

cotton crops in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan sucked it dry well before then.

We could easily see across the river into Afghanistan as we travelled. The Tajik side had a proper road, electricity and brick houses, while the Afghan side sported mud huts and a single track that hugged the sides of the mountains.

Out of all the roads that I had travelled, I decided that this weeklong route had the potential to benchmark my adventure travelling. The culture and languages were new to me and historically fascinating. The substantial physical distance between the Wakhan Corridor and the outside world creates an enveloping feeling of commitment, and I realized that I could not simply leave, even if I wished to. Erwan's frustrating attempts to return to Europe with his motorcycle convinced me of that – and he was in the capital city. Towns and fuel stops were far apart, so nonchalant travel only welcomed trouble. Emergency international medical assistance was days away; the area's general inaccessibility demanded a serious acceptance of personal responsibility. The amount of paperwork and bureaucracy needed to access the Wahkan Corridor was staggering, but riding there I felt it to be an appropriate price to pay. In fact, it was a bargain.

The high-altitude plateaus and the towering Hindu Kush mountains – separated by Central Asia's mightiest river – left little to improve on in a geographic respect. This land supported a few subsistence farmers and Kyrgyz herders who were proud of their lifestyles, and generations spent living off the meagre offerings of the Pamir mountain range had driven the tradition of hospitality and sharing deep into their culture. A cup of tea was never far away at any stop.

Many travellers, on motorcycles or with backpacks, crave authentic experiences in foreign lands. Our collective brow furrows when the local elder asks us to please exit the village through the gift shop. We choose new destinations hoping that the location will make us feel as if we were the first foreigners ever to show up, and that our excitement to share details of our world will be trumped only by our hosts' excitement to share



Faces from the Wahkan Corridor.

details of theirs.

I know that I have precious few opportunities for these exchanges. Above all else, I want my new friends to know that I, for one, do not want to change the way they think, or to offer quick solutions for their problems. I did want to start to reverse the ages-old experience where two people of different histories meet, only for one to ask or force change from the other. For me, it will be: Greet, share, listen, shake hands, and ride on.

The occasional village along the way had built rock walls beside the road to reduce the dust and noise of the even less occasional traffic. In one nondescript town, Guillaume and I stopped a man and used our sign language to ask for a place to put our tents and sleep for the night. He understood perfectly and turned us immediately into the next driveway. We parked the bikes in the fruit orchard while the women cleaned an area under the mulberry trees to put our tents. I thought the



Guillaume leaving Langar.