

Day 4 – Yining to Turpan

After a couple of days waiting about we thought it best to have an early start to try and catch up on the time lost during our extended stays in Khorgos and Yining, so everyone was up and ready for a 6am departure, except one; who shall for the sake of his or her anonymity remain nameless. After collecting our bagged up breakie of bread and cakes we headed off out of Yining back to Khorgos to pick up the main road to Urumqi and beyond....

The road out of Khorgos was a challenge, it as in the process of being re-surfaced so we were constantly being diverted of the relatively smooth tarmac on to very rough loose stone covered roads running in parallel for any distance up to 2km before popping back on to the main road for a few kilometres. Following about 40km off flat arid landscape we found ourselves nestled amongst some mountains with some spectacular views, snow topped peaks, rocky mountain slopes, tree and grass lined mountain sides the variety of the scenery was preposterously good, darting from tarmac to off-road sections was challenging but great fun especially in the mountains as the we had the morning sun popping out from behind the slopes and huge clouds of dust being thrown up by the multitude of trucks moving through the passes with us. Once all the road works seemed to cease the road suddenly began climbing, we could see waterfalls and stream appearing on the mountain sides the map told us there was a large lake atop the peaks, as we rounded what seemed to be the last ascent we spotted a great view down in to the valley below and decided that after 3 hours on the road it was time for a break for breakfast.

Back on the road again we had gone but a few hundred yards when we came across the lake shown on the map, the still nature of the water and the regular shape of the banks made us think it was a reservoir but even so the bright morning sun shining of the deep blue water made a spectacular sight.



The roads by now were levelling out as we crossed the 3000m plateau then the single carriageway made way for a brand new expressway which was absolutely deserted. The almost untouched tarmac snaked off as far as far as the eye could see. Surrounded buy dusty, flat, baron land and the mountain peaks behind us disappearing over the horizon there was much else to do other than get to know each other a bit more over the radios and drive.

The next 600km seemed to fly by the banter over the radios really helped bond the team and the vast expanses of empty tarmac gave us great opportunity to practice our convoy driving.

Mid afternoon we arrived in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang region of China it is also the biggest city in the world that is further from any sea or ocean. We had a quick stop for some supplies, mainly drinks as the heat was unbearable at times, we met the wife and



daughter of the agent who put together all the paperwork to get into china and we made a stop at the bank to withdraw some money for fuel and tolls as we discovered plastic was not a readily accepted form of payment; cash is preferred.

The last few hundred kilometres were much the same, empty expressway convoy driving and banter over the radio, but dusk was setting in and we still hadn't reached our final destination, as we were discovering the sat nav, paper maps and actual Chinese roads bared very little in common with each other, but with a bit of ingenuity we were finding our way, at what turned out to be the final stop for a direction check, we noticed that the temperature was considerably more than we had experienced back in Yining, after checking the Discos on board computer we found that it was 39degrees, yet it was 9:30pm.

Our arriving in Turpan came just at the right time, it was just after 10pm it was still stifling hot and we were hungry and tired after a 960 kilometre trip from Yining, the shower and a local restaurant were becoming us all. A freshen up in the rooms and we were off in search of food, fortunately china never seems to sleep there is always something going on somewhere, so finding a local restaurant wasn't a tricky job. After our noodles, rice and dumplings we were all ready for bed, it had been a long and tiring day, but successful in many ways. We had made good time, clawed back some of the time lost early on and grew closer as a team, another early start was on the cards for the next day but the promise of some time off to enjoy a bit of sight-seeing was enough to keep spirits high, which is exactly what was needed so we could complete this mammoth task.