



## Two Cultures in Contrast

As we began our descent into a remote mountain valley, I yelled, “Is that it!?” straining to raise my voice above the roaring engine of our 1984 Soviet jeep, a sturdy veteran of the Russo-Afghan war that was built to go just about anywhere, although certainly not in comfort.

“Not yet, but we’ll see it in a second!” said, my driver, Chorshanbe. He and the other passengers travel these far-flung dirt roads and trails often as they go home to the mountains to visit their families. For me, the only foreigner, it was an unforgettable first. I leaned forward in my seat, gripping tightly to the warm metal frame of the jeep in a vain attempt to steady myself as we careened down the road carved in a deep gorge. Chorshanbe was apparently confident in his driving ability, despite the sheer drop just outside my window.

Suddenly the mountains around us pulled back to reveal the wild beauty of the small valley below. Ice-crowned peaks rose on all sides with a strip of fresh green running down the middle. Trees dressed in purple spring blossoms dotted the valley and mountain flanks. A glacial blue river, boiling from spring runoff, emerged from the mountains rising from one corner of the valley, momentarily slowing in the valley bottom to provide access to two villages facing each other on opposite banks, and then turned to tear back through the rugged mountains.

“See the river!?” Chorshanbe asked in his heavily accented Russian, “That’s the Pyanj! Everything to the right of it is Tajikistan, and everything to the left, well, that’s it—Afghanistan!”

No Events