

The Silk Road May 6 to May 27

May 6-7 An uneventful night flight from O'Hare to London, with about 2 hours sleep. We skipped the breakfast on the plane and had a small breakfast in the arrivals lounge before taking a taxi to the Heathrow Hilton near terminal 5. We took a nap and had a snack in the lounge for dinner. We managed to sleep from 10:30 to 5am, so felt good for the next flight.

May 8-9 After breakfast in the lounge, we took a taxi at about 9am back to the airport for the Turkish Air flight to Istanbul. (11:30 am departure, arrived in Istanbul about 5:15 pm local time). We had a 3 hour layover and used the Turkish Air Lounge for dinner, while we waited for the next flight to Ashgabat. When we went to the gate for the 8:25 pm flight, we held our tour booklet out so we could be identified by other people on the tour who were taking the same flight, and soon met Michel Behar, our MIR guide for the trip. There were 10 of us, plus Michel, on the flight. The flight arrived about 2 am on the 9th, and the journey through immigration required innumerable passport checks. Since we already had our visa for Turkmenistan, we just had to pay the arrival tax at a bank, then continue to the official immigration stop. We were met by the local driver with a bus and taken to the Hotel Oguzkent and settled into the room by 4am. The hotel was gorgeous, built by Sofitel 5 years or so ago, and still operated by them. Ashgabat was not at all what I expected. The new modern airport is shaped like a falcon. The buildings are Soviet block style, but in white marble, and at night lit by colored lights, and there are vast green parks. From the hotel window we could see the Turkmenistan version of Disneyland, plus lots of official marble buildings. And almost no people walking around...my guess was that they had underground walkways because of the extreme heat, but I have zero proof of this. My international roaming on the phone did not apply in Turkmenistan, so I tried to use the hotel internet instead of email on the phone.

May 9 We had a long, leisurely breakfast, and chatted with the few people who were at breakfast from the group, including Gil Stein, our OI archeologist. The breakfast was a great buffet with lots of good cheeses, yoghurt, breads, eggs, etc. The coffee was weak by my standards, but plentiful. After breakfast we reorganized the packing, showered, then we went down to look for a very light lunch and immediately ran into Gil, so sat down with him. After much discussion among the 3 of us, we had a lentil soup, some hummus, a salad, and the local version of cheese pizza, which is basically a flat bread with the edges curved up to hold the cheese. So as our food started to arrive, another couple showed up and then another, so we ended up with a long leisurely lunch. We then spent a while playing in the swimming pool and showered and it was time for dinner.

We went down for our casually arranged dinner at 6:15 and most of the group was in the lobby, so we slowly moved over to the restaurant. Michel and Gil were busy so we got seated and slowly 3 other people came in so we squeezed in around a very large table. Then Michel announced that he had managed to collect the rest of the group, they were turning the dinner into the introductory part of the trip that had been scheduled for the next morning. The two waiters that were taking care of all of us had taken most of the orders at this point, then Gil gave an introduction of himself, then

Michel gave an introduction of himself, and then they had us go around the table and talk about ourselves. Of course with 20 people and just 2 servers, it took a while to get the food, then it took them a really long time to start bringing the checks (this was an on-your-own meal). They brought Steve's and then 3 other people, and after waiting for a while I went to the desk and they made mine up, so we paid and went to the room. The food at this meal was probably the best we had on the trip (I had a really good baked eggplant dish).

May 10 We woke up at 3am, but Steve was able to get back to sleep. As Judy was drifting off at 5am, she heard rain! There was even lightning. Another great breakfast, then a lecture by Gil, "Central Asian Overview: Deep Patterns in the Physical and Cultural Landscapes", at 8:45.

We were introduced to our local guide for this part of the trip, Eugenia Vasilyeva, then drove about 40 minutes through Ashgabat and 18 km out of town to the World Heritage site of Nisa, which was the capitol of the Parthians, traditionally assumed to be founded by Arsaces I (reign 250 BC–211 BC). The fortress walls were 8-9 m thick in their base and were strengthened with 43 rectangular towers. It was badly damaged by an earthquake in the first decade BC. There are quite a few walls still standing that we could walk around in. We were given the tour by one of the Russian archeologists who is working at the site, and a lot of his ideas are pretty clearly outdated. Since we had already read up on the site, we were snickering (politely of course) at his grander statements. The main thing is that the Parthians obviously had some Zoroastrian worshipers of Ahura Mazda but not likely the pure form in Persia. There were also lots of other religions practiced on the site. So the archeology guide was convinced that one section had been a fire altar (there's a great deal of complaining in the literature that if the archeologists in this area don't know what something is, they decide it contained a fire altar).

From there we went to the big Kipchak Mosque (Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque) and the previous President Saparmurat Niyazov's Mausoleum; we were not allowed to take photos inside. The domes of both were really beautiful. Lunch was at Altyn Chinar Restaurant, and included vegetable soup (potatoes, carrots, paprika, onion, and greens) and great eggplant, as well as Russian vegetable salad (potato, egg, green peas, vinegar, onion, greens) and ice cream.

We then drove back into Ashgabat to go to The State Museum of the State Cultural Centre for a whirlwind tour of the antiquities section with a really good guide. They have some astonishing rhytons (drinking horns) and a few really wonderful Neolithic pieces. (My biggest regret of the trip was that I didn't buy the \$15 US photo pass. I did not make that mistake again!) From there we visited 2 of the astonishing monuments in town, the Monument Arch of Neutrality and the Independence Monument flanked by giant statues of Turkmen warriors, then went to the Russian Market (a fairly ordinary street and vegetable market with no Russians). After that, we drove 45 minutes out of town to a horse farm to see the amazing local horses, Akhal-Teke. There were lots of foals and one had just been born yesterday! They are really high spirited with very thin legs and they hold their head really high when they trot.

Finally, about 7:30 we got to dinner at a Wedding Palace, where we had our welcome dinner. The food wasn't very interesting and the wine was moldy, but there

was a Dove Bar for dessert. We had to do a brief repack so that we could take overnight bags with us the next day and leave the bulk of the luggage at the hotel.

May 11 Up before 4 am, showered and had a great breakfast, then checked out of the hotel. It was a very long day. We left at 6:30 am and drove to ancient Anau. Anau includes two mounds, north and south. The northern mound contained remains of the Chalcolithic and the Bronze Age, and the southern mound contained Iron Age remains. The lowest layers of the north mound provide some good evidence for the transition from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic in the area. Some copper items, as well as imported lapis lazuli were found. The Anau fortress existed in the Parthian period, and the mosque, dating from the 15th century AD must have been beautiful before being damaged in an earthquake; but there is a bit of tile left. We left the bus at this point and moved to 4-wheel drive vehicles, which were necessary to get into Altyn Depe later in the day.

Then we drove to Namazga Tepe, a Bronze Age site near the border with Iran, which was a mound with lots of pottery sherds. There was a model of what they thought it would have looked like in the museum, and it is important because archeologists were able to sequence the Bronze Age pottery for the whole region by dating the pottery there.

Then we drove to Abiwert, a medieval city with lovely mud-brick walls still partly standing.

The next stop needed to be lunch, on the way to Altyn Depe, which was supposed to be a 2-hour drive. First a road was closed, because of railroad track repair; then a park, where the local guide wanted to take us, had been taken over by a wedding (unfortunately we could not see the bride!). Then they found a shrine that allowed them to set up tables and chairs under a roof area (fortunately, since it had started to rain! We claimed we were magic to bring so much rain to the desert!). The lunch picnic was pretty awful sandwiches, and good fresh cucumbers and tomatoes. Families were at the shrine enjoying their own picnics, and the children were fascinated by us. We continued the drive over completely torn up roads and after hours made it to Altyn Depe. It was amazing, with vast areas of pottery sherds scattered everywhere. In roughly 3000 BC there had been 60 pottery kilns on the site, and copper had been smelted there. It was astonishing, but we were not sure it was worth the difficulty to get there. We then had to drive back over the awful roads and made it to Mary a little after 10pm. We checked into the Mary Hotel and went quickly to a very late, not very interesting dinner.

May 12 Up at 5am and off at 6:30. Breakfast in the Mary hotel was much better than we expected and I was happy that their internet worked in our room (most people could not get it to work except in the lobby). I wasn't able to get internet while we were driving.

Our first stop (lots of driving on dirt roads) was the UNESCO World Heritage site, Gonur Tepe, which has been restored a bit, with walls restored to 4 feet or so in places, so you can walk through the rooms, etc. It was a large early Bronze Age settlement, and the major settlement of the Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex, 2200-1700 BCE. Areas have been identified as a palace and Zoroastrian fire temples. Some of the most interesting areas had been pottery kilns, and had the remains of baked color on the mudbrick.

We were supposed to have a picnic lunch at Gonur Tepe, but the guides were worried about the time, so we ate bananas and peanuts before we started for Merv, another World Heritage site. On the way (more unpaved roads) we ate tomatoes, apples, etc.

Merv is a huge site, with portions of large fortification walls still standing, as well as a few buildings. There are archaeological traces of a village back to the 3rd millennium BCE, and historical records mention it as part of one of the satrapies of Darius. The first city of Merv was founded in the 6th century BC as part of the Achaemenid expansion into the region by Cyrus the Great, and there is a legend that Alexander the Great visited the city. It was one of the cities on one of the major parts of the Silk Road. The Sassanid Ardashir I (220–240 AD) began a Sassanian rule of almost four centuries. Remains that we visited included an ice house, the Great Kyz Qala, the little Kyz Qala, a Mosque, and the Sultan Sanjar Mausoleum.

After Merv we drove to the airport and had a pretty easy time getting back to Ashgabat to the Hotel Oguzkent. Because we were late we went straight to dinner at a reasonable restaurant. I have no memory of the food, but I'm sure it involved beets.

May 13 We were up at 5:30 and had the luggage out by 7, when we went to breakfast. We loved the breakfast at that hotel! From the hotel we went straight to the airport and flew to Dashoguz, close to the border. We drove a couple of hours to Kunya-Urgench (ancient Khwarazm), and stopped first for a good lunch. There was a great eggplant salad, a light soup, and great pumpkin in a not-so-good dough. There were steamed dumplings that were ok, and very dry cake.

We then toured the ancient site of Kunya-Urgench, another World Heritage Site. There are no remains from the early structures on the site, at least back to the 5th and 4th centuries BC. In 1221 Genghis Khan destroyed the city, but it was rebuilt. Timur (Tamerlane) sacked Urgench in 1338 and destroyed the irrigation system and planted barley over the ground to disrupt the agriculture. The standing structures today include the Kutlug Timur Minaret (11th century, 60 meters in height, 12 meters in diameter at the base and 2 at the top.), the Turabek Khanym Mausoleum (mid-1300's), the Tekesh Mausoleum (late 1100's), and the Najm-ad-Din al-Kubra Mausoleum (early 1300's).

We then crossed the border into Uzbekistan, which required getting to the border, showing all our passports, then the bus was allowed to take us to a gate. Our luggage was unloaded and we went through 2 checkpoints, had the luggage scanned, showed our passports to many people, had our luggage searched, showed the passports to 2 more people and then we were in the no-mans-land. Oh, and we went through a scanner ourselves at one point. Then we pulled the luggage across the no-mans-land to the Uzbekistan side. Our guide Michel said he had never seen the Turkmenistan side go so smoothly. As we approached the Uzbekistan side we were sent into a building for a "health scan" (they took our temperatures with a remote thermometer) then we showed our passports to several people and had the luggage scanned and we were in. The whole process took about 3 hours. We were met by the local guide, Yusup Kamolov.

We then went to a very old necropolis, Mizdakhan, with a view of the remains of the Gyaur-Kala fortress. The original settlement dates to the 4th century BC. Steve was too tired to climb the hill, but I went up, and was really glad I did.

We were then taken to a private house for dinner, so we figured we would be sitting on the floor etc. But it was a beautiful house with a table set with silver and China, and lots of nuts and tomatoes and cucumbers, an ok salad and soup and noodles with potatoes. There were several ok pastries for dessert. Then several family members performed for us on Uzbek instruments, and one man did throat singing. We then checked into the Jipek Joli Hotel in Nukus, where we stayed 2 nights.

May 14 We woke up at 5, but we were actually able to get back to sleep! At 6:30am we got up and did a little organizing, showered, and got downstairs for breakfast by 8:30am. They made eggs to order and brought cheese and a little warm pastry and not very interesting bread. 3 very good jams...apricot, strawberry, and a local berry.

We left the hotel at 9 and headed north to the former bottom of the Aral Sea, about a 3 hour drive. The sea is now largely dried up because of careless Soviet over-irrigation policies. When we arrived at the town nearest the former southern end of the sea, Muniyak, we went to a little museum which had photos of the Aral Sea at different stages, a few local artifacts, and some modern paintings, then had lunch (beet salad, light soup, strange bread, lots of wonderful fresh cherries), then went to the monument at the former southern end. There is a (fake) lighthouse and a dozen rusted ships sitting in the sand. Our guide was an environmental scientist who is working to save the sea. He talked about the issues and the solutions he's working on. His discussion of the experiences of his family under the Soviets was unexpected and very matter of fact. He told us we were lucky to be at the site during a sand storm since most people don't get to see that, but we didn't think it was a particularly big storm.

When we went to dinner, it turned out that the museum director who was scheduled to speak to us over dinner had brought a PowerPoint, so we had to do that first before dinner. She had been fired from her position at the Savitsky Art Museum for political reasons, but seemed to be moving back into favor, since she was allowed to speak to us. This made dinner very late again, and fortunately we were eating at the hotel.

May 15 Up at 6am, showered, breakfast, and luggage out for a 9:30 departure. We spent the morning at the Savitsky Art Museum, which has a small collection of antiquities and a very large collection of Avant-Garde Russian Art. Savitsky was a painter who avidly collected art, paying much less than the art was worth and sometimes never making payments. The collection is housed in a modern building and many of the display areas are well done. Unfortunately, the glass on the cases reflected all the nearby light, so photography was difficult. The photography fee was an astonishing \$40, which I decided I would pay, since I had made the mistake of not paying the \$15 fee in Ashgabat. Because the fee was so high, I volunteered to take photos for the group, and had a lot of fun being the "official photographer". Apparently people seldom pay the fee, because the museum guards were especially respectful to me. We had lunch in the museum café, a beet salad, a noodle salad, a very good light poufy dough thing, and a very weird "cheesecake" for dessert.

After lunch we drove 3 ½ hours to Khiva and checked into the Bek Khiva hotel. We spent 3 hours with a guided tour of old Khiva. It was fabulous, and the old city is really well reconstructed. We got to climb to the top of the citadel (the 5th century Kuny

Ark), which has a great view over the site, and see an old church that was "probably" Zoroastrian. Khiva is a World Heritage Site, and one of the Silk Road cities. The old town area is all pedestrian and surrounded by high city walls, so it was easy to wonder around. Among other things, we saw the Kutli Murad Inak Madrassa, Uc Avlija Mausoleum (from the outside), and the Tash Chauli ("Palace of Stone") which included a tour of the rooms from the harem and wonderful carved wooden columns. The Juma Mosque had especially beautiful carved wooden columns. The Kalta Minor minaret was a great landmark, and we saw it from the outside.

Then we walked back to the hotel, leaving the old town through a different gate, and took a shower; and went to a nice dinner, with a really good Ratatouille, then a very good flour "tortilla" lightly grilled, with cheese, then ice cream for dessert. The best desserts were ice cream!

May 16 Up early, showered, and had breakfast before a trek to another hotel that had AV so Gil could use PowerPoint for his lecture. The hotel was pretty nice, but the AV never worked, so Gil had to give the talk without his slides. After the lecture we were taken back to the old town of Khiva for "free time. We first followed the guide and saw a wood working shop where a man was carving one of the wooden pillars that were around town. On our own, we then went to the Museum of Applied Arts, in the Islom-Hola Madrassa including a tiny museum with old photography equipment. It was very relaxing to not have to rush from site to site.

We went back to the hotel to check out and had lunch at the hotel, then left, not long after 1pm. for the 8-hour drive to Bukhara. Some of the drive was in a very large oasis (not the palm tree kind, but lots of trees and some flowers) but much of the drive was in the desert. It was a very tiring drive. Much of the road was really a mess, and not long after we left Khiva there was a huge traffic jam because of many many Russian trucks that had huge loads for an ammonia plant they were building.

We checked into the Modarixon (not a very good hotel...it had just opened, and some people had no hot water, including us, and some had no cold water, which meant that their toilets would not flush). Oddly, the water to each room seemed to be controlled separately. The beds were hard, etc. The view from the room was like a slum, so we kept the curtains closed. We had dinner across the main paved street, and it was great. An even better Ratatouille than the night before (and that was good!), an excellent bean and potato soup, really good potatoes and onions, ice cream.

May 17 Up early (5am again), and not a very interesting breakfast, across a dirt road from the hotel. Instant coffee, as was often the case. Because we were here for 3 nights, we turned in our laundry, which came back later in the day. We went to another hotel for AV for Gil's lecture again, and this time it worked, so we got 2 lectures in one. Our local guide was Makhsuma Niyazova.

Then we started the city tour of old Bukhara. Bukhara was a major city on the main Silk Road route, and the area has been settled for at least 5 millennia, and many of the buildings are from the 1500's. We first walked down the main street of the old town, which was lined with shops, mosques, and "shopping arcades," all in old buildings. We were given free time to meander through the town (and shop!). Among the sites were the Kalon Mosque and Minaret (originally built in 795 but burnt to the

ground in 1068, then damaged by the Mongols in 1219, the current building was finished in 1514), the Mir-i-Arab Madrasah (built in 1535 using the proceeds of the sale of 3000 Persian slaves), and two of the Covered Bazaars from the 16th century.

Our next stop was the Ark Citadel (first recorded fortress on the site was in the 7th century, but it kept falling down; the ramparts were built in the 12th century but then destroyed by the Mongols in 1220; the current walls are from the last 3 centuries), where we were given a lecture by the Senior Advisor, who only spoke Russian (Makhsuma translated). We then had a tour of many of the rooms of the citadel and several rooms that are now a museum. Before lunch we stopped at the Zindan Prison and some people climbed up to the pit where Conolly and Stoddart, British explorers in the area, were kept by the Emir before they were killed in 1842.

We had lunch on the edge of the old town, an area where we had many of our meals while in Bukhara.

After lunch we went to the Lab-i-Hauz complex, one of the few places that still has a pond in Bukhara. The mulberry trees near the pool were planted in 1477. The Nadir Divanbegi Khanagha is reflected in the pool and has beautiful tile work and carved wooden columns. Our last stop before going back to the hotel was the incredibly beautiful Ismael Samani Mausoleum, built at the beginning of the 10th century for an Amir of the Samanid dynasty. The building is a cube, with intricate baked brickwork.

We had a little time at the hotel for our cold shower (the engineer kept thinking he had turned on our hot water) and laundry sorting before going back to the old town for dinner. Dinner was nice, with (you guessed it) a beet salad, a kind-of potato salad with peas and carrots and some other stuff. For dessert, they served us Rice Krispie treats (I'm not making this up!). Fortunately one of our group had his 75th birthday today, so the guide ordered a big chocolate birthday cake and we all sang to him and got a slice of the cake. So we said the rice krispies was the desert appetizer. There were singers and dancers who moved around the restaurant as we ate. When we got back to the hotel we finally had hot water, so didn't have to change rooms.

May 18 Up early. At breakfast, the staff was trying to make a new coffee machine work (much better coffee than the instant). It was a small machine, so it kept running out of water and the grind basket kept filling up, so it took a while for everyone to get their coffee.

We drove to Paikent. The city of Paikent had been similar to Bukhara in size and function but did not survive until the 12th century, so missed the Mongol Horde. In contrast to Bukhara which is largely preserved or reconstructed, Paikent is the standard archeological dig, which we got to climb around on the mudbrick and pickup (and put back down) pottery sherds. They also have a small museum on site that we went to after the dig.

On the drive back to Bukhara for lunch, we stopped at the Chor Minor Madrassah, built in the 19th century, for a photo opp.

After lunch, we went to the Magok-i-Attari Mosque (originally built in the 9th century and with parts still standing from the 12th century, so one of the few surviving buildings from before the Mongol invasion), which now houses a carpet museum. Then the Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa Summer Palace (built in 1911 by the Russians for the Emil Alim

Khan to get him out of the Ark fortress) where there is an active Friday mosque and many museums. Then we went to the Bakhaudin Naqshbandi Complex.

They gave us an hour back at the hotel to bathe, rest, and repack, then we went to dinner. The only thing I remember about dinner is the chocolate lava cake for dessert, but I'm sure there were beets.

May 19 Up early for a 5-hour bus ride to Samarkand. The staff at the hotel had brought in pitchers of water for the coffee maker, so as it ran out of water, Judy refilled the reservoir. They had not figured out a waste basket for the grounds, but were pretty good about emptying that reservoir.

We stopped for lunch during the bus ride, and two other groups of western tourists were at the same restaurant, so obviously the place to be. There were really great peanuts in the shell and cherries, and dishes of raisins; also good eggplant and plenty of sliced tomatoes and cucumbers. We continued the drive until we reached Shakhrisabz. Our local guide, Larisa, met us there.

Shakhrisabz was known as Kesh (or Kish) historically, and Timur was born in the area in 1336 (he created a birthday of April 9th as an auspicious date). Alexander the Great married Roxanna in the area 328-327 BC. We started with the Kok Gumbaz Mosque, a Friday mosque built in 1437 by Ulugh Beg in honor of his father Shah Rukh. Next to it is the Dorut Tilovat, a mausoleum, built by Ulugh Beg in 1438 but apparently never used for burials. We then spent time at the World Heritage Site related to his dynasty. The most impressive ruins are the remains of the Ak-Saray Palace, which Timur began in 1380 as his summer palace and completed in 24 years. The tiles that still remain are a beautiful blue, though most have been stolen or dropped off the walls. We also saw the Khazrati-Iman complex, which included the tomb that Timur had built for himself, which was very simple and down a steep flight of stairs (but he was buried in Samarkand.) and the Tomb of Jahangir, his eldest and favorite son. Our final stop was a statue of Timur, 200 yards or so from the summer palace.

We continued the drive to Samarkand, had dinner, and checked into the Emir Han hotel.

May 20 Up early, showers and breakfast. The hotel was very nice, so we were disappointed that we would not be able to have the breakfast the second morning.

Samarkand, a World Heritage Site, is one of the oldest inhabited cities in Central Asia, along with Bukhara, and an important city on the main line of the Silk Road. There is evidence of human activity back to the late Paleolithic, and the city may have been founded between the 8th and 7th centuries BC. It was capital of the Sogdian satrapy and Alexander the Great conquered it in 329 BC, the Sassanians around 260 AD, then Genghis Khan in 1220. In the 14th century, Timur made it his capital and built a lot of monuments. In the meantime, in the late 8th century, the first paper mill in the Islamic world was built in Samarkand, after paper making was learned from the Chinese in 751. Because it was Sunday, the city was very crowded.

Gil gave a lecture, "Sogdia and the Sogdian Role in the Silk Road Trade." After the lecture, the bus took us to the Gur-e Amir ((Tomb of the Commander) Mausoleum (World Heritage Site), where Timur was actually buried. It was completed in 1404 and

intended for Timur's grandson, Muhammad Shah, but ended up being used for several family members. Totally different from the tomb he wanted in Shakhrisabz.

Next we went to the Registan Square, perhaps the most famous landmark in the Stans. Three Madrasahs, on 3 sides of a square, Ulugh Beg Madrasah (1417-1420), one of the best clergy universities of the Muslim Orient in the 15th Century CE. Abdul-Rahman Jami, the great Persian poet, scholar, mystic, scientist and philosopher studied at the madrasah, Tilya-Kori Madrasah (1646-1660), a residential college for students, and Sher-Dor Madrasah (1619-1636), The tiger mosaics with a rising sun on their back represent the more ancient Persian Mithraic religious motifs. We were guided through the madrasahs and taken to a pottery shop. In a musical instrument shop, we were given a recital by a gentleman who played several different local instruments. We were then given free time to walk around the site before going to the Mausoleum of the Shaybanids (16th century, just the outside).

From Registan Square, we walked along a street with shops and went into a shop where a woman was demonstrating weaving. We then walked downhill, stopping at the Bibi Khanum mosque, that Timur had begun in 1399, but it began to fall apart quickly. The Soviets began reconstruction in 1974. On the grounds is a very large stone Koran holder.

We continued to walk downhill, half a mile or so to the Shah-i-Zinda complex, which contains over 20 buildings (mostly mausoleums), in three levels, connected by four-arched dome passages, from the 9-14th and 19th centuries. The legend is that Kusam ibn Abbas, the cousin of the prophet Muhammad was buried there. There is a crypt called an Octahedron from the 15th century. We were told how many stairs we climbed to the top, but I can't remember; not too many. After our tour guides led us through some of the structures, we were allowed to meander back down at our own pace, and we were picked up by the bus on the main road at the bottom of the complex.

At some point we had lunch, but I have no memory of it. It was likely at this time slot.

Our next stop was a paper mill where the paper was handmade using old Chinese techniques. A water wheel was used to generate power, and we watched women strip bark from mulberry branches, soak the strips in vats, which were stirred by the water wheel, then the soaked strips were shredded, pressed into sheets, and the sheets were dried on screens.

Ulugh Bek began the building of his Observatory in 1424 to support astronomical studies in his madrasah, but it was destroyed in 1449. Little is now left but a meridian arc; it was so crowded that it felt like we had to elbow our way in to the small space to see it.

The last stop before dinner and the hotel was the Afrasiab Museum, located at the historical site of Afrasiyab, an ancient city destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century. The museum has a group of frescoes from a Samarkand palace from the 7th – 8th century, and the upstairs has a chronological presentation of 11 layers of civilization in Afrasiyab. Dinner was in a private home, and very nice.

May 21 Up at 3:30 am and bags out at 4:30 to catch the bullet train to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan and historically a city on the Silk Road. We were given a bag breakfast (a hard boiled egg that no one ate, a stale roll, a juice box, and a piece of fruit)

to eat on the train. I complained about no coffee. When we unloaded from the bus, we went through security and a passport check to get to the platform. Our guide Michel had reorganized the train tickets so couples could sit together, and given us each our tickets before we left the hotel. The local guide, trying to be helpful, gathered up all the tickets from us to give to the passport clerk, and mixed them all up. Michel had to redistribute the tickets. 6 of us were in a coach cabin and the rest in business, so the whole thing really wasn't organized very well. As we waited on the platform, the local guide told us coffee would be much better on the train than in the station. Then a man came around selling cappuccino and espresso, and it was great. I wished I had bought two of them. We made the trip to Tashkent in a little over 2 hours. The train itself was pretty new. The highest speed we noticed was 220 km/hr, but I think it went faster than that at times.

Even though we were really tired we didn't sleep on the train. It was interesting to watch the countryside. Our local guide was Yulia Lashko, and met us with a bus at the train station and took us on a driving tour of Tashkent to fill the time until the Fine Arts Museum, which was the first stop on our schedule, opened. At 9, we walked into the front of the museum, to be told that it was closed on Mondays. Astonishingly, they allowed us to use their super clean toilets. The guides made phone calls and discovered that most of the museums were closed on Mondays, but found that the Museum of Applied Arts was open. It was housed in a building built by the Soviets in the 1930's, with displays of musical instruments, ceramics and textiles. There were peacocks in the enclosed yard and three different gift shops.

From there, we were driven to a pottery workshop, which was also a school, and had interesting designs on display. They have an active project of visiting remote locations to keep old pottery designs alive.

We had a nice, long, relaxed lunch with a really good cauliflower, broccoli and carrot dish. There were bits of onion, also, and the vegetables were tossed in a light sauce, like a ranch dressing. There was a beet salad, of course, and a really good bean dish, and they brought around for each person a thin slice of dough with a bit of cheese in it. BTW, the cheese here has been boring and the bread pretty good, in general (except really dry sometimes).

Our next stop was the Telyashaykh Mosque. It has several small rooms of Koran, the star being the Uthman Koran, considered to be the oldest extant in the world. Dating from 655, it was brought by Timur to Samarkand, seized by the Russians as a war trophy and taken to Saint Petersburg, and then returned to Uzbekistan in 1924. When it was written, they made 5 exact copies which are now lost, and destroyed all other Korans so this one would be the only "true" Koran. There is only about 1/3 of it left.

We then checked into the Lotte City Hotel, which was a really nice hotel, with a swimming pool that we didn't have time to use. We rested until time to go to dinner at 7. We all needed a rest after so many long days! It was a nice dinner.

May 22. We had a "late" morning. We had to put luggage out by 9am and put our hand luggage on the bus at 9:30 (so we wouldn't have to carry it around the museum). We walked to the State Museum of History and were met in the lobby by the director. He apologized for not having time to give us a tour, but answered questions and provided a docent to take us around the museum.

One of the questions was, “What are the best objects in your collection? He named a very well preserved alabaster Buddha relief found at Fayaz Tepe in Termez and a “stone amulet in the form of 2 snakes” (2000 BC), from the Sokh, Ferghana region (this was astonishing, and they had it mounted on a rotating dais). There were many other wonderful objects from prehistoric to modern (Steve found a photo of Hillary Clinton with the president.).

After 2 hours at the museum, we headed for the Tajikistan border. The drive to the border took 1 ½ hours (or maybe 2). For many miles before the border we were behind a military convoy going 5 miles an hour. There were storks in their nests on some of the electric poles, but I didn’t get a decent photo. The border itself took about an hour for everyone to get across (same basic process...wait at the Uzbekistan border, walk through no-mans-land, wait at the Tajikistan border). The guards were more interested in practicing their English than worrying about what we had in the luggage. There didn’t even seem to be tables for them to use to open up luggage. We were the first of the group through, and the Tajik guide, Oriz Dildorbekov, who was with us the rest of the trip, met us as we went through the last passport check and carried our luggage to the bus. Another 1 ½ hours to Khujand, and the first thing we did was have lunch at 3:30pm. We then went to the Historical Museum of Sughd, which, in the basement, had some archeological artifacts under a glass floor, some paintings of Persepolis, and a set of modern mosaics on the life of Alexander the Great. Cyrus the Great founded Khujand, and Alexander the Great built his easternmost Greek settlement nearby in 329 BC. Khujand was on the Silk Road, and very proud of Abu Mahmud Khujandi, astronomer and mathematician.

We next went to a wedding palace, the Palace of Arbob, that had a small museum of photographs of the Soviet era. Then we went to the Hotel Sugd and checked in (pretty crummy, as we expected). We went to dinner and were surprised to discover that the owner and a teacher at a private English school were joining us. We gave them a great deal of leftover food to take home with them.

Our general feeling about the place is that it is still Very Soviet.

May 23 Early morning, light breakfast, check out of the hotel and head for the Panjshanbe Bazaar, purpose built in 1964, which was actually very nice with lots of fresh vegetables and even a section of flowers. Gil bought some bread and honey and let us dip bits of bread into the honey for a treat. Sweet. As we entered the bazaar building, I noticed a woman laden down with plastic shopping bags that she was selling. When we came out, she had 10 or so left. The square facing the Bazaar was lovely, and we watched pigeons being fed bird seed by children. There were two beautiful buildings adjoining the square, the Masjidi Jami mosque and medrese. As we stood around, watching the people and enjoying the view, the owner of the English school came by on his way to work and stopped and chatted with us.

We next went to the 72 feet-high statue of Lenin in an outlying park, which some of us found astonishing and had our photos taken at the base of the statue. In 1974 when Khojand was called Leninabad, the statue was moved from Moscow. In 2011 it was removed from a high-profile position on the river, and replaced by the current statue of Ismail Somoni (a national hero in Tajikistan—as well as Uzbekistan, where we had seen his mausoleum in Bukhara). Our next stop was in fact the Ismail Somoni

Monument, with a tiered fountain and lots of modern mosaics. (Sort of a workers' paradise Soviet thing, even though it's post-Soviet). Next we went to the ruins of the 10th century fortress for a photo op, though it was dramatically renovated. We then stopped at Istaravshan at the Abdal-Latif Mirza Mosque and Madrassah. Abdal-Latif Mirza killed his father, Ulug Bek, and being very pious, built the Mosque and Madrassah.

Then on to Penjikent, over the mountains. The mountains were incredible. We had views of snow-covered peaks and rugged valleys and sheep were being moved from one mountain grazing area to another...on the road. We stopped at a mountain wedding palace for lunch and used the Shakhriston Tunnel. The Shakhriston Pass is 11,083 feet, and the tunnel is under it, so we were not that high. When we arrived in Penjikent we checked into the Sugd Hotel (room 7), the worst hotel of the trip (but this is a really remote area, and we were there for the archeology, not the hotel). Then dinner.

May 24 Up early and bags out. Only the second mediocre breakfast of the trip (The bag breakfast the early morning of the fast train to Tashkent being the other. This was similar: badly boiled egg and very dry bread. There was instant coffee.). Our first stop was the Republican Museum of History and Local Lore of Rudaki, the poet, which had a nice collection of artifacts from the World Heritage Site Sarazm, and from Old Penjikent (which should be a World Heritage Site in Gil's opinion.)

We then went to Sarazm, which was a proto-urban site. It was the largest exporting metallurgical center of Central Asia around 3000 BC, and then abandoned around 2000 BC. It is thought to have revived as a mining point about 1500 BC. A burial with luxury grave goods was found, and the skeleton, dubbed the Sarazm Princess, is now in the Rudaki museum. A group of archeologists were working when we arrived, and the director of the site gave us a very good tour of the site and the small museum.

Our next stop was Old Penjikent. We were able to walk around dirt trails to various excavated sites, including a fire temple. The ruins are of a major Sogdian town on the Silk Road, 5th to 8th century. The palace was decorated with ornate frescos and pillars, now in museums. The mountain panorama of both Sarazm and Old Penjikent was breathtaking, with snow-capped mountains in every direction.

After a mediocre lunch we began the drive to Dushanbe. An even more astonishing mountain drive, first retracing our route on the A377 back to "highway" M34, then turning south toward Dushanbe. We used the Anzob tunnel (it has no lights or ventilation; very scary!) which was above the snow line (but below the 11,000-foot Anzob Pass), and the mountains were incredibly beautiful. Again, sheep were moving along the narrow road in groups, so we were going very slowly.

We checked into the lovely Sheraton Hotel Dushanbe and were driven to dinner. There was ice cream: the usual chocolate and vanilla, but one really odd one that tasted like those orange spongy candies shaped like a peanut. Back in the room, we started the final repack.

May 25 A very good night's sleep and a good breakfast (the Hotel Oguzkent breakfast was better of course.). Gil gave the last lecture of the trip at 8am and then we went to the wonderful National Museum of Antiquities. The 43-foot-long sleeping Buddha was my favorite object. I still remember the National Geographic article about it decades

ago. It was removed in 92 segments from Ajina Tepe in 1966; it dates from around AD 500 and is the largest Buddha statue in Central Asia. There are artifacts covering 3000 years of Tajik history, including bronze mountain goat throne fragments from the 5th-century BC, lots of pottery, and some of the Old Penjikant frescos.

From here we went to the National Museum, which has beautiful grounds and is a vast, newly built modern museum. It has a very bad copy of the sleeping Buddha, and many reproductions, but it does have a very good musical instrument display and an exhibit of coins. We had lunch and then drove to the Hissar Fortress which gave us a chance to climb around on walls, one last time.

We went back to the hotel to rest, finish packing and then went to our farewell dinner where there were some speeches

May 26 Up at 2:30am; on the bus by 3am. We took our own luggage down, to make sure we got every last second of sleep. An uneventful trip to the airport, and very little unusual security check. We discovered at the gate that the airlines had shuffled all the seats, so we spent the first 20 minutes on the plane getting people reorganized so couples could sit together. The flight attendants were very helpful and obviously used to this. The flight left pretty much on schedule at 5am, arriving in Istanbul about 8:30 am local time. Because we were transit and the luggage had been checked through to London, we were able to go directly to the lounge and rest and read, before saying goodbye to the part of the group who had been on the flight from Dushanbe with us. Our flight to London left about 10:30 local time, and arrived at 1 pm local time in London. We took a taxi to the Heathrow Hilton and Judy slept. We went to the lounge for a light snack for dinner, then slept until early morning.

May 27 Final flight home, arriving about 1:30 pm, home by 2:15pm.

Turkmenistan

Ashgabat: local “Disney”, Independence Arch, Arch of Neutrality, The Wedding Palace



Old Nisa



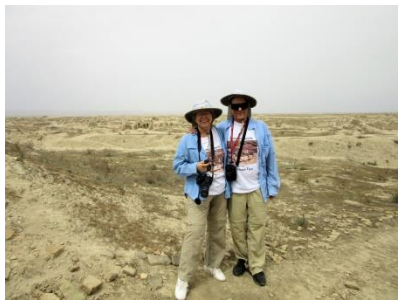
Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque



Ancient Anau



Abiwert



Along the road



Altyn Depe



Gonur Depe



Merv: Great Kyz Qala



Merv: inside the Little Kyz Qala,



icehouse,



Sultan Sanjar mausoleum

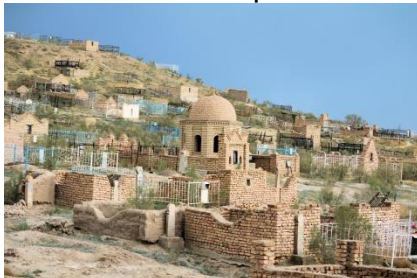


Konya-Urgench: Turabek Khanum, Kutlug Timur Minaret, Il Arslan, Tekesh



Uzbekistan

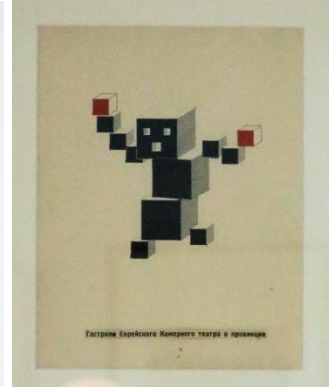
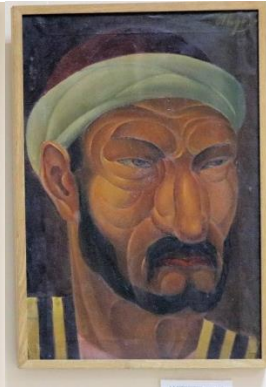
Mizdakhan Necropolis



Aral Sea Monument



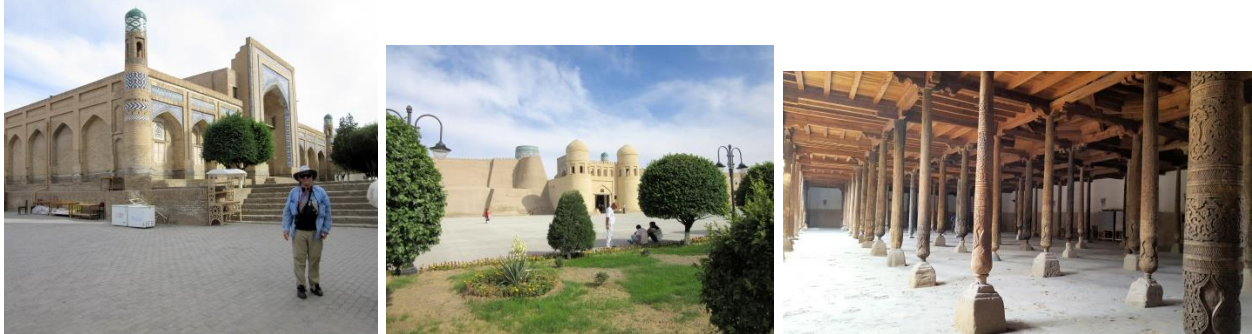
Nukus: Savitsky Museum



Khiva: Ark, Ichan Qala



Matniyoz Devonbegi Madrasasi, Juma Mosque



Bukhara: covered bazaar, Poi Kalon Mosque



Old Paikent



Shakrisabz



Samarkand: Gur-e Amir



Samarkand: Registan Square, Shah-I-Zinda



Tashkent: Telyashayakh Mosque



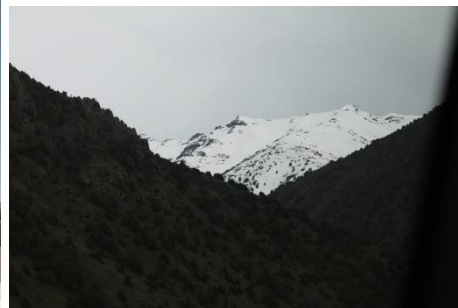
Tashkent Museum of History



Khujand



Drive to Penjikent



Sarazm



Old Penjikent



Drive to Dushanbe



Dushanbe: with the Buddha



National museum rotunda



Hissar Fortress

