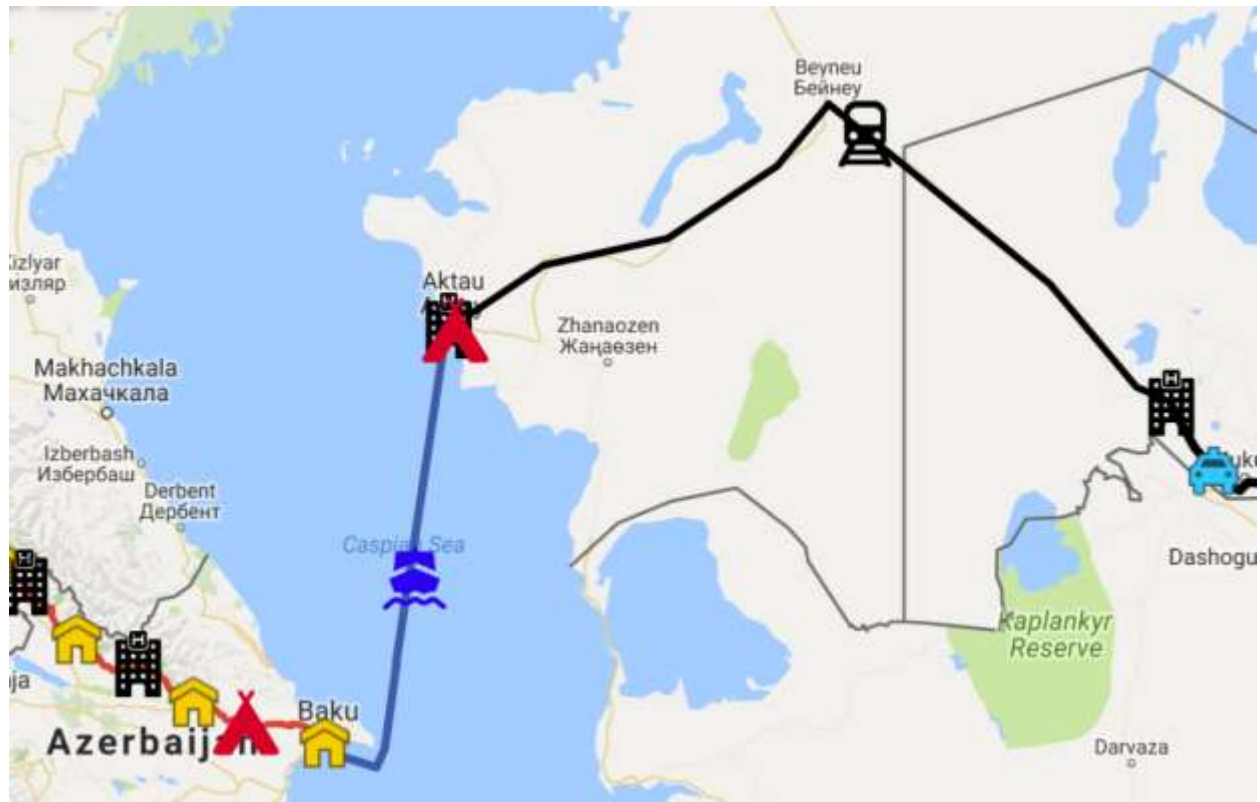


Season 14 – Part 1. Across the Caspian Sea to Baku.



Tu 8.11.2016, day 485. Onto the ferry (Aktau – Caspian Sea, 15 km)

We arrived at the port at 10 pm sharp the evening before, only to be told to sit down and wait. So this is what we did. At 11 pm we were still waiting, sometime before midnight we were told to come back next morning maybe 8 or 9 am. So there we were, stranded without a place to sleep. Most of the truckers, who were also all waiting for the ferry knew us by now and they offered to allow us to sleep in the cabin of their truck. They were just popping over to Aktau for a bite to eat, but would bring us over to the truck parking when they got back. This sounded great and we said we would be at the restaurant having a chai. The classy restaurant was closed so we headed over to the other one, a seedy grotty restaurant / bar place with a nasty pit toilet out back. Some truckers were sitting at some tables, smoking and drinking beer, some ladies were sitting at other tables. Turkish music was blaring out of the loud speakers that were turned up to the max and frequently cut out. We had some chai and some Mantis (a kind of Ravioli). Sometime close to 2 am we decided to simply pitch our tent beside the restaurant and give up on our trucker friends who had offered us a bed in their cabin. We found a good spot in the wind shadow of a truck trailer. The music was still pounding out of the restaurant. Peeking in through the windows we could see that the truckers were now dancing with the ladies and having a great old party, while we (the old folks) headed for bed.

I woke with a start at about 6:30 am to the sound of shouting, fighting and people running close by. It was still pitch dark and I was a bit worried. I pulled on my trousers and crept outside to investigate. The

shouting was coming from the other side of a concrete wall a couple of meters away from the tent. I pulled myself up to peak over to the other side and immediately also this mystery was resolved. Behind the wall was an army training camp and the boys were performing combat drills.

We headed for the port administration building at around 9 am and were again told to wait. After a while we were told to come back at 3 pm. This was starting to turn into a comedy! Had they no idea when their ferry would arrive?

We spent most of the morning hanging out having chai in the restaurant. We expected boarding to be even later and were thinking of doing something, maybe head over to the beach, but then to our amazement we saw the elusive ferry slowly gliding into the harbour. 3 pm was confirmed as passport check time and everyone rushed to the passport check. We stood in line with our bikes and huge pile of bags that we had taken off ready for the x-ray scan. Finally nothing was scanned. Soon we were pushing our bikes onto the ferry. The ferry was a very pleasant surprise. We were shown to our double cabin with en-suite toilet and shower. It had a large window that we could open to let in the sea breeze.

The ferry left at around 8 pm, just as we were having fried chicken and rice for dinner. It was a beautiful evening and the sea was very calm. Virtually no part of the boat was out of bounds and it was great to wander around all over exploring the boat from top to bottom.

Soon we were freshly showered snug in our bunks listening to the wind and waves outside. I slept incredibly well and dreamt of sliding down an immense 1000 m high slide.





We 9.11.2016, day 486. Across the Caspian Sea (Caspian Sea - Baku, 15 km)

It was a very quiet day, hanging out with the predominantly Turkish and mostly quite old truckers. Many of them spoke several languages after having worked abroad (France, Italy, Germany, Russia) for several years. Siria also got friendly with the young third officer, who then invited us in to the ships bar for Vodka and some food. He was really quite drunk and also probably had a smoke of something. We were quite relieved when we managed to escape.

We arrived in Baku at around 8 pm. It took over two hours for the customs to arrive. All the truckers were whisked off to the customs office by bus and we were asked to follow the bus on our bikes. We were the first to get our passports checked. There was a bit of a problem when we wanted to bike out the gate and we had to go back to have our passports re-checked. In all it was an extremely chaotic and inefficient process but quite hassle free. We then biked the 10 km along the main costal highway through Baku into the old town. It was 11 pm when we finally arrived. We were looking for the Merci Baku Hostel, but it was nowhere to be seen. We asked around a bit and finally found the glittery Merci Baku restaurant. The guys there knew the owner of a hostel right next door and soon we were brought up to the third floor of an old house, where a tiny 1 room apartment, complete with kitchenette and bathroom, had been converted into a hostel with 8 beds. It was being run by the young son of the family who seemed to own the building. We were the only guests and had the whole place to ourselves.

We were thrilled to have arrived in Baku and certainly felt as if we were slowly getting home.

We were also very surprised to learn, that Mr. Trump had been elected to be president number 45 of the USA. We live in funny times. Times where facts seem to have become irrelevant and people can say any old rubbish and get away with it. Times when people live in their very own social media bubble, where they read only news that corresponds to their world view, connect only with people who think the same way as they do. Times where people are scared shitless that “foreigners” (blacks, terrorists, asylum seekers, muslims, Chinese, socialists, Mexicans, fundamentalists, etc...) are coming to take away their jobs and money. The funny thing is that the people who are most scared are the people living in places with the fewest foreigners. This again shows that facts have become completely irrelevant. I think people should spend more time cultivating edible forest gardens.

The last notable incident of the day was that Siria badly stubbed her tow against a step in the hostel. Ouch!











Th 10.11.2016, day 487. Culture Shock (Baku, 0 km)

Baku is really quite a surprise to me. It is a boom town fuelled by oil revenue. We had a long walk around the old town losing ourselves in the narrow alleys, then biked up and down along the manicured parks lining the coast, admiring the expensive shops and sparkling glass clad skyscrapers that were sprouting up all over the place like Asparagus in spring. This city really is quite a contrast to the cities in the 'Stan countries.

Most of the afternoon we spent in Starbucks. It's been a while since we saw the last one!

We got back to the hostel looking forward to a quiet evening in "our" little apartment, but it was not to be. Shortly after we got home a group of 5 Ukranian travellers arrived and piled into the tiny apartment. They were a pleasant enough bunch, but it was simply too claustrophobic, so I went for an evening walk and Siria headed straight for bed.

I got back at 11 pm and there was a bit of a party going on. Wine was flowing fuelling laughter and merriment. I didn't feel like joining in, so went to bed, but couldn't sleep. At about 1 am the party was over and everyone went to bed. Soon the dorm was echoing with loud snoring. I still couldn't sleep. It must have been well after 3 am when I finally nodded off.











