

WAKHAN & the AFGHAN PAMIR

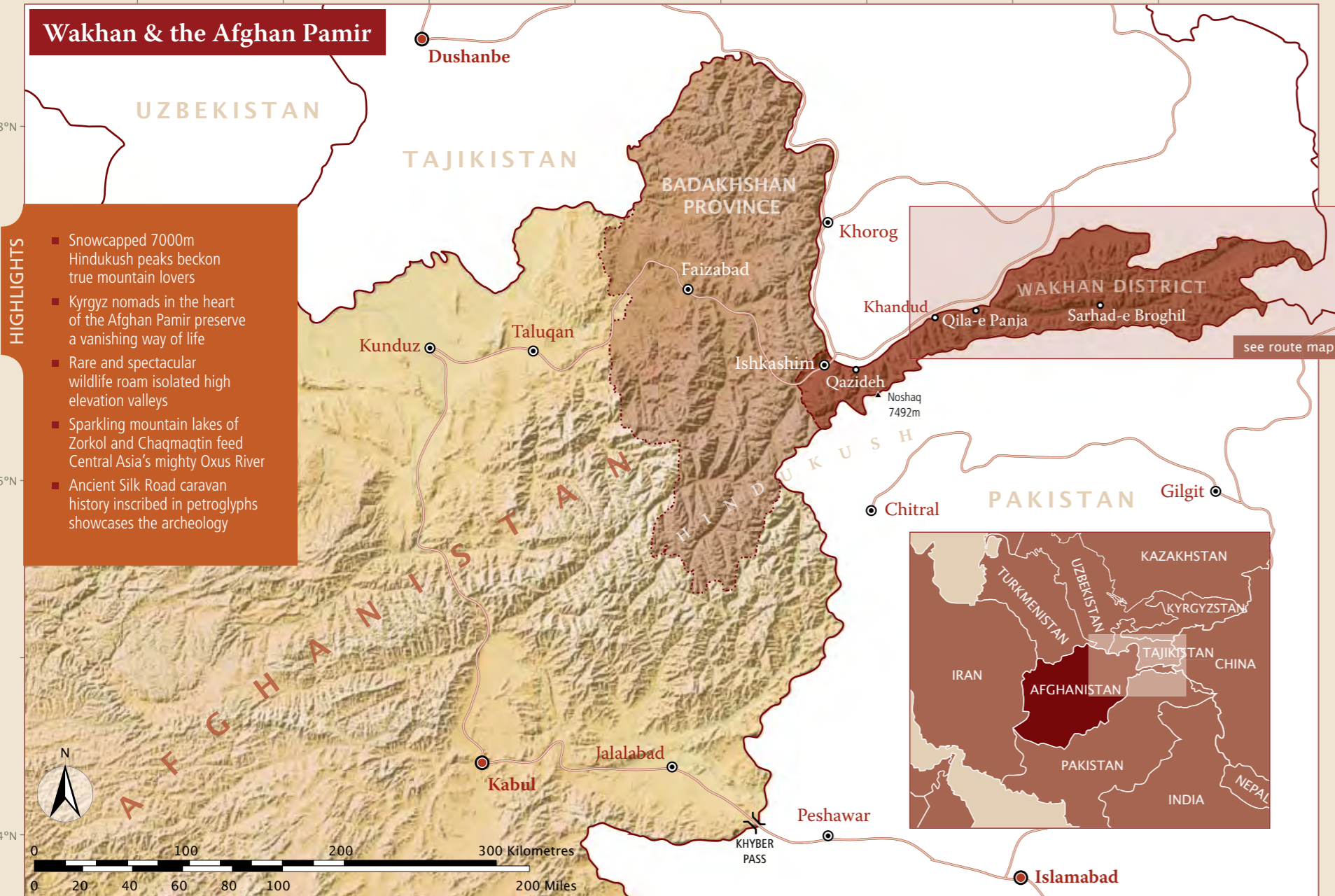
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MARCO POLO



Wakhan & the Afghan Pamir

HIGHLIGHTS

- Snowcapped 7000m Hindukush peaks beckon true mountain lovers
- Kyrgyz nomads in the heart of the Afghan Pamir preserve a vanishing way of life
- Rare and spectacular wildlife roam isolated high elevation valleys
- Sparkling mountain lakes of Zorkol and Chaqmaqin feed Central Asia's mighty Oxus River
- Ancient Silk Road caravan history inscribed in petroglyphs showcases the archeology



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WAKHAN FACTS

COUNTRY
Afghanistan

PROVINCE
Badakhshan

DISTRICT
Wakhan

NEAREST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
Kabul

NEAREST DOMESTIC AIRPORT
Faizabad

GATEWAY TOWN
Ishkashim

DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS
Khandud

MAIN VILLAGES
Qazideh, Qila-e Panja,
Goz Khun, Sarhad-e Broghil

POPULATION
approximately 12,000
in 1500 households

LANGUAGES
Persian, Wakhi and Kyrgyz



"We were glad to seek shelter from the keen air of these breezy altitudes in the felt tents of the Kyrgyz of the Afghan Pamir."
Sir Aurel Stein

DISCOVERING WAKHAN

WAKHAN IS A LAND SO REMOTE THAT FEW OUTSIDERS HAVE EVER VENTURED THERE. YET THROUGH WAKHAN FLOWED A VITAL BRANCH OF THE GRAND TRANS-ASIAN ARTERY KNOWN AS THE SILK ROAD, LINKING EAST TO WEST. PETROGLYPHS DEPICTING WARRIORS, HUNTING SCENES, CARAVANS AND BUDDHIST HISTORY, ALONG WITH THE OCCASIONAL RABOT OR TRAVELLERS' SHELTER, BEAR SILENT WITNESS TO THE TRACKS OF TRADITION, AND OFFER THE VISITOR A GLIMPSE INTO THE RICH HERITAGE OF PILGRIMS, CARAVANS AND ARMIES THAT ONCE TRAVERSED THIS CLASSIC ROUTE.

The great explorers who visited Wakhan are still a source of inspiration and wonder for today's intrepid travellers – Hsuan Tsang, the 7th century Chinese monk who went in search of Buddhist teachings; Marco Polo, who in the 13th century journeyed overland to China; Mirza Muhammad Haidar, who chronicled the Moghul Empire in the 16th century; Lieutenant John Wood and Lord Curzon, Englishmen who searched for the source of the Oxus River in the 19th century; Sir Aurel Stein, the 20th century British archeologist who sought to unravel the Buddhist history of Innermost Asia; and mountaineer H.W. Tilman who sought unknown routes across the mountain ranges.

Snowcapped peaks soar majestically above villages and glaciers descend precipitously to feed raging rivers in this land of immense scale, beauty and contrast. On the Afghan Pamir, the unimaginably wide open spaces seem to extend forever. Here you're more likely to bump into a big-horned sheep or a brown bear than another human being.

Yet Wakhan is also home to hardy mountain people – Wakhi farmers and herders, who greet guests with unmatched hospitality – a warm smile, a cup of tea and a bowl of yogurt – and the last remaining Kyrgyz nomads, whose welcoming yurts dot the fertile grasslands of the Afghan Pamir.

THE AFGHAN PAMIR

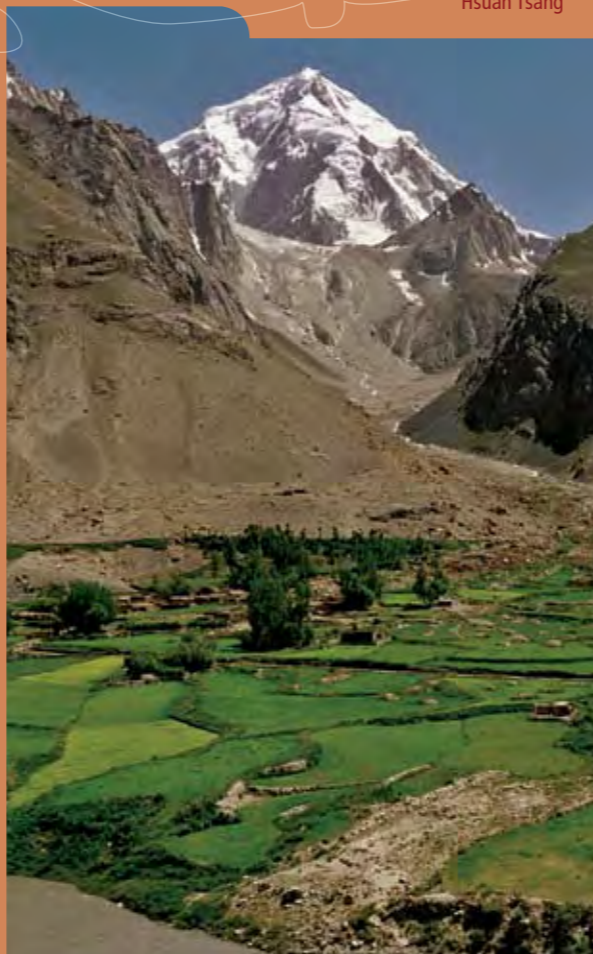
Pamir are unique U-shaped, high-elevation mountain valleys distinctive to Central Asia, where there are more than half a dozen named *pamir*. Renowned as summer grazing grounds for their abundant grass and water, these vast plateaus are covered by snow six months of the year.

The Afghan Pamir include two such grasslands at the eastern end of Wakhan – the Big Pamir and the Little Pamir, which are better known by their Persian names. The Big Pamir or Great Pamir is called Pamir Kalan and Pamir-e-Buzurg (*kalan* and *buzurg* both mean 'great' or 'large'). The Little Pamir is called Pamir Khurd and Pamir-e-Kochak (*khurd* and *kochak* both mean 'little' or 'small').

The 60km long Big Pamir nestles between the Southern Alichur Range to the north and the Wakhan Range to the south. The Little Pamir, at 100km long and 10km wide, is actually larger in area than the Big Pamir, yet the more rugged Big Pamir has a higher elevation and so earns its name. The proper name 'Pamirs' typically refers to the Central Asian mountain range that extends from Tajikistan into Afghanistan and China.

"In the middle of the Pamir valley is a great dragon lake, clean and pure as a mirror. The colour of the lake is dark blue and the taste of the water sweet and soft."

Hsuan Tsang



THE LAND

Afghanistan's Wakhan District is a narrow strip of land separating Tajikistan and Pakistan that juts eastward some 350km to meet the China border. Wakhan District has two distinct parts – the Wakhan Corridor and the Afghan Pamir. All of Wakhan lies at elevations higher than 2000m and the Afghan Pamir lies above 3500m.

The Wakhan Corridor is a deep valley formed by the Panj River that courses between the 7000m peaks of the Hindukush to the south and the lofty mountains of Tajikistan to the north. Along the south bank of the Panj River and its upper tributary, the Wakhan River, are numerous Wakhi villages. The villages between Ishkashim and Qila-e Panja are termed Lower Wakhan. More than 5000m of vertical relief commands the southern horizon of Lower Wakhan, where the valley is as broad as 2km. The villages in Upper Wakhan between Qila-e Panja and Sarhad-e Broghil lie along the more narrow banks of the Wakhan River, which opens to a dramatic river basin 3km wide at Sarhad-e Broghil. Streams fed by precipitous Hindukush glaciers cut across the Wakhan Corridor and flow into the main river.

Three mountain ranges – the Hindukush, Karakoram and Pamir – converge in Wakhan to form what is called the Pamir Knot. The Hindukush Range, which forms the border

with Pakistan, has 38 summits higher than 7000m, including Afghanistan's highest peak Noshaq (7492m). Permanent snow blankets Wakhan's highest peaks. The high, open valleys between these three mountain ranges form the Afghan Pamir, known in Persian as the Bam-e Dunya, or the "roof of the world," which is home to Kyrgyz nomads.

High passes called *kotal* transect the mountain ranges and were used by armies and ancient trade caravans. In the Afghan Pamir, passes, although at high elevation, are relatively easy for people to cross. The passes across the more rugged Hindukush are more difficult. The key Hindukush passes are: Broghil Pass (3882m) and Darwaza Pass (4288m) to Chitral; Khodarg Werth (or Khora Bort Pass) to Ishkoman; and Irshad Uween (4979m) and Dilisang Pass (5290m) to Gojal.

All of Wakhan is a semi-arid zone. In the Wakhan Corridor, agriculture is only possible through irrigation, fed by meltwater in the streams descending from the mountains. Apart from occasional clusters of shrubs or willow, birch and other small trees, the landscape is largely barren of vegetation. Above 3500m, the valleys widen onto the expansive Afghan Pamir with its lush seasonal meadows, peaty soil, and vivid blue lakes.

THE MOTHER RIVER

The Amu Darya or "Mother River" is the Persian name for the river that classical Greek geographers called the Oxus. It forms much of Afghanistan's northern border with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and courses more than 2400km across Central Asia to the Aral Sea. The Amu Darya, one of Afghanistan's four major river systems, has its source in the icy heights of the Pamir Mountains at the head of Wakhan's Wakhjir Valley. Joined by the stream coming from Chaqmaqin Lake south of Bozai Gumbaz, it becomes the Wakhan River, which is met at Qila-e Panja by the Pamir River flowing from Zorkol. Downstream of Qila-e Panja, the river is called the Ab-e Panja (Panj River) and flows through a deep gorge forming the border between Afghanistan's Badakhshan Province and Tajikistan. Finally, east of Kunduz, it's joined by Tajikistan's Vaksh River and becomes the Amu Darya for the remainder of its course across Central Asia.

"The Oxus is a river whose headwaters, tell of forgotten peoples and secrets of unknown lands, and are believed to have rocked the cradle of our race."

Lord Curzon



WAKHAN ACTIVITIES

A JOURNEY THROUGH WAKHAN IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF ADVENTURE TRAVEL. AROUND EVERY TURN IN THE ROAD OR TRAIL ARE TANTALIZING MOUNTAINS, UNKNOWN WILDERNESS, AND FASCINATING VILLAGES AND NOMAD CAMPS. WITH EVERY STEP DEEPER INTO THE MOUNTAINS, YOU DISCOVER A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF ADVENTURE. WALK ALONG THE ROAD, WANDER THROUGH VILLAGES, EXPLORE THE INVITING MOUNTAIN PASSES. TRAVEL WITH THE GRACIOUS AND HOSPITABLE PEOPLE WHO LIVE HERE, SHARING THEIR HARDIHOOD. EXPERIENCING THESE MOUNTAINS FIRST-HAND IS INCOMPARABLE AND UNFORGETTABLE.

Trekking, by far the most popular activity in Wakhan, is traditionally a multi-day overland journey on foot involving the support of a trek crew who transport your personal belongings and gear such as tents, food and cooking equipment. Today's trekking styles vary from backpacking where you carry everything yourself, trekking with porters who transport your gear using pack animals (yak, donkey, camel or horse), buying an animal and leading it yourself (usually a donkey, hence the name **donkey trekking**), or hiring a tour operator who organises your trek.

Distances in the Afghan Pamir are so great that you may want to hop a ride during part of your trek (called **yak trekking**). Yaks, strong shaggy beasts, are regularly used by local people to transport gear, but are also fun to ride and useful for crossing rivers rather than fording them. In winter when rivers are frozen solid, it's possible for intrepid travellers to move on these icy pathways in traditional caravans of double-humped Bactrian camels.

It's more common, especially with Kyrgyz, to travel on horseback. **Horse trekking**, where your horse is your transportation vehicle and your travelling companion, allows you to move faster than on foot, relieves you of having to transport gear separately, and also facilitates navigating river crossings and steep slopes. You can go horse trekking even if you have little experience with horses by hiring a horse trekking tour operator.

The unique attractions for **mountaineering** in Wakhan are several easily accessible 7000m peaks of the Hindukush, including Afghanistan's highest peak Nushaq (7492m), and numerous peaks higher than 6000m awaiting first ascents. The glaciated side valleys in the Big Pamir offer a host of virgin peaks. Extreme adventurers will find a playground for climbing and ski mountaineering.

The isolation and remoteness of Wakhan, its natural beauty, and its cultural diversity are ideal for **cultural touring** in 4WD vehicles. Exploring the cultural heritage, meeting people on village walks, **day hiking** and untrammelled **camping** each night combine to please the most venturesome visitors.

Unlimited opportunities for **photography** and discovering the rich **natural history** abound. **Birdwatching**, easily combined with other activities in Wakhan, is superb. Some of the best is along the Panj River and Wakhan River as you drive between Ishkashim and Sarhad-e Broghil. The upland rivers and lakes are nesting grounds for geese, ducks and ibises, as well as spring and fall stopovers for migratory waterfowl and raptors. Marshy flats and oxbow lakes provide year-round habitat for many wading birds.

The pristine natural environment boasts ideal **wildlife viewing** where charismatic species such as Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*), snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*), and



brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) make their home, particularly in the Wakhjir Valley and in the numerous side valleys of the Big Pamir. The whistling alarm call of ubiquitous long-tailed marmots (*Marmota caudata*) alerts you to their presence before they dive into their burrows. (Inadvertently stepping into a marmot burrow may be the greatest physical danger for anyone trekking in the Afghan Pamir!) Grey wolf, red fox, Afghan urial (*Ovis orientalis*), ibex (*Capra ibex*), and other wild cats also thrive in this high and wild terrain. Ethereal and wonderfully unique butterflies grace summer wildflowers.

A few ambitious cyclists have already made their way to Wakhan. The road through the Wakhan Corridor is there for mountain biking, but you'd better be a good bike mechanic and have an ample supply of spare parts and tires.

Wakhan is an undiscovered, uncrowded gem not yet on the tourist map of the world. Cultivate a spirit of adventure and open heartedness, and add to it self reliance, sound judgment and good planning and you have the recipe for an unforgettable trip to one of the earth's most exotic landscapes.

THE WEATHER

Wakhan is at its best during the short summer, which lasts from late June to mid-September. It is followed by a long winter from late September to early June with cold temperatures and severe, snowy conditions characteristic of this subarctic mountain climate. Wakhan receives fewer than 10cm of annual rainfall, much of it coming in the form of snowfall. Infamously fierce winds known as *bad-e Wakhan* blow throughout the year, fueling summer dust storms and winter blizzards. Unpredictable and changeable weather is a given in the mountains, and it can snow any month of the year in the Afghan Pamir.

WHEN TO GO

The tourist season in Wakhan is relatively short, starting in May or June and lasting until September or early October. From April to early June, melting snow swells rivers and high water blocks road access to many areas, making some rivers crossings impassable by foot, animal or vehicle. Many areas only become accessible as of early July. The later in summer you travel, the easier it is to cross streams and rivers, and the greater the likelihood of being able to drive as far as Sarhad-e Broghil. August to mid-September is the optimal travel time. By early September, however, snow can close trails and roads for the season.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

THE RESPECTFUL TOURIST:

- behaves conservatively as a show of respect for the local culture
- is humble and grateful when accepting offers of local food while not taking advantage of generous hospitality, and pays for food and accommodation
- wears loose, long-sleeved, unrevealing shirts, and full-length pants that cover the ankles
- wearing a hat or scarf is optional for women travelling through Wakhi and Kyrgyz areas, but is advisable elsewhere in Badakhshan
- doesn't drink alcohol in public view
- refrains from all public displays of affection
- contributes to the local economy by patronizing local businesses, hiring porters and buying local products, which encourages local people to conserve their natural resource base
- asks permission before photographing people or sacred places
- makes donations through established organizations or respected community leaders, and doesn't give handouts to beggars or children

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

THE RESPECTFUL TOURIST:

- lessens the negative impact on the environment
- travels in a small party to minimise overall impact, but avoids travelling alone
- cooks on a kerosene stove avoiding wood or dung fires since these fuels are a scarce resource that belong to the local people
- brings adequate warm clothing to avoid relying on campfires for warmth
- bathes, washes dishes and clothes with a basin and discards soapy water at least 50m from water sources
- relieves one's self at least 50m from open water sources or campsites since toilets don't exist
- burns rubbish that can be burnt and packs out other rubbish
- leaves campsites the same way they were on arrival; doesn't clear vegetation, cut trees, limbs or branches, and doesn't move rocks from walls or canals
- doesn't write names or mark graffiti on rocks
- doesn't hunt or trade in endangered species
- refrains from harassing or feeding wildlife or eating wild game
- patronises tour operators who commit to environmentally responsible tourism



THE RESPECTFUL TOURIST:

- is law abiding and obtains necessary permission(s) for the route
- respects the sovereignty of international borders and obtains all required permission for cross-border routes
- takes responsibility for one's actions and avoids foolhardy decisions

RECOMMENDED ITINERARIES from Ishkashim

WITH ONE WEEK

- Drive to Sarhad-e Broghil enjoying beautiful scenery, village walks, diverse cultural exchanges, and visits to intriguing roadside tombs, shrines and petroglyphs.
- A shorter road trip as far as Qila-e Panja allows for a side trip to the confluence of the Pamir and Wakhan Rivers and a visit to Avgarch village.
- The spectacular route to Nushaq Base Camp offers world-class trekking just an hour's drive from Ishkashim.

WITH TWO WEEKS

- Try one longer route to picturesque Zorkol in the Big Pamir, or to the nearest Kyrgyz camps in the Little Pamir.
- Combine two routes by traversing the Big Pamir starting from Goz Khun to Zorkol, and then to Sarhad-e Broghil in Upper Wakhan.
- Attempt a cross-border route from Sarhad-e Broghil in Upper Wakhan to Pakistan's Northern Areas.

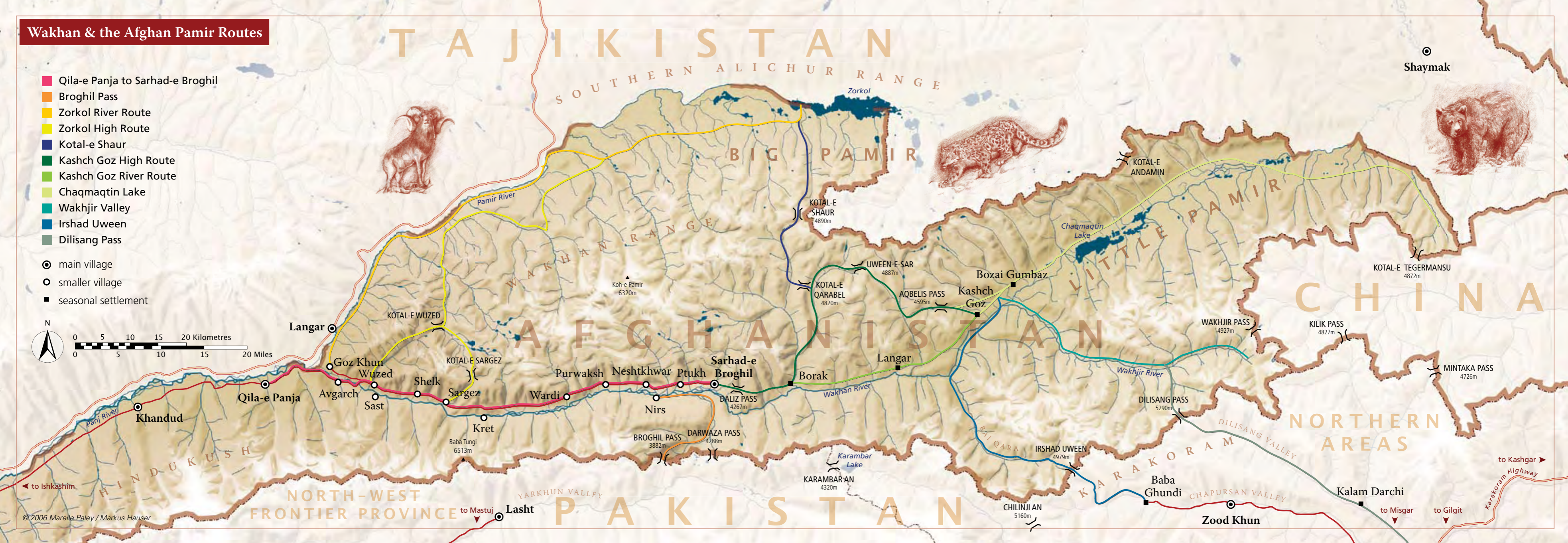
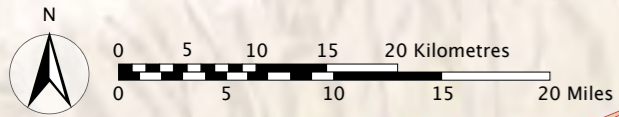
WITH THREE WEEKS

- Visit Chaqmaqin Lake in the Little Pamir and outlying Kyrgyz settlements.
- Enjoy wildlife viewing in the Little Pamir's Wakhjir Valley.
- Combine routes by visiting the Big Pamir and more remote areas of the Little Pamir.

Wakhan & the Afghan Pamir Routes

- █ Qila-e Panja to Sarhad-e Broghil
- █ Broghil Pass
- █ Zorkol River Route
- █ Zorkol High Route
- █ Kotal-e Shaur
- █ Kashch Goz High Route
- █ Kashch Goz River Route
- █ Chaqmaqin Lake
- █ Wakhjir Valley
- █ Irshad Uween
- █ Dilisang Pass

- ⊙ main village
- smaller village
- seasonal settlement



WAKHAN & THE AFGHAN PAMIR ROUTES

LOWER WAKHAN

NOSHAQ BASE CAMP

DURATION 5-6 days round trip
STANDARD moderate
START/FINISH Qazideh

- visit base camp (4450m) of Nushaq (7492m), Afghanistan's highest summit and second highest peak in the Hindukush
- superb close-up views of four 7000m peaks
- Wakhan's best short trek
- trailhead less than one hour's drive from Ishkashim

UPPER WAKHAN

QILA-E PANJA TO SARHAD-E BROGHIL (see on route map)

DURATION 3-4 days one way
STANDARD easy
START Qila-e Panja
FINISH Sarhad-e Broghil

- walk along road visiting friendly Wakhi villages
- alternative when road to Sarhad-e Broghil is blocked by landslides or floods
- good views of Baba Tunji (6513m)
- ideal for donkey trekking
- hot spring in Sarhad-e Broghil

BROGHIL PASS (see on route map)

DURATION 1 day
STANDARD easy
START/FINISH Nirs

- broad, grassy (3882m) pass on Afghanistan-Pakistan border
- perfect for horseback riding
- historic pass, lowest pass across Hindukush Range
- side trips to ancient forts above villages en route
- Warning: Crossing the Broghil Pass into Pakistan is not permitted.

BIG PAMIR

ZORKOL RIVER ROUTE (see on route map)

DURATION 8 days round trip
STANDARD moderate
START/FINISH Goz Khun

- Zorkol, largest lake in the Afghan Pamir (20km by 2-5km)
- stunning scenery along Pamir River with no passes to cross
- easier and shorter route than Zorkol High Route
- side trips possible to several side valleys linking to Zorkol High Route

ZORKOL HIGH ROUTE (see on route map)

DURATION 10 days round trip
STANDARD demanding
START/FINISH Sargez or Wuzed

- challenging route crosses three passes (4300m-4500m) each way
- wildlife watching
- trekking peak possibilities
- Wakhi summer settlements and Kyrgyz camps

ROUTE DIFFICULTY

EASY: ■ trails below 3500m, 3-4 days
■ 500m daily elevation change
■ no pass crossings, no glacier travel

MODERATE: ■ trails below 4500m, less than 1 week
■ 1000m daily elevation change
■ cross a pass below 4500m

DEMANDING: ■ trails below 5000m, 1 week or more
■ 1500m daily elevation change
■ cross a pass below 5000m
■ less than one day nontechnical glacier travel

VERY DEMANDING: ■ rugged trails below 5000m, 1 week or more
■ 2000m daily elevation change
■ cross a glaciated pass above 5000m
■ one day technical glacier travel

KOTAL-E SHAUR (see on route map)

DURATION 10 days round trip
STANDARD demanding
START/FINISH Sarhad-e Broghil

- links Upper Wakhan with Zorkol
- option to link Big Pamir with Little Pamir routes
- cross three passes each way: Daliz (4267m), Kotal-e Qarabel (4820m) and glaciated Kotal-e Shaur (4890m)
- impressive high mountain scenery from Kotal-e Shaur

"There is nothing in my experience more fascinating than finding and crossing an unknown pass across a mountain range. The more important the watershed, geographically speaking, the more satisfying the achievement." Eric Shipton



LITTLE PAMIR

KASHCH GOZ HIGH ROUTE (see on route map)

DURATION 9-10 days round trip
STANDARD demanding
START/FINISH Sarhad-e Broghil

- cross three passes each way: grassy Daliz (4267m), snow-covered Uween-e-Sar (4887m) and flower-carpeted Aqbelis (4595m)
- petroglyphs at Sang Nevishta
- Wakhi summer settlements and Kyrgyz camps
- accessible during summer when Kashch Goz River Route is blocked by high water

KASHCH GOZ RIVER ROUTE (see on route map)

DURATION 6-7 days round trip
STANDARD moderate
START/FINISH Sarhad-e Broghil

- cross one pass each way: Daliz Pass (4267m)
- one day shorter than Kashch Goz High Route
- Wakhi winter settlements at Langar, and Kyrgyz camps
- route along Wakhan River used only when low water and in winter



CHAQMAQTIN LAKE (see on route map)

DURATION 9-11 days round trip
STANDARD demanding
START/FINISH Sarhad-e Broghil

- renowned lake, source of Murghab River or Aksu
- second largest lake (9km by 2km) in the Afghan Pamir
- follow Kashch Goz High Route or River Route to Kashch Goz
- allow at least 1 day each way between Kashch Goz and lake
- Kyrgyz tombs at Bozai Gumbaz
- several Kyrgyz camps along route
- hot spring
- side trip to Tegermansu (3-4 days one way from Chaqmaqтин Lake) and Kotal-e Tegermansu (4872m) on Afghanistan-China border, easternmost area of Little Pamir
- Warning: All passes leading into Tajikistan and China are strictly off-limits to foreigners.

WAKHJIR VALLEY (see on route map)

DURATION 14-16 days round trip
STANDARD demanding
START/FINISH Sarhad-e Broghil

- superb wildlife viewing in upper Wakhjir Valley
- remote wilderness of breathtaking beauty
- primary source of the Oxus River
- follow Kashch Goz High Route or River Route to Kashch Goz
- Warning: The Wakhjir Pass (4927m) on the Afghanistan-China border is strictly off-limits to foreigners.

"At Sarhad, the Oxus bursts from the gorge and, rejoicing in its freedom, spreads in meandering streams over a wide flat stony valley." H.W. Tilman

CROSS-BORDER

Anyone in search of real adventure will relish the world-class mountain travel opportunity of a cross-border route.

Special permission for cross-border routes from the Little Pamir to Pakistan's Northern Areas is required from the governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan in addition to obtaining visas for both countries (see the Wakhan Travellers' Information insert for further information).

IRSHAD UWEEN (see on route map)

DURATION 8-9 days one way
STANDARD demanding
START Sarhad-e Broghil
FINISH Chapursan Valley, Northern Areas, Pakistan

- historic trading route from Little Pamir's Bai Qara Valley to Chapursan Valley
- cross one 4979m snow-covered, but nonglaciated pass
- challenging river crossings
- multi-coloured rock formations
- allow 4 days between Kashch Goz and Baba Ghundi

DILISANG PASS (see on route map)

DURATION 11-12 days one way
STANDARD very demanding
START Sarhad-e Broghil
FINISH Misgar, Northern Areas, Pakistan

- Little Pamir's Wakhjir Valley to Misgar
- cross one or three passes en route to Wakhjir Valley
- cross one 5290m glaciated pass on Afghanistan-Pakistan border
- spectacular high mountain experience
- side trip to head of Wakhjir Valley (2-3 days)

THE PEOPLE



THE WAKHI

For more than 2500 years the Wakhan Corridor has been the homeland of Wakhi people, who refer to themselves as Wakhik or Khik. Today about 10,000 Wakhi live in Afghanistan's Wakhan District, with another 40,000 living in adjacent areas of Tajikistan, Pakistan and China. Wakhi live in year-round villages extending from Qazideh (2800m) at the western end of Lower Wakhan to Sarhad-e Broghil (3300m) at the eastern end of Upper Wakhan. Wakhi people are farmers, who cultivate wheat, barley, peas, potatoes and a few apricot trees at the upper limits of agriculture, where production is rarely sufficient. *Chinir*, a festival celebrating the start of the barley harvest, occurs around the first week of August. Wakhi depend on livestock to supplement their agriculture, and almost all households have some animals. Wealthier families have many sheep, goats and yaks along with a few camels, horses and donkeys. Every summer, Wakhi people take their livestock to summer pastures as high as 4500m, where the animals grow fat on abundant grass. Wakhi people speak Wakhi, which they call Khikwor. It belongs to the Pamir group of Iranian languages and is spoken throughout Wakhan. Most men also speak Persian, which is used as a link language to communicate with people from other parts of Afghanistan. Wakhi people are Ismaili Muslims, whose spiritual leader is the Aga Khan.



KUCH

The annual seasonal migration, or *kuch*, of Wakhi people and their livestock to and from summer pastures is a colorful sight. Yaks piled high with cauldrons, bedding and household goods move along the trail, while large mastiff-like dogs trot beside them. Wakhi women, swathed in red scarves and shawls, ride on yaks and camels with young children clinging behind their mothers. Infants ride in cloth-draped cradles perched on the backs of yaks and the men walk alongside, leading the yaks, or ride on horses.

The spring migration usually departs from the villages in the first week of June. During the summer, the *kuch* moves progressively upvalley to higher grazing areas, and in autumn they retrace their routes downvalley. The joyous return migration arrives in the villages in the second or third week of October. Travellers may encounter these caravans in the Afghan Pamir, especially on trails leading to and from the Little Pamir.



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THE KYRGYZ

Central Asia's Altai mountains along the western border of Mongolia are the traditional home of the Kyrgyz, a Turkic pastoral nomadic group. Each summer, small bands of Kyrgyz would migrate from lower valleys in Central Asia to the Afghan Pamir, but following the 1917 Soviet revolution, several thousand Kyrgyz settled permanently in the Big Pamir and Little Pamir. Their once wide-ranging migration became a series of short, seasonal movements within the closed frontiers of the high-altitude Afghan Pamir. Kyrgyz live in felt yurts or *oey*, which they move seasonally according to available pasture, sunlight and shelter from wind. Their settlements lie between elevations of 4000m and 4500m. The Kyrgyz tend herds of fat-tailed sheep, goats, yaks and Bactrian camels, and trade with Wakhi neighbors or travelling merchants for all their needs not supplied by their livestock. Following the Soviet-backed 1978 coup in Afghanistan, some 1300 Kyrgyz, led by Haji Rahman Qul, left the Afghan Pamir for Pakistan. In 1982 this group of Kyrgyz was resettled in the mountains of eastern Turkey. Today, about 1400 Kyrgyz remain in the Afghan Pamir. Their language is also called Kyrgyz, which is from the Kipchak group of northwestern Turkic languages. Most Kyrgyz men also speak Wakhi. Like all Turkic people, Kyrgyz are Sunni Muslims.



"It was a delightfully cosy yurt, carpeted with bright felt rugs. Plenty of embroidered cushions and other fineries attested the owner's wealth and comfort."

Sir Aurel Stein



WAKHAN ACROSS THE CENTURIES

THE UPPER AMU DARYA REGION HAS BEEN POPULATED FOR MORE THAN 2500 YEARS, AND WAKHAN HAS RECEIVED VISITORS FOR NEARLY AS LONG. THE SILK ROAD, WHICH LINKED ANCIENT CHINA WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN, PASSED THROUGH WAKHAN AND WAS IN CONTINUAL USE FROM 100 B.C. UNTIL THE 8TH CENTURY A.D.

Both Chinese and Tibetan records mention Wakhan as a kingdom, and both powers contested the region and its rich trade during the 7th and 8th centuries. Trade brought the first known European traveller to the area in the 13th century, the Italian voyager Marco Polo who first mentioned the big-horned sheep that bear his name. Mirza Muhammad Haidar, a member of the Moghul dynasty that controlled Kashgar and India, completed his *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* in 1545, in which he described his travels through Wakhan, which he knew as a part of Badakhshan. Benedict de Goës, a Jesuit, apparently travelled through Wakhan on his way from India to China in 1603, although he did not specifically mention Wakhan.

British accounts of the early 19th century mention Wakhan as a remote and little known mountain state whose ruler was a vassal of the Mir of Badakhshan. Lieutenant John Wood of the British Navy was sent to survey the upper Amu Darya, seeking the source of the Oxus River, and reached Wakhan in January 1838. Wood found the ruler impoverished from taxes imposed by Badakhshan, the land insufficient in grain production with livestock the only wealth, and reached Zorkol, which he identified as the source of the Oxus. The British sent a series of native explorers or 'pandits' through Wakhan between 1860 and 1870, and in 1873, a British mission visited Wakhan and met Mir Fateh Ali Shah and his son, Ali Murdan Shah. The mission noted Wakhan's relations through marriage with neighboring princely states of Shugnan and Kanjut (Hunza). At that time Wakhan encompassed both banks of the Panj River and its two upper tributaries, the Pamir River and Wakhan River.

The geopolitical rivalry between Great Britain and Russia, known as "The Great Game," led to the dissolution of the principality of Wakhan at the end of the 19th century and the formation of new borders. Wakhan became in effect a buffer zone separating the British and Russian empires. Subsequent geopolitical events of the 20th century resulted in closed borders with the Soviet Union and China, leaving Wakhan District cut off and isolated. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the subsequent civil war and Taliban rule kept Wakhan closed to travellers from 1979 until the establishment of the Karzai government in 2002.

The people of Wakhan welcome travellers and are looking to tourism to spur their economic growth and prosperity in the 21st century.



Numerous rock carvings bear silent witness to the tracks of tradition that traverse Wakhan.

www.wakhan.org

Pristine alpine landscapes are home to Wakhan's emblematic wildlife.



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Visit www.wakhan.org for updated Wakhan travellers' information.

WAKHAN TRAVELLERS' INFORMATION

ENGLISH

How are you (doing)?
I'm fine
How are you?
I'm well
Where are you going?
What is your name?
My name is ...
What is that?
I'm tired
Sit down
Drink tea
Eat food
Go!

WAKHI

chiz hol he?
bidurt em
tut siyeta?
wuzem siyet
kumeret takh?
tī nunge chist?
zhu nunge ...
yāoi chiz?
washk vitk
nezdita
chōi pev
shapik yāo
chow

KYRGYZ

abalēngēz qanday?
jaqshē
ōzüngüz qandaysēz?
jaman emes
kayda barasēz?
atēngēz kim?
menim atim ...
Bul emne?
men ajēz
olturunguz
ich chay
jhe tamaq
ket

ENGLISH

yes/no
Where is ... available?
I need ...
how?
how much/many?
what?
when?
where?
who?
day/night
morning/evening
yesterday/today/
tomorrow
beautiful
fire
house (yurt)
mountain
rock
stream (glacial/clear)

WAKHI

yan/net
... esh kumer gotten?
mārey ... dirkor
tse sokht?
tsumar?
chiz?
tsogdar?
kumar?
kui?
ror/naghd
sahār/purz
yezī/wothg/
pigā
khushrui
rakhnigh
khun
koh
gar
dur/zherav

KYRGYZ

oshondoy/joq
... di qayerden?
magha ... kerek
qancha pul/turat?
bul emne?
qachan?
qachan?
qayerde?
kit?
kun/tun
erteng menen/kech
kechee/bügün/
erteng
supu
ot
oey
too
too tek
darēya

ENGLISH

trail
water
good/bad
left/right
cold/hot
rain/sun
snow
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
50
100

WAKHI

videkh
yupk
baf/shak
chap/rost
sur/thin
mor/yir
zem
yiu
buī
troī
tsabur
pānz
shāth
hub
hāth
nao
thas
buwista thas
yīsad

KYRGYZ

jolu
su
jhakshi/jhaman
solgo/onggho
ötösuuq/isik
jamghēr/kun
qar
bir
eki
üch
tört
besh
altē
jeti
segiz
toghuz
on
elüü
bir jüz

GREETINGS

hello (peace be with you)
and with you
goodbye (God be with you)
asalaam alekum
wa alekum salaam
khuda hafiz

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and GTZ support the Wakhan tourism development program, which is being implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation - Afghanistan.



The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of development agencies working in health, education, culture and rural and economic development, primarily in Asia and Africa. It is dedicated to improving living conditions and opportunities for the poor, without regard to their faith, origin or gender.

AKDN has been active in Afghanistan since 1996 and is now undertaking a range of development initiatives addressing issues of food security, infrastructure rehabilitation, upgrading and support for healthcare and educational institutions, water and sanitation, revitalization of cultural assets and urban development. Network activities are also responding to the need for investment in priority sectors of the economy such as microfinance, telecommunications and tourism.

Through the integrated efforts of its agencies, institutions, and affiliates – and in cooperation with a wide range of international and local partners – AKDN has made significant achievements in its long-term commitment to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan.

www.wakhan.org



*Kyrgyz woman
with newborn.*