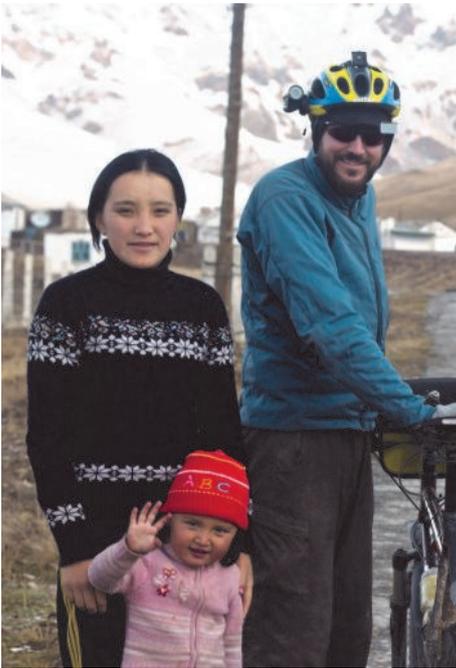




Up the Torachul Pass in Kyrgyzstan where men are men but it's rather chilly.



"Wha-to!" which means "Hello!" in Sary Tash, Kyrgyzstan, (70km from China)



"Wait for me!" calls a young boy from Arslanbob, Kyrgyzstan



Toktogul Reservoir, Kyrgyzstan



The Karakoram Highway on the Pamir Plateau in China.

After a hearty breakfast, I said bye to my new friends and set off up a seemingly endless 1500m climb, on the other side of which streams the Pianj, a river that forms the natural border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and a river that would be my companion for the next 640km (400 miles). The "Winter Road" to the Pamir region follows this river through narrow gorges and a few slender valleys with a few farmers' houses or sometimes small villages built in them. On the Afghan side of the Pianj, sometimes only 50m from the road that I skirted, the villages were even more rustic. Only a narrow donkey trail connected these tiny clusters of huts made of mud bricks. Not a power line was to be seen on the opposite side of the river. Over several days I saw a few brightly coloured villagers but only two motorbikes and not a single auto.

A bored Afghan boy scampering on the other side of the river used his sling to wing a stone in my direction, but, fortunately for me, he had not the aim of David. That day I passed through the town of Kalaikum and rode until dusk looking for a secluded place to camp. There had been many beaches with soft, virgin sand but I had been warned of unmarked mine fields in this area and hence avoided them. On the opposite side of the road from the Pianj River I came across a small, but deep cultivated valley with rock walls and no sign of life, so I followed the steep side road down to a little field and began to set up camp. I stockpiled some rocks in case I had a visit from wolves in the night. Just as complete darkness fell and I was about to retire to my tent a gunshot shattered the silence. I was frozen with terror, heart pounding ..... [to be continued].



Kyzylkum Desert, Uzbekistan