

WHERE THE TRAIL ENDS PART 1



THE ENDS . . .

Filming In The Gobi

By John W. Phipps

AT FIVE O'CLOCK ON A

THURSDAY EVENING, I RECEIVED A CALL FROM DEREK WESTERLUND FROM FREERIDE ENTERTAINMENT AND BY MONDAY AT ONE O'CLOCK, I WAS ON A FLIGHT TO AN "UNKNOWN" LOCATION IN THE GOBI DESERT IN NORTHWESTERN CHINA. I'M PRETTY FAMILIAR WITH SPUR OF THE MOMENT TRIPS BUT WHEN I GOT THE CALL FOR THIS ONE, I MUST ADMIT, I WAS SHOCKED. GOING TO THE GOBI DESERT HAD BEEN A DREAM OF MINE FOR QUITE SOME TIME AND NOW IT WAS POSSIBLE. I DID EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO PUT WHATEVER I WAS DOING ON HOLD, GATHER UP ALL MY GEAR, RENEW MY PASSPORT, GET A CHINESE VISA AND BE ON THE MONDAY FLIGHT.

Rampage times ten: James Doerfling sends it into an endless landscape of sandy cliffs, mountains and valleys. For Where the Trail Ends... the crew was on a mission to make every descent a first descent.

After almost two days in planes, we touched down in the city of Urumqi, apparently a small city by China's standards but a damn big one by mine. The heat upon exiting the airport was like hitting a wall of dry air. We loaded the bikes and the gear into a Land Cruiser and out into the desert we went. We soon left the signs of civilization behind and drifted out into what we came for...the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of the Gobi Desert. In the middle of the desert, in the hottest place in China, lay the city of Turpan. The rest of our crew, who arrived several days earlier, awaited us there.

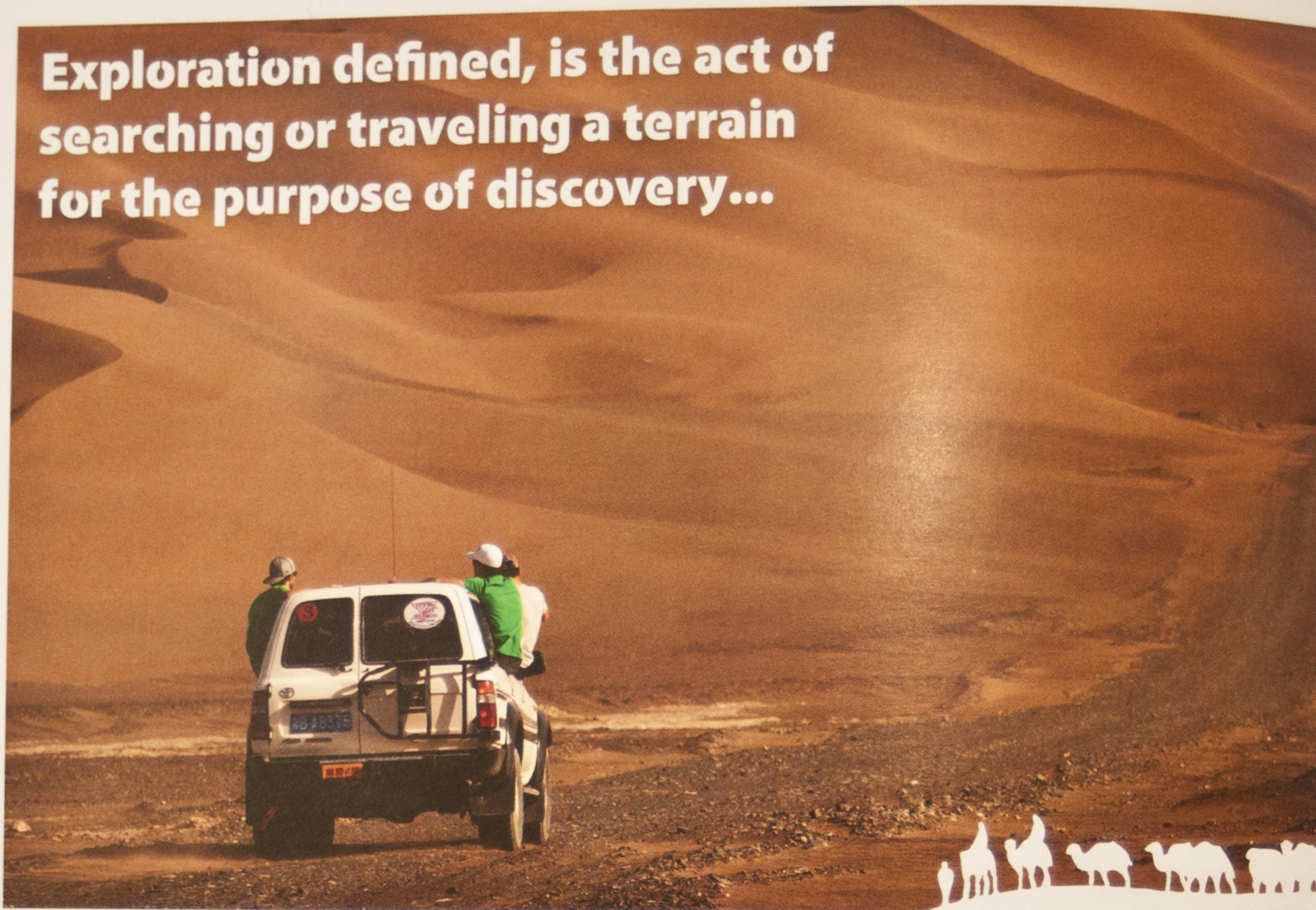
The Gobi

Our crew consisted of riders Darren Berrecloth, James Doerfling and Kurt Sorge as well as filmmakers Dustin Lingren, Brad Macgregor, Jeremy Grant and myself. The glue of our posse was our guides, who met us on the ground. We soon found out they were essential to navigating and dealing with the Chinese authorities who, more than once, assumed we were up to something other than just casually riding our bikes. They were right, they had no idea what we would be doing with our bikes, but we'd still have to prove we weren't spies!

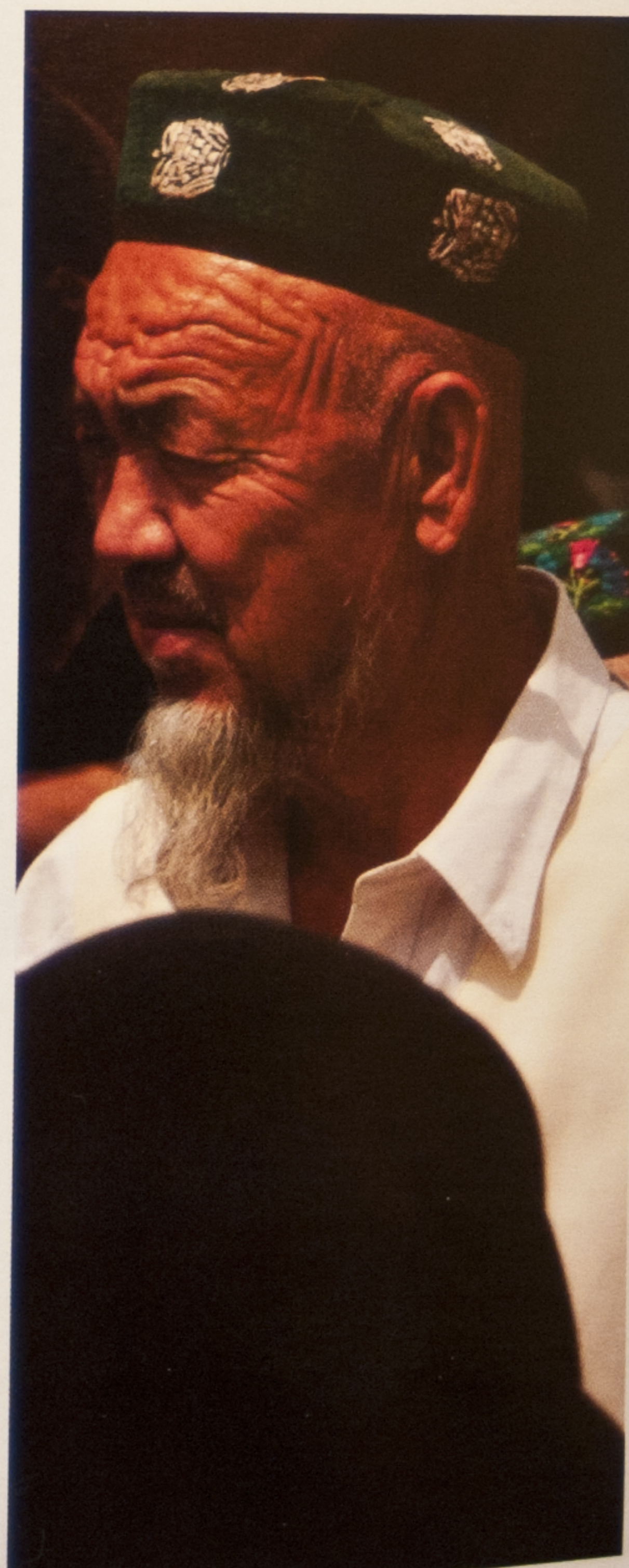
Our crew on the ground consisted of our translator, Jack, who was fundamental and our three drivers who came to be named Mr. Woo, Yow Ming and Tiger, who kept us from getting whipped out in the crazy Chinese traffic.

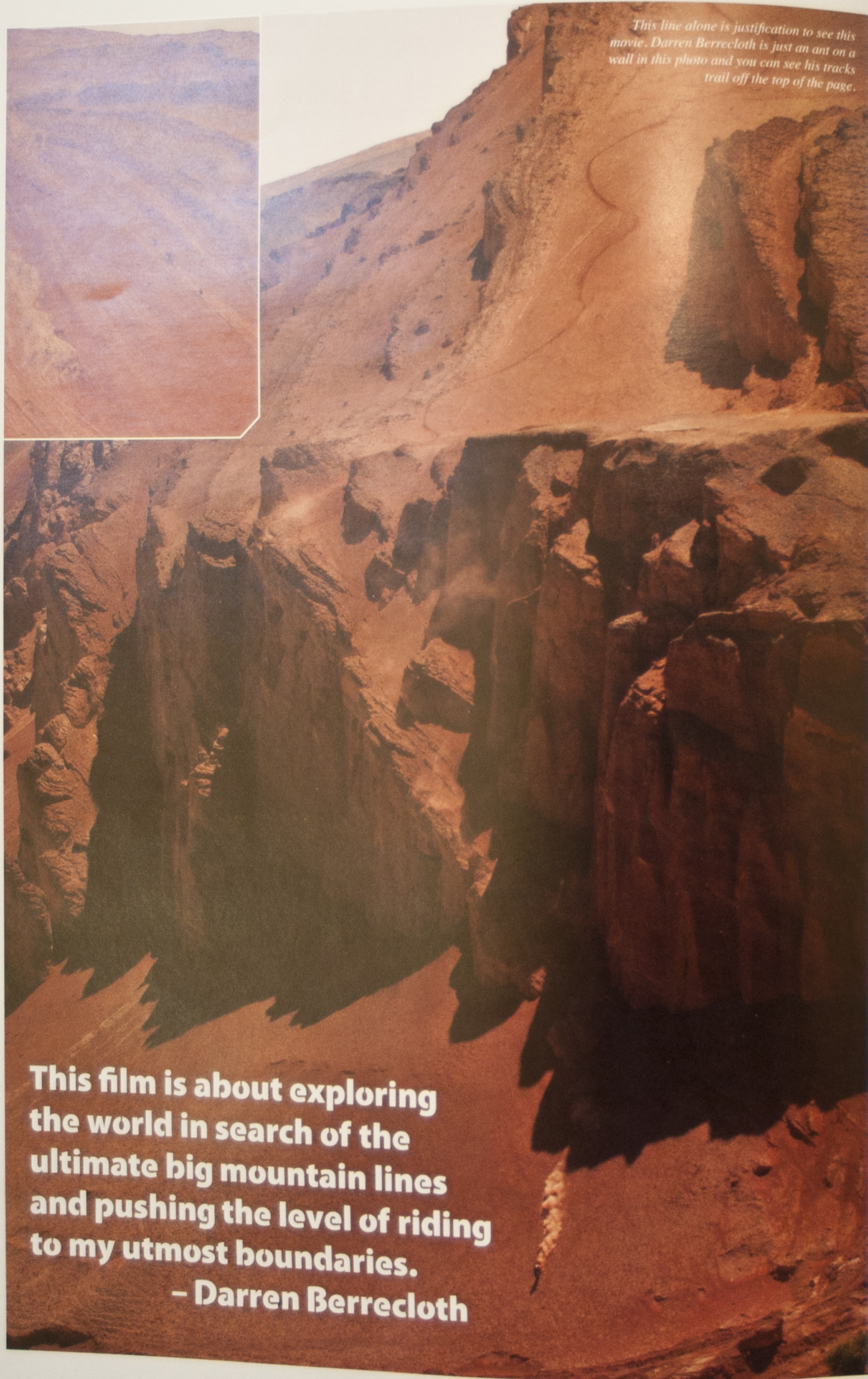
We came to learn that the Gobi holds some pretty impressive stats. The city closest to where we would be riding is the furthest city from the ocean in the world. The elevation is 100 feet below sea level. Dry valleys that tap into canals from the nearby mountains also make the Gobi the largest raisin producer in the world. One thing that shocked me at first was the people. I expected

Exploration defined, is the act of searching or traveling a terrain for the purpose of discovery...



There are two things in this photo to help clue you in on the identity of this rider: The single-crown fork and naturally smooth whip. Yep, it's Kurt Sorge.





This line alone is justification to see this movie. Darren Berrecloth is just an ant on a wall in this photo and you can see his tracks trail off the top of the page.

This film is about exploring the world in search of the ultimate big mountain lines and pushing the level of riding to my utmost boundaries.
— Darren Berrecloth



the people to be Chinese but this area is a mixture of Muslim, Chinese and even Russian and Middle Eastern people, hence, making it one of most culturally diverse places in China. We were in for a treat, travelling, riding and eating in this mystical place, which was so different than anything any of us had ever seen.

The first moment I lay eyes on the terrain that the boys were going to ride, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. What Darren, who had been here two years earlier, had described was true but seeing it with my own eyes made it all real. Slopes, completely treeless, that stretched out from the valley floor to heights that we couldn't even begin to calculate from below. The boys would have to throw their bikes up on their shoulders in heat well over 100 degrees and start hiking in order to find out. We had found big mountain biking lines that make Alaska-sized ski lines look small. The boys started hiking and within an hour they were just specks, a term known in the ski world as "ants on a wall," never brought to mountain biking until now.

A Rude Awakening

After our first few incredible experiences with the local cuisine I found myself thinking about food all the time. Some of my fondest memories from the trip are from eating! With a group as large as ours, ordering food was usually a challenge. Upon entering a restaurant after accommodating ourselves, crouched around short tables cross-legged, we decided to just order a ton of different things from the menu and share them. Nothing looked familiar and everything tasted amazing. Peanut chile chicken dishes, green beans with sesame seeds, mushrooms that looked like ears served in an incredibly tasty sauce, the list of incredible delicacies goes on. We definitely wouldn't starve; we just hoped we didn't get sick!

One thing we learned on our first or second day was that to beat the heat we had to make a plan. It got hot fast and once 10 o'clock in the morning hit, it would be a dry 120 degrees until six or seven at night when the sun dropped enough for the rays to be a little less intense.

We made a plan to camp out in the desert, that way we would have morning light, beat the heat and ride some of the mountains we had seen further out in the desert. We jumped in the trucks and headed for a far location we had scoped a few days earlier. It was a huge face, one of the biggest we had seen and there looked like a good spot to access the bottom of it with the Land Cruisers and camp the night.

We made camp under a huge sky of Gobi stars and were soon approached by a group of local farmers wondering what we were doing. Our guide/translator, Jack, talked to them briefly and came back to us with a big smile on his face. He told us, "The local people want to come and play some traditional music around the campfire!" Perfect, we told Jack to send them up. Soon we were dancing around the fire with local Gobi farmers who played long guitar-style instruments.

In the midst of it all, I thought to myself, "I never thought a mountain bike could have brought me here...what an experience." We stayed around the campfire until it burned away and then, in the calm, clear, starry skies, we all retired to our tents. We had no idea what would awake us in a matter of hours...

I heard a scream that jolted me awake. It was Sorge. A gust of wind had come out of nowhere and his tent (which didn't have a floor) had been picked up by the wind and caught him around the neck! Pop, it released him and took off like a bullet. Gone, the tent tumbled out of sight. The wind had now picked up to a full storm from all angles.

Before we had come out to the Gobi, we had been warned of the sand storms that can happen there. They come out of nowhere and will pick up sand for miles and miles around and turn it into



This photo makes us wonder two things: Where is James Doerfling going to land and how did he get up there?



a swirling, powerful cloud of blindness. One was upon us. I got up right away and tried to weigh down my camping gear so it didn't disappear in the wind. I looked over at Doerfling and Sorge, now standing without their tent, yelling, "What do we do?" Doerfling was standing up with his sleeping bag still on, silhouetted by sand. We had to find cover. Soon everyone was up, trying to organize gear and take cover. Not being able to see two inches in front of your face because of blowing sand made things a little difficult but somehow we managed to get ourselves behind an adobe brick grape-drying hut that somewhat protected us from the brunt of the storm.

Finally morning came and almost on cue with the sun, the winds died down and so did the sands but we were exhausted and there would be no morning riding. The notorious Gobi sand storm had shown us its true colors.

Getting A Groove

We soon got into a groove to beat the heat and steer clear of sand storms. The boys just kept finding amazing features to ride in Gobi's moonlike landscape.

Darren came down from one of his largest lines one day and quite casually said, "That made my trip..." He said it was possibly the most fun he's ever had on his mountain bike.

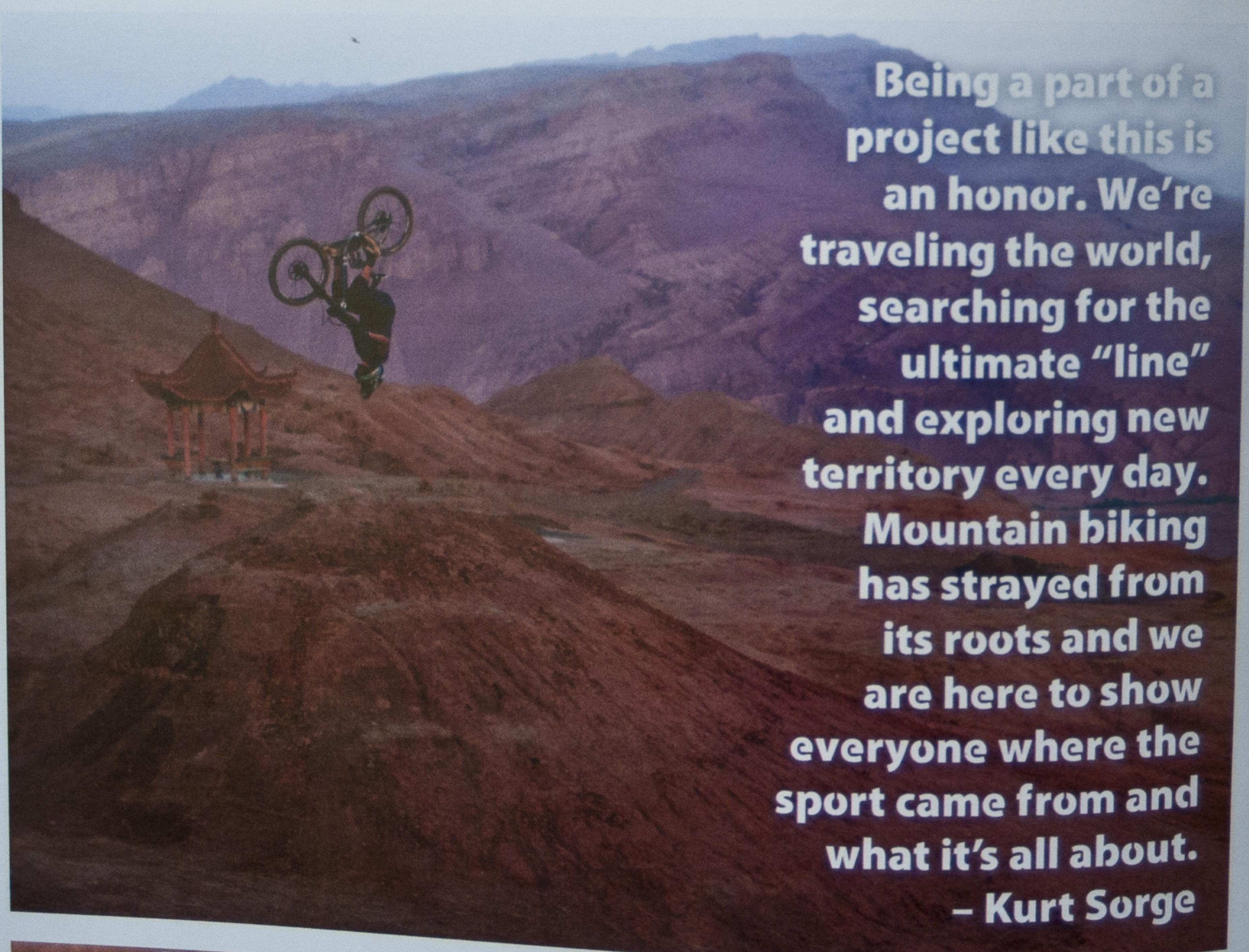
The planet is full of huge mountains, most covered in forests or made up of rock. In the end, only a few and select parts of these mountains can be ridden by a mountain bike without any trail work. Our trip was a complete success. We had found the perfect first location for the film series Derek wanted to produce.

"Where The Trail Ends..." literally taking mountain biking to places where there are no trails, where every turn is a new, fresh one, where first descents are every descent and nobody has a clue what awaits them. Our trip, which had been more of a scoping mission for prospects of such a place, had become everything we hoped it would be. 📺

For more info on the End Of The Trail... project, go to freeride-entertainment.com



To see the trailer for *Where the Trail Ends...*, go to declinemagazine.com/trailends.php



Being a part of a project like this is an honor. We're traveling the world, searching for the ultimate "line" and exploring new territory every day. Mountain biking has strayed from its roots and we are here to show everyone where the sport came from and what it's all about.
– Kurt Sorge

