

BicycleTraveler

International Magazine on Bicycle Touring





BicycleTraveler

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"Attention solo cyclists! Are you interested in tips on how to improve your self portraits? Then check out professional photographer Peter Jordan's interview in this edition." ~ Grace Johnson

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Costa Rican FIRE STATIONS

By: RICK GALEZOWSKI

A little-known fact about Costa Rica is that many of the country's fire stations offer free accommodation to touring cyclists, and it is quite possible to travel all the way from Nicaragua to Panama without ever having to stay anywhere else.

With this in mind, we arrived, at the end of a long day, in the driveway of the Liberia *Cuerpo de Bomberos*, the first such fire station eastbound along the Panamericana highway.

Anyone who has ever spent a day in a fire station can tell you that the men spend 90% of their time dutifully polishing the pumper, and this was exactly how we found them, in the middle of vigorous lathering. One by one they paused in silence, and for a few awkward moments it seemed that maybe we'd made a mistake; that we had rudely intruded upon their fastidious world of lustrous

into a private room, clean and spacious, with comfortable beds, hot showers and air conditioning. Furthermore, there was a full kitchen at our disposal, a pool table, satellite television... even HBO! How this tradition began we have no idea; why it extends only to cyclists remains a mystery; and while all of this may sound less than spectacular to anyone who normally sleeps in a bed, given our usual accommodations, we assure you, this was *Pura Vida!* On our map we plotted the full constellation of fire stations clear across the country and off we went- connecting the dots, savoring the air-conditioned hospitality of our new best friends - the Bomberos of Costa Rica.

*“there was a kitchen,
a pool table, satellite
television... even HBO!”*

chrome bells and whistles. So imagine our surprise when they dropped their sponges and welcomed us warmly; and we were ushered inside, upstairs, and

AFTER A FEW successive nights it seemed our good times might last forever. But adventure was not long in calling. With an everlasting itch for things wild and forbidden, we said our farewells to the beaten path of the Panamericana, and pushed off toward distant, uncharted

fire stations, where we discovered, to our astonishment, men who knew nothing of this wonderful tradition. To assist in their cultivation, and for the sake of those who might follow, it became our mission to spread the good word. They always treated us gently, with slow movements and lots of agreeable nodding (perhaps suspecting some sort of mental impairment), and they *always* invited us to stay. And the two times that these fire stations didn't have any room, they directed us around the corner to the ambulance station, where *they* invited us to stay. And the one time the ambulance station didn't have enough room, two paramedics insisted that we take their beds for the night, choosing to sleep on the floor instead. All told, we spent every night but one in the company of Costa Rica's

emergency service personnel, and it says a lot about Tico hospitality that all of this was achieved by doing nothing more than showing up, announcing that we had cycled here from Canada and were looking for a place to sleep, and then standing there- sometimes for a long while- grinning our most ingratiating grins. In a desperate bid to keep a good thing going, we arrived at the first fire station in Panama and asked if perhaps we could stay with them too.

We were told politely but firmly, "No". **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.



Photo: SARAH HEDGES www.bicyclenomad.com



In praise of... **Cable Ties**

By: DEAN CLEMENTSON

Cable ties. What would we do without them? What did we do before them? They come in a variety of sizes and colors, and you can even get re-usable ones.

I was reminded of their near-infinite usefulness the other day. I was just leaving a small village, off the main highway, riding towards the Indian town of Bundi on a real boneshaker of a road - bumps, lumps, potholes, the lot.

There were three grinning loons on a motorbike riding behind me, just about on my wheel, and I waved at them to clear off or come past, but they were having too good a time staring at me to leave yet. I had to brake sharply to miss a wheel-munching pothole, and as they were so close and paying so little attention, they clouted into the back of me.

I picked myself out of the dirt. My right pannier had been knocked off by the impact. The motorbikers had stopped just ahead - they looked at the damage, and at me in a fury, screaming abuse at them. Then they left. Bastards.

I WAS IN a real floor-kicking, stone-chucking rage. I started throwing rocks after them, but (luckily) they were out of range.

A busload of Italian tourists stopped to check I was OK. I scrounged a fag off one of them (my first cigarette in four years) and had a smoko while I assessed

the damage. My good old Carradice Super C pannier was undamaged, as you'd expect from something sturdily made in BRITAIN, except for the hooks which attach it to the rack. They weren't repairable - however, I quickly realized that I could bodge a temporary fix with... cable ties!

By then, a huge crowd from two buses and umpteen motorbikes had gathered to watch, and pass comment, and help. But mainly to watch. I was a bit too focused to let it bother me. In short order I had my pannier re-attached, and a murmur of admiration went through the crowd. We all shook hands, one of the tourists took my photo, and I packed away my gear, with many hands passing my possessions back to me.

I'm pleased it happened, even though I later discovered that the screen on my ereader was another victim of the collision. Not only did I get chance to show off my bodging skills to an attentive audience, it encapsulated the best and worst of the Indian experience, as my mood went from exasperation to red rage to calm acceptance and finally amusement at how my situation had become another part of the street theatre that passes for your average day in India. **BT**

Dean Clementson cycled from the UK to...as far as he could get before his sanity or money ran out. You can read about is journey at: <http://aroundtheworldbyaccident.blogspot.com>

Image from
the **Road:**
Kyrgyzstan

STÉPHANE GIRARD
www.ouestef.com







Image from
the Road:
Tajikistan

HEIKE PIRNGRUBER
www.pushbikegirl.com



Handwritten text on a piece of paper hanging from the ceiling. The text is mostly illegible due to blurring and angle, but appears to be a list or notes.

Handwritten text on a wooden beam above the window: "M... DFC R M Y ..."

Handwritten text on a chalkboard on the right wall, including the word "Circumference" and some numbers.



Image from
the **Road:**
Malawi

PAUL JEURISSEN
www.pauljeurissen.nl



International Ride A Biker Day

By: MIKE BOLES

I'VE BEEN in Kalbarri, Australia for four days for no particular reason while I drink wine on the beach and wink at the beautiful people. The sun hasn't risen in the same place twice, though each morning it spreads light on the only path out of town. Something keeps me from it, unable to shake the sand from between my toes.

In travels past the culprit would have been sickness or exhaustion. Now I think I just need to get laid.

Knocking boots with the anybody of my dreams is hardly an ignoble endeavour. But the problem is this, and it's the one inviolable truth I've discovered on my journey: Bikers just ain't sexy.

In theory it shouldn't be this way. Cyclists are in incredible shape and generally have a big smile on their face. Some of us are even nice people.

THE TROUBLE is that we wear Lycra and helmets. Spandex alone is okay. Wonder Woman wore tights and she was a part of the Super Friends and Justice League of America. No doubt she had her office flings.

On their own, helmets are fine also. George Patton wore a lid. So too did Joan of Arc, Neil Armstrong and Evel Knievel. These folks inspired awe in the masses while keeping their brains from spilling out their ears. Nothing could be hotter.

But can you picture Superman with his tongue squeezed between his lips as he tries to buckle his bike helmet? How about Darth Vader fidgeting with the padded bum in his elastic shorts?

Me neither.

OF COURSE, the fact that I sport a scraggly beard and carry most of Australia beneath my fingernails doesn't help my cause.

Nor does my wardrobe. My Sunday best is a red hoodie and my right shoe keeps falling off my foot. If it were a dog I'd have to shoot it.

But I shall overcome these obstacles. I'll meet the right person – we'll touch as we reach for the last package of expired biscuits in the discount bin. Our eyes will lock and lustily they'll ask if I know where to steal wireless Internet.

We'll walk hand in hand to that special place, filling our bottles in public fountains as we go.

It will be magic. **BT**

Mike has been cycling around the world for four years and has no plans to stop anytime soon. He writes, "Every single day on the road is a gift, a precious flash of something sublime, and if I had any goal at all, it was only to experience that beauty firsthand." Follow his journey at <http://mikeonbike.wordpress.com>.

Photo: www.urbanistcycling.com



GEAR REVIEW

SLEEPING PADS

By: LOGAN WATTS

I have been sold on Big Agnes gear since I first stretched out on their Insulated Air Core sleeping pad I got for my birthday 2 years ago. On our recent tour in Mexico and Central America I carried their Copper Spur UL3 tent, the Insulated Air Core sleeping pad and the Pitchpine SL sleeping bag. All of this gear was purchased based on reading solid reviews and being generally impressed by the feather-weight products in Big Agnes' super and ultra light categories. Now that I am putting together an ultra light pannier less kit for an upcoming trip, I was glad to find out that they have several new products that boast even lighter and smaller packages. Here are three tried and tested air chamber sleeping pads for bike touring (one non-Big Agnes). Two of which have a lot of road use from our recent tour.



Q-CORE SL

SIZE: 20" x 78" x 3.25"

WEIGHT: 17 OZ.

INSULATED AIR CORE

SIZE: 20" x 78" x 3.25"

WEIGHT: 24 OZ.



EXPED SYNMAT

SIZE: 20" x 72" x 2.8"

WEIGHT: 29 OZ.

BIG AGNES Q-CORE SL

The most interesting of the three is the Q-Core Super Light (SL) sleeping pad. It comes in several widths and lengths, in both rectangle and mummy. I chose the 20" x 78" x 3.25" mummy variation because of its packed size. It rolls nicely into a 3.5" x 11" burrito-sized roll that can easily fit on a fork-mount cage or be strapped on to a rack.

I had the opportunity to give it a go on our trip to Vermont and was very impressed. Because I've only used this pad a few times, I can't vouch for its toughness, but it feels durable. I found the Q-Core to be even more comfortable than my Air Core. It seems slightly thicker and cozier. The dimpled, quilt style feels more plush, and the slightly loftier side rails keep you from rolling off of the pad. I can only hope that it holds up as well as my Air Core. Another plus for the Q-Core is the amount of time it takes to blow up. This could be attributable to the mummy shape, but it seemed to take half of the time that I usually spend huffing and puffing my Air Core. My only complaint about this sleeping pad is the stuff sack. Mesh!? Not very durable or protective, but that's hardly a deal-breaker.

BIG AGNES INSULATED AIR CORE

I am briefly highlighting this pad because I have given it a thorough testing. Although it was slightly bulkier and heavier than I wanted, this is the pad I settled on for our Central American tour, and I have put in countless hours on it, in both ridiculously hot and fairly cold temperatures. I love this sleeping pad. I have honestly

stated on several occasions that it's more comfortable than most beds. However, it's no superlight tiny packed roll like the new Q-Core. Never-the-less, it served me very well.

EXPED SYNMAT

My wife, Virginia, decided on this sleeping pad for our trip. I can vouch for it's comfort and it's durability, but other than that, I only included it here as a point of comparison. In my opinion, it's heavier and slightly noisier than the Big Agnes pads. Its only two benefits can be derived from its unique hand pump system. This system was designed to allow for mat inflation without filling the chambers with humidity from ones breath. I'm not really sure what advantage that ultimately provides. It also allows you to save your breath for more important things. Also, to let air out, you just open the valve instead of having to lie and wait for the slower Big Agnes valve to expel all of its air. Despite those benefits, Gin is opting for a Big Agnes for our next tour. She finds the hand pump system to be a little awkward and more time consuming than the old fashioned Big Bad Wolf method. **BT**

For more information on the Insulated Air Core and the Q-Core SL sleeping pads see www.bigagnes.com. For the Exped SynMat visit: www.exped.com.

Logan Watt's site www.pedalingnowhere.com started as a blog about a bike tour and has become a place to document a rambling obsession with bikes, gear and adventure.

TRIP GEAR

A look at equipment for bicycle travelers.

By: GRACE JOHNSON



Mini Camera Tripod

◀ The Gorilla Pod Micro 800 has an aluminum positioning ball with 36° of movement in any direction and its feet can be folded up to fit in a camera case or shirt pocket.

Weight: 2.3oz. (65gr.)

Price: \$20.47 U.S.

www.joby.com

Dry Bag With Window

Sea To Summit's lightweight Ultra-Sil View dry sacks come with a clear TPU window so that you can easily view the contents inside. ▶

Price: varies depending on size.

www.seatosummit.com



Bike Mirror

◀ The UltraLite Bike Mirror from Ortlieb provides a wide field of view. It can be mounted on all types of handlebars as well as forks.

Price: \$26.99 U.S.

www.ortlieb.com





Balaclava

◀ The Buff balaclava offers breathability and humidity control with the benefit of a Polygiene treatment to keep the fabric smelling fresher for longer. It comes in either 100% Polyester Microfibre or 100% Merino Wool.

Price: \$28. U.S.

www.buffwear.com

Small Safety Triangle

Increase your visibility with this small safety triangle from Rivendell Bicycle Works. It's Velcro straps can easily be attached to saddlebag loops, straps or even bungy cords.

Price: \$8. U.S.

www.rivbike.com



Silk Liner

◀ The Sea To Summit silk travel liner is lightweight, super compact and helps to extend the life of sleeping bags by keeping them clean.

Price: varies depending on length.

www.seatosummit.com



PHOTO STORY

Indonesia

*Photographer Mark Watson and his partner
Hana Black set off on a 2500km journey
down the giant island of Sumatra.*

Photos: MARK WATSON









Upper left: *Small roadside stall.*

Upper right: *Slow moving traffic.*

Left: *A rebuilt village on the road south to Meulaboh.*

Above: *A rickety building with a shop in the bottom left.*









Above: *Stopping for lunch at the local cafe.*

Left: *The verdant green plains of the highlands.*

Mark Watson is a New Zealand based freelance photographer and graphic designer. He photographs travel, adventure, lifestyle, landscape and his work can be seen at: www.highlux.co.nz/blog The Indonesia images are from Mark and Hana's 9 month bike trip from China to Sumatra.

Pedalling to



o Budapest



In Slovakia - *while good food is h*

THE DAY was the classic Danube Bike Trail that one may imagine, but it doesn't really exist. It was a rollicking ride along the big, wide river into big and busy Vienna. This city is made for bike riding and the locals are out in full force. To begin with there is some confusion, and following the flow we eventually figure it out. My wife Valerie imagines a rest off the bikes; it's not to be. The next day, we have the bellman rolling the now road-worn two-wheelers through the lobby and out the front door, much to the delight of the other guests.

The ride out of Vienna is as fantastic as the ride in. Bicycle-clogged city streets soon cross the Danube and disappear into an extensive city park and then into the wilderness, but not before riding through the nudist-friendly river-bank parks and clothing-optional beer gardens. Chomping at the bit, we are off on the quest for a new capital city in the next country of the tour.

BRATISLAVA, SLOVAK Republic, the tour literature says "maybe a good spot for an extra day." I say not; yet it is still a great ride, with long bridges to cross back and forth, always in sight of the armadas of long, skinny river cruise ships navigating through locks. Eventually, a beautiful old city emerges from behind ugly and dirty concrete buildings from a not-so-distant repressive past.

Slovakia is the poor cousin of the Czech Republic, while good food is

hard to find, good beer flows freely. The villages are more drab and boring, yet the beauty of Gothic and Renaissance architecture is everywhere, so are the remnants of communal life and industry, boarded up factories and public buildings.

We had survived the first night of the tour in a strange and creepy place, so we knew we could survive the night in a small and nondescript wide spot on the trail called Gabeikovo. Here the route mysteriously disappeared into construction surrounding the "megalomaniac dam" that separates Hungary and Slovakia. There is no prescribed detour, but by now we are road warriors and take it all in stride.

The next day we head off to the last stop in Slovakia, Komarno which is located at the confluence of the rivers Danube and Vah.

KOMARNO IS the site of possibly the best three-star hotel of our tour, Hotel Banderium. But the town overall is one-star, full of empty buildings, an entire town built with each individual structure designed to look like that of another country in Europe. Maybe 50 different buildings, mostly empty, as are the streets. Anyway, it is the last night in Slovakia and the hotel's restaurant is excellent.

We get our first rain day of the entire tour. After determining the day's route was mostly highway and not pathway, we decide to ride with the luggage transfer – no reason to risk life or limb this close to the finish. A quick email to the tour office and a second taxi is offered up for the

ard to find, good beer flows freely.

bicycles and we all head for the border and into Esztergorn, “the Rome of Hungary.”

Glad to be dry and to have a rest day before the last big ride into Budapest, we soon discover that Esztergorn is worth a full day’s visit. Eventually, we end up at the famous basilica and decide to climb to the top, not knowing that few attempt that feat. Now we know why, after navigating up extremely narrow 24-inch wide ancient stone circular stairs, up over 30 stories of windowless towers designed to turn the strongest believer into a shivering, claustrophobic, sweat-drenched pilgrim. We are treated to a 360-degree walk around a very shaky walkway of rotten wooden planks ringed by a rusted out cable rail in a blustery wind and driving rain.

Why are we here? It must be the view, down the Danube in the direction of Budapest, across the Danube to the Slovakian side of the city called Storovo and up the Danube from whence we came.

ONE MORE reward for our efforts as a tiny little elf of an old man, the keeper of the dome, appears and motions us to follow him through a locked gate into the darkness. Here he demonstrates with a yelp, the reverberating, round and round and round echo. Stay here, he motions, and disappears, soon the most beautiful choir boy voice serenades us from the other side of the dome, we sing back and this becomes one of the most memorable events of a memorable tour.

With only 70 more miles of typical Danube Bike Trail, from path to highway,

some traffic, then more traffic, we are zig-zagging in and out of villages. Its detours, dirt tracks, washed out paths, more highways and then the trail gets friendlier with miles of riverfront vacation cottages and small hotels, even a few restaurants and bars. So close, yet lost again in a confusing urban landscape, we find ourselves on the wrong side of the tracks, literally.

GETTING GOOD directions from helpful English-speaking locals means that we are close to the city; few people speak English outside of the cities. We can sense Budapest, yet we still can’t quite get there.

All of the sudden we are swept up by a pack of 7- and 8-year-olds out for a club ride. Pedalling their little mountain bikes with reckless abandon decked out in high visibility green bike vests decorated with a logo of the Big Bad Wolf. They hoot and holler as they ride through the underpasses and tunnels as they lead us to the Erasable Bridge, one of eight that join Buda with Pest, and the bridge that leads us to the final hotel of the tour. Wow, what a finale! We check in and head to the bar for a well-deserved celebratory cocktail. We get what we want without the now-tattered map and meet Zoltan, the barman who learned to speak English by watching the Cartoon Network.

But that is another story – and the end of this one. **BT**

Rob Philippe and Valerie Weber enjoy the combination of bicycle touring and fine hotels. www.robertsphilippe.com/media

PETER JORDAN

Interview: GRACE JOHNSON Photos: PETER JORDAN

London newspaper photographer and solo cyclist Peter Jordan traveled through France with a compact camera and a Gorilla Pod.

In 2013 Peter Jordan spent 5 months cycling through France and afterwards he published a photo book titled “Me, my bike and a compact camera. France”. The book preview can be viewed [here](#) and Peter’s facebook profile [here](#).

Q: During that trip you carried a Canon G12 compact camera with an optical zoom of 28 – 140. Why did you choose that instead of carrying multiple lenses?

A: I would have to carry 4 prime lenses - a 28mm-50mm-85mm and a 135mm - plus a camera body to put them on, to have the same range as I get from the compact I carry. That's a lot of weight. Yes you do get better quality pictures from a prime lens but I have no complaints from the quality of my photos taken on the Canon G12. I have A4 size prints on my walls at home that look great and could have been bigger if I wanted. I even had a 13x11 inch photo book made and it looks superb. Why would I want to lug around such heavy equipment when I can do the same job with a small light-weight and easily accessible camera?

A lot of people seem to think (understandably) that you have to have top of the range expensive gear to take great



“Me, my bike and a compact camera. France” book cover.

pictures. I think that's rubbish.

Q: You also carried a Gorilla Pod tripod – how did that work out for you?

The Gorilla Pod is a great bit of kit. They have different sizes to fit a variety of cameras and lenses. The one I have fits in the front bar bag alongside my camera. You can put it in places where a normal tripod won't go. Because of its bendy design you can wrap it around almost anything. I've used it on tree branches, fences, sign posts, rocks and even my bike handle bars. The only advantage I can see from carrying a tripod is that you

can use the camera at different heights but even this isn't an issue if you think creatively about how to place the tripod.

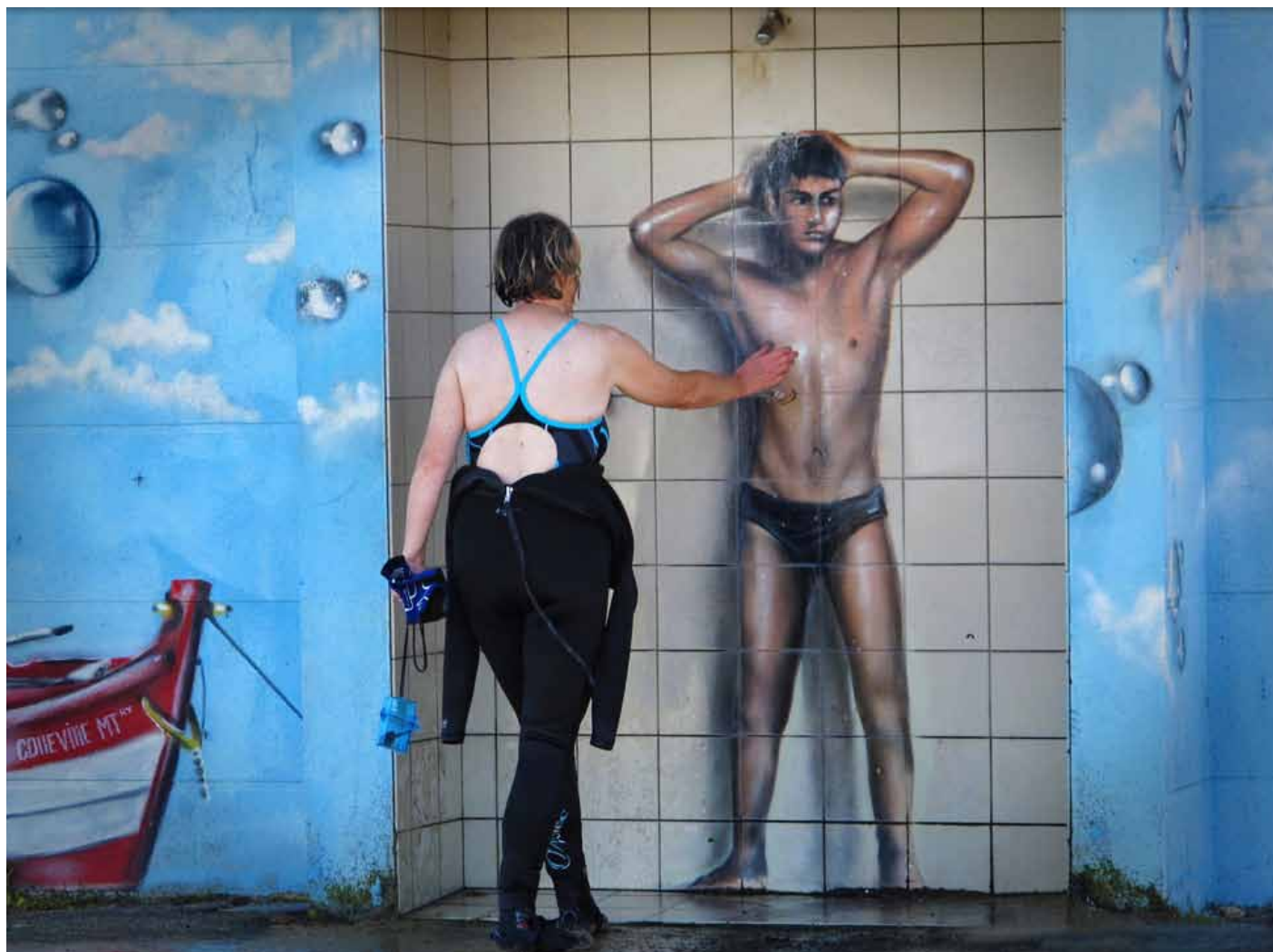
Q: Peter you travelled solo yet your photo book preview is full of self portraits. How did you manage to get all of those shots?

I almost never ask a passerby to take a picture of me. That's because I'm always disappointed with the results. Taking good selfies takes time and effort, most of the time. I love taking them and will spend a lot of time getting it right. Once I've seen what I think might make a nice picture I will look for somewhere to put the camera and then do some test

shots. I will change the angle and move it around. I look at the back screen and think how I can make it better, maybe under exposing the pic depending on the circumstances or shooting from ground level looking up or from above looking down. Some people can see a picture straight away in their mind before they even take it. I can't. I cover all the possibilities until I see what I like. I sometimes take dozens of shots until I'm happy with just one. When I am happy with the result I will dump the rejects to free up memory space. There's no point in keeping pix you won't use.

Q: In the book forward you write, "There is no rhyme, reason or

Beach shower at Lion-sur-Mur in Normandy.





Shaving in the lake at Arques after wild camping.

theme to the pictures. If I saw something I liked, then I would stop and take a picture of it.”

Yet when I view the book preview – it’s full of a variety of images ranging from a fence gate to a pan of pasta. Did you make a list before the trip of subjects that you wanted to shoot or is it just all of your years of newspaper experience that helped you photographically document your trip so well?

I never make a list. I sometimes have an idea but most of the time I just bump into pictures along my route. I'm always looking as I ride along. If I see something I

will stop and take it. People say to me "I saw a great picture today" but they never took it. You have to stop. It does take effort and time but for me it's part of the whole cycling experience along with the camping, cooking and being free. It also gives you great memories too.

I like taking pictures of the food I cook. If I've spent time preparing something nice then I want to show it off to others. It's a pride thing too, I don't want all my Facebook friends thinking I live on Pot Noodles all the time, although I do like them too.

Working as a press photographer is an advantage but our eyes are the same. Just think pictures and it will fall into place eventually.

Q: In the future - would you carry the same photography equipment or is there something you wish to change?

I love the combination of the Canon G12 and the Gorilla Pod. No, I would not change anything at the moment. The camera did start playing up towards the end of my trip. I have had it repaired now but I know it has a shelf life. If I had to replace it then as a lover of the Canon G series it would be one of the newer models. The Gorilla Pod is a great bit of lightweight kit and would also stay, no question.

Q: Any last words of advice?

You don't need a big expensive camera with the biggest sensor to take good

pictures. Try looking for a decent compact with a zoom lens (you don't need the longest zoom either). The camera should have a few different settings on it. I would look for one with a Program and Manual setting, exposure compensation, the ability to focus at close range (macro setting), to take HD videos and the option to turn the flash off. My G12 has a few fancy settings which I hardly ever use but they're fun when I do. Learn about the camera. Read the manual inside out until you know what all the settings and buttons are for. The more you know how to use the camera, the more comfortable you will be about taking pictures with it. Experiment with it to see what it is capable of.

A spare battery is a must. Keep it charged up. Two memory cards was fine

Fireworks over Rennes les Bains on Bastille Day.



for me. I never used the second one as I edited on a Mini iPad along the way and dumped the rubbish pictures to free up space. If you intend to edit after your trip then take several cards with you and go through your days pix on the back of the camera deleting any that don't make the grade.

Take time out for your photography. Look and think all the time of what might make a nice frame. When you see one, do it properly. Take lots of different pictures, not just landscapes. There are

loads of nice images out there waiting to be taken; you just have to find them by keeping your eyes open. Don't worry about the weather or if it's day or night. Think silhouettes or expose for just the highlights of something. Maybe use a slow shutter speed and pan a moving subject for a creative blur effect. The macro can produce some stunning close ups. Make sure your pictures are sharp and well focused, if not do it again and get it right. **BT**

- 1. Pork chops with rosemary and garlic cooked in olive oil and sprinkled with sea salt.*
- 2. A fence stands on it's own in the middle of a field just south of Rouen.*
- 3. A local Frenchman in the village of Revel poses for me in the window of his house.*
- 4. A dog sits in a shopping trolley in the back streets of Bordeaux.*
- 5. Celebrating my new found freedom.*
- 6. Another little chap standing in the middle of the cycle path on the Canal Lateral.*
- 7. Enjoying a big splash back in England.*





4



5



6



7

LIVING AMONG LIONS

By: HELEN LLOYD

YOU MUST PRAY to God every night”.

“No”

“You do believe in God though?”

“Hmm...” I decided to be honest, ‘no’”

“You must believe in God. You cycled here from England and you’re still alive!”

“Well, no I don’t. But yes I am, clearly.”

“Then what do you believe in?”

There was not time for a long philosophical debate. I was waiting for the boat to cross the river into Botswana, and it was already on the way.

“I’m not sure. I suppose, I believe in sound judgement,” I smiled, “and a spot of good luck.” I was thinking back to when I swam in the Sankuru River in the Congo and was later told there were many crocodiles lurking in the murky depths. That was definitely not one of my smarter moves. It is easy to forget about unseen threats.

Perhaps just a lot of good luck.

The young man in smart trousers and polo shirt tucked in at the waist studied me and shifted his bag uneasily on his shoulder. He was not sure what to

believe now. We both stood in silence until the platform ferry reached the bank and then walked on.

“But aren’t you scared?”

“Of what – people? No.”

“Scared of animals?”

“Not so much.”

“But the lions. You must be scared of lions.”

“Not really.” There weren’t many lions to worry about the way I had come. They were on my mind though. I often thought about what was down the road, and lions were definitely there. “I have been thinking about them,” I admitted.

“What are you going to do about them?”

Good question. I had been wondering about that too.

“WELL UNLESS I hear better advice, I guess I’ll cycle in the daylight and stay in my tent at night when they’ll be hunting. And trust to luck.”

“Man, I can’t believe you’re still alive. I mean, this is Africa.” As I pushed my bike down the ramp into Botswana, he called

after me, "I shall pray for you tonight."

Those words were ringing in my ears as I started south towards Nata. The road passes through game reserves, which means fewer people and more animals. I kept a lookout for any unsavoury wildlife that might consider me a savoury snack. *Perhaps I have been lucky until now. I'd better not push it.* My field of view was limited by dense green bush to my left and right. Only the grey asphalt continued ahead endlessly to the horizon.

It was a grey, dull day and certain to rain. I intensely scanned the bush looking for lions. My plan was to cycle only once the sun was well up, when any lions would be resting from the heat. This didn't account for cool, overcast days like today. Hopefully, they wouldn't be hunting

me. Elephants, I had been warned, were also numerous on this road. I figured they would be easy to see.

IT WAS NOT long before I sighted the first elephant, surprisingly well camouflaged by the thick bush and grazing on a tree by the roadside. I was almost on top of him before we both saw each other. He immediately stopped eating and turned to face me. I pedalled faster.

I was still wondering how I managed to miss seeing the elephant when I saw a herd of them ahead. I had slowed down to consider the options when a white 4x4 pulled up alongside me. It was the police from the checkpoint I had passed earlier.

"Are you OK?" one officer asked, as you might to someone who looks lost.



Photo: DEREK KEATS www.flickr.com/people/dkeats

“If you see a lion - *you stop, face the lion and don't*

“Fine,” I said.

“You do know there are wild animals on this road, don't you?”

“Yes.” *I'm not stupid.*

“Do you know what to do if you see a lion?”

Is this a test? “I would like to know what you advise,” I said tentatively.

“Well, we haven't tried this you realise,” and the officers exchanged glances, “but this is what you are supposed to do if you see a lion: you stop, face the lion and don't move. It's very important that you don't run away.”

I stood silently, expecting to hear what I should do next, but nothing more was offered. “OK,” I encouraged and waited for the officer to continue.

“Well, if you are OK, take care and be safe.” The driver turned on the ignition and started to make a U-turn.

That's it?

I pedalled away, confused, wondering how any wild cat staring contest would end. Then I remembered the elephants. One had seen or smelt me. It turned, with trunk in the air and huge ears agitated, and then the others reacted too. *Uh oh.*

FORTUNATELY, THE police saw and drove up alongside to shelter me. Now that I was hidden from view, the elephants went back to grazing. Then the police left.

Alone once more

This whole time, I was cycling faster than usual and didn't stop for breaks. It was a completely irrational response to

the lion threat. I would only be more tired if (and hopefully now when) there was a problem. Adrenalin fuelled me on, but that could not last

My mind wandered, and the next thing I was aware of was that the bush had gone and I was cycling through open savannah. I wondered how long I had been lost in my own thoughts, not thinking about lions or elephants. Since I was failing to see huge elephants that didn't even try to hide, I was unlikely to see a lion stealthily stalking me. I decided to stop thinking about it, turned on my music and tuned. Ignorance is bliss.

I couldn't ignore the little Metro with three young girls and their luggage crammed inside. It pulled up alongside me.

“Hi. We thought we should warn you that there is a lion ahead.”

“Oh. How far ahead?”

“Um. Not far.” *Not helpful.*

“Just roughly. Is it 100 metres? One kilometre? Five?”

“You see that tree over there? Near there,” the girl pointed. *About 500 metres then.*

I CLEARLY DIDN'T look too concerned because the blonde girl in the passenger seat leant over and went on to clarify, “It's a rather, um, aggressive lion.”

“Really?” *What's that supposed to mean?*

“Yes, it's rather aggressive. It tried to climb on the car.

I looked at the little blue and white

move. It's very important that you don't run away."

metal box they were crammed in and thought that wouldn't be hard. I thanked them for warning me, thought quickly, and concluded I should wait for the next sizeable vehicle to come and ask for a lift.

It was the end of the South African Christmas vacation time, and many families were returning to Johannesburg. While loading my bike onto the roof on one couple's vehicle, another stopped. The driver leant out to ask what the problem was.

"There's no problem. Apparently there's an angry lion ahead, so I'm going to get a lift past."

"A lion!" The lady passenger exclaimed.

"We'll go and check it out for you," the driver said, already swinging his Land Cruiser around in the road. They just wanted a photograph.

WHEN WE PASSED the couple were out of their vehicle on the other side

of the road. That didn't strike me as a sensible thing to do. We slowed down, curious and concerned.

You know that feeling when you have spent the morning cleaning the car only to have your pet cat jump up and leave a trail of paw prints over the bonnet? You might even want to strangle the cat. Now imagine you are driving through Botswana in your shiny white, brand new Land Cruiser, and you stop to take a photograph of a lion, and it leaps. Now you have huge muddy paw marks smudged down the side of your vehicle along with deep scratches and a hole where the rear side window used to be with glass shattered over your luggage in the back. If that happened, you would be really pissed off. **BT**

Helen Lloyd's book "Desert Snow" is her 'Take On Africa' - 25,000km from the U.K. to Cape Town, fuelled on with 1,000 beers. <http://helenstakeon.com>.



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Image from
the Road:
Argentina

NEIL PIKE

www.pikesonbikes.com





A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's hand holding a pair of sunglasses over a gravel path. The path is made of light-colored gravel and leads into the distance. The background is a blurred landscape with green grass and distant mountains under a clear blue sky. The person's hand is in the foreground, and the sunglasses are held over the path. The overall scene suggests a journey or travel in a natural setting.

Image from the Road: **Kyrgyzstan**

ALENA PESAVENTO
www.frischluf ttour.ch



Image from the Road: **England**

By: PAUL GROVER

Photo of: PETER JORDAN





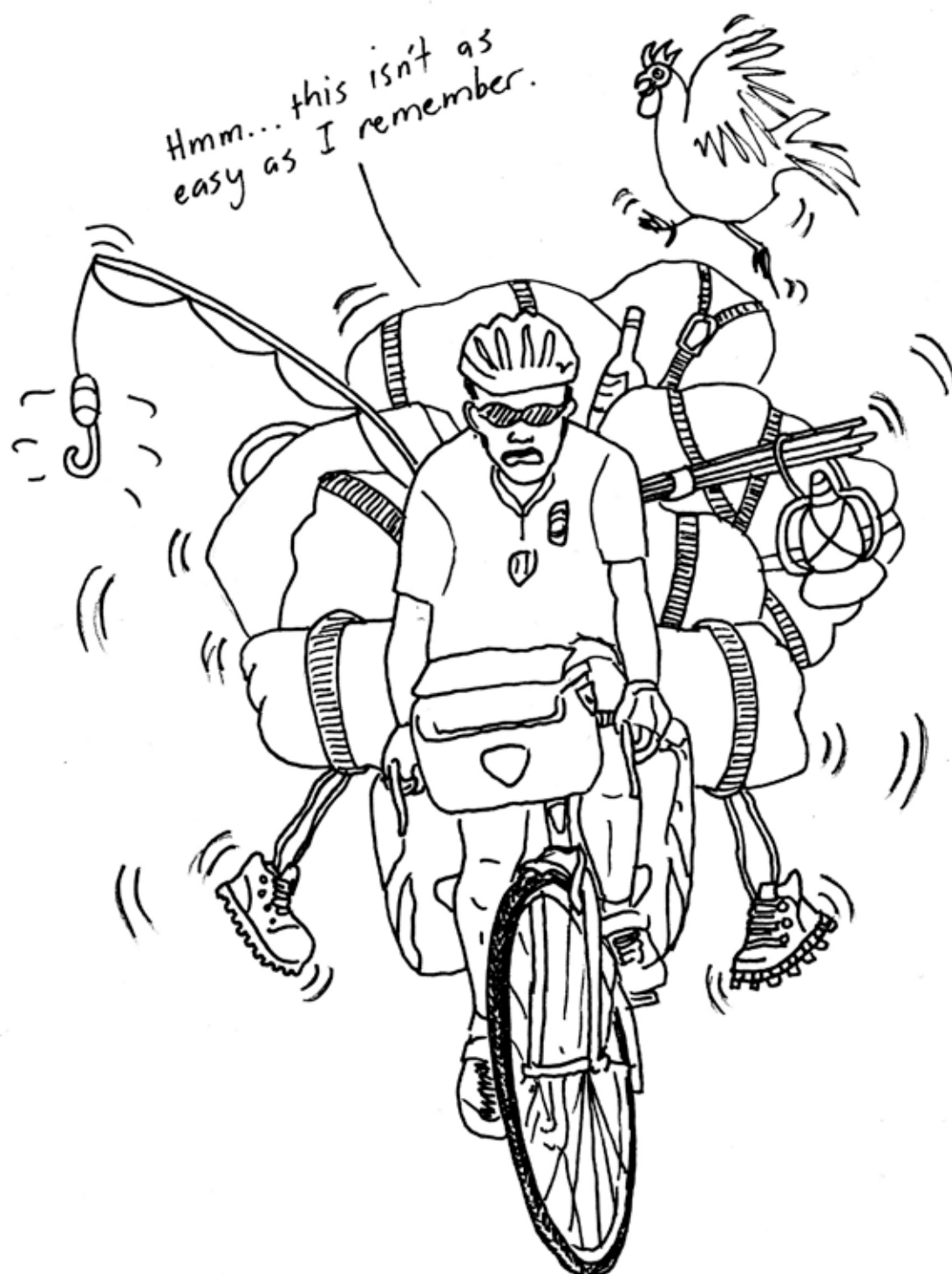


Image from
the **Road**
India

PAUL JEURISSEN
www.pauljeurissen.nl

UPS AND DOWNS

The curse of day one



"Ups and Downs: A Cycling Journey across the Alps" by Michael Tran tells the story of his bicycle journey from Paris to Munich. This humorous and entertaining book combines two of the author's greatest passions in life, bicycle touring and graphic design. For more information see: www.michaeltran.info

Parting shot



Photo: RICK GALEZOWSKI www.backintheworld.com

"I met this gentleman years ago while touring in the Rockies near Revelstoke. He was on his way to Ottawa, Canada.

Yes, that's a spare prosthetic leg hanging up there in the rigging. And yes, those are his ducks riding along on the overturned kiddie pool (which explains the pool skimmer, I suppose).." ~ Rick Galezowski

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