

BicycleTraveler

International Magazine on Bicycle Touring



BicycleTraveler

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"In this issue Mirjam Wouters demonstrates the proper way to clean your touring bicycle." ~ Grace Johnson

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Bottom

By: LORETTA HENDERSON

How's your....she lowers her eyes and blushes, yourah... she points to her pants....your....she finally finds the word....*bottom*, doesn't it get sore? I have a great seat, I answered. I have been asked this question many times in many countries by people from many countries. My bottom has become a topic of world renowned curious mystery. I have always thought that my bottom was cute but to be mentioned so often is a bit humbling. How my bottom feels, is one of those unsolved mysteries to the walkers of the world.

Bottom is the New Zealand word most often inserted into the sentence, how is your? A rather polite word always said with a reserved gesturing and softened accent. My tooshy, my backside, my bum, my butt, my duff, mon derrier, my behind, my arse, my ass, I personally prefer the wonderful latin word *gluteus maximus*. Defined by Webster's dictionary as *"the greatest gluteal muscle and the biggest muscle in the human body. The gluteus maximus forms the bulk of the buttocks. It acts to extend the upper leg, spread it, and turn it outward."* The use of the Latin word makes me feel that my bottom has reached a

certain lofty international status. Bicycle seat isn't defined by the Webster's dictionary but that is the reason my *gluteus maximus* so enjoys peddling through random countries.

MY BROOKS leather seat, a queens throne in which I perch myself day after day to see the world. It is a fine leather seat that has been moulded to my *gluteus maximus* after over 13,000 or so kilometres of pedaling. When I first purchased the Brooks leather saddle/seat it was stiff and as hard as a granite counter top. That first day in England with each push of the peddle, I could feel the bruises making their way to the surface of my *gluteus maximus*.

I chose to leave Pandemic, the magic bicycle and her queens thrown out in the rain on the very first evening that I purchased her. Then, come the next day I sat on it and rode back to the bike shop for final adjustments of the handle bars. When I arrived at the bike shop, the mechanic

looked horrified as to the condition of the new leather seat. It looked a few years old after only one night. I smiled proudly and tried to tell him that the seat was just a bit hung-over from a rough night but he wasn't very entertained.

MY REASONING behind taking the new leather bicycle seat to a party in the rain was because when I left the bike shop it felt as stiff as new figure skates. I grew up in Canada where the boys played hockey and the girls figured skated. I wanted to play hockey with the boys but was told I was too small and that girls don't play hockey. I was too young at the time to debate my mom about sexual discrimination so I figured skated with the rest of the girls. Each winter my sisters and I, when we got our new figure skates, would soak them in the bathtub and then walk around the house wearing them to break them in. I figured that all the stiff leather bicycle seat needed was a good soaking and a ride to break

in and my *gluteus maximus* would be fine. The leather seat has been as comfy as a recliner on Super bowl Sunday ever since.

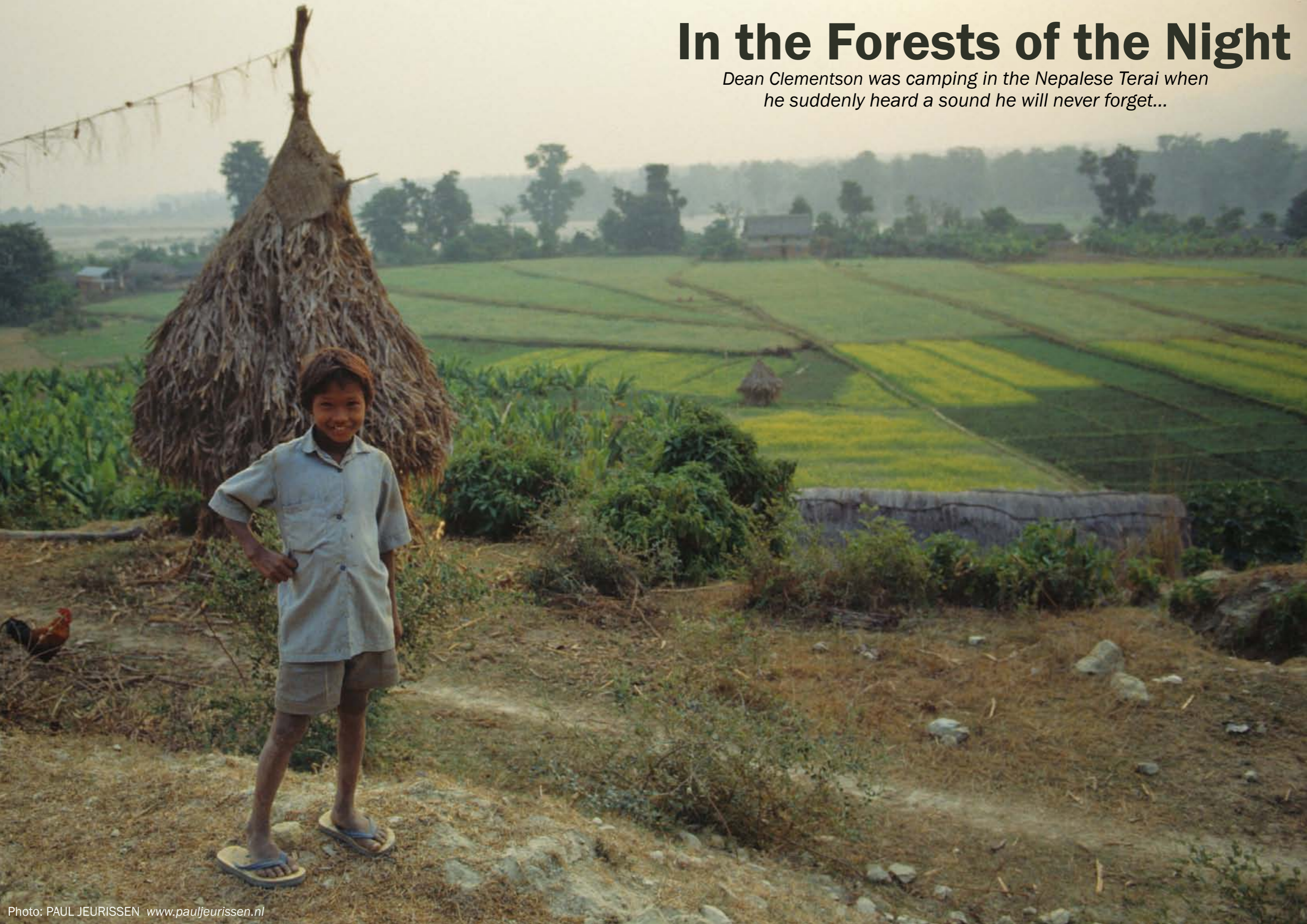
Would you like a pillow for that recliner? Otherwise known as, padded, spandex bicycle shorts. I have never ventured into the "pillowing" of my *gluteus maximus*. I figured if my *gluteus maximus* eventually needed a spandex pillow to enjoy the view from the royal saddle I would seek one out. No need occurred, so I am still riding bareback, spandex pillow free and enjoying the game. **BT**

Loretta is a writer, speaker and the founder of the WOW (Women on Wheels) Wall at her website www.skالاتitude.com. WOW is a growing community of 180+ solo female cyclists who share tips and safety advice.



In the Forests of the Night

*Dean Clementson was camping in the Nepalese Terai when
he suddenly heard a sound he will never forget...*



There I was, in a town I didn't even know the name of, with no bike or luggage, wearing only my VC167 jersey, my 3/4 length shorts with the hole at the crotch which I've already repaired once but which had split again, and carrying only my camera, wallet, phone and passport. And there was no room at the inn.

The night was warm, and I was eyeing up the benches as a decent place to sleep.

I cracked a beer, lit a fag, and waited to see what the landlord would say.

I'd camped up quite happily in light jungle within sight of the road and my biggest concern was keeping the big spiders, beetles, fire ants, enormous moths and crickets out of my tent. I had no appetite so I didn't break out my stove. I had a beer which I'd only bought earlier in the day as the shop couldn't change a 500 rupee note, and after half a day in my pannier it was warm to the touch, and it wasn't going down well.

A local lad came past, and asked for some of my water. It's lucky that I didn't need any for cooking, as he drank a whole litre in one gulp. He warned me against camping, as he said there were tigers around, but they say that sort of thing everywhere. I think he was inviting me back to stay with his family, but I'd already put up my tent and I couldn't be bothered to strike camp when it was getting dark. I told him that I'd just sleep there, which he misinterpreted as a sign that he should take a nap, which he did, laying down in the brush with his back against the tree trunk.

About half an hour after he'd left, another couple of young locals came up

the same way, walking towards the road. Again they asked for some water, though only the elder of the two drank any. I gave another bottle to the younger, who seemed grateful for it. He never spoke; only the elder did, in a mix of Nepali and English which I could hardly understand. I did understand the word "tiger" again, and he kept asking if I had any friends with me, even going to the extent of shining his phone light into my tent to confirm

there was no one else with me, at which he gleefully said "no friend!" I chased them off, and sat uncomfortably in my tent, sweating gently in the heat and humidity.

I stepped out of my tent to get some fresher air, and to shoo away the insects that were gathering around my tent.

I heard rustling in the trees to the east. I ignored it at first, as it was probably leaves and other debris falling from the trees. Then back into the tent to concentrate



Photo: PAUL JEURISSEN www.pauljeurissen.nl

on drinking and not being so paranoid.

However, the sound was drawing closer, and it was a big sound. I got back out, and shone my head torch in the direction of the noise. It was away from the path, into the heart of the jungle, but I shouted a couple of "hellos" and "namastes", in case it was a local gathering wood or taking a shortcut. It was getting slowly closer, and it was clearly something big. I shone my head torch in that direction again, and half-thought it was a pair of tiger's eyes reflecting the light, but I told myself not to be so daft as it was more likely to be a couple of the glow flies that were flitting about, or a spider in one of the trees.

However, I then heard a low but distinct growl coming from the same direction. I'll never forget that sound. It wasn't loud, but it contained such a promise of danger and menace that I didn't hesitate. It was long past the point where I could have struck camp; I went to grab my phone, realized I'd already put it into my pocket, and retreated to the road, listening carefully for sounds of pursuit.

None came. The road was utterly deserted, though, and the traffic that did come along ignored my increasingly desperate arm signals. I was alert to every sound coming from the undergrowth, every falling leaf and crackle of dead branches.

After what felt like an age but was probably ten minutes, a bus stopped for me. I stood in the doorway and let the night breeze cool me down. The conductor and other passengers said there was a hotel 30 km away, and that was where I'd be getting off. While I was on the bus and my heart rate came down from a whine to a purr, I did wonder if it had been some elaborate hoax by the locals

to scare me away and steal all my kit. I'd only find out in the morning. Luckily, I had my most nickable items (camera, phone, iPod, passport and wallet) on my person, and more importantly I'm not especially tied to my possessions. Other cycle tourists have commented on how relaxed I am about leaving my bike unlocked and not bothering to take my panniers off. I had made a conscious decision that I wouldn't be tied to my bike while on this

But was it a tiger? It could have been anything. A cow or a nervous deer creeping through the undergrowth.

trip, which made it very easy to leave it all behind rather than face the wrath of a tiger in its territory.

Realistically, it seemed that it was too over-elaborate to have been an attempt at theft when they could have just outnumbered me and intimidated me into handing over my possessions. And the approach of whatever it was had been too slow, too stealthy, and too focused in one place to have been a gang of locals playing tricks. I did worry that the second local who'd come along had been very specific about checking that I was alone, but that's a question I get asked so often that to be paranoid about it as absurd. The other possibility was that it was a wild cow, rustling through the jungle and scavenging for food, but the cows around here are well domesticated, and there was that growl...

The landlord found a room for me, with a mattress about half an inch thick and a hard wooden board underneath. I

didn't care, especially for the equivalent of less than two quid. I scrounged some pen and paper to record my thoughts, as I didn't want to waste my phone battery. I'd had the forethought to mark my position on the highway, and I was going to use my phone to find my way back there the next morning. I'd worry about my possessions then.

I slept straight through until 6 am and I was immediately awake, catching the world's slowest bus back. I did find out the name of the town where I slept (Lamki) and I explained - or tried to explain - to the bus driver that I wanted to go to a point about 5 km after Sukhad. They understood Sukhad.

I was too worried and nervous to get travel sick on those journeys, not to mention that it was in the cool parts of the day. Midday on those buses would be deeply unpleasant, but I was starting to think that I might have to catch buses, if my bike and tent and luggage had been stolen. I was preparing myself for the worst. I had locked my bike, however, and wrapped one of the guy ropes around the lock, which I usually do when I'm camping, if only to give myself some reassurance. I am relaxed about the idea of theft, and most people are deserving of trust, but I'm not daft. I'd looped my locks around both wheels, so stealing the bike would have meant the thief snipping the guy rope, lifting the bike and carrying it away. I was hoping that, at worst, scavengers might have come along and nicked my panniers. I could live with that, and carry on, as long as my bike was still there.

The bus overshot my location, as the GPS function on my phone was struggling to find my location in the poor

reception pocket between villages. I spotted a landmark I recognized and shouted at the driver to stop. I didn't really need my phone to find the spot, but it was reassuring to have that backup.

It was with some trepidation that I walked back down that track, my feet crackling over the dead leaves. I jumped at every sound as the leaves and catweasels (local equivalent, anyway: fist-sized stickles dropping from the trees made a frighteningly loud noise) fell to earth.

No tigers, and my tent and bike and all my possessions were there, just as I'd left them. I was so relieved. I'd been imagining that I'd come back to a bare campsite, and have to call the police, explain to them where I was, go through the rigmarole of filling in reports and insurance claims, as well as coming away feeling like a right idiot for having been gulled so easily.

I packed up quickly. I wasn't going to hang about. I rolled to the next town and booked into a cheap guest house to have a day off. Looking at the map, I'm only 20 kilometres from Bardia National Park, where there are wild tigers. Maybe I should have taken those locals seriously.

But was it a tiger? It could have been anything. A cow or a nervous deer creeping through the undergrowth.

When I had dragged my bike back up to the road, I stopped for a drink and in the sand by the road I saw fresh paw prints, which I recognized from Corbett National Park as being the prints of a tiger. **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 his journey at: <http://aroundtheworldbyaccident.blogspot.com>

Image from
the **Road:**
Iceland

MIRJAM WOUTERS
www.cyclingdutchgirl.com





Image from
the Road:
Peru

MIKE HOWARTH
www.mikehowarth.co.uk

PIKES ON BIKES

Harriet and Neil Pike have spent a few years cycle touring in the Andes and Himalaya. I tracked them down to ask about how they plan and organize their kit for mountain rides.

Q: You often take side trips as part of your longer tours. Why, and have you always done this?

A: We got into bike touring through our love of mountains. We'd already spent a long time backpacking and hiking, but when we met some touring cyclists and started reading blogs, we realized bicycles were the perfect way of accessing hilly areas which are hard to reach by public transport. These usually lie off the main routes, which is why we began taking side trips.

It took us a while to do this though. Our first trip, from Istanbul to Oxford, we always had our destination in mind. We'd been away 18 months and were looking forward to returning home. So though we didn't take a very direct route, we stuck almost exclusively to paving and didn't ever detour to explore one area in any detail.

Our next trip was in South America, and again we began like this, aiming for Ushuaia from Rio de Janeiro. From Ushuaia we headed north, with vague

ideas about reaching North America, but kept getting distracted. We found we really hate cycling on roads with traffic, so started spending most of our time on dirt roads. We also couldn't resist the lure of the high roads in Bolivia and Peru and ended up cycling circuitous routes on mining roads. When the rainy season overtook us we hadn't even made it to Cusco, so we abandoned all plans of going north of the Darien Gap. As we were having so much fun pedalling through the areas with the best scenery, we continued doing this for the remainder of the trip. Since then we've stuck to dirt roads, but have tried to lighten our loads and make our touring bikes a bit more off-roady.

Q: Why have you found it important to leave excess baggage behind and travel lighter?

A: Mainly because when you're pedalling uphill at high altitude it's so much easier to ride a lightly loaded bike. We particularly notice it when we're



Neil and Harriet Pike

unacclimatized, but even after we've been at altitude for months; it's a lot more fun on light bicycles. On the high roads, if the surface is bad 40km can sometimes be a good day even on a light bike. Our first few days above 3,000m were such a wakeup call that we soon jettisoned unnecessary kit and cut bits off our clothes and panniers! We started thinking of all kit weights in terms of chocolate bars: ...would we rather take a spare tyre, or 10 extra Snickers...?

A few times we've carried large amounts of food and water on remote routes; having 25kg more weight on your bicycle changes things completely, and makes some routes which would have been a fun challenge on a light bike, into a chore. A perfect example is

the rollercoaster 'Peru's Great Divide' route. We took 15kg of kit each and could ride the climbs, whereas much stronger cyclists have ended up pushing some stretches because they were carrying far more stuff.

Q: So, do you avoid taking much equipment with you on a long tour?

A: That's always the plan... but we like to combine hiking and biking on our trips, so often have trekking kit with us. We used to lug it around all the time in four panniers, but now we try not to carry it when we don't need it. Many Andean countries make this easy because coach companies take cargo, and you can send parcels ahead and pick them up in the next large town you

“We started thinking of all kit weights in terms of chocolate bars. Would we rather take a spare tyre, or 10 extra Snickers...?”

pass through. We've sent rucksacks crammed with mountain boots, down jackets, crampons etc ahead on buses, and collected them a few weeks or a month down the road at the next place we want to go hiking.

We also enjoy cycling loops in the mountains as part of longer tours, and when that happens we leave as much kit as possible in the place we're returning to.

Q: When you ride loops, where do you leave your kit?

A: If it's a circuit out of a town, we leave things at a guesthouse or hostel. When we're in remote areas we just dump stuff by the roadside, hiding it as best we can, and return for it a few days later.

Q: Have you ever got into trouble leaving gear by the roadside?

A: Nah, not really - most of the time we return to our stash to find it just as we left it. On a couple of occasions though we've had food supplies pilfered in the Andes. The first time by tourists at an unmanned mountain refuge; the second time by a fox that dug up a food cache we'd left under rocks, ripped open the bag and took all the tasty supplies.

Q: What do you consider excess kit?

A: It all depends on the situation. If

we're riding a there-and-back road we rarely take spare parts or a laptop, and may go without cooking equipment too. On our longer trips we never take 'normal' clothes, and try to just have enough outdoor clothing to keep us warm and dry if the weather turns bad.

Q: Bikepacking seems to be a buzz word right now – what's your preferred touring setup?

A: On the kind of roads we're drawn to we've found that rear panniers, a frame bag and some kind of front bag work well for us if we don't need to carry huge amounts of food and water. It's a good compromise between comfort and weight – we can take a tent, Therm-a-Rests, warm sleeping bags, warm clothes, and a stove and it weighs in at about 15kg. each, which isn't too heavy to lug up the hills. Having the frame bag and front bag helps distribute the weight and means we don't end up doing wheelies on the steeper climbs, and having the panniers means there's room to stuff in extra small things, without having them hanging off our bikes. **BT**

Neil and Harriet Pike run the website www.andesbybike.com and occasionally blog at www.pikesonbikes.com. They've written the Adventure Cycle-Touring Handbook and Peru's Cordilleras Blanca & Huayhuash: the Hiking & Biking Guide, both for Trailblazer Guides.


Photo: HARRIET PIKE www.pikesonbikes.com





MONGOLIA

Photographer Nicolás Marino and Julia Ibarra Cameron pedal the Mongolian steppe.

A full-page photograph of a person with long brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt and grey pants, riding a motorcycle through a vast, flat, green grassy field. The motorcycle is heavily loaded with gear, including a yellow and black bag on the back and a spare tire. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The person is seen from behind, looking out over the horizon.

Having cycled across Mongolia meant having made a long-time dream come true. 55 days that felt like leaving the time and space in which one is used to live in. It is probably true that you must have felt some romanticism in all of what I have photographed about this country, but it's just that the beauty of Mongolia takes you out of your own orbit and invites you to romanticize. Its landscapes of smooth shapes and slow paced "precarious" life pacify the mind and evoke a feeling of magic inside. It is true that these are images of its brief summer. Soon after we left the country, temperatures plummeted down to -20C and by the end of December they stabilized between -37 and -40C (when speaking, Mongols unconsciously omit the "-") and a windchill of much lower ones. Even with its extreme weather, I suspect that even spending a winter here should be an intense experience which I'll try to make happen some time in the future.



As you cycle along this immense lonely green mantle, the gers, nomad's dwellings, are little white dots breaking the uniformity of colour.



The nomads are hospitable by nature. We just had to cycle past near their gers and, always, someone sighted and invited us to come inside. Reception is as though we are honoured guests.





At a time when I found myself alone, I took a moment to visit the cabin of a family. A grandfather and his little grand daughter greeted me with joy and curiosity, while the grandmother served me the usual tea with a delicious melted cheese that tasted a bit like provolone but only a bit sweeter.



The Mongolian steppe is a lonely space that, with its soft shapes and subtle colors, encourages serenity and soothes the soul. In it, roads disappear and become tracks traced in the grass, forking one, two, three and up to ten times as one cycles on. Without signals, one needs to be guided by map and compass as sole means of reference to avoid becoming lost.

I think I will never leave Mongolia because it is very deep inside me and has grown on me, in both my heart and the sheep smell that seems impossible to wash away. This series of photos are a very brief summary of the infinite images that were recorded in my retina. **BT**

Nicolás Marino is an architect and photographer who travels through remote regions, in the pursuit of the cultures that have resisted the globalization process. Follow his journeys at www.nicolasmarino.com



To cross every river became a feat in itself. We often depended on locals to get across them and they never charged us a penny.

Stove Talk

By: PAUL GRIFFITHS

Broadly speaking, your happy camper is faced with 3 types of stove to choose from; alcohol, gas canister and multi-fuel, in ascending order of both price and power. For the wandering cyclist in remote or developing parts of the world, sourcing gas canisters is generally a nightmare, so you're effectively down to 2 options...

Multi-fuel Powerhouses

If you're looking for serious power and man points you want one of these beasts. As the name suggests they'll burn almost anything, which, for the shoestring cyclist, inevitably means standard car gasoline. Not only does this make them incredibly cheap to run, but you can also get hold of fuel almost anywhere.

The downsides are not insignificant though; they're expensive (U.S. \$100. or more), heavy-ish (ballpark 400gr.), soon become a dirty sooty mess and then there's the whole palava of actually getting the thing going. Having pumped up the fuel bottle to a reasonable pressure, it's onto the 'priming' stage, which basically involves setting fire to the whole thing (to heat the fuel jet up sufficiently that it'll vaporise the fuel when it shoots through on its way to the burner). A bit of a black art and somewhat unnerving on your first go, especially when the MSR manual tells you to expect a 'football sized' flame.

MSR Whisperlite

I started the trip with the 'go to' multi-fuel stove, MSR's Whisperlite, a frankly brilliant bit of kit that I got to know intimately

Photo: THELEOM www.flickr.com/photos/hizonic

during it's a year and a bit of use. Had it not been nicked, leaving Mat and I to go Bear Grylls in the Cordillera Huayhuash, I would no doubt have continued with it to the end. Completely user service-



MSR Whisperlite Internationale
U.S. \$100. excl. fuel bottle.

able and simple to dissect for occasional maintenance, it's a stove I have full confidence in. If you're passionate about cooking you may want something that can actually simmer though; the temperature ranges from ferocious to hotter than the sun.

Some tips:

- It took me about 6 months to figure this out, but to largely avoid the sooty mess, prime the stove using pure alcohol. I started always carrying a small bottle with me so I could pour a little into the priming cup, light it, then only let through the gasoline when it was primed and could burn as a clean blue flame (instead of a dirty yellow fireball).
- Be sure to use the right jet for your

fuel type, again it took me a while to figure out I was using the wrong one; 'K' instead of 'G'

Optimus Nova

Following the theft of the MSR, keen to stick with the power of multi-fuel I picked up a barely used Optimus Nova. This is a sexy beast it has to be said and sounds like a rocket during takeoff (which I'm classing as a positive), but that's about the extent of my praise; my relationship with this stove was one of woe and frustration. Having serviced it as best I could it was still horrendously unreliable and difficult to start after priming. Used exclusively in the high Andes over 4,000m. I'm not sure if was the altitude, poor quality gasoline or just some genuine problem with the stove, but failure to light on a subzero morning at Laguna Rajucolta was the last straw. Time to cut my losses and move on...

Alcohol Simplicity

Coming from the raucous world of multi-fuel, experiencing the Zen like process that is alcohol-cooking came as somewhat of a contrast. Almost completely silent and ridiculously simple, you just let it do its thing and wait patiently. And therein lies the only real downside; it's quite a bit slower than the roaring inferno of multi-fuel. Fine in my opinion for solo cooking, but for a couple the Zen effect may be lost as you slowly starve waiting for your pasta. Arguably fuel is also less easy to track down, but in South America it really isn't a problem. Pharmacies, which are bizarrely numerous over here, almost al-

ways stock bottles of 90%+ alcohol and in many rural areas, especially in mining areas, the locals basically drink the stuff so it's rarely hard to find (just look for the horrifically drunk chap).

The Beer Can

In its simplest form an alcohol stove is just a container in which you can set fire to some alcohol. Enter the beer can.

[The world of DIY beer can stoves](#) is an incredibly geeky place; with a bewildering number of designs from ranging from the humble half cut can to the pressure



Paul's ultra-cheap beer can stove.

sensitive [penny stove](#). With nowhere to buy a stove I disappeared down this DIY rabbit hole and emerged with a 'middle of the road' version.

Along with stand fashioned from spokes (3 for 30cents from a street side bike mechanic) and spare can sides this is a seriously budget bit of kit.

For something that costs effectively nothing, weighs effectively nothing and takes about 10 minutes to make, I have to say it's absolutely incredible. This is [Tom Allen's DIY video](#) that I followed.

It's seen a lot of action in Peru, Bolivia and the Puna de Atacama and has performed admirably. The only downside is its susceptibility to being crushed when packed, but seated inside my mug it's fine.

The Trangia

This Swedish classic is popular choice in adventuring circles, basically a sturdier brass version of the beer can. I picked up a second hand one of these in La Paz, but found it slower (possibly as a result of its age) than its beer can counterpart so soon ditched it and returned to my trusty can.

So there you have it, a self-confessed gear geek moving from the relatively high tech world of multi-fuel to the humble beer can, a real 'under dog' story if you will. I have no doubt it'll see me through to the Fin del Mundo and it's something I'd have no hesitation in recommending to others planning similar endeavours. After all, if it does break, it's just a case of having a beer and making a new one, hardly a disaster... **BT**

Paul Griffiths started pedalling south from Alaska's Prudhoe Bay in 2013 on the adventure of a lifetime. Taking routes increasingly less travelled he's now closing in on his final destination; Ushuaia, Argentina. Follow him at: <http://theridesouth.com>

Rediscovering the GLOW

By: EMILY CHAPPELL

After successful bicycle crossings of Asia and Iceland, former cycle courier Emily Chappell decided to take on the isolation and -40C temperatures of the Alaskan winter.

The morning after Caitlin and Reese let me sleep in their house, I woke up to the smell of petrol, rolled out of my emperor-sized bed, and realized that my stove pump had failed once again quite spontaneously, and was wafting noxious fumes out of my open pannier and into the palatially furnished room.

(This wasn't the first time an MSR stove let me down in this way. Somewhere between my final Iranian campsite near Rafsanjan and the Khunjerab Pass in Pakistan, another pump cup failed, and rich, green, geopolitically significant Iranian petrol gradually evaporated through all of the miscellaneous tools and spares I carried in my front right pannier. Better tools than clothing or food, I suppose, though it did also permeate and utterly ruin the bar of Lidl chocolate I had been saving for a special occasion, and which Michael and I tried and tried and ultimately failed to enjoy and had to abandon after our triumphant ascent of the Khunjerab.)

I had intended to be on the road at seven, a couple of hours before sunrise, but after unpacking my toolkit to fix the stove, swearing at it as I tried to fish a detached pump cup out of the mechanism with a pen and a pair of tweezers, and wolfing down a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs, I didn't manage to get to my bike until long after the sun had started to tip the tops of the nearby mountains. The air was still bitterly cold, snatching at my chest and throat with every breath I

took and I fumbled and stumbled, trying to balance the bike between my knees as I strapped everything onto it, cursing the brand new rear light that I'd bought in Anchorage and never managed to turn on, and gazing fondly at the cheap back-up light I'd bought to replace it, which was so large and dazzling there was no danger of drivers failing to spot me. I placed it carefully on my saddle as I wrestled my shovel under the bungees, promptly knocked it to the ground, and on picking it up, discovered that some mysterious internal connection had been dislodged, and the light would no longer turn on, no matter how much I shook it, or knocked it against the top tube, or replaced the batteries, or examined its innards for obviously protruding wires.

BEGIN It was not an auspicious start to the day. But I was perversely comforted by my annoyance, which at least felt like a more familiar emotion than the numb fear of the previous day. Over dinner, Caitlin and her boyfriend Reese had described the road ahead (a sharp dip down to Caribou Creek, then a long slow climb up to Eureka Pass, the highest point of the Glenn Highway, then a gradual descent towards Nelchina), and lent me a copy of The Milepost, an annually updated resource for the legions of road trippers who infest Alaskan roads in the summer months, which gives a mile-by-mile account of lodges, gas stations, campsites, viewpoints, pull-ins and any other feature than might conceivably be of interest. Although most of the facilities

it mentioned would be closed for the winter, it was apparently enough for my fearful mind just to know what lay ahead – that I wasn't really riding off into a world whose colour and warmth would gradually dwindle down to absolute zero; that people had been there before me,

a long-anticipated downhill, my mood hitches itself upward and I burst into song, forgetting all the mental tangles and downward spirals of the previous hour, and deciding that none of it – whatever it is – is so bad after all, really. My mind, suddenly regaining some of the

THE AIR WAS STILL BITTERLY COLD, SNATCHING AT MY CHEST AND THROAT WITH EVERY BREATH I TOOK

and documented what was to come; that I would end up somewhere, rather than nowhere.

Most of my day was spent gaining the 1,000 metres or so of the Eureka Pass, crawling slowly up almost imperceptible inclines, worrying that I was sweating too much, and that my clothing would end up full of ice (how on earth do you stop yourself from sweating at -25C, when you're already in your lowest gear, and would topple over if you cycled any more slowly?), and cursing inwardly whenever the road took a downward turn, knowing that all the altitude I lost would have to be regained before the day was over.

I sometimes find, during a difficult day on the bike, that my mood shifts and undulates in exact correspondence with the terrain I'm covering. On a flat, clear road, with perhaps a slight downward tilt, I'm jovial, meditative, rolling along with a few fragments of thought or song rattling repetitively around in my head. On

oxygen that my legs had hogged on the climb, blossoms into life and I start having ideas, composing and editing future blog posts, fleshing out future business plans, planning future expeditions, fantasizing about all of the dozens of directions that my life might take from this point onwards.

UPHILL But on a long slow climb, usually without my realizing it, everything swings around and I can't help but look on the dark side. And it's not so much mere pessimism as active annoyance. I dwell on all that's gone wrong that day, obsess gloomily over anything that might be ailing me or the bike or the tent (or in this case my lighting strategy, now reduced to a cheap blinker I'd had for years, held together with duct tape, and the tiny red LEDs on the back of my head torch). I dredge through my long- and short-term memory, looking for people to be annoyed with, recalling angry

I WAS IGNORING THE FACT THAT THE ONLY PERSON TRULY TO BLAME FOR THIS UNBEARABLE SUFFERING WAS MYSELF.

London drivers I had tried to forget, twisting long-resolved arguments around in my head in order to wind myself up all over again, lingering with inexcusable self-pity on all the minor infractions of family and friends over the years. Failing all else, I get angry with anything that's immediately to hand. The road surface. The headwind. The unfavourable gradient. The lack of a lay-by when I need a rest. The fact that my water has frozen again – which in this case it had.

FALSE HOPE Late in the afternoon, I finally hauled my way to the top of the pass, and from a long way off, spied the Eureka Lodge, which Caitlin and Reese had told me would probably be open, at least for petrol and snacks. For two miles or so I had it in my sights, glistening in the snowy sunlight on the flat top of the pass, smoke pouring from its chimney into the clear blue sky, telling me that here were people, and here was warmth, and probably something I could drink, and possibly sympathy for this terrible ordeal that had been inflicted on me. (In order to remove any obstacles from my raging annoyance, and to allow its downward spiral to flow unimpeded, I was ignoring the fact that the only person truly to blame for this unbearable suffering was myself.)

I pulled up on the flattened snow of the lodge's forecourt. There was no one to be seen. I parked the bike against a tiny shack, through whose locked door I could see a fridge full of soft drinks and a couple of racks of candy, jerky, and other irresistible delights.

"Closed on Tuesdays" said the sign in the window. I refused to believe it was Tuesday, or that, even if somehow it was, the owners wouldn't sense my desperation from within their cosy warm house, and come rushing out to rescue me. I stomped up and down the line of ramshackle buildings that made up the lodge. Through the window of the largest, I could see an industrial-looking kitchen, with stainless steel counters and racks upon racks of crockery. The lights were on, but there was not a single human being in evidence. A sign informed me, once again, that the lodge was closed on Tuesdays. Up at the other end of the lot were two houses, clearly inhabited, but with no sign of life, no matter how pointedly and plaintively I walked past, and stood, looking all around me, waiting for someone to respond.

Eventually I came to the inevitable conclusion that it was indeed Tuesday, and that no one was going to come – and that walking around in the cold was warming up my feet, but turning my

Photo: THOM QUINE www.flickr.com/photos/quinet



hands, in their damp sweaty gloves, into shuddering claws of ice. As I rode away over the pass a shameful, entirely irrational wave of hatred swept over me, for these selfish, ignorant, unthinking people who would close their shop for a whole day, leaving a shivering and vulnerable cyclist to fend for herself. At the back of my mind I knew that this wasn't even slightly true – that these were probably kind, hard-working, generous people, who took the opportunity to have a little time off in the quietest part of the year, to work through the backlog of chores that builds up during the busy tourist season, or to drive down to Anchorage for a day off. I hated myself for hating them. The spiral continued.

A couple of miles further on I was suddenly gripped by a frenzy of thirst, stopped the bike, stood astride it, and undid my jacket in order to get at the water-filled backpack beneath it. My numb fingers plucked uselessly at my cuffs, unable to grasp them tightly enough to pull them over my hands, and in the end I ripped the jacket off over my head, turning the sleeves inside out, and noticing as I did so that the fleecy lining was coated in thick white frost, from all the sweat that had been steaming out through my merino jerseys. The water, once I had managed to unscrew the lid, was not only still liquid, but actually tepid, the temperature of a swimming pool, or a draining bathtub, or, in fact, my own warm body. I gulped down half a litre or so, trying hard not to spill any drops on the backpack, knowing that they would freeze almost

instantly and add to the quantity of ice nestling amongst my clothing, then put my backpack and jacket back on and resumed my slow crawl down the road.

I had only been cycling for a minute or so when I felt an ominous trickle of warm water down the small of my back. Panicking, I tore off my jacket and backpack, and quickly discovered that the cap was on squint and the bladder was leaking. Dolefully, I put it right, and wondered whether, once I crawled into my sleeping bags, my so far reliable body heat would be capable of melting the ice and evaporating it far enough away from my body that it would condense into my bedding rather than my clothing. If not, then I might be stuck with this ice for days.

MISERY The downhill that followed Eureka Pass was not a rewarding one, so my mood continued in the same petty, self-pitying groove it had worn itself into on the way up. I should really have been grateful to have to pedal down the hill, since it was far too cold to freewheel, but it wasn't really about the hill at all. This was annoyance without an object; annoyance that chased its tail, around and around, growing ever more pungent and pointless.

The daylight began to fade, retreating to the tops of the mountains and mocking me as I sped downwards into the gathering gloom. I reached up to turn on my head torch, and to my dismay, felt nothing but the sheer edge of my helmet. I couldn't even remember when I had last had it on. Probably, I concluded, it had

pinged off my head and into the snowy verge when I was tearing my clothes off in a panic on top of the pass. I wasn't going to go back and look for it. The last few miles had taken me long enough in a downward direction. And now, I realized, I was down to a single rear light, having started out with an over-cautious four.

And then, as the day's final insult, I fished my glasses out of my left pogie, wanting to protect my eyes from the icy breeze that was numbing their edges

***FOR THE FIRST TIME I WAS PROPERLY STRUCK,
AS WITH AN ARROW TO THE HEART,
BY THE BEAUTY OF WHERE I WAS.***

and freezing their lashes together and, as I wrestled them over my helmet, broke off one of the arms. I stood there at the side of the road, unable to muster the emotion to laugh or cry, and suddenly noticed that there was a lodge to my left – a lodge whose existence I was somehow, despite poring earnestly over The Milepost the previous evening, entirely unaware of. A short drive sloped down off the main road, and arrived in front of a modest wooden building, with a couple of smaller cabins stretching away behind it and dark spindly spruce trees all around. Were it not for a few outdoor lights shining out into the twilight, I might have sped (who am I kidding? crawled) straight past it.

I propped my bike up against the edge

of the veranda, and started as I looked up, as someone was already opening the door, almost as if they'd been waiting for me all along. It was a sturdy blond man of about my own age, dressed in jeans and a cosy-looking red hoodie. I mustered just enough of my already fading annoyance to envy him his warm dry clothes, and then all my senses were flooded with pathetic gratitude as he ushered me into a bright, wood-lined reception room, assured me that yes, it was no problem to

camp on his property, and no, he didn't mind if I spent a little while sitting around and warming up before pitching my tent. Down the hallway I could hear the cheerful noises of a young family – shouts and chatter; somebody reading aloud; somebody playing the piano. A long-haired, long-skirted woman appeared, with two tiny boys hovering close to her legs.

RECOGNIZED "It's that biker" said the man, indicating me. My presence on the Glenn Highway had not gone unremarked. Josh and Anna (for these were their names) had driven past me the previous day on their way home from Anchorage, where they went twice a month to stock up their larder from Costco. It's an eight-hour round trip, but they have

seven children to feed, and groceries are far more expensive in Glennallen, sixty miles further north, so it's worth their while, and just one of the many challenges of living in rural Alaska. Later on, Anna told me that Josh spends all of February and March out in the woods, rebuilding their stock of firewood, since their house is entirely heated by a couple of wood stoves, and in a place where temperatures regularly dip below -30C, it wouldn't do to run out of logs. In the summer they're rushed off their feet catering to all the tourists who pass through, and I guessed that must be when most of the money came in.

DARKNESS As we talked, night fell outside, and although the sun had set long ago, a faint glow remained on the horizon I'd recently ridden over, like the lingering echo of the day just passed. I remembered a similar day in the Zagros mountains of Iran three Januarys ago, where I had pushed myself all day through the fear and the cold and the cruel, glittering sunshine, and then watched the light drain out of the sky from inside a small teashop in the village of Shirin Su, while local gentlemen bickered amicably over who would host me for the night.

Josh and Anna invited me to join them for dinner (Josh was just on his way out to fire up the barbeque to cook the hamburgers), and eventually also offered me a cabin for the night, since the temperature was still falling, and Anna couldn't bear the thought of me sleeping outside. I thanked her as sincerely as I could,

but I don't think I really needed to say anything – the crack in my voice and the tears in my eyes were probably enough.

And so, after a cosy and convivial meal with Lydia, Judah, Hannah, Evelyn, Obed, Ezra and Sylvia (and their parents), I hauled my bike up onto the veranda of the cabin Josh had warmed up for me, spread out the contents of my panniers to variously dry, air and recharge, stripped down to my baselayers and stretched out on the bed. Just before I fell asleep I wrapped myself up again and walked over to the main house to use the bathroom. On my way back, confident of the warmth that awaited me, I lingered in the cold for a minute or two, and for the first time was properly struck, as with an arrow to the heart, by the beauty of where I was. All around me the spruce trees were caked with pure shining snow, glowing in the light from the cabins. Above them, a velvety black sky glistened with a million stars and a full golden moon shone down on me. As I watched, the faintest green glimmer of the northern lights played across the night sky. The air was crisp and sweet and silent, as if the snow was swallowing up all sound – or simply because, aside from the occasional swishing, scraping noise of a car passing by on the highway, there was almost no sound to be heard. **BT**

Emily's current off-bike adventures include a UK speaking tour and a memoir, to be published by Guardian Faber in 2016. See <http://thatemilychappell.com> for more details.

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Image from
the Road:
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PAUL JEURISSEN
www.pauljeurissen.nl



An Ode to Wind

By: DAN SLATER

The lot of a cyclist can be good or bad,
And the governing factor is weather.
The whim of the gods can turn happy to sad,
And bring a man to the end of his tether.

Rain we can take and sun we adore:
We just slap on some more of the cream.
But there's one weather system that strikes to our core,
With the power to put paid to our dream.

I'm not talking of darkness or locusts or hail;
Such plagues we will take in our stride.
No, what slows our pace to that of a snail,
Is a South Island curse, far and wide.

It is not, you might think, just a bit of a breeze,
Or a freshness to blow our hair back.
I mean massive great gusts that bring sheep to their knees,
And buffet us right off the track.

Our route down to Bluff was straight as a die,
From Queenstown directly down south.
"These next few days will be easy as pie,"
Are the words that slipped out of my mouth.

Now, I'd like to think if I'd tried all my life,
I couldn't have been any wronger.
For the headwind proceeding to cause us great strife
Could not have been any stronger.

Past farmland and towns, rivers and dykes,
We bore its incredible brunt.
With force enough to knock us clean off our bikes,
We battled the low pressure front.

Photo: WERNER WITTERSHEIM www.flickr.com/photos/wwwuppertal



Photo: ADAM FOSTER <http://adamfoster.photography>

At least, so we thought, it would be at our backs,
When we reached Bluff and turned it around,
But incredibly we were still stopped in our tracks
Like our wheels had been tied to the ground.

Like a heat-seeking missile the bloody wind changed,
And began now to blow from the north,
It was all just a little bit too well-arranged
And was nearly the end of Danforth.

It pummelled and pushed, and slapped us about,
Causing resentment to fester,
More than once did I crack, shake my cold fist and shout –
“I’ll beat you, you bloody nor’wester!”

I scanned local papers for headlines expecting:
‘Strongest winds since our records began!’
But the topical news was of semen injecting
And to pages and pages it ran.

And so go our days, filled with varied delight:
Logging trucks blow us right off the shoulder,
Each and every kilometre puts up a fight,
And every night I feel thirteen weeks older.

But little by little we outrun the gale,
And away from that fevered farrago,
Making good our escape on the Clutha Gold Trail
And the Rail Trail of Central Otago.

And finally, as a reward for our pain,
The wind dies and forward we lurch
On the long and straight flats of the Canterbury Plain,
To the quake-stricken city – Christchurch. **BT**

*Adventure travel writer Dan Slater has also written
a book: This is Not a Holiday - an introduction to the
concept and practice of the warmdüschers and how to
avoid being one. www.thisisnotaholiday.com*

Image from
the Road:
America

PAUL GRIFFITHS
<http://theridesouth.com>



By: HENRIK FREDERIKSEN
Photos: PAUL JEURISSEN



You **know** you're a
Bicycle Traveler
when...

1. Even when travelling by bus, you are looking around the countryside for good hidden places where you can camp without being seen.
2. You walk around a city with your friends and are hand-signaling potholes and obstacles that people could trip over.
3. You measure distances in days, not hours.
4. You have absolutely no qualms about eating ice cream, chocolate-bars, bananas, greasy chips and drinking coca-cola for lunch.
5. When you eat, you eat a lot. Really a lot.
6. You never really trust local people when they tell you how far it is to the next city.
7. You love to cycle mountains, except for when you actually are cycling mountains. Then you leave the mountains behind you, and you miss them again.
8. You have answered the question “Where are you going?” so many times that you know the question and answer in multiple weird languages.
9. Your geographical knowledge about a region outshines everyone else’s, sometimes even the locals.



10. You consider access to running water and electricity “a luxury”.
11. You think that a warm shower after 6 long, sweaty days of cycling is soooo good, that it was actually worth not having that shower for those 6 days.
12. You can survive days-on-end on the same monotonous canned-food or basic 3rd world local dishes.
13. You know that Satan exists and that he materializes himself as a strong headwind.
14. You don’t really care about how many kilometers you have cycled, but you really care about how many kilometers you have cycled.
15. You have filled out so many visa-applications, arrival-forms and hotel-check ins that you remember your passport number.
16. You say “hello!” to so many people every day, so when a nearby local guy is answering his phone with “hello”, you simply reply “hello” without thinking.
17. You have some seriously ugly and weird tan-lines.
18. You know the definition of being seriously thirsty.

19. You care an awful lot about your equipment being small and lightweight, but you have been travelling with 3 heavy books and a large, weird voodoo-talisman for the past 2 months.
20. You've spent a ridiculous amount of time listening to music and never get tired of it.
21. You often wake up with rural local 3rd world people outside your tent, who simply can't get their head around *why* a foreigner is sleeping in their rice-field.
22. You keep fairly well track of the phases of the moon, you know quite precisely what time the sun is setting and can easily locate The North Star.
23. You think that riding an unloaded bicycle without baggage feels weird and unstable.
24. You are frustrated with map-makers and seriously don't understand why the f*** they don't take their job seriously.
25. You have developed an intense evil gaze that can make most of the attacking dogs turn around. And you're up for a sprint when it doesn't work...
26. You are sometimes the first foreigner that the local people have ever seen in real life, and you are fine with them pulling your hair and skin to see if you are actually a human-being.

27. You consider a trash-dump or a cemetery a perfectly fine place to spend the night.
28. You are accustomed to being stared at, and understand how the monkeys in Zoo must feel. You also realize that some nationalities, you simply *cannot* beat in a staring contest (who said Indians?)
29. You are not afraid of the dark; contrary, you take comfort in its ability to hide you.
30. You learn a lot about the local fauna from the many road kills you see everyday.
31. You find it funny when a tour-agency sell 1 hour ATV tours with big family-groups and call it "Adventure".
32. You actually read all of the 32 points in this stupid stereotypical list, found them funny and recognized yourself in some of them. **BT**

Henrik Frederiksen not only cycled around the world but he also wrote a book about his experience drifting down the Amazon in a homemade bamboo raft. You can follow his journeys at www.worldonbike.com

Photographer Paul Jeurissen and his partner Grace Johnson are 'Bicycling around the world in search of inspiring cycle images.' www.bicyclingaroundtheworld.nl





Peru

Cass Gilbert cycles the stark yet beautiful backroads of the Peruvian Andes.

Bikepacking the Huayhuash.



Local kids in Secolla.



1



2



4



3

- 1. *Wearing her Sunday best.*
- 2. *My companion Kurt of www.bikegreaseandcoffee.com.*
- 3. *Local transport.*
- 4. *Kurt's loaded pugsley.*



Above: Spending the night in a half built church

Left: Heading up to the mountains.

Cass Gilbert is an avid bike traveler and photographer who has been touring regularly for the last decade. You can follow his journey through the Americas at <http://whileoutriding.com>



Image from
the Road:
Scotland

PAUL JEURISSEN
www.pauljeurissen.nl

Parting shot



Photo: MIRJAM WOUTERS www.cyclingdutchgirl.com

"Tip for how to clean a bicycle... Bikini optional but recommended if you're going to post pictures." ~ Mirjam Wouters

BicycleTraveler