



Ak-Baital Pass.

taintops, dirty with spring's dust, and it melted slowly into thin, trickling streams. It was completely barren and breathtaking.

We didn't linger on the pass. We arrived at the Tajik border post at 5:30 in the evening and went through the formalities of leaving Tajikistan. Light snow started to fall as we approached the border. I didn't mind being in the office next to the wood-fired heater as I did paperwork.

We crested the mountain pass between the two countries and the snow turned to rain as we descended a dozen muddy hairpin turns into a grey, overcast valley where the Kyrgyzstan border office was located.



Our first Kyrgyz friend, 5 minutes from the border.

A thorough and time-consuming entry process for entering Kyrgyzstan, including a drug search (the first since Djibouti), lasted into twilight. Not far from the border offices, I stopped to photograph a yurt – the traditional round, felt, portable house – and ended up getting invited in for tea. One teabag was brought out and hot water was poured from a large, plastic flask into eight small cups. The mother did the honours of steeping the tea, which involved long dips of the teabag into Guillaume's and my cups, and quick bounces into the other six. In addition to the tea, they offered large bowls of kumis, a refreshing drink traditionally made



Fresh kumis for sale.