

TREKING THE SILK ROUTE



October 2007

Thank you so much for supporting **TEENAGE CANCER TRUST** by sponsoring my trek in the Fan Mountains of Tajikistan, towards the ancient Silk Route capital of Samarkand in Uzbekistan. Here's a photo journal of the trip...

Tajikistan is not the easiest place to get to, nor to get around. Visa regulations changed a few days before we went, which involved someone having to go the nearest Tajik embassy – Brussels – to get our visas. We couldn't spend the first day and night in the capital, Dushanbe, as planned, because of a conference. We were first warned that we wouldn't be able to stay in our hotel, and then that all the roads in and out of Dushanbe were to be closed. So as soon as we arrived in Dushanbe (at 4am) we loaded everything onto 2 minibuses and headed for the mountains to avoid the road closures...



Our bus pauses [left] on the highest pass into the Fan Mountains – there was already a light covering of snow.

Our bus pauses again [right] for its (first) puncture to be repaired.

The broken, rocky and dusty road surface, as well as the persistent smell of diesel, were constant features of the journey.



A stop for lunch lasted a whole afternoon when we learned that the road ahead was closed from 6am until 6pm for

blasting the rock face with dynamite, and then clearing the debris. Traffic jams – including large lorries – built up on both sides of the blockage and, when the road was opened, met head on – by then, in the dark!



After our first night in a lodge, we continued the journey, meeting some local people on the way...



... until, 3 days travelling from Heathrow, we finally arrived at the mountain lodge which was the starting point for the trek.



After a cold but comfortable night, we were off trekking at last!



It was uphill all the way, and the terrain was difficult, but the scenery stunning. Our first night's camp was by the Kulikalon Lakes, a beautiful spot, but very exposed. No-one slept much – it was absolutely FREEZING. A bottle of water in my rucksack, in my tent, froze solid overnight!





Himself looking fairly perky considering the lack of sleep, and the gruelling day ahead.

We climbed from the campsite, at 2900m, over the Alauddin pass [below] at 3860m – gaining virtually 1km in altitude - before descending almost as far to the Alauddin lakes.



No pictures were taken at the top of the pass due to the near gale force icy winds, but from a lower vantage point we had a calmer, stunning view of the turquoise lakes below, where we camped for a couple of nights and explored the valley.



Throughout the trek we carried day packs with several layers of clothing, needed as the sun dropped behind the mountains, water and so on.



Our other bags, and all the tents, food and cooking equipment, were carried by donkeys.



Our route was circular, and the return took us over the 3630m Laudon pass to our final camp site.

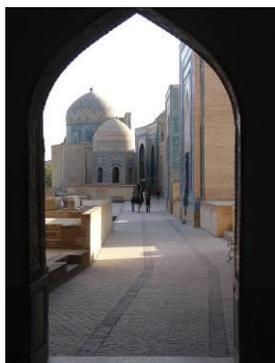


We eventually returned to the mountain lodge for a night and then headed by road to the border with Uzbekistan and on to

Samarkand – the same destination that traders’ caravans headed for after they had crossed the Fan Mountains and other ranges. Founded in the fifth century BC, Samarkand sat at a crossroads where the Silk routes spread out to China, Persia, India, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.



SAMARKAND - OUR DESTINATION



The 24 hours in Samarkand made a fantastic finale to what had been a very tough trek in difficult conditions, but what really made the whole thing worthwhile was knowing that we had raised funds for such an important cause. One of our group had lost a teenage son to cancer only a year ago, and a sense of our purpose was never far away. You helped me raise £2,525.

THANK YOU !

NIGEL TURNER