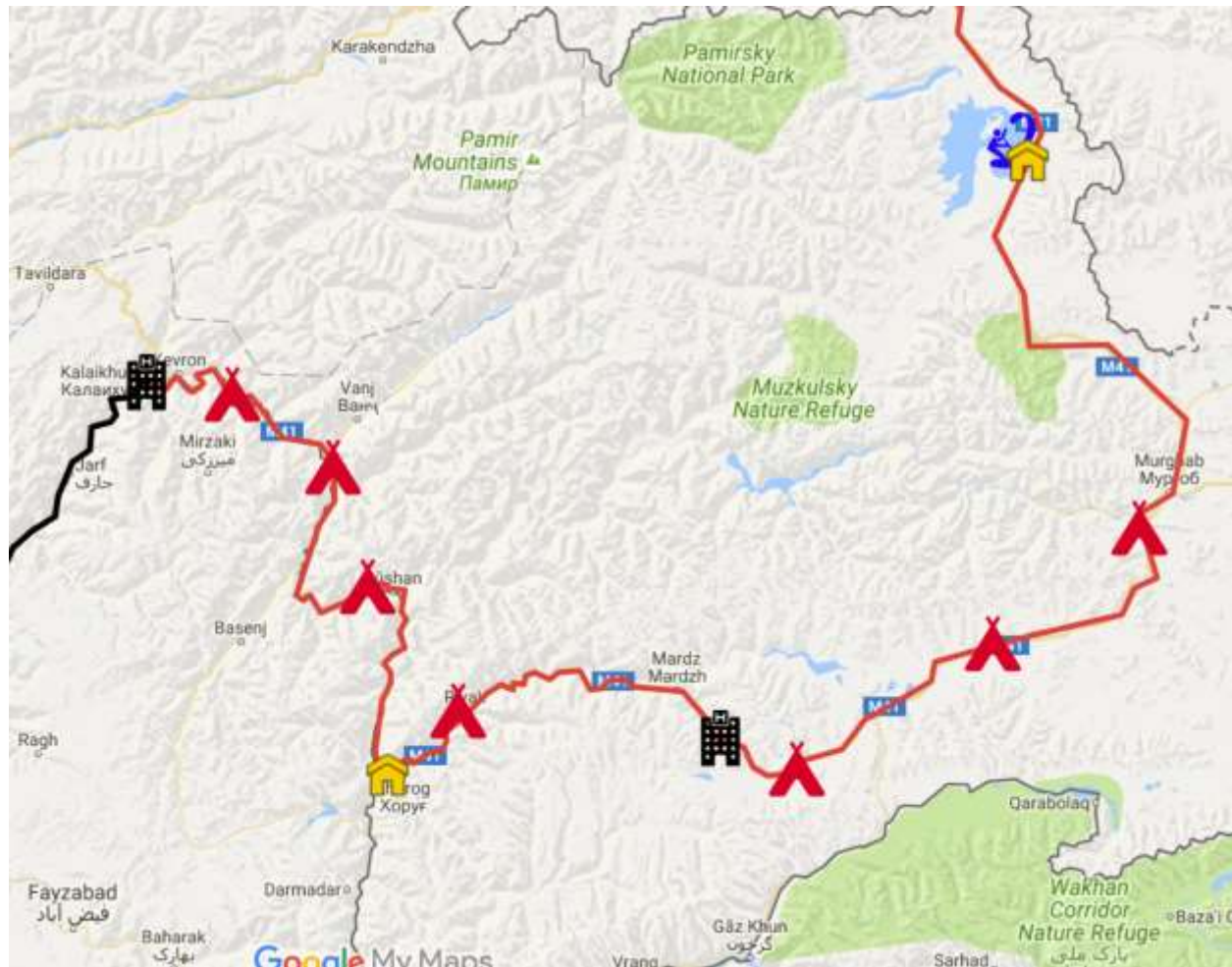


## Season 13 – Part 2. Lake Karakul.



Th 29.9.2016, day 445. First Regatta day (Karakul, 0 km)

We immediately and completely immersed ourselves into all the activities going on for the Regatta event. I joined Maria for English classes with the older kids, while Siria went to the kindergarten to help make stick horses that were afterwards displayed with great pride by the kids. After lunch the wind came up as usual and I decided to go and have a go at kite surfing. Once the word spread as to what I was up to, crowds started to gather at the lake shore. I was really wondering what it would be like. The dried salt on the beach soon covered the kite and my wet suit. All the locals crowded around trying to help. When I stepped into the water I could feel ice cold water trickle in under my wet suit and into my shoes. Soon I was away out into the lake. Conditions were really tricky. The wind was very gusty and somehow the thin high altitude air made the kite move very quickly and unpredictably. I was a bit overambitious with the first jump, couldn't control the kite properly and came splashing down. Now I was completely drenched from head to foot and had a nasty taste of salt in my mouth. I kited around for a while, but soon my hands were numb with cold and I returned to the beach.

Again I was quickly surrounded by helpful hands and Alizar from the Tajik TV started interviewing me. That was certainly a first for me!

I was freezing cold, quickly packed up my stuff and headed straight for the hot baña to rinse the salty water off me. It really had been an incredible experience!

















Fr 30.9.2016, day 446. Second Regatta day (Karakul, 0 km)

Matthias asked us if we wanted to join his Dad on an expedition out into the Pamir national park to look for some Marco Polo sheep. Of course we were thrilled to go along! Our tour guide arrived at 8 am, we asked him if he could wait 30 minutes so we could finish breakfast. "No problem!" he said, disappeared and returned again at 11 am. So finally we were off in his old beaten up Soviet UAZ jeep. First along the main road, then along a couple of tire tracks through the desert and finally straight up over the rock strewn hills. It was a really nice excursion with great views but we didn't spot any Marco Polos, only the skulls and horns of dead ones. Finally, the guide pointed up into the hills and said "There! 12 of them!". We all strained our eyes through the binoculars but weren't able to see anything. My suspicion is that he simply pointed out to some grey blotches in the distance so that we would not be disappointed that we hadn't spotted any Marco Polos that day.

We took the long way back along the far shore of Lake Karakul. Suddenly we spotted a man walking through the desert in the middle of nowhere. Turns out it was a local who was tending to some yaks and his yurt and was making his way on foot straight across the desert towards Karakul, about 15 km away, to get some supplies. He was very happy to be given a lift.

In the evening I had another go at kiting. It was more fun than the first time, as I was starting to get used to the conditions. But still it was bitterly cold and I soon had to call it quits as my hands went completely numb. To my delight Siria also decided to give it a go. Unfortunately, the conditions proved a bit too challenging for her, and after a promising start she soon found herself plunged head first into the icy waters.











































Sa 1.10.2016, day 447. Third and final Regatta day (Karakul, 0 km)

Today was the big day. The whole village was on its feet. The first main event of the day was a rubber boat race. It is somehow crazy to think that the villagers live right on the shores of the lake but they have no boating tradition whatsoever. Most of them have never even been on the lake. There are now plans to build a jetty and offer boat trips to tourists. Taking a boat would certainly also make travel to and from all the yurts scattered around the lake far quicker and simpler.

The locals certainly seemed to have lots of fun splashing around in the rubber dinghies, however they seemed more intent on taking selfies of themselves than on paddling and so when the wind started to pick up the dinghies were blown away down the shore and had to be carried back up.

As the day wore on more and more people appeared and all sort of games were in progress: tug of war, volleyball, stick horse riding, skipping, hoola hoop, ...

After lunch the wind on the beach got too strong and so the whole event was moved into a more or less protected courtyard. But even here the wind whistled in and blew up clouds of dust. It was quite incredible how tough the kids were. They certainly played hard, there were bruises and scratches, but the only tears we saw were caused by the dust and grit in their eyes.

The whole event was closed by a long prize giving ceremony conducted by the village major, his golden teeth flashing in the sun, surrounded by a crowd of the most dirty and dusty but also most happy kids I have ever seen.









Su 2.10.2016, day 448. Gone with the wind (Karakul – Karakul, 70 km)

Today the whole Regatta team was leaving. Soon we were the only ones left in the homestay and it was time to get going. The weather was not really looking very inviting. The wind had already been whistling early in the morning and the sky looked suspiciously stormy. Still we decided to head off. Once we were on the long straight road along the lakeshore we found the wind was simply howling in our faces. Siria was again not feeling too well and the wind slowed her down to almost walking pace. We trudged on for a couple of hours, but we were simply getting nowhere. I was again quite frustrated, still too much used to go at my own pace from the past couple of weeks and was acting like a complete jerk. An additional problem was that the sky was slowly turning a threatening black colour. We finally made the decision to turn around. In retrospect it was the most sensible thing to do, but it sent me spiralling into a really glum mood. We averaged well over 30 km/h as the wind blew us back all the kilometres we had fought so hard to cover. Slowly the snowstorm rolled down over us, but we were back in the cosy homestay just before the storm hit and just in time for a nice hot pot of tea.

Two tourist groups arrived in jeeps and it turned out to be quite a fun evening. We negotiated a reasonable price to get a ride to Murghab the next day with the son of the family running the homestay: a 130 km ride across the highest pass of the Pamir highway at just over 4600 m. I was really sad we were not going to do it by bike.







