22, 2007)

The second stage involved climbing the mountain (Figure 6). It was divided into the following two parts: 1) moving toward the base camp; 2) moving toward the summit. There were times when the base camp was established at the very summit. During the ascension, the way was led and the rear was brought up at all times by the group's more experienced members. When walking, the group would take their cues from the member bringing up the rear, which helped prevent the group from getting stretched out along the route and, thus, boost the safety of the hikers. Every time someone moving in the middle was seen to be lagging behind the rest of the group, the rearmost member would command the group to interrupt the journey, and they would then make a stop for rest.

The third stage involved setting camp, a highly important part of any trip (Figure 7). Camp was normally set up either at the summit of the mountain or in immediate proximity to it. It is from the camp that radial hikes would be undertaken of various sites, including those of increased difficulty. The crew would first set up the tents, and would then split up into three groups. One of the groups would be in charge of getting some wood in a forest area, the second would do the cooking, and the third would take care of the camp's infrastructure (e.g., the tents and the campfire area). Finally, on resolving all their principal needs, the hikers could get some rest to be ready for their climb in the morning.



Fig. 7. Camping on Mount Achikhsho (September 22, 2007)

It is worth noting that the trips were also significant in terms of applied research. Specifically, in 2008 Aleksandr Cherkasov published a monograph entitled 'A War in the Mountains: Pages in the History of the Defense of the City of Sochi (1942–1943)' (Cherkasov, 2008), concerned with the military action that took place during World War II in the mountains of the Western Caucasus in the USSR. The hikes in this region helped gain a better idea of the nature of the military action in the mountains and form a more realistic picture of the events. Another example is the expedition to Shatili. More specifically, in October 2018, Aleksandr Cherkasov and Aleksandr Volkov undertook an expedition to Georgia with the aim of visiting Shatili, a fortress situated high up in the mountains (Figure 8). Participants in the expedition explored the surrounding area to gain a deeper insight into the siege of the fortress undertaken by Russian troops in 1813 and arrived at a number of interesting inferences (Cherkasov et al., 2019: 166-175).



Fig. 8. Aleksandr Cherkasov posing against the backdrop of Fortress Shatili, Georgia, in October 2018

The 2010s saw climbs of Mount Elbrus in Kabardino-Balkaria, the Alibek glacier in the mountains of Dombay in Karachay-Cherkessia, Mount Agepsta in Abkhazia, and a number of peaks of the Western Caucasus in the vicinity of the cities of Sochi and Tuapse.

Between 2016 and 2019, Aleksandr Cherkasov each year took part in Arctic Floating University expeditions (Novaya Zemlya, Franz Josef Land, and Svalbard). [Figure 9](#) displays one of the photos taken in the Novaya Zemlya archipelago from the direction of the Kara Sea in August 2018.



Fig. 9. Posing in Novaya Zemlya in August 2018

In 2019, Mikhail Maydan conquered another 5-thousander – Eastern Kazbek (5,033 meters).

In March 2020, a radial hike was undertaken in the vicinity of Las Vegas (USA) of the world famous Grand Canyon, the rocks at the bottom of which are nearly two billion years old.

One of the last hikes was the ascension of Mount Elbrus undertaken by Mikhail Maydan, a staff member of Cherkas Global University Press, via its western slope on August 17, 2022 ([Figure 10](#)).



Fig. 10. Mikhail Maydan climbing Mount Elbrus (August 17, 2022)

Despite the adverse weather conditions, the ascension was successful again ([Figure 11](#)).



Fig. 11. Mikhail Maydan, left, standing at the top of Mount Elbrus (August 17, 2022)

On December 22, 2022, the year's last radial hike was undertaken. The participants in this hike of the trails of Sequoia National Park (California, USA), covered by lots of snow at that time already, were Aleksandr, Irina, and Anastasia Cherkasov and Igor Koshkin. Sequoia National Park is known for being home to the General Sherman tree – the largest known living single-stem tree on Earth (Figure 12).



Fig. 12. Sequoia National Park, California, USA (December 22, 2022)

Figure 12 illustrates the contrast in height and size between some of the trees in Sequoia National Park and humans.

5. Conclusion

The Hiking Club at Cherkas Global University was launched in 1996. Over the period from 1996 to 2022 inclusive, members of the teaching and administrative staff of Cherkas Global University completed nearly 100 mountain hikes, some of which included as many as ten overnight stops. Whereas the highest peaks ascended in 1996 did not exceed 1,000 meters above sea level (the Western Caucasus), as early as 1999 regular ascensions were also seen by peaks as high as 2,000 to 3,000 meters. Beginning in 2005, trips were also made to peaks as high as 5,000 meters (the Greater Caucasus – Mounts Elbrus and Kazbek). So far, staff members of Cherkas Global University have gone on hiking trips in the US, Norway, Georgia, Russia, and Armenia. These expeditions involved some research, its outcomes including several publications in top-rated journals and a number of rational proposals.

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