

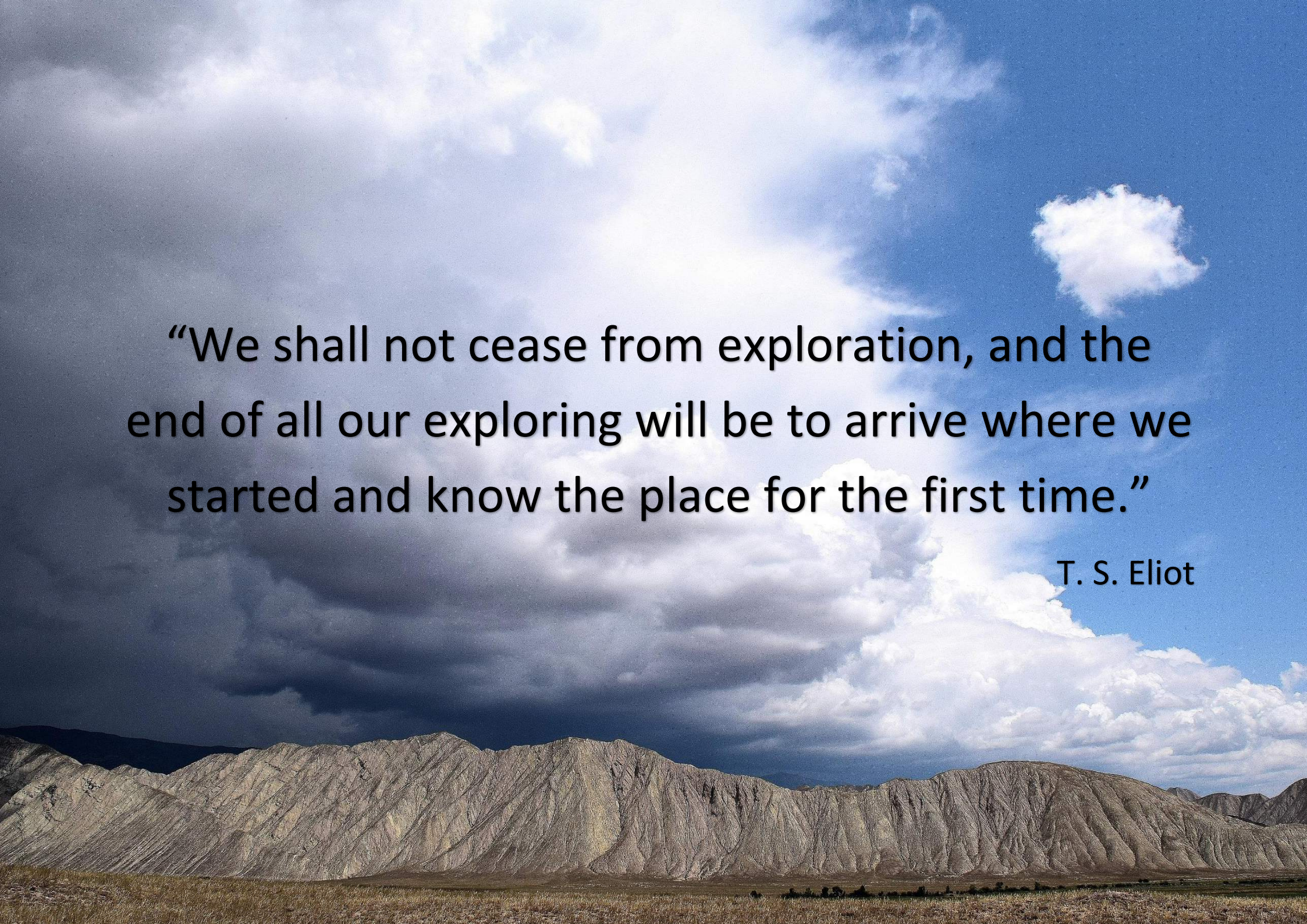


# Cycling the Silk Road 2015

27<sup>th</sup> July - 18<sup>th</sup> September







“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

T. S. Eliot



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# Introduction



## Introduction

Central Asia has been the crossroads of the world for millennia, creating a rich and diverse culture steeped in history. It is home to the Silk Road, an ancient collection of trade routes that carried goods and ideas between the great Eastern and Western civilisations of the time. Throughout history, the region has experienced great upheaval as it has played host to the likes of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane over the centuries.

Our expedition traced the Silk Road as it passed through Central Asia, a vast region extending from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Chinese border in the east.

## Expedition Objectives

- Explore the legacy of the Silk Road
- Raise awareness of Neglected Tropical Diseases

The primary aim of our expedition was to explore Central Asia and observe the impact the Silk Road had on the development of the constituent countries.

A secondary objective was to raise awareness of Neglected Tropical Diseases through the creation of a website, blog and this expedition report.







Meet the Team



## Meet the Team

### Robert Bennett – Expedition Leader

**3<sup>rd</sup> Year Medicine, Imperial College London**

Rob got his first taste of the greater outdoors as a scout and a member of various Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions. He has since walked many corners of the UK and is a keen skier. His real passion for remote travel emerged at the age of 17 when he took part in an expedition to Ladakh, high in the Indian Himalayas. Now 21, Rob has spent his summer holidays visiting the French Alps and the best part of a month discovering the remote and stunning Iceland. After a brief encounter with the university Mountaineering Society, Rob returned to the rowing boat where he found cycling a useful means of cross training and now commutes up to 40 miles a week. Keen to combine his love of remote travel and his recently acquired appreciation of cycling, Rob could not resist the call to cycle along the Silk Road.



### Christopher Holt – Expedition Medic and Treasurer

**3<sup>rd</sup> Year Medicine, Imperial College London**

Chris has spent much of his childhood moving around the UK, living in Somerset, the Peak District and Shetland. Throughout this time, he has been a keen member of the Scouts and participated in activities such as climbing, abseiling and caving. Keen to impart their love of the outdoors, Chris' parents have taken him from a very young age to many parts of North America where he spent his holidays walking and skiing. At university, Chris is [was] a member of the University of London Officer Training Corps where he spends many of his weekends away on exercise. He is also a keen runner and a commuter cyclist, cycling up to 110 miles a week.



### Kamil McClelland – Navigator and Logistician

**3<sup>rd</sup> Year Medicine, Imperial College London**

Kamil has a vast experience of exploration, having travelled all around the world to such weird and wonderful places as the Amazon, Burkina Faso and Mongolia. It was in Mongolia that he became particularly interested in the Silk Road as a project, having seen the impact trade and migration along it had had on their way of life. He also gained experience of travel in desert environments in the Gobi Desert and has mountain experience, being a keen skier and having gone trekking in Bhutan and Nepal.



### John Adeney – Expedition Mechanic

**3<sup>rd</sup> Year Civil Engineering, Southampton University**

John has a reasonably broad experience of expeditions. Whilst at school he undertook all three Duke of Edinburgh Awards as well as a month long expedition to the Indian Himalayas around Ladakh. Since leaving school he has also been involved in a number of mountaineering expeditions throughout the UK and in Switzerland. As a keen sailor, John has undertaken a number of sailing expeditions around the south coast of Britain and in the Baltic and last year competed in the British Army crew for the Three Peaks Yacht Race, coming second overall.





# Country Profile



## Country Profile

### Kyrgyzstan

#### **Terrain, Geography and Climate**

Kyrgyzstan is a landlocked country on China's western border, famed for its rugged mountainous landscape, with over 94% of the country at over 1,000m above sea level. The climate is continental with summer temperatures of 12°C in the highlands and temperature in excess of 40°C in the lowlands.

#### **Language**

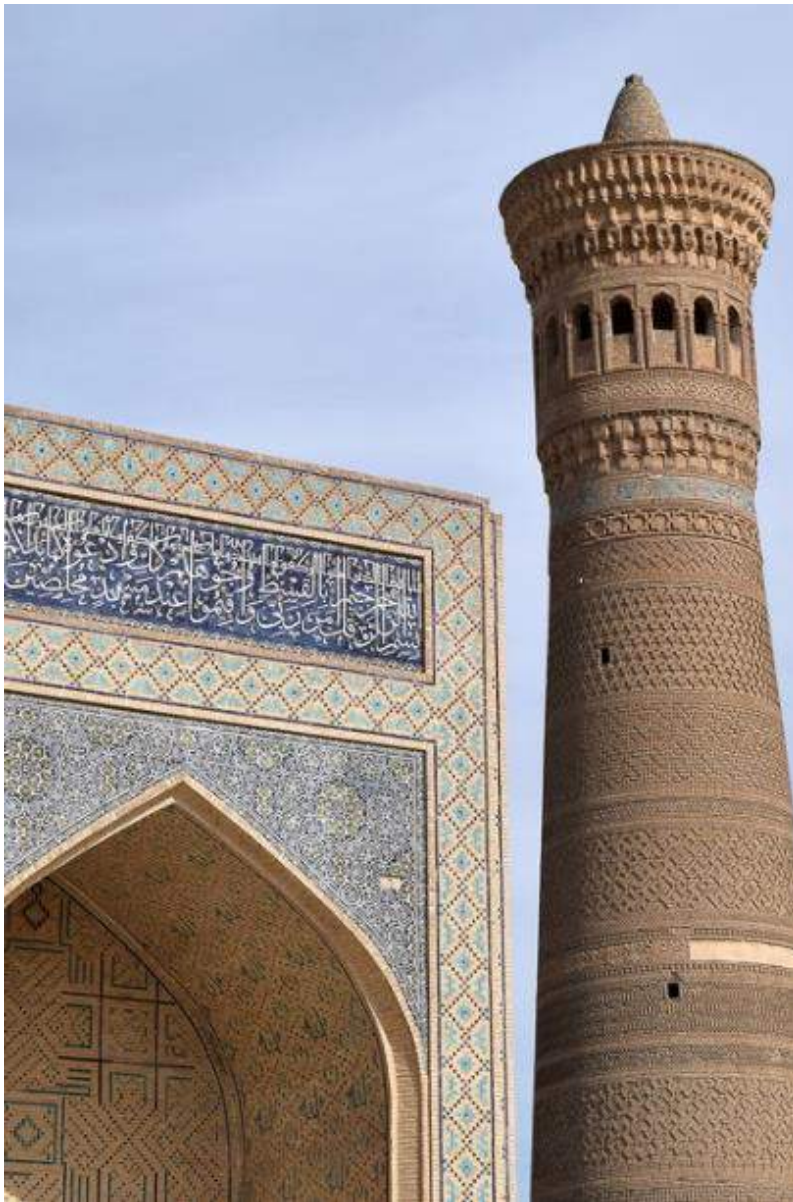
Kyrgyz is the national language. Russian is the official language.

#### **History**

The Kyrgyz Republic is based upon a civilisation of nomadic tribes that moved across the northern part of Central Asia many centuries ago. The Kyrgyz Khante was the first Kyrgyz state and existed from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century, with borders extending from south-central Siberia to eastern Kazakhstan. In 1218 Juchi, the son of Genghis Khan conquered all of the Kyrgyz tribes and they remained under Mongol rule until 1510. The Kalmyks overran the region in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Manchus in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Uzbeks in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1876 Russia conquered the country and Kyrgyzstan became part of the Russian Empire. During the Soviet era, the country played a key role as a supplier of agricultural products such as wool and specific mineral and military products. Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991 and suffered for periods from political instability, most notably the Tulip Revolution in 2005 and the 2010 ethnic clashes in the south of the county. However, greater stability and improving business ties with China look to develop its economy in coming years.







## Uzbekistan

### Terrain, Geography and Climate

Uzbekistan is a landlocked country covering an area of 447,400 sq km, with almost 80% of that made up by the Kyzyl Kum desert. Mountains are found in the southeast and far northeast, the last foothills of the Tien Shan range. The Fergana Valley is the country's industrial and agricultural heartland, located in a bowl surrounded by high mountains and intersected by the Syr Darya River. In the far west you can find the shrinking Aral Sea and the inland delta of Khorezm. The climate is continental with temperatures reaching in excess of 45°C in summer with low humidity.

### Language

Uzbek is the official language. Karakalpak is a recognised regional language.

### History

Iranian nomads established irrigation systems along the rivers of Central Asia in the first millennium B.C. founding towns such as Samarkand and Bukhara. These formed wealthy focal points on the emerging Silk Road linking China to Europe. The Arab Abbasid Caliphate in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries heralded a golden age of learning and culture. As with the whole of Central Asia, the region was overrun by Genghis Khan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century though another renaissance occurred during the Timurid empire of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, which made Samarkand its capital. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, two rival khanates, Bukhara and Khorezm ruled the region. In the same period, Silk Road cities began to dwindle as ocean trade flourished. These khanates were isolated by wars with Iran and weakened by attacks from northern nomads. In 1876 Russia had absorbed the last of these khanates into its empire. Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991 and has been led by President Islam Karimov ever since.



## Kazakhstan

### **Terrain, Geography and Climate**

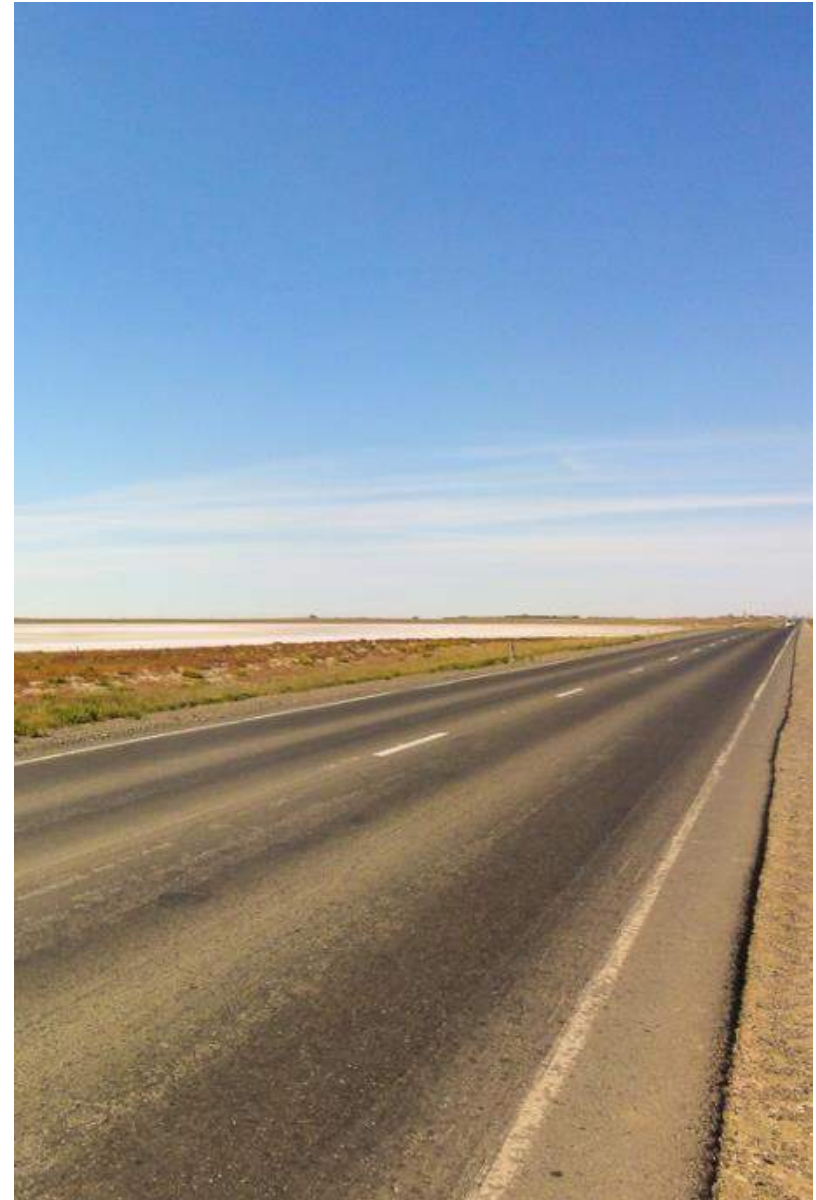
Kazakhstan is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world covering an area of 2,717,000 sq km. Consequently, there is considerable variation in the topography of the country. In the east and northeast, 12% of the country is occupied by parts of the Altay and Tian Shan mountain ranges and over 75% of the country is desert or semi-desert. The country has a dry continental climate with summer temperatures averaging 27°C in the south.

### **Language**

Kazakh is the state language with Russian the official language.

### **History**

Prior to Russian conquest, Kazakhstan's history was determined by the movements, conflicts and alliances of Turkic and Mongol tribes. The first state in the region was the Turkic Khanate, established in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century the dominant states were those of the Karakhanids and Karakitai. The latter was conquered by the Mongols and split into three groups: The Great Horde, The Middle Horde and The Lesser Horde. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century these became caught between Russian trades from the north and Kalmyk invaders from the east. The Great Horde was forced to accept Russian protection in the 1820s signalling the end of an era. The region was later absorbed into the USSR and was greatly affected by Khrushchev's Virgin Lands Campaign. Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991 and has been ruled by Nursultan Nazarbaev since, who has taken advantage of their vast oil reserves to boost the nation's economy.





# Neglected Tropical Diseases





## Neglected Tropical Diseases

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of infectious diseases that tend to affect the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. Contrary to their name, NTDs do not need to be in the Tropics; the only common feature is that they are neglected; this is mainly due to the lack of profitability for pharmaceutical companies in researching them and because they affect populations with low visibility and little political voice.

They are not the notorious diseases of developing countries like malaria or HIV/AIDS, but instead lie insidious under the surface, causing chronic health problems either directly or by weakening the immune system of sufferers, opening them up to other infections. The diseases cause stigma and discrimination and pacify sufferers at the bottom of society through disability, loss of productivity and a general decrease in their quality of life.

Despite this, they can be prevented and treated very cheaply and effectively and are some of the most cost effective health interventions possible, given their considerable disease burden worldwide. Despite being relatively unheard of, almost all of the poorest people in the world have at least one NTD and it is estimated about 800 million people, mostly children, suffer from some kind of soil-transmitted helminth infection. This can lead to malnutrition and mental impairment, affecting learning and future earnings, hence reinforcing poverty.

Overall, this has huge effects on the health and economic development of countries and can lead to an annual loss of billions of dollars. The importance of tackling them cannot be underplayed.





Although not many of the core NTDs are present in Central Asia, an important reservoir still exists in the region for a number of soil based helminthic and zoonotic diseases.

The Central Asia region itself presents a problem in combating these diseases. Precious little data exists on current disease prevalence in the region. During the Soviet era, massive public health initiatives helped eradicate diseases such as leishmaniasis in Uzbekistan. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, healthcare infrastructure fell into disarray in the region, allowing certain NTDs to reappear. Twenty-five years later, it is still possible to see rates of some of these diseases increasing completely unabated.

This is particularly evident in the pastoral communities of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan where, due to their rural and often nomadic existence, they have limited access to healthcare facilities. The closure of the mechanized Soviet slaughterhouses has presented further problems with meat processing being largely left to unregulated homes and farms, without veterinary inspection. As a result, certain zoonotic NTDs have been left unmanaged and uncatalogued.

The most common and burdensome neglected diseases in the region are most likely ascariasis, echinococcosis and brucellosis, all of which are being studied and managed carefully in Kyrgyzstan with new public health campaigns. A study showed that, amongst rural schoolchildren in southwestern Kyrgyzstan, the majority had at least one soil-transmitted helminth infection, mostly ascariasis. Other research on echinococcosis in the Alay valley of southern Kyrgyzstan has shown a startling 7% prevalence of alveolar echinococcosis, a deadlier form of the disease that will leave most of its sufferers dead within ten years if they do not receive adequate treatment. Finally, brucellosis had some of the highest rates of infection in the world in Kyrgyzstan until an aggressive public health campaign began in 2011 that has brought prevalence back down to pre-2000 levels.

In terms of other diseases making a comeback in the region, areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are now at risk of malaria infection, despite prevention strategies. This is thought to mostly be related to migration from Afghanistan, where malaria is much more common. There are also concerns about the prevalence of cysticercosis however, as it is only spread by the ingestion of improperly prepared pork, it is unlikely to be having a large effect in this largely Muslim region.

To find out more about NTDs, please visit our website at [www.tourdestan.co.uk/ntds](http://www.tourdestan.co.uk/ntds) where you can learn about the 19 major NTDs and more specifically about the NTDs that affect the Central Asian region, such as ascariasis, leishmaniasis and rabies.



I would like to thank Professor Alan Fenwick of the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative for his information about NTDs, including the story about echinococcosis amongst the Turkana tribesman in Kenya. I would also like to thank Aurelie Jeandron, a research fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, for her information about her work on intestinal helminths in Krygyzstan. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Paul Torgerson, Professor of Veterinary Epidemiology at the University of Zurich, for information about his work on echinococcosis and Dr. Peter Steinmann, Public Health Specialist and Epidemiologist at the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, for his information on NTDs in Central Asia.







Equipment



## Equipment List

Whilst drawing up our equipment list we scoured the internet for advice. As a consequence, most of what we took is drawn from the equipment lists of various other publicised cycling expeditions. It should be noted that whilst cycling in mountainous terrain, every gram of weight carried is felt. For this reason, it is advisable that each item you take is either essential to the expedition or has two functional uses.

For organisational purposes, it is easiest to divide equipment into three broad categories. Personal equipment, team equipment and medical equipment. The items we took have been detailed below:

### Personal Equipment

Personal equipment was very much down to personal preference. We spoke amongst ourselves to ensure no one was taking too little or too much.

Clothing	Equipment	Personal Effects
Cycling Shoes	Four Season Sleeping Bag and Liner	Books
Cycling Shorts	Sleeping Mat	Cards
Cycling Jersey	Head Torch and Spare Batteries	MP3 Player
Cycling Gloves	Mobile Phone and International SIM	Kindle
Long Sleeve Shirt	Spare USB Battery	Journal and Pens
Trousers/Zip Off Shorts	Personal First Aid Kit	Boiled Sweets and Rehydration Drinks
Fleece	Wash Kit (incl. Sun Cream and Antibacterial Powder)	
Waterproof Jacket	Travel Towel	
Underwear and Socks	Cycling Helmet	
Belt	Antibacterial Hand Gel	
Sun Hat and Sunglasses	Whistle	
Scarf/Snood		
Lightweight Sandals		



## Team Equipment

Bicycle and Essential Accessories	Miscellaneous Equipment	Electronics
Cinelli Hobootleg 2015	Map and Compass	11" Netbook
Ortlieb Front and Rear Roller Plus Pannier Set	Russian Phrase Book	Satellite Phone
Brooks B17 Imperial Saddle	Communication Picture Book	Instapark Mercury 10 Solar Charger
Bar Bag (Personal Preference)	Gifts for Locals (Postcards of London etc.)	eTrex HCX GPS
Cateye Enduro Cycle Computer	CTC Plastic Bike Bag and Fragile Tape	Front and Rear Bike Lights
Sigma BC 14.12 ALTI Bike Computer	Travel Sewing Kit	Galaxy Tablet
Bicycle Cable Lock (2)	Trowel	Adaptor (2)
Marathon Mondial Tyres	Bungee Cords (4 each - More is Better)	

Tools	Spare Parts	Consumables
Topeak Alien Multi Tool	Inner Tubes (10)	Duct Tape
Topeak Road Morph Pump with Gauge	Foldable Tyre	Cable Ties
Second Spare Pump	Brake Cables and Casing	Power Cord
Spoke Key	Gear Cables and Casing	Superglue
Chain Tool	Brake Pads	Rim Tape
Next Best Thing 2 (NBT2) Cassette Remover	Spokes and Spoke Nipples	Bike Lube
Bicycle Spanner (2)	Chain	Chain Degreaser
Pedal Wrench	Cleats and Screws	Lithium Grease
Leatherman	Rear Axle	Puncture Repair Kit
Cleaning Rag		Park Tools Tyre Boot Patch Set
Tyre Levers		Spare Nuts, Bolts and Washers

Essential Camping Equipment	Miscellaneous Camping Equipment
Terra Nova Ultra Quasar Tents and Tent Repair Kit	Collapsible Wash Bowl
Primus Omnifuel Stove and Stove Repair Kit	Washing Line and Pegs
Cook Set and Cooking Utensils	Scouring Pads and Washing Liquid
Katadyn Pocket Filter	Matches and Lighters
Oasis Water Purification Tablets (17mg)	One Day Emergency Rations
Tarp (for bikes/midday sun)	



## First Aid Kit

The First Aid Kit was compiled by Chris Holt with the help of an expedition medic we met through the First Aid course undertaken prior to our departure. The items we took with us have been detailed below and can be broken down into Medical Equipment and Medications.

### Medical Equipment

<i>Item</i>	<i>Number</i>
<b>HARDWARE</b>	
<i>Suture pack</i>	1
<i>4/0 non-absorbable suture</i>	6
<i>Stitch cutter blade</i>	4
<i>Tweezers</i>	1
<i>Tuff cut scissors</i>	1
<i>Kit scissors</i>	1
<i>Sterile gloves (medium)</i>	2 packs
<i>Non-sterile gloves</i>	10
<i>Alcohol swabs</i>	1 large pack
<i>Safety pins</i>	1 pack
<i>Sam splint (flat)</i>	1
<i>Sam splint (rolled)</i>	1
<i>Resus face shield</i>	2
<i>Survival blanket</i>	1
<i>Thermometer</i>	1
<i>Biohazard disposal bag</i>	2
<i>Instant ice pack</i>	4
<i>Tourniquet</i>	1
<i>Emergency tourniquet</i>	1
<i>Dental first aid kit</i>	1

<i>Item</i>	<i>Number</i>
<b>HARDWARE</b>	
<i>1 mL syringe</i>	5
<i>2 mL syringe</i>	5
<i>5 mL syringe</i>	5
<i>10 mL syringe</i>	5
<i>Orange needles</i>	7
<i>Green Needles</i>	7
<i>Giving sets</i>	1
<i>14G IV cannulae</i>	4
<i>18G IV cannulae</i>	4
<i>Set of guedel airways (size 9 and 10)</i>	1
<i>Emergency light stick</i>	1

<i>Item</i>	<i>Number</i>
<b>DRESSINGS</b>	
<i>Sterile wound closures</i>	5 each size
<i>Adhesive plasters</i>	Assorted
<i>Elastic bandage 10cm</i>	4
<i>Elastic bandage 7.5cm</i>	4
<i>Elastic bandage 5cm</i>	4
<i>No 15 Compressed Dressing</i>	1
<i>No 14 Compressed Dressing</i>	1
<i>Eye dressing</i>	2
<i>Gauze 7.5cm x 7.5cm</i>	5
<i>Melolin adhesive dressing</i>	3
<i>Non Adherent Dressing 10 x 10</i>	5
<i>Burn dressing</i>	2
<i>Burn gel</i>	5
<i>Micropore tape</i>	1
<i>Finger bobs</i>	6
<i>Zinc oxide tape</i>	1
<i>Triangular bandage</i>	2
<i>Blister dressings</i>	8
<i>Crepe bandage 10cm</i>	2
<i>TraumaFix Dressing 10cm x 18cm</i>	2
<i>Hand wash 50ml</i>	1
<i>Jumbo brown plaster</i>	1



## Medications

<i>Item</i>	<i>Amount</i>
<b>ALTITUDE</b>	
Acetazolamide 250 mg	50
Dexamethasone 2 mg	25
<b>ANALGESICS</b>	
Co-codamol 30/500	30
Paracetamol 500 mg	50
Ibuprofen 400 mg	50
10% ibuprofen gel	100g
Deep Heat Rub 100 ml	1
<b>ANTIMICROBIALS</b>	
Chloramphenicol (eye) ointment 1% 4g	2
Clarithromycin 250 mg	1 X 14 pack
Ciprofloxacin 500 mg	2 X 20 pack
Co-amoxiclav 625 mg	2 X 21 pack
Metronidazole 400 mg	2 x 21 pack
<b>CREAMS AND OINTMENTS</b>	
Tisept	7
Clotrimazole cream	20g X 1
Flamazine® cream	20g
Eurax Hydrocortisone Cream	15g
Savlon® Dry	1

<i>Item</i>	<i>Amount</i>
<b>GASTROINTESTINAL</b>	
Senna 7.5mg	22
Dioralyte® sachet	50
Loperamide hydrochloride 2 mg	20 (+18)
Buccastem 3mg	20
<b>OTHERS</b>	
Cetirizine 10 mg	30
Lansoprazole 15 mg	15
Celox sachet	1
Sterowash Eye Wash Pod	10
ORS	3
Centrum Performance multivitamins	1





Pre-Expedition Training



## Pre-Expedition Training

Certain skills were required before undertaking our expedition to ensure that we were suitably prepared. They are detailed below:

Skill		Attendees
First Aid Training	Fieldwork First Aid Course	Entire Team
	Expedition First Aid Course	Rob, Chris, Kamil
Bike Maintenance	Bike Works: Level 1 – Beginners	Rob, Kamil
	Bike Works: Level 2 – Intermediate	Rob, Chris, Kamil
	RideRide: Tune Up and Geared Up Course (Southampton)	John
Fitness	A short training plan was drawn up to be incorporated into sports already undertaken by team members	Entire Team

It should be noted that the bike maintenance courses offered by Bike Works were provided free of charge for residents of the Kensington & Chelsea or the Hammersmith & Fulham borough and come highly recommended.

### London to Southampton

Before we had made a firm decision on our choice of bicycle, our team made short trip to Southampton in order to assess the levels of fitness and competency within the team. The chosen route took us a distance of 155km, with 2000m of ascent. This was completed on our personal commuting bikes and with no added weight. The outing was a success and our first taste of long distance cycling. Although it was clear that fitness was lacking across the board and that our navigation skills needed improving, we were optimistic for our next trip.

### London to Worcester

Once our bicycles had arrived we undertook a two-day trip to try out the camping equipment and new bicycles. Unfortunately, Chris was unable to partake owing to illness. Our route took us across the Chilterns and through the Cotswolds before entering the Severn valley, a total of 200km. This was completed in a day and a half and our first experience of cycling fully laden bikes. It was in fact not as hard as was expected but there was of course still progress to be made.

### The Peaks

We spent four days in the Peak District a fortnight prior to our departure, our final training trip. The purpose of the trip was to prime our legs for the Kyrgyz Mountains and to ensure that we had gathered all necessary equipment and that it was all working. Consecutive days of gruelling hill climbs were understandably challenging but it also gave us an opportunity to refine our cycling tactics and have any final discussion before our final departure.





**Itinerary**



## Itinerary

Prior to our departure from the UK we composed a detailed itinerary. Below a simplified version can be seen and it is contrasted with the actual progress we made. All distances are approximate.

Planned Itinerary			Completed Itinerary	
Day	Description	km	Description	km
1	Depart London		Depart London	
2	Bishkek to Nevaket ruins	60	Bishkek to Nevaket ruins	60
3	Nevaket ruins to Kegeti Valley	60	Nevaket ruins to Kegeti Valley	60
4	Cross Kegeti Pass (3800m)	40	Begin up Kegeti Valley	20
5	Resupply in Kochkor. Head to Lake Song Kol	80	Cross Kegeti Pass (3800m)	20
6	Continue to Lake Song Kol	60	Head to Kochkor	50
7	REST DAY by Lake Song Kol		Resupply in Kochkor. Head to Lake Song Kol	60
8	Cross Moldo Ashuu Pass and head towards Jalalabad	125	Continue to Lake Song Kol	70
9	Continue past Kazarman	95	REST DAY by Lake Song Kol	
10	REST DAY and visit petroglyphs at Sailmaluu Tash	60	Cross Moldo Ashuu Pass and head towards Jalalabad	90
11	Head towards Jalalabad	100	Head to Kazarman and camp in Doodomol	80
12	Arrive in Jalalabad	90	Arrive in Kazarman and Cycle Onwards	80
13	Jalalabad to Uzgen to Osh	100	Head towards Jalalabad	80
14	SPARE DAY		Arrive in Jalal Abad	90
15	SPARE DAY		Jalalabad to Uzgen to Osh	100
16	SPARE DAY		REST DAY in Osh	
17	Cross Uzbekistan border and towards Andijan	60	Cross Uzbekistan border and towards Andijan	10
18	Andijan to Fergana to Margilan	90	REST DAY in Andijan	
19	Margilan to Rishtan to Kokand	85	Andijan to Tashkent by Car	
20	Cross Tajikistan border towards Kariakum Reservoir	95	REST DAY in Tashkent	
21	Arrive in Khujand	55	REST DAY in Tashkent	
22	Cross Uzbekistan border towards Bekobod	100	REST DAY in Tashkent	
23	Head to Jizzakh	115	Tashkent to Samarkand	50
24	Head to Samarkand	75	Head to Samarkand camping before Jizzakh	150
25	Arrive in Samarkand	30	Arrive in Samarkand	120
26	REST DAY in Samarkand		REST DAY in Samarkand	



27	Samarkand to Kattakurgan	75	REST DAY in Samarkand	
28	Head to Navoi	70	Samarkand to Bukhara	170
29	Arrive in Navoi	35	Arrive in Bukhara	110
30	Navoi to Bukhara	95	REST DAY in Bukhara	
31	REST DAY in Bukhara		REST DAY in Bukhara	
32	REST DAY in Bukhara		Bukhara to Khiva via Gazli	160
33	Head to Khiva	120	Head towards Khiva	150
34	Head to Khiva	120	Arrive in Khiva	150
35	Head to Khiva	90	REST DAY in Khiva	
36	Arrive in Khiva	120	REST DAY in Khiva	
37	REST DAY in Khiva		Khiva to Ayaz Qala	120
38	Khiva to Urgench to Guldursun Qala	90	Ayaz Qala towards Nukus	100
39	Visit Qalas	70	Arrive in Nukus	150
40	Visit Qalas	70	REST DAY in Nukus	
41	Last Qala to Chiplik to Nukus	70	Nukus to Kunkhodzha and C & K Return to Nukus	150
42	REST DAY in Nukus		C & K Train from Kungrad	Kunkhodzha to Kungrad (and car back) 50
43	Head to Kazakhstan border	125	C & K Arrive in Atyrau	Kunkhodzha towards Kazakhstan Border 200
44	Head to Kazakhstan border	105	C & K REST DAY in Atyrau	Cross Kazakhstan Border towards Beyneu 140
45	Head to Kazakhstan border	125	C & K Return to UK	Arrive in Beyneu 30
46	Cross Kazakhstan border	80	REST DAY in Beyneu and head to Kulsary in evening	60
47	Kazakhstan border to Beyneu	80	Arrive in Kulsary	160
48	REST DAY in Beyneu		Kulsary to Dossor	140
49	Beyneu to Kulsary	110	Dossor to Atyrau	100
50	Arrive in Kulsary	100	REST DAY in Atyrau	
51	Kulsary to Dossor	115	REST DAY in Atyrau	
52	Dossor to Atyrau	100	REST DAY in Atyrau	
53	REST DAY in Atyrau		REST DAY in Atyrau	
54	Return to UK		Return to UK	





# Expedition Diary



# Into The Mountains, Kyrgyzstan





## Into The Mountains, Kyrgyzstan

### Day 1 – 27<sup>th</sup> July

We met at 0900 London Gatwick for our 1240 flight to Istanbul. Our panniers were pre-packed into large plastic laundry bags and then shrink-wrapped. Our bikes were bagged in CTC plastic bags. Everything ran smoothly until we had to pay for our bikes, which came to twice the expected amount. Although the team arrived very early for the flight, with the hassle of bikes we still only had 20 minutes spare before departure. After a quick flight, we met a fellow traveller in the Istanbul transit zone who was travelling from Bishkek to the Pamirs with his brother. It seemed all the foreigners travelling to the region had an adventure ahead.

### Day 2 – 28<sup>th</sup> July

Our flight arrived at 0500. After waiting for our bikes, we passed through customs. We had filled out a declaration for our medications, which led to a lot of hassle, with a customs official shouting at us in Russian! However, as soon as they found out we had come from the UK, we were let through straight away. On the other side we assembled our bikes much to the intrigue of the airport staff and taxi drivers. Rob found he had a buckled wheel but after ninety minutes spent truing his wheel, we finally left for Bishkek.

Three minutes down the road Kamil's worst nightmare came true as he was chased by three large, excitable dogs. Thankfully we soon escaped and were on the road into Bishkek. Once there, we oriented ourselves and changed some money before grabbing lunch at a local café. Next, in our search for groceries we ended up in a very high-end shopping centre, much too expensive for us. As Kamil and John waited outside, a very friendly Russian and fellow cyclist, by the name of Rustam, approached

them and offered to be an impromptu tour guide of the city. He showed us the sights and gave us friendly advice for cycling in the country before taking us to a local market to buy supplies. He advised us to walk like Russians – with your hands in pockets and some 'swagger' – to avoid getting hounded by locals.

Forty kilometres out of town was our first Silk Road destination, Nevakat, a 7th Century citadel with imposing views over the landscape. As night was falling fast, we asked permission from a local herder and struck up camp. However later that evening, we realised we had misinterpreted him and in fact he had invited us into his house for dinner and shelter, an offer we gladly took up. This turned out to be a great first night in Kyrgyzstan. To show our thanks, we gave his son a postcard of London with our names and story on the back.





### Day 3 – 29<sup>th</sup> July

On waking up at the herders' hut, we soon realised Kamil's pannier rack was missing a spacer and bolt. We quickly fixed it and were soon on the road, planning to grab breakfast on the road to Tokmok. However, the melon stalls we were relying on soon disappeared and the 38° heat started to take its toll. We spent a long afternoon in the shadows of Burana Tower, a 10<sup>th</sup> century watchtower, where we slept and had a long lunch. Here we also planned our route to Kegeti, a town at the foot of the valley we planned to ascend up. However, we were going to be away from civilisation for a while and so needed to find a shop where we could stock up. On the main road there were many fruit and vegetable stall, but these were hard to come by on the smaller roads that we were travelling on. Thankfully we did find a small shop late in the day and treated ourselves with an ice cream. Rob bought a watermelon here, which soon proved to be an unwise decision as with no way to secure it, he struggled to carry it over the poor roads.

### Day 4 – 30<sup>th</sup> July

This was our first day to climb towards the Kegeti Pass. The roads started well, but began to deteriorate rapidly. Combined with temperatures in excess of 30°, the climb was no easy feat. We stopped at the Kegeti waterfall where we met some Russians who offered us copious amounts of watermelon, just what we needed on this hot day. Whilst here we met a family from Tokmok who invited us to join their picnic, consisting of the best food we had had so far. We proceeded up the winding valley where the road crossed riverbeds and landslides. It made for slow progress. We made camp at 2300m after climbing 1600m that day.





### Day 5 – 31<sup>st</sup> July

The ascent began and altitude soon became apparent. Our lungs could not cope with the demand on our legs and we would often stop after only 50m. This was not helped by the rocky road and spinning out of back wheels. In places the road was destroyed and had been rebuilt as a result of landslides. This happened frequently the higher we got.

At about midday and with 600m in height to go, we had to stop for lunch, as half the team could go no further. We passed a herder hut and enclosure that had been built across the road, indicating that the pass was not open and hadn't been for a long time. The last 300m of the climb was incredibly steep and proved to be difficult with narrow paths and brick sized boulders. We were at such an altitude at this point that we were cycling next to a glacier! We reach the pass at half three. After a brief stop we had to walk our bikes down a scree slope as the road had

been destroyed by a landslide – this route could not be attempted in the opposite direction. Frustratingly, there was a bulldozer 500m below, starting the long process of rebuilding it. The workmen had seen us at the top and were waiting for us to reach them before they headed home. They said hello, wondered what on earth we were doing and offered us fermented milk with vodka.

The roads soon improved and we got to enjoy our first proper downhill of the trip. However, our lack of training on these gravel surfaces started to show and Kamil's bike span out, leading to a sheared rear pannier and a puncture. We made camp soon after at 3000 m, higher than we wanted but the sun set quickly in the mountains.









### Day 6 – 1<sup>st</sup> August

Having finished late the day before, we opted for a lie-in in order to let our bodies recover. This transpired to be more of a morning off with us leaving at noon. The valley leading out from the valley was beautiful, with a stream running alongside for the entirety of the descent. A broken chain on Chris' bike proved a minor hiccup but we were soon on our way again.

Once we reached the first settlement, we were faced with a choice of roads to Kochkor. We opted for the shorter route, which soon turned out

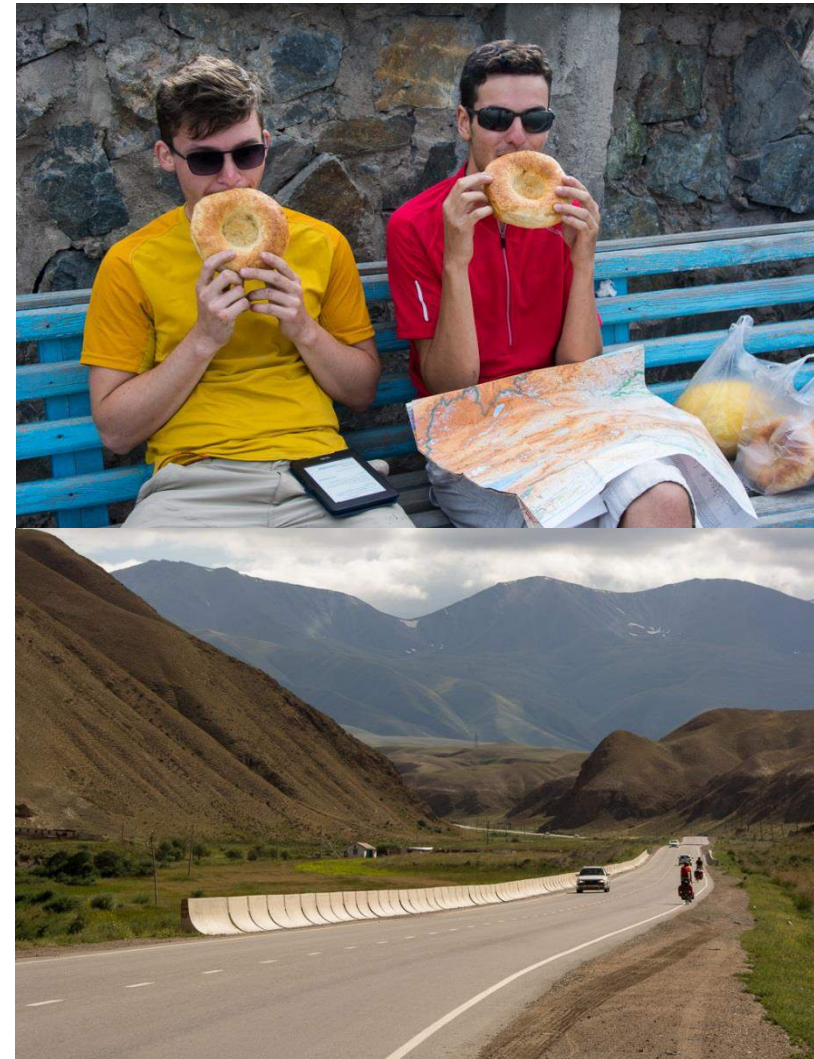
to be a regrettable choice. This route took us on a road that had recently been compacted into corrugations that rattled our bones and bikes and made a speed over 15km/hr impossible. As soon as possible we cut across onto the tarmac road and covered the same distance we had already covered in a third of the time. We made camp just off the main road for an early start the next day.

### Day 7 – 2<sup>nd</sup> August

We made it to Kochkor by 8 and found a bench in the bus station to have breakfast of bread and melon. In pairs, we explored town, from the busy Sunday market to the Soviet era Lenin statue. After updating our blog in the local tourism office, the only place with WiFi, we set out to buy enough food for the next six days in preparation for our cycle up to the remote Song Kol. As Chris and Rob did that, John and Kamil bumped into a couple of fellow cycle tourers, one American and a German. Having just followed the route we planned to take to Jalalabad, they proved a useful source of information about road quality.

It was around midday and 32° when we finally set off towards Lake Song Kol. The majority of the route there followed the main trucking road to China, flawless tarmac that allowed us to make up ground rapidly, despite the incline. Forty kilometres later we came to the turnoff for the lake, a

gravel road that was quite acceptable seeing what we had endured so far. We finally camped not too far above the town of Keng Suu on the banks of a river and readied ourselves for the ascent up to the lake tomorrow.









### Day 8 – 3<sup>rd</sup> August

The day began two hours later than initially planned due to torrential rain washing away any impetus we had to get out of bed. However, when finally under way, we made steady progress up the bumpy road. A ring of high mountains isolates Lake Song Kol on a 3000m plateau and so to get there, we had to cross a 3400m pass with a brutal final ascent. We decided to have an early lunch by a bridge before this and were joined by three local herder children, curious as to what we were doing and extremely playful; they even let Kamil ride their donkey!

Midway through our ascent, the heavens opened, turning the muddy truck into a stream and greatly slowing our progress. As we entered into the clouds, we bumped into a couple of Spanish cycle tourers fourteen months into a four-year round the world adventure. Perched on the mountainside, we tried to gain as much wisdom as possible from their months of experience, particularly about the road ahead. We were soon



at the top and for the first time, the vast expanse of the lake became evident. We knew it was 20km to the lake, however the road passed far away from the shore due to marshland. So an already long day became even longer as we rounded the lake from the northeast to the southwest corner, where it was best to camp. Exhausted, we were glad for our planned rest day the following day and made friends with some Austrian tourers who were cycling on to Bishkek.

### Day 9 – 4<sup>th</sup> August

A lightning storm heralded in the next day. Song Kol it seemed was defined by its extremely changeable weather. After seven days on the road, we had earned our rest and it was very much appreciated. We spent most of the day in and around the tents servicing our bikes and various bits of equipment. Some of us swam in the lake and did a thorough wash of our clothes. Our activities were very much limited by the weather, which could change in less than twenty minutes, including when Chris and Kamil were busy making dinner!









#### Day 10 – 5<sup>th</sup> August

We woke early for a long day, and ate breakfast as the sun emerged over the peaks of the surrounding mountains. We were soon underway and quickly reached the mountain pass that led us out of the bowl. Ahead lay 1500m of descent to the valley floor with spectacular views along the way. Unfortunately, John fell a short way from the top, shearing off his left gear shifter in a way none of us thought possible. We glued and taped it in place as an interim measure until we reached the next village.

We were chased down the mountain by an enormous weather front that caught us short a mere 500m from the village. Here we encountered the first navigation irregularity, with local directions at odds with the map. We followed the local advice and cycled for a further 30km along gravel road before finishing out of town having ridden the most glorious 3 km of tarmac. We camped by a river in a canyon where local Kyrgyz drivers

filling water bottles joined us.

#### Day 11 – 6<sup>th</sup> August

Ahead lay the penultimate pass of the trip. We narrowly beat a bitumen lorry up the relentless climb just as the midday heat started getting too oppressive. At the top we rested with a local herder and his daughter, who wanted to practice her English with us. The descent was slow and tortuous, with pannier clips snapping and mounting heat.

After lunch we faced a small hill, a larger hill and then a surprise canyon not shown on the map. We were not happy. Finally we passed into Dodomol where, exhausted, we ravaged the local shop. We made camp in a nearby field but were found by the town's children who, on the one day where we just wanted to collapse into bed, insisted on pestering us.









### Day 12 – 7<sup>th</sup> August

It was an easy 30km descent into Kazarman the following morning. Despite the usual roads and the tendency of Chris' bottles to fall off we made it into Kazarman for around 11. En route we also met our first British cycle tourer, who was on his way to Bishkek following a similar route to ours. He had originally planned to travel the Pamir Highway but was diverted because of a landslide closing the popular tourist route.

Kazarman itself was distinctly underwhelming. One asphalt road skirts the edge of the town with a small bazaar and some cafes located in the centre. Here we had our first locally cooked lunch, a pleasant break from the monotony of our camping food. After filling up on supplies we headed out of town to find that the new Kazarman to Jalalabad road was under construction. Given where it led, we were confident we could simply follow this better road surface all the way to Jalalabad, despite the unpleasant dust from the heavy machinery.

As we cycled down the road, we were confused by the disparity between what we were observing and what was marked on the map. However, given how unreliable the map had been so far, we powered on for 30km into the headwind. But this new Chinese road was unfinished; they had not yet built a planned tunnel through the mountains. It was late in the day and we did not fancy the prospect of returning to Kazarman to join the right road. Conflicting information from our map, a local farmer and the Chinese engineers left us completely confused as to what to do. We took the gamble of a farmer's track as a shortcut through the foothills, using our GPS location as a guide. We would only find out if it paid off the following day as we camped not much later, just as the sun set.





### Day 13 – 8<sup>th</sup> August

Luckily the gamble did in fact pay off and we were eventually back on the correct road, in a completely different place from where our map said it was. We powered ahead into the foothills, with the plan to make lunch at the base of the final pass. However as we had already learnt, things never go to plan; on a descent, Kamil was thrown off his bike by a deep pothole, sustaining injuries to his hands, arms and knees. The bikes and panniers also took a toll – one buckled wheel, a flat tyre and a sheared pannier.

Lunch was made while Kamil tried to recover. Here we met a French cycle tourer who had just completed the pass and we shared stories of our adventures over a shared meal. It was already 5.30pm by the time Kamil was bandaged up and his bike was fixed. Despite this, we began our ascent, hoping to camp just the other side of the summit so that we didn't have to make the climb tomorrow and fall further behind. But Kamil's bike was in pieces and even a small bump caused his pannier to shear off once again; given what road conditions were bound to be ahead, he was reluctant to continue, as it was unlikely that he and his bike would summit before nightfall. There also didn't seem to be any viable camping spots on the exposed mountainside ahead and it seemed the weather was turning so it was a case of either camping now or

making it over. But the team continued, convinced we could make it over. As the light faded and the temperature dropped sharply, the wind started gusting violently, so much so that we had to cycle tucked into the mountainside so as to not be blown off it.

The traffic on the single-track pass picked up as night fell around 8.30pm. Kamil and Chris used this opportunity to hitch a ride with a passing lorry to take them across to the other side whilst Rob and John continued on in the wind and rain. At the bottom of the valley, Chris and Kamil set up

camp and waited until 10.30pm for Rob and John to join them after their night descent.





### Day 14 – 9<sup>th</sup> August

Today was our final day spent in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan; ahead lay the Fergana Valley and flat Uzbekistan. We descended from our camping spot at 1800m through picturesque foothills and into farmland and a broad river valley. Shortly before lunch Kamil's bad luck continued as he fell at speed after hitting a patch of deep gravel. An early lunch was called as he tended to his many grazes, lucky not to have anything worse.

An hour later and we were in Jalalabad, our first city in the more conservative and less Russified south. Whilst getting our bearings near the main bazaar, an English teacher approached us and selflessly welcomed us to her town, offering us her house for the night as well as a shower and home cooked meal; it was a miracle. Whilst being shown around town, Kamil was stopped by an undercover police officer who mistook him for an Uzbek; apparently there had been some ethnic clashes in town between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz and, with all his bandages, Kamil had been confused for one of them!

We spent a relaxed evening in her house, perched on top of a hill with magnificent views over the town. With the evening call to prayer, we ate our plate of *plov* and spoke for hours under the clear night sky. We slept that night under the stars on beds laid out for us in the courtyard.





### Day 15 – 10<sup>th</sup> August

As Jalalabad slowly came to life below us, we awoke and had a simple breakfast of bread, watermelon and some of the left over *plov* from the night before. Our visit coincided with the opening of a new English school by our host Aygul and so we obliged to come along and teach the kids some English and tell them what life is like back home, much to their excitement.

Our first 100km day beckoned and we were soon out of town, pushing on along the perfect tarmac to our lunch stop in Uzgen. A straight 60km road did exist to Osh but local border politics meant we had to skirt around the Uzbek border along a windy mountain road. But the perfect roads meant we ate the hills up and on some of the downhills were hitting almost 69 km/hr. Uzgen and our lunch stop came quickly and kebabs in a roadside chaikhana were all we needed to give us the energy for the final 50km of flat tarmac road.



The rocky outcrop of Suleiman Too, a shrine in the centre of Osh, guided us into the city and after a few wrong turns we were at our guesthouse. 100km for five hours in the saddle, including over a kilometre of climbing: it's amazing what good roads can do for us! We met some other travellers and went for dinner with them, sharing our stories of adventure over beer and Kyrgyz delicacies.

### Day 16 – 11<sup>th</sup> August

You seldom appreciate the bed you sleep on, but we woke from our deep sleep realising the punishment the previous fortnight had inflicted on us. The bed served only to remind us of home comforts. Osh is the second city of Kyrgyzstan, a sprawling place with everything you could need after weeks in the mountains. We spent the day exploring the sights and visiting what is said to be the largest Bazaar in the region. The size soon became a hindrance when trying to look for the bike repair stalls, which we eventually found tucked away near the metal workers at the far end of the bazaar.





# Rest & Recuperation, Uzbekistan





## Rest and Recuperation, Uzbekistan

Day 17 – 12<sup>th</sup> August

Osh heralded the end of our chapter in Kyrgyzstan and after only a ten-minute cycle ride, we were at the Uzbek border. We had read a lot about the notorious Uzbek border crossings and how they insisted on travellers emptying all of their belongings out onto the floor, even checking memory cards to make sure there wasn't anything suspicious. Here we had to declare all currency, all electronics before explaining what each item was in the bags we carried. Generally, they were all very nice and eager to see us through the border, however explaining the bag of medications was a stressful experience for Chris.

Kamil had been feeling generally unwell since waking up, with a mixture of a headache, fatigue and just generally feeling lethargic. However, during the border crossing his condition deteriorated and two kilometres down the road into Uzbekistan, he could not go any further. Chris took his temperature and it was over 39 degrees; by this time he was also feeling nauseous. And so whilst Kamil lay down in the shade of some trees, Rob and John searched for a taxi to Andijan and Chris contacted our UK doctor and medical insurance. Following their advice, Kamil was promptly started on paracetamol and co-amoxiclav for his presumed infection.

John and Rob returned empty handed and at this point some concerned locals had started gathering around Kamil. Unlike in Kyrgyzstan, very few people now spoke any Russian so the little we had picked up on our travels was now of no use. Coupled with our lack of local currency, now that we were in a different country, and the fact evening was fast approaching, we felt quite vulnerable. Our salvation came from a man, supposedly a local doctor, who put us on the phone with an English-speaking friend, who said he could arrange for a lift into Andijan for \$50.





Within 20 minutes, we were on the road again, this time in a rickety Lada with our bikes strapped to the roof.

The plan was to first find a hotel and unload all of our kit, then Chris would go with Kamil to the hospital. The first place we stopped at was booked up but the next was not so we unloaded all of the kit and Chris and Kamil continued to the hospital. The only hospital recognised by our insurers was in the capital Tashkent but it was too late to go there now so we went to the best hospital in town according to our driver, apparently the top hospital in the region.

It was certainly a new experience and one we hoped we wouldn't have had to face on our trip. Speaking no Uzbek, we tried to explain what was going on and Kamil was eventually fast-tracked through triage, being the only foreigner in the hospital. Occasionally nurses would approach carrying primed syringes filled with an unidentified substance, the fear of any person visiting a hospital in foreign land. We were finally referred to a doctor who spoke English and Kamil's wounds were soon cleaned and dressed and he was started on the necessary medications. Kamil was admitted to the hospital and given a bed for the night, sharing a room with a friendly Uzbek man who was recovering from an operation. Chris meanwhile made his way back to the hotel alone, with no money and in a completely new city.

#### Day 18 – 13<sup>th</sup> August

Now split as a group, the non-hospitalised three had an early breakfast before searching Andijan for a shop where we could buy domestic flights to Tashkent; it turned out they only flew every other day, so instead we arranged a taxi to take us the distance.

Once we arrived at the hospital, it soon became apparent that we were being treated differently from the locals, as we skipped queues and got

the head doctor's attention. The most apparent difference was the arrival of state TV reporters, who interviewed Kamil and his doctors – Chris, John and Rob declined to be in the broadcast as they were worried about attracting unwanted attention in the city. Andijan is a city that sees very few foreigners, famously mainly for a massacre that occurred there ten years ago; we didn't want to be any more recognisable when walking the streets.

Once the team got an update on Kamil's condition, which had now greatly improved, they left him to rest and proceeded to change hotels so that they could be closer to the hospital, quite a task with four bikes and over thirty bags. They then had lunch and explored Andijan, mainly the fairground and bazaar. In the evening arrangements through local contacts were made to take our bikes and us all to Tashkent the following day so Kamil could visit an international hospital and fully rest.





#### Day 19 – 14<sup>th</sup> August

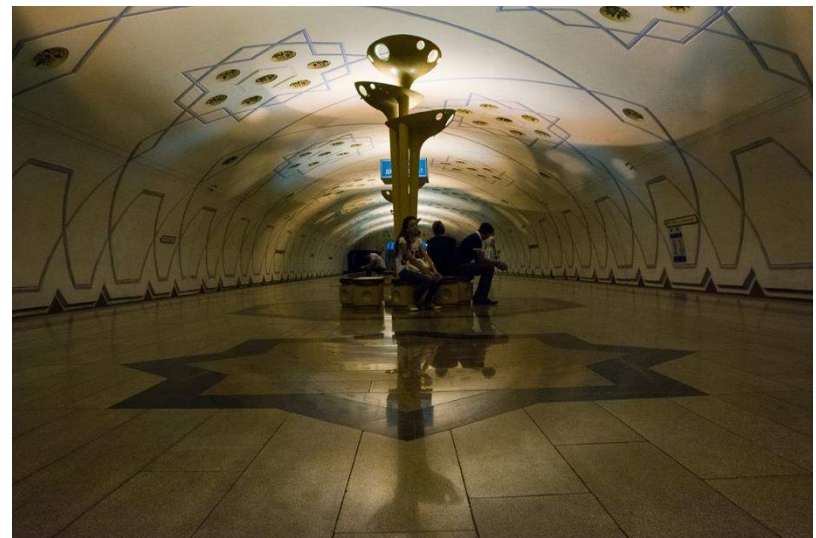
We went to see Kamil before he was discharged later that morning. In Uzbekistan, there is a peculiar law whereby tourists must register on their first night in the country and then at least every third night after that. Because Kamil had been in hospital that had not been possible so we had to collect a special letter from the head doctor to explain what had happened. Unexpectedly, the final hospital bill was in fact waived; this was either as an act of goodwill for putting up with the television crew or due to an agreement for reciprocal health care between Uzbekistan and the UK. Farewells said and with a parting gluteal injection, we returned to the hotel and got our taxi to Tashkent. Our bikes followed in a van.

#### Day 20 – 15<sup>th</sup> August

The day started with Kamil heading to the international medical centre. The feedback from this was for Kamil to rest for a week and recuperate and continue on the antibiotics he had been prescribed. In fact Kamil was not the only one needing to recover; most of the day was spent resting as John battled with ongoing bowel problems and Rob nursed an infected graze on his leg, for which Chris gave him some co-amoxiclav.

#### Day 21/22 – 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> August

We spent the next two days sightseeing in Tashkent and made plans to restart the expedition with Rob, Chris and John cycling to Samarkand whilst Kamil met them a couple of days later by train.





And So The Adventure  
Continued...





## And So The Adventure Continued...

### Day 23 – 18<sup>th</sup> August

Today, the group split with Kamil resting in Tashkent and the remaining contingent cycling to Samarkand. We departed in the evening cycling 50km out of Tashkent. Here we asked a local family for water and they kindly invited us in for dinner and to stay the night.

### Day 24 – 19<sup>th</sup> August

The plan had been to cycle to Samarkand in three days, however we found the roads to be excellent with no head winds. We cycled 150 km after having a 6am breakfast with our host family. They also gave us a large jar of exquisite apricot jam that fuelled us for many days to come.

We had an enforced break from 12 to 4pm due to the intense summer heat. Temperatures soared to 50° as we wilted in the shade of a melon market found beside the main road. Here you could buy melons of all shapes and sizes in quantities ranging from one to a whole truckload. It was chaos!

We finished the day just before Jizzakh, camping in a ditch beside the main road.



### Day 25 – 20<sup>th</sup> August

The final day to Samarkand saw us enter the hills, albeit little ones. We climbed for most of the morning to reach the state boundary at the crest of the final hill. From here we were granted a strong tail wind and cruised downhill all the way to Samarkand at 40km/hr.

Entering Samarkand, we soon found ourselves lost and had to use free Wi-Fi over lunch to find out where to go. We ended up checking into a Guesthouse next to the Mausoleum of Amir Timur, the hero of Samarkand.









#### Day 26 – 21<sup>st</sup> August

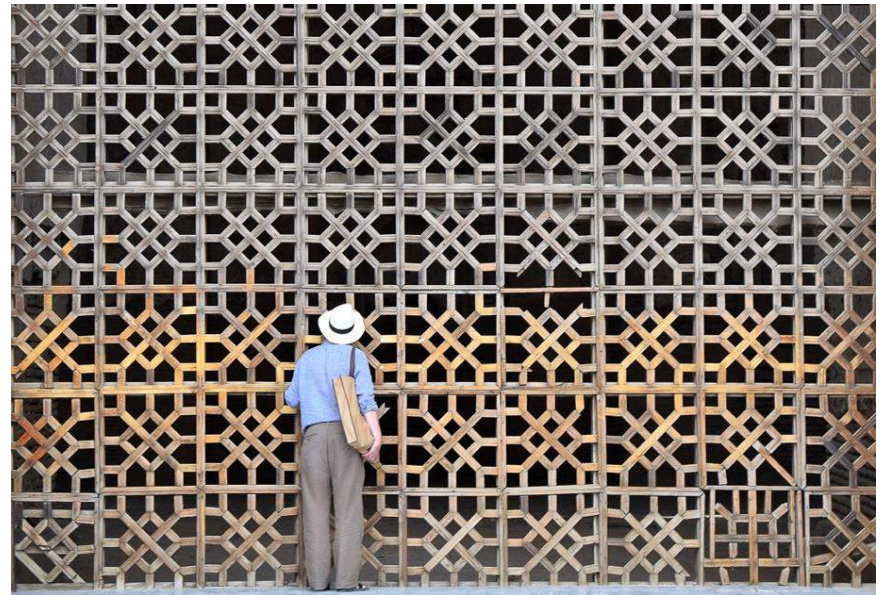
Kamil arrived after lunch, having got the train down from Tashkent that morning. The others had spent their morning visiting the bazaar and crafts centre. When he arrived we spent the remaining time visiting the attractions around town.

#### Day 27 – 22<sup>nd</sup> August

Our final day in Samarkand saw us visit the major tourist attractions in town, joined by Kamil's father who had come down from Tashkent for the day. The Registan was closed due to a music festival that evening so we had to miss it sadly, although we visited the Shah I Zinda, Bibi Khaym Mosque among others.









### Day 28 – 23<sup>rd</sup> August

Leaving the hotel in Samarkand at 4.30am in order to make the most of the cool weather, we set off for Bukhara. Our target for the day was to reach as close to Navoi as possible and we managed 100km before twelve o'clock. Having only had some boiled eggs and bread when we left Samarkand and one samsa on route, we were hungry by this point. We therefore decided to stop at a roadside restaurant to have lunch. After ordering, we were approached by two gentlemen from a wedding that was happening in the adjacent building. They were carrying what looked like a bottle of water but was in fact 'Uzbek Whiskey' (read: homemade vodka). Half an hour and around 1.5 litres of the 'whiskey' later the team decided it was time to make their escape.

Now in a slightly more jovial mood the team cycled onto Karmana. Here we spent some time looking at a mausoleum, on which many in both Samarkand and Bukhara had been modelled, as well as the local mosque. Chris also suffered the third puncture of the day, after Kamil's and John's earlier on. As dusk came, we cycled a little further along the road and camped on the edge of a cotton field.



### Day 29 – 24<sup>th</sup> August

We woke at dawn the next day, just as the cotton farmers began to arrive to their fields. We wanted to leave quickly and so stopped an hour down the road at the Rabat-i-Malik caravanserai for a breakfast of bread, jam and some grapes a local had given to us. Our first stop was the workshop of Abdullo Narzullaev, a 6th generation ceramicist who has in the past presented his work to President Karimov, Hillary Clinton and Prince Charles to name a few. After a long morning of cycling in unpleasant heat, arriving at his house was welcome respite, especially given the feast of fresh Uzbek cuisine he had prepared. After we had recovered, he showed us around his house and workshop. We very much wanted to buy some of his beautiful ceramic pieces on offer but were aware of the weeks of cycling we still had ahead and that they probably wouldn't make it home. We settled on a few small pieces. Later than we had planned, we continued on the last few hours of cycling into Bukhara, stopping briefly at the impressive Vobkent minaret. Roadworks and awful roads hampered our progress but not long before dusk, we arrived in the magical Silk Road city of Bukhara, our hotel, 'Rustam and Zukhro', tucked just behind the main square on the edge of the historical Jewish Quarter.





### Day 30 – 25<sup>th</sup> August

Our first full day in Bukhara was split between sorting out our kit and taking a look around some of the sites that Bukhara has to offer. In the morning we decided to do this independently and then met up for lunch. We then took a walk around the old Jewish Quarter including visiting a house that had been maintained in the same condition since the fall of the Emirate of Bukhara to the Red Army.

### Day 31 – 26<sup>th</sup> August

For our final day in Bukhara we spent the morning visiting one of the local non-touristy markets in order to buy supplies and then went back into the centre of the city to visit more sites including various madrassas and the Ark, Bukhara's fortress.













#### Day 32 – 27<sup>th</sup> August

We left Bukhara early in order to make the most of the cooler weather as we were now starting our first desert leg. The conditions were good although there was a bit of a head wind as ever. Having cycled for most of the morning we arrived at our first town, Gazli (literally Gas Town) and bought some supplies for lunch and an ice cream before continuing on the road. We then stopped for our lunch break and faced the challenge of producing some shelter in an area that was completely flat and with no notable trees or bushes. Having climbed down a bank of the new road that ran next to the existing one we used two bikes and ground sheet to form a cover to hide from the sun for the next few hours. After lunch we cycled 40km before reaching another small settlement where we were able to buy more water and crossed a police checkpoint. After this we travelled a further 10km down the road before stopping to make camp. Just as we began to set up our tents we were joined by another cycle tourer, Taneli, from Finland who had seen our bike poles sticking up over the top of the bank! He was heading in the other direction but was happy to meet other tourers as we were the first he had seen for 3 weeks.

#### Day 33 – 28<sup>th</sup> August

We set off early, saying goodbye to Taneli and heading north on the new roads. It was a long day due to head winds and the slightly undulating terrain. We were also slowed as Kamil was suffering from a stomach problem and so after reaching a roadside cafe and grabbing some bread we headed up the road a short way to find somewhere to rest for lunch. Once the heat had died down we headed off again and covered another 50km. We were aiming to be close to a town called Meshkali where we intended to get supplies but on realising that we had accidentally passed through it, as it was signed as Nukus, we made camp.





### Day 34 – 29<sup>th</sup> August

Having been unable to get supplies the previous evening we used our snacks for breakfast before getting on the road. Fortunately a short way down the road we found a cluster of restaurants but these turned out to only sell fish, something we hadn't really come across before this. This marked the end of the desert as we entered the more fertile Khorezm region. After a late breakfast of bread and chai from one of the restaurants we were back on the road. We hoped to take a more scenic route to Khiva via a road we had been suggested that followed the river. The only issue with this plan was finding where that road began. As a result we ended taking the main road via Urgench. On reaching the turn off for the road to Urgench and Khiva we rested briefly as we planned to make Khiva for a late lunch. We set off again with the wind behind us, much to our pleasure, although at a steady pace due to Kamil still feeling a bit unwell. We finally reached Khiva in the middle of the afternoon after a few navigational issues and found our hotel, Hotel Alibek, just outside the walls of the Khivan old town. We then settled down for an evening of rest and on the advice of another group of tourists found a supermarket a short distance away from which to buy supplies.





### Day 35 – 30<sup>th</sup> August

As in Bukhara we spent our first day in Khiva resting, sorting kit and having a look around some of the sites. The old town is a densely packed walled citadel, which was the capital of the Khivan Khanate before being taken over by the Soviets. It was notorious for its role in the slave trade and is packed with many madrassas as well as the tallest minaret in Uzbekistan.

### Day 36 – 31<sup>st</sup> August

Our second day in Khiva was similar to the first with time spent sightseeing as well as reassessing where we were in the trip and how we wanted to use our remaining time. We finished the day by climbing the watchtower in the palace at sunset, which gave us fantastic views across the old town. On returning to the hotel we met a group of Kazakhs who were visiting Khiva on their holidays and were originally from Aytrau, our final destination. Having chatted to them over a bottle of whisky, we were invited to stay another day and join in with the Independence Day celebrations with them. We eventually decided to decline the offer, as we wanted to get back on the road before Nukus and the final desert leg.









### Day 37 – 1<sup>st</sup> September

Independence Day. Today we planned to head to Ayaz Qala, a 4th century BC castle in the desert a day's ride north of Khiva.. We decided to press on, using a map sketched on a scrap of paper by a local taxi driver to navigate our route there. After a hearty breakfast at the hotel, we headed off, eating up the distance without even realising it. Kamil picked up another puncture on the same wheel as a few days beforehand. A tear in the rear tyre that he had patched was now rubbing on the inner tube and had caused the rupture. This proved to be a recurring problem over the next few days and there was little that could be done. A quick lunch and we began our first foray off the main road in Uzbekistan. On one side of the road would be cotton fields (and the odd child labourer!) and on the other sand dunes, a testament to the country's destructive agricultural policy that had caused the death of the Aral Sea. We stopped at the local shop for ice cream and Chris cycled the last 25km to the castle complex with a cantaloupe in his front pannier. That evening we lit a bonfire at the base of one of the fortresses and enjoyed our melon as we watched the sunset.





# The Long Road North





## The Long Road North

### Day 38 – 2<sup>nd</sup> September

The next morning, we hiked up to see the castles and enjoyed our breakfast at the top. The imposing position gifted us with impressive views over the desert. A leisurely cycle took us to Toprak Qala, another castle even more well preserved than the last. We were getting hungry by this point but were told by locals that the only restaurant was on the main road some one and a half hour's cycle away. By this time, the wind had noticeably started to pick up and paired with our fatigue and hunger, the next couple of hours was an unpleasant slog. When we reached the main road, we tried to ask locals where we could eat. Everyone told us to go in a different direction and after half an hour of confusion and frustration we went for the advice of an old man. Luckily for us, his advice paid off and, exhausted, we re energised over a plate of buckwheat and potatoes. The headwind didn't die down over lunch. In fact, it even seemed to worsen. And so we carried on, only making about 15 km/hr. Rob was really flagging at this point and we came to the decision to stop early as we were just tiring ourselves out needlessly.

### Day 39 – 3<sup>rd</sup> September

After the previous day of extreme headwinds and quitting early in the afternoon, the team was pleased to wake to near perfect conditions. We made excellent progress on the roads, but due to the lack of shops we had not eaten much for breakfast and at around 1100 we thankfully found a great family run restaurant. Here we managed to order ten eggs instead of four and half a kilogram of fish by accident – however we all needed the protein so this wasn't that bad after all.

Before cycling the final two hours into Nukus, we made an excursion to Chilpyk, a Zoroastrian Temple of Silence. This was an amazing solitary monument in the endless desert.

Finally, we made our way into Nukus, and after getting lost (a rite of passage on entering cities in Uzbekistan) we booked into the old Soviet hotel – Hotel Nukus, which was less than desirable but an experience to say the least... Outside the hotel we met two local teenagers – Jamshaid and Shohrukh who offered to take us round the city – which we accepted.

### Day 40 – 4<sup>th</sup> September

With little to see in Nukus the next day consisted of fixing our bikes, gathering large amounts of food for the 1000km desert stretch ahead. Kamil also visited the Savitsky Museum, Nukus' only real attraction and a breath-taking collection of Soviet avant-garde art. John was feeling quite unwell and rested at the hotel in the hope he would be well enough to cycle the following day.





# Parting Ways





## Parting Ways

### Day 41 – 5<sup>th</sup> September

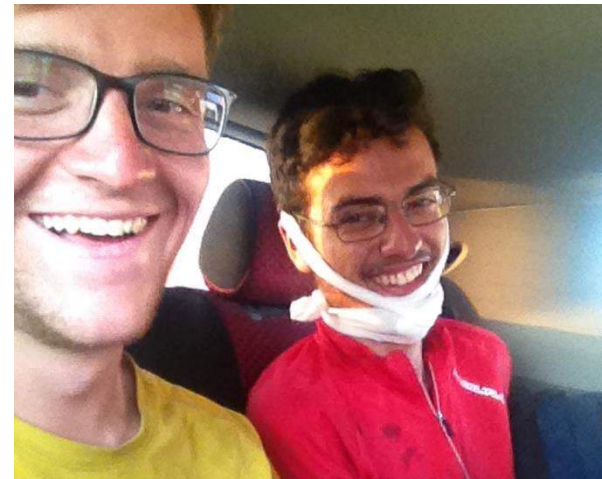
The day started somewhat early with the team leaving at 7am. We had adopted the Uzbek breakfast of melon and bread to power us through the day. We took the road north towards Kungrad via Khojali arriving in time for lunch. Whilst passing through Khujali we met Harri, a friend from Tashkent, on his way to the Aral Sea. It is a small world out here. The 100km cycle to Kungrad was fairly simple but rather monotonous. We stopped for lunch in the shade and had an afternoon nap, as John was still not feeling one hundred percent. After lunch, we ascended onto the Ustyurt Plateau and began the next few days of empty desolate cycling. However, things did not go to plan. Chris overtook Kamil as Kamil was pulling out, causing him to lose balance and fall at 30km/hr. He grazed his hands and knees badly as well as a deep cut on his chin. Chris administered first aid before flagging down a car taking them back to Nukus, where Kamil received two stitches at hospital. Meanwhile, Rob and John made camp with the remaining gear having failed to flag a lift for themselves and four bikes back to Nukus.



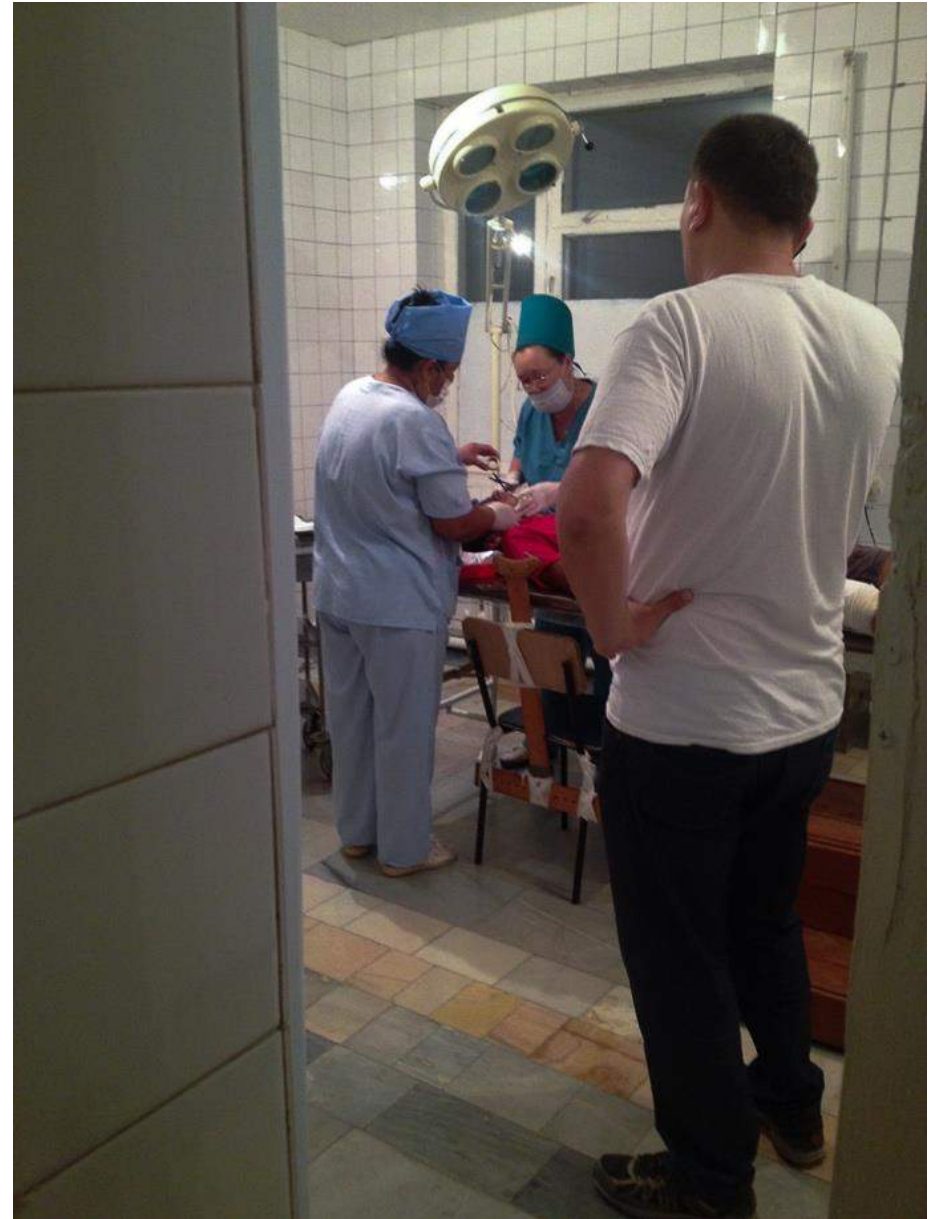
### Day 42 – 6<sup>th</sup> September

Kamil had been advised by the doctor that saw him in Tashkent and a UK doctor that continuing with the trip was unwise. With a week in the desert ahead, he would not be able to properly look after his wound and there would be a high likelihood it would not heal well and perhaps even get infected. And so, Kamil started making plans to head home. Chris chose to accompany him. After exchanging money in the bazaar, Chris and Kamil bought train tickets and took a bus up to Kungrad where the train departed from. Rob and John, who had spent the day in the desert, cycled Chris and Kamil's bikes the 30km to Kungrad to hand them over and say their farewells. The train left at 6pm and would be arriving in Atyrau at 4pm the following day.

Whilst waiting for their train, Chris and Kamil befriended some police officers, which turned out to be a great move as they then assisted us with placing our bikes on the sleeper train. The train ride was a fairly simple and enjoyable experience, with only the border crossing at 1am being a little stressful. Meanwhile, Rob and John returned to their well hidden bikes by taxi and cycled a further 3km to a motel in a nearby gas town.









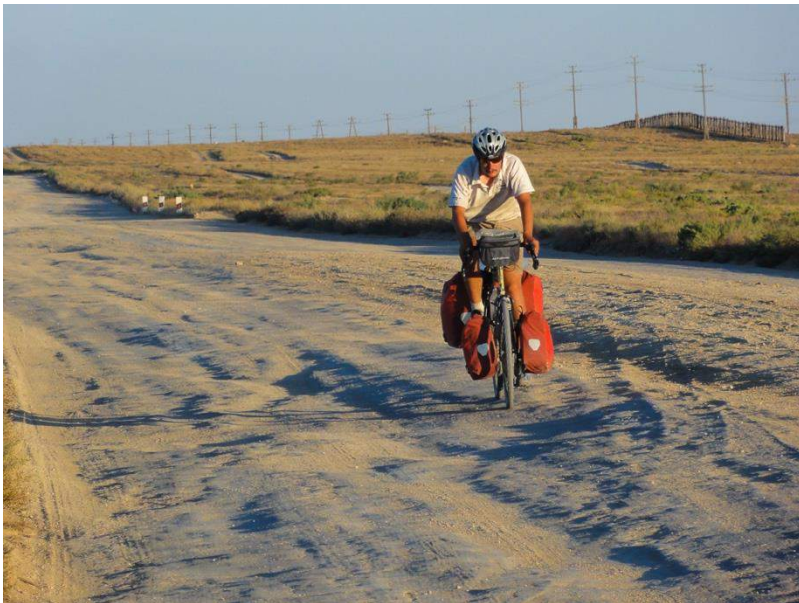




#### Day 43 – 7<sup>th</sup> September

After disembarking the train, Chris and Kamil set off to find the cheapest hotel in Atyrau, quite a task given this oil boom town was not made for the backpacker tourists. We managed to negotiate a good price at Green Hotel and then set up base, showered and went out to exchange money.

During the whole trip, we had not experienced more than half a day of tail winds. However, today Rob and John were graced with a tail wind that only grew stronger as the day went on. Settling into a routine of 50km on and 30 minutes off, they left at 8am skirting a dried salt lake. Swapping the lead cyclist every 10km to break the monotony, distance soon flew past. After 130km and barely 1pm, we hit Jasliq, the last major town for over 100km. We enjoyed a leisurely two hour lunch in the first roadside building since leaving that morning. Sensing this was the day, we left and cracked out a further 70km to reach the 200km mark well before night fall. We made camp off the road having covered 202km in one day!



#### Day 44 – 8<sup>th</sup> September

After the previous evening, Chris and Kamil decided that it would not be wise to stay in Atyrau until the 18<sup>th</sup>, due to the high cost of living being more than the price of changing flights. Therefore, they woke early and while Kamil went to a clinic to get his stitches checked and wounds dressed and cleaned, Chris managed to rearrange the flight tickets. We then explored the city in few hours remaining, taking some photos of us crossing the Ural River – the boundary between Asia and Europe. After an early dinner we then cycled to the airport while it was light, packed our bikes and bags and made camp for the overnight wait for our flight.

Today was Rob's 22<sup>nd</sup>, unfortunately not quite the celebration he had hoped for. A short 90km, again with a mighty tail wind, saw them arrive at the Kazakh border for 11:45am. Strangely, it was only Uzbeks using the border, which would explain what was waiting for them on the other side. Entering Kazakhstan, it was now a not-so-short 86km to the town of Beyneu. However, to call what they faced a road was pushing it a bit. Using their legs to suspend themselves above the seat was the only way to make it manageable. Half way to Beyneu they stopped at the top of a hill. There, a lorry stopped and gave them a bottle of Dizzy Cocktail energy drink. It did the trick and saw them cycle 14km to camp with 30km left to go to Beyneu.





### Day 45 – 9<sup>th</sup> September

This day was never going to be easy, but we did not expect it to be near impossible. Although we had contacted Transaero months in advance to confirm we could fly with our bikes, the rude gentleman representing them in Atyrau ignored this and demanded a huge amount of money for us to travel – claiming we had to pay for it per kilo. After thirty minutes of arguments it became apparent that we would not be flying if this was not paid, and with the plane about to leave Chris ran over to the cashpoint and withdrew the amount demanded.

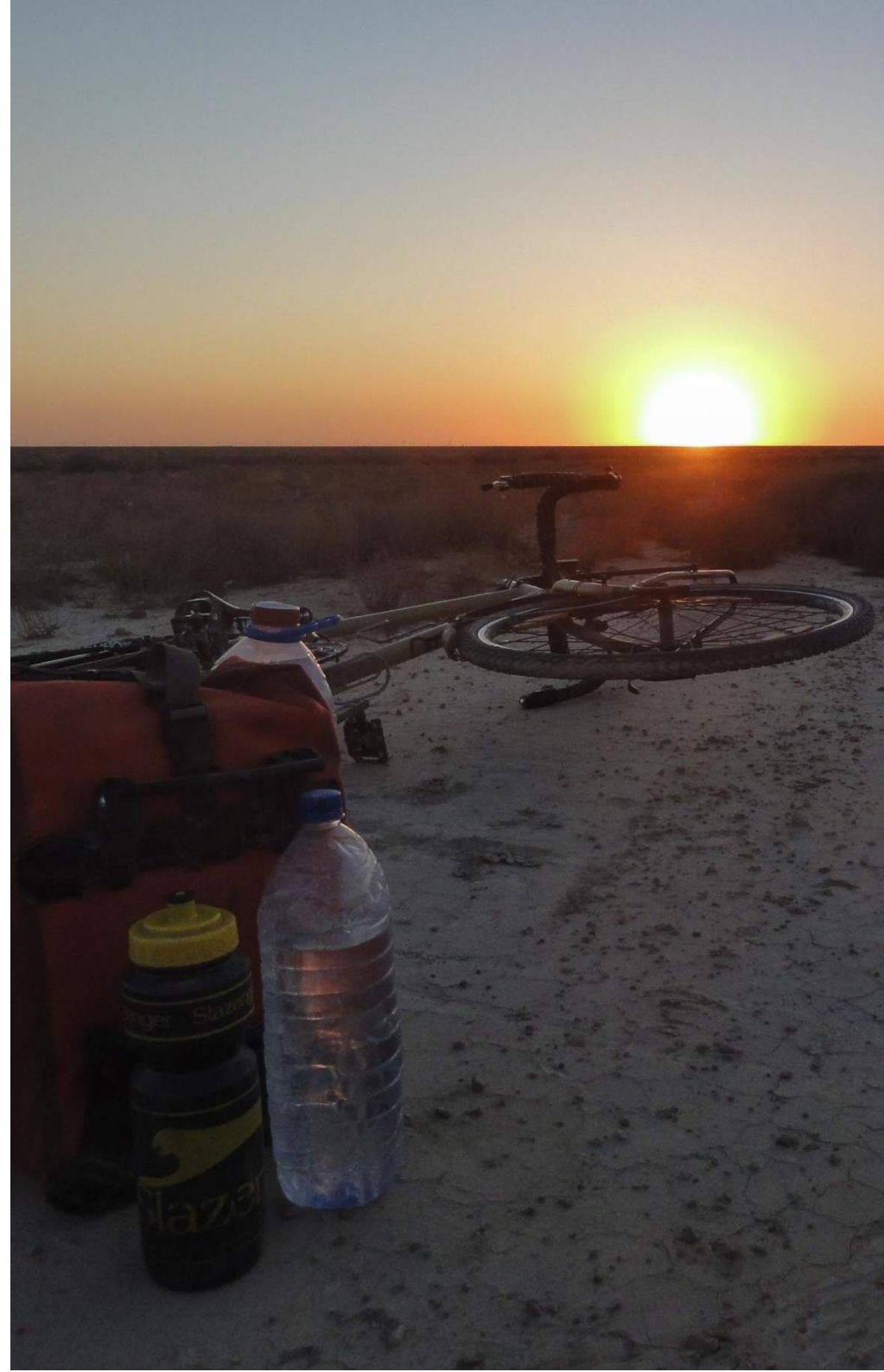
Before we headed into passport control, Chris bumped into the family we had befriended in Khiva – they had just flown into Atyrau. They reiterated that we are mad, but wished us a safe trip home. The rest of the day was fairly simple; with a short layover at Moscow we landed at Heathrow and before we knew it were back home. The expedition was over for half of the team.

Into Beyneu, the roads started predictably badly but occasionally would throw in a short section of perfect road before returning it to something worse than before. The worst section actually lay 1km from Beyneu and led us into the town; the locals in fact chose to drive through the desert rather than face the onslaught of the tangled mess of steel bars and broken concrete. We found a hotel and made base there. This was our rest day. Changing money in the bank and buying supplies for our final leg, we were now ready.





# The Final Leg





## The Final Leg

### Day 46 – 10<sup>th</sup> September

Our rest day continued into the early afternoon as we lounged about in Beyneu. Every little bit of rest counts after doing 350km in just two days, not to mention the further 400km that lay ahead. In an attempt to buy some time we opted to leave and hit the open road shortly after 2pm. The heat was intolerable after our air conditioned room with temperatures reaching over 40 degrees Celsius. After only 10km we decided to take a short rest by a derelict barn and wait for the sun to lower its position in the sky. The next 50km was a hard won affair with rolling hills, a head wind and high temperatures. We camped before another low hill, encountering our first scorpion of the trip! We also managed to break one of our tent poles, though I believe this was due to the tents age and the good use had out of it.



### Day 47 – 11<sup>th</sup> September

This day could quite aptly summarise the whole of our short stay in Kazakhstan: eagles, hard work and incredible hospitality. Starting 150km from Kulsary, we had our sights set on reaching the city before nightfall. Better still we wanted to get there in the early afternoon to visit the police station and complete our registration. It transpired both were tall orders. Starting at 9am we began back on the road. The head wind of the previous day had not faded and only grew stronger as the day wore on. No matter which way the road turned, the wind always persisted. Fortunately, the road was of very good quality and the temperatures lowered as clouds passed overhead. The start of autumn was on us. Nevertheless, we struggled on to reach our obligatory 50km rest point. Today cycling tactics played their biggest part in the whole trip. Swapping lead cyclist every 5km helped us maintain speeds of 22km/hr. Shortly before five we rolled into Kulsary. A kind Kazakh directed us to the hidden police compound, a throw back to the day of Kulsary's crime ridden days. We were informed that we did not need to register as we were flying out but that it was a good thing to check. Then we wandered to a shop to buy some fresh produce before heading out into the steppe to camp. Here a maths teacher approached us and offered us a to come in for dinner and stay the night. That night was one we will never forget with such unconditional kindness shown by our host and her family.





#### Day 48 – 12<sup>th</sup> September

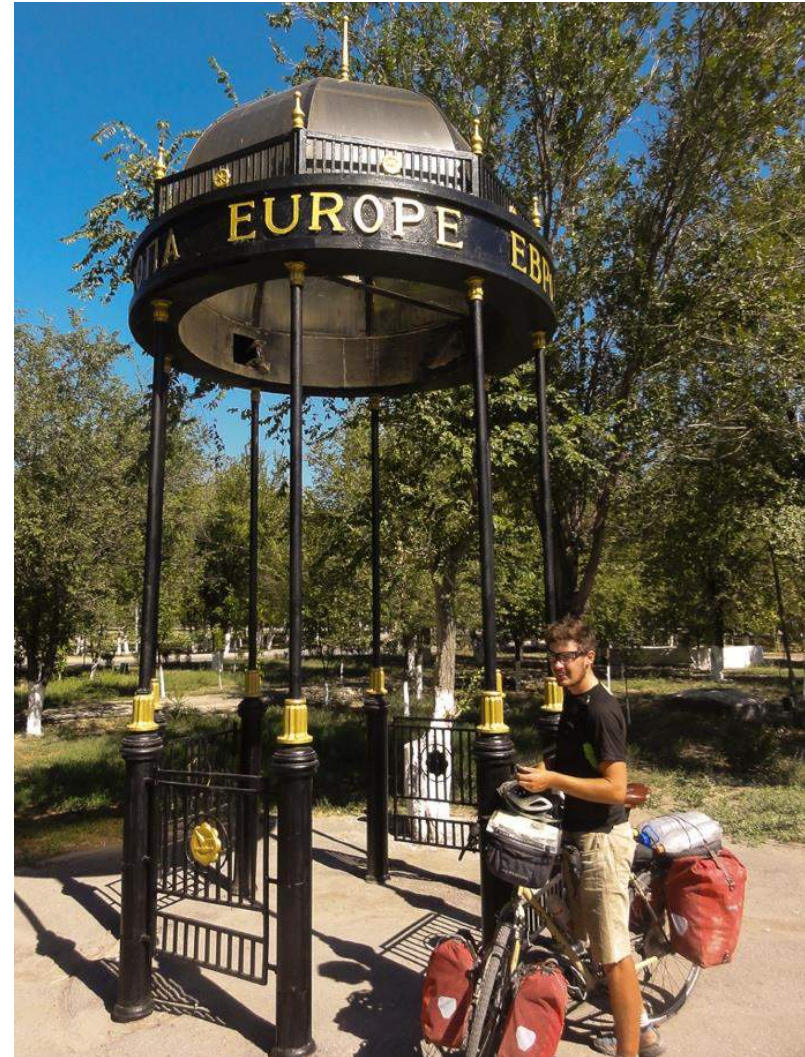
Leaving behind our host, we continued towards Dossor. The road twisted and turned as it skirted around salt lakes of all sizes and volumes. We passed through Dossor shortly after 5pm and continued on for 15km. The wind now gave us a tail-cross and we cruised on oblivious to the time. Once sufficiently far from town we set up camp off the road and were struck by the sudden realisation that today would be our last night under canvas. After around 140km today we were only 95km away from our end point, a sad realisation that the adventure was soon to be over but also a welcome relief that home and all its comforts would soon be ours.

#### Day 49 – 13<sup>th</sup> September

The day began rather badly. Rob found he had snapped a rear spoke and his wheel was slightly buckled. However, with only 95km to go, rather than spend an hour fixing it, he opted to true the wheel and cross his fingers. It held, but it was a nervous ride. We rolled into Atyrau shortly after lunch and crossed the Ural river into Europe! We made our way to the hotel and began the days of idling whilst we waited for our flight.

#### Day 50 to 53 – 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> September

These four days were spent exploring Atyrau, resting, eating and sleeping. After over 3000km we welcomed the comfort of a hotel and all its conveniences. We spent some time packing and on the advice of Chris and Kamil posted our excess weight home with Kazakh Post. Fortunately, it did arrive back!









### Day 54 – 18<sup>th</sup> September

Whilst waiting for our flight we were recognised by the chairman of the Atyrau cycling club. He had seen our blog and was following it keenly. He was dismayed that we hadn't updated our location precisely as he would have loved to go cycling with us had he known where we were. Then things got a little out of hand. The flight home was delayed and we missed our connection. However, the real drama of the day took the form of a stubborn Kazakh official who refused to take our bikes on the plane without a payment for oversized baggage. At €16 per kilogram it was outrageously expensive and we were not at all pleased. We were within our weight limit and had a letter explaining the bikes were eligible for

normal baggage allowance provided they were less than 203cm. This was easily the case but he would not budge. We asked for help translating his demands and made a compromise with the assistance of some fellow passengers. We removed our wheels and racks and shrank the bike down until acceptable in size. Given the all clear we loaded the bikes and called it a day. We arrived back in the UK late in the evening on a new flight due to the missed connection.







Finances



## Finances

Our finances were kept transparent through the creation of a spreadsheet on a shared Google Drive and accompanying folder into which we uploaded our receipts. Personal equipment has not been included in the simplified tables below. This is due to the differences shown by individual team members in the quantity and quality of clothing/equipment they had to purchase.

### Income

Imperial College London Exploration Board	2250 + 1350
Lord Mayor's 800 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Awards Trust	1300
Personal Contributions	7400
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£12,300</b>

### Expenses

Flights	2060
VISAs	320
Bikes	3600
Bike Equipment and Repair Kit	1400
Camping Equipment	175
Medical Equipment	360
Insurance (3/4 Paid by Imperial)	1820
Satellite Phone SIM	145
Website	20
Spending Money	2400
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£12,300</b>

Living costs remained relatively low whilst on the road with the largest of expenses being accommodation and gifts purchased for friends and family back home.



A scenic landscape featuring rolling green hills in the foreground, a dirt road with a wooden post, and a range of rugged mountains in the background under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

# Medical Report



## Medical Report

Before undertaking our expedition, we assembled a First Aid Kit with potential uses in mind. We knew there would be some minor ailments, such as gastroenteritis, but there was also a relatively large chance of serious injury. We worked on the mantra that it is best to avoid injury and illness rather than treat it. Thus we adopted simple measures as detailed in our risk assessment and others such as strict usage of antibacterial hand gel to reduce the chance of gastroenteritis.

Our First Aid Kit and the medications we carried reflected the perceived high risk of illness or serious injury in very remote areas of Central Asia. For example, a broken bone or bacterial infection in the Lake Song Kol area would present serious difficulties due to the lack of local hospitals or medical clinics. Consequently, the first aid kit we carried was comprehensive and required one entire front pannier whilst the medications and sterile supplies occupied a third of another.

Throughout the duration of the expedition we encountered a number of medical incidents, two serious and many minor. These hampered our progress and had the more serious impact of reducing our team morale. Below you can read about our incidents and this is followed by some general advice we can now give having experienced first hand the trials of an expedition.

If any future expedition medics would like further advice or access to our first aid kit/medications please contact Chris on [christopher.holt12@ic.ac.uk](mailto:christopher.holt12@ic.ac.uk).

## Altitude Protocol

The whole team started to take Acetazolamide 250mg BD at 700m two days before we started our ascent of the Kegeti Pass (3800m). Starting at 2500m, we climbed to 3800m and descended in one day. For this reason, we were unlikely to suffer AMS however if we had to camp over 3000m the risk of AMS would have been increased substantially. Note: The prophylactic use of acetazolamide is controversial.

We had no altitude related illness or symptoms, except for exceptional breathlessness.



## Incidents

### Multiple bike falls in Kyrgyzstan

These resulted in multiple grazes, loss of skin on palms and extensive road rash. Debridement of skin was needed and extensive penetration of gravel proved difficult to remove without local anaesthetic.

*I would recommend future teams carry Lignocaine. This could be applied to large dirty grazes via a soaked bandage and thus allow the very thorough cleaning needed. Excess supply of sterile saline (eye wash pods) for jet washing and excess supply of sterile gauzes should be taken, as I had to use bandages later in the expedition in their stead.*

*The use of zinc oxide tape was invaluable in keeping bandages on hands whilst cycling – it became harder to bandage people up when they cycled seven hours a day in over 40 °C heat as a result of the sweat. Note that dressings need to be changed daily or twice daily so take an excess supply of non-adherent dressings.*

### Vague illness starting in Osh, Kyrgyzstan

Symptoms including an unremitting headache and fatigue, but no fever in Osh. Once we had crossed the international border into Uzbekistan the condition deteriorated rapidly. Our progress on bikes came to a halt when the team-member in question lay down his bike before collapsing by the side of the road in the shade. His fever increased before it spiked at 39°C. The individual had three days previously fallen from his bike and suffered extensive grazes. These did not appear to be infected however the rapid onset of general symptoms and fever meant we had to consider sepsis.

Broad spectrum antibiotics (Co-amoxiclav 625mg) were immediately started with paracetamol (anti-pyretic) after a quick phone call to our UK based doctor and then evacuation to a hospital was mandated – all wounds needed to be cleaned, re-dressed and I.V/I.M antibiotics and paracetamol prescribed. After much bother, we managed to find our way to the nearest hospital – Andijan regional hospital and after the language barrier was overcome the above treatment took place. After two nights he was discharged and we evacuated further, to Tashkent. Here we sought further assurance that only rest was needed at the international medical clinic – the hospitals in Uzbekistan have no diagnostic capabilities and thus could not actually test for infections or tropical diseases. The team-member rested here for one week before continuing the expedition.



*There are many lessons to be learnt from this case. The illness was probably a result of the extreme toll the Kyrgyzstan Mountains had put on the body, the large injuries to skin and the heat. Lack of training may have also been a factor, progressive but intense training is really needed for this type of expedition.*

*We also thought we could rely on insurance companies medical assist phone lines to help us in emergencies – this is not the case and I would recommend you only to call them if you know they have accredited hospitals in the region or when you are actually at a hospital. We wasted a lot of time talking to them during the incident and this could have been done once it was under control. Make sure you have a compressive list of hospitals throughout your whole trip.*

### Gastroenteritis and general illnesses in Uzbekistan

All team members were affected and this was either due to a substantial increase in meals being bought and not cooked by ourselves, or a reduction in hand hygiene in cities. In reality it was probably due to both. Here we used a large number of loperamide tablets and hydration solutions, but ultimately bed rest was needed.

*Take more loperamide than you think is possible to be used – cycling and gastroenteritis do not mix well.*

### Lower leg infection following an injury

I was not asked to clean and treat the wound, so I cannot comment on how well this was done. This example shows that all wounds, however trivial, need to be dressed in these climates – *‘airing’ a wound to heal does not work*. This was relatively easy to treat – elevation of leg where possible and a course of antibiotics (co-amoxiclav 625mg) was prescribed and successful.

### Suspected dehydration in Uzbekistan

Some members of the team were quite susceptible to become fatigued and suffered from frequent headaches. In retrospect, this was most likely due to a lack hydration.

*It is important to ensure the team drinks plenty of water not only when under exercise but during breaks, in the evenings and on rest days.*



### Splitting of forehead in Khiva

One team-member managed to walk into a hotel door and split the skin of his forehead. As the wound was quite deep and open it had to be closed. This shows the importance of taking sterile supplies and steri-strips as it was easily closed and healed without infection or great scarring.

### Collision of bikes resulting in a split chin and grazed body of one team-member

This incident occurred 50km into the desert of our penultimate leg. The main injury was a deep laceration of the chin, with large amount of bleeding. The bleeding was stopped as an emergency and then the rest of the body was systematically checked for hidden injuries. The laceration required stitches and since facial sutures are notoriously tricky we decided to evacuate to the nearest regional hospital located in Nukus 140km away. Here the wounds were cleaned and sutured, with a course of Azithromycin prescribed for prophylactic cover. I replaced this with a course of Co-amoxiclav (if you take Flucloxacillin, use that for skin infections.)

*At this point in the expedition the first aid kit was running out of supplies and bandages had to be used in place of gauzes. Also, eye-pad bandages are great for bandaging a chin.*

### General Advice

Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine (Mini Guide) by Jim Duff and Peter Gormly. We took this on my kindle, but it can be bought as a paperback as well. I used it in every incident, while we were at altitude and I wish I used it during the planning phase. It is an unbelievably good book.

No matter what happens in the team, remember that you're the medic and be on the watch out for illnesses and when people are becoming too tired.

Private prescriptions are expensive and getting quotes is very time-consuming. SuperDrug is by far the cheapest and they have a company policy of undercutting their competitors, so I would recommend you to use them. The chap in their Kings Mall branch was extremely helpful.

Drugs take up a lot of space, as their boxes are not spatially efficient. To get over this used labelled poly bags instead – but flat pack and carry the boxes for reference and customs.

## Review of First Aid Kit

- Take more alcohol swabs
- Thermometer was invaluable (and cheap)
- Ice packs were not needed
- Take fewer syringes and needles unless you use injectables.
- 5/10ml syringes are great for jet washing so take a good supply
- Take a small supply of large plasters instead of a large assorted pack
- Take more than 5 packs of gauze as these are used liberally when cleaning wounds
- Instead of multiple types of dressings, just take medium and large sized non-adherent dressings, which can be cut down and then taped or bandaged on.
- The whole kit could have been reduced in size considerably, but then we might have been less equipped to deal with serious injuries in remote areas. It's a balancing act, but we probably took too much.

## Review of Medication

- Take fewer analgesics – we hardly used any and those taken would not have been useful in major injuries. Ibuprofen gel and deep heat is not needed.
- Co-amoxiclav was very useful and recommended on any expedition. The other antimicrobials could be reduced.
- Savlon Dry was very useful as a quick antiseptic
- Take less dioralyte
- Take more loperamide
- Take more sterowash and Tisept





Practical Advice



## Practical Advice for Future Cycling Expeditions

### Equipment and Budgets

Before purchasing your equipment you should carefully consider what it is you are setting out to achieve and the obstacles you might encounter. As with most Imperial Expeditions, ours was heavily reliant on funds we could raise ourselves. Constrained by a budget, it was vital that the equipment we purchased was both cost effective and necessary.

The obvious things are most often overlooked, but they are the easiest ways to save money and future hassle. Spend time researching what obstacles you are likely to face and thus what equipment you might need. There are plenty of resources on the internet and the pool of experience is only growing. Once you have a preliminary equipment list, you must consider whether there is anything out there which might meet two or more of the jobs, saving both weight and money. Spend time refining the list. Once this has been done the next step, acquiring the items, is often easier. The order in which you should go about this is:

1. Do you/friends have any of the equipment already?
2. Does Imperial College Exploration Board have any of the equipment already?
3. Are any Imperial Societies willing to lend the equipment in question?
4. Can you acquire sponsorship from the manufacturer or supplier?
5. Where is the cheapest place to buy it from?

For the reference of future cycling expeditions, we chose to take a steel framed bike with bar end shifters due to the reduced probability of them breaking. If a break did occur we could weld it back again in any village we passed through. Our bicycles had 700c wheels, which although harder to replace if broken, provide faster cruising speeds on flat roads. We upgraded the tyres to Marathon Mondial Tyres after reading reviews and we felt they held up very well against the Kyrgyz gravel roads. Finally we purchased Brooks B17 Saddles much to the amusement of many we encountered (they felt like rocks). Despite this, they come recommended from us and many others. Other things you should consider include the type of braking mechanism employed, the weight bearing capacity of the pannier racks and obviously the style of bicycle itself. If given a choice, we would recommend always going for drop down handlebars as they offer the largest variety of hand positions, something you will appreciate greatly halfway into an eight hour day.



## Sponsorship

Do it early and do it well. We left sponsorship far too late and suffered as a result. After some initial success, our deal on bikes fell through due to a shortage of bicycles. This occurred as our request was finally processed at the end of the 2015 season just before the 2016 range of bicycles was produced. As a result, the bikes we wanted were no longer in stock and the new models had yet to be released. Companies you approach want to know what it is you can do for them. You have to sell yourselves and the opportunities you have to give them a return on your sponsorship. The best piece of advice we can give is to persevere. Don't give up if at first you don't succeed.

## Travelling with Bicycles

Travelling with bicycles presents two obstacles. The first is flying. The conventional method of transiting with bicycles is to put them in a cardboard box and be done with it. Damage can follow but the biggest issue is that it can be tricky to source a box in remote parts of the world. We opted to take our bicycles across in CTC plastic bags. Just protect the key parts (brakes levers, derailleur, gear shifters etc.), let the tyres down and then throw it in a plastic bag. The logic is that if someone knows they are moving a bicycle, they will be more careful. It is debateable as to whether or not it improves care but it is certainly something you should consider. We then carried our CTC bags in the bottom of our panniers preventing them from getting damaged. Your experience of flying with bicycles is influenced heavily by who you fly with. Research your carrier's policies on bike carriage and investigate the charges. Get written confirmation of the charges and dimensions your bicycle must conform to and this can help sway any disagreement with check-in staff in your favour. It may be that a more expensive flight works out cheaper once bike passage has been accounted for. The second obstacle is a little more of an issue. What to do with your bikes when sight-seeing? Or even just popping into the shop! Ultimately we tried to never lose sight of our bicycles. We found that most hotels were happy to let us keep bicycles in a secure room. We also carried two cable locks to secure them as a precaution.

## Travelling with Money

Entirely up to personal preference. We all took a spare \$100 hidden to be used only in emergencies. In many countries they will only accept crisp notes and thus they should be stored somewhere they won't get damaged. In Uzbekistan there were few ATMs and bank transfer was expensive, consequently we opted to carry the entire trips worth of money with us and hope we did not become victims of robbery. If you opt to do this, it is advisable to take more money than you would expect to spend. Chris and Kamil had a credit card to use as a back-up.

## Communication

If you want to get the most out of your travels, it is vital to have a basic grasp in the key language of the region. Our Russian was sketchy at best and this hampered our efforts to communicate fully with those we met. If you don't know the language in question, fear not for it is easy to pick bits up. Prepare and you will reap the rewards. You will also discover the ease with which you can communicate ideas across using only your hands and facial expressions. Be warned, although it makes for quite funny viewing, miscommunication can be common. For example, on our first night we were unsure whether we were being offered a slaughtered goat or the farmer's neighbour would come and slit our throats if we camped there. You get the idea!

## Emergency Procedures

When things go wrong, they go wrong fast. If you want to know what happened to us, just read the section on Medical Encounters.

If things do go wrong, they rarely take the shape or form you would expect and it always occurs at the most inconvenient times. The best advice we can offer is to make sure you research your exit points carefully and ensure each member knows what to do should that eventuality transpire. Your carefully planned emergency protocol will almost certainly go out the window, but in preparing it you have equipped yourself with the knowledge necessary to extract yourselves from the hole you might find yourself in. For example, we knew that our trains out of Uzbekistan departed from Kungrad and thus Kamil and Chris were able to book themselves easily onto the next train out. When reporting an incident, you must keep all parties informed. Both Imperial and your family need to know, but they should only be informed once you have the situation under control. The reason for this is that incomplete news can often convey an incorrect portrayal of the situation and may warrant evacuation when in fact a rest day would suffice. Not only this, but it places undue worries on parents.

## Highly Recommended Websites

In no particular order

- <http://www.cycling-east.com>
- <http://www.alastairhumphreys.com/>
- <http://thenextchallenge.org/resources/sponsorship/>
- <http://travellingtwo.com>
- <https://jamesftravel.wordpress.com>
- <http://www.carryoncycling.com/>
- <http://nathnac.net/>
- <http://www.masterlyinactivity.com/>
- <http://www.rgs.org/>
- <http://tomsbiketrip.com/>
- <http://www.14degrees.org/>
- <http://www.adventure-cycling-guide.co.uk>
- <http://benandmargosworldcycle.blogspot.co.uk>
- <http://www.worldbiking.info>
- <http://www.thecyclediaries.com>
- <http://bicycletouringpro.com>
- <http://goingslowly.com/>
- <http://www.crazyguyonabike.com/>
- <http://www.bikepacking.com/>
- <https://cycletom.wordpress.com>
- <http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/>
- <https://cycletom.wordpress.com>
- <http://cyclingabout.com/>





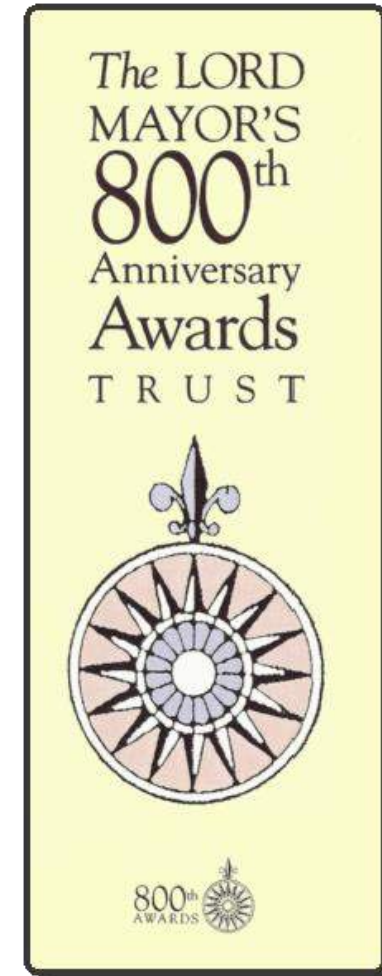
# Acknowledgements




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# Imperial College London







“Kit is irrelevant. Attitude is everything. A positive attitude, being kind to each other, and laughing a lot is all that you need.”

Alastair Humphreys