

BicycleTraveler

International Magazine on Bicycle Touring

10th
Issue



Sahara

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Himalayas

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Jugarh

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China

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Belize



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From the editor

Can you believe this is the *tenth* issue?

We are so happy to share this one with you. This special, extra large edition is full of fantastic photography and entertaining tales that will make you want to grab your bike and hit the road.

Bicycle Traveler launched five years ago. We wanted to be a magazine that showed what cycle travel is about and why people dream of undertaking round-the-world tours. Since then we've grown (more than 19,000 subscriptions) yet we're still passionate about publishing stories and images that illustrate this wonderful way to see the world.

My sincere thanks go out to all of you who have helped make the publication a success. Your contributions to *Bicycle Traveler* have been the heart of the magazine

Plus special thanks to:

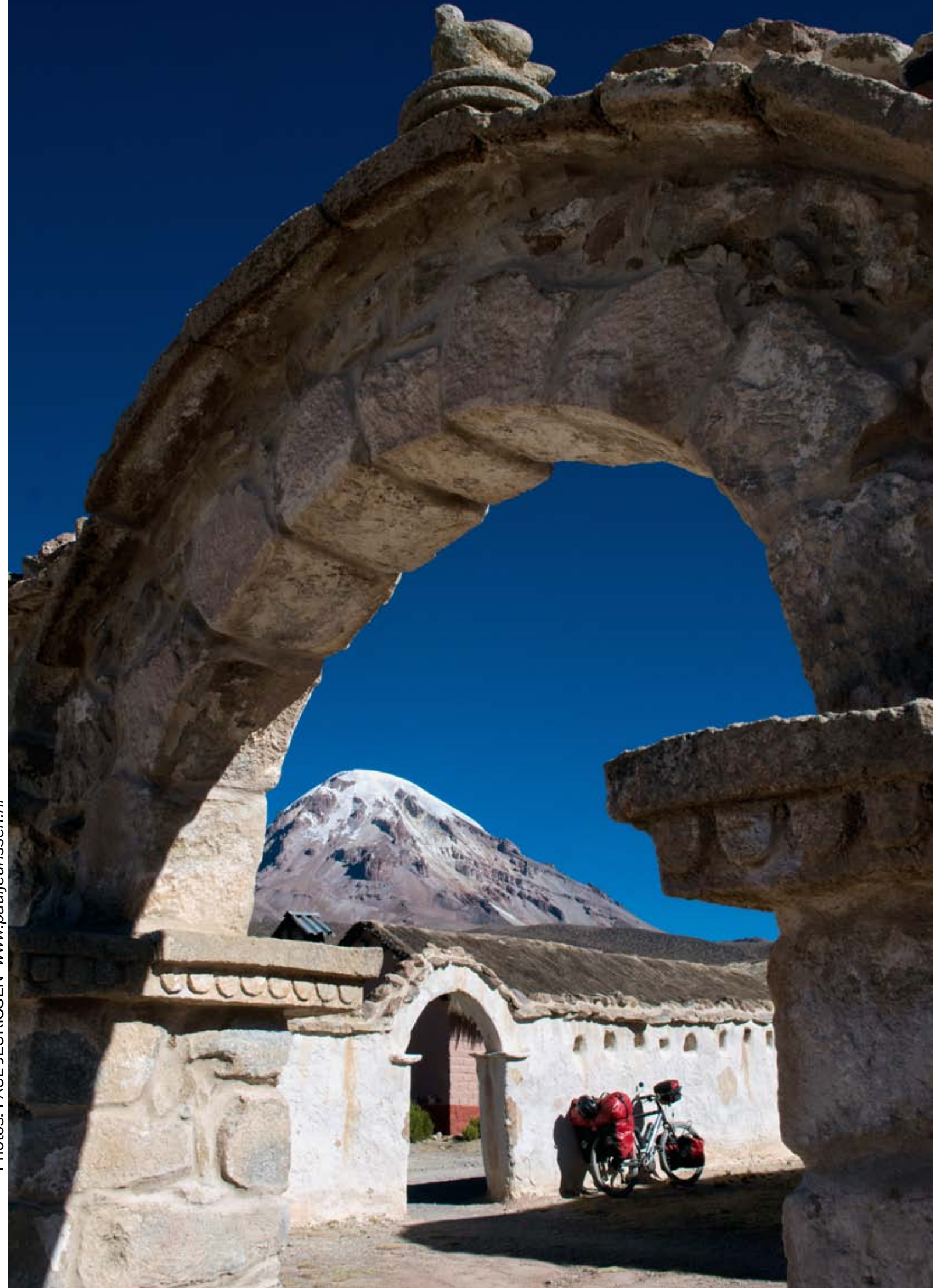
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Buddha on a Bike



Sorry, dear reader. I don't want to harp on about how tough it is out here in the desert and how great the suffering, but as my days are filled with nothing but sun, sand and self-pity I'm afraid you'll have to bear with me one more time.

Last week saw me make a little detour to Dunhuang, a sedate town in the southern Gobi that probably wouldn't exist if it weren't for the nearby Mogao Caves. This age-old temple complex, 'discovered' and subsequently looted by a handful of Western explorers at the turn of the last century, was once the centre of Chinese Buddhism. It's impressive as much for its dazzling murals and serene Buddha statues—some standing well over thirty metres tall—as for its sheer size: of the original thousand man-made caves some five hundred survive today. Of those I only managed to visit ten, and that took me the best part of a day.

To get to Dunhuang I had to leave the main road leading to the mouth of the Hexi Corridor and cycle southwest for a day. The wind seemed to have anticipated this move: it was working against me as enthusiastically as it had on my west-east crossing of Xinjiang province. Fortunately, I had something to look

forward to: a few days off, a bit of culture, something else than noodles for dinner. It also helped that there were two oasis villages along the way. In the first I gorged myself on watermelon, which is particularly good in these parts, and watched the melon vendor crack himself up with the 'romance' section of my Mandarin phrasebook. (Apart from the pretty universal 'Would you like a drink?' it has phrases such as 'You look like some cousin of mine', 'Piss off!', 'How about going to bed?', 'Don't worry, I'll do it myself', 'Easy, tiger!' and the rather anticlimactic 'You're just using me for sex'.)

SUCH LIGHTHEARTEDNESS seemed forever out of reach when I rode out of Dunhuang a few days later. I was cycling east on a narrow connecting road, and as the last houses disappeared behind me I noticed that the wind had turned yet again. And not only that, it seemed as though it too had taken a

few days off, only to return nastier than ever before. Now a grit-laden gale, it took great pleasure in keeping my speed in the single digits and forcing me at times to ride with my eyes closed.

'What have I done to deserve this?' I groaned. 'Is this a case of bad karma?' I racked my brain but couldn't think of anything inappropriate I may have said or done on my tour of the Mogao Caves. Torturing small animals or extorting money from poor old grannies aren't pleasures I usually indulge in, so what could it be? Bad luck? But is that possible? What are the odds of having to face a headwind every single day regardless of the direction I happen to be travelling in? Or is this how the human mind works? Could it be that we like to make a big deal out of unfavourable circumstances and simply fail to register those instances when the planets are aligned correctly and we get what we want without having to exert ourselves too much?

IT DIDN'T TAKE me very long to realise that the way I usually deal with windy days—taking it out on lorry drivers who like to lean on their horn while overtaking me—wouldn't get me very far this time. For one, there was hardly any traffic on this back road. Moreover, the wind was so strong that it would be foolish to take a hand off the handlebar just to give the finger to a lorry driver with the mental capabilities of a six-year-old. I made a quick evaluation of the situation. Between Dunhuang and Guazhou, the next town on this road, there would most

likely be nothing at all in the way of basic conveniences: no oasis villages, no settlements, no service stations. Without so much as a wall or a clump of trees to provide shelter it would be impossible to pitch my tent. And water... I shuddered to think of it. Even with the eight litres I was carrying I would have to ration myself.

AS THE DAY progressed the wind showed no sign of abating. I genuinely felt sorry for myself, which only made it worse. Then I thought of all those monks responsible for the marvel that is the Mogao Caves. When they first started hacking away at the cliffside, they had no idea that their little project would evolve into one of the greatest artistic accomplishments of all time, that 1600 years later people from all over the world would throng to see the fruit of their labour. 'Just think of all the effort that must have gone into the creation of a single cave,' I told myself. The hammer and chisel, the oil lamps, the desert heat, the perseverance it took to cover wall after wall with thousands of near-identical miniature portraits of the Buddha. And then, when one cave was finished, they would move on to the next. And then to another. And another. And they kept at it for years, for decades, for centuries. Generation after generation, dynasty after dynasty.

'What is a day of pain in the face of such determination and sacrifice?' I asked myself. I divided the remaining hundred-or-so kilometres in a thousand units, using the little stone markers on the roadside to measure my progress.

One marker for each cave. 'Now, the trick is to relinquish all desire for things of the world,' I lectured myself on the little I know of Buddhism. 'The pain you're currently experiencing stems from a longing for something you don't have. Forget about shade, forget about cold showers and the sound of clinking ice cubes. You should even forget about ever reaching Guazhou. Just focus on the next stone marker.'

STILL, THAT WAS easier said than done. A hundred metres is a lot when the wind is giving its best to get you airborne. All I could do was count the pedal strokes. One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight, one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight. Over and over again, marker after marker. This actually proved to be quite effective. The counting induced a kind of semitrance that prevented me from spending energy on anything but pushing the pedals.

Two-thirds through the day my attempt at meditation in motion was crudely interrupted by something that appeared on the horizon. It was like the classic mirage you get in cartoons. It started with a fleck of grey shimmering in the heat, which as I drew closer took on the unmistakable outline of a petrol station. I instantly forgot about having to let go of the base cravings of the self and allowed myself to be swept away by heavenly images of cold-drinks fridges hopping around in air-conditioned rooms.

This clearly was a test, and as the building grew larger so did the realisation

that I had flunked it. It was a petrol station all right, but one that was still under construction. No cold-drinks fridges here but stacks of building materials. No air-conditioned rooms but concrete boxes with paneless windows. I stopped, lay down on the floor and listened to the wind souging through the empty shell. Then everything grew dark.

THERE IS NO YIN without yang, no day without night, no heaven without hell, no beginning without end. Twelve hours after leaving Dunhuang I reached Guazhou (or Melon Town in English). And though I can't profess to have made much progress in terms of enlightenment, some kind of nirvana awaited me there.

It didn't take me long to find the town's budget hotel, but it soon transpired that the place didn't have police permission to accommodate foreigners. Acting on a hunch I decided to try my luck at a four-star affair across the street. As I walked through the revolving doors I felt horribly out of place. This was clearly the swankiest establishment for miles around—all crystal chandeliers and bellboys pushing around gleaming luggage trolleys—and I wasn't particularly looking or smelling my best. Nevertheless, the staff seemed delighted to see me. I was offered tea, and before I got a chance to frown at their rack rates I was offered a room for little more than what I usually spend at budget hotels. 'You are very important person,' said the smiley receptionist. 'Where are you from?' 'Holland,' I replied. 'Very beautiful,' she said. 'What, Holland?' 'No,

you.' And my chapped lips cracked as I smiled my first real smile of the day.

And it didn't end just there. I was doused with more tea, the manager came down to say hello and suddenly it was decided that only a deluxe room would be good enough for me. 'You are very important person,' the receptionist told me again. 'You are first foreign guest.'

WHEN I ENTERED the room I was close to tears. Chinese hotel beds usually consist of a piece of hardboard on legs with a stained duvet masquerading as a mattress. What I found was quite the opposite. From the thick rugs to the upholstered armchairs and the fluffy towels in the bathroom, everything oozed delightful decadence. There was a flat-screen TV, air conditioning, complimentary mineral water and, my favourite item, a tartan sleeve for the remote control. 'So much for relinquishing all desire for things of the world,' I thought as I stepped under the rain shower.

SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT through purity of mind—the idea rather appeals to me, but I'm afraid I'm just too much of a sucker for life's little luxuries to really make it work. **BT**

In 2001, after a failed attempt to study Mirjam Wouters decided to 'take a holiday' before going to University. And then she forgot to return... <http://cyclingdutchgirl.com>

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

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



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Uncovering Uzbekistan

Text & photo: FREDRIKA EK

Very few times in my life had I felt so exhausted. I was pedalling the final kilometers to the Turkmenistan Uzbekistan border and my legs were completely worn out. So was the rest of my body. Even the muscles in my face felt sore after days of squinting to protect my eyes

from blinding sand gusts. As I'm fairly good at ignoring muscles begging for rest, this wasn't that much of a concern. My biggest problem was another kind of tiredness. I was in desperate need of sleep. Lots of it.

Crossing borders in Central Asia

generally requires patience and a good poker face, but the Uzbek customs officers are notorious for being particularly horrible to overland travellers. They go through your stuff more thoroughly than impatient kids searching their parents' closets for birthday presents. They are

also known for pouncing on anything to get you in trouble.

Upon arriving at customs I was unprepared and simply too exhausted to give a damn. I was too tired even to react when the customs lady pointed out that my declarations form didn't match



up with the money I was carrying. And I didn't lift a finger when she spent a full ten minutes reading my (Swedish) diary.

Sure, when she specifically asked me if I was carrying a copy of *Mein Kampf*, I came back to reality for a brief second. But most of the time I just nodded and smiled on auto pilot, while simultaneously trying to take a mental power nap even though I was standing there with my eyes open.

Considering how it normally goes, they let me through pretty quickly. In less than an hour they had stamped my passport and let me enter the country.

This certainly wasn't because of my cooperation. My guess is that I was simply stinking up the whole building so badly that they wanted me to leave before they would all pass out.

AFTER A GREAT TIME cycling through Uzbekistan I finally reached the other side. It was time to leave. But this time I was out of luck.

If you've ever toured yourself, you know that you can fit a lot of stuff into bicycle panniers. And I mean a lot.

After a bunch of paperwork and weird questions, I found myself watching this super stern customs officer go through every single piece of equipment she found in my bags. She even took a closer look at my tent pegs. This was going to take some time...

Playing charades to show her what my medicines were for (diarrhoea, any-

one?) and answering questions about the subject matter of my Kindle e-books were not my main concern. I was worried about the other officers. One was

“He looked like a dad who's found booze in his teenager's room. I could tell I was in trouble”

looking through the files on my laptop, another was simultaneously examining my phone and camera, while a third was sitting at his desk with my external hard drive plugged into his computer.

Now, it's not as if I collect tutorials on how to break out of jail or how to construct nuclear weapons. Still, there is something a bit unnerving about having random people investigate your stuff. Especially when you don't *really* know what they're looking for.

As I watched the female officer disassemble my stove, an angry voice suddenly cut through the silent room like a machete.

‘Huh! What is THIS?! No good, NO good!’

MY HEART SANK. The guy holding my phone glared at me accusingly from across the room. He looked like a dad who's found booze in his teenager's room. I could tell I was in trouble.

Since I was unable to see the screen,

I couldn't answer his question. Before I knew it the other officers had gathered around him to see what he had discovered. They all looked at the phone. Then at me. Then back at the phone again, all the while talking in Uzbek.

Since they didn't show any intention of letting me see what it was that was 'no good', I squeezed myself into the circle around the telephone screen. Within a split second I went from being clueless to knowing exactly what my crime was.

They had found porn. And I knew full well that porn is strictly forbidden in Uzbekistan and many other Asian countries.

But it wasn't just any porn.

The screen showed a bright, shining close-up of my naked butt.

Ranking all the socially awkward situations I've been in so far, I think (and hope) this will qualify as the worst one for a long time to come.

WHY, YOU MAY be wondering, did I snap naked pictures of my butt in the first place? Well, let me explain...

Last summer I cycled through Iran and it was insanely hot. Being a woman, I had to follow the national dress code for females, which basically meant wearing more clothes than anyone would think reasonable in those temperatures. I was sweating!

This fact, combined with me not wearing bicycle shorts, left me with some incredibly uncomfortable saddle sores. In desperate need of sympathy, I snapped a photo of my swollen, aching butt and

sent it to my mum.

And then life continued, my backside made a comeback and I forgot all about it.

That was, until this particular day, when I was unexpectedly reminded of it.

OBVIOUSLY, THIS whole border crossing episode ended up taking ages. Still, I enjoyed it. The situation was just so weird. In the end, the customs officers were satisfied with me deleting the photo. They gave me my exit stamp so that I could leave – equally amused and embarrassed.

When I left the customs building I took a deep breath. I had officially completed my sixteenth country, and the one that I had been looking forward to the most was up next.

I was going to Tajikistan. Economically speaking, it would be the poorest country I had visited so far, but in terms of mountains and nature it would be the richest. I was excited, to say the least.

With one last look over my shoulder I said goodbye to Uzbekistan and got into the saddle. Then slowly, almost hesitantly, I started pedalling away. **BT**

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



NAFTANAXI
HOTEL

HOTEL

Image from
the Road:
Somalia

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Image from
the Road:
Tajikistan

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Belize journal

Text & photo: JOE CRUZ



Usually I aim for it to be several days into a trip before stuff goes notably ass over tea-kettle, but, really, why wait? Could see on the map where the road would take me, a roundabout and obscure route to be sure, but coherent enough and it would eventually link into a muck slog that Cass Gilbert did some years ago.

Obviously it was going to involve mud hole surfing, which it did, nor long before stuffing the front wheel into an unexpectedly deep void, dead stop and then ankle to calf to knee slop deep. Covered then, pedaling on, hours, many, of cloying jungle maybe it will maybe it won't rain, until the skies open, which will at least clean up the drivetrain a little. Sometimes a narrow track, sometimes drier sand paths, and a notable fracture between my legs' urban winter lethargy and my self expectations.

ON PAPER I'm well through, a few turns then there's a gate and a house and I scare the lurch out of a guy in a hammock. His shirt says "Ranger" and I make all the Polite Inquiries, evidently The Company doesn't allow anyone through their decimating-the-jungle-but-I'm-not-right-now-judging land. But that's not really the thing, it turns out. The road is collapsed in several places ahead requiring wading across, for which, of

course, I conceal my enthusiasm and instead merely nod stupid and persistent. But they don't want to risk me getting hurt, we politely disagree about whose business that is.

The suggestions of a "donation" to the company don't work, hard to blame him for not wanting to put his job in jeopardy, so I turn the bike around to retrace my steps into the interminable, which is fine. Though it gets dark.

NEXT DAY the rain hasn't stopped, wrecked legs preclude making up time. In the evening taking a break in the town park in San Ignacio, near the Guatemala border, just unwinding a bit and then a startling snap. Front tire is flat and green slime about. Sigh. Inspection reveals that it's a colossal tear where the sidewall has separated from the bead. Things are getting interesting, walk to the main drag of town. Thanks for wondering along where I'm going to get a 2-9 tire in western Belize.

"Oh, you're rightly fooked, mon. You'll

"Wot the fook you doin' bringing a 700c mountain tire here anyways? A 26 eench, I would just give you one, mon."

never find one here." My face somewhere between rue and a smirk. The

irony is not lost on me that I've insisted on precisely this truth a number of times. Jamal runs a tour company and, among other things, they rent the inevitably impossibly decrepit mountain bike.

"Wot the fook you doin' bringing a 700c mountain tire here anyways? A 26 eench, I would just give you one, mon."

"ER, WELL, YEAH, I know, ridiculous." I hem and haw about it being two weeks, what are the chances of a tear that couldn't be sewn?, been on the road a lot and never blown a sidewall before, etcetera after etcetera. We're laughing about it, "So you know better!" Sure, MC can just send me one but I'm on an aggressive timetable to move through Guatemala.

"A few months ago, there was this couple from Europe, they were having serious problems, mon. They were fighting, not listening to each other, you know? She was going to kyl that fooker, it was bad, mon." I liked Jamal immediately so I suffer this non-sequitur and offer a cheerful "uh huh."

"Yah, and so da solution was to give up on d'ayer bike tour, they had brought them bikes from home, you know, or give up on dayer marriage. So they offered to sell me the bikes, the racks with the bags, all their stuff, mon."

"Yeah..."

"DEY WANTED 300 US for each one, no way I was going to pay that even though they were worth it, maybe, you

know, I wasn't even in the market for bikes! But we negotiated, I didn't want to take advantage of a bad situation, but I guess I a little bit did."

"Oh?"

"So now I rent their bikes to tourists with all the rest of the bikes, those fooker tourists don't know shit about bikes, by the way, they shift all the gears without pedaling and when they pedal again it gets all messed up." We laugh.

"That Euro couple's bikes are these right here and it is your incredible luck, mon, that they have 700c tires."

"Wait, seriously?"

Jamal shows me two funky looking, i.e., Euro, trekking bikes and, no shit, they do have 700c x 38 tires, VeeRubber. We howl and laugh and carry on for awhile.

"Sell me a one."

"Yeah, mon, I will but I don't want to. Where da hell will I get a replacement in dis country? But, yeah, looks like you take advantage of me now, that's the way the world is, you know? Like I said, it's your lucky day." **BT**

Joe Cruz is a professor of philosophy, writer and expedition cyclist. He has pedaled the world over and you can follow his travels via his blog <https://joecruz.wordpress.com>.

10 Ways to get Consent from 'The Missus'

By: MERAID GRIFFIN

We have dreams of following in the tyre tracks of Cass Gilbert and packing up the bike for an epic trail ride. His blog, While Out Riding has many of us turning green with envy. Why? Because while he's out riding we're at home. Putting out the rubbish and plodding along on the 9 – 5 treadmill. But we dream. And many of these dreams are only little bitty dreams. Like riding off with some bikepacking friends for a couple of weeks in Scotland to be eaten alive by midges; or a Winter break to Morocco; or Wales.

You've planned the route, you've figured out when you want to go and boy oh boy you've definitely got the kit. You've even found some friends to go with you. There's one teensy obstacle in your way – You need to get consent from the missus.

And here's where I can help. You see I am 'The Missus', also known amongst bikepackers as 'She who must be obeyed', 'The Wife' and possibly other names unsuitable for use on forums. I recently found out that I am known as 'The Home Office'. Hmm!

Now luckily for my partner Dan, I enjoy bikepacking so we go on trips together like a horse and carriage (stole that line from a song). However, many of you have to earn brownie points to get off for a few days and I totally agree that

this should be so. I was a golf widow for many years so I know ALL the tricks you guys can play. Selling a trip away with the lads as 'Self Development' or 'Networking' won't cut it – It is what it is – A holiday with the lads, while the family stay at home. Be honest.

Whether you need to enter into domestic negotiations or obtain a pass will depend entirely on your partner. Here are some secrets to help you gain that all important Permission Granted stamp. This is best achieved over an extended period not something you can do a few days before the big date.

1. Demonstrate a love of all things domestic by taking cleaning duties to a level bordering on OCD. That includes scrubbing the toilet bowl. What? You didn't realise that a human actually does that! NEVER leave the toilet roll with one or two sheets on it. Replace it and make sure it flows the correct way. Yes. The correct direction is the way 'She who must be obeyed' does it, no matter what you think.

2. Cook some meals. If you already do a share of this, then up the ante and do it more often. The key to success here is to leave the kitchen as clean and sparkly as you found it.

3. If she looks tired, then tell her to put her feet up and bring her tea. I understand that you may also be tired, but remember this you're the one looking for the 'Get out of Jail Free' token.

4. Suggest that you watch the kids so that she can go clothes shopping some Saturday instead of going out on your bike. This means that you grab the opportunity to play with the children while doing ALL of the household chores and preparing dinner. Don't even think about going onto a bikepacking forum or reading a bike blog. If you think you should all just sit together watching a film, think again. The Missus will hear about it. No matter how much you have done, or how efficient you are, if we hear that you have been laid out on the sofa for so long as five minutes, then that's what we'll decide you have done the ENTIRE day. Remember, there can be no slacking.

5. Each day, you should tell her every how fabulous she is. Build up to this and don't come on too strong because she will A) think you want something big (which you do) or B) think you are having an affair and start going through your personal stuff and she will find out about all that bike kit you've been buying or C) tell you to go on a long trip as you are getting on her nerves.

6. Those jobs you've been reminded about repeatedly over the last year need to be done, like decorating the spare room or fixing the kitchen cupboard that used to hang off its hinges and is now completely separate. She's not falling for the line that open plan shelving is the

next new thing in kitchens.

7. And if you think you can win her over after some sensual schmoozing and catch her in the afterglow, let me tell you that this treatment only works on MEN. That's what we do when we want something from you!

8. Send her nice text messages. Examples include – "I was having a really crap time at work today and then I remembered your gorgeous smiling face this morning and everything was great again". Or 'Your voice makes me horny'. Though this is probably better suited to the super slow foreplay technique (guaranteed winner – for perhaps another blog) Or 'Thank you for being you.' The most important thing to remember about telephone calls and text messages is to answer promptly. Failure to respond will ensure you are doomed to failure.

9. Flowers are optional. Bring in a posy from the garden or make a daisy chain bracelet. Be advised – Never EVER buy flowers from a gas station.

10. Another option is to include the family at the beginning or end of a trip. The end is best as you'll be ready for a bit of luxury and canoodling.

Bon Voyage! **BT**

Meraid Griffin is a freelance travel author who writes mostly about bikes, boats and bites. Brought up in Ireland, she currently lives in England where she sails, cycles and travels regularly. You can read more about her adventures on her blog, www.farawayvisions.com.

the

Image from
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Argentina

NEIL PIKE
www.pikesonbikes.com

Image from
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MARC MCSHANE

www.instagram.com/nutmegcountry





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www.pauljeurissen.nl

Image from
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America

MIRJAM WOUTERS
www.cyclingdutchgirl.com





**The Art of Jugarh:
one part DIY,
*one part WTF***

Text & photos: MIKE ROY

I don't remember the day it started, but I do remember the first day when it got bad. Chris and I were on our way to Shillong, Meghalaya ("Abode of the Clouds"), northeast India. We had stayed the night before with an Adventist pastor and his family. It poured that morning, with such ferocity that we wondered whether the monsoon had finally showed up, and whether we'd be better off turning around and heading for the plains. That would have meant skipping those wondrous "Living Root Bridges" of Nongriat, though, so we packed our bags and waited for the rains to end.

Around midmorning, they did. We said our goodbyes and set out, but within a few minutes of setting out, I could tell something was up: with each turn of my wheels I felt a thump, as if I were running over miniature speed bumps, or had a chunk of one somehow attached to my back tire. I had been semi-ignoring the issue for months, figuring that the roads themselves were to blame. I preferred not to believe that the bike itself could have an issue. Though, if it did, it was probably something in the rear axle. Might have gotten bent that time we hitchhiked for two days in a rickety mack truck to get back over the 4,200 meter pass we had crossed - and descended in a downpour - a few weeks previous.

Except that I had had the axle and hub checked, cleaned, and greased just two days before in Guwahati. The problem had to be something else. Now the thump had grown so severe that it felt like more of a shudder - with every revolution, my bike and I would bounce an inch or so to the left and make a sort of clunking noise. Not the sort of irregularity

that you want when trying to deal with the totally unpredictable Chaos that is Indian traffic.

It was raining again, so Chris and I pulled off at a restaurant on the side of the road. While Chris took some pictures, I finally bit the bullet and inspected my bike closely.



SIDEWALL WEAR. Each time this worn-out segment of tire hit the ground and took on the full pressure of the weight of the bike (and, more significantly, me and my last few Indian meals), the inner tube squished down, pushing outward and to the left. That explained both the bump and the tremor. I pictured the likely future in my mind's eye: the wall would become so weak as to be unable to contain the tube, at which point either the pressure from within or the pinching from the rim above would cause it to rupture. Something similar had happened to Chris not too long before - a loud pop, the sound of rim scraping on pavement, a few days of hitchhiking and public transport to get to a bike shop, and a full week waiting for the right new parts to come in.

The source of the wear was still a mystery. Had I been under-inflating my tires? Maybe it was those four months' worth of heinous, hellacious, atrocious, bodacious roads of Arunachal Pradesh? Maybe because all those mangoes we

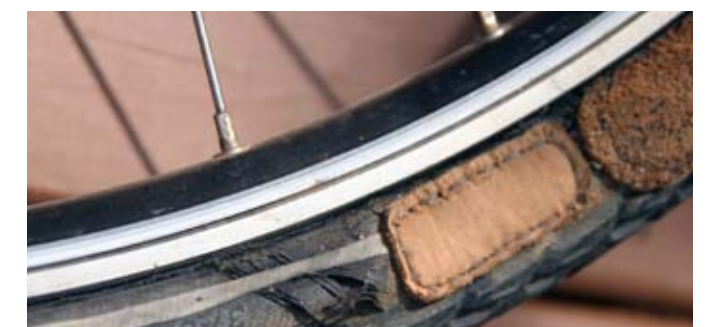
were gifted in Myanmar put too much weight on the rear of the bike? Thankfully, those questions didn't actually need answering. I switched to my spare tire, and once the rain let up, we kept on keepin' on, because we wouldn't be true fauxbos otherwise.

Dysfunctional as it was, though, I didn't want to toss the old tire. It barely had nine months and 10,000km on it, and the tread was still plenty good - I had used my last one for a full year and nearly 15,000. That, and it was a primo tire, Schwalbe Marathon Mondial, nearly puncture-proof. Also somewhat expensive and hard to replace. It was quite an eyesore, all gnarled, dusty, and dilapidated, but there was nowhere I could store it except rear and center, right on top of my backpack. It got in the way every time I needed my jacket (often) or my ukulele (not), but I was determined to stick to my "No Trash" rule and get this thing rehabilitated.

Which turned out to be hard work. I looked around Shillong, capital of Meghalaya, but couldn't find anyone who seemed like they might be able to fix it. 500km later, I also failed to find anyone in Siliguri, the 2nd biggest city in West Bengal. Up in Darjeeling, home to so much trekking and MTB activity, nobody could help me; bike shop owners told me to go to the tire stores in the bazaar, where I was told, surprise surprise, to go back to the bike shops in town. It wasn't until I reached Hub Outdoor in Gangtok where the owner, a certain Mr. Palden Sherpa, who takes his 7 year-old son on week-long MTB excursions through Bhutan, that I got the important life lesson I had been lacking: "You need to learn Jugarh.

No tire or bike store is going to fix that for you. Go take it to a cobbler."

I knew just the place. Or rather, the dude. Around the corner from my host's house, on a particularly wide and yet oddly untrodden patch of sidewalk, an old man was always sitting there Indian style on a mat on the ground, surrounded by piles of insoles and stacks of cans of polish. He spoke no English. I didn't know whether I was supposed to speak to him in Hindi or Nepali, but it didn't matter, because I think they're just about the same, even down to the fact that I don't know either. I produced the tire and pointed out the sidewall, making gesticulations that to me indicated sewing. Without words, the cobbler picked two suitably-sized leather patches from his stash of swatches, glued them to the inside and outside of the tire, and sewed them together with some thick-gauge rubber string. Within two minutes and at a price of two dollars, the coil of rubber I'd been toting around for a solid month had been restored into an actual, useful, even valuable object. I still didn't know what "Jugarh" meant, but I liked it.



THE PICTURE of that first "Jugarh" job was lost to the ravages of time. Eventually, though these patches became both an addiction and a necessity. By the end of my time in Nepal I had about ten of them between my two tires.

I returned to Mr. Sherpa's shop to proudly show him the results. He nodded knowingly. Such Jugarh-ing is apparently a normal fact of life for Indians. I asked him, "What's that word you used before?" "JOO-garhrh," he said, with a roll on the second syllable that sounded vaguely piratical. "How would you translate it into English?" Despite his nearly flawless command of my mother tongue – likely his third or fourth language – he wasn't able to come up with an answer. "It's like...you just find a way to make it work."

Ohhhh. It means to "MacGyver" something. Not that I said that to him. It probably wouldn't have pleased him the way it did me.

Having been on the road a while, and being naturally cheap (if not necessarily inventive), Jugarh is something of a lifestyle for me, so I enjoyed having a new word for it that I could use when talking to locals. Saying something like "Oh, yeah, I just did a bit of Jugarh on this tire here, now it's almost as good as new" almost always earned me a smile and a laugh. [Not quite as good a reaction as I would get after I learned the Nepali for "I'm a fartknocker" (mo buhdua ho), but pretty good.] I even used the phrase to other cobblers when the problem cropped up again and I sought their assistance on another segment of the tire. "What do you mean you can't fix a bike tire. Just do some Jugarh, uncle!" Mission accomplished! Later acquaintances told me the Jugarh means "improvising," while the internet seems to think it

means "innovation." Later, I even came across the same word in a magazine article about generally untranslatable words that subtly express a concept missing in English. Do a google image search for what sort of things count – small computer CPU fans attached to the back end of chopsticks so your noodles get cooled off before they hit your mouth, a truck cab sat on top of a donkey cart, wearing motorcycle helmets while chopping onions – and you'll see why no definition really works. If I ever happen to run into someone who works for Merriam-Webster's, I know what word I'm going to suggest for the next edition.

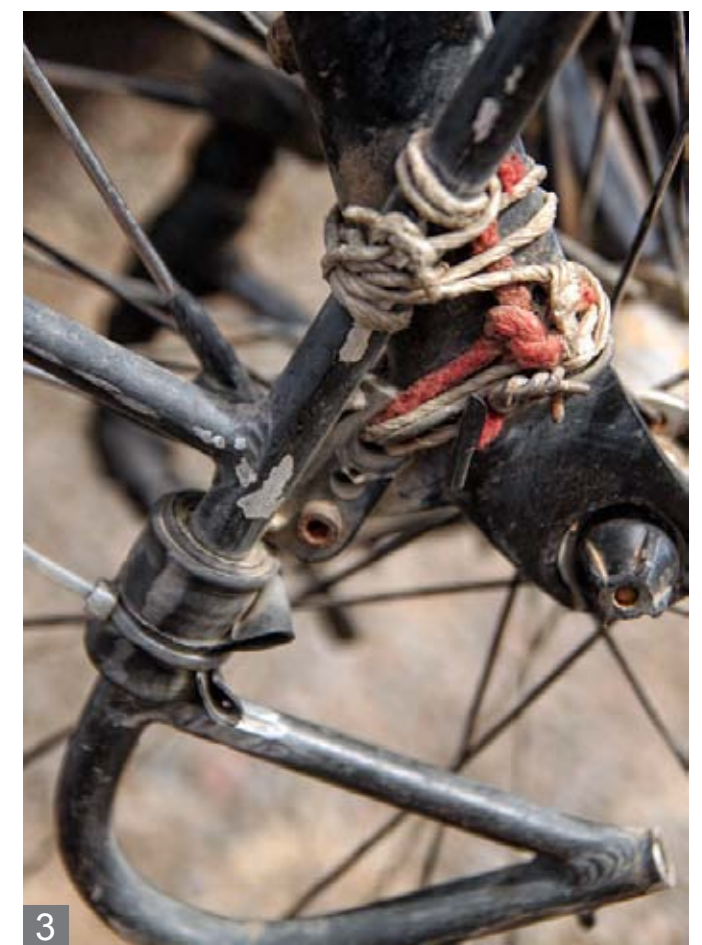
So, that's a long way of saying that I love Jugarh, both the word and idea, and that I have some of my own Jugarhifications that I'd like to share with you. After about a thousand days of being bounced around in my panniers and subjected to all sorts of other use and abuse, there's hardly anything I own that hasn't tried to kick the bucket at least a time or two. And there's hardly anything that I haven't managed to Jugarh back into shape.

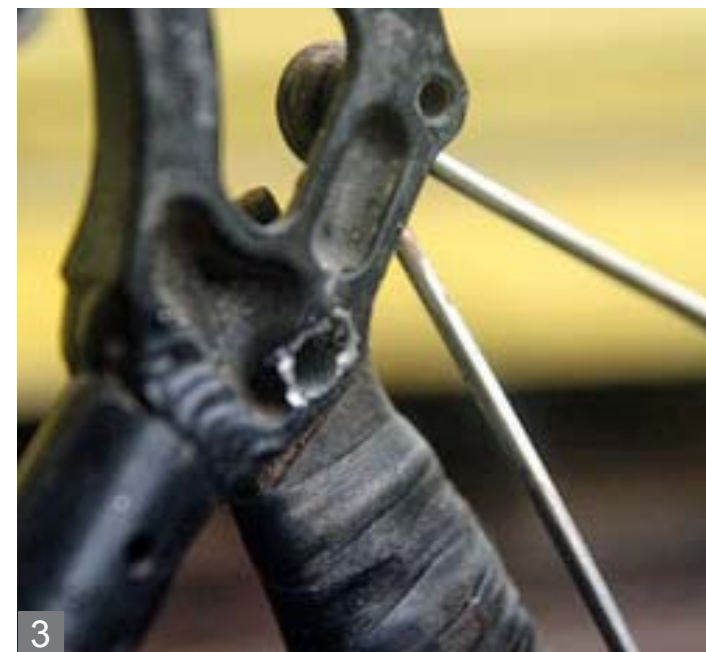
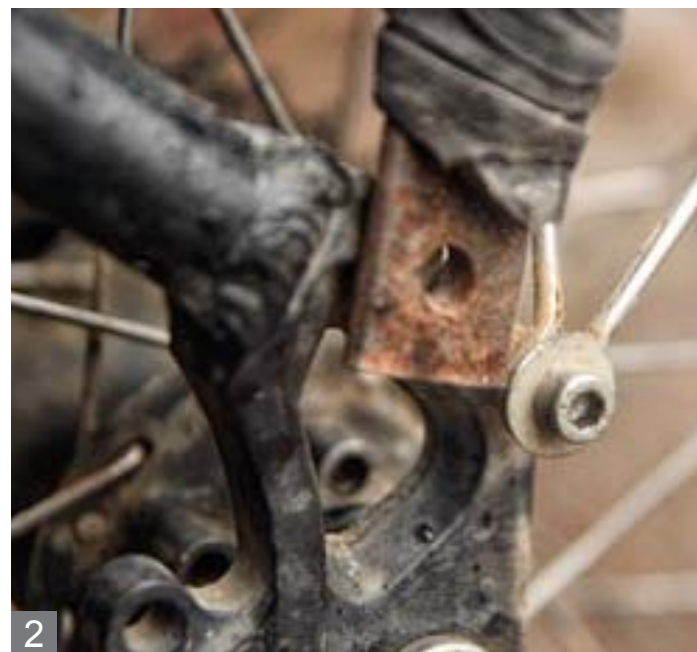
IMAGE 1) My proudest Jugarh, accomplished long before I knew the word. Spontaneous sidewall eruption (thanks to a tube explosion of unknown origin; the protruding tube pictured above is the replacement), Cambodia, January 2014. Only 2,000km into the life of this new tire. Repaired right there on the side of the road using two Jugarh all-stars: superglue and duct tape.

IMAGE 2) Interior view. I used the superglue to attach a rubber spacer (who knows why I had that in my kit) across the tear, thereby distributing the tube's pressure across a larger, still-intact section of tire. I used duct tape to make sure it held in place and to soften the spacer's corners, lest they puncture the tube again. This high-quality MacGyvering took about fifteen minutes to think up and work out. It gave extended my tire's life another TEN THOUSAND kilometers. Then, when it fell apart, I had a cobbler fix it up all fancy, and got another 3,000 out of it.

IMAGE 3) If it's a little hard to tell what's going on there, that just means it's a truly inventive and competent Jugarh job. My front rack here started getting all wobbly on account of a snapped eyelet, threatening to swing inwards and wedge into the spokes. Definitely don't want that. "Turtle Brother", my companion at the time and a pro bike mechanic in real life in Korea, scoured the ground nearby and picked up some string and aluminum (?) wire. We tied everything together, ran the wire through, cinched it up with some pliers, and Voila! No more front rack issues for the next 20,000km. Good fix! Much easier than buying a whole new bike frame.

Bonus Jugarh down in the bottom left of the photo. See that roll of old inner tube cinched together with a cable tie? That's buffering a spot where my pannier had rubbed a divot, and then a hole, into the aluminum rack.





BACK RACK MEGA-JUGARH:

IMAGE 1) Eyelet on back rack snaps. No place left for the beam to connect to the bike frame.

IMAGE 2) Clever neighborhood mechanic uses a rubber splint to attach a small steel plate to the beam, then drills a hole in the plate. Runs the original screw back through. It does the trick.

IMAGE 3) Six weeks later, the bolt breaks in half. No way to remove it except to find a friendly mechanic/Jugarhist willing to drill straight through the frame of my bike (eek!). Not a mod to be undertaken lightly.

IMAGE 4) Widened the hole, replaced old bolt (now smithereens) with new, longer, thicker, heavier one. And a few extra washers for good luck. Still working, one year later. Even survived Nepal!

IMAGE 5) So, that takes care of the tires, the frame, and the racks. What

else can go wrong? Well, the foam grip on the handlebars can start to split. Easy enough to take care of with a length of twine. Looks more earthy now, too.

IMAGE 6) My camping pot. The left handle had cracked and fallen out, making the pot rather difficult to lift, particularly with boiling water sloshing around inside. Rather than toss it out, I took it with me to the bazaar in downtown Darjeeling, where I found a little hole-in-the-wall electronics shop with a kindly uncle hooked me up with a foot of wire and some electrical tape. Then he went ahead and did the whole job for me. And wouldn't take my money after.

IMAGE 7) Aaaaand my old shoe, which started giving up at about 20,000km, even though I kept wearing it until about 30,000. The Annapurna circuit proved to be its undoing, but I couldn't find a suitable replacement or decent cobbler up there at 13,000 feet, so I did what I could. Which was this.



Know what the last words I heard in Chinese before crossing into Laos were? “Hey, your butt is showing.” It was the dude behind in line at immigration, pointing out that the monkeybutt had separated from the spandex at point 2. Could be from all that cycling, but spandex is also particularly vulnerable to getting pinched in chairs and stuck on protruding nail heads and that sort of stuff. So many Aunties have gone to work on these that by now they’re probably more patch than pant.



THUS ENDS THE TOUR of some of my broken crap. I hope you have enjoyed this collection of random bric-a-brac, along with all the strange stories which have glommed onto it. I myself have truly enjoyed this walk- or was it more of a hobble? – down memory lane.

However, I'm sorry to say that this post is going to have to end on a sad note. Some objects, it seems, cannot be resuscitated, even not by that odd mixture of DIY and WTF known as Jugarh. Please join me in wishing a fond final farewell to the two (I guess three) hardest-working members of my team:

IMAGE 1) All that carnage wreaked by my buns o' steel.

IMAGE 2) My Merrells. The tops are still in decent shape...by my standards. But even I can't sanction this.

Thanks, guys. It was great while it lasted. **BT**

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

PHOTO STORY

SAHARA

Nicolás Marino and Julia Ibarra Cameron cycle into a sea of sand.



We are just two insignificant dots rolling across this untamed ocean of yellow sand. Our fragility in this immensity must be so evident that every vehicle that passes us very sporadically, stops to offer help and water. They give us food too and they wish us the best of luck before speeding up again.



I ask Julia to wait for me while I go and play around the dunes. They are smooth as silk, I want to feel them under my wheels even when I can't ride on them.



1



2



1. Heading out of Cairo.
2. Pedaling through the vast desert.
3. Surrounded by sand.
4. Local customers in a Farafra tea house.



As I walk around our camp, I stand in awe at the tent illuminated in the middle of nowhere, the rocks behind it and the stars above it. I say to myself: "what a blessing, Sahara". Sometimes I find myself in such magnificent places and situations that I find it hard to believe that they are real and that I got there on my bicycle. The magic of the life of an adventurer at its best. It is for moments like these that I live for and for which I celebrate existence.

Nicolás Mariño 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



Test MSR Tent

Text & photo: KIERAN ROWLEY

QUICK FACTS

- Name: MSR Hubba Hubba HP Ultralight Tent
- Weight: 1.93kg
- Size (Packed): 51 x 17cm
- Set-up Time: Less than 4 minutes
- Packing Time: Less than 2 minutes

OUR RATING:

On our previous bicycle tours of Great Britain we used the Terra Nova Laser Space 2 tent. We believe that it was a great tent for short cycle trips when staying on well kept camp sites in good weather. However, we were slightly worried that the size and number of pegs required would mean that the Laser Space 2 would not be as suitable for the wild camping which was bound to be required on a long, international tour. We both decided that we would require a new tent, and that it should fulfil the following criteria:

- Small and lightweight when packed
- Easy to pitch with few or no pegs
- Comfortably sleep two with room to store other kit inside
- Green or dark in colour so to be discreet when wild camping

With all of this in mind, we both spent many hours reading the blogs, books and reviews of other cycle tourers in a vain attempt to decide which tent we would need for a trip of this magnitude. It was while reading Peter Gostelow's great Big Africa Cycle blog that we first became aware of the MSR Hubba tent.

From what Peter Gostelow wrote it seemed that the tent (or more specifically, the bizarrely named Hubba Hubba tent) would fulfil all of our requirements for what we considered to be a fairly reasonable price.

After 9 months of extensive and strenuous testing we thought that it was time that we gave back to the community that provided us with so much

information while we were in our planning stages and write our own review of the MSR Hubba Hubba Tent in the hope that it might help some of our fellow long distance cycle tourers to make that same, difficult decision in the future.

SIZE AND WEIGHT

You can get lighter tents that pack down to smaller sizes, but as we were preparing to live in the tent for the next few years, we didn't want to sacrifice comfort for a few grams or millimeters. Especially as there were probably going to be days where we might spend the whole day stuck in the tent due to bad weather. We think that the MSR Hubba Hubba reaches a happy compromise of small and compact when packed (51 x 17cm) and big enough to sleep, sit and store a few bags in when pitched. The tent weighs less than 2kgs.

The relatively low profile and green colour make it great for wild camping in a large majority of locations. At times we have been invisible from the road despite being less than 2m from it!

PITCHING

Pitching the tent really couldn't be easier and after a few practice runs we were soon able to set the tent up in a matter of minutes.

We usually peg down the inner tent using one peg at each corner (we also purchased the separate footprint, which we hope will extend the lifetime of the tent). You then clip the single pole into the inner tent and footprint, pull over the flysheet, which clips into the four



corners of the tent. You then peg out the two entrances (one peg each) and Voila! you are done.

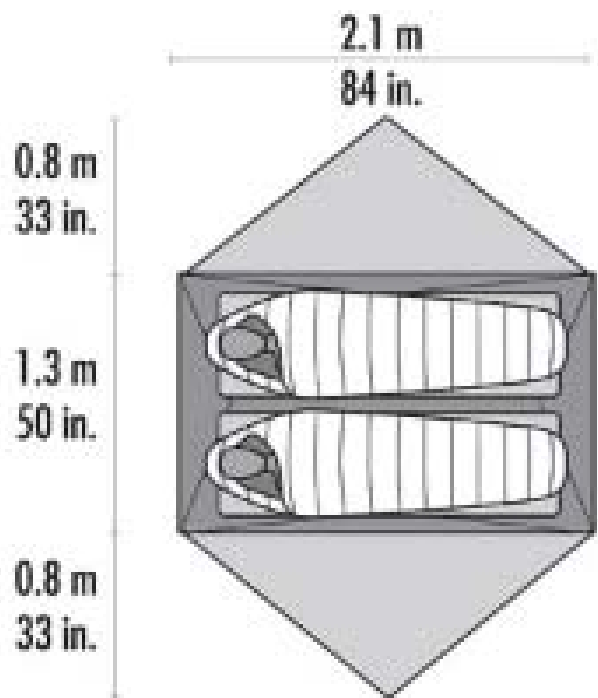
On really hard ground (or when camping on the concrete roof of an abandoned fishing hut) you can even pitch the tent without using any pegs, although you do lose some firmness and stability in the base. This would probably cause the outer sheet to come into contact with the inner sheet and let in water during bad weather. Plus the doors are likely to flap around in the breeze if not secured by a heavy rock or similar, but in good weather we've never had any problems.

SLEEPING

Over the last 8 months we must have

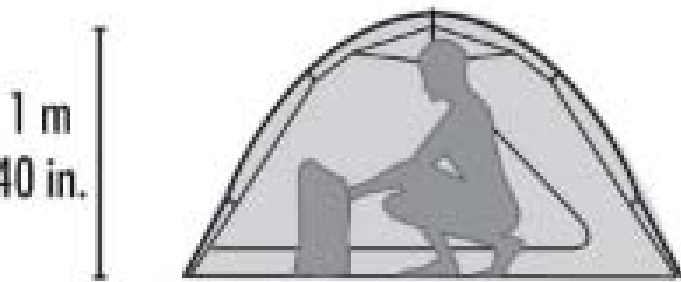
slept in this tent hundreds of times, and not once have we had a bad nights sleep that could be blamed on the tent itself. There is more than enough room for the two of us, our Therm-a-Rest sleeping mats, sleeping bags and bar bags inside the tent, while the awnings on either side are just big enough for us to squeeze all of our panniers in, although this makes getting in and out of the tent impractical. The two entrances are useful for one person to get out of the tent without disturbing the other.

The large pockets at either end of the tent are useful for keeping our kindles and torches in (but you wouldn't want to put anything heavier in) and although we did originally consider purchasing the optional gear loft we don't



MSR HUBBA HUBBA

WEIGHT: 1.93 kg
FOR MORE INFO SEE:
WWW.CASCADEDESIGNS.COM/MSR



personally think that we require any extra storage space. We have experienced a few mornings when ice and condensation has formed on the inside of the tent so it would probably be better if there were some ventilation flaps. We have not yet had to camp in the snow, and as it is not a 4 season tent I hope we never have to!

VERSATILITY

The unique design of the tent offers a number of ways to pitch the tent depending on the weather and your mood. You can;

1. only pitch the inner fly sheet to keep cool whilst also keeping the insects off in hot weather
2. peg the outer sheet in such a way so that the tent is half open. Similar to the first option but with some shade and privacy
3. If you have the optional footprint, you can also choose to only put up the outer sheet. We've seen this done on the internet but are personally at a loss as to why you would want to do this.

PACKING AND STORING

The tent packs down as quickly and easily as it pitches and we have never once struggled to fit the rolled up tent inside the supplied bag. The 6 supplied pegs are light and strong (only one of ours has slightly bent due a rather misguided attempt to "tap it in" with a rock). They are also brightly coloured

which has ensured that we have not lost any and have only stepped on them while wearing flip-flops (and even walking shoes) a few painful times! A more conventional peg might not have hurt quite so much as the head of the peg is quite sharp.

IN SUMMARY

We are very happy with this tent and feel that, for the money, it is a great, no nonsense tent suitable for long and unpredictable cycle tours.

PROS

- Very few pegs (if any) needed
- Lightweight, yet still hardy
- Easy to hide due to colour and size
- Easy to pitch
- Very waterproof. We have been in high winds and raging storms and never once got wet.

CONS

- The tent flaps are a little fussy to tie up, but once you get the hang of it, it is easy enough
- Can't fully set it up without pegs, especially not in bad weather
- Condensation – It could do with some ventilation flaps **BT**

In May 2013 Kieran Rowley and Natasha von Memerty sold their belongings and set off from England pedalling in an easterly direction. Almost 2 years later they reached Thailand. You can read about their adventure at: www.downhillfromhere.net.

TRIP GEAR

A look at equipment for bicycle travelers.

By: GRACE JOHNSON



Flexible Frame Glasses

Trio 3U eyewear is made from an ultra-durable material called Ultem which is strong, lightweight and has an unparalleled elasticity.

weight 1 oz. (28 gr.)

Price: \$ 47. U.S.

(incl. optical lens + shipping)

www.trioo.us

Tent Pegs

Hilleberg's V-Peg is made from hardened aluminium and has an integrated string loop for easy removal from the ground.

Set of 10 pegs

weight 0.4 oz. (11 gr.)

Price: \$ 29.95 U.S.

www.hilleberg.com



Emergency Tire Boot

The Park tool tire boot is a strong vinyl membrane with a pressure sensitive adhesive that assures the boot stays in place.

Set of three

Price: \$3.49 U.S.

www.parktool.com



Ortlieb Back-Roller Pro

This new pair of XL panniers can hold up to 70L. volume and the two 8L. outer pockets offer further space, especially for wet laundry.

Weight for pair: 71 oz. (2008 gr.)

Price: \$ 275. U.S.

www.ortlieb.com

Merino Air Base Layer

Patagonia's new air wool-polyester base layer offers a stretchy, chafe-free fit, lightweight warmth and exceptional breathability due to exposing the fibers to a high-pressure air gun.

Weight: 6.9 oz. (195 gr.)

Price: \$129 U.S.

www.patagonia.com



First Aid Kit

The Stay Out There kit contains first aid, personal care, and emergency items in a small lightweight and waterproof bag.

Weight: 8 oz. (227 gr.)

Price: \$ 36. U.S.

www.palespruce.com





Image from
the **Road:**
Scotland

LUKASZ ZIACH

<https://thebrothersnomad.wordpress.com>



Image from
the Road:
Argentina

ALBERT SANS
www.albertsans.com

Image from
the Road:
China

FREDRIKA EK
www.thebikeramble.com



Image from
the Road:
Brazil

ALBERT SANS
www.albertsans.com





Sikkim

Text & photo: MIKE ROY

I'm afraid this story is going to be a little short. It's not that Sikkim – a pinky-nail-sized Indian state sandwiched right between Nepal to the west, Tibet to the north, and Bhutan to the east – isn't full of all the beauty and glory and majesty that you'd expected from a Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom. It's just that all that goodness isn't so easily accessible to foreigners. Especially ones with "limited" financial resources. Especially ones on bikes. Especially during rainy season.

I'm not saying I wouldn't recommend it to other cyclists; the roads are quite often decent (if your standards have been sufficiently lowered by the surrounding states), the general permit is free and easy to get, and it's not much of a detour if you're already planning on crossing the northeast. I certainly don't regret going, especially now that I've forgotten most of the unpleasantness faced – I daresay surmounted – along the way. By "unpleasantness," I'm referring to stuff like: much-anticipated 20km downhill rides through luscious tea gardens ruined by roads so rocky and dusty that I had no attention to spare for the scenery. Would-be dazzling viewpoints totally obscured by fog. 4:30 wakeups just to catch a glimpse of the sun rising over the Himalayas...also rendered pointless by fog. Descents so steep that my hands went numb from holding the brakes and my face went numb from the continuous grimacing. The rain's annoying habit

of starting out as a trickle, leading you to think that you'll be able to push on through it, then gradually thickening until you're already soaked anyway and now there's no reason not to push on through it. Waterfall road washouts that guarantee wet brakes and feet all day, every day, even on sunny days. Climbs of 30 or 40km at a time with hardly so much as a gazebo to collect yourself in. And, most demoralizing of all, even in one of those moments where everything is perfect, the sky is clear, the road is smooth, and you've earned yourself a magical panorama of the valley below, you know what's taunting you on the other side? The same town you thought you'd left two days before. Fourteen man-cycle hours, eighty kilometers of gut-wrenching drops and laborious climbs, and you're still about ten kilometers as the crow flies from where you started.

On the plus side, I did learn a thing or two about my limits. Namely that cycling three hours uninterrupted uphill in the rain is doable, but afterwards doing anything besides eating and keeping myself wrapped up in comforters isn't. **BT**

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

The Road to Success

By: JACKIE WINTER

We hadn't cycled much further before the road narrowed and soon petered out into a track, leading off into the fells. According to the map, after a couple of miles we'd meet up with a road which would take us around Haweswater reservoir. What we didn't know was how rideable this track would turn out to be. However, coming towards us, walking his border terrier, was a friendly-looking chap, who we hoped might know the answer. Sure enough, he confidently promised us that we were in for a treat.

"Marvellous scenery and a very reasonable path," he said. "I should think you'll be able to cycle most of it quite easily."

"So we shouldn't have any problem

finding Haweswater?" my husband Allan asked.

"You'll soon get your first glimpse of it in the distance," said the pleasant fellow. Enjoy yourselves."

With hindsight, this short and misleading encounter could have several explanations:

- The man had a mistaken idea of terrain which could be described as rideable.
- He was an ancestor of the jester, Tom Fool.
- He was a compulsive liar.
- He was a sadistic nutcase.

The terrain was beautiful, certainly. It was also extremely hilly and the track rapidly disintegrated into a stony and

muddy trail, barely negotiable. Allan resorted to carrying the tandem across long and boggy stretches of moorland. It was slow going and we were forced to slosh our way through many a marshy swamp. Consequently, our shoes were soon soaked and filthy, and only Bob was escaping unscathed.

"It can't be much further," Allan panted. "We should be able to see Haweswater soon. Maybe round this next corner." But once around the corner, all we could see ahead was a cyclist wearing a lime green peaked cap, making even slower progress than us and also carrying his bike.

Hoping for an encouraging exchange of words, we got a move on and caught him up. Like us, he was covered in mud and, also like us, he'd chatted to the amiable owner of a border terrier.

"He told me that cyclists ride along this trail all the time," green cap grumbled.

"It's barely a track," Allan complained. "Let alone rideable. I've carried our bike for miles."

"Me too. Mind you ..." with a less than envious glance at our tandem cradled

in Allan's arms, "that thing looks heavy."

How dare he call Bob a thing! From being a fellow cyclist having a difficult day, green cap had turned into an ignoramus, who thoroughly deserved to be given rubbish directions. Rather stiffly, we said cheerio and left him chewing on chocolate-covered Kendall Mint Cake, while we continued the long plod uphill. I was suddenly reminded of some character-building advice Robert Baden-Powell is credited with having once given his young scouts, and thought I'd share the great man's wisdom with my husband.

"The road to success in whatever you do is the power to endure and to keep on keeping on," I told him. Allan, weighed down by a sturdy tandem, gave me a frosty glare but didn't have enough puff to retaliate and I sensibly shut up. **BT**

Jackie Winter loves reading, writing and cycling. Author of Life In Tandem. Her husband thinks she'd rather write about cycling than actually do it. He's wrong, of course....
<http://www.amazon.com/Life-In-Tandem-Cycling-Travels/dp/1500198463>



Image from
the Road:
Bolivia

PAUL JEURISSEN
www.pauljeurissen.nl

Image from
the **Road:**
America

MARC MCSHANE

www.instagram.com/nutmegcountry





Image from
the Road:
Tajikistan

JOSH CUNNINGHAM
<http://joshcunninghamcycling.co.uk>



Image from
the Road:
Cameroon

JEAN BAPTISTE
<http://freewheely.com>



What can *possibly*
go wrong?

The first day in India starts with a literal bang. Trying to leave Kolkata, weaving through the seething, moving chaos of trucks, motorbikes, buses, rickshaws, bikes laden with pots, animals and merchandise, pedestrians, dogs, cows, goats, garbage, potholes.

Everywhere an interminable stench of rotting rubbish, feces and incense.

Between a truck coming up on my right and a dog on my left, a man suddenly darts out into the street directly in my path, sees me two feet away and freezes. There is nowhere to swerve to avoid him. "Move! Move! Move!" I yell seconds before impact. The collision sends Pegasus and I sprawling across the dusty asphalt.

"Are you crazy?" I shout more from the surprise of hitting the guy than anything else. He scampers away unfazed, while I pick up Pegasus and realign his chain. "People with a death wish...." I mutter and shakily remount, ignoring the blood dripping down my shin, desperate to get out of this death trap and onto the open road. It takes over two hours to maneuver my way out of the city. Forty kilometers later, I still have not eaten breakfast, so I pull over at a little roadside truck stop restaurant for chai tea and biscuits. While I eat, a small crowd gathers around Pegasus, pinching and prodding the tires as though testing fruit for ripeness.

"Expensive?" they ask in the international sign language for money, rubbing fingers and thumb together.

"No, noooo." I lie.

This quickly becomes a theme. Each time I stop, the crowd swoops in. At first I feel nervous and claustrophobic, like the monkey in a cage, till I begin to understand that all the attention is over my bike. Pegasus is a two-wheel rock star. People gather just to touch his tires. Even covered in dust and filth, compared to the rusty one-gear contraptions they all ride, he stands out like the Ferrari of bicycles. Naturally, I never let him out of my sight, even taking him into the toilets with me.

A hundred and twenty kilometers on, I am growing desperately hungry and thirsty, and feeling the effects of the sun. I turn off at the next little town I pass to find food and water. There is a national festival on, crowds of men with orange powder smeared down their foreheads block the road waving three-foot long sabers to the rhythm of drums. It is a public holiday and everything is shut apart from a few filthy roadside stalls cooking food



next to piles of rubbish and mangy street dogs, everything covered in flies. When I find an actual restaurant that looks open, I am told that food is not served till night.

“PLEASE”, I BEG. “I’m hungry.”

I must pull off pathetic pretty good. They take pity and offer some leftover Biryani from the day before. I shovel down the fragrant yellow rice while the owner, cook and waiter sit on a row of plastic chairs watching me eat.

When I’ve finished, I ask for the toilet and one of them escort me through a dark, cavernous hole full of rubbish and pots that is the kitchen. The waiter points to a drain in the corner, “there”.

I realize with horror that they do their ‘business’ in the same place where they cook the food I have just eaten.

“Never mind.” I smile weakly and briefly consider retching up my lunch. Meanwhile, the cook has mounted Pegasus and taken a wobbly spin around the little cement courtyard. I let out a yelp when he nearly crashes it into the wall.

“Uh, thank you for the food.” I tell them, a possessive hand on Pegasus’ handlebar. “I really should be going.”

Back on the road, and pedaling out of town towards the highway, I am accosted a couple youth on a motorbike. They are dressed like Bollywood sidekicks in collared shirts unbuttoned half way down their chests and tucked into tight jeans, hair strangely gelled and aviator sunglasses. One of them calls out, “madam, stop a moment!”

I don’t.

They follow me down the road with frustrating persistence. “Please madam, we just want to take photos with you.”

When it’s clear they aren’t going to leave me alone, I pull over. A second motorbike putters up with two more guys and the four youths take turns posing around me, the photographer commenting between snaps, ‘Oh very sexy.’

Right.

I finally get rid of them and back on the road. The sun starts setting at four and by five it is almost dark, so I turn off for the nearest little town, Belda.

In the only hotel, a vociferous argument is taking place between the manager and a cross-eyed old hag. They are too absorbed in the heated exchange to notice me enter. A huddle of mustached spectators sit around laughing and commenting.

AFTER WAITING a good fifteen minutes, I plant myself impatiently in front of the manager’s desk. He stares up with a distinctly hostile look as if I have no business standing there.

“I need a room.”

“How many in your party?”

“Just me.”

“You? Alone?” He stares in disbelief.

One of the onlookers say something in Hindi, the discernible word being “cycle”. The manager looks from me to Pegasus and a rumbling sound comes out of him. Laughter. Apparently this is the most ridiculous thing he has ever heard. Shaking his head and mumbling imperceptibly, he laboriously puts me through the registration formalities and I am led to a room with browning walls, dusty floors, bare mattress, a clothesline slung from wall to wall, no toilet paper or soap. I go back to the front desk and make the motions of putting a sheet on the bed. The

manager rolls his eyes and calls the assistant who reluctantly drags himself over.

Meantime, the old hag has dashed to the linen cupboard, pulled out some bedding and rushed into my room, leaping lightly onto the bed and throwing out the sheet like a fisherman casting a net. The assistant, roused by her actions, follows just a few seconds behind and with a single movement, tears off the sheet she has

just laid. This sets off a volley of unintelligible expletives which he fires back just as rapidly and chases her from the room with one threatening hand raised. The hag carries on a screeching tirade in the hall, while he slowly and methodically makes up the bed. Though I cannot understand a word, the entire spectacle is pure entertainment.

THEY FINALLY LEAVE, I go to lock the door and discover there is no key. When I go back to the front desk to ask for it, the manager pretends not to understand. I act out a key being turned in a lock. He shrugs and waves a hand, “don’t worry about it.” I am plenty worried about it. “Sir, I must have a key. I will not sleep the night with an unlocked door.” He grudgingly pulls open a drawer and hands it over.

Back in my room, I find the hag waiting in the door frame, one hand outstretched and the other pointing to her palm. I close and lock the door, vaguely wondering what will await me when I open the it again on tomorrow?

I needn’t have wondered. Come 6:00am I am awakened by the doorknob

slowly turning. When whomever is on the other side finds it locked they start to pound their fist against the wood instead. I pull the door open with some displeasure, and there is the importunate old hag, still pointing to her palm. I decide

*I realize with horror
that they do their ‘business’
in the same place they cook*

the argument of the previous night likely had something to do with her disturbing the clientele.

AN AUSPICIOUS START to the second day, which takes a flying nose-dive from there. The Biryani of the day before has taken effect. I’d woken in the night, my stomach an internal tsunami and spent half of it on the toilet. I know I risk severe dehydration cycling in the heat without food or water in my stomach, but I am not staying another day in that hotel of horrors, so I pack up and decide to try and reach Baleshwar, 100 km away. They are the longest 100 kilometers I have ever cycled. I have not eaten or drunk since yesterday, my head is pounding and my stomach is getting ready to either implode or explode.

Antonio calls around 10:30. “Everything okay?”

“No. I don’t know if I can go on. I have to crap so badly I can hardly pedal.”

“Just stop somewhere.”

The sound that comes out of me is somewhere between a cry and a laugh. “Where?! I am literally on a highway in the middle of nowhere.” I am not about

to squat by roadside alla Indian. I keep on pedaling, dizzy from the heat and the excruciating pain in my stomach. Antonio calls again.

“Ju, I’ve booked you into a clean hotel in Baleshwar. Just try to reach there and you can rest.” I wonder what planet he is on. A lot of sarcastic replies come to mind.

“Kay.” Is all I manage and hang up. I have to stop every few kilometers, one leg wrapped tightly around the other like a liquorice stick while my stomach rumbles and shakes with the early stirrings of an intestinal eruption. By the time I enter Baleshwar, there is no more restraining it. Right in the middle of the street, it explodes. Literally and publicly. I run cross-legged into the first hotel I see.

“Help!” I shout desperately. “Please! The toilet!”

The old, turbaned man at reception points wordlessly to a white door at the end of the hall. The horrifying ordeal which follows would need the entire alphabet to describe. A is for awful, B is for bust, C for chagrin, D for disgust...

I have hit the lowest point yet. Veritable rock bottom. Washing out my pants in the toilet, I just start laughing. It’s one of those scenarios you hear about, but never imagine could happen to you. I have shit myself like a baby at 31 years old. It can’t get much worse than this, can it? Fortunately, the bathroom has a shower and I use it. Putting my wet clothes back on, I emerge nearly half an hour later, looking sheepish.

“Thank you.” I mumble to the man behind the desk, my pride completely pulverized.

“Ten rupees.” He answers. I fish out the cost of my shame and quickly slink out. **BT**

Juliana Buhring is an ultra-endurance cyclist and writer. She holds the first Guinness World Record for fastest woman to circumnavigate the world by bike. <http://julianabuhring.com>

You can view more bicycle touring and culture images on photographer Paul Jeurissen’s website; www.pauljeurissen.nl.



PHOTO STORY

HIMALAYAS

Eric Schambion and Amaya Williams pedal over the highest mountains on Earth.

Traversing India's rough and rugged Himalayan region is an awe-inspiring experience for even the most well-travelled cycle tourist. You can test your mettle on punishing climbs to over 5,000 meters and pitch your tent on the shores of a dazzling turquoise lake. The Manali-Leh ride, with its barren but beautiful landscapes, is the most popular route in the region. Remoter and less-touristic, Spiti Valley is where the real adventure lies.

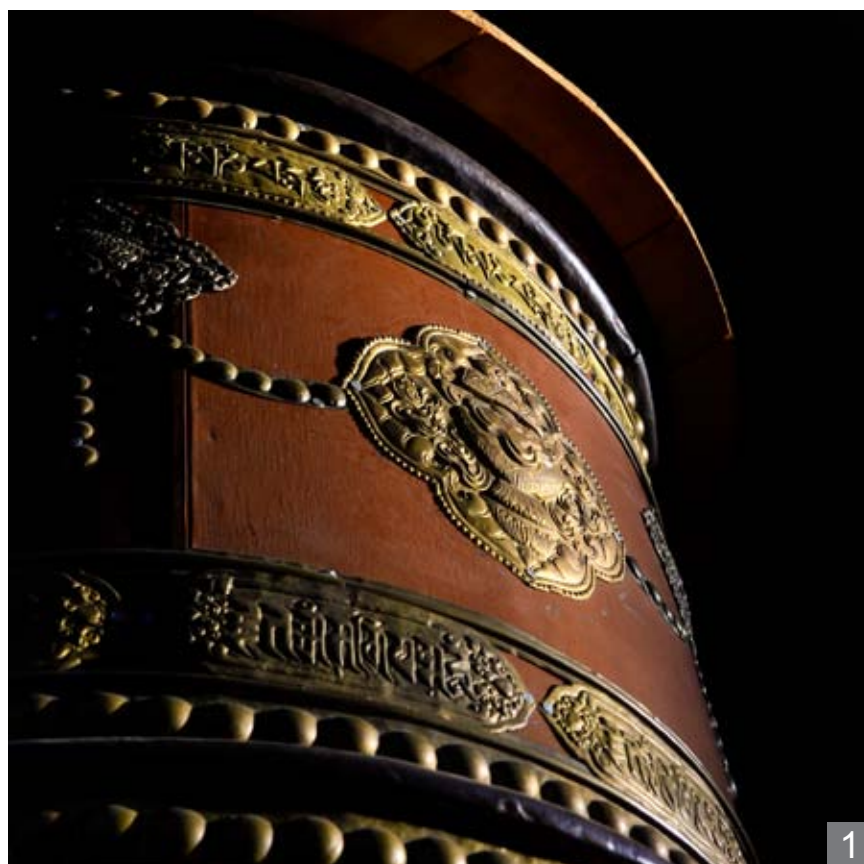
Himalayan sunrise



Cycling down Baralacha-la on the Leh - Manali highway.



A last look at Leh.



1



4



- 1. Prayer wheel
- 2. Camping in Lamayuru Monastery, Ladakh
- 3. Ladakhi lady
- 4. The road to Tso Kar



Bicycling the Spiti valley.



Camping near Miru, Ladakh

In 2006 Amaya Williams and her partner Eric Schambion set off to cycle every country on the planet. You can follow their progress and download their free photo e-books at: www.worldbiking.info.

undipped adventures



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

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Zissi Kauch
Zoa Gypsy

Parting shot



Photo: MIKE BOLES <https://mikeonbike.wordpress.com>

*"48,000 km and not a millimeter more.
So long, old friends." ~ Mike Boles*

BicycleTraveler