

BicycleTraveler

International Magazine on Cycle Touring





Cover photo: JULLA SALMINEN www.instagram.com/jukka_salminen

Photo: PAUL JEURISSEN www.projection3.com

From the editor

After publishing the last edition I received the following e-mail from an old friend, Mark Hillman.
“Wow, another great issue. Have I had any “adventures”? Well, not really. But I did have an exciting couple of days on Hokkaido, Japan with my 13 year old grandson, Sean. We were just out a couple of days and wound up in Typhoon Chanthu. Had to lean on the windward side of the tent for 2 1/2 hours to keep it standing. Sean said after the college cycling club’s tents blew away....”Grandpa, their tents are GONE! This is my first cycle tour and it is terrible but I love it... we gotta do this again!” Made me a happy grandpa!”

Last year Loretta Henderson published the [Big Women On Wheels e-book](#). It’s so WoW! that it deserves some extra attention.

Friedel Grant of [Travelling Two](#) wrote
“It’s not often that a book about bicycle touring comes across less of a manual and more of a rollicking, inspiring tale woven around the stories of 100 cycling superheroes from 30+ countries, but that’s exactly what Loretta Henderson’s Big Women On Wheels Book has managed to achieve.”

You can read Friedel’s full review [here](#).

The 12th issue a bit late forthcoming since we’ve been busy renovating our own website, [Impressions from Bicycle Travels](#). On the site we’re planning on placing articles on photography, great shots from other cyclists plus resources that just don’t fit into the magazine format.

Grace Johnson

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Doing Nothing

By: ALEX GANDY

Cycle, breathe, listen, look about, think a little, then stop, get off, have a snack, maybe a chat, get back on and repeat. It's the life rhythm which engulfs anyone who travels for long distances on a bicycle. It's a gloriously simple, wonderfully self-indulgent and a purely escapist way to live. For the most part we do nothing of any great significance, but as my travels begin to near their end I think more and more about how fortunate I've been to do not much other than observe for such a very long period of time. Time spent getting to know the world for all its good bits and bad bits and getting to know myself for all my good bits and bad bits. Away from a world where time flies by to the rhythm of a cash register I feel it's these days spent doing nothing much other than watching the world pass by and figuring things out for myself that will turn out to be some of the most memorable of all.

"What I like doing best is Nothing."

"How do you do Nothing," asked Pooh after he had wondered for a long time.

"Well, it's when people call out at you just as you're going off to do it, 'What are you going to do, Christopher Robin?' and you say, 'Oh, Nothing,' and then you go and do it.

It means just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering."

"Oh!" said Pooh."

~ A. A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh **BT**

In 2013/14 Alex pedaled from Istanbul to Bangkok, documenting the trip on his photography blog at www.cycling-east.com. He will soon be self-publishing a photo book of the journey.

Photo: RICK GALEZOWSKI www.backintheworld.com

A Mongolian Dump

By: CHARLES STEVENS



Photo: ELPHEAL <http://elpheal.blogspot.nl>

OVER A FLAT EXPANSE, pebbled with dirt and the occasional brush stroke of struggling green lies a small hut. Beyond it, the Gobi Desert starts to give way to the fertility of the steppes. At first glance it could have been a small stable. It was not attractive; a black scratched exterior lies below bare wooden col-

umns supporting an uneven black tiled roof. As I walk closer the streaking sun illuminated the unlit building between the gaping panels. Untreated wooden supports separate ten stable like slots - five on either side - as exposed nails staple the structure together.

As the wind subsides it becomes obvious

what this structure is. It is a Mongolian lavatory - not one of the typical tourist attractions of Mongolia. The wretched odious smells fill my nostrils as I try not to breathe too deeply. With difficulty, I choose my slot. Two flimsy wooden beams separate a foot wide hole into a ten foot deep pit. Hovering my foot over the hole it be-

comes apparent that a wrong slip could see me wriggling 10 foot below amongst a collection of unpalatable debris. I imagined falling down, unable to escape the steep rocky walls cut by heavy machinery with only a spectrum of different coloured loo roll, plastic bags and a variety of different bottles for company as I try to scramble out. My screams would be unheard as bare buttocks blocked my sinking despair. I tighten my grasp on the loo roll as if it had become a stress ball. Instead I try to focus on the cloudless surroundings as I faced outwards. Another strong gust of wind helped to disperse the convulsive aromas as I thought about my plan of action for the most dangerous lavatory I have yet encountered. Taking out my phone I thought about it plunging down and landing with a squelch, half buried, only moving as it wiggled helplessly to the buzz of my morning alarm until the battery died or it was recovered by a sophisticated rescue operation.

As I tried to dispose of the spoiled goods the convection currents caused the loo roll to flutter upwards, unfurling outwards in a long strip as it wafted around me like a circling kite. In desperation, my fingers delicately plucked it, re-wrapping, and this time I thrust it downwards. Watching its progress, I was satisfied that it was all clear. After repeating this process I carefully straightened up, trying not to fall down in the same way you may fall down when bouncing onto your buttock when on a trampoline.

Relieved, I walked out with the fresh air cooling my humid brow. Just before my tent, I turned away from the sight of a local alleviating himself against the wall of a house. Disdain was my first reaction, as the shack stood, unforgettably, behind me. But then again if you cared for your safety what would you do? **BT**

Charles Stevens and Will Hsu cycled from Beijing to Tehran in the hope of seeing ancient silk road cultures before they disappear entirely. You can read more from their trip at: <http://beijingtotehran.com>.



Punctures, Bloody Punctures

By: SIMON CLODE

On this journey there were many, many punctures. Rather than whine about each and every one of them, I've done my very best to mention only those with a significant effect on the journey. For example: those punctures leading up to and including the explosion that led me to give up on my Chinese Pigeon bicycle; and those that had a greater effect on my day than a mere ten minutes of irritation.

That said, there was almost an average of one puncture a day, so it would be remiss of me not to spend a very short while sharing what the trip taught me about punctures, and whining on a bit.

Punctures come in several forms. First, the big ones, which consist of an audible pop, followed by a complete loss of control and the feeling of being sat on a contraption with at least one wooden wheel. These are my favourite. They're honest, easy to find, and generally easy to fix.

Second, the silent, yet audacious, show offs. These are the punctures that announce themselves with a slight change in handling and a squishy tyre when you dismount and give it a squeeze. A rudimentary check then reveals a sharp object that, in the style of a step-father in a disappearance-soon-to-be-murder case, is still at the scene of the crime. I also like this form of puncture because your problem area is immediately identified and easy to fix. It is even more adorable because once you pull the offensive object out, the tyre lets out a pathetic pfff of air, reminiscent of a sly fart in the early days of a relationship – just with a rubberier smell, unless of course, you're experimental from the off in your romantic endeavours.

Third is the troublesome cousin of the second variant, when the object that has pierced the inner tube hasn't stayed around for the autopsy. Leaving you with the irritating task of finding a tiny hole by the side of the road. These are the worst punctures.

Finally, the mystery slow puncture, of which this trip experienced many. The kind of irritating slow depreciation in pressure, which can be remedied by one full inflation per hour. My response to these was to always make-do with the hourly inflations until I reached a hotel, where I could identify the leakage using a sink of water or, on one boundary-crossing occasion, the very same bath in which I was soaking.

Finally, if I could give you one piece of genuine advice, it would be this: old style sandpaper, glue and patches repair kits are vastly superior to the self-adhesive circles of Sellotape that some plonker has decided are a good idea. Take the extra five minutes to use the old puncture repair kits that your dad taught you how to use and save yourself hours in the long run. Let's bankrupt that sadist shit together. Then afterwards we can burn the factories producing Presta valves to the ground. **BT**

*Simon Clode cycled from Beijing to Kashgar and wrote a book about the experience called *Last Flight of the Pigeon*, which is available on Amazon but no good book stores www.lastflightofthepigeon.com*



Ready to Roll

Bicycle travelers
and their rigs



Photo: HEIKE PIRNGRUBER

NAME: Heike Pirngruber aka 'Pushbikegirl' and I'm from Heidelberg, Germany.

HISTORY: I've pedaled over 50 countries, 75.000 Km. and my current tour started in May, 2013.

Before 2013, I only left for months at a time, with the one exception of a 8 months solo trip across the desert of Australia. After starting this journey, I soon realized that a multi-year trip requires a different approach. Your mind has to be set, you need to be willing to do it because your biggest muscle is your brain, not your legs.

The mental and physical challenges of traveling solo for years on end are far greater than any problems I have had with gear or logistics. On the other hand, I also learned that everything is possible. You just need to do it.

TOURING STYLE: I love remote places, the further away from civilization the better. I also love dirt roads and trails, but I don't stick to them for the sake of it. If a paved road is traffic-free, I enjoy it just as much. Open skies, deserts, mountains and campfires make me happy.

The longer I was on the road the slower I went. Kilometers aren't important, whereas people, nature and adventures are.

The bike is simply my form of transportation. I don't use it to break records, but to dig deeper and come closer to the diversity the planet has to offer.

I also avoid routines since variety is the spice of life. Challenges are what keep me going and freedom is my biggest pleasure.

I prefer to only use planes and public transport when needed but have since become

more relaxed with that rule.

I also explore more than the 'greatest cycling' destinations. I want to see the full range the world has to offer. This means visiting the so-called 'boring' places and forming my own opinion about them.

BIKE: My 15 year old CUBE LTD1 MTB took me to the remotest corners on this earth without problems. Unfortunately in 2016 it was damaged in an accident.

The Cube was replaced with a Surly Troll and again I opted for 26". I prefer easy replaceable components and 26" is available worldwide.

I also prefer less technical gear and am convinced that you can tour the world on most bikes. After all, you still need to pedal - no matter which bike you own.

Sometimes I wish I still had my old bike, which was not as attractive to steal, even if I never had any problems. I especially miss the Cube's antique front suspension fork. It was more comfortable on rough dirt roads and didn't require maintenance.

I use Schwalbe Mondial 2.1 tires which are a compromise that suits tarmac and gravel /dirt roads. They are puncture resistant and long wearing. I have had less than 20 punctures in the last 50.000 KM and my first front Schwalbe Marathon tire lasted 35.000 Kilometres.

I replaced my V-brakes with Disc brakes and am happy with that decision. The brake pads have held up well.

BAGS: I started off with a classic Ortlieb set-up and was satisfied with it. I also pedaled difficult trails using front and rear panniers.

Upon receiving my new bike, I decided to research bikepacking set-ups. So I undertook several trials using different bag combinations.

After a year I concluded that a hybrid set-up best suits my needs. I found out that reducing gear weight is more important than the type of set-up. What I missed with a pure bikepacking set-up was the space to carry healthy food. I'm on a multi-year trip so eating fresh fruit and vegetables helps me stay healthy. The small front panniers which I attached to the rear now provide that extra space.

I also found it time consuming and impractical to pack and unpack bikepacking bags. With my small Ortlieb panniers, I can speed packing time up, Yet I can still benefit from other practical bikepacking features such as lighter weight bags and better weight distribution.

I reduced my weight in form of getting rid of most of my clothes. I also no longer carry winter gear in summer, instead I send them towards my next destination. A super light hobo stove, one pot, no spare tire, hardly any spare parts, one pair of shoes. It doesn't feel like I am missing something important.

Read: [My gear set up nuts and bolts](#), but I reduced it to even less than that – it's not up to date)

FAVOURITE GEAR: Therm-A-Rest Neo Air is a great pad which is comfortable, easy to blow up and stow away. It's also good in hot and cold climates.

Hilleberg Soulo tent. It's expensive, a bit heavy and not made for the tropics. But it is sturdy, functional and holds up well in harsh weather conditions.

An MSR stowaway pot is cheap and nearly indestructible. Good for cooking on a fire.

Picogrill 85 is a hobo stove and I am totally happy with it.

A world map. I use it as a conversation starter when people invite me into their homes. It's great fun when the entire family looks at the map, trying to figure out which country is where and where I'm from.

FINAL REMARKS: For more information concerning my trial bikepacking / pannier set-ups read: [Bikepacking setup or classic Ortlieb panniers for your bicycle trip around the world?](#) It's an extensive report on my experiences.

After more than 4 years on the road it was time for a break and I just headed back to the US to go for some more bikepacking trails. Additionally I will head home for Christmas. Shortly after I will be back on the road – Africa would interest me the most, but nothing is set in stone.

WEBSITE: www.pushbikegirl.com

*See also 'Ready to Roll' disclosure on page 91.





Yes, we can!

By: Pujo

I AM FIVE KM'S outside of the city when I see a group of five individuals at the side of the road. I don't think anything of it and continue past them at a chill pace. Soon enough, one of these high-school kids jumps on top of my trailer while another takes me by the waist gingerly enough not to dismount me, but firm enough to start rummaging through my pockets. He's not coming off anytime soon, so I bring the u-lock down on his nose and he finally lets go, along with his friend. The five of them run off into a grand junkyard and I stop to check my things. My camera and wallet are still zipped tight in my pants, but my tunebox is gone, and with a fully loaded bike, I'm in no condition to give chase. I find the nearest police station to see if I can get some help finding these runts, but other than offering me a place to stay for the night, there's not much the police can do besides assuring me I will not be arrested for assaulting a minor.

While other tourists might shrug off a stolen ipoop as no big deal and thank The Seven that their passport and wallet wasn't stolen, I--as a cyclist with an excess amount of testosterone--will not allow such a slight to go unpunished. The next day, I return to the same location and start talking to pretty much every local I can find, describing as much as I can about these kids and asking if anyone has seen these sketchy looking so-and-so's walking around lately. It's not long before I find out where one of the kids works at night (the very same junkyard in which they made their escape). I also discover a sympathetic taxi driver named Samuel who not only knows exactly who I'm talking about, but also had his money pouch stolen by the same kids a week before. We join forces and head to the junkyard to ask the whereabouts of one of the kids. We

get an address from the boss and head a few miles up the road to a shack, where Samuel politely describes our situation to the mother of two of the robber muchachos. After we help her move some fresh water inside her house, she agrees to take us to where the five robbers hangout in town. These kids were not expecting to see the two of us again, let alone with their own momma at our side. After we reassure them that we were not bringing the police, one of the kids with a bloody rag stuck to his nose brings out the driver's money pouch and my tunebox. This kid, with a nasty crusty blood soaked rag wrapped tight around his snout, has the chutzpah to tell me that he and his friends weren't the robbers, that someone else sold them the goods for 20 soles (\$7.50). Some people. Anyway, the day was a success, and the moral of the story is as always "yes we can". **BT**

Pujo writes; "I do not encourage cyclists to be vigilantes, nor do I encourage violence against teenagers." So maybe this should be titled, "what NOT to do when you're robbed".
<http://talesofthedreamcrusher.blogspot.nl>



A Magical Night

Text & photos: BRETT WATSON

OK, SO THIS WAS AS EVENTFUL as evenings get out here, so it needed to be documented. We have been not so lazily blasting through wine country here south of Santiago, Chile and we have been slowly magnetized to the vineyards like my mother gravitates towards the local casino. Of course there are the uppity vineyards scattered about where you pay out of your ass for a bottle at \$4. That said, we prefer the service of a small house with a "se vende vino" sign out front. Not only do you get to suck on numerous glasses while counting the wine makers teeth on one hand, but he will even suck on the garden hose to siphon your vino into an empty 1.5 liter water bottle. Top notch service all for about \$1...comparable to Larry at the deli counter.

The one downfall to all of the vineyards is private property absolutely everywhere. Because scaling barbed wire fences isn't an option, we had to knock on some doors. We won the powerball with this one. We were led back to a small plotch of dirt with a healthy view of 20,000 liter monster caskets of homemade wine. Felipe, small in stature, but large in heart, proved a curious fellow as he rattled off question after question regarding our going's on. In the midst of this chatter, he mentioned they also made Aguardiente which happens to be booze made from the leftover water after a wine harvest. Translation: illegal Chilean moonshine...uhhhh, sign us up!

What followed is detailed below. Please forgive the shitty, unfocused photography....
WHO AM I, ANSEL ADAMS?! Christ...

1) 17th pour.

2) Nothing kills the party like the vineyard workers dumping the recently deceased family livestock in the tasting area/garage.

3) Nothing livens the party like using teamwork to gut the old bitch and ladling blood into a 5-gallon bucket.



All in all, nothing more than a standard evening with a bit of wine and new friends. A fine time had by all...except possibly the horse. **BT**

Read more from Brett Watson and Ryan McMahon's trip to South America at:
<https://conbigotes.wordpress.com>

Chile - you're a bastard but good to see ya...

By: BRETT WATSON

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY to continue to glue our asses to the comforts and lackadaisical nature of the Casa de Ciclistas in La Paz, but our Precision Wind Speed Judgment Bike Group finally got back on the road feeling rested and ready for Chile. The south-western border of Bolivia was only a healthy 4 Altiplano days away and the Atacama desert loomed shortly after.

Very aware that riding conditions of rain, wind and zero air to suck would soon change to well, just wind, we yearned for a change. Though damn gorgeous, these high plains beat the hell out of you. Not only physically, but the mental grind is just as much of a task. There is something overly demoralizing about starting a what looks like 2 kilometers of road, straight as Charlie Sheen, and it ends up being 30 kilometers of pedaling on a treadmill. Distances are almost impossible to judge as there can be zero landmarks from horizon line to horizon line. I equate it to waking up on the a sailboat in the middle of the Caribbean and all you can see is 360 degrees of water.

It's quite humbling. In addition to there being absolutely nothing out here, it is accompanied by the deafening absence of sound. Listening to yourself breathe sounds like a Scorpions concert from 1979.

All of that nonsense being ledgered, we did have a fairly interesting time the day after we crossed the border. I'm not at all sure why, but Chile finds it necessary to thief all of your fruit and vegetables upon entering their country. This would be only a small hurdle if:

A) We weren't idiots cycling this portion of Mars

B) There would have been any locale selling any sort of substantial food items shortly after the border.

Having no options for dinner later that night, we rolled the dice on a pre-packaged bag of llama and potatoes that had been idle in some broad's cooler for god knows how long. Turned out to be fine. Salty and a bit gamey, but when it's your only option, it tastes like a fucking porterhouse. Christ, I've lost sight of the point here. Anywho, figuring there

would be a tiny tienda somewhere in the next galaxy to buy anything food wise, we pedaled on the next morning without worry. Ummm, we were wrong. What followed was 145 kilometers of nothing. No food, only 2 liters of water and a 4,400 meter mountain pass to climb. When the pioneers of adventure cycling wrote the manual, this was in the chapter of "Shit Not to Do." Halfway through and figuring we were screwed, I won the lottery and begged a woman for some food. She was delighted to provide a bowl of soup, some bread and 2 glasses of Chilean wine to keep me warm from the cold and freezing rain. Ryan, who had distanced himself a tad and didn't see me stop, continued and I knew he was up shit-creek when I was informed the next town was 75 kilometers ahead. Folks, we got lucky. What followed was 3 hours of descent with a hefty tailwind from the high plateau down into the dryest portion of land in the world. I finally found Ryan in the town of Huara, ramming spaghetti and beer in his face after 8 hours and about 755,000 burned calories.

Finally on the Chilean coast and resting for a couple of days in our old vacation stomping grounds of beautiful Iquique, we only had what looked like a casual 4-day push south to Antofagasta. Though scenic, I didn't much care for fighting 30 mph headwinds for almost all of it. Wind quickly turns pleasurable riding into the most goddamn frustrating thing you can imagine. It completely sucks all the energy out of you and makes fun of your love-handles after that. I would have paid a healthy amount of cash to have wind actually be a person, so I could cut her achilles tendon in her sleep. She is an absolute slob.

The final 2 month push to Ushuaia will ensue shortly and I am excited, but at the same time, I have no idea what to do not having a bike seat jammed in my rear on a daily basis. When I figure it out I will let you know. **BT**

*Read more from Brett Watson and Ryan McMahon's trip to South America at:
<https://conbigotes.wordpress.com>*







The Worrying Symptoms

of an Experienced Cycle Tourist

Text: BRUNO SAULET

Photos: STÉPHANE GIRARD



Symptoms after the first tour:

Right, you'll get this right the next time. You decide to buy yourself proper bike bags to replace the worn out duffel bag that you filled with cans of food and which squashed you on the saddle for kilometres and kilometres.

You've just bought a magazine about the great outdoors which advises you to put on warm clothes when it's cold and cool clothes when it's warm.

You can finally ride more than 60km in a day without hunger pains and without sobbing on the phone and asking your mother to drive out and take you home.

Symptoms after your third tour:

You've signed up at a web site for cycle-travellers and you love to spend your evenings asking everybody the best way to fix solar panels on a bike rack, even though you can find electric sockets throughout the entire world.

Your physical condition has never been better but you get dangerously close to blowing your heart when you climb that wretched hill on the way to work. You decide to follow the advice of a local cyclist and hope things get better.

Your uncle's bike from the 1970s can no longer stand up to the 60kg you load exclusively on the back wheel.

Symptoms after your sixth tour:

You have just bought a wonderful made-to-measure bike with your name written on it and you invite all your friends to admire "the beast" ecstatically.

You find that three chainrings are a lot better for a tour of the Alps.

You adore answering all the questions from novices on your own web site and you love seeing how fast the personal messages come in.

The start of your collection of newspaper articles is the new pride of your web site.

Symptoms after your 10th tour:

Your panniers are still full of stuff even when you're not on the road because, you find, they make excellent cushions on the sofa.

Your partner reluctantly decides that going cycle-touring with you is the only way to save the marriage.

You have an intimate knowledge of at least three continents and you have just enrolled for an advanced class in Mandarin.

You now cover more kilometres a year on your two wheeler than in your car.

Symptoms after your 18th tour:

You've changed your tent at least five times because the promises that tentmakers make have no relation with the technical indications in their catalogues.

Your boss is tired of seeing you turn up yet again to ask for more time off because you now spend as much time on two wheels as you do in the office.

Your bike is smothered in stickers advertising so-called sponsors because you're proud they can make so much money from your efforts in return for "giving" you a voucher for 15 per cent off the price of anything you buy there.

Symptoms after your 25th tour:

Your partner threatens to leave if you don't stop cycling before the end of the year.

You know everything ever made for cycle-tourists and you adore telling companies how to improve their products.

Your neighbours have run out of excuses for not collecting your mail, not looking after your house keys, not storing things. They simply avoid you. They find it the easiest way.

Symptoms after your 30th tour:

You regularly give talks at local old folk's homes, where you pinned up your poster in the hope that it might inspire young people.

Your level of cycling will soon be at least as good as that of a local racer making a comeback.

You go back to countries you've already visited because, like you and your bike, they change. And after all, you still can't pedal to the moon.

Airlines have lost or destroyed at least two of your bicycles.

Symptoms after the 50th tour:

You've been living alone for a long time.

You have at least three touring bikes in your otherwise empty garage, plus two trailers, two recumbents, a trike and all sorts of bike bags. A car? What would you do with that?

You know people all over the world and you're close to overloading your list of friends on Facebook.

You're tired of all the stupid questions that novices ask about your bike and the way you live.

Everyone thinks you belong to a sect.

Symptoms after your 100th tour:

You can't remember how many countries you've visited.

You prefer "high risk" countries to be sure of not coming across other tourists.

You are the champion of knocking on doors and asking for somewhere to stay. You're so good that you no longer see the point in lugging a tent and stove.

You no longer worry about looking like a hobo. Not now it's already too late, anyway.

You've been out of the country so long you're not sure you've still got the papers you need to get back in again.

You've had one heck of a good life! **BT**

Bruno Saulet now runs a velo gite in Valence France. <http://www.velogitevalence.fr/english>

Stéphane Girard spent a year cycling with his wife Angela between Poland and New Zealand. Now back to normal working life, he tries to make every holiday count by exploring a new country every year. www.ouestef.com



Renée Rowland

Interview by: Loretta Henderson

The Big Women On Wheels book contains 100 interviews with females who travel the world solo by bicycle, including this interview with U.K. to N.Z. cyclist Renée Rowland.

“To be honest, after the initial honeymoon period it took me a while to find peace on the road,” Renee said when I asked her about life on a bike. There is a duality with cycle touring in the developing world, a euphoric sense of daily accomplishment that coexists with poverty, hardship, grief, ugliness. Cyclists are vulnerable to the environment - social and natural. Renee found adjusting to her new life to be a challenge and said, “There is a lot of love involved now but it’s a rollercoaster – the road is not without vicissitude, as you know.” I asked Renee about some of that roadside vicissitude.

Q: What are the elements that you love about bicycle touring?

A: At first, it was the novelty. I was no longer in a 9-5 job that actively crushed my spirit; I was on a bike traveling! I had spent nine months planning the trip, partly in reaction or repulsion to the life I had been living. When I finally started out, for the first time in my life, I was driven each day with a purpose. I now love the tension between the short term and long term - every day is filled with challenge and intensity, but every day is part of a big plan, a big journey that will be more than the sum of its days.

Q: What does a day in the saddle feel like?

A: There will be at least one point every day when something blows me away. I love the clouds. The infinite combinations of where the road meets the sky. I get excited for what I am going to see when I crest the top of a hill. I love cycling through a canyon or over a mountain and knowing that not even in my most intense

imaginings could I have visualized the scene before me or comprehended the beauty. And I love buying fruit and vegetables and saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ in the local language.

Q: What do you find challenging?

A: All these things I love coexist with grief and hardship, pollution, poverty and ugliness. I can’t isolate myself from those things as much as I want to ignore them because I am part of them. I can be in complete despair over all the rubbish and pollution and then see a gnarly beautiful twisted old tree and feel a great sense of appreciation. Or I can be coasting euphorically downhill with the sun on my face, the road smooth and the sky vibrant, but there is a part of me that is very awake and very heartbroken from missing all the people that I love. So perhaps it is the rollercoaster that I love. At this stage in my life, I am honoring the first responsibility I have, to live a meaningful life.

Q: What is it that makes us all so energetically open and full of love? I sometimes call it the Zen of touring.

A: Perhaps because we are intensely vulnerable all of the time. You can’t escape it. And every time a truck passes you, every time you make camp in the wild, every time you see the stars, you are reminded of that fact. So in some ways, we are forced open, whether we like it or not. We are exposed to the real human condition, both in ourselves and in those we meet, in an almost raw, crude or primal way – as well as in a sophisticated and

magnificent way. When I lived in the city and worked 9-5, I counted the days ‘til the next payday and then I went out drinking cocktails and accumulating junk.

Q: Were you practicing yoga or meditation prior to embarking from the UK to New Zealand?

A: I had been practicing yoga for about a year before I left on the bike and had this notion that I would be able to continue my practice on the road, but each day passed and I couldn’t bring myself to do a sun salute.

By the time I had pitched my tent and made camp and dinner, etc., all I could do was climb into the sleeping bag. So yoga has fallen by the wayside but the cycle has brought me peace. Getting on the bike and pedaling became the one constant in the universe. When everything else was foreign and difficult and uncertain, swinging the leg over the panniers and saddle and going somewhere became the thing that provided the most comfort, the one thing I could control that brought me a sense of achievement and peace.

Q: I am often overwhelmed with a deep sense of gratitude. I sometimes feel like thanking everything. I say thanks to dogs that chase but don’t bite. I say thank you to cows for allowing me to swerve around them but not crash. And I always try to leave a place better than I found it. I collect garbage and always take the time to speak with locals. Do you feel grateful?

A: The gratitude just arrived one day, overwhelming me. I had made a decision to ‘go dark’ and cycle for a couple of weeks without checking email, Facebook, or going on any of the rides on the social media Disney Land. It was tough at first, but it turned out those three weeks were the best riding days. Just me and the road and the bike. And within that space I’d created, rather than thinking of the next blog post or Instagram picture, there was just the pure and simple joy and, after that, the

gratitude and love just flooded in. I just wanted to contact everyone I knew and thank them and tell them how much I loved them and how thankful I was for their existence as well as my own, for my journey and my life. It is a powerful energy and it still overwhelms me.

Q: Do you have a road philosophy or something you tell yourself at challenging moments?

A: I have three mottos for the tough, miserable moments: You got this! Everything is temporary. No effort is wasted.

But aside from that, there are two things I practice as much as possible and have to do so actively because they don’t gush forth as I wish they would: kindness and patience.

I try every day to be kinder than I need to be. Kind to myself because I’ve discovered, lo and behold, self-loathing is just another headwind and cruelty is depraved. Kind to my future self so the next day is easier (by doing things like cleaning up properly after dinner and doing the bike maintenance at the end of the day so the morning is free) and kind to everyone I meet.

I try to live within a wholesome discipline, but I also know I have to be gentle with myself. If I want to eat biscuits for dinner, I let myself. If I want three breakfasts, I let myself have three breakfasts. Patience I struggle with, but I ask myself, ‘What would a tree do?’ The answer is always the same: breath and wait. So I try to be more like the trees. **BT**

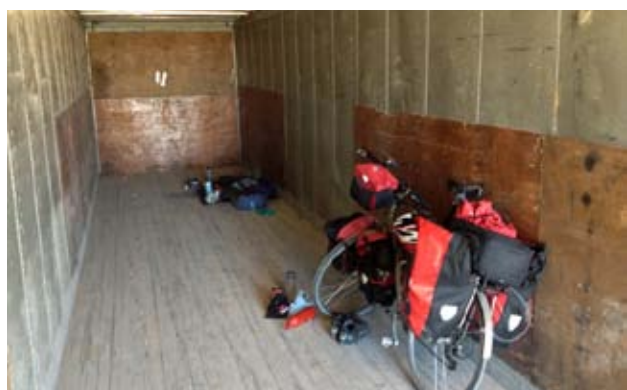
Renée reached her hometown in New Zealand in December 2016 after 18 months on the road and 27 countries later. She now lives and works in Twizel, NZ as a freelance writer and still cycles everyday. www.instagram.com/rjr61.

Author Loretta Henderson dedicates her Big Women On Wheels book to all the little girls in the world who look up and say, “maybe I can do that one day.” You can buy her book at www.solofemalecyclist.com.









What to expect...

Text & photos: DAVE GILL

Bicycle touring for a sustained period of time is a funny old thing. It is freedom. It is frustration. It is joy. It is really a range of everything you can get thrown at you, erm, being thrown at you. Here are four things you might expect if you saddle up and live off a bike for a while.

Mechanical Issues

During these moments, riders will often be heard feeling sorry for themselves by muttering / screaming such phrases as, *"F*?k this!"* or *"Not again!"* or *"Just give me a break for one day!"* or *"Not dealing with it. I'm done. Totally done. Where's the nearest burrito shop?"*

Ambiguous Sleeping Arrangements

It's 9PM, 10PM, 1AM. You haven't got a clue where you are. Your eyelids are heavy. You need to stop. You'll want to sleep A LOT. Fear not though – spend long enough living on a bicycle and you will become a sleep ninja. You will become a hawk, being able to spot possible places to sleep from a mile away. Your sixth sense will develop, and you'll become comfortable not being comfortable. You might even wake up in a nice spot occasionally. Popular phrases during these times include: *"This bench will do"*, and, *"No way will there be a park ranger who kicks the tent at 4.30AM. Absolutely not."*

Lots of Empty and Enjoyable Roads

You know, those roads that keep going right the way to the horizon. These are either total bliss (if you're in a good mood) or hell on earth (if you're in a bad mood). Either way they become some of the magical moments that, after all is said and done, will always provide memories that will make you daydream and sometimes miss road life. Phrases during these times include: *"No one will hear me singing Bat Out Of Hell here, surely not"*, and, *"It's flat and straight. There's absolutely no way anything can go wrong on this stretch."*

Teaming up with New Pals

Who is that in the distance? They look like pannier bags. Maybe they are. Finally, after weeks and weeks, you're not a loner anymore! It's another person on a bike! These times are wonderful. They take you out of your own head and often form the experiences which you'll cherish forever. Someone once said, *"Happiness only real when shared"*, and they were right. Phrases during these times include: *"Want to stop for a beer?"* and *"Want to stop for lunch?"* **BT**

Dave Gill quit his job to go cycling around North America for a year. "Vague Direction: A 12,000 mile bicycle ride, and the meaning of life" is his first book. www.vaguedirection.com.

ALASKA

*Claude Marthaler pedals the
length of the Dalton highway
to meet a kindred soul.*



A road to nowhere. A dream's road for a traveler, ending at the Arctic Ocean, still half covered with ice. To the west, just a Bering Strait's distance of Alaska to Siberia, and the whole Eurasian continent. Up here, planet Earth appears like a soap bubble -- light, fragile, gracious, colorful under the brightness of the sun.

Things happen like that. You end up one day in a tiny place called Deadhorse or Prudhoe Bay (already two names to describe it), your eyes trained by the immensity of the tundra covered by a paper fine trace of snow, surprised by an unexpected number of airplanes landing and taking off from this point, visible 20 kilometers before you reach it.

After about 400 miles of gravel road, nearly 900 kilometers of distance from Fairbanks, the Dalton Highway ends abruptly. Call it mile or kilometer 0, almost everything starts here. The vastness of the landscape tells you the real dimension of time, but the modern human chapter of Alaska takes a short cut: rush. Rush for fur, rush for gold, rush for war, rush for black gold.

The trans-Alaskan pipeline was a strange presence, always showing its profile never its face and yet faster than I, filling its long snake's body with a 7 to 8 miles per hour black, hot, multi-million dollar old substance giving, on its way south, birth to almost everything, starting with the tires of my bicycle.

One day we flew over the Northern Slope. The pilot, who has been flying since the age of 15 (more than half of her life) tells me "See, flying is addictive, like cycling must be to you, isn't it?" She slightly tips her vessel to point out some caribou. The white tundra crossed by curves of black rivers looked like an old grave. In a few weeks, it will change dramatically

into a blossom of fresh colors.

We landed on a small airstrip called Nuiqsut, a few 90 grade paved roads, some electric cables and inside, ugly houses (not fancy but practical due to the harsh winter conditions), linked only by air and radio to the outside world. We brought some junk food and sodas, extending the worldwide network of unhealthy habits to this end of the world. Today, I believe I could better understand caribou than humans.

Yes, things happen like this, the road to nowhere brought me to the essential. The fragile silhouette of me and my bike, braving the rain, the wind, the snow, the fog and the cold over the Brooks range attracted the truck drivers, the very first tourists, some people working on the pipeline, like they would attract the mosquitoes in a couple of weeks.

Truck drivers were the most unpredictable species on the road, haunting my cold nights under my tent by their terrible stories. "The grizzly bears have just come out of their long hibernation, they are very hungry!" Though a cyclist is a skinny animal, it would easily make a grizzly's picnic, a good change for his diet. I hoped The Grizzly bear would be as kind as the Yeti in Tibet, like a legend, adding a sweet sensation of fear (enough to make you appreciate suddenly the unique value of life), instead of suppressing human beings. Enough good to be never seen. Truck drivers also stopped for a



chat or to feed me. Not knowing, along with the bears, that I was carrying 14 kilograms of food.

The first person I was to meet in Deadhorse was the right one. Strangely enough, call it karma, destiny or chance, she was reading the same books as I was and soon said "Follow me!"

I pitched up my tent in front of the airstrip. Peering through the zippered opening let me appreciate the ballet of the tiny airplanes -- dream machines.

"The little prince" was somewhere around. I met Diana, not the princess, the other one. She just brought back from San Francisco a bunch of books about Tibet, the yak's country, where of course, she intended to go. The most remote places on Earth, like strong magnets, bring people in search of nothing to everything simply together. And like a snowball, the miracles become the most natural phenomena. Traveling develops your intuition incredibly, your instinct.

Looking for a truck to hitch-hike back the road to nowhere and also finding finally a suitable place to write my travel stories, slow like always, I was to forget that Alaska still meant 'rush'. "You can fly tomorrow to Anchorage for free, even to SAN FRANCISCO if you wish!"

The answer fell down from the sky, faster than an email. This was no hallucination, just true reality, something chemical between people on the same wave, without any logical explanation. "Please, draw me an airplane!"

said the little prince. Diana was drawing, and it seemed good enough to add wings on my bike's wheels.

I was, perhaps for the last time in my life, to see the airstrip of Deadhorse without knowing really if I was landing or taking off. Probably there was only one place on Earth called Deadhorse. It was snowing outside, I could feel the bellows of the airplanes, turning in a round sound like a primordial pulse, perhaps this of the bull of soap.

I have to pack my bags, and bags of emotions, turning definitively my back to the Arctic Ocean, heading to Patagonia, the other extremity of the continent. Full tilt. An enigma to arrival. Some more 15500 miles to the South. "To the South!" But tell me: Where is the South of nowhere? **BT**

Claude Marthaler has published 9 books. His philosophy; "It is the slowness that blurs the boundaries, reduces the importance of the exotic and ideology. The bike measures the pulse of the earth like a sensitive seismograph."
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Marthaler

After resigning from his job four years ago, John Fontanilles is enjoying an extended midlife crisis traveling around and photographing the beautiful places he sees along the way.
<https://wanderingbicycle.com>

Ready to Roll

Bicycle travelers
and their rigs



Photos: Helmi Pitkaniemi

NAME: Jukka Salminen, from Finland

HISTORY: My dad introduced me to bicycle touring at a young age. Together we undertook week long trips through Europe.

After starting university, I had some health problems. So I decided to take a year off.

At first I only planned to pedal for 10 months through South-East Asia. Then six weeks before my flight, I was sitting on the toilet, studying a world map. Suddenly I thought, "Why not cycle every continent?" I hadn't dreamt about it beforehand, nor had I heard of anybody else who had done it. But boy oh boy, I felt "that's it"! I cancelled my return ticket and never looked back.

In 2005, at age 23, I flew to Bangkok. From there I rode through Asia, Australia, Europe, Africa and North America. After more than 4 years of travel, I decided to end my trip in Mex-

ico and flew back to Finland. In 2013 I took off again for South America.

TOURING STYLE: I'm not interested in mileage and just let life happen. Sometimes I like to 'smash' a big mountain pass with a hammer and afterwards take a number of days off. Then I'll just relax and recover. With slow travel, I'm more able to appreciate my surroundings.

I've enjoyed everywhere that I've pedaled through but my favorite rides have been over difficult high altitude passes. Technical riding is so much fun!

BIKE: I started my world tour on an old 26 inch Felt mountain bike. Later I was lucky that the Finnish importer of Felt bicycles began sponsoring my journey. In the last continent, South America, I rode a stiff aluminum Felt 29er

with 2.35 inch knobby tires and a rigid Surly steel fork.

During the "big trip" I just rode what I had. I set off with only 3,000 Euros in my pocket and earned extra money underway. I didn't have surplus cash for expensive lightweight bikes and gear; it all went up on food and visas.

Now that I'm back home and working, I've been able to splurge on top range equipment. For bikes, I really like the 2.8-3 inch wide plus size format for its versatility. It rolls well on tarmac and lets me comfortably explore demanding forest trails. Together with my girlfriend, we now have three plus-sized bikes: a rigid packing mule Surly ECR, a lightweight Felt Surplus 30 hardtail and a comfortable Trek Fuel EX8 Plus full-suspension bike. Our daughter Hilla has a 24 inch Evon Gauzy bicycle with a 250w electric motor so that she can ride with us!

BAGS: I used to travel with a traditional four pannier Ortlieb setup, although even during the days of fully loaded touring, I was weight conscious and tried to keep the gear weight at around 20 kg during the multiyear tour.

Now I also own a full range of Revelate bike-packing bags. I combine them with panniers depending upon the planned trip. On shorter tours, I attach small Ortlieb panniers to the rear rack and use a framebag plus handlebar roll and bag to distribute the weight evenly. I feel that the extra weight of small panniers is worth it since they allow me to carry 'proper' food and a couple of comforts like a soft pillow. It also makes it easier to pack in my gear. On our latest family tour in Portugal, I was the donkey who carried all the heavy stuff. During that trip I used big 20 liter Ortlieb back panniers.

ELECTRONICS: Writing helped fund my travels. So I needed to carry a laptop. Magazine articles and books also needed illustration photographs, so I had to carry a camera and learn how to use it. At one point I had a big DSRL camera with a zoom lens, but it was heavy. It became more of a burden than a tool! I wanted things to be simpler, so I changed over to the small fixed lens Fujifilm X100. As my photographic needs aren't big, I could take all the pictures I needed with just one 35mm focal

length lens. I like its simplicity. I also have a lightweight Zipshot tripod that enables me to take photos of myself cycling.

My daughter loves her e-bike. She can now easily keep up and even pass me on it.



FAVOURITE GEAR: The bicycle is an amazing tool to celebrate the movement in a human body. So let it be my favorite piece. All the other things and details just support my desire to ride it.

My other favorite piece is my daughter's e-bike. With it, she enjoys riding with me, just as I enjoyed riding with my father.

WEBSITE: www.jukkasalminen.com and www.instagram.com/jukka_salminen

**See also 'Ready to Roll' disclosure on page 91.*







Seven weeks in Tibet

Text: JASON LEWIS

Photos: RICK GALEZOWSKI





Each day I rode north under the benevolent southern Chinese sun, passing fields of golden stooks shaped like the local houses, their thatched roofs tapered into spires to slick off the rain, I gained a few hundred feet in elevation and a little of my former strength. It was August and the rice harvest was in full swing, fueling a festive atmosphere in the surrounding paddies.

I was witnessing the completion of a life cycle that began in Laos with the planting of fledgling rice seedlings.

I stopped between villages to watch a row of barefoot women laugh and crack jokes as they worked, doubled over, scything a stand of mature rice plants with their short-handled sickles. One of the men threshing the stems waved me over.

"How... ode... are... you?" he asked. He was using both of his hands to beat a bundle of stalks against the inside of a wooden box. The grains ricocheted around the inside and

bounced down the slanted sides of the box. "Thirty eight," I replied.

In spite of the hot sun and the back-breaking toil, it was all smiles. Bringing in the harvest was the highpoint of the year for these people, knowing they'd get through another winter.

I picked up a sheaf myself and whacked it into the box. They all thought this was hilarious, the foreign devil playing at Chinese peasant. "Okay, okay! Ferry guda!" And I laughed with them, because it was a glorious day and the sun was shining and the landscape stunning, and in spite of the limited communication, I was enjoying the rosy-cheeked scene of pastoral bliss.

Sadly, such cultural breakthroughs were turning out to be a rarity in China. In spite of my Singaporean friend Melissa's daily lessons in Mandarin, my grasp of the language was still abysmal, limiting social interaction.

The only thing I could say with any degree of competency was, "Wǒ xiǎng jiān jīdàn." I would like a fried egg. Even then, every few hundred kilometres regional inflections would change sufficiently for my attempts to be rendered ineffectual, and I'd be reduced once again to marching into kitchens and stabbing at ingredients.

IN KUNMING, a city of four million, I stopped to track down an oversize printer. There were plenty of reasons to be apprehensive about travelling through Tibet—the risk of landslides on the steep mountain trails, vertical drop-offs, rabid dogs, and falling sick with no hope of medical treatment—but the thing that worried me most was the whereabouts of the police checkpoints, making accurate maps essential. My father had emailed digital versions he'd found on the Internet, avoiding the risky business of smuggling them across the border from Laos. Now I had to find a way of converting them to hard copies to use in the field.

As a provincial capital, Kunming afforded a glimpse of the new China everyone was banging on about, the rags to riches story that hogged the covers of international business magazines with headers like China Rising, New Powerhouse of the East, and Red Dragon Apparent.



As the publications indicated, I could have been in London or New York going by the trendy shops with kitschy English names selling everything from the latest Paris fashions to Double Choca Mocha Frappuccinos, all presented with a designer's flare for complementary colours, slick lighting, and subtle techno pulsing in the background. But I couldn't stop thinking of the farmers less than a day's ride away bringing in the harvest with their bare hands, not a machine in sight. The disparity was so marked, the urban fantasy so out of synch with the harsh realities of Chinese rural life, that future dissent from the impoverished many seemed almost inevitable.

But hey, what did I know about China? I found my oversize printer, had twenty-two large-scale maps printed on durable silk, and spent the next two days holed up in a cheap guest house working out the exact location of the checkpoints. The maps were 1:200,000 Russian military topos, the only ones my father had managed to find marked with latitude and longitude. Working backwards, I first had

to marry the place names and key features—prominent peaks, rivers, and bridges—to those on a Chinese road atlas, translating the Cyrillic script into Chinese Hanzi and Tibetan uchen characters. Next, a list of essential odometer readings compiled in English, including the checkpoints themselves, had to be transposed to the Chinese atlas, and then to the Russian topos. Finally, I entered the latitude and longitude fixes of the checkpoints into my GPS, shaved my head and beard, trading the hairy foreigner look for that of a Buddhist monk, and struck out for Dêqên, the last legal town before the Tibet border.

THE FIRST TOPO I slipped into the map case on my handlebar bag was dominated by three parallel scars gouged by the Mekong, Salween, and Yangtze rivers, each of them full-blooded torrents spilling off the Tibetan Plateau. Between them, and over millions of years, these engines of attrition had produced the most demanding topography I had ever

"It was a preview of what lay in store over the coming weeks: rugged, merciless terrain, and the road spiralling through the roof of the world."

faced. The road to Benzilian involved a fifty-six-kilometre climb between the Mekong and the Yangtze. It took all day snaking up 7,800 feet of cobblestone switchbacks, leading to stunning views of tumbling glaciers and saw-toothed peaks capped in snow. Ten kilometres before the pass, it started to rain, which turned to sleet, then to hail, causing my wheels to lose traction and sending me sprawling. The air was so thin I could barely think straight, my breath coming in shallow, ragged gasps.

It was a preview of what lay in store over the coming weeks: rugged, merciless terrain, and the road spiralling through the roof of the world.

AT 2:45 AM the beeping of my watch alarm woke me. I rolled up my sleeping bag and air mattress, slipped out from behind a partially collapsed wall above the road, and scrambled down to the dusty track, dragging my equipment behind me.

There was just enough moonlight to ride by, if I pedalled slowly. Keeping the thundering-Mekong to my left, after forty or so minutes a yellowy ball of light appeared, hovering in the darkness ahead. I dismounted and began walking my rig, tyres crunching on the loose gravel. Drawing near, I saw the light was from a household bulb suspended by a naked wire from the eaves of a low building: the first of two checkpoints either side of Yanjing.

Fifty yards short of the guardhouse, I stopped and listened. *Will the guards be asleep yet?* I wondered breathlessly. Only the wind whistling through the sleeping town made any sound. The shadows of the surrounding mountains crowded in, adding to the sense of claustrophobia gripping my throat. I pressed the night light on my watch. Usually an inoffensive glow, the green luminescence seemed to light up the entire valley. I cursed myself. Any mo-

ment there'd be a shout, the clatter of boots, searchlights probing the night.

Nothing. Just the gusting wind.

I crept closer, my breath sounding horribly amplified. A pole barrier materialized from the blackness with a sign written in English and Chinese. DO NOT ENTER, it read. Keeping one eye on the guardhouse, I steadied my bike and trailer and ducked underneath. Suddenly, a dog began barking. The night erupted as others took up the cry, baying and howling in a frenzied cacophony.

Still there was no movement from the guardhouse. I vaulted into the saddle and pushed away, the canine chorus following me in a rolling wave.

Three kilometres later, the second checkpoint loomed. Again, I got off and tiptoed the last hundred yards towards the barrier. The guardhouse was set back from the road and dimly lit by another solitary bulb, this one affixed to the top of a pole. Once the other side and around the first bend, I pedalled as fast as my headlamp beam would allow, aiming to put as many miles between me and Yanjing before daylight. What a rush! Punch-drunk with nervous exhaustion and relieved at negotiating my first checkpoint, I stopped only once to fill my water bottles from a stream crossing the track.

The Mekong in this part of the world had a different name, the Lancang Jiang, meaning the river kingdom of a million elephants. It was young and peppy, a boiling cauldron of whirlpools and swirling mud. The valley floor, more a sharpened V, was stifling even in the shadowy dawn light. Animal trails criss-crossed the sheer slopes, and only scant vegetation and the hardiest of creatures prevailed—the odd feral donkey, sure-footed sheep, and black goats that scrambled nimbly along the lips of dizzying precipices, sending mini-avalanches of rocks clattering onto the track. I even saw a lone cow



up there, perched hundreds of feet in the air, eking out a precarious existence between the vertical bluffs of rock.

Averaging six kilometres an hour, I started up a thirty-eight-kilometre series of switchbacks to the next pass. Time slows to a crawl on long mountain climbs. As the river below receded in microscopic slow motion to a loop of sepia braid, my mind began to wander. What were the chances of being apprehended between the checkpoints? Maybe I should ride only at night and hide in the day? But at night, going slower, would I still get over the Himalayas before winter? And was that tinkling bells I could hear echoing off the canyon walls?

Around the next bend, a dozen mules appeared with plaits of red wool wound in their leather halters. They teetered stiff-legged under the weight of the sacks slung across their backs—barley flour, I assumed, the only cereal

capable of growing at such altitude, producing the regional staple known as tsampa. Three weather-beaten herders brought up the rear, their mahogany faces creasing into smiles as we passed. When I greeted them in Chinese, “Nǐ hǎo,” they scowled and responded with, “Tah-shi de-leh. Keh-rahng kah-bah phe-geh?” Greetings. Where are you going?

I knew then for sure that I’d made it to Tibet.

AT THE TOP of the pass, the sun was already clipping the peaks to the west. A herd of yaks came shuffling up the track in the twilight, their straggly black and white tails swinging like pendulums, keeping time with their plodding gait. Five nomads in wide-brimmed hats walked beside them. If it had been earlier in the day, I would have stopped to soak in this classic Tibetan moment. As it was, having ridden for fifteen hours straight, I was dog-tired and longed



to camp, so I kept going. I also felt queasy—from the altitude, perhaps, or from the stream water I’d collected earlier in the day but hadn’t had a chance to filter yet.

After jouncing down fourteen kilometres of switchbacks, I looked for a turnoff near a small hill. Another kilometre up a steep sandy track, according to my notes, I could expect to find a monastery, one that was home to a friendly English-speaking monk called Jamanbo, and ask for sanctuary.

The square-roofed monastery was snuggled up against the mountainside. It had slab-sided walls that were freshly whitewashed, and the entrance to the inner courtyard was sumptuously framed like a gilded mantelpiece, its stepped eaves painted with elaborate flowers and mythical beings—dragons, demons, and goddesses—brought to life with earthen pigments of reds, blues, and radiant gold. At the centre of

the cast iron gates was the monastery’s emblem, a bouquet of fiery eyeballs tethered like balloons to their optic nerves, the flames alluding to the modus operandi of the establishment: the raising of spiritual heat, kundalini, leading to moksha, the final release from the cycle of rebirth and worldly pain.

At least that was my assumption. Once inside the courtyard, I found little evidence of devotional pursuit. The place was shambolic, abandoned, as if invaded by gypsies. There was litter everywhere, a beat-up dump truck parked in a corner, and two men tinkering with a motorcycle. Chinese pop music blared from an upstairs window. Where the heck were the monks?

A woman holding a snotty-nosed child appeared before me. When I repeated the name Jamanbo, she just giggled, and the child shook a packet of instant noodles at me. Feeling too sick and exhausted to backtrack and find some-

“Tibet had remained unique for as long as it had in large part thanks to almost impenetrable geography, something I could attest to.”

where else to camp, I made the international sign for sleep. One of the tinkering mechanics seemed to understand, and led me out of the compound to a walled garden filled with fruit trees and purple flowering plants. It was the ideal spot, just what I'd been hoping for, hidden from the road and the PSB.

The hinges on the wooden doors collapsed when I pushed them, but no one seemed to mind. Assisted by two filthy, grinning children, I wheeled my bike inside and set about erecting my tent under a leafy apple tree. It took forever, my fingers fumbling with fatigue, guts gurgling. As I was finally pegging down the rain fly, I heard whistling, and turned to see an old woman whirling something over my head, a rattle-shaped prayer wheel inlaid with colourful stones and Sanskrit letters. She hobbled around the tent, spinning her wheel, her exquisite face lined with compassion. Was this a blessing? An exorcism? I didn't really care. Five minutes later, I was curled up in my sleeping bag, riding out the stomach cramps until sleep finally came.

The sound of padding feet and low voices woke me. It was late, the sun on my face. Encouraged by how much better I felt, I stretched contentedly, unzipped the fly, and peered outside. A monk in magenta robes was helping a woman stuff dry grass into the branches of a nearby apple tree. Beyond them, past the far wall of the garden and partially hidden by trees, I noticed another whitewashed building, one that I'd missed the previous evening. That must be the actual monastery, I realized. Two monks were sitting with their backs against the outer wall, glancing furtively in my direction. Maybe they were having second thoughts giving me refuge and getting ready to alert the PSB?

Seeing that I was awake, one of the monks got to his feet and hurried through a side door. I was considering breaking camp and making

a run for it when the same monk reappeared with a thermos of hot water and three steamed dumplings wrapped in a cloth napkin. I was delighted. Two nights before, the fuel line on my stove had cracked, leaving me unable to cook food or heat water. Having a replacement part shipped to Tibet was out of the question. So was lighting a fire or stopping in towns. To keep as low a profile as possible, I'd resigned myself to soaking instant noodles in cold water until Kathmandu, 2,300 kilometres away.

I made some tea, rehydrated a packet of noodles to go with the dumplings, then sat slurping my breakfast, watching the monks shyly finger the fabric of my tent and contemplating where I was:

an apple orchard in eastern Tibet, home to one of the last great cultures that had managed to preserve its identity and traditions from the homogenizing onslaught of globalization.

NOT FOR MUCH LONGER, I feared. Reading Thubten Norbu's *Tibet - Its History, Religion, and People*, I was surprised to learn that Tibetans were once a warlike people, thrashing the Chinese in a series of military campaigns beginning under Pu Gye, one of their earliest kings and a national hero ever since. But after Buddhism was introduced in the seventh century AD and the people eschewed fighting for peace, the Chinese reversed the tide with a series of punitive invasions, culminating in full authority when the present Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959. The last nail in the coffin of subjugation was the recently completed railway from Beijing to Lhasa. Having endured centuries of humiliating defeats, China was poised to deliver the ultimate act of vengeance by turning Tibet into one giant amusement park overrun with goggling Han Chinese tourists.

Only one thing is more damaging to a cul-



ture than tourists: their money. The chattering sightseers and shutterbugs would leave, but their dollars would stay, fuelling the appetite for more. Tibet had remained unique for as long as it had in large part thanks to almost impenetrable geography, something I could attest to. But people are people, and with the railway acting like a giant hypodermic needle, mainlining the country with cash-rich holidaymakers and extracting its soul one trainload at a time, a way of life that took centuries to evolve would almost certainly be gone in a few years.

“Ho! Yes! Look at me! Ha-ha!”

It was four days later. I was passing a low wall between the villages of Chadang and Chongqui when a pirate captain beckoned me over. The farmer wore an eye patch, a knotted red bandana around his head, and all his front teeth were missing. When I dismounted and produced a camera, he sprang into showbiz-mode, snatching fistfuls of yellow barley straw and flagellating himself.

“Whoa! Look at me!” He whooped with glee as he whipped himself over one shoulder, then the other. *“Look at me working like a Trojan*

while you’re swanning around on that bike!”

At least, that's what I imagined he was saying. His wife, teenage son, and daughter were working close by, bent over their sickles, whirling the shorn bunches of barley like batons before binding them with loose stalks. Even in the heat, the two women wore purple long-sleeve shirts, folds of dark cloth on their heads, and ankle-length dresses as heavy and dour as blackout curtains from the Blitz.

I then experienced something that happened on several more occasions, and always with men, some as young as twenty. The father quit playing the goat, glanced nervously up and down the road and fished out a pendant hidden inside his smock. Inside was the faded black and white photo of a young man, his face open and guileless, and looking studious in a pair of thick-rimmed glasses. It took me a moment to register who it was: Tenzin Gyatso, the expedition's patron and the fourteenth Dalai Lama. This made sense. The Buddhist leader had fled Tibet forty-seven years ago, aged just twenty-four.

The piratic farmer then became distraught, gabbling in Tibetan and gesturing between the





photograph and me. Was he trying to solicit something? Money perhaps? I caught the Chinese words for English and American governments—Yīngguó zhèngfǔ and Měiguó zhèngfǔ—and then I twigged it. As a Westerner, able to leave Tibet, could I please ask the British and American governments to put pressure on the Chinese to allow their beloved leader to return?

The wife and children had stopped working and were sitting cross-legged on the stubble, listening intently. It was a heart-wrenching scene, this little Tibetan family huddled together in their barley field in the high Himalayas, tears streaming down the old woman's face, the father wringing his hands, imploring me to do the impossible and reverse the inexorable tide of Han Chinese expansionism. I was moved to tears myself, by how endearingly naïve they were of the size and complexity of the world beyond their borders, and at the bravery of the old boy to keep such a photograph in his possession—anyone caught with an image of the Dalai Lama could expect to be beaten and imprisoned. Above all, I was touched by their loyalty to a man who'd done a bunk nearly fifty years ago. Where else in the world could you find such devotion to a religious figurehead who hadn't already been dead a thousand years?

THE OLDER TIBETANS I met in the coming weeks were respectful and courteous, but the children, bar a few exceptions, were little shits. I grew wary of the effusive smiles and hearty salutations approaching a village. As soon as I'd passed and my back was exposed, the rocks would come zinging. In the village of Yaka Luo, a dozen tykes with hoes and other digging implements tried to jam my wheel spokes as I rode by. The bolder ones even ran alongside, snatching at the water bottles and camping equipment strapped to my rear panniers. By this point in the journey, I carried a long piece of timber sharpened at one end to ward off attacks by rogue Tibetan Mastiffs, a powerful breed traditionally kept by mountain nomads to protect their livestock from leopards

and wolves. I now used this to great effect on the children.

Appeasement was useless. Tormenting the foreign devil was obviously a national pastime for the youth of Tibet, whose parents stood idly by, clucking proudly as their beloved offspring took aim. I quickly learned to bury any scruples and play them at their own game. Detecting an ambush, I would dismount, pick out a few choice missiles from the arsenal of rocks in my handlebar bag, and use my longer range to lay down covering fire, scattering my pint-sized assailants long enough to slip past.

Equally obnoxious were the white Land Cruisers schlepping Chinese tourists to Lhasa in double quick time. Every day a convoy would roar past in a barrage of beeping horns and volleys of gravel. One vehicle would typically pull over, stopping long enough for a lens to poke out of a window and snap the lone cyclist at his toil, before tearing off in a cloud of choking dust. None of them ever asked permission or, more to the point, whether I needed anything, food or water—a given rule of the wilderness road elsewhere in the world.

In truth, though, I wasn't that surprised. The way drivers hogged the road tallied with the male personality traits I had observed since entering China: loud, overbearing, and just plain rude for the most part, chain-smoking men wandering around with their shirts rolled up, bellies pressed against the face of the world. They reminded me of the bullies you find in any schoolyard, pushy fat kids competing to be the noisiest, the most ostentatious, jostling for attention with exaggerated shows of excess, starting with their gut size.

Of course, these were all simply snap judgments born from the lazy traveller's tendency to generalize and create fiction, rather than bother to stay long enough in a place to actually learn the language and the customs. Nevertheless, I hated the white Land Cruisers.

The monsoon season was officially over, but it still rained every afternoon. It was raining when I pushed my bike off the road sixteen kilometres south of Mangkam, a crossroads town



known for its vigilant checkpoint, and looked for a hidden spot to camp in the folds of the surrounding hills. It was raining when I awoke at 3:00 the next morning, broke camp in the freezing darkness and rejoined the track.

It was raining still as I entered the outskirts of town, soaked to the skin, wheels sloshing through the mud. The sound of arguing drunks echoed from the shadows as I wound my way through the empty streets, eventually arriving at the junction with the Chengdu road, another muddy track coming from the east. Fifty yards to my left was the checkpoint, this one floodlit. A PSB officer was standing beside a truck parked at the barrier, talking to the driver.

It was 4:47 am, the rain hammering down harder than ever. The guard stepped back from the cab, waved, and lifted the pole barrier, allowing the truck to rumble past, then lowered the barrier and ran through the slashing rain to the shelter of his guardhouse. I agonized over what to do next. Chance it tonight, or try again in 24 hours when the guards would hopefully be

asleep? The latter carried the risk of my campsite being discovered in daylight by an inquisitive local. I leaned my bike up against a low wall, slipped off my crackly jacket and SPD sandals with their noisy clips, and crept barefoot to the office window.

Standing on tippy-toes, I could see the top of the policeman's cropped head through the ornate bars. He was sitting at a desk, writing in a ledger. Seizing my chance, I hurried back, grabbed my rig and started walking briskly across the glare of the floodlights, the hissing rain drowning out the sound of the crunching tyres. What if he steps out to pee? I thought suddenly. This was not the time for having second thoughts. I reached the barrier, ducked underneath, and slipped into the darkness beyond.

Four checkpoints down, seven to go.

A FEW NIGHTS LATER, I neared the checkpoint at Zuogong, again in the rain. Like at Mangkam, I planned to dismount well before the barrier and reconnoitre on foot to make sure

“It was time to deploy the secret weapon I’d been carrying with me since Kunming, recommended by a veteran cyclist who’d made it to Lhasa.”

the guards were asleep or otherwise distracted. With two hundred yards to go, however, something large and hairy emerged from the shadows and gave chase. A short distance later, another appeared. Then another. Soon, a whole pack of Tibetan Mastiffs was in hot pursuit. By the time our little posse reached the barrier—which was raised, thank goodness—we’d reached terminal velocity, blazing past in a muddle of legs, teeth, and flying fur.

At the edge of town, the road started up a steep incline. My speed dropped to six kilometres an hour, and I could hear my pursuers gaining on me. It was time to deploy the secret weapon I’d been carrying with me since Kunming, recommended by a veteran cyclist who’d made it to Lhasa.

Sausages.

Chinese sausages are really no different to any other sausages, but the “Schwinway” brand was particularly disgusting, apparently, making them irresistible to Tibetan Mastiffs. I reached into my handlebar bag and threw a couple over my shoulder. The pounding of feet stopped immediately, and a furore followed me into the night as the pack turned on each other, fighting over ground up tits, lips, and arseholes.

For the next hundred ragged kilometres I shadowed the Oi Qu, a tributary of the Salween, before reaching the junction at Bamda. Here the track split. The left fork took me to the next checkpoint, which I crossed in the early hours and started climbing to the next pass.

At the summit, it was snowing hard. The trademark streamers of flapping prayer flags that adorn all Himalayan passes were virtually obscured by swirling fog. Originally I’d intended to fire up the satellite modem and send a video clip back to the website, but this clearly wasn’t going to happen. My knock-off Chinese waterproof jacket was no longer waterproof. My

fingerless gloves were useless. My feet felt like two blocks of ice wearing sandals. Finding shelter before I succumbed to hypothermia was the order of the day. I did a quick whinge to the camera and was about to push off when a white van with black-tinted windows pulled up. When the passenger window rolled down, my heart sank.

Inside were three PSB policemen.

I’d been so careful up until this point, doing everything not to be caught. The police generally kept to the towns, secure in their strongholds. Running into a vanload of them out in the boonies was plain bad luck.

The driver, who looked to be the ranking officer, leaned forward to address me. “Nǎlǐ shì nǐ de xǔkě?” he barked. Where is your paperwork?

He was referring to the three permits I should have had with me: a Tibet Travel Permit provided by the Tibet Tourism Bureau, an Aliens’ Travel Permit issued by the PSB, and a Military Area Permit for sensitive areas like eastern Tibet.

I had none of them, of course, so I just shrugged and feigned simple-mindedness—not difficult in the circumstances. The heat generated from the climb had already dissipated, and I was shivering uncontrollably.

“Nǎlǐ shì nǐ de xǔkě?” the officer shouted again.

“Wǒ bù míngbái.” I shouted back. I don’t understand.

The weather was deteriorating, the snow coming in horizontal globs, melting against my neck and trickling inside my jacket. The driver yelled some more, too fast for me to catch this time, and his two subordinates sank up to their noses in their greatcoats.

I hunched my shoulders and offered him my palms. “Sorry, mate,” I said this time in English.

“But I have no fucking idea what you said.”

It was one of the few occasions on the

expedition when a communication impasse might actually work in my favour. After all, how much longer were the policemen prepared to keep the window open, losing the heat from their cab, trying to get the stupid foreigner to understand?

“Nǎlǐ shì nǐ de xǔkě?” shrieked the PSB officer.

“What’s that?” I cupped my ear.

“Nǎlǐ shì nǐ de xǔkě?”

The junior officers inched closer to the heater vents as the charade continued. Finally, one of them leaned in and muttered something to the driver, who shook his head in disgust. The window then rolled up and away they went.

A deluge of icy runoff had washed deep furrows across the track. With no suspension and in danger of breaking a spoke (worse still, cracking the frame) the twenty-kilometre descent took nearly as long as the ascent. My hands, which had long lost all feeling, rested on the handlebars like frozen claws. To change gears, I had to stop and use my right sandal to depress the lever.

AFTER FOUR HOURS of this, a raised water tank materialized in the blinding sleet. Beside it was a tiny shack fabricated out of flattened 40-gallon drums with smoke leaking from a makeshift chimney. I poked my head inside. A man and a boy wearing a lime green New York Yankees cap were huddled against a wood-burning stove. Seeing me, the man smiled and gestured to a kettle on the hob.

“Cuppa cha?” he said.

What was this, an East London chai wallah in the middle of Tibet? Thinking I’d misheard, I said, “Cha? You mean tea?”

The man nodded, a cowlick of black hair falling across his broad forehead. “Cuppa cha?”

He was thirty, maybe, wearing grey trousers, a grease-stained cardigan, and the serene expression of someone who accepted life’s privations with humble equanimity. For him and the boy, this consisted of eking out a living in this roadside hovel, filling the overheated radiators of Chinese Dongfeng trucks labouring up to the pass.

Feeling hypothermic and my legs caked in freezing mud I needed little persuasion. Elbowing my way inside, I planted myself next to the stove. The man found a plastic cup and filled it with steaming yellow liquid from the kettle. Yak butter tea is oily, pungent, and difficult to choke down at the best of times having the consistency and flavour of unsweetened motor oil. But being high in fat and energy-releasing calories, it is the ideal beverage for life in the arctic Himalayas. It was also the first hot fluid to pass my lips since the monastery, ten days before.

Reaching for the cup like it was the Holy Grail, I inhaled the contents greedily and felt instantly revived. The storm meanwhile continued to rage outside, banging on the flimsy walls and slamming the sheets of the tin roof.

“Cuppa cha?” The man poured me a refill.

“Cuppa cha,” I parroted, just happy to be there. “And a very good cuppa cha, too, if I may say so.”

The man beamed with pleasure, and the three of us sat grinning at each other, bobbing our heads.

The sleet and snow gradually slackened to a light rain. My core temperature now stabilized, I pushed some yuan into the palm of my host and continued my descent. The river valley below was spectacularly prehistoric: barren and hostile, not a blade of vegetation growing. The Salween itself was a roaring livid thing the colour of chocolate milkshake, churned by the fresh runoff. I grew anxious about landslides. Composed of shale and pebbles embedded in sandstone, the canyon sides were hopelessly volatile. A



Belgian cyclist had been killed on this particular stretch in 2002; the same year an entire Land Cruiser filled with Chinese tourists was buried. I put on my helmet. Not for fear of coming off the bike, but of loose rocks falling from above.

EXHAUSTED, and dreading yet another early start in the rain to cross the checkpoint at Baxoi, I opted for a layover day. Hiding my tent below the track on a concealed bend of the river, I took the opportunity to rest up, clean my bike, and attempt to dry at least one set of clothes by wearing them inside my sleeping bag. My feet had swollen and turned white from the constant damp. Another cold camp, everything drenched, I scribbled in my journal. *Even if I thought I could risk it, there’s no chance of a fire—all the wood is wet.*

I lay on my back and dreamed of a hot meal.

Now, well into my second week in Tibet, food was becoming a serious issue and hunger my constant gnawing companion. Every morning and evening, I soaked a packet of instant noodles in a pan of rainwater to try to soften them, before adding the little sachet of monosodium glutamate for taste. Even then, the noodles were barely edible cold. So, when a lone restaurant appeared the other side of Baxoi the following morning, I thought: *What the heck, it’s safe here, surely.*

Propping up my bike outside, I hurried in and ordered two portions of egg with tomato and rice, one to eat on the spot, the other later. Feeling chuffed at making myself understood, I pulled up a chair and watched the orange fish bob in the aquarium, while my mouth puddled with saliva at the smell of frying egg batter. When the food arrived, I realized I hadn’t paid



yet. I stepped out to retrieve some money from one of my panniers and noticed a blue and white sign with Chinese writing on the building opposite. "Police Station," it read.

How did I miss this?

Dashing back inside, I slapped a ten-yuan note in the hands of the bewildered restaurant owner and then fled, riding away as fast as I could. Ahead of me lay a twenty-two-kilometre climb to a 15,000-foot pass. I was ravenous. My stomach was empty and rumbling. I thought: *There's something seriously wrong with this picture. I'm pedalling away from two hot meals I've already paid for.* But all it would have taken was for a policeman to stick his head around the corner and see my bike, and the balloon would have gone up.

By September 13, I'd been in Tibet exactly three weeks. To celebrate a mini-milestone and break the monotony of my daily routine, I decided to camp early near the town of Tangme. It was also my birthday.

Scouting random footpaths, I stumbled upon an old road construction camp, since grown over and hidden from the road. I set up my tent

and settled down to enjoy what had become the highlight of each day: wearing the one piece of gear that remained remotely dry, my sleeping bag, and thawing my fingers on the one part of my body that remained remotely warm. Lying there, staring at the roof of my tent, hands clamped around the family jewels, I marvelled at nature's genius. Ergonomically shaped to the human palm, perfectly positioned at arm's length, and suitably apportioned with one for each fist, testicles make the ideal hand warmers.

FINGERS DULY DEFROSTED, I got up, cleaned my bike, and prepared my birthday dinner. This didn't take long. Unable to face cold noodles for the umpteenth time, I opened a packet of "Good Taste Biscuits" instead. I'd found these between villages in a remote kiosk, a rudimentary affair knocked together with rough-cut lumber, and run by a woman with red and blue woollen braids twisted into her hair and all her own teeth—a rarity in Tibet. Inside, hunks of fat dangled from the ceiling and freshly flayed animal skins shared wall space with posters of torpid Buddhas

and strutting Chinese rock stars. The shelves were virtually bare, just biscuits, rice whisky, a few packets of instant noodles, all of which I bought, and stacks of high-tar cigarettes.

The Good Taste Biscuits were stale, oily, and tasted of paraffin, but I managed to choke a few down with frequent swigs from a bottle of ninety proof whisky. The pitter-patter of rain began on the outside of the tent. Of the twenty-one days I'd spent in Tibet, rain had dominated all but three of them. I'd given up cursing at the sky, saving my breath for scaling the mountain passes. Every day felt like a month, and although Lhasa was only six hundred kilometres away, less than twelve days' ride, it might as well have been an eternity for the dawdling rate that time passed.

"Today, I am thirty nine years old," I grumbled to the camera, taking another pull from the bottle. "I've been fucken around doing this expedition for ..." I had to think for a few seconds.

"Twelve years, now."

Egged on by the whisky, I was soon on a roll, sinking into that slough of preoccupation and selfpity that afflicts the long distance traveller in times of loneliness and despair. The beauty and mystery of Tibet that had once so captivated me was fading fast. Riding through villages, I was becoming more and more grouchy and bad-tempered, surprising even myself at how I snapped at the children: "Don't touch my bike, you little bastards!" Cold, wet, and starving, all I cared about was getting to Lhasa.

The gut rot whisky set my belly on fire, sending a wave of nausea into my throat. Unzipping the rain fly, I scrambled out just in time and upchucked my birthday dinner at the foot of a nearby tree. Standing there, retching, I felt a stabbing pain under my left ear. A hornet! Having taught me a lesson, the enraged insect returned to a swarm that was busy flogging around a rugby ball-shaped nest hanging from a branch above my head.

THREE DAYS LATER a line of colourful umbrellas appeared beside the track, the reds, pinks, yellows, and greens more colour than

I'd seen in a month. When I saw the produce underneath, I had to pinch myself. Boxes and boxes of apples: green Granny Smiths, yellow Golden Delicious, crimson Galas. None of them had obviously been grown in Tibet, which I took to be a good sign. It meant I was getting close to Lhasa and its markets.

"Five," I said to the girl, holding up my hand.

She was in her late teens, wearing a trench coat with synthetic fur lining the hood. I pointed to a mound of Granny Smiths.

The girl giggled as she picked out the apples and placed them in an orange plastic bag. "Wun ... Chew ... Free ..." Her friends crowed with delight as she regaled me in English.

A kilometre up the road, I pulled over beside a willow and retrieved one of the apples. It was huge, the biggest I had ever seen, so big it barely fit in my hand. Pausing to savour the moment, I sank my teeth in all the way to my famished gums. The flesh was white, succulent, and so crunchy I thought I might lose a tooth. Then something quite wonderful happened. Through a gap in the clouds the sun appeared for the first time in weeks. I turned to face the warmth and closed my eyes in ecstasy, feeling like a worm peering out from under a stone the first day of spring. I took another bite and smiled. The last checkpoint was in Bayi, the next town. Like the ten before it, I would rise in the early hours of the morning and slip across. After that it was a straight shot to Lhasa, only three hundred kilometres away. I allowed myself to say the words I hadn't dared to until now.

I'm going to make it. **BT**

Jason Lewis circumnavigated the globe using only human power. He is now writing a trilogy of books about the journey. More information can be found at: www.jasonexplorer.com & [@explorerjason](https://twitter.com/explorerjason).

Rick Galezowski is a Canadian architect who has toured extensively through Asia and the Americas. His website www.backintheworld.com is full of stunning imagery.

PHOTO STORY

BAJA DIVIDE

Mark Watson and Hana Black pedal the new 1,700 mile off-pavement route down the length of the Baja California peninsula.

As much as the Baja Divide is about riding through incredible landscapes, challenging yourself on the variable terrain, and all the experiences that come with touring in a developing country; it's also about the camping and the random patches of dirt you get to call home each night. Sometimes they're poxy and sometimes they're the best campsite you've ever had.





1. Roadside shrine.
2. Grandmother looks after the kids in El Datil.
3. Misión San Francisco Borja.
4. The riding surface varies immensely and can be relentlessly tough.





The route leads through an enchanting landscape of cardon cactus, cirios trees and cholla.



Mark Watson is a landscape and outdoor photographer with a passion for steep places and human-powered, two-wheeled machines. Together with his partner Hana Black, they're cycling from Alaska to Argentina via the road less travelled. You can follow them at www.highlux.co.nz, www.instagram.com/highluxphoto and www.instagram.com/beinghana.

The Baja Divide route was researched and developed by Nicholas Carman and Lael Wilcox. More information can be found at <http://bajadivide.com>.

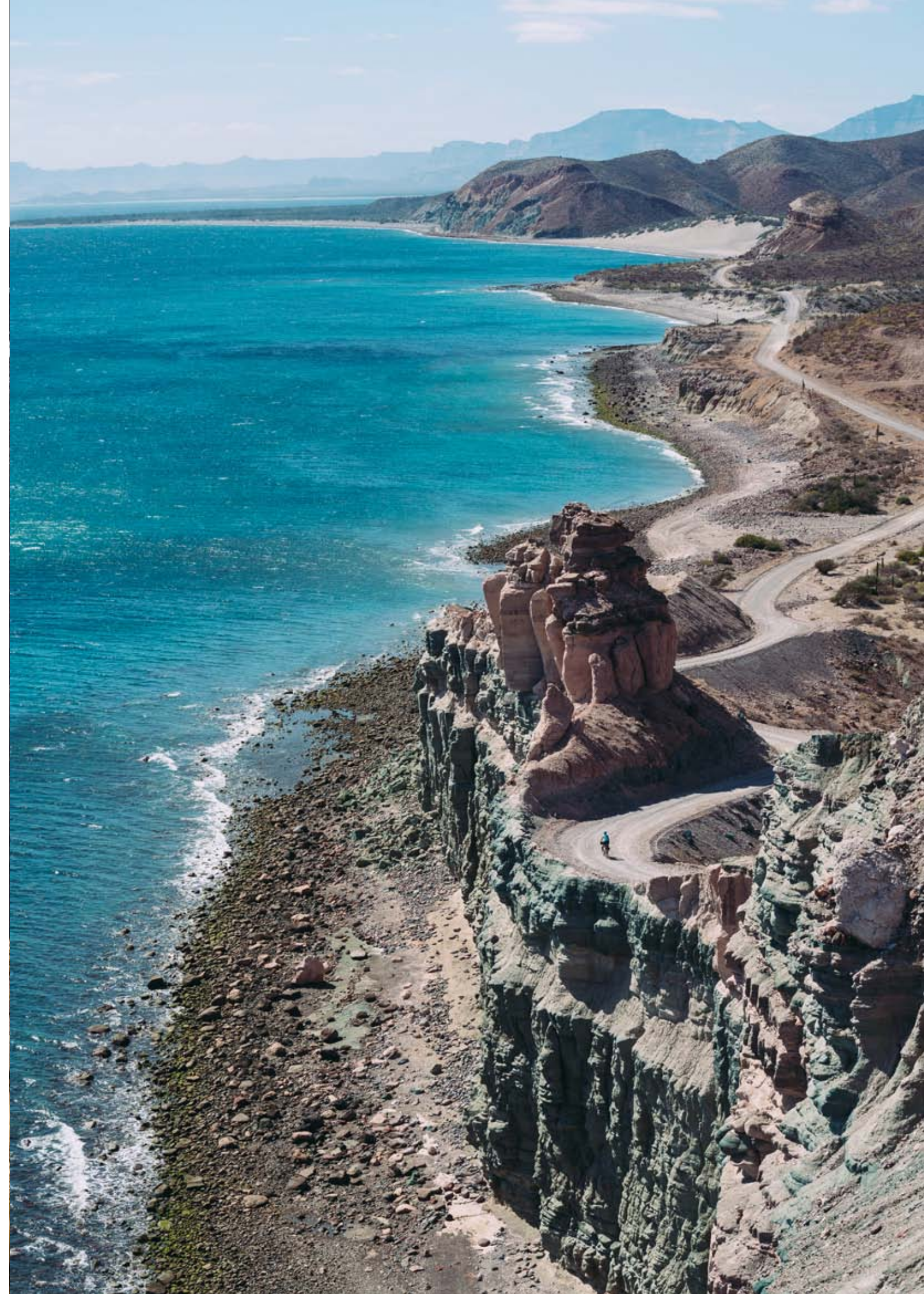








Image from the Road: **AMERICA**

BY: JOHN FONTANILLES <https://wanderingbicycle.com>



WHEN THE WARMEST SPOT IN THE CAMPSITE
IS THE SHOWER CUBICLE IN THE MEN'S ROOM

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.

Parting shot



Photo: STÉPHANE GIRARD www.ouestef.com

BicycleTraveler