

boy riding shotgun. The carwash people are brilliant. Not only do they clean the car inside and out vigorously, but they also insist I take tea with them, in fact several, and a Hooky full of orange tobacco, (complete with a hideous health warning on the packet showing what my lungs are likely to look like). Judging by my light head could be wacky backy. Finally I decline an invitation for lunch with them and after all this they refuse point blank to be paid for the wash that has taken two hours. Just another example of the amazing generosity of these people.

I meet a very well spoken girl (definitely a Fruit Bat) who has a BA in English Literature and asks me what my religion is before going on to ask what I thought about Muslims. Ever the diplomat I assured her I loved Muslims and Iran. When she asked why Britain hates Iran I tried to explain that it was more our government hating their government than anything else. Most Britain's know nothing of Iran or it's people and would be amazed at what a lovely bunch you are. (Cubbon you would have been proud of me!)

Then I met a lady who had been persecuted for the demonstrations last year and she plus husband are being allowed to leave Iran for the USA presumably to get them out of the Mullahs' hair. It must be very difficult to be a woman here; you have to see it to believe it.

So, Iran has been fantastic as in 2005 thanks to the generosity and friendliness of the people. We leave tomorrow for Turkmenistan and beyond, once again with fond memories and deep-seated concern for the future of the people here.

Following our much-enjoyed rest stop in Mashhad we are up with the lark to drive the 200 kms to the border in the mountains between Iran and Turkmenistan. These mountains are a natural barrier between Iran and the north and appear fairly impenetrable for an army that is probably why both countries have had stable borders for years.

Exiting Iran takes a lot longer than getting in and we spend most of the day at the Turkmenistan border clearing in just before it closes at 1800. The Turkmens' have taken bureaucracy to a new level. There is form upon form to complete - all with a cost for which there is of course a receipt. Some 200 dollars poorer and carrying a sheaf of official papers, receipts, insurance documents and the like we are finally allowed through - once everyone has had their photo taken in the Bentley.

Our first sight of Ashkhabad reminds us of just how gilded this city is, gold statues everywhere. Although the one of Turkmenbashi which has him rotating with the sun has been pulled down in the couple of years since he died. Apparently it is being relocated to the 'hills'. So much for the 'beloved leader' of the Turkmens'. However, the new president is having his own palace built so he does not have to use the old presidents. Along with this every building is magnificent, if empty, and the billions spent on this trophy capital is beyond comprehension.

Having got totally lost in the new construction of yet another massive complex we





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finally arrive at the hotel, which in itself is extraordinary. It reminds me of the Versace hotel in Labrador on the Australian Gold Coast although the latter is a poor reproduction in reality. It is enormous, all marble and gold and looks as though it would cost a fortune to stay in. However it is run by Sofitel and is in fact quite cheap for a room. The same cannot be said of drinks, a beer was over 20 USD; a bottle of wine at supper cost 100 USD but was worth it to celebrate our departure from Iran and the fabulous view from the top floor restaurant.

An early departure to travel to Mary or Merv as it was called in the time of the Great Game. This was one of the cities the Russians invaded and captured with a view to launching an attack on the British through Afghanistan. Mary is very ordinary but does have a bling area as in Ashkhabad but much smaller. For us it is notable only for the fact we met three cyclists there, a German and Frenchman cycling to Singapore and a young Scottish lad, Robbie, cycling around the world with his guitar and a small cycle trailer. How these people motivate themselves to ride everyday at 20 km/hour for endless miles is totally beyond us but they are true heroes.



Robbie had been knocked off his bike by a tractor this day on the appalling road from Ashkhabad on which we had spent all day bouncing, bumping, grinding and swearing at it. The lad wants to give up and backpack as the accident broke his handlebars and more importantly his guitar. Coupled to this, the day before he had slept in a Mosque and someone had stolen his size 12 1/2 shoes. Heavens knows why as there is no one out here with feet that big. Hopefully we persuaded him to rest and think on things for a day or two before abandoning bike and trailer.

As I mentioned the road was atrocious and is definitely top of the worse road league thus far.

### Across the Garagum to Uzbekistan

Our stay in Turkmenistan is almost at an end, from Mary we cross the Garagum Desert into Uzbekistan south of Bukhara.

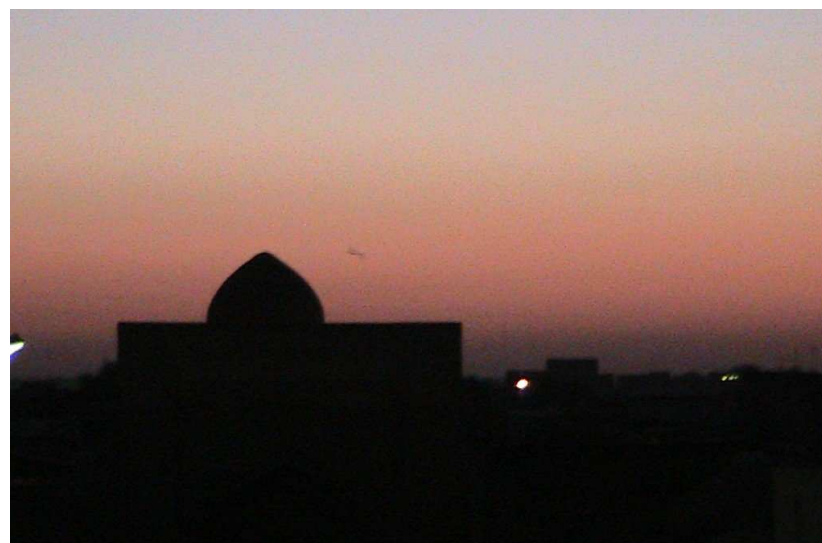


The road is much better thank heavens. Although we have a very severe incident about half way when I more or less lost control of the car as we crossed some corrugations at speed and the steering couldn't cope with the front wheels bouncing so much. Pretty scary slewing across the road out of control. Luckily no other cars on the road at the time.

Anyway we press on past camels, sand, sand and more sand until we reach Turkmenibad in the north of the country. From here we cross over a tributary of the Oxus on the same bailey bridge we used in 2000, nothing changed except the toll which is now 14 USD. Guess there are not enough cars and lorries over the last 11 years to pay for a proper bridge!

It is a very strange approach to the Uzbek border, miles from anywhere and we arrive 1







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minute after they have shut for lunch at 1230. So we sit in sweltering heat, 44 degrees Celsius, in the queue whilst we wait for the border to re-open. The Bentley is swamped and David and I give up trying to stop people crawling all over it. However the people are really just enthusiastic and not of any threat to the vehicle - at least not intentionally.

Finally the border re-opens at 1400 and we spend three hours clearing out and then into Uzbekistan, We then speed the 90 Kms to Bukhara on a pretty good road and into the bar to drain the hotel of beer before supper. The hottest day so far and 12 hours in the sun gives one a big thirst, huge even. By midnight we have added several bottles of Uzbek white wine, not bad considering, and several Uzbek Cognacs, also not bad but the cause of a violent hangover the next morning!

Bukhara appealed to most of the rally but not really to me, contrary as ever ! Most of the ruins have been rebuilt having been destroyed by floods and the Russians some years ago. Many have become tourist attractions with little residual feeling for the past. The rest are tourist traps selling ethnic souvenirs and other rubbish much admired by inexperienced travellers.



However, having signed up to a walking tour of the old city I lasted all of 10 minutes before peeling off for a mega massage and Turkish Bath in the old part of town. This involved sitting in a boiling cellar for some time followed by a very rough sanding down at the hands of a male masseur followed by a bath, massage and being covered in ginger. Not a bad way to while away two hours in the heat of the day. I did meet some interesting Uzbek young who could speak good English. They complained of being unable to get a job, as they did not know any government officials nor from a select family. Bottom line, Russians may have left the country but the country has not got rid of Russia.

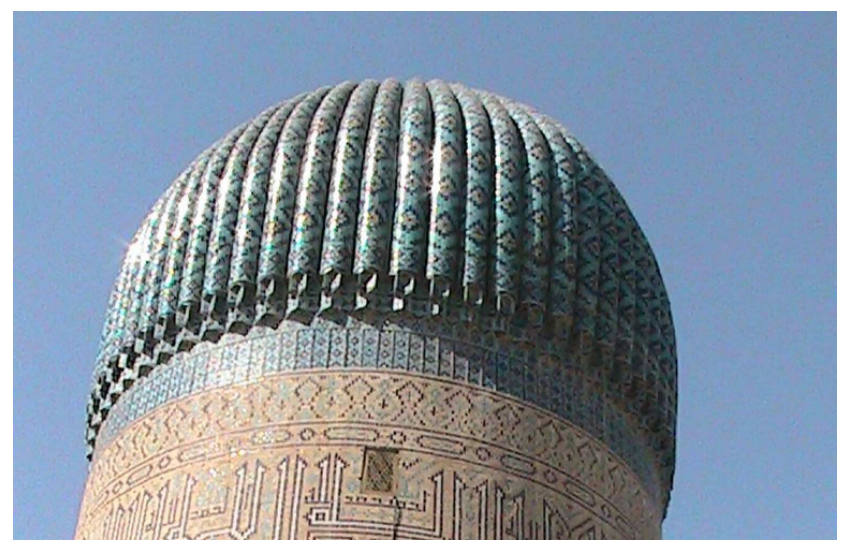
Interestingly I found it impossible to track down a tyre repair centre in Bukhara and eventually two local students jumped into the car and showed me the way to a small shop behind the street facade. It seems that to keep the city looking good the service shops are behind the main streets making them very hard to find. Only one puncture to fix but I am taking the opportunity to sand down all the rough edges on the tyres to see if I can stop these annoying problems.



We had a couple of really good meals out in Bukhara and it is a lovely city at night to be in. We met a Spaniard, Jorge, who came over to say hello and ask about the Bentley. He has a 1936 Hooper version of my car and was really very knowledgeable. It was only when we met up again in Samarkand two days later that he showed me a table of his car collection: 40 cars including a Bugatti Veyron, a dozen Porsches, several Bugattis and MG's. What the hell was he doing on a coach trip to Bukhara?

Our caravan moved onto Samarkand, which is one of my all time favourite cities although this time I saw more of my car and parts bazaars than I did of its attractions. Yes, you guess right two more punctures on the way, one after another almost marooning us on the main road. We were saved by the fact the punctures occurred 100







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yards from a Vulcanamista who promptly fixed the tubes again for us.

However, I also had a problem with the passenger seat falling to bits, a dicky battery isolator switch and a duff battery. What a weekend. I spent a lot of it looking for parts, the only bright spot being 'jumped' in a queue of 40 cars waiting for petrol by the garage owner's three stunning blond teenagers. Made my day! Never mind, got the car filled up quick. The big issue in Uzbekistan is benzene (Petrol), no idea why as it is not expensive but gas and diesel seem more popular these days.

The police are a pain in this country, we are stopped endlessly, mainly for a photo of the car but occasionally in an attempt to extract money from us. However, the Uzbeks are very friendly and once again genuinely helpful people lightened our difficulties.

### The Road to Afghanistan



We finally head for the border with Tajikistan and the capital Dushanbe pronounced De Shan Be. They are arguing with the Uzbeks so have shut the closest border and forced us to divert 300 kms to the south to a secondary border. This is a major headache as this is the day the inner tube saga reaches crisis level, three punctures in 200 kms. However we are ready for them and as each one comes off I give it a damn good filing to remove all the rough surfaces. I won't bore you with the details but we seem to have established in our own minds what is going wrong and are hopeful the problems will recede in the coming days, only time will tell.

We are once again marooned with no spares in a desert which would have been a disaster except for a Good Samaritan who stopped, picked up the tyres and me and took us back the way he had come. With his whole family we wait an hour at a small tyre shop whilst the tubes were vulcanised and I filed off more sharp edges. They then drove me back to the Bentley where I gave him 20 bucks, he was over the moon. Interestingly they do not drive with the engine on all the time, he would accelerate to 100 kph and then freewheel down to 30 before repeating the process, I would really love to know how much that improved petrol consumption. Of course many of the latest English cars do this automatically and stop their engine at the lights; however it seems the Uzbeks are way ahead of us on this one.



We finally reach the border after numerous police checks and passport registrations to be met with a morass of bureaucracy; first to leave Uzbekistan and then to enter Tajikistan. On top of which I have the group visa so there are 3 cars and 6 very bored people waiting for us to arrive! Lucky for them we were not left in the desert for a lot longer!

I have to say that from a scenery point of view Uzbekistan had very little to offer and we did not take many interesting photos outside the two cities. Bye bye Uzbekistan, hello Tajikistan, 93% mountains, 7% flat.



The drive to Dushanbe is late and in the dark, the Bentley's lights are pathetic and stuck up in the air but somehow we manage to get through and arrive at the Hyatt Regency. We could be in Hyde Park. It is amazing, a stunning hotel in this fairly small city. Several G&T's later, Sautéed Prawns, Huge Entrecote steak and a Crème Brule, I begin to feel relaxed again after what has been a 12 hour day for David and I. Car is OK but we are on tender hooks over the tyres as the next day we have the trial of the rally - although at this point we have no idea just how big an test this is going to be.

After the feast we head off to bed looking forward to the next day. Oh what a mistake that was.

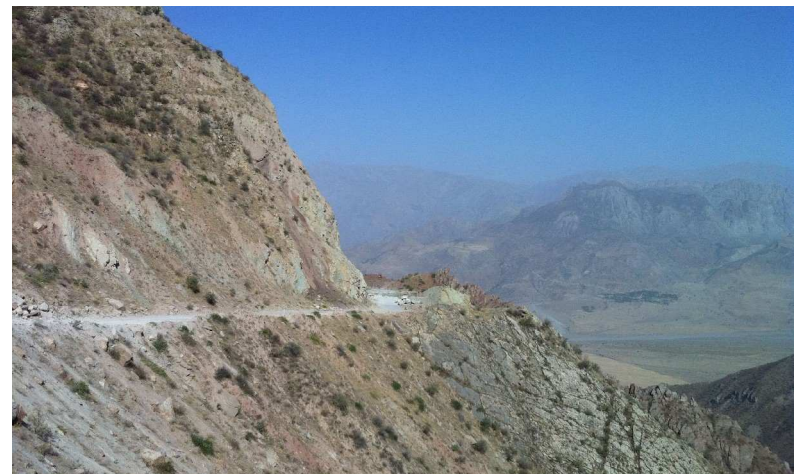
Dawn breaks over Dushanbe and from our hotel room window we can see parks, beautiful buildings, Government house and presumably the Presidential Palace all looking magnificent in the sun. We head off through the city looking for the road south and east to some unpronounceable place on the way to Khorog (pronounced Horob) on the Afghan border.

Well the first 200 kms is no real problem but we are climbing constantly towards 1,900 metres (6000 ft), car goes well, no punctures but we suddenly come across the Morgan on the road side broken. We offer help and find that Phil and Lorette are overheating, well the car that is. Few ideas are thrown around before we sort things out and off we both go again. A mile later Morgan is stopped again, we use the last of our water to replace what she has lost. The Yellow Peril arrives and offers a tow to the mountain top which is the last pass for the day. They couple up and we follow to the top.

Having all disengaged we head down hill, David and I take the obvious path ignoring an 'off' to the left, 1000 metres (3,000 ft) on the road ends in a 300 metres (1000 ft) drop to a gorge, an earthquake has taken out the bridge and if we don't stop we will be Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Thank heavens the brakes work, we turn around and head back to the top and take the 'off' which takes us 5 kms around the valley head and back to the other side of the drop. We get to a police checkpoint who cheerily declare we will not get through, well specifically that the Morgan won't. With a feeling of dread we head off down the hill.

Suddenly the road ends and we are on a rough rocky track; no tarmac, no gravel, just bedrock. We keep going dropping 1,500 metres (5000 ft) to the Oxus River below, the scenery is beyond description. Nothing can describe the mountains and valleys we see as we drop to the river. We come to a corner around which we can see the river and Afghanistan on the far side, close enough to touch but with rapids that would defy a Grade 12 Rafter. Unbelievable. The water is grey with silt brought down from the highest hills on earth, the Himalayas.

We drive on; no road just rock, people occasionally in tiny villages. Afghanistan rising on the other side. A track has been cut into the Afghan mountains some 50 metres above the water disappearing in both directions as far as the eye can see. On this path, people and donkeys walking for days, we are 200 kms from any town on our side; we





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see no towns on their side at all just tiny villages. The path is built up using stones, it is unbelievable. How long do they walk? How far do they walk? We drive 180 kms through streams, across wet and dry river beds, over promontories, never more than yards from the raging river below winding its way down to the Aral Sea but never making it, siphoned off for industry all along the way.

We are closer to the source in its unspoiled region, just us, a few Tajiks, and the Afghans over the river. They call over, we whistle back, it is perhaps a 1000 metres (3,000 ft), but insurmountable.

On on we drive, 16 kph, yes 10mph, rattle, bang, crash. The exhaust goes then gets knocked back on. The fuel guard snaps off, the dynamo ceases, but NO punctures. Mile after mile, kilometre after kilometre we trudge on, the day passes and night falls, still no let up. The scenery is us, river, road, Afghan path and the sky; snow on the highest peaks; the world greatest rafting but no one here to sample it.



13 hours we drive to get half way along this road. We stop at a tiny village to get water, we have plenty of food and means to cook it, we are prepared for the worst but hoping for the best. As the sun drops below the mountains and 18.36 approaches, we know we have until 18.50 before all is black (Nautical Twilight you know). We must be stopped by then. There is no way we can drive at this speed on this track in the dark.

We hit the Badastan Autonomous Region border post at 18.25. Please let us through, we need the last of the light to reach a village we can see maybe a mile ahead. The guards are watching satellite TV, miles from anywhere, using a generator. We ask where does the road start. The guard say 1 km ahead. We think he is talking rubbish but the village we plan to stop at is just beyond that so we must go on. Unbelievable we hit smooth , perfect tarmac, within 1000 metres (3,000 ft), would you believe it, thanks to the EU, our money working. Thanks UK taxpayer.

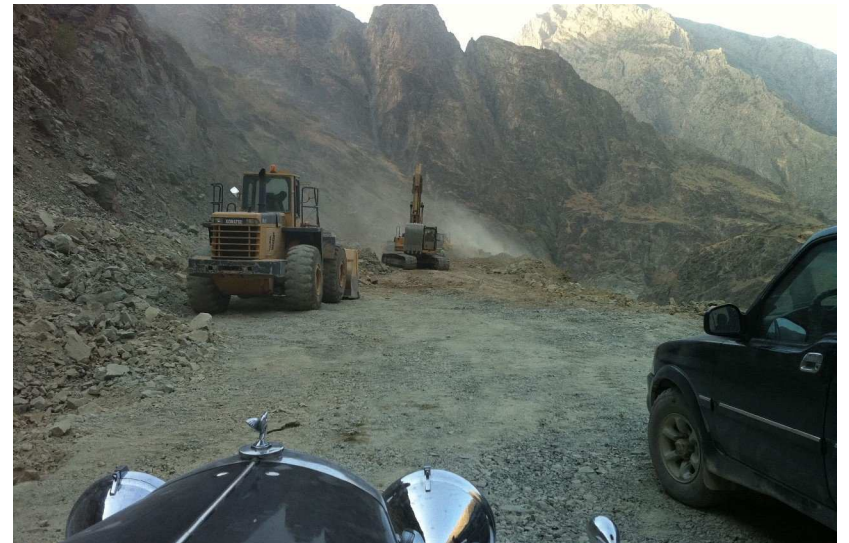


We are off, 30, 40, 50 mph and it is as smooth as silk, can we make it to our Homestay, 60 kms to go, nothing stopping us now, whew ! Bugger the lights, on we go. Spot light on and vaguely lighting the road. We will be fine providing we do not meet one of the hundreds of cows we have met all day standing in the road. (Ask Arabs about meeting a camel on a dark road at night, you will not find one that has survived it!). We are off for 30 kms and trucking. Then, just to make our lives interesting, the EU road finishes - stop. No more road, back to track, but we are energised now, Homestay within 30 kms, just go for it, never mind we cannot see a thing, or that we have a fast flowing river on the right or that the road is non existent, or that the car is shaken to pieces, we are going to get there. 'David, 5 kilometre countdown please'.

30 mins later we crash metaphorically into the town of 'no idea' and reach the Homestay. What an incredible drive, ghastly, terrible, unbelievable, extraordinary. What we came for.

We are covered in dust, I have filthy knees, arms, clothes, hair, face and feet, car is exhausted, we are tired but Bernard and Dina are there with a beer and a smile. We









made it; but where are the Yellow Peril and the Morgan; both were in front of us after the problems earlier. Suddenly the Yellow Peril arrives, it has been out for supper so no sweat but still no Morgan, we have lost it.

David is off for a shower. I get the cooking kit out, not risking Delhi Belly here, so it's Chilli con Carne for supper with some sausage I have bought earlier in the day, bread from a shop nearby and my birthday present from David's wife, Yvonne, the Gentlemen's Relish. It is officially a feast when Chris and Liz bring out the Brandy and Vodka and we all sit down on the house balcony for dinner. What an end to one of the most amazing days of my rallying career. We are just exhausted but here.

The next day we are off to Khorog and Afghanistan. Originally we were to drive into the Wakham Valley and cross the border into Ishkashim, but yesterday's road has put paid to that as the road out of the Wakham is worse. Instead we plan to get visas in Khorob and go into Afghanistan for a day there. The road to Khorog is an improvement and although slow gets us in before dark and in fair shape. The scenery along the Oxus River is amazing and the drive requires a blend of avoiding potholes

whilst trying to see all around us. The footpath along the Afghan side continues for miles before finally petering out in the middle of nowhere. We see a lot of people on the path going to and fro but they are just out of shouting range.

The car charging system has started to fail and we are no longer charging the battery as we travel which is a worry, but hopefully we can fix the problem in the coming days.

### **Afghanistan at Last**

Waking up in Khorog, in sight of the border crossing into Afghanistan is exciting and we all trape down to the Consul to see if we can get visas. He is very helpful and pleased that we plan to visit even if it is only for an hour or two. Needless to say there is a cost involved but having come this far we can hardly not go through with the visit.

Visa in hand we go back to the hotel and walk down to the border crossing, which is a small bridge over the Oxus. No problem getting out of Tajikistan or into Afghanistan although the Tajiks thought we were mad to visit that 'dreadful place'.



Incredibly lucky, as the town is 7 kilometres away, I talk to an Afghan who speaks perfect English and is leaving the country for a posting in Quebec. He is the local police chiefs brother and arranges for a car to take the 5 of us to the local town. Here we are met with great glee by all as they rarely see visitors from Tajikistan and even less from Europe. We are taken to an eating house for lunch and listen to local music whilst they pull and prod everything we have. No one speaks a word of English but with the help of our Point It book we get by and have a really interesting lunch.

After lunch they take us to their bazaar which is surprisingly well stocked with goods and food, although the hanging meat covered in wasps is a bit of a concern as Chris and I have just eaten some of that!

I am persuaded to buy a 'Burberry' bag for 5 dollars from one of the traders and return to Tajikistan with this along with a new Afghan cap. The kids are all very well dressed and the women mainly uncovered. The local area is called Badadistan and is clearly more tolerant than the south of the country.

After a further hour or so and having handed out quite a bit of small money to various parties we are on our way back to the bridge in an old Toyota which bangs and crashes down the rough track to the border.

I had been keen to visit Afghanistan whilst being very nervous. As it turned out the people were brilliant and we really enjoyed our brief experience whilst remembering how bad things are further south in Helmand. Anyway we have done it and I would not have missed it.

A restful evening in Khorog before the rigors of the drive down the Pamir Highway – 400 kms at about 3,500 metres (12,000 ft).

### The Pamir Highway

Leaving Khorog we expect a very difficult road over the Pamir Highway to Murgab, as it turns out this is actually not so bad and we make good time up the mountain to 3,650 metres (12,000 ft) and the plateau beyond. It is our first cold day's drive really and we have to break out coats and gloves for the trip. The Pamir Highway is a famous road in these parts and it is true to say the scenery is sublime, however after 300 kms of it we were very pleased to see Murgab ahead, not least because we were running very low on fuel.

The only fuel in the town was 80 Octane that is really not very good for high altitude work. We were lucky that one of the many people who came to look at the car knew of a secret stash of 95 Octane fuel. This turned out to be in the back yard of a local house. Having refuelled we had the decision to make as to whether we stopped in Murgab overnight as planned or press on towards Osh being as it was only 13.00.

Bernard and Dina had arrived a little before us and felt that pushing on to a lakefront





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Homestay 130 kms closer to Osh made sense and we agreed. Four hours later we arrived at a tiny village on a lake with several huge 'Homestay' signs painted on house walls. We had been told of a specific one and so went there. It was cosy to say the least; we met a cyclist from New Zealand going home from the UK, an Oigher (pronounced weegar) tour guide who was en route to the Kyrgyz border and of course Bernard and Dina.

After dumplings for tea we tried out the 'douche' that consisted of standing in a small dark hut with a huge water boiler, fired by wood, a bucket of cold water and a saucepan. What looked like a disaster actually turned out to be a really good way of warming up whilst cleaning up! After this experience an hour spent driving children around the village was followed by some bread and jam for supper. David had the full meal but I was not hungry after the dumplings earlier. Beds consisted on two duvets on the floor of a private 'suite', hard but warm.

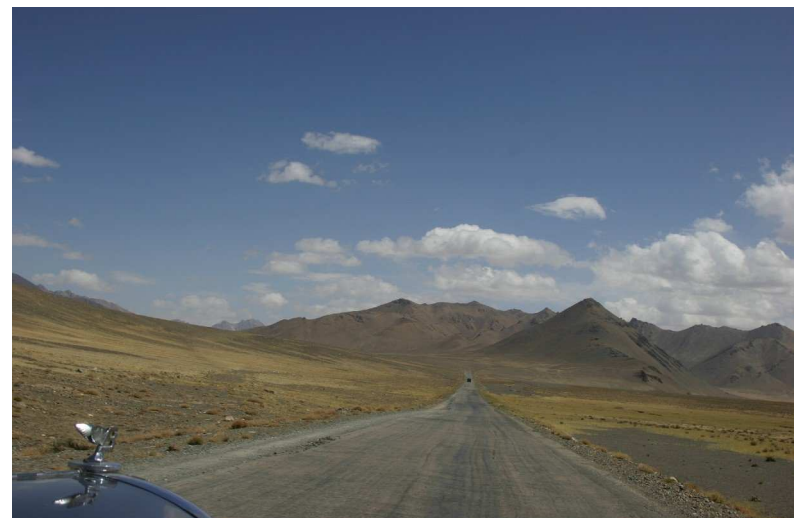
The following day we pressed on to the Kyrgyzstan border which required us to climb through two further passes at some 4,500 metres (15,000 feet). At this altitude we were in snow rather than just seeing it the day before. Bitterly cold wind made the passes quite an event and we were really pleased when we made it to the border post.

The car charging system still refuses to work and we had to be bump started at the Homestay. The situation worsened after the border when the car stopped completely in no mans land. Luckily Bernard and Dina realised something was wrong and came back to see what had happened. They gave us a pull to start the engine and we then went on in convoy to the Kyrgyz side of the border. Once through we headed across the plateau to Osh, dangerously low on fuel and desperate for a source of power to replace our faltering battery and failing power pack.

We arrive in a small town that has a petrol station and refueled without difficulty. However, the battery situation has worsened and I did a deal with the garage owner to buy the battery from his mate's car for USD 100, damn expensive but we need it. Once this is installed we head off again, freezing cold and very windy but we are making progress, well for 1 mile or so, then the car just gives up with a cloud of black smoke.

After trying a number of things we limp back to the garage to be told the nearest mechanic is 100 kms away. We stop to wait for the last Landrover in the hope he can help but in the meantime I work my way through the problem and come to the conclusion that the air filter could be an issue. Taking this out takes a second and it is covered in dust from a dust storm the day before and a week of appalling roads in Tajikistan. Having beaten the dust out I replace the filter and the engine starts first time, thank heavens for that, a three hour wait for the Landy with a Morgan on the back has been averted.

The descent to Osh continued without further incident, a final high pass, reasonable road, minimal traffic and then we were there - sighing with relief. We hear that the Morgan is dead and that Conrad and co will bypass Osh and drive straight to Bishkek. I head out to find a battery charger to buy or hire but soon realise all I will be able to do





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Returning to the hotel Chris, Liz, Bernard and Dina are ready to go off for supper to the Richman Club. This turns out to be a restaurant made up of private rooms with curtains and red upholstery. Not sure it is a good place for a meal, more like a knocking shop. Anyway we order and sure enough the food is very slow and inedible. So hungry but two pints of beer later we return to the 'Deluxe' hotel and bed. In the morning I find our car has been rifled and we have lost all our coats, my Afghan hat and Burberry bag and all my good clothes for our return home. What can you say?

Chris had paid the hotel proprietors' son 100 Som to look after the cars and clearly he had slept through the raid. We should have known better and taken all the stuff inside with us. C'est la vie.

We depart Osh early, at day break, as we have a 670 kms drive to Bishkek which we are dreading as the car is very tired and far from being in good condition. In addition to the charging problem the rear sump guard is hanging off; tyres still an issue; running rich and a rear bumper is loose. However, we are running OK, unlike the Morgan that by this time has been loaded onto a lorry for transporting to Bishkek.

### Out of Tajikistan and into Kyrgyzstan

We leave Osh with the Porsche having a clutch problem but Bernard has agreed to wait and see they are OK, as we need to get started to make Bishkek before dark. Without charging system we have no lights at all and cannot drive after dark.

The start out of Osh is fairly confused but we eventually get on a reasonable road to Bishkek and make some speed. We have another high pass to transit towards the end of the run but before this we have a further three punctures, luckily slow ones that we check on the high plateau in a tiny village where there is a Vulcaniser. He repairs the tyres but we lose an hour; arrival in daylight is now looking difficult.

The car is running rich and I decide to leave the engine running whilst we sort the tyres out to avoid having to bump start it. This is a mistake, as we leave the village the engine is spluttering and lacking power, due, I think to the spark plugs being sooted up. We press on in the hope they will clear themselves. Eventually that happens twenty minutes later.

The run is beginning to get to us. We are tired and it is already 16.00. We start up the long pass to 4,500 metres (15,000 ft) with the weather deteriorating, light rain/snow and the temperature plunging. By now the car is running a bit battered and we have to coax her up the long winding road to the pass.

Things gets worse when we are suddenly plunged into darkness in a long unlit tunnel. I cannot see a thing and have to lean out to see past the windscreen that is covered in snow, to see where I am in relation to the solid wall on my right. There is a car 30 metres (100 ft) in front which is getting away from me but at least he gives me some idea of the direction of curve of the tunnel. Keeping a metre from the wall we press





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on with lorries and cars passing us to the left. With no lights we run the risk of someone overtaking in the tunnel and hitting us head on. Nothing we can do but push on at a fair speed to try and keep behind the car with lights. What seems like hours later we suddenly emerge from the tunnel and start downhill. David's only comment : " that was tense ".

No snow this side but the road winds down the mountain for miles ahead. On the third turn down we have another puncture just when we are beginning to think we are over the worse. We change this just as Bernard arrives in the Landrover. He tells us that the Porsche is broken and is also going on a truck to Bishkek with Its clutch arm bent. So we are the only car left. Back on the road and we head on down the hill to a petrol station at the bottom some 60 kilometres from Bishkek. Having refuelled we drive off to join the Tashkent to Bishkek road along which I passed in 2000.



Our arrival in Bishkek is faultless with the help of a taxi from the outskirts taking us into the Hyatt hotel near the presidential palace. Thank heavens we are here and have a rest day to sort out all our car problems. The Morgan is due in at 04.00 along with the Porsche in a different lorry, no sign of the rally Landrover but we believe this also on the way.

What a week it has been !

### On to China and Kashgar

Bishkek is a very busy rest day for us. We had to get some of the Bentley problems sorted out. At the top of the list was the charging system but before I can work on this I need a battery charger and some bits and pieces for the days ahead. The Morgan and Porsche had arrived overnight and were parked in their lorries at the hotel. But what of my tyres, sent from the UK by UPS and bound, from past experience, to be tied up in customs? Well, they are at the hotel, thanks to Charles Wunderle at Ecoflow and Amrit Gurung at the Hyatt they have managed to expedite the tyres and tubes and get them to the hotel where they are waiting for me in a storeroom. I can honestly say this is the first time I can remember anyone getting a spares package into an Asian country without massive problems usually leading to the parts being lost. Well done, and thank you Charles and Amrit.

First thing in the morning we, along with two translators from the hotel set off to a Mercedes garage to have the broken cars looked at. David and I follow on but then deviate to a car shop to buy the charger etc. This was remarkably easy in Bishkek and we got most of the things we need all in the first shop we stop at. I tried to get a new regulator in case the one on the Bentley is kaput but this was not possible.

Returning to the Hyatt, I got to work on the charging system with Bernard and Jim. It takes most of the day and finally in desperation I phone Chris Simons in the UK who contacts an auto electrician from Bovey Tracey. Over 4 calls Nick gives me directions and eventually we isolate the problem to the regulator. However, we are out of time,





