

IRAN-AFGHANISTAN

Friday October 14. Campsite at the Iranian border. Beside our tent live some folk in a wooden hut. They sell chai and lemonade. We have to pay 10 TL, too much of course. 9.10 Still, that enormous row of trucks before the border. We try to insure the bikes, could be necessary regarding the bloody traffic in Tehran!

Saturday 15 October. 9.00 Tabriz, at the camping. This one is cheap, but yet quite luxurious.

All night I heard the crows screeching. They are numerous here. And I even saw 2 common starlings. Beside the camping there is a large pond, in the middle of which is something that reminds me of the Taj Mahal (without towers).

Here also are the Germans whom we saw in Erzurum. One of them had protected his car windows extensively with metal screening. However, fate can be cruel: a stone thrown up by an oncoming vehicle had managed to hit the front windscreen from an impossible angle. The result: smashed to pieces!

17.30 Today I did some shopping in Tabriz. The traffic did not lead to the expected problems; we were already 'prepared' by Istanbul. Here also a good portion of daring was the solution.

Also here I do not go unnoticed with my motorcycle jacket, helmet and tall figure.

There is no difficulty to acquire things; if necessary I use my drawing skills (when I wanted candles!). I needed a pair of jeans, that cost me a bloody 80 guilders! I did show the guy that I didn't like that very much. In the post office: there were letters from the Leliveld family and from Meti. I also picked up 3 letters for Tim Fryer. Wherever would he be now?

And finally there is coffee again! How we craved for it. We purchased a good number of tins of Nescafe.



Night in Tabriz

Monday 17 October. Third day in Tabriz. 21.30 Tonight I looked at the moon crescent with the 20x80 binoculars. The light reflected from earth was clearly visible; even in the darker parts, formations were vaguely distinguishable.

I have been reflecting about the meaning of star gazing for me. It is, and will be, an observing activity that gives a lot of joy while doing it. I don't believe I should think too much about it; I mean, I should not be trying to achieve results with it per se. I cannot fulfil my creative needs with it now. That will be possible again in the Netherlands, with the help of astrophotography, telescope making and drawings of moon and planets.

I like best of all watching the moon and planets. (By the way, the 'laymen' I have known also did so). Looking at it that way, it is best to go for a telescope meant for those objects.

Tuesday 18 October. 16.20 The head cold certainly is not over yet. Which is the main reason we linger on in Tabriz. In the morning I saw a doctor. And ..., well, yes, again a VIP-



Typical rock layers in NW Iran

treatment! But oh goodness, now I will have to take about 20 pills a day and he also advised to go to warmer regions. Here it is not as cold as in Erzurum, but at night it cools down quite a bit. We obtained some wonderful Persian caps. If only we would have had these on the Erciyas Dagi!

Today Jan and I have decided to proceed to Australia, but to not immediately to go on to America after that. We fear that the lust for travel at a certain moment will diminish (temporarily!) and from that point of view it seems better to delay the trip to America to a later stage. (*This reasoning proved later to be prophetic.*)

Traffic in Tabriz and the shopping; well, look, if there is one thing in Asia that is important, it is staying calm. Acceptance when there is some bad luck, but pursue your goals with quiet perseverance.

Written some letters this afternoon. In fact, I am getting fed up with this more and more. I prefer to make drawings, but also not too many in a day. One very laborious good one gives more satisfaction than several careless ones.

Jan is not upset about the delay, here, as in Erzurum. Indeed, he is very good to travel with. In the evenings we read the booklets that we got from the Persian tourist office. Filled with pompous language, they are about the 'white revolution' and the 'revolution of the Shah and the people'. (*Post script: Well, they got their revolution (1978), but it was not exactly white.*)

Wednesday 19 October. I am pondering which attitude to life I would like to promote to the pupils when I return to the Netherlands and find a job in teaching. For instance, that it is nice to work on something with your heart and soul. More satisfactory. You are more likely to do it really well. And that an interest in nature can be an important source of joy. This also is true for creative activities.

Friday 21 October. Finally, we travelled a substantial distance again! Tabriz-Takestan 435 km. The landscape looks much like that of Anatolia: endlessly rolling hills in yellow and brown, here and there also green quarries. But then, half way to Takestan, suddenly huge rock formations appeared. And also tunnels again, for God's sake. One of them had a lovely surprise in the middle of its dark inside: a deep ditch. Your heart skips a few beats. In Zandjan we were the centre of interest again. If you look the people straight into the eyes for a quarter of an hour, well, they will stare back at you for a quarter of an hour ... You sometimes see villages along the long deserted road, made of brown clay with big piles of hay on the roof. A totally different sight than in the cities. On approaching Takestan we saw in the distance a gigantic cloud, with lightning strikes flashing downward like celestial swords. And there it came again: rain. On arriving, the campsite had already turned into a mud pool; we therefore hired one of their tents that was already set-up, rather than trying to erect our own in the mud. The next morning it was amusing to watch some fellow travellers desperately trying to get their bogged mini-van out of the muddy field. For the reader who does not appreciate pleasure derived from the misfortune of others: we eventually helped them to get the car going.



Settlement in NW Iran



Hills in NW Iran

22- 24 October. Tehran. In my journal I went on for 3 pages about this city in fairly derisive language. I shall refrain from that here, but I would like to give the more reasonable impressions:

The trip from Takestan to Tehran was quite normal. That is to say, on entering a grocery along the road to buy cheese, I was there on my own, except for the shop owner, for a few minutes, until 6 people came in as well, and all they did was stare at me!

Entering Tehran: Until we arrived at the monument for the 2500-year remembrance of the Persian empire, nothing special happened. Then: the turn onto Saveh road! From the distance I could see it already: a jumble of cars. Not only on the road, but the 10 m wide roadsides were used extensively as well. And because those roadsides were full of holes, the sight of it was as follows: In the middle, (on the actual road), two streams of fiercely hooting cars, (among which a large number of trucks), going in both directions (or more often than not, *trying* to go). At the same time, on either side of the road, criss-cross driving side-streams, bumping along the poor surface of the roadsides, on each side also trying to go in both directions!!

The overwhelming impression Tehran made on me is largely due to its chaotic traffic. While we were there, we visited substantial parts of the city by bike. Each time we were confronted with its most absurd street: Saveh road! The reason for that was that the camping was situated there. On that first day I, still being naive, thought that the car drivers would pay proper attention while overtaking, even in chaotic traffic. I was met by the facts in a harsh way, when I lay moaning underneath the motorbike after having been hit by an oncoming car that was in the wrong lane. While lying on the road, I saw next to me the enormous wheels of a lorry coming up and the driver expressed his anger by hooting loudly: how dared I lie in his way for a whole minute!

Luckily I had little damage, a loose trunk-fastener and an aching leg; the car of the Iranian had an enormous dent: of course he tried to get me to pay for the damage, but with a number of Dutch curses and an aggressive attitude we made it clear that that was out of the question. The next days in the evening: again unbelievable disorder on Saveh road! We spent more than an hour in complete bewilderment there: impatient drivers of enormous lorries who steer without hesitation towards the right side over the edge, or, if they happen to want to turn left, just cross the oncoming traffic at the first opportunity, well before the intersection, and then proceed towards that intersection using the roadside on the wrong side of the road to do so. Of course, the drivers on that crossroad get the fright of their lives!

Tehran: 5 million inhabitants, endless streets, whole districts with shops that sell similar products; you can get anything here. But not the sparkplugs Jan was looking for. Luckily for me we found wheel bearings that I needed in a shop in an alley. The shelves in that shop were literally bursting with bearings!

The avenues: endless streams of cars, with motorbikes and mopeds wriggling between them. Grinning traffic police, who wave their hands a bit on crossings; their instructions being ignored by the drivers. They are aware of this, so when we were waiting once before a red light (we should have known better, who waits for a red light in Tehran?!) one promptly came in our direction, letting the traffic run its own course and started leisurely scrutinizing our bikes.

And then that one evening on Saveh road: In the boiling traffic we saw a shepherd driving his herd straight across the road, between the driving cars! It was truly unbelievable! Myself, I wouldn't have dared to cross the road on my own. It is obvious that the pedestrians in Tehran have to be totally fearless and need to have contempt for death.

I still remember the very cold evenings in the big hired tent. We were sitting there in our bike-gear, with a scarf and a woollen cap, with the petrol stoves burning in front of us on the table. And we were still cold!



Post Office in Teheran

Jan's journal:

A few days in freezing Tehran. Indescribably audacious and rude traffic. Frans had a collision with a car within the first 15 minutes of partaking in Tehran traffic. The fact that the driver of the car was so clearly at fault and the total chaos that such an incident immediately causes, contributed to the fact that, before long, everybody continued on their way. On the second day it was me, who managed to "remove" a piece of a bumper-bar from another car with my bike. It was dubious who was at fault and I settled for a small amount (200 Rial). Today Frans had another collision. Fortunately, again without major consequences. The traffic police in Tehran seems to be totally irrelevant: no-one pays any attention and the police themselves seem totally disinterested. I witnessed a policeman directing traffic and, before long, the traffic ground to a complete halt with nobody being able to move an inch forward or backward, simply because everyone just ignored him. Another incident: I am waiting amidst a number of cars at an intersection where a policeman is directing traffic. He sees my bike, leaves the traffic for what it is and comes leisurely strolling in my direction to have a good look at my bike, while 20 metres behind him, the Tehran car drivers sort things out in their own way: unbelievably chaotic. Some people on our campsite left one afternoon at 3.30 pm, allowing enough time to meet some friends in the city for dinner in a restaurant at 7 pm. At 10.30 pm they returned at the campsite, never having made it to the restaurant.

Frans' journal:

Monday 24 October. 22.00 We are camping at the Caspian Sea, about 25 km east of Chalus (direction of Babol). Had a wonderful ride through the Elburz mountains. This rather small, but very high, mountain range culminates in the 5600 m high Demavend, that lies like a big snow covered boulder just next to Tehran.

In one word: it was great! Similar ravines and tilted earth layers as we saw in Macedonia, but here everything is somewhat larger. The highest pass went through a 2 km long tunnel with only room for one stream of traffic and they were going full speed ahead. Here and there were water pools on the road. Even with this massive thickness of rock above us, the rock is sufficiently porous to let water pass through to the tunnel.

At the parking places along the road I saw often light-green rock. What could that have been? Here in the Elburz mountains a warning sign against falling stones would have been appropriate. Another proof of Persian indifference. Maybe it would not even have been useful, because how could one protect oneself against it? At one instance, Jan stopped in a parking place next to an enormous abyss (which to me seemed at least 1000 m deep), because right in front of him a stone had smashed down. I also stopped and saw how above me the bushes were moving fiercely. Moments later a rock of about 50 kg came crashing down from the overhanging rocks and smashed into pieces on the road. We were lucky not to be hit by it. On those mountain roads impatience is the biggest danger. I was following a Landrover that was about to overtake a series of cars. When suddenly it braked and moved to the right. The bus that was approaching suddenly from the opposite direction was a complete surprise to me. I narrowly avoided a head-on collision, but in the process caused a series of big scratches along its full length. My rack got dislocated further, so that the rear vertical bar bumped against the frame bar of the motor all the time. We stopped, everyone in the bus disembarked, there was chattering (and me chattering back in Dutch), a well-known gesture was made (1000 Ryal), but after some further unintelligible conversation the bus driver smiled and we all went our own way again. Here in Asia the people are not all that concerned about damage to the bodywork!

Jan's Journal:

Today we rode back to Karaj and from there to Chalus on the Caspian Sea. An astonishing road through a very imposing mountain range. The most beautiful mountain road I have ever travelled on. The difference in heights was enormous and the way the road ran through unbelievable chasms was without comparison. Perpendicular rising rock-walls on both sides of the road, unbelievably high. Off course such scenery goes hand-in-hand with the dangers of falling rocks. I was lucky enough to miss a rock that fell with an enormous bang on the road surface, simply because I decided to stop to have closer look at an abyss at the side of the road. As I am telling Frans about this when he arrived a few seconds later, another rock above us, (must have been at least 20 kg), comes tumbling down and falls over our heads, smashing into pieces on the road surface in front of us. We hurriedly ventured a few looks into the abyss (unbelievably deep) and, keeping a close eye on the mountain slope above us, mounted the bikes and moved on.

Some 25 km after Chalus we found a good campsite that, as far as we know, is unfortunately unknown by over-landers. The temperature here on the Caspian Sea is fortunately considerably higher than in Tehran.

This morning we learned that there was snow in Mashhad. Yesterday we heard about snow in Erzurum. If we don't hurry, we might not be able to get through Afghanistan and Pakistan (Kabul is at an altitude of some 2000 metres!) and then we would be forced to return to Tehran and take the Southerly desert route, and thus bypass Kabul. I really hope that it won't get to that. We'll have to wait and see. Goodnight.

Frans' journal:

Tuesday 25 October. Gorgan. Today we continued eastward. We camp in a dark wood, beside a wild little river. While we are busy putting up our tent we are watched closely by a little group of Persians. While walking I bump my head against a branch and then trip over a root. The Persians don't laugh; probably they consider my behaviour typical for a westerner. After dinner we walk to a nearby kind of dancing venue. The beer is ice cold, as is the ambience in this venue, but perhaps I misunderstand the Persian social environment. There are no English signs, we see Persians in neat suits and expensive cars. This must be an entertainment centre for the rich.

Wednesday, 26 October. 250 km east of Gorgan we had to call it a day. The R50 has problems with its ignition. And it is raining again. Darned if it is not true: It seems that every sea we come close to, treats us with a portion of rain. Thus the Caspian Sea as well. We put up our tents in a stony area behind the petrol station. Next to the petrol station is the house of the owner where we recover with a cup of tea sitting around the heater. Now and then rather peculiar people come in. During the night the inhabitants of the house regularly try to find their way behind the house in the dark looking for the back entrance. Of course they trip over the long lines of my tent.

Jan's journal:

Between Gorgan and Mashhad we found a place for the tents behind a petrol station. Today is the Shah's birthday. Besides the many flags (not from residences, just from monuments and public buildings) not much celebration. After leaving the Caspian Sea it has become again freezing cold, rainy and unpleasant. Fortunately, there is some sort of restaurant/tea-house where the heater is going and that's where we are heading after coffee. In Mashhad we will be taking care of a few things; Frans' bike needs welding, we need an oil change, we will try to fix the play in Frans' rear wheel bearing and we need to get a visa for Afghanistan. My "Carnet de Passage" has been fixed up in Tehran (automobile club). Hopefully it will be accepted.

Yesterday we camped near Gorgan, still in the Caspian Sea area. The area is clearly a tourist attraction. (Very much like Southern Germany or Northern Switzerland). Lots of woods and green. Nothing special for us, but given that the vast majority of this enormous country is dry and barren, this is clearly an attractive holiday destination for Iranian tourists.

We often talk about this trip being far from a holiday trip. All together it is pretty heavy going. But we look at it more as a trip to gain experience, or a "development" trip. It really is a crazy feeling, sitting on your motorbike and realising that you are riding through Persia, along the Caspian Sea. It is a strange feeling that you can look, as a manner of speaking, across the steppes on the left-hand side of the road into Russia. The world seems smaller now; The distance between Holland and Persia seem to be less to us now, than it seemed to be back in Holland. You now know what lies between. The countries we have travelled through have been less strange, and less frightening in their strangeness, than I had expected. This is probably because we experience the changes gradually. The big difference with air travel.

We don't pay a lot of attention any more to herds of sheep on the road or to the incredible audaciousness of fellow road users. With the exception maybe of that sheep herder in the outskirts of Tehran, who herded his sheep across a road that was so godforsaken full with fast driving, heavy traffic that it defies imagination. I would have never considered (not in a hundred years!) to try to cross this road myself, on my own. Certainly not given that overtaking on the right-hand side (using the roadsides) is here just as common as overtaking on the left. The only way this herdsman could have managed this is by being incredibly brutal and having a total contempt for death.

I am very much looking forward to everything that is ahead of us. My geographical knowledge has improved in leaps and bounds, but unfortunately communication with people is very limited and can be tiring. Tonight was an exception. In the tea house we came across an Iranian person who spoke English fluently. There were also 5 Dutchmen staying overnight at the petrol station in a van. When I asked about the celebration of the Shah's birthday, because I had the impression that some villages seemed to have less signs of celebrations than others (altogether, by the way, not even 10 % of what you would see in Holland on the queen's birthday), he answered: "Better not talk about". I don't understand this at all. Is there an opposition here or not? A news article in the Tehran Journal suggested there was: On the occasion of the Shah's birthday they would release from prison 200 people, of which 100 were in prison because of unlawful opposition to the government. But in which social circles exists this opposition? The Shah claims that it only exists in the circles of the big-land owners. But is that true?

Frans' journal:

Thursday, October 27 21.00 After a trip of more than 400 km we have arrived in Mashad, the most easterly big town in Persia. Rain and wind, it is simply freezing. This is not the impression of Asia we had back in Holland.

We are again at an altitude of 1000 m. Two days ago there was a considerable snow-fall here and you can still see the remnants of it. With a bit of luck, we might make it to India before we get really caught up in the winter snow in central Asia.

The last 200 km before Mashhad: the road just goes straight on through the lonely undulating landscape. No villages, only some mud huts here and there. You see a lot of sheep with their herds and sheep dogs.

The campsite is very good. We hired a big tent for 300 Ryal; we try to keep it warm with the two petrol stoves, but still, we wear two sweaters and our bike gear! The bikes and our motorcycle clothing are caked with mud and are in need of a thorough cleaning.

Sunday, October 30, 1977. The third day in Mashhad. There are some troubles with my bike. One of the bearings in the rear wheel had a bit of play; we glued it back with a kind of metal-glue for which we had been searching one and a half day in Mashhad. You know, if you want a jerry can or a candle, you just draw it if you don't speak the language. For glue that was too difficult at that time. It is of course possible to draw the process of gluing, but then what? You don't want paper-glue but special epoxy resin! Luckily we suddenly saw Araldite tubes in a shop window.

The number of carpet sellers is amazing around here. Boys are roaming the streets everywhere, trying to lure tourists into a carpet shop. We were snagged as well and a man took more than an hour to explain to us everything about carpets. It is simply unbelievable how much work goes into a carpet!

They distinguish between "tribal carpets" and "city carpets". The first are made in Turkestan, Turkmenistan and the Caucasus area. One million knots per square meter, brilliant designs, herbal pigments; such a carpet sometimes takes half a year to make! Prices vary between 200 and 1000 dollars; you can send them by ship to your home-address; the seller takes care of that. The man stayed polite when we didn't buy one.

One time I was squatting to inspect my bike: a wasp was obliging enough to sting me in my throat. I had to go and lay in my tent, sick for two days with diarrhoea and headache. One piece of comfort: a cat kept me company for several nights.

Jan's journal:

We have spent 3 days in Mashhad. Strange city with very wide streets and a beautiful, tiled mosque with gold-plated minarets where we were not allowed in. Numerous people who are keen to show you the city and surroundings (out of pure hospitality) and are happy to invite you to have a cup of tea with their family or relatives, whom, by pure coincidence, happen to have a carpet shop or turquoise grindery. We have had a number of times explained to us the various factors that determine the quality of carpets, however without buying anything. Not that I didn't want to: many of them were exquisite.

We spent an important part of our time here with maintenance. Frans' rear wheel bearing's outer ring has been rotating in his wheel axle, causing excessive clearance and ruining the interference-fit. We have glued the outer ring with some kind of epoxy glue in place, trying to centre it properly and trying to achieve the right clearance for the bearing. I am curious to see if this is going to be a permanent solution.

AFGHANISTAN

October 31, 1977

Jan's journal:

October 31, 1977. Today we rode from Mashhad to Herat. (400 km +all the business at the border). Very strange scenery; Immense flat high-plains, stretching beyond the horizon. the road cutting through them straight as a ruler with every now and then a slight bend, 50, 60 70 kilometres without even the smallest village. Nothing; only plains stretching for hundreds of kilometres. Every now and again a herd of sheep or dromedary. Then Afghanistan: people with friendly, open faces that are happy to help you, in contrast to the Iranian side of the border where they do the same with an inexpressible expression of boredom, At the border, an Afghan tea-house, benches for the Afghanis upon which they sit in their tailor-sits drinking tea. Turbans everywhere. Later, as we ride along on the bike, we get surprised looks from dark-bearded, white-turbaned people with some lazy-staring dromedaries in the background.

My first impressions of Afghanistan are very good. The villages have exactly the same colour as the landscape. They would be hard to spot from the air, except maybe for the white turbans moving through the grey-brown dusty streets between the mud-brick houses (almost like small fortifications, with small holes in the wall as windows).

At the moment we are in the Park Hotel in Herat; a big, reasonably luxurious hotel with excellent service. (Room for 2 people: 100 Afg (about 2 dollars). Bread, jam, omelette, 2 pots of tea, sugar: 50 Afg)



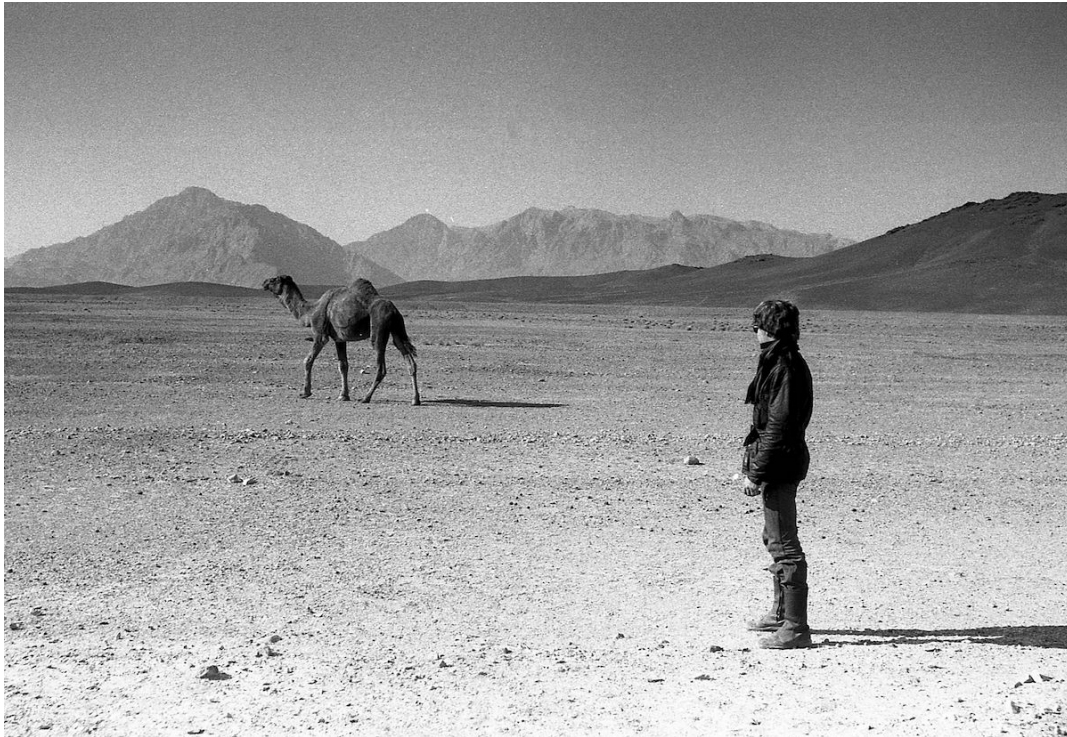
Afghan teahouse at the border



The Herat-Kabul bus



Emptiness in Afghanistan



Jan and Camel in West Afghanistan

Frans' journal:

Tuesday, November 1: Afghanistan. 18.30 In the hotel Fahrarod; about 200 km after Herat (on the road to Kandahar). It is a lonely country! The almost empty road winds over an endless dry plain with brown-grey grass. But around us we see incredibly rough mountains that look like the Black Mountains from the "Bommel" stories by Maarten Toonder. In Herat we saw for the first time those remarkable 3-wheel scooter taxis that often are adorned in a wonderful way. Also, the trucks are real pieces of art sometimes.

Jan's Journal:

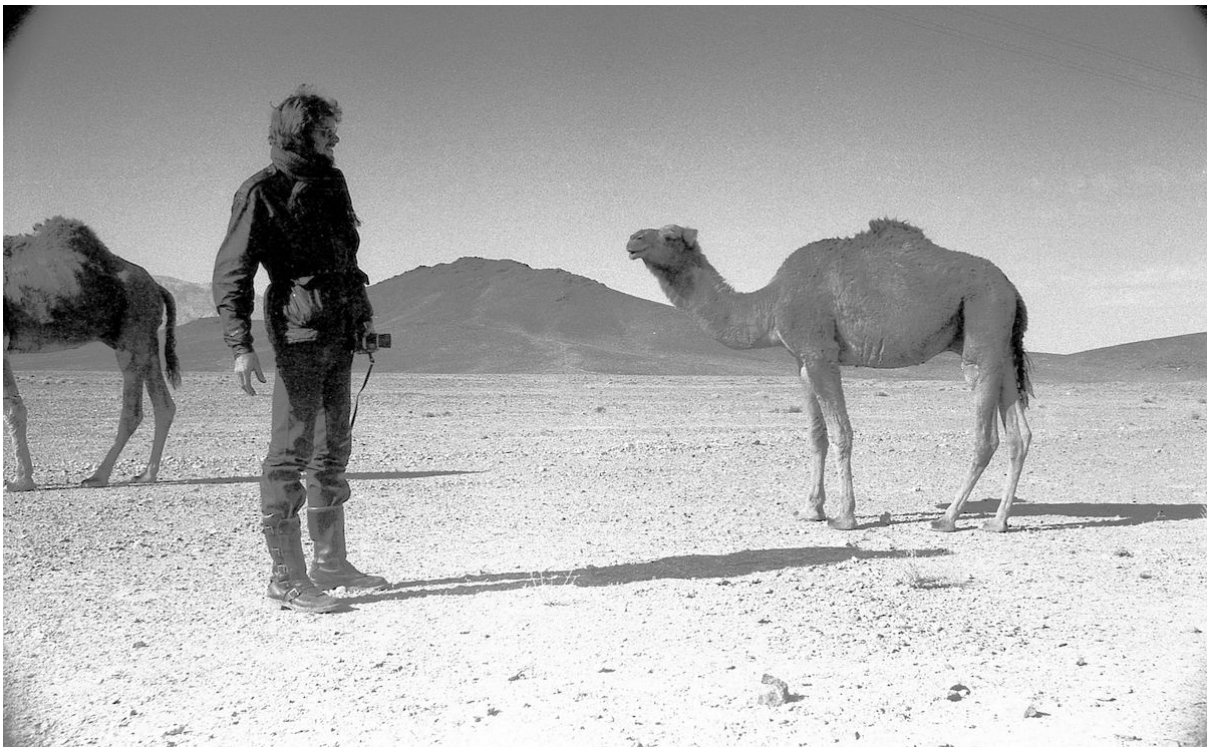
Fahrarod Hotel (about 200 kms from Herat). This morning I strolled through Herat. Nice city with beautifully adorned horse-drawn carts and friendly, but not annoying, people. The road from Herat to here was impressive; desert, dry with now and then oasis-like bits where, through the use of irrigation, some agriculture was possible. The only danger on the road were the dromedaries which could cross the road at the most unexpected moments. The trucks are heavily decorated and worth a closer look. I will try to capture some on camera. Afghanistan is inspiring us again. I will try to start taking photographs again (In Iran I took hardly any). An unbelievably dry and barren area.

At the moment we are in a hotel that was built here by the Russians. It has everything: swimming pool, all rooms with a bath, kitchen with modern fittings, etc. The only problem is that nothing works; no electricity! Ridiculous isn't it? They say that tonight between 7 and 11 there will be electricity and thus running water. Let' hope that that is true. But then again, (at this moment the lights come on!), the scenery is fabulous. Here I can imagine the presence of fata-morganas and the mountains in the distance have, due to their craggy shapes and the endless barren plains surrounding them, a sinister appearance. they could have been drawn by Maarten Toonder.

Just a little extra note about our "luxurious" hotel: electricity from 6.20 pm till 10.20 pm. Running water from 6.20 pm till 7.30 pm (We thought it was going to be for the whole evening) and apparently, tomorrow morning from 6 am till 7.30 am.



Truck in West Afghanistan



“Sizing-up” some camels



Ruins near Fahrarod



Landscape in West Afghanistan





Jan's journal

Wednesday, November 2, 1977. Kandahar. Today we rode again for almost 400 km through the desert (Dasht-i-Dargo or Desert of Death). Immense barren plain, stretching to beyond the horizon with virtually no plant growth. Occasionally a dry river-bed with ruins of deserted villages. Every now and then an oasis, (unbelievable how a bit of water can change the landscape). We also saw mirages.

Frans' rear wheel has excessive play on the bearing again. This time we tried to achieve a permanent fit for the outer ring by roughing up the surface in the axle. We'll see if it works. Tonight I discovered that I have lost my passport and all other documents. After some thinking, it seemed to be most likely that I put them with me in the sleeping bag before going to sleep. This morning I have aired the sleeping bag by hanging it over the balcony of the Fahrarod hotel room. They could have possibly dropped in the garden there.

After some efforts it was fortunately possible to ring that hotel: indeed, they had found the papers. Goddammit. I will now have to travel 380 km there and 380 km back through that goddamned hot desert (even in this time of the year), to retrieve my documents. No matter how impressive that ride was today, I think that by tomorrow night I will have seen more than enough of it to make me sick.

Frans' journal:

Thursday, November 3, Kandahar 23.30 And now I find myself watching the stars together with 2 Afghans. Actually, it is a pity that my binoculars cannot magnify more. For public observation nights, the C-5 or a Questar would be ideal. I plan to look for a Questar in Australia, if finding a job turns out to be possible.

Within 3 minutes I observed 3 falling stars, among which a rather clear one. It was remarkable that the sluggishness of the day disappeared at the moment I started to watch the stars. It is just that, while showing objects in the sky to laymen, I have the frustrating feeling that it is useless and that things cannot really be explained, because it is all too abstract. I started thinking about preparing a clear, enthusiastic presentation, in such a way that it can be

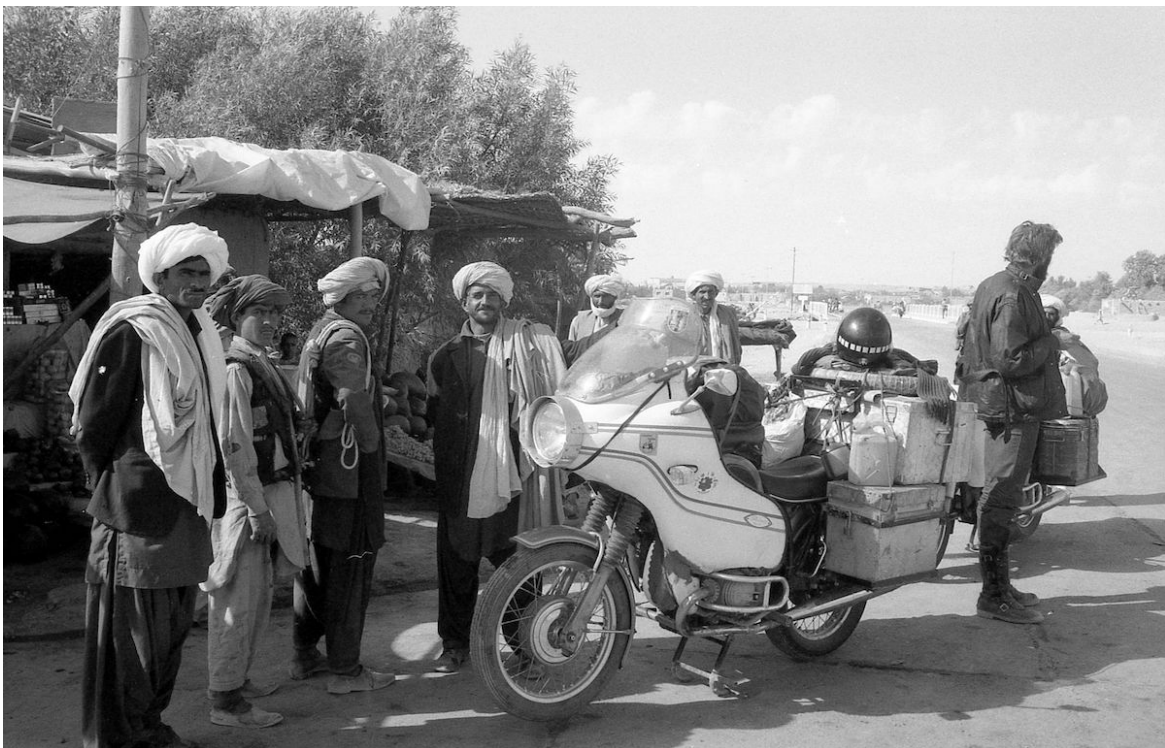
understood by lay-people.

Jan left his passport in hotel Fararod and that is why he had to make an extra trip of 750 km!

Friday, November 4. Walked about in Kandahar. What I just saw leaves me a dedicated vegetarian! Stalls with goat heads, and the sellers were picking at them leisurely. They offered me a piece. Brrrrrrr! The street was slippery with blood. And then those small eat-houses, where the plates are washed in the gutter. But on the whole it was nice. Tea on a bench in an old-fashioned tea house; opposite us 3 Afghans who invited us for a hunt. All those little shops are open almost day and night and it is not clear to me where the people sleep!

Today I bought some gem stones: lapis lazuli, a few kinds of quartz and a black stone that I have not been able to identify.

After intensive haggling the price could be lowered to half. Possibly that is still too much, but okay. In Asia it takes time to buy something, long haggling is customary.



Having a break along the road in Afghanistan

Jan's journal:

Yesterday I completed the trip to pick up my documents. It was not too bad really. The bike did extremely well. Today I strolled through Kandahar. This is really what you would hope for in your wildest dreams: totally untouched by western culture. The people leave you in peace. You can walk around the oppressively hot slums and shopping areas without being bothered. An unbelievable hive of activity. At the meat stalls you see enough to make you a vegetarian for the rest of your life: numerous goats- and sheep heads from which people leisurely cut meat amidst clouds of flies that cover these "delicacies" in layers. Other than that, delicious tea and beautiful weather. Tomorrow we hope to get to Kabul (510 km).



Somewhere in Afghanistan

Frans' journal:

Tuesday, November 8. 12.00 What a lovely day in Kabul! Wonderful weather, in a good mood, full of plans. After 3 days of the 'Kabul trots' my intestines are normal again. Those evenings in Sysis, where we ate pancakes with Ollie, Tim and Alastair I shall not forget so soon. There is something great in making plans together. Alastair and Ollie are on their way to Nepal, Tim has to wait for new clutch plates from England and Jan and I have a week delay because of that stupid visa for India. But "we'll meet again". If not in Delhi, then in Kathmandu ("along the track, maybe") or in Madras, Colombo or Perth. Alastair suggested to eventually arrive in Kathmandu with 6 motor bikes!

Bruce and Tiina are with their tent on the grass of the "Friends Hotel".

Kabul is like Kandahar, but then to the nth degree. Many more tourists.

To get here from Iran, Tim and Ollie had taken the central route along Jam and Chaghcharan, together with 4 Landrovers. It must have been an incredibly enervating trip and Jan and I jealously listened to the story. Tim had been stuck because of a worn-out clutch. The Gold Wing just wasn't the right bike for that adventure, he had to drive constantly with slipping clutch in places where Ollie's bike (the Honda 400F) didn't need to do so.

When it broke down, the bike was taken apart and transported by the Landrovers and later on an Afghan truck. Then there was some trouble with the truck owner. He wanted to take advantage of Tim's alleged wealth and when Tim was not that willing, the truck driver was suddenly put into jail. Anyway, it came down to Tim pulling the wallet again to buy him out. The whole thing (transport motorcycle, flight to Kabul, ordering parts from England) is going to cost him some £ 200. *(Later we found out that those twits in England sent him the wrong parts twice!)*

21.50 Our hotel's host (Sharif), a 28-year-old man with a big black beard, (he looks as if he is 45), just visited us in our room. Giggling, smoking, drinking, his thoughts are difficult to follow. His servant ran away. Well, I can understand that, for the little boy had to work from 6 in the morning to 10 at night. Many times Sharif came chattering to us, he himself also had a bike, an old 250 cc BMW. And it didn't work that well, so Jan had something to do again.



Ollie and Jan in Kabul

Jan's journal:

We have been a couple of days in Kabul now. We met up again with Ollie, Tim, Alastair and Bruce and Tiina. Today Al and Ollie have left. We would have gone along with them, but the visa application for India spoiled that idea. (Takes 7 days. Can be picked up on November 15th). To get here, Ollie and Tim had taken the central route through Afghanistan together with 4 Landrovers. What an adventure! Alastair had to refrain from joining them because of problems with his ignition coils. Tim's clutch packed up halfway. He had to travel by air to Kabul and his bike has been transported by truck. That cost him, including the new parts, some f 1000 (\$400?). He even had to bail the truck driver out of jail at some stage! Ollie made it. River crossings with water levels well above his exhausts. It took them 8 days. Tim is waiting at the moment for the arrival of his parts (they sent the wrong parts first time around) and Bruce and Tiina had to send for a rectifier for their Suzuki 750 from Australia. We have now tried to repair Frans' rear wheel bearing with Araldite. We are hoping that it will be OK. The day after tomorrow we will go to Bamyan and then on to Band-e-Amir by bike. My bike is the only one that hasn't had any serious problems so far. Knock on wood. This morning we heard a nice story about the bus to Bamyan: Full of vomiting and spewing Afghans. Terrible! Kabul is a good place to spend a few days. Meals 25-35 Afs (50-60 dollar-cents). Hotel rooms 35 Afs each. The weather is pretty good and plenty of beautiful things for sale.



Bank in Kabul

Frans' journal continued

Wednesday, November 9. 18.00 Kabul, the city that I want to return to once more. Roaming the streets, endless rows of little shops with beautiful handmade stuff, the evenings in Sygis and the Steakhouse. All that I will remember.

Tomorrow we will go to one of the world-wonders: Band-e-Amir, some 250 km from here at an altitude of 3000m in the middle of the Hindu Kush mountains.

Thursday, November 10, 1977

We leave for Band-e-Amir and take the southern route to Bamyan:



On our way to Band-e-Amir



The road to Bamyan









The road to Bamyān





Evening, Thursday, November 10, 1977: Finding a place to sleep, not having been able to reach Bamyán in one day

Friday, November 11, 1977

We continue on to Bamyán and then to Band-e-Amir:





Between Kabul and Bamyan



Teahouse on the way to Bamyan



Arrival at the Bamyan valley



Bamyan Valley



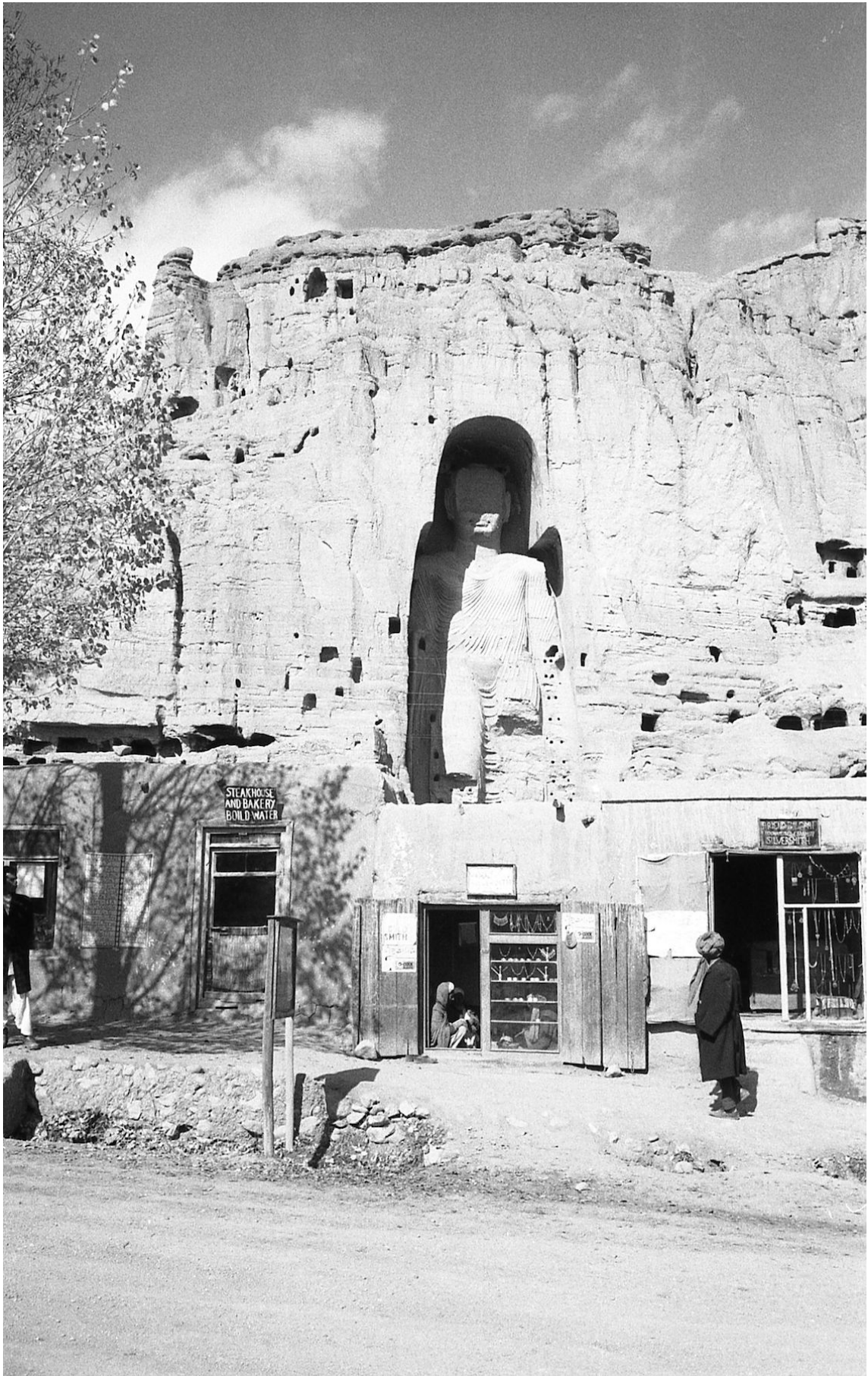
Bamyan Valley with Budha statues in the niches



Jan in Bamyan.



Bamyan. (Note: Even here! Recognise the Coca Cola sign in Afghani, in the centre of the photo?)



Bamiyan. *(Note the shop sign)*



The great Buddha of Bamiyan. (*53 m or 173 foot high, destroyed by the Taliban in 2001*)



Band e Amir Afghanistan november 1977

Finally, arrived in Band-e-Amir



Writing letter to Frans Jacobs.

Friday, November 11, Band-e-Amir, 11.00 Dutch time 14.30 Local time.

(Letters to Frans Jacobs)

Frans' letter:

"Dear Frans and Gerda,

In front of me I can see some snowflakes drifting through the air, as if coming from the steel-blue lake deep below me. I feel it: this is the place that makes my trip worthwhile.

You know that I love nature. In Holland nature consists of bird song, lovely meadows and woods. But here, in this huge wilderness of stone, snow and snow clouds, I as a human being feel pushed back in defence. In the distance, just before the very high red cliff on the opposite side of the lake, I see a black crow hovering, how I envy it! The cold comes creeping through my leather jacket, but I feel happy. Gone are my concerns about the engine trouble that will cost me quite some money and trouble in the coming days. Band-e-Amir, one of the world's wonders, deep in the heart of Afghanistan, 3000 m high. The trembling I feel is not only from cold! Jan's sniffing and shivering, some distance away from me, almost appears irritating to me, here, in this world of silence.

Before me I see lakes, winding like a string of pearls between the strange walls of the ravines. Snow is glistening on the tops and I feel that spending the night here, will keep me in its icy grip, as a very tiny human. In front of me, beyond the gap wall, I see white clouds floating in the clear blue. Blue, my favourite colour, the colour of infinity that I also saw last night, while shivering in my sleeping bag in the Hindu Kush mountains.

I roll a cigarette (Samson, also for sale in Kabul!) to warm my nose. The sun, that mighty giver of life, now warms my face and takes a little of the cool grandeur away.

Further away I see an Afghan strolling towards us. What the hell is he doing here?

Frans and Gerda, I envy you in your warm home. This is not a place for a human body, this is a world for ghosts!"

Jan's letter:

Dear Frans.

I don't know where you are, but we arrived 5 minutes ago at one of the world-wonders: Band-e-Amir. A string of mountain lakes in the Hindu-Kush mountains. This seemed to us a good place to write the letter, but we only made it in the nick-of-time. to get here from Kabul took us one and a half days over a road that we had severely underestimated, but that is incredibly beautiful. Distance from Kabul is about 250 km, but the road was more like track with passes in excess of 3300 m. We had to cross

rivers and had to sleep in the mountains without a tent. We had hoped to spend the night in Bamyān in a hotel, but didn't get there in one day. The last bit was very cold: over a plateau at an altitude of 3000 metres with a freezing wind, surrounded by grim, snow-covered mountain tops of more than 5000 metres. I am now writing with my gloves on.

This first view of these lakes is so splendid and so full of promise for the coming days that there is hardly any space left in my mind to concentrate on you. I am sure you would understand if you saw this. It is starting to snow now. If that continues we will be really stuck here, because there is no way that we could even consider returning to Kabul. Fortunately, the sun is breaking through now. Frans I am going to stop now. I'll write some more tonight.



Frans' journal:

Sunday, November 13, 1977

I creep upward along the debris-covered slopes toward the foot of the highest cliff. In the shadows, away from the sun, it is cool, I wear my motorbike jacket. The Afghan dancer from last night waves me off kindly. Higher and higher I go, until I reach the ridge, beyond which a deep abyss gapes. To the right, to the foot of the red cliff. I pull some withered plants from the soil for Ron, fascinated looking for them between the stones. Parts of the red cliff have collapsed. On the broken surface I see hollows with quartz crystals. And I even find a fossil shell! All of this area has been under water in the past.

We sleep in a small primitive hotel close to one of the lakes. The food is lovely, unfortunately I have to moderate myself because of the "Kabul trots" has struck again! During the night I blunder several times from our little room via the 'hall' where a lot of people are sleeping, into the icy cold night where the 'toilet' is. In short: each time I do this the whole bunch is woken up against their will.

In the evening an Afghan dancer performs. We are flabbergasted about his energy.

Unbelievable that someone can achieve that.

The lakes are hundreds of metres deep and they also continue way under the actual plateau. At the foot of the highest cliff, which I reached after an exhausting climb, I had a great view on the Band-e-Amir plateau and the 5000 m high snowy tops of the Koh-i-Baba mountains in the south. During summer the inhabitants of this area build stocks of food and fuel, because in winter they are fully isolated by the snow! We were already late, we saw several of the hotel's employees leave by bus to Kabul.

I believe that, if a 4-lane road would be made to Band-e-Amir (with American or Russian money; they practically build all the roads here), that the serene peace and silence of this area would soon be finished. What would we have then? Mount Cola-can!

And whom did we meet accidentally again in Band-e-Amir? Of course! Piet and Truke. Wisely, they had taken the northern route. And at once the cards were pulled out.

Monday, November 14. Back in Bamyan. The past days: the trip through the Hindu Kush via the southern route to Bamyan, and then 2,5 days in Band-e-Amir.

The southern route to Bamyan: once, but never again! Total distance 180 km, but 140 km along winding mountain roads, over a 3260m high pass (the Unai-pass) and a 3780 m high pass (the Hajigak-pass). Fallen on my face twice. This is the worst road until now.

We were not able to get to Bamyan in one day and spent the night in a field along the road in the Bamyan valley. Around us the menacing Hindu Kush rock peaks. Above me I saw the marvellous starry sky; not a single star was flickering! This is thanks to the high altitude.

Almost all night I watched this immense spectacle. The Leonids (among which a fire ball!) also contributed to these heavenly fireworks. Through the 9x63 I could admire the conjunction of Mars and M44 in the constellation of Cancer.

Band-e-Amir: a deserted plateau with huge red-brown cliffs. Among those cliffs, in the deep, the radiant blue lakes, with their white banks quickly sinking away into the blue-green depths of the water. From above you can clearly see the red-brown fish swimming in the crystal-clear water. A waterfall between the lakes: many coloured mineral deposits, a marsh-like area with bushes, beautiful coloured birds (orange-black-white).



Jan's journal:

Bamyan, November 14, 1977

Band-e-Amir: one of the highlights of the trip! We spent two full days in Band-e-Amir.

Indescribably beautiful. I hope that the slides will show a little of what can be seen there. I rode like a king on the bike through the barren, splendid scenery until I could go no further.

Then left the bike and walked for hours in utter enjoyment. Basic but good hotel with wonderful, friendly people, long evenings with tea and card games and then getting up early to explore. We got there from Kabul over the southerly route, ("impossible" said the tourist information in Kabul), via the Unai- and Hajigak passes (both in excess of 3300 metres with loose gravel and rocks). Dangerous road. We didn't get to Bamyan before nightfall. Slept in the mountains. Pretty stupid, but all went well. But a beautiful road it certainly was.

Frans is starting to dislike the bike riding more and more. He fell several times, damaging his fairing and a few other things. Once he almost rode into an abyss. He is not enjoying it and probably for that reason doesn't concentrate enough on the riding.

I Love it. The more difficult, the more I like it and falls only happens very rarely and in exceptional circumstances. My bike is going fabulously. I seem to be able to do the most impossible things with it. Almost like a mountain goat. And all of that without having had any mechanical problems with it. I am more and more convinced that I will never sell it.

Frans found a fossil shell in Band-e-Amir. I managed to get one too by swapping it for a (cheap) ballpoint pen with an Afghani boy. Shells at an altitude of more than 3000 metres. Unbelievable. They must be millions of years old.

Also, I tried riding a horse, but, no matter how strange this may sound, I rather ride my motorbike through this scenery than a horse. I can get my bike to do what I want with gentle persuasion and I can maintain it. I "reward" it for all its trouble by keeping it in top condition. In contrast, I can only get a horse to do the necessary things by hurting him and chastising him, while he makes it clear that he doesn't feel like it. That goes against my grain and after 15 minutes I had enough. After that, when those boys tried to rent me their horse, I just pointed at my bike and said: "That's my horse" and I meant it from the bottom of my heart.



Riding the bike up and then walking to explore













A lake contained by a 50-foot-high natural wall.



Note the huts at the foot of the wall





Inside: Gravity-fed, water-driven milling stones







Frans' journal:

Saturday, November 19. Jalalabad. End of the lazy quiet days in Kabul. We returned to Kabul a few days ago via the northern route from Bamyan. Only a few problems this time, although the road fiercely shakes your body because of its many corrugations.

Oh, yes, I nearly forgot. In Kabul I bought a wonderful gold (real?) ring with lapis lazuli stone. I went for the enchanting blue of the stone. This strange mineral is found in one of the inhospitable regions of north-east Afghanistan. When I come back here I want to buy a similar ring, but with a malachite stone. Spent at least half an hour buying it yesterday. It was the familiar story, I even walked out, upon which the shop keeper came after me and dragged me back into his store. We agreed upon 2000 afghanis (about \$5?).

In spite of the rain we left Kabul today on our way to Pakistan. Over are the dinners in the Steakhouse. Farewell to Tim, who just had the wrong clutch plates sent to him for the second time. How unlucky it is for him. Perhaps he will cancel the boat and we might see each other in Kathmandu.

These last days the rain never stopped. The Kabul river gorge: marvellous, earth layers that stretch in all directions, very high cliffs. It made me think of an Anton Pieck drawing of a spooky castle on a high cliff surrounded by wild waters. We reached Jalalabad after 140 km.

We put up our tent on a field in front of the Springhar hotel.

Tomorrow we will cross the border into Pakistan.



The road to Jalalabad



Kabul- Jalalabad