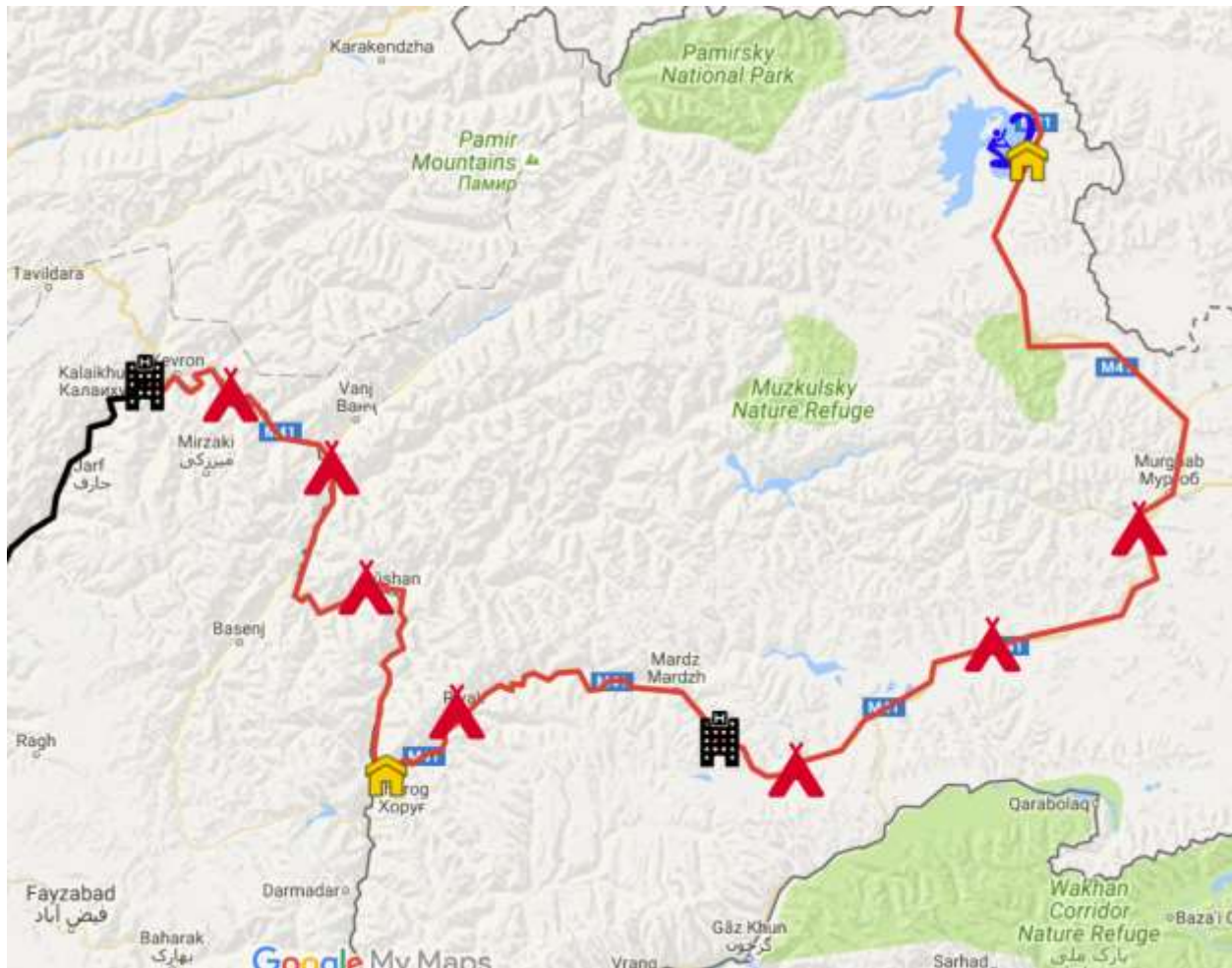


Season 13 – Part 3. The Pamir Highway



Mo 3.10.2016, day 449. By jeep to Murghab (Karakol – Murghab, 35 km)

The ride to Murghab was stunningly beautiful and I was really very upset that we were doing it by car. What hurt me most is that we didn't even try. We simply gave up.

We got off some kilometres outside of Murghab at about lunchtime. My bad mood got even worse when I realized that I had lost my phone. We biked around trying to find our driver in the hope that I had left it in the car, but he was nowhere to be seen. We then saw one of the tourist groups that we had spent the night with in Karakul arrive and we followed the jeep to the homestay they were staying at in Murghab. I asked the driver if could call the homestay in Karakul and ask about my phone. To my astonishment he simply reached down and handed me my phone! What a stroke of luck!

We were not sure if we wanted to spend the night in Murghab or if we wanted to move on and camp somewhere on the road. This issue was quickly resolved when we realized that there was no way of withdrawing money in Murghab and we had only 60\$ left that had to last us all the way to Khorog, the next place with a bank, about 5 days away by bike.

We did however manage to get ourselves a Megafon simcard at the Bazaar that was made up of second hand cargo containers, giving us internet access and allowing us to send out long overdue messages to our folks at home telling them we were OK. We had some great Osh Pilav, the local rice and mutton dish for about 3\$ and stocked up on food from the local store. Then we were off. It was a perfect day. Utterly wind-still and pleasantly warm. The ride was absolutely lovely. Towards the evening we bumped into a very cheery bunch of touring bicyclists, an English couple on a tandem, a German couple, a Swiss couple and a Belgian guy. They had all started in Europe and met up in the Wakhan valley and were now biking together.



















Tu 4.10.2016, day 450. Towing Siria into the wind (M41 – M41, 60km)

After a peaceful night at a beautiful little camp spot by a river and a nice Müsli breakfast in the tent and out of the cold, we headed off. The first 10 or 20 kilometres were great. The road was perfectly smooth asphalt and there was not a breath of air. I connected my speaker and turned up the music full blast. The first time I have done this in a long time. We were happily biking along, we turned a corner and as if someone had turned a switch, the head wind started. So once again we found ourselves fighting our way into the howling wind. I remembered the Canadian guy we met in Karakul and I remember his words that he uttered with a smirk on his face: "I had 5 days of really strong tail wind. It was niiiice!!". I hated him!! Our speed again dropped to just above walking pace. I was bursting with energy and again really frustrated at our pace. Finally, I tied a rope to the trailer and asked if Siria would mind if I tried to pull her along. It worked great and for me this saved the day. I was able to pedal as hard as I wanted and very quickly got rid of all my pent up energy and frustration. We also made quite good progress through the otherworldly landscape of this amazing highway up at 4000 m.











We 5.10.2016, day 451. A cold night (M41 - M41, 70 km)

We had found shelter from the howling wind in a hollow behind a ditch where we had pitched the tent. The night had been really cold, I saw a temperature of -19°C on the thermometer of my GPS (that went up to -14°C when I took it into the tent to take a photo as proof). We only had a short ride to the village of Alichur where we hoped we would find fresh water and provisions. The shop was however quite a disappointment. The only thing we found were some instant noodles and a can of sweet corn. We were given some bread as a present from a friendly local and pumped some water from the village well with the help of a bunch of kids. We did however find a restaurant. The menu was sausages and eggs. That was the only choice. We skipped the sausage but were very grateful for the eggs. After a nice long sit in the warmth of the restaurant we headed off. The wind was still in our face and the road turned from very good to medium with stretches of pretty bad. But the landscape was simply unbelievably beautiful and more than compensated for any cold or headwind or bad road.





















Th 6.10.2016, day 452. Hot bath day (M41 – Jelondy, 80 km)

We had one more pass over about 4300 m ahead of us before the road descended into the valley. Also we had a hot spring in Jelondy to look forward to. The weather again looked pretty threatening and the wind was in our face as usual. But the road was significantly better than I had expected and the climb up to the pass was a piece of cake. Soon after the pass we celebrated the next milestone of our trip: 20'000 km biked. Really quite amazing. The stay at the Sanatorium in Jalondy, a relic of the Soviet era, was also quite memorable. The very first impression I got when we entered was a long corridor with doors leading off to the left and to the right. A very elderly lady was slowly wading down the corridor with a Zimmer-frame supported by a nurse dressed in white. It looked exactly like a Sanatorium was supposed to look like. The room was about 16\$ for the two of us and was quite acceptable, the pit toilet however was out the back door and quite a long walk away. We immediately headed off for the bath. Men's and Woman's were separate. The shower was delicious and the hot tub unbearably hot. Outside the snow had started falling, making the hot bath even more agreeable. I had some laundry that I wanted to wash, however there were quite a few locals having their bath and I thought it would be inappropriate to start doing my laundry under the shower. I decided to go back and do it later. So after supper of a nice hot mutton soup for about 1 \$ each, I went back thinking I would have the place to myself. But I was wrong. There were even more locals crowded in the around the bath. The vodka had obviously been flowing freely and the guys were having a good old orgy, stark naked, shouting, pushing each other around, slipping and falling on the slippery floor, jumping into the steaming water and generally prancing around. I took a quick shower and was straight out of the place again. The laundry stayed undone.















Fr 7.10.2016, day 453. Into the green (Jelondy – M41, 90 km)

The ride was beautiful, the road in good condition following the river dropping slowly down into the valley. The mountains were dusted with a white sprinkling of snow from yesterday's snowstorm. The only problem was that again we had the wind in our faces forcing us to pedal hard even when going downhill. First bushes and then trees started appearing at the roadside, the small villages we passed were really clean and tidy with perfectly maintained houses and gardens. Finding shops became less and less of a problem, but they still mostly carried only instant noodles and sweets wrapped in plastic.

We found a great spot to camp amongst some trees. In fact, it looked like a camping, there were even tent sites marked out with stones. We later realized that it was probably a place where yurts were mounted during the summer months.

























