

BicycleTraveler

International Magazine on Cycle Touring



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- 06 THE SEVEN SISTERS OF NEVADA *By Mike Boles*
- 08 TECHNICAL ISSUE *By Michael van Vliet*
- 20 CYCLING FOR SIMPLICITY *By Greg Foyster*
- 24 MONEY, COMPLIMENTS, PUBLICITY *By Mike Roy*
- 40 THE COLONEL'S TROUSERS *By Edward Genochio*
- 60 HATI HATI *By Stani Martinkova*
- 62 SHAKESPEARE CYCLED *By Stani Martinkova*
- 70 THE BATTLE OF ICE AND SNOW *By Sarah Webb*
- 98 LI LING *By Edward Genochio*
- 102 GUATEMALA *By Rick Galezowski*
- 106 THE TRIBE *By Fredrika Ek*

READY TO ROLL PORTRAITS

- 10 MARK WATSON
- 78 AMAYA WILLIAMS

INTERVIEW

- 58 ALEE DENHAM

EQUIPMENT

- 55 GLOVES *By Claire Mason*
- 56 MULTIBAR *By Alia Parker*

UNCLIPPED ADVENTURES

- 117 ATTACKS *By Tegan Phillips*

PHOTO STORIES

- 28 WHERE I SLEEP *By Juan Sisto*
- 86 KYRGYZSTAN *By Joshua Cunningham*

IMAGES FROM THE ROAD

- 12 AMERICA *By Mark Watson*
- 14 CHINA *By Fredrika Ek*
- 16 TAJIKISTAN *By Fredrika Ek*
- 18 ITALY *By Jiri Koten*
- 48 GUINEA *By Nicolás Marino*
- 50 CONGO *By Nicolás Marino*
- 52 ANGOLA *By Nicolás Marino*
- 54 AUSTRALIA *By Alexandre Gendron*
- 64 CHINA *By Joshua Cunningham*
- 66 AMERICA *By Mirjam Wouters*
- 68 KAZAKHSTAN *By Scott Daniel-Guiterrez*
- 80 AUSTRIA *By Jiri Koten*
- 82 GERMANY *By Peter Clements*
- 84 BELGIUM *By Lukasz Ziach*
- 112 PERU *By Seth Berling*
- 114 AMERICA *By Marc mcShane*
- 116 AMERICA *By Marc mcShane*

PARTING SHOT

- 118 TELEVISION *By Kamran Ali*





Photo: PAUL JEURISSEN www.pauljeurissen.nl

From the editor

In the 11th issue we are introducing a new series, 'Ready to Roll'.

The idea behind 'Ready to Roll' is to highlight the wide gamut of gear-setups for cyclists. Just a decade ago, most bicycle travelers preferred a classic four pannier set-up and mainly pedaled known routes. Choices were constrained due to navigational limitations. Yes, back then we had to rely on good old paper maps. Squiggly lines shown as minor roads and paths often turned out to be nothing but the figment of a map maker's imagination. If you attempted some of the off-road 'doodles', you could end up lost for days before having to backtrack to your original starting point. Sure, you could try asking the locals for directions, but if you didn't speak the language – they would inevitably point you in the direction of a main highway.

Luckily, with the arrival of low-cost GPS technology, Google Earth and various offline maps apps via smartphones, you can easily zoom in on every back road and path to see exactly where it leads to. Smartphone technology has revolutionized bicycle travel and opened up the world to cyclists.

With almost limitless options, bicycle travelers are now developing new routes which cater to their own personal interests. Some choose smooth paved roads between cities renowned for their culture or history. Others prefer remote back roads and precipitous mountain paths.

This technology-charged development in route planning has led to cyclists tailoring their equipment setups to their preferred style of riding.

In the Ready to Roll series, riders explain their travel style and corresponding gear choices. As Nicholas Crane once said, "There are as many different ways of making an enjoyable bicycle journey as there are stars in the sky. I've yet to meet two cyclists who could agree on what equipment to carry."

So there is no 'wrong' or 'right' way, the best way is 'your way'. But aren't you a bit curious to see how other people do it?

Grace Johnson

Bicycle Traveler is copyright Grace Johnson.
All material has been used with permission
and is copyright original sources.

CONTACT

info@bicycletraveler.nl

DISCLAIMER

The articles published reflect the opinions of their respective authors and are not necessarily those of the editor.

CONTRIBUTORS

Alee Denham
Alexandre Gendron
Alia Parker
Amaya Williams
Bob K.
Claire Mason
Edward Genochio
Eric Schambion
Fredrika Ek
Greg Foyster

Hana Black
Jiri Koten
Joshua Cunningham
Juan Sisto
Kamran Ali
Ken Lund
Lukasz Ziach
Marc mcShane
Mark Watson
Michael van Vliet
Mike Boles
Mike Roy
Mirjam Wouters
Nicolás Marino
Paul Jeurissen
Peter Clements
Rick Galezowski
Robin Chubb
Sarah Webb
Scott Daniel-Guiterrez
Seth Berling
Stani Martinkova
Tegan Phillips

The Seven Sisters of Nevada

By: MIKE BOLES

I couldn't be sure if the old man was teasing me or if he really wanted to know. So I told him. I'm not trying to find anything on the road – not anymore.

“Nothing? Shit, son, we got plenty of that.”

He winked and I waved goodbye. In the cool morning air of Nevada I began pedaling from Carson City, my wheels pointed east down Route 50 – the Loneliest Road in America.

Lonely it may be, but I was never alone. The sun was there, beating on a shimmering road that seemed somehow alien amid the seas of sagebrush and dusty soil. Tiny lizards cocked their heads and darted from one shore to the next.

The wind found me, too. Whipping against

my back, it urged me over the flat lands and a horizon that promised more. I covered 130 kilometres before dinner – mileage that would have taken me two hard days in the mountains of California.

Then there was salt. The road shifted with the gale and I was left to pedal across a great salt bed with a crushing headwind. Sometimes I walked, sometimes I swore. It took me two hours to wobble 15 kilometres to the sheltering walls of a rocky hill.

I wound my way up the pass and re-marked how strange it was that Nevada should have a mountain at all. I thought it was flat. I thought it was desert.

Not so. I know now that Nevada is, in fact, the most mountainous state in the Lower 48. The modest summit I was standing upon was the first of 16 that would have to be lumbered over on my way to Utah. Of those, seven rose above 7,000 feet (2,130 meters).

They were my Seven Sisters of Nevada.

If I wasn't kept by one, I was held between two. I ate on their winding slopes, slept in their star-covered valleys and strove for their eastern kin every moment of every day. Strange to be comforted by mountains, but I was.

There were challenges out there to be sure. The heat of day was relentless. The nights dropped to near freezing. Water was hard to

come by and help harder still. It took me six days of gritty cycling to make it to Utah.

None of it matters. Long after my cracked lips have healed and my stomach has been filled, I will remember Nevada for its mountains and valleys, mountains and valleys.

They gave purpose and beauty and truth. How endlessly they stretched to the horizon. How easily they filled my nothing. **BT**

Mike writes; “Every single day on the road was a gift, a precious flash of something sublime, and if I had any goal at all, it was only to experience that beauty firsthand.”
<http://mikeonbike.wordpress.com>

TECHNICAL ISSUE

By: MICHAEL VAN VLIET

TWO DAYS BEFORE my health decided it needed some time away from me, I asked myself one of those silly questions that have a way of turning against you. Suppose something had to go wrong with either your bike or your body, which would you choose? Easy, I told my imaginary interlocutor. My body, of course. Correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't the body have this astonishing ability to cure whatever ails it? Don't go expecting it to deal with anything as cataclysmic as a brain hemorrhage, but the common flu or a nasty gash in the head are no match for the magic powers of your body. Just give it a couple of days and you'll be as good as new.

Now try that with a bicycle. 'Flat tyre? Oh, let me just put it against the wall, it'll sort itself out.' If anything, that tyre will be only flatter after a day or two. In fact, for its well-being my bicycle is wholly dependent on me, a clueless quack who can hardly tell his bottom bracket from his crankset. Just imagine what my poor bike must have gone through when I tried to fix my very first puncture. Having turned the patient upside down, I actually started taking snapshots of the rear wheel because I wasn't sure whether after removing it I'd be able to figure out how to put it back again. I guess it's like being wheeled into the operating room only to hear the surgeon say, just before the anaesthetics kick in: 'Don't worry, sir. We know how to cut you open, but we're still consulting the textbooks on the sewing-up part.' Not very reassuring.

Now, it's true that I've progressed since those early days. It takes me less than thirty minutes to turn a fully-loaded bicycle with a flat tyre into a fully-loaded bicycle that's good to go. And, having reversed the sprocket on my Rohloff hub, I even managed to realign the chain tensioner. But some things never change.

Strange sounds emanating from unidentified parts of the bike still give me palpitations. And when I'm unable to come up with an immediate solution to a technical issue, part of my mind is already working on an exit strategy: get bike on bus, book flight, go home, forget about the whole thing.

BY CONTRAST, I hardly ever worry about that other machine: my body. It's there, it always does what it's supposed to do and it never gives me trouble—apart from the occasional bout of traveler's diarrhoea and, quite curiously, a different skin rash for each country I'm in. Another plus is that it's low on maintenance. Just stuff it with calories, give it the odd scrub and make sure it's in a horizontal position at the end of the day. And—very important to those weight-conscious round-the-world cyclists—there's no need to carry any spare parts.

And then, as I rode into Korla, that trustworthy machine came to a sputtering halt. Rather than one or two parts, it felt as though my entire body needed replacing. There was a dull throb in my head, my neck and shoulders were locked in a painful clasp, my legs were filled with porridge and I was feeling low on sugar, salts and, above all, morale. It had been a long and hot day through the desert, though no longer or hotter than any other day. Still, caught in Korla's afternoon rush hour, looking for a place to stay, I found myself wondering if this is what heatstroke feels like.

A MIRACLE of the human body I haven't mentioned is that it is capable of pushing back its own collapse. Mine got me to a hotel, where it managed to drag thirty kilos worth of luggage up six flights of stairs. Then, having closed the door behind itself, its defenses went down.

Fever jumped at it from a dark corner, and, just before I slipped into a twelve-hour nightmare marathon, news reached me that my bowels had decided to join the revolution.

And here I am, dealing with the aftereffects not of heatstroke, as it turns out, but good old dysentery. Which is not as dire as it sounds. Every hour or so my bowels perform some kind of Chinese contortion act, which is a sure sign for me to potter off to the shared toilets down the hall to turn one of the cubicles there into (quite literally) a bloody mess. But I'm not complaining. At least the bike is fine. **BT**

One day, Michael van Vliet decided to buy a bike and ride it to the other side of the world. Untrained, ill-prepared and without a clear sense of direction.
www.asphaltandlycra.blogspot.com

Michael now runs the Roadmaster Foundation, a small non-profit organization that offers sponsorship to Dutch touring cyclists and helps them raise funds for a charity of their choice.
www.roadmasterfoundation.nl



Ready to Roll

Bicycle travelers
and their rigs



Photo: HANA BLACK

NAME: Mark Watson, from New Zealand.

HISTORY Myself and my partner Hana Black have been cycle touring and bike packing on and off for 24 years. Back in the early 1990's we explored most of New Zealand via a couple of several-month long tours. Mountain biking was just getting popular at that time so we also made lightweight bike packing trips (often on barely ride able tracks) and loved the novelty of using the mountain bike as a medium for exploratory touring. Cycle tours in Fiji, the Philippines, UK and France followed along with a few overnight and multiday rides in North America, the highlight of which was a very mountainous week bike packing in the Copper Canyon in Mexico.

In 2011 we made our first really long tour; from western China through to the southern tip

of Sumatra. Seven South East Asian countries over 9 months and 13,000 km. We stuck to the remotest / quietest roads we could find much of the time. At the end of the tour neither of us were ready to stop, which gave us the confidence that we had the patience and endurance to tackle a longer trip: roll on 2016 and our current Alaska to Argentina tour.

TOURING STYLE: We're definitely not about finding the straightest line from country to country for the sake of ticking them off; for us the journey is most definitely the destination. Being off the beaten track and away from cars suits us and where there is a feasible dirt option, we'll take it. We love the hills and given the choice of coast or mountains, we'll nearly always pick the mountains. It's in the hills I really feel like

I'm *riding* my bike and engaging with the terrain.

BIKE: We're currently riding Surly Ogre 29ers. We wanted a bike that could handle long distance touring loads, yet would still be practical to ride for short – perhaps more technical – side trips and be fun to ride on the rough stuff generally. They have been perfect so far. We've hand picked a few custom parts, i.e. Watson Cycles titanium handle bars (for road shock), Ergon grips, Brooks saddles, Spyke TRP mechanical disc brakes and drivetrains with 22 x 36 as our easiest gear.

We started from Deadhorse, Alaska with 2.35 inch Maxxis Ikons (which were perfect), but at Whitehorse swapped back to skinner slicks for a few weeks of sealed highway. Since we started on the Great Divide mountain bike route we are back on 2.35 inch knobbies, run tubeless, and will go slightly bigger once we start the Baja Divide in January.

BAGS: For our SE Asia trip we both used Ortlieb panniers throughout but the rough riding was limited so these worked well. For our Americas tour we are aiming to ride dirt roads as much as possible, so we opted for a hybrid touring / bike packing set up. We run rear racks with panniers, but the rest of our kit came from Revelate Designs. Their bike packing kit helps distribute the load evenly over the bike, improving handling, while giving us more clearance at the front of our bikes. Salsa Anything Cage HD's give us a bit of extra storage space. Bike packing gear also makes it very easy to organise your gear and keep things accessible, even while pedalling. We often eat on the trot and it's efficient to be able to make clothing changes without digging into panniers.

ELECTRONICS: I'm a photographer by trade and I'm documenting our journey with the intent of producing a book about our Alaska to Argentina route, so have a reasonable load on board! As far as the camera gear goes it's very similar

to the set up I carried while walking the length of New Zealand for my *Te Araroa* book. On board is a Sony A7RII, with Metabones adapter and Canon lenses as follows: 16-35mm f2.8L, 50mm f1.2L and 70-200mm f4L IS. I use the f4 over the 2.8 edition of the 70-200mm as it quite a bit lighter, and it's probably my most used lens on this trip. As a landscape photographer I deem a few filters as essential items: Lee .3 and .6 ND soft grads, a 3-stop ND filter and a circular polariser. My tripod is a fantastic Sirui T-024X (carbon fibre) which is super light but still sturdy enough for heavy lenses.

I carry a 13 inch Macbook Air and two Western Digital 4TB USB HDs for backup. Two other smaller HDs carry some of my existing image library so I can still work on the road. I carry the camera and lenses in a Lowe backpack, and while the thought of carrying a backpack while touring is anathema for most cyclists, I have gotten used to it!

FAVOURITE GEAR: I chose a Battery Box (400 grams) over a dynamo hub/USB charger for my electronics as it will run the Mac for hours, or provide multiple charges for my smartphone (which I use for navigation). Hana is running a dynamo hub and 'The Plug' USB charger on her bike.

REMARKS: Coming at cycle touring from many years of backcountry travel we have a fairly lightweight philosophy to life on the bike and have tried to pare away as many extras as possible – partly to compensate for my heavy camera gear. We have a pretty basic cooking set up (MSR Whisperlite and one pot) and both carry the bare minimum of food, clothing, toiletries and tools. We actively chop and change what we carry depending on the season (i.e. lighter/heavier sleeping bags and jackets as required).

WEBSITE: www.highlux.co.nz **BT**

**See also 'Ready to Roll' disclosure on page 117*









Cycling for Simplicity

*Greg Foyster cycles up Australia in search of simplicity...
and meets a fellow traveller full of wisdom.*

MY GIRLFRIEND SOPHIE and I were standing by the road in the high country of Australia's southern island state, Tasmania, having a massive argument about a tiny teaspoon. It was April 2012 and we were on the first leg of a bicycle odyssey up Australia's east coast exploring simpler and more sustainable ways to live. When you're riding long distances your body can literally run out of energy – a phenomenon known as 'the bonk' – and we'd been treating this sudden calorie bankruptcy with peanut butter and jam sandwiches. To spread the condiments we carried two tiny teaspoons, and I seemed to have misplaced them.

"Where are they?" said Sophie, rummaging through my panniers. "Where are the fucking teaspoons?"

Her reaction may seem out of proportion, but at the time it was appropriate. When you can carry only a limited set of belongings even the most trivial item takes on monumental significance. But I was forgetful and had already left behind, then doubled-back to reclaim, a pair of gloves and a cable for locking up our bikes. We planned to cycle through some remote areas and Sophie was worried I'd lose something vital for survival. We ended up recovering the teaspoons, which now rest in our kitchen drawer at home, and I've held onto the lesson too: don't take your stuff for granted.

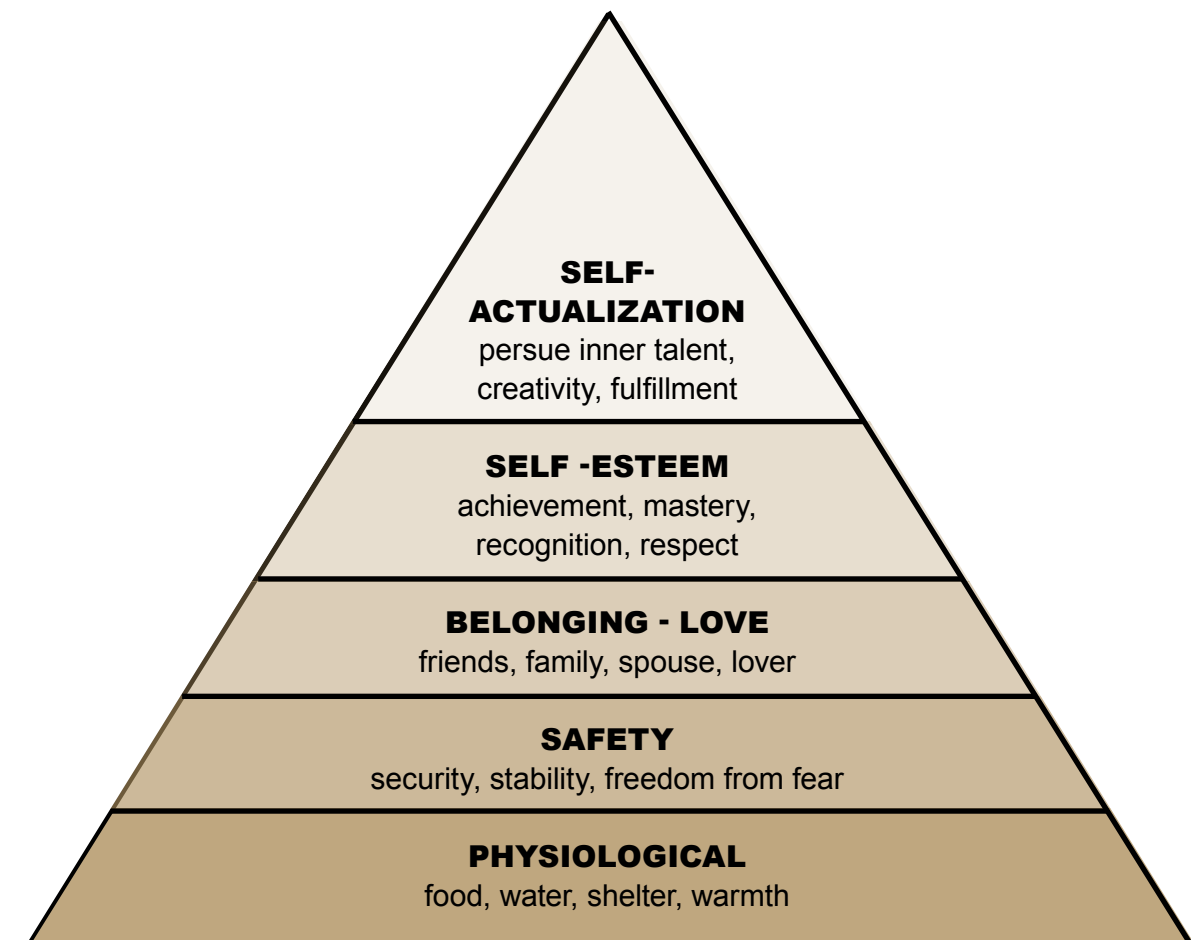
Our journey was to be slow by most cycle touring standards – 6500 kilometres over nine months – but mainly because the focus was

tracking down people in remote locations who'd chosen to live more simply, and then interviewing them for a blog and book. Out of that whole odyssey, it may seem strange to focus on a domestic tiff about cutlery. But I mention it because it shows how cycle touring made me reassess my entire relationship to material possessions, right down to something as small and mundane as a teaspoon.

FROM INTELLECTUAL TO PRACTICAL

The Teaspoon Incident raises another broad theme of our journey. We had set off in March 2012 with grandly intellectual ambitions – to interrogate consumer society and explore viable alternatives to the nine-to-five lifestyle of working and spending. In the comfort of my lounge room, I had daydreamed of pedalling casually from one quaint village to the next, lying on the grass reading, and spending nights by the campfire sharing profound thoughts on the nature of existence.

Instead, I spent an awful lot of time washing socks. Or boiling rice and lentils. Or searching for a safe campsite. In university I had studied Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs', the psychological theory that humans have to fulfill basic requirements such as food, shelter and sleep before they can hope to attain higher goals. On the road I became a living case study. I couldn't do anything intellectual (like reading a book) until I'd done the required practical work (like airing out the tent or boiling water). It was a re-



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

The needs are often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid and can be divided into deficiency needs (e.g. physiological, safety, love, and self-esteem) and growth needs (self-actualization).

The deficiency needs motivate people when they are not met. Also, the need to fulfill them will become stronger the longer they are denied.

Maslow's theory suggests that the most basic level of needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire the highest level of self-actualization.

“The more people put energy into accruing material possessions, the harder they have to work to get fewer and fewer rewards.”

minder that all our cultural achievements and pleasures are only possible because we have efficiently secured the necessities of life – shelter, water, clothing, food and fuel.

And actually, I found it liberating! There was something deeply satisfying about spending your waking hours just trying to secure the necessities to keep going. I didn't worry about work, or my bank balance, or even the depressing state of politics because I had more important concerns. Like washing my one decent pair of socks.

WHY TRAVEL BY BIKE

At first, our reason to cycle rather than drive was also intellectual. We figured that a trip exploring simple and sustainable living should be conducted with a simple and sustainable mode of transport – the bicycle.

That was all good in theory, but at the time I wasn't very fit. The first few months were a tremendous shock to my body, and my knees twinged with the repetitive strain of pedalling. I didn't know bike shorts are supposed to be worn without underwear so I cycled thousands of kilometres with the seams of my boxers chafing my bum, leading to painful blisters. Convinced my hard seat was to blame, I swaddled it in bubble wrap and when my wheels passed over a bump I heard a faint 'pop!' beneath my crotch.

And yet choosing to do the trip by bike was the most instructive experience of all. We learnt that Australia is a big country not because we'd heard it in some hackneyed political speech, but because we'd felt it in our aching limbs. We learnt that good food kept us pedalling for hours, but sugary junk only fuelled us for 40 minutes. And, as the Teaspoon Incident

highlighted, we learnt to value every item we carried, no matter how small or inexpensive.

LIVING WITH LESS

By the time we reached northern New South Wales, we loved cycling and camping. It had become normal for us to travel between towns by bicycle. Normal to cook on a camp stove and sleep in a tent. Normal to carry only a small amount of food and water, to have only one set of clothes and to shower only once every few days. It was normal simply because we were used to it.

For the same reason, I thought, our lifestyle seemed weird to others because they weren't used to it. Drivers would pull up alongside us, hear about our intention to cycle to Cairns, and shake their heads in disbelief. But if the situation were reversed and most people in Australia travelled by bicycle, then getting around by car would be the 'weird' thing to do.

During the first few months I missed my creature comforts, but it was remarkable how quickly I adapted to living with less. The process of changing habits is painful, but once you've adjusted to a new normal you don't feel deprived of the old way. In fact, changing back may be just as painful because it also involves adjustment. So the thing I feared about living with less – that I'd miss the life I once led – became a non-issue very quickly.

UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS

We interviewed a broad range of people on the trip, including an activist who lived up a tree, an architect who designed tiny houses the size of a backyard shed, families who lived off grid, and well-known people in the Australian environment movement, such as Clive Hamilton and David Holmgren.

Most of these interviews were pre-arranged, but our journey was also blessed by serendipity. In Far North Queensland, we heard about a 'barefoot monk' who had walked up the state carrying only three robes and an alms bowl. As we cycled along the Bruce Highway en route to Bowen, we spotted him sitting cross-legged under a tree, his back to the hurtling traffic. We sat down and he told us about his life. "I wanted to see if it was possible to live the old way with just three robes and bowl in Australia," he said. "I thought if I could walk from Gold Coast to Townsville, I could prove you could do it."

According to his spiritual practice, he was only allowed to eat one meal a day before noon, and the food had to be given to him. He wasn't allowed to forage for fruit or even pick up an apple off the ground. He also couldn't hoard food. "I have to wake up each morning with nothing." Despite this, he'd walked thousands of kilometres through harsh northern Australia without missing a meal. Truck drivers would pull over and give him a feed.

At night he slept under trees and bus shelters, or inside concrete pipes beneath railway lines. He could accept accommodation if it was offered to him, as long as he didn't place a burden on anyone, and he'd slept in people's sheds and garages. He used a single woollen blanket for warmth and he didn't have a sleeping mat. "If you sleep against hard things the body gets soft and flexible," he said. "If you sleep against soft things, the body gets hard and rigid."

I wondered what was the point of this extreme asceticism. "How does living simply help your spiritual practice?" I asked. He said it was not possible to have a mind capable of enlightenment while you're constantly drenched in 'sensory temptations', which can distract from deeper issues. "Renunciation is essential for spiritual practices because unless one renounces material things people won't notice there is a problem."

It might be hard to understand the joy in such an existence, but Buddhism is experiential, and you have to live the lifestyle to appreciate the

benefits. 'Buddha said you can't understand what can be gained by renunciation unless you renounce.'

When you seek happiness through material things, he said, you're subject to the law of diminishing returns: your first Mercedes Benz might make you happy, but your second will make you less happy. "The more people put energy into accruing material possessions, the harder they have to work to get fewer and fewer rewards."

All of this makes him sound bit extreme on paper – but he was the most lucid and logical person I'd ever met. He'd studied to be a lawyer and took a rational evidence-based approach to his spiritual practice. He has touched many lives in Australia, and is now the subject of an [ABC National radio documentary](#).

I'll never forget the monk's feet: his soles were as black and calloused as a dog's paws. "We have as much ability to adapt to the environment as animals," he said. While we spoke, several large stinging ants crawled across the bottom of his right foot. He didn't flinch.

BACK TO NATURE

The monk's words would prove prophetic. Gradually, without me even noticing the change, I adjusted to a slower pace of life. By the fourth or fifth month on the road I enjoyed the simplest thing: wind on my skin, the sun on my back, a view of single gumtree in a brown paddock. A bird would fly across the road and I'd watch every flap, mesmerised. By the time we reached our final destination, Cairns, I'd go gaga over the sight of a single swaying palm. I'd started to appreciate the environment not because it had become prettier but because, after spending so much time outdoors, I felt a part of it. I can thank cycling for that too. **BT**

Greg Foyster is an Australian journalist and author who writes about environmental issues. The book about this journey, Changing Gears: A Pedal-Powered Detour from the Rat Race, is available from Amazon Kindle. www.gregfoyster.com/most-recent-book

Money, Compliments, Publicity

“A man once said the pinnacle of success is when you finally lose interest in money, compliments, and publicity.

A noble enough idea, I suppose.

But how on earth he does this, heaven only knows.

I know I’m gonna need a lot more of all three of those before I ever have the nerve to turn up my nose at any money, compliments, publicity.”

– Todd Snider, “Money, Compliments, Publicity” from *The Excitement Plan*.

Mike Roy cycles down the eastern coast of India

American teacher cycles his way to ecological awareness



Mike Roy of the US pedals his bicycle on the Beach Road during his visit to Visakhapatnam on Tuesday as part of his world tour.

— DECCAN CHRONICLE

Roy pedals across borders just for fun

DC CORRESPONDENT

Two-and-a-half years on and having covered 30,000 km, 30-year-old Mike Roy, who was working as an English teacher in South Korea, has crossed 14 countries and has reached Vizag on Monday to reach his next destination — Puducherry.

bottle which I picked up from a trash bin which was washed and am now using as my water bottle.”

Having travelled to South Korea, China, including Hong Kong and Macau,



Mike Roy with a group of people during his visit to Visakhapatnam.

సైకిల్ తో 14 దేశాలను పర్యటించిన

అమెరికాలోని కాలిఫోర్నియాలోని లాస్ ఏంజెల్స్లోని మైక్ రాయ్, 30 ఏళ్ల వయస్సులో, 2014 నవంబరు 14 న విశాఖపట్నంలోకి చేరుకున్నాడు. అతను 14 దేశాలను, 30,000 కి.మీ.ల దూరాన్ని ప్రయాణించి, విశాఖపట్నంలోకి చేరుకున్నాడు. అతను 14 దేశాలను, 30,000 కి.మీ.ల దూరాన్ని ప్రయాణించి, విశాఖపట్నంలోకి చేరుకున్నాడు.

The Young Globetrotter ON A GREEN MISSION

Emerging from college with a degree in his hand, Mike Roy had a whole world of opportunities before him. But, he opted to dedicate his life for a noble cause.

The young American was disturbed by the growing rate of pollution that has been endangering the environment. The perils of progress have been leading the world to an environmental disaster. Concerned over the alarming rate of deforestation and industrialisation, 30-year-old Mike Roy decided to tread the tough path of spreading awareness about the ‘risks of development’, as a responsible citizen of the world.



nature, to ensure a greener world and to save eco-system for the future generations. Travelling 80-90 km per day, Mike Roy, a native of Virginia, has been bicycling for the last two-and-a-half years.

Visiting 14 countries, meeting myriad cultures and communities, the environmental crusader landed in Visakhapatnam, the City of Destiny, on Monday night.

With his project uniquely titled ‘Three Rule Ride’, Mike aims to campaign across the world creating awareness about his principles, which is indeed like a tagline ‘No Gas, No Meat, No Trash’.

However, it obviously was not something that he decided overnight. Mike embarked on his journey after a lot of observations and experiences involving various classes

The youngster makes sure his campaign runs with few implementations, where he doesn’t use plastic materials, doesn’t use fuels which give off gas. And finally, and most remarkably, he is a pure vegetarian, sticking to a meat-free diet.

A young man with the whole world ahead of him, why did he take up this unique job? He quotes an experience at Cambodia in 2009, which totally altered his perception of environment:

“In some rural parts of Cambodia, I saw children roaming naked and eating food from plastic materials. People were living in small houses, littering plastic and lighting up the plastic wastes. There was no infrastructure and nobody to help them. It made me think of how there are similar places around the world where people often suffer from health problems due to environmental pollution. That was when I personally felt that I should do something as a fellow human being.”

chapatnam: An Environment protection is mission to spread awareness by bicycling around the world.

like Roy, an American teaching English in South Korea, has cycled his way through South Korea, China, Japan, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Thailand, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal and parts of India.

Speaking to media persons here on Tuesday, Roy spoke on what he termed his Three Rule Ride – No gas, No meat and No trash’.

“I intend to spread awareness on environment protection. Firstly, we need to drastically reduce fossil fuel consumption and stop using plastic. Most countries do not have the facility to recycle plastic waste and it just ends up in landfills,” he said.

Roy, who has cycled 30,000 km so far, said, “Consumption of meat is another major cause of rising pollution. In



Mike Roy cycles through the Beach Road in the city on Tuesday to spread awareness on environment protection as part of his world tour

More importantly, these countries are developing nations that are dealing with a whole range of problems.

Replying to a question whether he was motivated anyway en-route or he had to deal with impolite people, Roy said Asia was way more than other continents South America. However, he said that his

From America, on three-rule ride

G. Narasimha Rao

VISAKHAPATNAM: A 34-year-old American is going around the world on a bicycle to promote protection of the environment. He has set himself three rules – no gas, no meat and no plastic – and calls his journey a three-rule ride.

Using a bicycle to drive home the environment aspect is not surprising but the point about meat is surprising. Michael Roy, who touched

Visakhapatnam on Tuesday on his world tour, explained the three rules he is following and said he turned vegetarian after watching the way meat was processed and sold in the US and also because it means cruelty against animals. “It is not difficult to avoid eating meat if you really want to be a vegetarian”, Mr. Roy said. He passed through many countries, after setting off from South Korea on August 14, 2012. “In most countries people were surprised when I told them that I don’t eat meat. But in India people have

Mike Roy, an American teaching English in South Korea, has cycled his way through South Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Vietnam, Tibet, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal and parts of India.

More importantly, these countries are developing nations that are dealing with a whole range of problems.

Replying to a question whether he was motivated anyway en-route or he had to deal with impolite people, Roy said Asia was way more than other continents South America. However, he said that his

From America, on three-rule ride

G. Narasimha Rao

VISAKHAPATNAM: A 34-year-old American is going around the world on a bicycle to promote protection of the environment. He has set himself three rules – no gas, no meat and no plastic – and calls his journey a three-rule ride.

Using a bicycle to drive home the environment aspect is not surprising but the point about meat is surprising. Michael Roy, who touched

Visakhapatnam on Tuesday on his world tour, explained the three rules he is following and said he turned vegetarian after watching the way meat was processed and sold in the US and also because it means cruelty against animals. “It is not difficult to avoid eating meat if you really want to be a vegetarian”, Mr. Roy said. He passed through many countries, after setting off from South Korea on August 14, 2012. “In most countries people were surprised when I told them that I don’t eat meat. But in India people have

Recognize this guy? According to the papers, he's a "Young Globetrotter." A "maverick." A badass American that "pedals across borders for fun." Naw, just a humble fauxbo who enjoys long rides under the blazing sun and longer nights worrying if monkeys are going to steal his samosas and ravage his tent. Oh, the joys of India! Let's get right into it with a list of happenings from my 22-day, 2000km ride down the subcontinent.

DAY 1: Two dudes in an SUV roll down their window and chat me up. They offer to buy me a chicken but I suggest we have tea and savory snacks instead. Camped in a forest just off the side of the road. 118km.

DAY 2: A dude on a motorbike chats me up. When I mention needing a snack, he brings me to a *dhaba* (truckstop restaurant). The owner comps my meal of *paratha* (flatbreads) and tea. 114km.

DAY 3: The owner of my hotel from the night before catches up with me along the way and tells me to stop at his restaurant in the next town for a free lunch. In the evening, a friendly uncle leads me to the local *dharamsala* (pilgrim's hostel) and pays the \$0.85 tab. Then he takes me for a bit of street food. Then his cousin takes me to see the town's most famous temple. Then he brings me to his cell phone shop, where his nephews come and chat with me for an hour, uttering such sweet sentiments as "Sir, you don't know how many wonderful memories you are making for us right now." Then back to his house for a five-course meal (including *chana masala*, chickpea curry) courtesy of his wife. 124km.

DAY 4: Same uncle buys me a breakfast of tea, fried *puri* flatbreads, and a few *jalebi* funnelcakes, and sends me on my way. 90km and five hours later, some uncles at my lunch *Dhaba* wake me up from my nap to invite me for a beer. "One glass" turns into three, they bust the whiskey out, and loads of snacks (including omelettes and *chana pakora*, deep-fried chickpeas)

ensue. I break away at about five, manage another hour of cycling, and stop in the next sizeable town and check my map at the main intersection. Within two minutes, a few twenty-somethings circle around me, offer to guide me to a guesthouse, then take me out to the best *chai* shop in town. contraband is also an option, but I use my rough riding schedule and my already weakened state as an excuse. 111km.

DAY 5: Same hooligans treat me to breakfast. About 5km out of town, an uncle asks me to pull over without explaining why. Normally I'd refuse and chew him out a little, but he's got an adorable little girl on the bike with him, so I try to stay cheerful. She asks to take a photo with me – another request that I refuse for most dudes and uncles, but will allow in the case of extreme cuteness. As we say our goodbyes, the uncle asks if I need anything. I say no, joking that I have my bedroom, kitchen, office, and garage all on the bicycle; he pulls out 100 rupees (\$1.50) and insists I take it. 129km.

DAY 6: In the morning, I turn down an alley in search of a snack. One dude sitting there reading a newspaper turns to the page with my photo on it; I guess those guys who ambushed me at lunch the day before claiming to be reporters hadn't been lying! Dude says "Meeting you is the coolest thing that has ever happened to me." At lunch, I stop at a fancy hotel hoping for a big meal. The owner offers me the use of a 3-star room to shower and rest in, then comps my meal, one of the best *thalis* (sets) I've ever had. An hour later, a dude on a moped passes me and chats me up. He suggests we stop for tea and for some reason I'm willing. He also insists on buying me a few packets of cookies. That evening, I stop at a *dhaba* to camp; the owner has his chef cook me up another awesome *thali* and serves it to me with a small bottle of whiskey, all on the house. 126km.

DAY 7: *Chai* courtesy of a reporter trying to convince me to wait until his cameraman and translator could come and do a proper interview. Free lamination of the previous day's newspaper articles courtesy of a shop owner who

appreciated my message and my willingness to chitchat with her middle-school daughters, who spoke perfect English. Free oranges and sweets courtesy of a dude on a bicycle. Camped under a ginormous mango tree. 101km.

DAY 8: Dinner of *dosa* (fermented rice pancakes and coconut sauce) and dessert delivered to my hotel room by my friend Surya's uncle's nephew or something. He had never heard of Surya. 125km.

DAY 9: Morning munch of free dessert snacks from last night. Breakfast provided 25km down the road by more of Surya's relatives, an uncle and auntie who arranged for some reporters to meet and interview me at his shop. Packed lunch, dinner, soft drinks, and bagged *lassis* courtesy of the same. Slept nearby at Surya's friend Praveen's place. 145km.

DAYS 10-12: Meals at home with Surya and family. Praveen's parents also made sure I had my fill of tea and snacks and made me promise to come back for more. Also treated to tours of Surya's hometown, Vizag. AND Surya arranged a massive (by my standards) press conference for me, which got me and 3RR into about 15 newspapers and even on to TV. No cycling, except a bit around town and to show off for the cameras.

DAY 13: Breakfast with Surya and family. Enough *chapatti* flatbreads and curries for lunch and dinner prepared by mom, packed trash-free into my tupperwares. Camped behind the staff quarters at a gas station. 155km.

DAY 14: Raju, a Vizag politician-and-philanthropist who spotted me first in the newspapers on Day 11 and then again on the highway on Day 13, treats me to a village tour, an awesome dinner prepared by a village auntie, and a night in an air-conditioned room with fluffy pillows. 105km to meet Raju, 20km via his station wagon back to the village.

DAY 15: Breakfast with Raju and friends. Lunch offer from a dentist out for a morning ride

("I feel like I'm meeting an alien or something from National Geographic!," he said to me) refused because I hadn't yet hit 100km. Five coconuts (nearly broke my bike) and a watermelon courtesy of Ravi, a solar engineer who chatted me up from his motorcycle. He promised to send me a solar charger from his company. Camped outside another *dhaba*. 177km.

DAY 16: Teenage *dhaba* chef decides not to charge me for my curry, *roti* (flatbreads), and salad. He probably felt sorry for me since I dismantled my bike in the parking lot to give it a nice cleaning. Camped out behind another gas station. 158km.

DAY 17: First day with no freebies, but a friendly uncle in the town of "Sullurpet" did help me to find a budget hotel and wrangle the price down from \$7 to \$6. 168km.

DAY 18: A dude in Muslim garb on a motorcycle in Chennai, a city of some 15 million, passes me on a main thoroughfare and silently extends his arm, handing me a cold bottle of orange soda. Dinner and free shower and floor accommodation courtesy of my couchsurfing hosts Nina and Hannes. 85km and then DONE. Almost.

DAY 19-20: Two more nights surfing Nina and Hannes' floor.

DAY 21: Last day of the ride, 145km to Pondicherry. I bought the pizzas, my friend Jihye bought the refreshments.

DAY 22: A paltry 8km to reach Sadhana Forest my home for the next few months. Free clothes from the free store, free hut in the forest, free bananas and jackfruits and papayas from the trees, free hugs, music, massage, etc any time. **BT**

Mike Roy has been cycling and spreading awareness about ecologically conscious living options since 2012. He also practices and promotes a "No Gas, No Meat, No Trash" lifestyle, on the road and off www.threeruleride.com.

Where we sleep

In 2013 photographer Juan Sisto set off from Chile to discover new horizons via his camera lens. In Guatemala he met his travelling and life companion Bea and together they cycled towards Alaska.





A peaceful Mexican courtyard





Sleeping in a Brazilian church courtyard

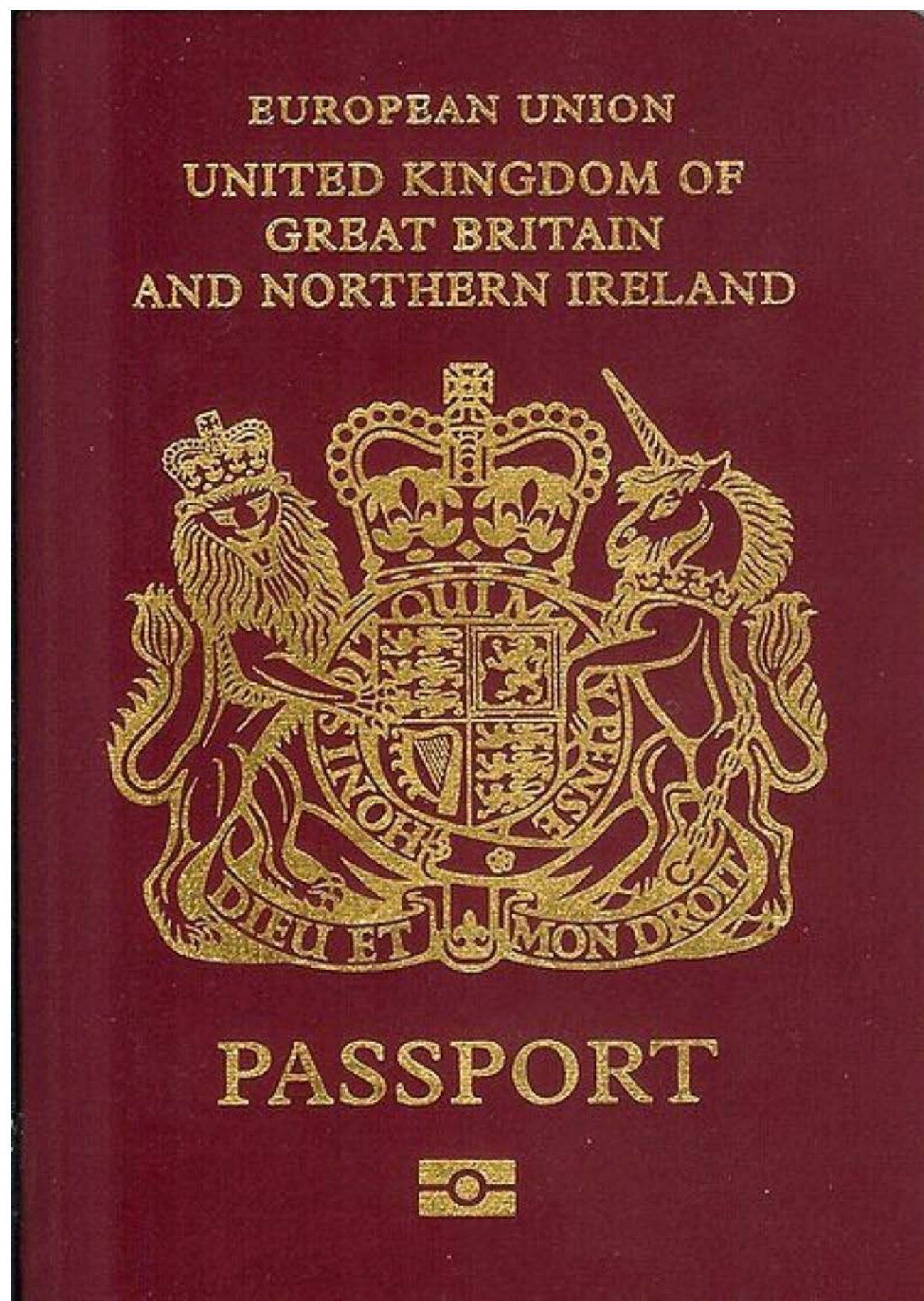


A Mecian fire station

After studying photography and film in Madrid, Juan Sisto worked as a television cameraman making documentaries and travel programs. In 2013 he set off from the tip of South America to pedal north to Alaska. <https://fisterrabicicleta.com>

Alvaro Juan, a professional filmmaker, accompanied sections of the tour and together they are putting together a documentary of the trip called North Horizon. Visit their contribution page www.horizontenorte.es to see their pledge rewards and view spectacular footage from the trip. (Set CC on for English subtitles.)





The Colonel's Trousers

By: Edward Genochio

IT'S THE BEST feeling you get on a bike. The wind is on your back and you're flying down a hard-packed dirt road. You haven't seen a car all day. Your wheels are spitting kilometres out the back, and the world feels good.

Out of nowhere, a car horn blasts me. Russian drivers are generally pretty friendly and like to offer a bit of encouragement to stray cyclists. I glance over my shoulder and see a battered maroon Lada kicking up dust behind me; I think the driver is waving. I wave back, smile, and, since the blood is pumping this morning, kick the pedals a little harder. It is that kind of day - I feel good enough to give a Lada a good run for its money.

I hit thirty, maybe thirty-five kilometres per hour. It feels fast, exhilarating, on my heavily-laden tourer. The steppe blurs on either side as I burn down the middle of the track. The Lada revs harder to keep up, and the driver raps out a rhythm on his horn. I wave over my shoulder and give him the thumbs-up, not looking back.

The engine sound gets closer and soon the car pulls alongside, two wheels up on the grass. The driver hoots and his passenger waves. I smile and wave back, easing over to the right to give him space to get four wheels on the track.

The waving doesn't look quite right. The window comes down and it's definitely more a flagging than a waving; in any case, he's starting to squeeze me up against the right bank. "Tormoziy", the passenger orders me. "Stop."

SOMETHING IS WRONG. We're not racing any more, I don't think. I realise these guys are going to bike-jack me. Better to stop than risk being run off the road at speed: I hit the brakes.

I've got my feet on the ground, straddling my bike, waiting for what's coming and running through in my mind how I'm going to get out of here once I've been relieved of my money, passport, and bike. The passenger gets out of the car, followed by another, taller man, dark and moustachioed, who has been in the back behind tinted windows. The tall man shuffles towards me. His boots seem ill-fitting.

"Federalnaya pogranichnaya sluzhba," he announces, while placing on his head a high-

peaked cap, the sort that goose-stepping guards used to wear as they drilled in Red Square - only his is battered and tatty to match his Lada. He raises his right hand to his forehead and offers me a shaky salute. "Vashy dokumenty, pozhaluysto." Your documents, please.

His cap bears the badge of the FSB, the new name for the KGB - same guys, same caps, different badges. So if this is a robbery, it is an elaborate one. I hand over my passport; he examines it, upside-down, for a while, and looks puzzled.

"IS THERE SOME PROBLEM?" I ask.

"What is your nationality?"

"British."

"How do you mean, British?"

I begin a lengthy explanation of how I, despite having an Italian surname and being born in Belgium, came to have British citizenship.

The Man in the Cap frowns. "Your restricted area pass?"

I do not have one. I have never heard of a restricted area pass. I don't even know that I am in a restricted area. "I have a visa in my passport."

The driver gets out of the car to join his friends in poring over my Russian visa. The visa is printed in Cyrillic, so at least now they can decipher my name.

"Genry," announces the driver.

I nod. This has happened to me in Russia before. Henry is my middle name; it is rendered Genry in Russian, which always surprises me a little since the Russian language has a perfectly serviceable, if slightly guttural, h sound in its armoury. The Russian authorities always seem to pick on my middle name. Perhaps it is easier to pronounce than Genochio.

"Genry," takes up the tall man, who seems to be in charge. "Genry, we will report to our base that you are British. Please wait a moment." He reaches into the car and gets on the radio.

"We have intercepted the man on the bicycle. He claims to be British."

After a pause, a response crackles over the speaker. "Please repeat. He claims to be what?"

"British."

Another pause. "Nonsense. Any documents?"

"Yes, a passport. British."

"This is ridiculous. A British man on a bicycle. Does he think we are stupid? Bring him in."

The tall man turns to me. "Genry. You must follow us. Your documents will be checked at the base."

THE PASSPORT goes into his pocket, and the three get back into the maroon Lada. I clip into my pedals and follow as they u-turn and drive back. Their dust trail gets in my face, so I let them get ahead a little. We're going into the wind now; I curse them loudly for spoiling a perfect day's ride.

Twenty minutes later we turn off the road into a tiny settlement: a handful of wooden cottages and a disproportionate number of telegraph poles. The car pulls up outside a compound - it is surrounded by serious-looking barbed-wire topped fencing - a world apart from the rickety efforts that mark off the vegetable plots around the cottages. The driver leans out of the window and yells. "Open the gates, for heaven's sake. It's us. We've got the British cyclist." The gates are opened by a soldier with a Kalashnikov round his neck. The car drives in and they beckon me to follow.

Half an hour later, I am sitting in the lieutenant's office. He explains the situation. I have entered a restricted border area without a permit and with dubious documentation, and am being held by the Border Troop division of the FSB ("formerly the KGB", he emphasises) on suspicion of illegal entry and possible involvement with contraband, narcotics, espionage or terrorism, until my situation can be clarified. He is courteous and offers me a cup of tea and a biscuit.

"What is the name of the Queen of England?" he asks.

"Elizabeth," I answer, doubting whether that will be enough to secure my immediate release. I think of the inside page of my passport, which is sitting on the lieutenant's desk. Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State Requests and requires in the Name of Her Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance...

I ponder the wisdom of drawing this to the attention of my hosts, and decide against.

Two people are brought into the room. "Do you know these people?" asks the lieutenant. There is a man in a dirty tracksuit, mid-thirties probably, smoking nervously, and a girl, pretty in a Russian peasant kind of way, no older than twenty.

"No. I have never met them."

"Good. They will be our witnesses." The lieutenant passes a piece of paper under their noses, and tells them to sign it.

"Now, let me explain your rights," says the lieutenant, turning to me. "Under the constitution of the Russian Federation, you have the right to remain silent. You have the right not to incriminate yourself or your relatives. You have the right to speak in your own language. An interpreter will be provided by the state if you request one."

"Good," I say, speaking for the first time in English. "Then I will speak in English. Do you understand English?"

"No," says the lieutenant, in Russian.

"Then I wish to exercise my right to an interpreter," I say, in Russian.

"There is a problem. Nobody in this village speaks English." This does not surprise me. "In fact, the nearest English speaker may be several hundred kilometres away. It could take several days to arrange."

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime you will remain here. It might be more convenient to proceed in Russian." A white cat slinks into the office. "Cat," says the lieutenant, in English, and smiles. "Do you insist on your right to an interpreter?"

"Let's start in Russian and see how we get on."

"Good. First we must examine your personal belongings. Then our interrogator will question you in detail."

THE EXAMINATION of personal belongings began. It was about four in the afternoon. It was still underway at three the next morning, when the witnesses, who had been hauled in off the street to see fair play, were finally allowed to go home. We began with pockets, then moved on to my handlebar bag. Panniers came last.

The money part was embarrassing. I was

HE WAS OFFICIOUS, PETTY, AND A CREEP, *AND WOULD HAVE MADE THE PERFECT GULAG SADIST IN DARKER DAYS.*

a couple of months into a 10-month ride, and was carrying a lot of cash. I had to count it all out in front of the witnesses, who had probably never seen a dollar bill, let alone a wad of 1,237 US dollars. I expect it was worth more than they earned in a year in a depressed-looking hamlet like this. The lieutenant wrote 1,237 US dollars down on his form.

Cycling through Europe on the way to Russia, I had accumulated a wallet-full of odds-and-ends from a dozen currencies. 840 Serbian dinars, I counted out, hoping that the witnesses would realise that this really was small change, not another foreign-currency fortune. 24 Hungarian forints. 10 Moldovan bani. A quantity of Ukrainian currency whose name I had forgotten. Each passing currency seemed to deepen their suspicions about me.

Credit cards were next. A couple of bank cards were easy enough to explain, and I think a long-since-expired "Young Person's Railcard" didn't raise too many eyebrows, but I came unstuck on a Youth Hostel Association membership card. I think it was the "Association" part he didn't like. It sounded faintly secretive, conspiratorial, underground.

When all my valuables were accounted for and neatly listed on the lieutenant's form, I was asked to sign my name at the bottom, confirming that this was a true and complete statement of all the money I had in my possession. I signed, sat down again, and noticed I still had something in a back pocket. It turned out to be a one-forint coin, a souvenir from Hungary.

"WHAT IS THAT?" asked the lieutenant.

"It is a one-forint coin. A souvenir from Hungary."

"Why did you not declare it earlier?"

"I'm sorry, I forgot about it. It was in my back pocket."

"You declared 24 forints. In fact you had 25. We must start again."

"Can't you just change the 24 to a 25 on your list?"

"Impossible. Crossings-out are not allowed. People will suspect something improper. We

must re-write the whole list from scratch."

"But that's ridiculous, it's only a forint, it's scarcely worth a kopek. It's only a souvenir. Here, look, I'll give it to you as a present, keep it, it will save you having to re-write the list."

The lieutenant looked gravely at the witnesses, and then at me. "Genry, I should remind you that bribery is considered a very serious matter in Russia. We will begin the list from scratch."

So he wrote out the list again, this time with 1,237 dollars, 840 dinars, 10 bani, and 25 Hungarian forints to my name.

"We will now go outside, and examine your other belongings."

The kit-check was, shall we say, thorough. It threw up a few surprises for me: I found things buried at the bottom of my panniers that I had quite forgotten about, untouched in two months on the road - an indication, if nothing else, that I had not yet perfected the art of travelling light. Watched by the witnesses, the lieutenant, the interrogator (who was warming up for the grilling I was due once the inventory-taking was over), and the bored soldier with the Kalashnikov, I went through my belongings, pannier by pannier, and item by item. The blond interrogator wrote them all down on his list.

I found a pack of envelopes in my stationery bag. "Envelopes," I declared.

"How many?" snarled the interrogator. The lieutenant had courtesy and had betrayed an occasional hint that he realised the absurdity of the whole process. The interrogator had neither of these charms.

I counted my envelopes. There were 22. "Twenty-two," I said.

"Are you sure? Count them again," said the blond man.

I counted again. 23 this time. "Oh, I'm sorry, twenty-three."

"Twenty-two or twenty-three? We must be precise. Count them again!"

It came to 23 again, so I settled on that. The interrogator read out as he wrote down: "White paper envelopes, 23, in cellophane wrapper."

Next up was an orange plastic groundsheet.

The interrogator wanted to know its dimensions, and what kind of plastic it was made of. I said I didn't know, and made him unfold it for himself if he really wanted to know. He was officious, petty, and a creep, and would have made the perfect gulag sadist in darker days.

It was now dark, a clear starry night that was becoming cold. The male witness chain smoked. The girl started to shiver in her little summer dress. The lieutenant ordered the soldier to fetch her a coat from inside the guard-house.

I had a stack of business cards from various contacts. The interrogator wrote down: "Business cards, various. To be examined in detail later".

Next out of the pannier (it was like playing lucky dip) was a fork. "A fork," I said, placing it on the growing pile of stuff on the table, confident that this would be a non-controversial item.

The soldier came out of the guard-house just in time. Draping an oversized military greatcoat over the girl's shoulders with exaggerated gentility, he looked at my fork and sneered, in perfect imitation of the interrogator, "How many prongs?"

THE WITNESSES laughed. I laughed. The lieutenant allowed himself a smile. The interrogator sat stony-faced and tried to salvage his dignity by pretending it hadn't been a joke at his expense. "Well, answer him! How many prongs?"

"Four," I told him, straight-faced, so he wrote down "Fork, metal-type, with prongs, four."

After several hours' hard work, the interrogator had perhaps the most complete listing of a cyclist's baggage ever produced. I asked him for a copy, thinking it might make a useful planning check-list for other cyclists. He told me that this investigation was not being conducted for my benefit, and that the personal interrogation would now begin.

I was taken into the guard-house and shown into his office. He had things set up properly. A bare light-bulb hung from the ceiling. He sat behind a bare desk on a big chair. I was sat in front on a little stool.

He wanted to know where I was born, what

school I had attended, what subjects I had studied, what grades I had obtained, where I had worked, and the names of my employers. He wanted a list of every country I had ever visited, with dates. Everything went into his little black notebook. He wanted to know where my father was born, in what year, on what date, and where he had been to school, and what jobs he had done. He wanted to know why I was riding my bicycle along the Russian-Kazakh border - ah, a sensible question at last - and who was paying for my trip and where had I obtained my visa and whether I had been to Russia before and if so where and when and whom I had met. He wanted a country-by-country account of my bike ride so far. The lieutenant came in to observe. I told the interrogator that I had come through Moldova.

"Where is Moldova?" he asked, about a country that had, a dozen years before, been part of the Soviet Union. I told him that it was between Ukraine and Romania.

"So it is part of Russia, then," he said.

The lieutenant intervened. "Moldova is an independent republic. You should know that. I have been on the radio with the colonel. He has instructed that we allow Mr Genry a few hours' sleep. The colonel will come down from headquarters to continue the interrogation in person in the morning."

This came as a relief; it was already 3 a.m. I was particularly pleased when the lieutenant assigned the comfortable sofa at the back of the interrogator's office to me, to the obvious annoyance of the interrogator. A soldier brought me a set of clean, freshly-starched military bedding.

THE COLONEL arrived in the morning, demanding breakfast. He had been driven several hundred kilometres through the night on rough roads to get there, accompanied by his driver and an oleaginous side-kick whose job was to laugh at his jokes and to play the straight-man while the colonel did the funny lines in set-piece routines.

An ethnic Tajik but a Russian nationalist, the colonel was, above all, hungry. He preferred

gestures and sound-effects over conventional language, and used them to reel off a string of anecdotes at which everybody present, all subordinate to him, felt obliged to laugh - led, of course, by the greasy side-kick.

The colonel invited me to join him for breakfast. The lieutenant chivvied various orderlies to knock together a platter of cheese, salami, cakes and bread, but only the colonel seemed interested in eating. I didn't feel too guilty about tucking in either. It wasn't as though I had invited myself in.

THE COLONEL sized up the situation pretty quickly. "So, you are an English gentleman. Riding your bicycle across Russia. This is interesting, really very interesting. Tell me, Genry, do you know the films of James Bond, the famous British secret agent?"

I nodded.

"Well," the colonel went on in Russian, uncharacteristically free of wild gesturing and guttural sound-effects. "My friend and I" - he indicated his side-kick - "were giving the matter some thought during our long journey to investigate your case here. And we have reached the conclusion" - he paused for dramatic effect - "we have reached the conclusion that in none of the James Bond films does the hero use a bicycle as his preferred means of getting about. We therefore think it unlikely that you are a British spy. Besides, I received my counter-terrorism training from a British officer on secondment to Moscow, and he did not ride a bicycle either."

The side-kick smiled. The colonel turned to the lieutenant. "Lieutenant, your interrogator tells me that he is not convinced by Mr Genry's story. What is your opinion? Have you seen the James Bond films?"

"Yes," said the lieutenant, adding, "Ya Bond - Djeymz Bond", quoting the secret agent's Russianised catchphrase to back up his claim.

"And do you believe that our foreign guest here is also a secret agent? Perhaps his real name is also Bond - Genry Bond?" The colonel was smiling.

"No, I think perhaps not."

"I am inclined to agree with you. However, we must ensure that both the sheep and the

wolves are satisfied." He turned back to me. "Genry, in Tajikistan, we like to keep both the sheep and the wolves satisfied. In this case, you are the sheep and we are the wolves. For our part" - his face became serious - "we should reprimand you. You were apprehended while riding your bicycle in a restricted zone near the very sensitive border between Russia and Kazakhstan. Entering this zone without a permit is an offence under the criminal code of the Russian Federation, and is punishable by a fine of not more than 5,000 roubles or imprisonment for two weeks. Do you understand the gravity of your offence?"

"I am sorry if I unwittingly broke the law," I replied.

"Good. Now, I am reprimanding you for what you have done. That is to satisfy the wolves. However, I believe that in your case your crime does not warrant further punishment. You will not be required to pay the fine or go to prison. That is to satisfy the sheep - in other words, you. Shall we have some more breakfast?"

THE BLOND INTERROGATOR, who had been sulking at the back of the room, sensed he was about to lose his quarry. "Colonel, I have not yet had the opportunity to examine in detail the collection of business cards which were found among the suspect's possessions," he whined.

"I think that can wait until after breakfast," replied the colonel, who proceeded to polish off the last of the biscuits as he launched into a story about the time he was serving in Kamchatka. It was a clearly a familiar story to the side-kick, who knew in advance when the laugh-points were coming. The colonel was giving an explicit account of his sexual performances with the local maidens, using graphic gestures rather than words, banging his fist into his palm with mounting enthusiasm. His tea-mug was half-way to his lips when he reached a crucial climax in the story. The fist came down, the mug came down, and, as hot tea sloshed over him and his audience, his mug flew across the table, cracking a plate and sending a shower of salami onto the floor.

The side-kick, the lieutenant, the interrogator

scurried to mop up and restore order to the breakfast table, but the colonel didn't seem at all put out, continuing his story unperturbed as hot tea dripped into his crotch. He paused to examine a slice of salami which had landed near his shoe, and decided it was too dirty for human consumption.

"Zdes yest sobaka?" he asked, waving the salami vaguely: Do you keep a dog here?

Then, suddenly, a long-forgotten English lesson must have leapt from his memory. "Dog!" he exclaimed, in English, beaming at me.

"Nyet," replied the lieutenant. "Yest kosha. Cat."

THE LIEUTENANT smiled nervously, perhaps aware that his insertion of the English word "cat" looked like an attempt to up-stage the colonel's "dog" - perilously close to insubordination.

"Fifteen all," I said. A Siberian girl had just won Wimbledon - I hoped a spot of tennis would diffuse the tension.

The colonel didn't seem to mind. He gestured to the interrogator to go and feed the salami to the cat, and resumed his breakfast.

"Do you want to know how I knew you were not a spy?" the colonel asked, munching on slab of bread and cheese. "I will tell you. It wasn't just the bicycle. MI-5" - he pronounced it mee-5 - "give their agents decent trousers." He pointed to where my trousers ought to have been. I had forgotten that the morning before my arrest I had split my trousers while bending down to pack up my tent. The split must have widened as I pedalled my bike, because now, I discovered, they were completely open from crotch to knee. I had been interrogated by the KGB with my underpants blowing in the wind.

"I will make a deal with you. Unfortunately I cannot permit you to continue riding on this road. But your trouser situation is very bad. Ride back the way you came, and turn right when you reach the main road. In two or three days you will reach our headquarters. You can't miss it. It's behind a kebab shop. Call in there and ask for me personally."

The colonel finished his breakfast; the lieutenant gave me more forms to sign, confirming

that everything had been done by the book, that I confessed my crime and accepted my reprimand; the interrogator brooded in his office, sharpening pencils with a pocket-knife. Twenty-four hours after I had been picked up, I was free to go. In the dusty compound courtyard was a concrete pillar inscribed with an outline map of the country and the Border Guards' motto: The Borders of Russia are Sacred and Inviolable. They let me pose for a photo in front of this totem, but, on grounds of national security, wouldn't pose themselves. Everybody (apart from the interrogator) wished me schastlivovo puti - bon voyage. The soldier with the Kalashnikov told me to take good care of my four-pronged fork.

A couple of days later, around noon, I found the colonel's kebab shop and, round the back, the FSB headquarters. The sentry told me the colonel had just gone out for lunch. I sensed I was in for a long wait. At half-past four the colonel's jeep returned. The burly Tajik strode out, holding his belly, followed by his side-kick. "Ah yes, Genry. We were expecting you," he said, passing me a neatly-folded FSB Border Guards uniform. "Here, try these on."

I lugged on the jacket. It had a sleeve badge bearing the Border Guards' insignia. It was a perfect fit, but the beltless trousers were a little slack around my waist. The colonel thought for a moment, then pulled the belt from his own trousers and handed it to me. "Don't worry, my trousers will stay up," he said, patting his belly. "I've had a good lunch. Oh, and just keep that uniform on at all times, and you shouldn't have any more hassle from the authorities in Russia."

I pedalled off towards the Urals, with the wind on my back. **BT**

Edward Genochio rode from England to China and back again. Read more about his trip at: www.2wheels.org.uk.

This story originally appeared in the first edition of the Adventure Cycle Touring Handbook. Since then an updated third edition of ACTH has been published. For more information see: <http://adventurecycle-touringhandbook.com>









Image from the Road: **AUSTRALIA**

BY: ALEXANDRE GENDRON <http://pixnbike.com>

GEAR REVIEW

Gloves

By: **CLAIRE MASON**

I have a pair of the ladies winter cycle gloves and André has the men's extra cold winter gloves. Of all the items I received from Seal-skinz these gloves are my favourite, I don't have a bad word to say about them.

Every time I have worn my gloves I have been impressed by how comfy they are, how incredibly warm and the fact they are completely waterproof. They transform my cycling experience in the cold and wet from a miserable one, to one that is much more bearable!

The gloves have a thermal rating of 4 out of 5, whereas André's have a thermal rating of 5. Seal-skinz state that thermal ratings of both 4 and 5 are 'for those times when you expose yourself to extremes in temperature and push yourself to the limit'. Cycling in the mountains of Turkey was certainly pretty cold but I am not sure we have hit sub-zero temperatures yet so the gloves may not have been tested to their limits, however, we have yet to have even slightly cold or damp hands whilst wearing these gloves.

Both pairs of gloves have a fleece-lined interior, which makes them very soft and comfortable to wear. They also both have gel padding on the palms to increase grip and comfort, which is great when on the handlebars all day. André's winter gloves don't have as much gel padding as mine. In addition, my gloves have a textured thumb and forefinger so that you can use a touch screen whilst wearing the gloves; this is a very valuable feature as we use our iPhones a lot for navigating whilst cycling and I appreciate not having to remove my gloves every time I use the phone. André's gloves don't have this feature and it is something he is very jealous of. And finally my gloves also have a patch of fleece/towel material on the back of



the thumb, this is perfectly positioned for wiping water out of your eyes, or off your face, or actually what it is used mostly for is wiping my dripping nose as I am descending down a mountain! André's biggest complaint about his gloves is that his fleece wiping section is smaller and is not the entire length of the back of the thumb and that the material is not towel/fleece like but rather like a travel towel and made of microfibre instead which isn't as good at wiping!

To summarise, we feel the winter gloves are the better option and a little bit cheaper than the extra cold winter gloves, they are excellent value for money. We have yet to test out the gloves in sub-zero temperatures so are aware that this might be where the extra winter gloves really come into their own. However, for attention to detail we prefer the winter ones and would highly recommend them to anyone spending lots of time in the great outdoors. **BT**

Claire Mason and André Siwek are cyclists who enjoy travelling to new places. In an attempt to combine these two interests, they decided to embark on a cycling adventure. www.puncturesandpanniers.com

GEAR REVIEW

Multibar

By: ALIA PARKER



I'll come straight out with it—they look like Micky Mouse ears. I don't think I'll ever get used to the awkward aesthetics, especially paired with the elegance of a hand-made Geoff Scott Clamont touring frame. But once the panniers are loaded, they start to look more at home. The BBB Multibar handlebar is specifically designed for bicycle trekking, and at the end of the day, I need a handlebar that is going to do the job. I used the BBB Multibar on my recent ride – 11,300km up through the centre of Australia and then down the entire Great Dividing Range – on which I needed good control and comfort on all types of road surfaces, predominantly sealed, a good deal of gravel and in some sections, rough rocky surfaces and sand.

HANDLEBAR OPTIONS

There are three common handlebar types used for cycle touring. The most common is the traditional drop bar, which offers a number of hand positions and the ability to get down low. Second is the flat bar, which is great for off-road control but limited in hand position options (although this can be improved by adding bar ends). And third would be the Multibar, also known as the butterfly bar or trekking bar. A fourth option, which is becoming quite popular with bikepackers, is Salsa's Wood Chipper, a shallow drop bar with drops that angle outward, providing not only an ergonomic hand position, but also a wider grip for off-road performance; pretty cool.

WHY DID I CHOOSE THIS BAR?

The key thing I was looking for in a handlebar for touring was comfort, and for me that meant plenty of hand positions. I also needed some-

thing that was compatible with hydraulic disc brake levers. The development of drop-bar levers that are compatible with hydraulics is only a new thing and it is understandably focused on the road racing market, so we're talking 11-speed and electronic shifting. I was running a 10-speed XT for this ride, so drop bars and Wood Chippers were out of the question.

However, not having drops was not a bad thing – the Multibar allows for a more upright riding position, similar to a flat bar, meaning improved comfort over many hours.

I wasn't keen to get a flat bar as I once lost the feeling in two of my fingers for six weeks due to handlebar palsy from mountain bike touring for four months with a flat bar – this was primarily as a result of not having enough hand positions. So a Multibar it was.

THE SET UP

I mounted my Multibar on a 110mm stem. That's 30mm longer than what I would have used in a drop bar fit. The reason I chose a longer stem is that the flat section of the Multibar – the part where it is possible to mount the brakes – curves back toward the rider, coming in closer than what a flat bar or drop bar would. So the longer stem was to avoid sitting too upright like on a town bike. Even so, it was still a little more upright than I like.

I angled the Multibar a few degrees upwards to make the reach to the side and front sections comfortable.

To add more comfort, I wrapped it in double bar tape, which felt really nice and easy on the hands. BBB makes a foam grip that fits the Multibar, but I haven't used this to judge whether I like it or not.

WHAT I LIKED

So after 11,300km, was I happy with my choice? Predominantly, yes – I certainly made use of all the available hand positions, and most importantly, I didn't suffer a recurrence of handlebar palsy or neck pain. Being able to move my hands around also affected my overall comfort on the bike as riding more forward or back on the bar would change up the angle of my body – so it was nice to be able to move around a little on long days.

The most comfortable position to ride in for me by far was with my hands up the side of the bar (I didn't feel so upright and the outward rotation of the arms and wrists felt nice) and it was also a great position to be in when getting up out of the saddle to charge up a hill as it was ideal for pulling the heavy load around. The bar is 57cm wide, which helped with control on dirt roads as I could get a nice wide grip.

I used the top curve of the bar the least, but valued it on very steep climbs when it was the natural place to grab and pull back on.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There were a few little things that weren't ideal, but not to the extent that they completely outweighed the positives.

The gears and brake levers are mounted on the lower straight section of the bar. When cruising along with my hands at the side, I wasn't bothered in the slightest about having to move my hands to change gears or brake. However, on steep descents – when I would need to keep my hands over the brakes – the ride would feel a little awkward as my hands were kind of tucked up under my chest and close together. I got used to it eventually, but it's not the ideal downhill position.

I also found my hands got a little uncomfortable when riding on the straight section, which is significant given that's where the gears and brakes are. As you will notice, this section is dead straight, which is not at all ergonomic and results in the wrists unnaturally twisting sideways a little to grip the bar.

If I had to suggest one way in which the ergonomics of the Multibar could be improved, it would be to have this straight section of the bar

angle ever so slightly toward the rider, reducing the twist in the wrist. This is particularly important as the gear and brake levers are mounted closer together than what they normally would be on a flat bar.

The other suggestion would be to produce the bar in different sizes as it is currently only available in one. For me, the 57cm width was a little wider than I would normally need and while I mentioned the extra width was nice on the dirt, I would have easily given up an inch in most other circumstances.

BOTTOM LINE

Overall, the Multibar is a good option for bicycle touring. It is particularly well suited to those who like a comfortable and more upright riding position with plenty of places to move your hands around the bar. It is well suited to active rides on and off-road, and is easy to grip and control a bike fully loaded with front and rear panniers.

At the same time, I wouldn't describe it as the perfect handlebar either. For many, the ride may feel too upright (and there were plenty of times I would have appreciated a drop) and it's not the most comfortable on descents.

Would I use it again? Yes, it did the job well. However, for my personal style of riding, I would ideally lean toward the Salsa Wood Chippers if component makers were to start to manufacture an STI lever that was compatible with hydraulic disc brakes and 10-speed gearing (although, I doubt there's enough demand for that). Of course, I could always go back to mechanical disc brakes, and that would open the way to using drop bars. We shall see.

SPECS

- 6061 T6 aluminum.
- Width: 57 cm.
- Bar centre diameter: 25.4 mm or 31.8 mm
- Colors: matt black, polished silver (25.4 mm diameter only) **BT**

Alia Parker's site www.cycletraveller.com.au is the cycle touring portal for Australia. It contains ride guides, reviews and other information to help you plan your route down under.

Alee Denham

Alee is a bike, gear and travel nerd. Earlier this year he decided to test how much weight and aerodynamics affect a touring cyclist's speed.

Question: Why did you conduct the weight tests?

I felt that the effects of weight were blown out of proportion. Some people spend huge amounts of money on lightweight bikes and gear with the idea that it will make their tours easier or faster. Some people even leave gear at home that can significantly improve the comfort of their bike trip.

The idea behind my testing is to quantify weight into time. That way we can be more rational about our gear choices!

When you spend that US \$200 to shave 1000g off your setup it seems like you're saving a lot, right? But consider this: 1000g makes up less than 1.0% of your total weight (75kg rider, 25-60kg bike+gear+food+water). Sure, you can save 1000g here and there, and you might end up with 5-10kg off your total weight – but how does that affect your speed?

A 100km flat ride with zero metres climbing:

Carrying extra weight on a flat ride has a minimal effect on time. One kilogram adds just seconds to the ride, and even if you're carrying 30kg extra, it's just 5 minutes extra to your day with the same energy output.

A 100km mountainous ride with 2000 metres climbing:

That US \$200 that you spent to save 1000g off your gear is now giving you 1.5 minutes extra rest at the end of the day. As your load goes up, you're adding about 15 minutes per 10kg of extra gear with the same energy output



Question: So is weight as significant as we think?

A little bit of extra weight isn't that significant in terms of time. For me, carrying 10kg extra (adding between 1 and 15 minutes to my day over 100km) so that I can have a nice cooking setup, a solid tent, a few spares, a laptop and some nice camera gear is completely justified, as long as I know I'll be regularly using them. Heck, you'd be crazy not to bring something that makes you comfortable (a full-sized camping mat, a pillow, a coffee maker) if it only weighs a few hundred grams and adds just a minute to your daily ride.

Plus the flatter your tour route, the less weight matters. This seems obvious, but if your ride is completely flat, you can go pretty nuts with what you bring because it only adds a handful of minutes to your day.

The places where weight does make a big

difference are on sandy routes, steep climbs and mountain passes.

Read the complete weight test results [here](#) and [here](#).

Question: And the aerodynamic tests?

After the weight tests I got to thinking about aerodynamics and wondered how significant of a role it played.

So I conducted more tests comparing different setups (bikepacking bags and 3 different pannier configurations) to find out how they compared.

It turned out that aerodynamics have a significant impact on your speed, especially when compared to weight. On my hilly test course when carrying 20 extra kilograms it worked out to be 18 minutes slower over 100km. To put that into perspective, that time difference is essentially the same as the difference between bikepacking bags or four panniers with equal weight (17 minutes). That's a lot!

Read the complete aerodynamic test results [here](#).

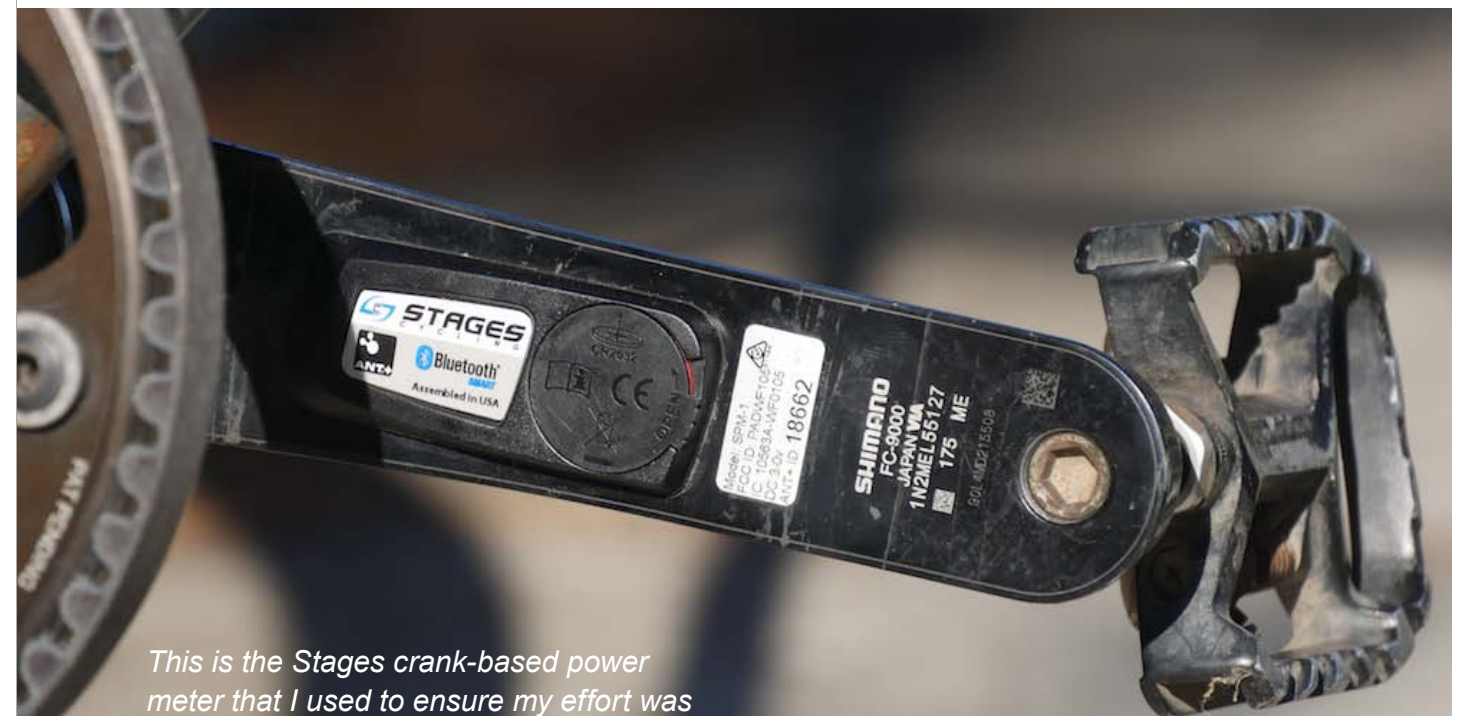
Question: Tom Allen wrote in the comments section "does speed really matter on a tour?"

Speed is as important as you make it. Using the same physical effort, you can haul a heavy load a shorter distance, or a lighter load a longer distance. If you have limited time and want to cover a lot of distance, optimising your setup to be aerodynamic and lightweight will make each day quicker and shorter.

Personally, I tailor my gear setup for every bike trip. If the trip is all about the cycling experience, I'll try and make my setup lightweight and fast so I can see more in a day. If it's about the camping experience I'll take four panniers, lots of food and many of my camp comforts. If I'm cycling off-road, I'll take bikepacking bags because they make the bike narrower, handle better and increase clearance from the ground. If I'm in a region where accommodation and food services are frequent, I'll pack light because I can.

There are so many different scenarios to contend with, so my best advice is to pack accordingly. **BT**

Not only has Alee Denham pedalled from the Netherlands to Australia, he has also written two guidebooks; 'Bicycle Touring in one hour' and 'The 2016 Touring Bicycle Buyer's Guide'. Check them out at www.cyclingabout.com.



This is the Stages crank-based power meter that I used to ensure my effort was consistent between all of my testing.



Hati - Hati

Text & photo: STANI MARTINKOVA

HOW OFTEN do you get told “Be careful” just as you’re about to hit the road?

Am I the only person who finds this irritating? Yes, I did say irritating. Before you start thinking how ungrateful I am, let me explain.

After more than 3 decades of hearing this (well I have been bike touring for 30 years now and was a bike commuter in London 3 years prior to that!), I can’t help but find it rather vexatious. I’m tempted to start ranting “it’s NOT ME THAT NEEDS TO BE CAREFUL but the

idiots in the cars around me!” but I just grit my teeth and smile at the well wisher. Let’s be fair though, it’s always non-cyclists who utter such farewells.

Funnily enough the Indonesian expression of “Hati – Hati” (literally translated as “Liver-Liver” but actually means “Take Care”) never incited that reaction. We love the saying and it’s joined the list of foreign words we now use in place of their English equivalents. Admittedly, we were a bit freaked out at first when

Indonesians we’d meet on the road would try to translate it into English and advise us to “Be Careful” - of what, we’d wonder? Had we done something to offend them and this was some kind of Mafia threat? I suspect we left a trail of confused Indonesians behind us when we’d respond with “what of?” or “why?” before we figured out what they actually meant to say.

So imagine how elated I felt when I first heard the line “Be Carefree - Be Mad - Be a little bit bad. It’s the unknown around the corner that

turns my wheel” The expression sang to my soul. That expression defines how I want to live my life.

Of course it couldn’t have been anyone else’s catch phrase but the touring cyclists’ guru Heinz Stucke. **BT**

In 1996 “The Velomads”, Richard Fergé and Stani Martinkova pedalled off from Alaska to take on the globe and campaign for the environment. www.facebook.com/Velomads

Principum

amicitias!

Shakespeare Cycled

By: STANI MARTINKOVA

The playwright loved pedalling. If you have any doubts, just refer to his works. You'll find them sprinkled with cycling references.

Declaration of love for his bike:

I would not wish any companion in the world but you

– *The Tempest*, Act 3, Scene 1

No leave take I; for I will ride, as far as land will let me, by your side.

– *Richard II* Act I, Scene 3

Equipment worries:

A merry heart goes all the day, your sad tires in a mile-a.

– *Winter's Tale* Act IV Scene 3

On sharing the road with car drivers:

This cuff was but to knock at your car and beseech list'ning.

– *Taming of the Shrew* Act IV, Scene 1

Advice for jumping red lights when the police are around:

Stir not until the signal.

- *Julius Caesar* Act V, Scene 1

Advice for Jumping Red Lights when they're not:

Lo, where it comes again! I'll cross it, though it blast me.

– *Hamlet* Act I, Scene 1

On the need for security:

You shall not now be stol'n, you have locks upon you

– *Cymbeline* Act V, Scene 4

Infertility in men or leg pedal injury:

For 'tis the sport to have the engineer hoist with his own petard

– *Hamlet* Act III, Scene 4

Cyclists arriving at the pub:

...do you look for ale and cakes here, you rude rascals?

– *Henry VIII* Act V, Scene 4

On overambitious touring itineraries:

...thou and I have thirty miles to ride yet ere dinner time

– *Henry IV Part 1*, Act III Scene 3

On bad roads:

The course of true love never did run smooth"

– *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 1, Scene 2

Be warned by me, then: they that ride so and ride not warily, fall into foul bogs – *Henry V*, Act III, Scene 7

Seeking companions:

Ride you this afternoon?

– *Macbeth*, Act III Scene 1

At the bike shop:

Will this gear ne'er be mended?

– *Troilus and Cressida* Act I, Scene 1

'll provide you a chain; and I'll do what I can to get you a pair of horns.

– *Merry Wives of Windsor* Act V, Scene 1

Lights, lights, lights!

– *Hamlet* Act III, Scene 2 **BT**

In 1996 "The Velomads", Richard Fergé and Stani Martinkova pedalled off from Alaska to take on the globe and campaign for the environment. www.facebook.com/Velomads







The battle of ice and snow
in the land of spicy contrasts
By: SARAH WEBB

奋力夺取灾后重建



Photos: SCOTT DANIEL-GUITERREZ



THE FLASHING blue and red lights of the police car fill my groggy brain as I follow it through the neon-lit streets of a Chinese city. I'm tired, cold and still in shock at what can only be described as one hell of a day – or one hell of a week – and I've got a nagging suspicion the fun isn't over.

Here, in the depths of the far western Xinjiang province, tourist movements are tightly controlled by the ever paranoid government making everything from hotel stays to wild camping a challenge. And we've just learned the hard way about what happens to those stupid enough to "cheat" the system.

Already Almaty, Kazakhstan, feels like a life time ago, but in reality it's been nine days since we pedalled out of the cosmopolitan hub as a team of four. Having met Jonathan, a young British cyclist with a big personality, in Osh and then again

in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) we decided to continue the journey east to the Chinese city of Urumqi together with our French companion Bertrand.

Fellow travellers had warned of the cold weather set to sweep the nation but we shoved our fears aside and pushed into the underwhelming and barren wilderness along the A351 to China via the optimistically touted "Grand Canyon of Kazakhstan".

We'd clocked 75km out Almaty when we pitched our tents in a sheltered field and while we were a new group of four it didn't take long to swing into a rhythm of pasta dinners, fart jokes and whinging about the weather.

THE COLD cranked up a notch the following day and as the small and frequent villages disappeared in lieu of wide, open plains framed by snow capped mountains the wind began to bite.

By late afternoon we found a hidden field to pitch and escape the looming grey storm clouds (as well as the cold) just beyond dark, while shivering in my sleeping bag, the rain began to pound with gusto. I remembered the bleak predictions of snow – but what we got was so much more.

The wind revved up into gale force through the night forcing the tent to buck and sway in the torrential rain. I wondered if our little "three season" house would make it or if we'd wake to water views but just after 4am it wasn't water that came gushing in.

THE DELUGE had long turned into a snow storm and huge white banks of the stuff had banked up against the tent and been swept in by the howling wind.

By morning it had found its way into the

inner layer and I woke to misty icicles raining down on my face.

Outside the barren landscape had turned into a winter wonderland with almost a foot of snow surrounding our tents and more to come.

It was after 8am when the intense storm died down enough for us to emerge (Jonathan's poor little "one man" had fared the worse and looked a few flakes off caving in) and it was after 9am that we set off, cold wet and hungry. Our bikes had all but frozen (including the gear and brake cables) making cycling a dangerous venture and our tents were icy inside and out.

With the use of one spin gear I pedalled on grumpily behind the others and half an hour later a roadside cafe came into view. I could have kissed its snowy steps out of sheer relief but instead decided to bolt inside in my wet gear to the alarm of the waitress.

Just like every crumbling cafe in Central Asia the menu didn't extend beyond gristly "lagman" and chai but today it might as well have been an Italian feast.

By 5pm we'd covered 40km along a cold, open plateau and so camped behind the only protection available, a snowy mound.

THE TEMPERATURE plummeted to around -10 and dinner was scoffed down in record time before we dove into our still frozen tents.

To ensure last night's fiasco wasn't repeated I brought my water inside while stuffing extra clothes into my sleeping bag but by 7am it was clear the elements had won.

My bottle was frozen and the tent resembled a rather feeble igloo. Outside our bikes (carefully placed under the tarp) were again frozen with long icicles hanging off the cables and cassette.

We had little choice but to melt the nearby snow for our morning coffees and porridge and later gaped in wonder as the dregs of our coffee froze within 30 minutes.

The foul weather had forced us to reconsider the canyon detour and we instead set our sites on China.

Just under 200km lay between us and what felt like the final far east country and after almost three tough months in Central Asia it couldn't come quick enough.

We pumped the pedals for 60km until we reached the rustic town of Shonzhay and after stopping almost every person we met for directions we found ourselves outside of a run-down looking hotel.

We were expecting (and frankly didn't care) a rat den but inside the warm and cosy establishment offered clean rooms and a hot shower for the bargain price of \$5 each. We decorated our little room with our sopping clothes and tent and then ventured out for more of Central Asia's finest cuisine – chewy mutton, rice and a suggestion of vegetables.

A warm bed inside is a hard thing to let go of and so in a desperate attempt to continue this

luxurious trend we pumped out 90km to the next and last real city of Kazakhstan before the border.

It was near dusk when we rocked up to the first hotel (parked over a karaoke bar) and despite the enchanting decor of cheesy Central Asian disco and mouldy, peeling wallpaper we dove in (later falling asleep to the pitter patter of rats running inside the walls).

There was just 40km left to the border the next day but rumours of over vigilant Chinese police inspired us to pedal just a half day to within a stone's throw and tackle the crossing the following. Fellow bikers had warned of having their luggage completely torn apart during searches (not to mention ruthless checks of all electronic devices) and so we used the extra time to delete all our porn (just kidding) and make sure we had no "China unfriendly" books or medication in our kit.

In the end we cycled just 20km until we'd reached a sandy camp spot behind an abandoned building which turned out to be a rather underwhelming final camp spot for Central Asia.

OUR NERVES and emotions were at an all time high the following morning and while we knew much of western China would be similar to what we were leaving it felt like a major milestone.

Just 16 months ago Scott and I had pedalled out of a northern Scottish town with the wide-eyed look of two naive travellers and had undergone some pretty bloody steep learning curves since. We'd come close to breaking point, been bowled over by the weird, the wonderful and the fabulous and learned what already felt like a life time of lessons.

The lesson we'd failed to remember however, was to always expect the unexpected.

China's border crossing turned out to be a seamless and downright pleasant experience as we hauled our bikes through the empty yet highly efficient building. Smiles and greetings from the crisp and well trained employees followed us through a mere x-ray of our bags and soon we were out the other side into another world.

Central Asia had not just evaporated in the space of a few kilometres, it was a whole universe away.

G**LEAMING HIGH RISES** and flashing, talking billboards lined the immaculate and wide highway into the border town of Khorgos while Chinese letters glittered from every wall. On the other side there'd been a few rusty shacks and some mangy dogs.

Smiling drivers in flashy four-wheel drives leaned out of their cars to take snaps of us on their smart phones while rumbling tuk-tuks belching grey smoke hurtled along the highway shoulder.

I was in complete culture shock while grinning from ear to ear and by early afternoon we'd found a posh restaurant to enjoy our first Chinese buffet.

The waitress brought out a new iPad on which we were to place our order and soon after we were tucking into steaming dishes of chicken, pork, tofu and fried dumplings accompanied by bottomless cups of tea. Words can't describe the pleasure of eating such an array of flavours and vegetables after so much deprivation.

By the time we'd finished it was late afternoon (owing to the fact that we'd lost two hours converting to Beijing time) and I was reluctant to move. An enormous saddle sore in a place I'd rather not mention had me walking and cycling like John Wayne and I was determined to sleep indoors.

What we hadn't counted on however, was the difficulty in doing just that.

China is paranoid at the best of times but since riots rocked the Xinjiang province a couple of years ago the police had all but shut it down to foreigners.

Hotels had been stripped of their "tourist" license, meaning just a select couple of (generally five star places) retained the right to house foreigners.

We were told a firm no at the first couple of establishments we ventured into and afterwards

gave it up for a lost cause and pedalled out of the city.

But the city came with us. High-rises gave way to run down shanties in a stark juxtaposition and by dusk we wondered if we'd find a free patch of dirt to pitch, let alone something hidden.

In the end we begged help off a few startled looking apple farmers who laughed and then pointed us to a nearby house.

We wheeled our bikes into the yard but a man and woman quickly followed us and gestured that it was cold and we should sleep inside.

They lit the furnace, gave me pride of place on the bed, and told the boys to sleep on the floor.

The road to Urumqi (which is 900km from Almaty and 650km from the border) is generally flat and with one teensy exemption – a small 2000 metre pass.

The following day we were due to hit it and after just 40km of pedalling we reached the snow line.

Unlike its Central Asian neighbours the Chinese know how to build a road (relaxed gradients, nice asphalt – you name it) so we felt confident we'd fly up the pass and perhaps pitch near the top that evening.

Just two hours later the weather had again turned foul and to make matters worse our highway had become a prison.

HUGE FENCES, hemmed in the road making it impossible for us to just duck off the side and camp while the snow thickened and the wind blew.

There was little to do but hope a house popped up on the horizon and an hour later the god of cycling answered our prayers.

We'd managed just over 50km when a cluster of official looking buildings popped up on the left and we quickly pedalled up the icy exit and plonked ourselves in front the largest of the buildings.

I decided to play the pathetic female again and hauled Bertrand inside with me while Scott and Jono guarded the bikes.

It was almost deserted and eventually we stumbled across an ambulance officer.



Photo: PAUL JEURISSEN www.pauljeurissen.nl

He spoke a fraction of English and with my best pet lisp and exaggerated shiver I asked if we could stay.

"No please, No!" He said emphatically but I wasn't going to be deterred.

"If we stay outside we die," I whined.

"Please it's so cold, you can't let us die."

IN THE END he didn't and we were shown into a spotless six-bed dorm with a flat screen TV and wonderful heating for the night for the price of a smile.

Dinner, we were told, would be in an hour.

After a hearty meal of steamed buns, noodles, meat and tofu (followed by an equally awesome breakfast the next day) we farewelled our highway patrol heroes and pushed on up the pass amid a steady stream of snow.

We had filled our bottles with boiling water before leaving and just two hours later (after a 15km bloody cold push to the tops) our bottles were frozen almost solid.

A series of tunnels and even an enormous

bridge had negated the need for serious leg pumping but the cold weather made it brutal.

For 30km we pushed along the plateau and by time the gentle descent approached we were shaking.

The tough wind meant we had to pedal but even still it was the most bitterly cold downhill I'd experienced. Scott was even worse off. His gloves were thinner and he admitted he'd feared frostbite the whole way down.

To make matter worse this seemed to be the one part of China that was empty and for five long, cold hours we pedalled on seeing little but abandoned shepherd's huts. By late afternoon, having cycled 100km, a petrol station and restaurant finally popped into view and we raced in and scooped down steaming bowls of noodles and buns.

WE RELUCTANTLY rolled out of the small hamlet down the prison-esque highway in the hope we'd find a camp spot but in the end we got one better – an abandoned crack house.

After rolling our bikes carefully over the guard rail and underneath the road tunnel we popped out on the other side to an abandoned cluster of shacks and set up in the least filthy (with the most windows).

THE LEFT OVER GROG bottles and paraphernalia suggested it was once a big "party" place but it was out of the cold and after jamming the door shut with a wooden plank we felt safe.

It was late morning when we rolled out of our party house and the efforts of the past nine days crashed down on me. My thighs felt weak and sluggish and Scott's backside was causing him grief. So far our maps had proved pretty fruitless in ever expanding China but we felt confident a decent city awaited in 65km and so pushed on with the promise of a hotel and perhaps even a day off.

One slow, boring ride later we'd reached a hotel with the help of some locals and while the disinterested receptionist didn't speak a word of English we were offered a room for \$10 each.

Jono and Bertrand ducked back out in search of a sim card and Scott and I kicked back to finally relax.

Then came the knock on the door.

Our now unsmiling receptionist wanted us to leave.

Using Google translate she insisted we could not stay as their hotel did not accept foreigners. I was baffled. They'd let us in, waited over an hour until we'd got comfortable, and then come in to boot us out.

WE ARGUED, we ranted, we gestured wildly around us and in the end, after admitting defeat, said they couldn't kick us out until our friends returned.

Unfortunately that wasn't until 8pm.

They were shocked and angry and tried to reopen the argument with the pathetic receptionist

but to no avail. By 9pm she threatened to call the police but Jono (who was afraid we'd be left stranded in a city with no hotels to take us in)

I called her "bluff" and said we were staying and she could do what she liked. Despite this I felt uneasy. I had looked forward to this rest for days and I knew we'd get anything but with the constant threat of eviction. Our useless receptionist had not bothered to help us find a suitable hotel and so I decided to march back out there and tell her we weren't leaving until we were guaranteed somewhere to go.

I wrenched the door open and came face to face with two police officers who were just about to knock. I'm still not sure who was more surprised.

IN THE END the dirty snitch called the police but thankfully they were everything she wasn't – kind, helpful, patient and English speaking.

They apologetically said we couldn't stay but that they would lead us to a suitable, cheap hotel and so at 10pm we trundled out into the cold, dark streets of Jinghe following the flashing blue and red lights.

And so here I am.

Already, after just five days in this enormous country, we've experienced the full gamut. Everything from technology, to attitudes and most importantly the cuisine (Central Asian is bloody awful) has blown us away and for the first time in months we're lapping up so many new flavours it's sometimes tough to process them all.

The enormous western city of Urumqi now lies just under 400km away and with the renewed spirits that only a day off can bring (spent largely in the luxury of our approved hotel) we're again ready to hit the road. **BT**

Sarah Webb, an Australian journalist, got fed up with writing about other people's adventures. So together with Scott Daniel-Guiterrez she decided to go out and have one of her own. www.longrodehome.com

Ready to Roll

Bicycle travelers
and their rigs



Photo: ERIC SCHAMBION

NAME: Amaya Williams and I'm from Missoula, Montana U.S.A. I travel with my husband, Frenchman Eric Schambion.

HISTORY: I come to the world of bicycle touring via travel rather than cycling. After a couple multi-year backpacking trips through Asia and Latin America, Eric and I grew tired of relying on public transport. We'd met a few cycle tourists along the way and became intrigued. The bicycle struck me as the perfect way to escape well-trodden tourist paths and stay fit.

Before beginning our tour back in 2006, we were both pretty naïve about the challenges of crossing continents by bike. Blogging wasn't as prevalent as it is today and there were limited online resources geared towards preparing people for a long-distance bicycle trip.

Looking back, I think being ill-informed was actually a blessing. Today there is so much information available that it's easy to get bogged down in the planning stages and over-think a big tour. We just went for it and everything worked out in the end.

Initially our plan was to pedal from Europe to Cape Town. Once we reached the southernmost tip of the African continent we'd truly fallen in love with two-wheeled travel and our 18-month tour snowballed into a quest to cycle every country on the planet. So far we've traversed 102 countries, pedaled 185,000 kilometers and are full-time bicycle touring nomads.

TOURING STYLE: We cycle a mix of paved roads and gravel and even do some pretty rough stuff that is meant for mountain bikes.

While we're not purists who insist on pedaling every inch of the way, we generally only hitch a lift as a last resort (an expiring visa, serious mechanical issues or illness). Exploring little-visited corners of the world intrigues us and we're keen to give the busy highways a wide berth. In the beginning we relied exclusively on paper maps, but now mostly use the GPS on our Smartphone to navigate.

BIKE: I've been riding the same Koga World Traveller for over a decade. It's a rock solid touring bike without any high-tech bells and whistles. We chose the Kogas because they came fully kitted out and we didn't have to make any decisions about racks, saddles or other components. I'm still using the old v-brake technology which works fine. They're easy to adjust and fix if anything goes wrong. My Brooks saddle is so incredibly comfortable I find padded bike shorts unnecessary. A few years back I added Ergon grips and these have been wonderful for relieving pressure on my wrists. I depend on a small rearview mirror for keeping an eye on traffic and would feel vulnerable without it. I also have a loud, annoying horn which is good in bear country and also entertaining for children and various border officials (grown adults cannot resist giving it a toot and it often serves to break the ice).

Although we've tried many high-quality kickstands over the years, we've yet to find one sturdy enough to withstand the weight of our overloaded bikes. A strong stick (preferably bamboo) is our low-tech solution.

BAGS: Our bikes are seriously overloaded. We use Ortlieb's largest capacity panniers, the new Backroller Pro Classic. They've got a handy outside pocket which is great for packing snacks, sunscreen and clothes you take on and off as the weather changes throughout the day. Eric even rides with big 'back' panniers on his front rack. Plus we each have a large drybag strapped sideways on the rear rack. Naturally, all the extra weight is tough on big

climbs and being passed up by retirees on sleek racing bikes is a humiliation I've grown used to. Ultimately we accept the trade-off between creature comforts and slower speeds. The road has been our home for over a decade so we lug around pillows, large laptop computers, a coffee maker, yoga mat and a full range of toiletries. We also carry up to a week's worth of food. As part of our cost cutting strategy, we stock up on provisions at large supermarkets in big towns where prices are lower. Large quantities of spare parts and tools are also stuffed into our panniers. We are known to schlep around a couple of extra tires, tubes, chains, a cassette, maybe a rim and possibly a derailleur or two. My husband has some issues with hoarding so nothing gets thrown away if it might possibly be useful one day.

FAVOURITE GEAR: We travel to a lot of remote spots where a reliable water purification device is essential. Of all the methods we've tested, our favorites are the SteriPen and the lightweight Sawyer mini filter.

For women, a Diva Cup is an eco-friendly alternative to tampons. For years we made mediocre camp coffee using a filter. A few months back we got an AeroPress coffee maker and now enjoy café-quality espresso every morning.

FINAL REMARKS: After completing the Great Divide Route in October, we'll cycle along the Southern Tier route and continue on north to New York City where we'll catch a flight to Central Asia in spring 2017. If all goes to plan, we'll fulfill our long-held dream to cycle the Pamir Highway and bike back to our 2006 starting point in Obernai, France. As we encounter more and more lightly-loaded bikepackers here in the US, it's tempting to follow suit. Perhaps after a decade on the road, it's time to rethink how we tour.

WEBSITE: www.worldbiking.info **BT**

**See also 'Ready to Roll' disclosure on page 117*







PHOTO STORY

A bike - hike in eastern
KYRGYZSTAN

By: JOSHUA CUNNINGHAM



Joshua Cunningham and Peter James hiked and pedaled through the Ala Too – one of the many mountain ranges which comprise the Tien Shan. Their route took them through the highland areas used by shepherds to graze their horses during summer. Being off the bikes and on foot was a welcome novelty, providing a fresh angle from which to experience the brilliance of outdoor life in Kyrgyzstan.



Above: River crossings a'plenty in the Uch Emchek valley.

Below: Asking for directions from a local family.



Above: Some Song Kol shepherds try their luck with 'the reception stick'.

Below: You know when you invite guests over for dinner, and then they just won't leave...





Entering the Eki-Naryn gorge



The switchbacks of Moldo Pass



Above: Ala Kul from the 4,200m pass above it.

Left: Being on foot provided a fresh angle from which to experience Kyrgyzstan.

After spending a year cycling 22,000km from London to Hong Kong, Josh Cunningham now works as a freelance writer / photographer in the sport, fitness and outdoor pursuits sector. www.joshuacunningham.info



Li Ling

By: Edward Genochio

China's tourism industry likes 'top five' lists: top five famous mountains, top five famous shopping streets, top five places for eating barbecued chicken, that sort of thing. The town of Li Ling in Hunan Province features in none of these lists. That is its charm. It is a place that offers no reason for visiting – and that, in my book, is reason enough to have a look around.

It was Christmas Eve, it was raining, and it was very, very cold. I was pedalling west on the G320, the epic road that runs through the heart of China from Shanghai to the Burmese border, when I hit a pothole. Hard. My rear wheel took the punishment. The result: a badly cracked wheel rim. A wheel in that state does not last long. It might give you another fifty kilometres, or it might only give you five before dumping you unceremoniously, leaving you with a unicycle and a sore backside.

I dug out my map and assessed the situation. Nearest town: Li Ling. Distance: about 25 kilometres. It was touch-and-go. I got back in the saddle and pedalled, gingerly, wincing at every bump and rut.

An hour later I rolled into Li Ling, where Christmas was in full swing. All the shops had 'Merry Christmas' sprayed on their windows, except one which cryptically proclaimed 'I Love Gloria' instead. The season's must-have was a red and white Santa hat with flashing lights. A pavement merchant could hardly open boxes fast enough to keep up with demand. They were selling so quickly that the local hot-cake seller had packed up and gone home early. Pretty much every head in town, from babes-in-arms to their dotting grandmothers, was decked out in red and white.

Meanwhile, I had a problem. I was cold and my bike was broken. I checked into a guesthouse.

MR HE'S PLACE was pretty comfortable, or it would have been if it hadn't just started snowing outside. The hotel is authentically Hunanese and that means a heating-free zone. Heating is for wimps, foreigners, and people who live north of the Yangtze. Li Ling has a warm climate, explained Mr Hu, as snow started to

drift into the lobby through the open door.

In fairness, the Hunanese approach to heating has a certain logic. Why heat the whole house when 99 per cent of it is empty space? It's not the house that needs heating, it is the people in it. The solution: a ceramic bowl the size and shape of a chamber pot, in which a couple of lumps of charcoal burn feebly. To get warm, you get as close to that pot as you can without setting your trousers on fire. In a large family – or a small hotel – you might be competing with a dozen others for prime pot positions. If you're lucky or pushy you might find space for a finger or two in the melee of hands and feet being dangled above the fire.

In these circumstances, the only viable option is to retreat to bed under a layer of blankets about six feet thick, and wait for morning.

The next day, when it came, was colder still, but brought good news: a friendly bike shop manager had arranged for the best wheel rim in Hunan to be express-freighted down from the provincial capital, Changsha. What's more, he's a friend of 'The best wheel builder in Li Ling'.

"That sounds like my man," I said. "Take me to him."

THE BEST WHEEL BUILDER in Li Ling works in a dark garage-cum-warehouse-cum-workshop up a narrow alley at the end of a back street. I felt instantly at home in his treasure-trove of bolts, bells, spokes, saddles, tyres, inner tubes and tools of every description. The little master sat on the floor of his Aladdin's cave and set to work building my new wheel. He promised me that he would "work like Lei Feng", the famous Chinese model worker and propaganda icon, to ensure it would be as strong and true as any wheel in the land.

And there must be some pretty strong wheels out there. One of the joys of cycling in China is meeting other cyclists whose loads put my meagre 35 kilos of clothes, tools and camping gear in the shade. One man came cheerfully whistling past, his bike weighed down with five large caged dogs. And then of course there are the cargo-tricycles which ply the roads between small towns and villages all over the country, on which a fridge, a large sofa, a new wide-screen

TV, half an ox, and grandma perched on the top would amount to a pretty standard load.

With my bike roadworthy once more, I was ready to get moving again, but with snow and temperature both still falling, the prospect did not appeal. Besides, I was starting to like Li Ling.

Mr He at the hotel invited me to join his family for dinner, which we ate in the lobby, hovering around the fire-pot. Afterwards Mr He took me to Li Ling's ping-pong club, where I thought I was giving him a decent run for his money until he switched to playing right-handed and thrashed me mercilessly.

THE NEXT DAY I met Mr Wen, a fireworks salesman, who insisted that no trip to Li Ling would be complete without a visit to the Li Ling Fireworks Factory.

The tour was not a resounding success. Thanks to the cold and snow, the factory's workforce had failed en masse to show up. The whole place was lifeless and devoid of anything to inspect but for a couple of chilly-looking ducks. Mr Wen looked embarrassed. We stood around in the snow looking at our increasingly hypothermic feet. It was hard to know what to say. "It must be a busy place when people do come to work," I tried, half-heartedly.

"Yes," answered Mr Wen, not exactly warming to the theme. "Are you cold?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, very much warming to that theme.

"So am I," said Mr Wen. "Let's go home."

To make amends for the firework factory debacle, Mr Wen suggested he show me round some of the town's other sights. Don't misunderstand me, I've nothing against Li Ling. In fact I'm rather fond of the place. But it doesn't do sights. It's just not that kind of town. Mr Wen tried. We went past a shop that sells trousers. "That is a trouser shop," he explained, striving for but never quite attaining enthusiasm. What to say in these circumstances?

"Do you buy your trousers there?" was the best I could manage.

"No," answered a downbeat Mr Wen.

To pursue, or to let it drop? That was the question. I chose pursuit. "Where do you buy your trousers from, then?"

"The Number 3 Department Store."

A department store! This was an exit strategy that would allow both parties to go home, pride and honour satisfied. It works like this: I display great eagerness – within the bounds of dignity – to visit said department store. Once inside I head for the biscuit counter, seize a packet of biscuits, announce that these are the very things I have been looking for, and buy them. The sightseeing expedition is thus instantly transformed into a great success, and we're free to go home. It worked a treat. Mr Wen looked very pleased.

Li Ling is down-to-earth, honest, a little rough maybe, but without pretension. It's my kind of town, and, for my money, it's in places like Li Ling rather than the swanky metropolitan cities that you will find the true soul of China.

Riding a bike in China is rarely dull. The joy of it is that you wake up each morning never knowing what you'll see that day, or where you'll be spending the next night. At this time of year the countryside is taking it easy, rice stubble idling in flooded fields. Fat-bellied ducks waddle and squabble, watched by dark-eyed, melancholic water buffalo. Old men drive pigs along the road to market, while old women carry heavy loads on bamboo shoulder yokes, a bucket hanging from each end. When the sun shines everybody sits outside for a game of mahjong.

NEUROTIC CHICKENS peck and strut on the road, flapping and squawking each time they are near-missed by a careering minibus. A streak of shimmering, iridescent blue flashes in front of me – a kingfisher bringing some welcome colour to the murky browns and greys of the winter landscape.

Cycling in China gets you to places that other forms of transport cannot reach. So throw away your credit card, hop on a bike, and head for the nearest place that doesn't get a mention in your guidebook. But one request: please don't all go visiting Li Ling – we don't want to ruin its unspoilt charm.... **BT**

Edward Genochio rode from England to China and back again. Read more about his trip at: www.2wheels.org.uk.



GUATEMALA

By: RICK GALEZOWSKI

Imagine, if you will, one of the more fanciful renderings of Hell from the 13th, 14th, or 15th centuries; those depicting the members of a wretched, naked humanity, squirming over each other, torturing each other, and finally devouring each other amid ashen, smoldering ruins. Now imagine that somehow you've arrived in the middle of this scene, quite unexpectedly, luggage in hand. A visit to Guatemala City isn't this exactly... but it's close.

The city center is divided along lines of affluence into two principal areas: the Zona 1, an urban slum of exceptional filth, destitution and sadness; and the ineptly named Zona Viva (lively Zone), where Guatemala's elite classes live and work behind fortifications of concrete, barbed wire and armed police. These are the nice parts of town. The rest is as frightening a case of impoverishment, overcrowding, urban decay, and general hopelessness as one could possibly imagine. To say that plunging into this mess on a bicycle can be intimidating is an understatement of the greatest magnitude, and once we realized this, we scaled down our sight-seeing itinerary to something a bit more realistic: getting in and getting out, as fast as we could, without being bundled into an alley or flattened by a bus.

There are certain looks we get everywhere we go. Looks that say, for example, "Hey, check out those two stupid gringos!" or simply, "Hey, stupid gringos!" Uncharitable as these may seem, they are almost always well-intentioned, and in what looks to be a potentially threatening situation, they are deeply reassuring. But Guatemala City was dominated by looks of a different sort. There was a dark concern in many people's faces. A concern that said, "Oh no you poor stupid gringos!" and, "You stupid gringos are in danger!" We quickened our pace and feigned intimidating body language- an aggressive posture, icy glares, a petulant sneer- a look intended to say, "Back off muchacho- don't make me have to seriously kick your ass". Anyone who knows us would agree, that our

powers in this regard are formidable (certainly enough to instantly terrorize a kindergarten classroom), but Guatemala City's crumbling avenues were lined with characters whose every fiber growled, "You can't run stupid gringo, and I can see right through your flimsy posturing- you're all mine..."

A few people hurled insults. Somebody else threw rocks. We shifted into run-for-your-lives mode and resolved not to stop. We punctured a tire, but just kept on going, riding on the rim. When we finally arrived in Zona 1 and came upon a sturdy looking hotel- heavy steel door, bars over the windows, thick masonry walls- it was among the happiest moments of our whole trip.

THAT NIGHT, we were lulled to sleep by competing rancho music turned to full volume, the ceaseless wail of car alarms, and drunken screaming. After a few months in Latin America, one begins to develop a tolerance for such things, but this is a country where detonating explosives in the street at all hours of the night (often directly below our hotel window), may be the closest thing there is to a national pastime. The Guatemalans, it seems, just can't leave themselves alone. It's not that we weren't enjoying ourselves, but as we lay there, cowering in the darkness, we felt quite satisfied that we'd seen everything we needed to, and decided to leave town first thing in the morning, on a bus.

In a country famous for thievery, there is no single place as notorious- no place as comically legendary- for getting ripped-off, as Guatemala City's Central Bus Terminal. Just standing at the margins strikes fear deep into your imagination, because you know full well that somewhere out there; in the sea of chaos closing around on every side; in the rivers of humanity brushing against you; in the thousands of eyes flashing and disappearing; certain people have spotted you, and are already making maneuvers to relieve you of everything.

WE WORKED TOGETHER, staying close, covering our backs, always moving. Sick and

wearied busses plowed carelessly past, roaring and rattling and coughing-up oily huffs of exhaust. Someone directed us toward one just out of reach, and two others began yelling that we had to get our bikes on top, "Rapido!, Rapido!"

TIME PASSES in one of two ways in Latin America. You find yourself either in an impossible rush because everything needs to be done Rapido!, Rapido!, or you sit and wile away the days in Mañana Land, waiting for something to happen. Half of these busses will break down out on the highway. There, everyone will sit patiently for hours (sometimes for a whole day), while the driver tinkers away, until such a time as the engine is magically revived, and then it's Rapido!, Rapido! all over again. Here in the terminal, it is always Rapido!, Rapido!, Rapido!, Rapido! "RAPIDO GRINGOS, RAPIDO!!"

From this point on is a bit of a haze. We panicked, and began furiously stripping our bikes down. I remember struggling to gather everything into my chest, thinking all the while that I had a good eye on everyone around me. As I remember it, this had only taken a few seconds. But when I looked up again, and turned full around... The bus was gone. Maggie was gone. And my bike... ...was gone.

TWO VISIONS roared into my mind. Several days earlier, on the long road from Tikal, we came upon a bus that had stopped to pickup roadside passengers. A fellow Gringo traveler, who had no-doubt been instructed to lift his backpack onto the roof, "Rapido!, Rapido!", hadn't been given time to get on himself, and was now running down the highway in a panic (the poor bastard), watching his belongings accelerate swiftly away without him. The second came from a newspaper article we had read only the day before. A bus full of Japanese tourists had been pulled over by bandits, in the middle of the night, on a secondary road not far from Tikal. The bandits took everything-

luggage, shoes, clothes... they even took the bus, and left the whole group standing naked by the side of the road, in the dark, in the middle of absolutely nowhere. The lesson here is painfully obvious, though one I was only now beginning to fully appreciate: Bussing in Guatemala is perilous misadventure.

I lunged into the crowd, inciting shouting and hostility. Somebody got very angry, and pushed me back hard. I remember being jostled several more times and dropping a bag,

"The bandits took everything - luggage, shoes, clothes... they even took the bus, and left the whole group of Japanese standing naked by the side of the road"

but then glimpsing Maggie on the roof of the bus, which was now stationary, and not far ahead. As I ran, I saw a man on a bike- my bike!- taking a joyride through the terminal. He seemed to be having a fantastic time- laughing and waving- and after completing a wide circle, was now headed straight for me. I seized the handlebars with a shout (causing him great offense), and after quickly securing everything to the roof, we hurried on board. What just a moment before had been every traveler's worst nightmare, was now, it seemed, suddenly fine. There was a pounding at our window. It was the same man, now thoroughly pissed off. Apparently, he felt he had done a good deal to help us, and was now demanding a tip. Mercifully, our bus lurched forward, shuddered through the terminal and into the street, then turned onto a highway where it picked-up speed, and delivered us far, far away from Guatemala City.

We never once looked back. **BT**

Rick Galezowski and Maggie Bennedsen are Canadian architects who have toured extensively through Asia and the Americas. Their website www.backintheworld.com is full of inspiring photos and stories.

the Tribe

Text & photos: FREDRIKA EK



Peddalling into the old city of Bukhara, I slowly found my way to Hostel Rumi. By word of mouth alone, this has become the meeting point of all touring cyclists entering and leaving Uzbekistan. And sure enough, just as the sun set and I was rolling my bike into the courtyard, I was met by six or so other touring bikes and a table full of smiling people, just about to dig in on dinner. Judging by everyone's weird tan lines, and the ridicu-

lously oversized portions of food, it was clear – these people were definitely cyclists.

That night was my first taste of Bukhara. In total, I spent three full days in Bukhara: one just to become human again after a particularly gruelling stretch, and a couple to explore the city and get myself and the bike ready for the rest of Uzbekistan. During my entire stay, I stuffed myself with unreasonable amounts of food to gain back the weight I lost in the desert.

Being together with so many other cyclists was a huge highlight for me. Since leaving Sweden some five months earlier, I'd only bumped into a handful of other two-wheeled travellers like myself. Mostly I felt like a complete alien, as I rolled into towns with my fully loaded bike. And at some point on the road, I think I started to consider myself as somewhat of a weirdo as well.

Here in Bukhara, for the first time, I truly felt like I was part of a community.

Now, to be fair, it was one eccentric community. Where else would saddle sores be a completely legitimate topic of discussion during dinner, or the top speed of mosquitoes (14 km/h for anyone lacking this possibly vital piece of knowledge) be considered as truly valuable information? But however strange it sounds, it really was as someone remarked during breakfast one morning: *'Guys? I do know it's a twisted one. But this really is my tribe – and I love it.'*

Despite our shared love of bicycle adventures, we were still an incredibly diverse group of people, with different reasons for setting out, our own styles, goals and our own stories of how we ended up on the saddle of a bike. During my

days in Rumi Hostel, I saw more than 10 cyclists come and go. None of them were quite the same.

There was the British guy Nick, who set out from home some months earlier, and planned to keep going 'until he finds somewhere worth staying'. Some, like the silent Italian couple on their honeymoon, were only travelling the region for a few weeks, while the older German couple, were heading home on the last leg of a world tour. There was also a loud guy, travelling *with* rather than *on* a bike as he had hitchhiked

most of the way from Europe.

Perhaps the two cyclists who stand out most in my mind, however, were two who showed perfectly how one touring cyclist does *not* equal the other. Both were in it for the long run but – apart from their use of bicycles to get around – had absolutely nothing in common.

Patrick, from Germany, had already been touring for eight years and intends to see every country in the world with his bicycle. Dressed in lycra from head to toe, his setup was the most



light and aerodynamic of any I've seen. He covers something like 200km on any given day. Patrick is a sportsman and the world is his arena.

And then there is Olivier from France, who left home about six years ago. Carrying everything from a toothbrush all the way up to a paraglider, he is the Jack Sparrow of bicycle touring and really has the bike to match. This guy is a traveller down to the core – and let's just say he'd need a bit of a tailwind to cover 200 km like Patrick.

In the midst of all these comings and goings, there was me.

Coming to Bukhara I was drained, in every sense of the word. But leaving, I was filled with a childlike inspiration and motivation, the likes of which I hadn't had since the very start of my tour. I had been reminded of my reasons for

going on this journey, and even gotten a few new ones. While standing still, I could feel my love for being on the move stronger than I had done in months.

My body surely would have benefited from sticking around a few more days, but my mind just wouldn't have it. I was packed up and ready to go. Ready to fully explore this new country I was in. To live life, in the best way I know how. I was ready to head out and create new stories.

And to outrun some mosquitoes. **BT**

In 2013 Fredrika Ek stumbled upon bicycle touring and pedaled 3 months across Europe. She became hooked and began to plan her dream trip even before she was back in Sweden. www.thebikeramble.com

Right: Frenchman Olivier stands in front of his overloaded bike.

Below: Patrick from Germany with his super lightweight setup.



Subscribe now, it's
Free!

Subscribers can
download earlier issues
of **BicycleTraveler** at:

www.bicycletraveler.nl



Image from the Road: **PERU**
BY: SETH BERLING www.pebblepedalers.com



Image from the Road: **AMERICA**
BY: MARC MCSHANE www.instagram.com/nutmegcountry



Image from the Road: **AMERICA**

BY: MARC MCSHANE www.instagram.com/nutmegcountry

unclipped adventure



"Never mind if it attacks us, what if it steals our food!!"

We, Tegan Phillips and Axel, are a pair of clumsy adventurers (human and bike, respectively) who explore new places and create cartoons about our experiences and about all of the interesting(ish) things that pop into our heads when we're trying not to think about going uphill. <http://unclippedadventure.com>

***Ready to Roll disclosure**

Bicycle travelers portrayed in the *Ready to Roll* serie may have received some equipment from companies at a reduced price or even for free.

A big thanks to:

Friedel Grant of www.travellingtwo.com for some last minute proofreading work.

Bikepackers magazine www.bikepackersmagazine.com for inspiration. Their excellent rider's profiles helped define our new *Ready to Roll* series.

Parting shot



Watching TV while on the road

Photo: KAMRAN ALI www.facebook.com/KamranOnBike

BicycleTraveler