

Iran

By 7am we were back on wheels and headed for Iran. We arrived at 12noon and were body searched for drugs. We were also made to swallow a tablet with water (god knows what it was), it was either swallow or go no further. The crossing meant entering a large room and standing at one end while names were called out. On hearing your name you moved with baggage to the middle of the empty room while the Iranians decided whether to further question you or search luggage. We must have looked innocent and we passed without further inquiry. Innocent I wasn't. The Iranian border official wanted to buy Swiss watches and spruked each person as they entered 'Swiss watch? You Sell?' I had bought a watch somewhere in South-east Asia which didn't work. The hour hand didn't move. The rest of the watch looked ok, second and minute hand fine. I offered, the guy read 'Swiss movement" and wanted immediately to make a deal. He swapped for a watch he had.

We sat in the bus and waited for the Afghan clothes smugglers to make their way through. We discovered Afghans could bring only what they were wearing across the border, and there was a real trade in full swing. The Bus had been full of men wearing six or more overcoats (one over the other) and many jackets and shirts underneath. They had sweated the whole of the trip.

The bus finally filled and was about to leave when suddenly the guy who swapped the watch with me jumped on board and began staring hard at all western men. He slowly walked up the aisle. He realized he had been swindled (probably at his own game). It was me who he was looking for. I instantly thought 'I can't tell these people apart" maybe he would be the same with westerners. So I sat still, made no eye contact

and hoped. It worked, he didn't recognize me. His watch worked for at least a year!

The buses were good, likewise the roads, so we made good time to Mashed and then onto Tehran. My brother and his girlfriend had stones thrown at them when in Tehran a couple of years before, so the general feeling was to leave. We had a quick bite and something to drink and left on the next bus out. By Sunday we had reached the Turkish border.

