

BicycleTraveler

International Magazine on Bicycle Touring





BicycleTraveler

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From the editor

We were overwhelmed by the enthusiastic response to our first issue of Bicycle Traveler – 15,000 downloads! Then again, maybe we shouldn't be surprised. Bicycle travelers are passionate about exploring the world and enjoy reading the adventures of others.

Yet who is a bicycle traveler? Is it someone who races around the world? Maybe not, according to this edition's columnist Steve Fabes (p.34). Irishman Fearghal O'Nuallain writes about missing "the road" (p.6), but do cyclists long for the same things when they are on it? It turns out what they miss (p.32) is as varied as the countries they travel through.

Grace Johnson

EDITOR

Grace Johnson

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The Road

Someday, all of this will come to an end; the sleeping rough, chiseled calves, calloused arse, taking 8 hours of exercise a day, wearing the same clothes for two weeks straight, having an interesting topic for conversation, worrying about incline, gradient and road surfaces, eating like a horse, being able to eat a horse, not knowing the name of the town I'm in, forgetting the name of the person I'm spending the night with, cycling another twenty km till lunch to save 50 cents, living out of a waterproof bag in a steel trailer, saying Irlanda 30 times a day, saying no/non/niet/nine/ not Hollanda... Irrrrrlanda, assessing the quality of a book by its size and weight as well as its content, wondering why anyone would ever wear clothes that are not waterproof/breathable/quick drying/light/thermal.

Someday, I'll be home; I'll have a fridge, a cooker, a shower, a cupboard and a bed, I'll be able to close a door and be by myself, talk to people in complex English with an Irish accent using colloquialisms, slang and very specific Alan Partridge references, I'll be able to get out of my bed and not have to pack it away, and go to bed without waiting for darkness or asking some one's permission, I'll have to get up at a specific time and do tasks that someone else dictates, I'll have a phone and a set of keys.

Someday, my life will be normal again, and uninteresting, and I'll probably miss my stop on the train because I was daydreaming about when I lived on a special simple world called the road.

- Fearghal O'Nuallain

Fearghal and Simon Evans are the first Irish cyclists to circumnavigate the globe. You can read their trip reports at: <http://revolutioncycle.ie>



Trucker **Traces**

Cyclist Andrew Morgan discovers that the Atacama desert isn't completely dry...

Story & Photo: ANDREW MORGAN

Truckers who traverse the long barren stretches of desert tarmac in Chile's Atacama Desert do so much like male dogs canvassing city blocks—they leave...uhh...bits of themselves...everywhere they go.

It's impossible to take in an Atacama view—the scattered black moon rocks, the bone-colored sand dunes, the mountains that look as if they've been ripped straight out of a Dali landscape—without noticing the scuffed, half-filled, plastic bottles, as well. They're *everywhere* (sometimes one can be spotted every 100 yards) and they're all filled with the same thing: pee.

That's right.

Pee, folks.

The driest place on Earth is turning out to be not such a dry a place, after all. It's saturated, almost, with the urine of passing truckers.

Thankfully, truckers in this part of the world create urine in hundreds of shades of solely yellow and orange, all hues that blend nicely with the shifting shades of the Atacama's sands. I have not once spotted a bottle of the tell-tale bright green urine of a daily-multi-vitamin-taker. Nor have I seen a container weighed down with the dark brown amber pee of a Coca-Cola-junkie. I don't know what

these drivers are eating and drinking, but whatever it is, it's stuff that keeps their pee Atacama-colored.

The problem rests with the plastic bottles. They give the place the feeling of a toilet bowl, raised to the power of two trash cans. Plus three stadiums after a soccer match, minus 10 redwoods. In the middle of the desert, in the center of

*“That's right.
Pee, folks.”*

what should be one of the world's most unique, arid, human-less places, I see liquid traces of lazy men. (I'm making an assumption here, I know, but I think it's a safe one: Only men drive and pee at the same time.) Instead of natural nothingness, I'm seeing lots of human stuff-ness.

I must admit, though: Seeing all of these bottles of trucker pee all over the place has inspired my mind to delve into areas of thought into which it never dared venture before. These are some of the things I think about when I pass bottle after bottle of Atacama trucker pee:

1. How in the world do these guys manage to pee into such small bottles and drive at the same time? Really, how? They must, I assume, carry (and hopefully

wash every once in a while) funnels.

2. Wow, that one was incredibly orange. I never in my life have seen that shade of orange before, in pee or anywhere else. I wonder if that guy's OK.

3. That bottle is so full it clearly has been used many, many times. In between uses, for a few weeks, where does he store it? In a cup holder? Under his seat?

4. If Chilean energy drink companies were smart (are there any Chilean energy drink companies?) they would send scientists out into the desert to collect samples from as many bottles of trucker pee as possible. From the samples, they'd be able to tell what nutrients and other stuff truckers are lacking in their diets. Putting these things into a specifically-designed-for-truckers drink would create a hit product, one with an uncanny ability to leave truckers feeling refreshed.

5. Hey, cool—someone filled a lemonade bottle with pee that looks exactly like lemonade. I mean exactly. Hmmmm... actually... maybe it's just a big bottle of lemonade that someone couldn't finish. Would it be too risky to open the thing and smell it to see if maybe it is lemonade and maybe, maybe I could drink it? Hmmmm. Hmmmm. Yes. Too risky. Definitely.

6. Ugggh! I hate seeing all of this trash everywhere! If I was President

of Chile, I'd create a pee-bottle recycling program, complete with incentives and all. For each ounce of pee you brought to a recycling center, you'd get some sort of food. A piece of carrot cake. Or a donut. Not a drink, of course, but food.

If you are a Chilean trucker, please, for the love of the two or three animals that call the Atacama home and all the tourists, all 10 of them, who ride bicycles across it each year, please don't throw bottles of pee out your window while you drive.

Stop, get out of the truck, take a breath of fresh air, and pee into the sand like everyone else.

Thank you. *Gracias.* **BT**

Read about Andrew Morgan's year-and-a-half long ride through the Americas at: www.Teacherontwowheels.com. A book about his trip is due out in 2012.



TRIP GEAR

A look at equipment for bicycle travelers.

By: GRACE JOHNSON



Sololite One Person Tent

◀ The Wild Country Sololite is an inexpensive all-season solo tent. It weighs 4 lb. 3.5 oz. (less than 2 kg.) and is over 7 feet (220 cm.) long.

Price: \$178.49 U.S.

www.terra-nova.co.uk

Synthetic Sleeping Bag

The Mountain Hardwear UltraLamina 32 sleeping bag weighs just 1 lb.15 oz. (870 gr.) and packs down to approximately 6 inches (17 cm.) long. It is designed for damp, cool conditions and is rated to 37 degrees F. (3 C.).

Price: \$190. U.S.



Advanced Sunscreen

◀ Escaping the dark winter months by touring Morocco or Mexico is fun but getting sun burnt after your first day of cycling isn't. Scape is a waterproof, sweat proof sunscreen which will not rub off and run into your eyes. It also has the highest UVA protection of all sunscreens on the market.

Price: \$14.99 U.S.

www.scapelabs.com





Scrubr Scouring Pad

◀ The Scrubr is a synthetic scouring pad for cleaning your cooking gear. It's lightweight, odor resistant and dries in minutes. The makers of Scrubr write; "We developed it because we were tired of having to throw away stinky sponges after one camping trip."

Price: \$2.75 U.S.

<http://lunatecgear.com>

Emergency Bivy Bag

▶ Many Asian countries are full of cheap hotels so it's tempting to leave your camping gear at home. Still if you become stranded, a cold night in the open can be extremely uncomfortable. An alternative is to carry the SOL Emergency Bivy. It's made from the same material as space blankets which reflect 90% of your body heat back to you. The bag packs small and weighs 3.8 oz. (107 gr.)

Price: \$50. U.S.

www.adventuremedicalkits.com



Kindle Protection

◀ TrendyDigital's SplashGuard case is a padded pouch with a protective screen. It's also resistant to water and dust. You can operate the keyboard and navigation button of your Kindle right through the case. It weighs 4.5 oz (128 gr.) and the company also makes protective cases for the iPad.

Price: \$15.99 U.S.

<http://trendydigital.com>

GEAR REVIEWS

Walkstool Comfort

By: TYLER KELLEN

A month before we left on our round the world trip I began thinking, “what are we going to sit on?” After talking it over with Tara (my wife), we decided our requirements for a chair were (in order of importance): compact size, comfortable to sit in, and (hopefully) very light.

I started at the tip of the camp seating iceberg by looking what I'd used during all my earlier family camping trips: those foldable chairs movie directors are supposed to sit in. I found big ones, comically small ones, wooden ones, steel ones, aluminum ones and countless other variations before realizing the solution had to lay elsewhere. Delving deeper I discovered a dizzying array of options including hundreds of folding chairs, a weird collapsible sling we tried it, it was awful), chairs with more moving parts than a car, and finally getting closer: lots of three legged ones that seemed to fit the bill except they were all rather large.

Once I'd decided that a three legged chair had the most potential I started looking for one with telescoping legs; I knew it had to exist! It took a lot of hunting but I eventually found the Swedish made Walkstool and it had everything we wanted: small collapsed size, very comfortable seating and thanks to its aluminum construction: light weight! One of the things I like most about the Walkstool is that you can sit on it when the legs aren't extended; the perfect height

for working on the drivetrain of your bicycle or preparing dinner on the ground.

After six months of use and abuse they look brand new and work just as well as they day they arrived at our doorstep. I only have one negative thing to report: they need better advertising! **BT**

Tyler Kellen & Tara Alan spent two years cycling around the world. Their website www.goingslowly.com is the scrapbook of their adventures together.

For further information on the Walkstool Comfort see: www.walkstool.com

WALKSTOOL COMFORT

HEIGHT: 18 IN. (45 CM.)

FOLDED LENGTH: 11 IN. (28 CM.)

WEIGHT: 26 OZ. (725 GR.)

MAXIMUM LOAD: 440 LBS. (200 KG.)



Ortlieb 10 Litre Folding Bowl

By: FRIEDEL GRANT

Sometimes it's hard to separate the important accessories from the frivolous ones when choosing what to take on a tour. For a long time we put Ortlieb's 10 litre folding bowl in the second category. We couldn't imagine why we needed one.

It wasn't until we met a couple with not one but two folding bowls on tour that we reconsidered our decision. Since then, the bowl (which comes in 5 litre and 20 litre sizes as well) has been one of our most regularly used items. What do we use it for?

Doing Laundry. Sinks are often without plugs or, if you're camping, you may not have access to a sink at all. The bowl is great for doing laundry in and you can fold it together with the clothes inside to help squeeze out excess water.

Collecting water for filtering. We get a large amount of water together in the bowl to filter into our bottles when we're in places where we can't trust the water.

Showering. Use the bowl to carry everything you need for your shower back and forth between the bathrooms and the tent. If you're wild camping, you can also use the bowl to collect water from a stream or river for a bucket shower.

Washing Dishes. Throw them all in with a little dish soap and you have an instant sink or just use the bowl to carry everything to the washing area.

Cleaning Food. You can throw large quantities of vegetables in the bowl to be washed. We use ours a lot for salad leaves, which are too bulky to clean in our saucepans. You can also use the

bowl as an extra serving dish. We often make and dress our salads directly in it.

It's hard to think of a day where we don't use our Ortlieb Bowl. When it isn't being put to work, it folds up into a triangle and sits on top of our camping mattresses, which lie across Friedel's two back panniers. So, how's it holding up? After 2 years of constant use, our bowl is showing some signs of wear but nothing that stops us using it as we want to. The sides are a little saggy but it still maintains the bowl shape. A small hole did develop in the bottom, along the fold lines of the bowl, but we patched it with our puncture repair kit and haven't had a problem since. **BT**

Friedel & Andrew Grant's extensive website www.travellingtwo.com contains their trip reports, resources for bicycle travelers and the e-book "Bike Touring Survival Guide".

For more information on the folding bowl see: www.ortlieb.de

ORTLIEB 10 LITRE FOLDING BOWL

WEIGHT 9.2 oz. (260 GR.)



PHOTO STORY

Iceland

Willem Megens and Rudi Verhagen experience Iceland's dramatic landscape as they cycle around the Vatnajökull glacier.

Photos: WILLEM MEGENS & RUDI VERHAGEN



Watching icebergs drift by at Jökulsárlón







4



5



6



3



2



- 1.** *The turquoise lake of Krafla*
- 2.** *Rudi relaxes at Stafafell campsite*
- 3.** *Willem crosses the Syri Ófael river*
- 4.** *Church near Ulfjótuvatn*
- 5.** *Loose sand on the jeep track to Hvítárnes lake*
- 6.** *Curious locals*

Willem and Rudi love bicycle touring since it gives them a sense of freedom and satisfaction.

You can see more of their photos at: <http://themeeg.nl>

Photo credits: #2, #4, #5 Willem Megens
#1, #3, #6 Rudi Verhagen

C A L I F O R N I A N BEAUTY

Swedish journalist Hanna Mi Jakobson cycled the Californian coast in search of new views.

Southern California is a blend of the authentic and the artificial. The natural landscape continuously shifts between green hills, rugged cliffs, and sandy dunes. One reoccurring feature is the golf course. I imagine the golf players live in the ritzy and rich neighborhoods that I passed on the way, such as Monterey with all its grand villas protected by high walls and Malibu's fenced in fancy houses that occupy entire beaches. I did not go behind those glamorous facades, but outside of them I met several genuine, generous and gorgeous people.

As I bicycled past the high walls and private beaches, the Big Sur coast appeared in all its simple beauty. The luxury life sometimes drove by me, in the shape of fast cars that looked like bat-mobiles and SUVs the length of limousines. Still I cycled on with the help of the wind. It pushed me up the high hills and treated me with splendid views from the top before blowing me back down to sea level. The scenery was spectacular, with waterfalls plunging into the ocean, waves that invited me in for a salty bath and camp grounds with the star lit sky as the only light source.

California's animals are full of character. Cute and clever raccoons ran their nightly raids in search of food around my

tent. During the day frisky squirrels jumped in the fields and lazy elephant seals took naps on the beach. The city animals have had a make-over to match the designer handbags that they sit in. Spoiled pets were pampered in cat-spas in glitzy Los Angeles and ate glazed dog biscuits from the bakeries of wealthy Carmel. In the beach town of Solana pet owners could even book a consultation for advice on reducing the climate change impact of their animal's high carbon lifestyle.

All of the pets and people who peek out from a fashionable handbag, gaze over a protective wall, watch through their bat-mobile car window or look beyond the artificial landscape of a golf course can still enjoy the true beauty of California, the coast. For me it was amazing to see reappearing views of the Pacific Ocean. It was there next to the Santa Barbara college house that I stayed in. It was there as I stretched my calves and thighs after climbing the Big Sur hills. It was there as I hung out by the skateboard park at Venice Beach. It was there as I dried in the sun after a swim near San Diego, and it will continue to be by my side as I start cycling through the beauty of Mexico. **BT**

*You can follow Hanna Mi Jakobson's further trans-American travels at:
www.hannamijakobson.com*



Photos: HANNA MI JAKOBSON

Goodbye, **BANGKOK**

Rob Halkett leaves the Thai capital amid the sounds of car horns, birdsong and “hey big spender.”

As I had been staying in northern Bangkok it meant that I had to ride through the city center and out the other side when it was time to go. I hoped that by leaving at 6.30am I would miss all the early morning commuter traffic. How wrong could I be? From the moment I left the safety of the hotel car park I was attacked by traffic. Even with all my bicycle lights blazing the drivers still couldn't see me, at one point I thought it might be safer if I turned the lights off because then at least they wouldn't know what to aim for. During that ride through the city horns blared all around me and cars driven by madmen desperate to get to work inched passed me.

Cycling manners

At first I was as polite as I could possibly be “come on guys take your time and give me a bit of room here after all we are in this together”, after about half an

hour of this politeness I managed to get the sentence down to a couple of choice words and hand gestures that are understood in most countries. Finally after three hours of madness I managed to reach the city outskirts and I was completely lost. Following my compass south with a map that was not detailed enough to show the suburban streets I had to hope that I would eventually find a main route.

Finding heaven

It was now 11am the sun was getting hot, I was tired from that morning's commuter adventure and felt it would be good to have an early finish. I spotted a sign that said Jimmies Guest House, perfect I would have somewhere to stay and hopefully Jimmie could help me with a detailed route out of the suburbs and south towards the coast. I never found Jimmy and after an hour of following the signs I gave up outside the gates to what



looked like an expensive resort. I didn't care if it cost \$1000 a night I just wanted off the bike. It turned out to be much cheaper than I thought and would be the perfect place for an overnight. Once again I was given a small private bungalow overlooking a lake. The rest of that afternoon was absolute bliss as I watched birds and other wildlife on the lake from the comfort of my private balcony.

Karaoke contestants

I met the resort's other guests at dinner, a group of pensioners from northern Thailand who had traveled down to Bangkok to perform in a karaoke competition. Karaoke is huge here and every bar or club and restaurant no matter how big or small has a karaoke machine. Everyone is welcome to pick up the microphone

and sing. I was used to listening to people who can't sing perform songs that should never have been written. At dinner I listened to "my way", "somewhere over the rainbow", "send in the clowns" and other classic songs from the 50s and 60s sung in Thai, it was the most bizarre evening. The group who were all great fun had brought a professional karaoke instructor with them and he was busy all night teaching the contestants how to sing each song. They had noticed that there was a foreigner in the restaurant listening to them and clapping at the end of each song and they were determined to get me on the stage. Fortunately we could find nothing in English on the machine, although that was partly my fault as I had told him to key into the machine songs by System of a down or Metallica. I went to bed that evening to the sound of "Hey Big Spender" sung in Thai. **BT**

For Rob Halkett there is no better way to see the world than from a bicycle saddle. You can read more stories from his world bike trip at: www.robsbikeride.com.

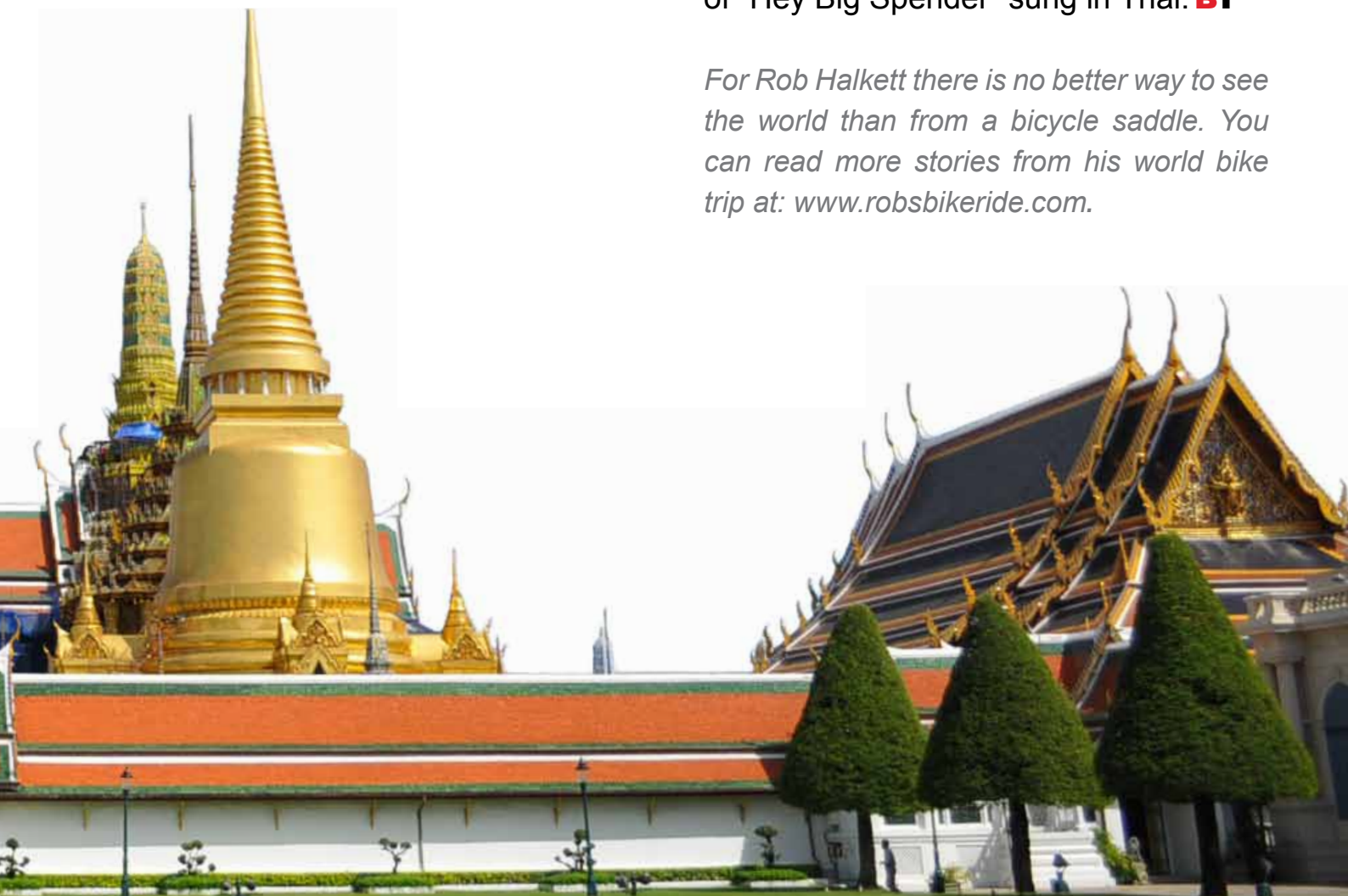


Photo: PAUL JEURISSEN

JOSIE DEW

Interview: LYNETTE EYB

Author Josie Dew recalls the joys of cycling through France.

Q: What are your most vivid memories of your first trip through France?

A: Discovering boulangeries and patisseries (heaven-sent eateries for cyclists!); trying out schoolgirl French and amazed that at least two people understood (or pretended to understand) what I was trying to say; finding it a pleasant surprise that French drivers didn't run cyclists off the road like English ones did and that French people really do say bon voyage and bon courage and allez! allez! a lot to cyclists; cycling up the Ardeche Gorge and then kayaking down it (including unexpected rapids and being overtaken by capsized unpeopled canoes); nearly cutting off my finger when sandwich-making in the dark while camping in Fontainebleau forest (I still have the scar and no nerves in that bit of finger!) and then having to cycle one-handed through Paris and round the Arc de Triumph; finding myself in a campsite that turned out to be a nudist camp.

Q: How did you choose your route?

A: Looking at my map each morning in my tent and thinking: I'll try going this way and see what happens.



Photo: JOSIE DEW

Josie Dew smiles for the camera

Q: You've returned sporadically to France ever since – what keeps drawing you back?

A: It's easy to get to by boat from England; it's a fine country for cycling, with quiet silky smooth roads, a huge variation in scenery, tasty food, and people who like cyclists – even ones with panniers!

Q: How have your impressions of France changed over the years?

A: Little – it's still lovely!

Q: If you could come back and ride anywhere in France, where would you go?

A: Everywhere!

Q: And where would you avoid?

A: The outskirts of Marseille.

Q: You've cycled all over the world – how does France rate when you compare it to all the other exotic destinations you've written about?

A: It's very close to the top of the list.

Q: In your early days, you managed to convince lots of non-cycling friends to undertake some pretty long rides with you. Do you have any advice for cyclists who have reluctant partners or friends they're trying to cajole along for a ride?

A: Plunge forth into the unknown – it's much more fun and much more memorable than doing something safe and tedious.

Q: France has some great routes for families – the Loire, the vineyard routes of Gironde, the greenways of Brittany. You've got two mini-cyclists of your own who are clocking up the miles – what's so great about introducing kids to cycling?

A: Freedom; adventure; seeing and noticing things that they never would when strapped into a vehicle; enjoying life without being reliant on some computerized gadget; being outdoors in all weathers. It also makes them sleep exceptionally well!

“French people like cyclists, even ones with panniers!”

Q: What three items can't you cycle without?

A: Tent, toe-clips and a mini Leatherman.

Q: Any final words of advice for people thinking about cycling in France?

A: Treat with extreme caution the ubiquitous signpost that points 'TOUTES DIRECTIONS'. How can you go in all directions at once, especially when it's pointing in the opposite direction from the one you want to go? **BT**

Australian cyclist Lynette Eyb started www.freewheelingfrance.com to help other bicyclists plan their trips through France.

Josie Dew is the author of several popular cycling adventure books such as; “The Wind in My Wheels: Travel Tales from the Saddle” and “A Ride in the Neon Sun: A Gaijin in Japan”. For more information see: www.josiedew.com

Image from
the **Road:**
China

BENJAMIN JACOB
www.globecyclers.de





Image from
the Road:
Uganda

FABIAN NAWRATH
www.africabybike.de



ANDA
ATOR



Image from
the Road:
India

PAUL JEURISSEN
www.pauljeurissen.nl





Longing for...

What do cyclists *miss* on their trips?

“My Wardrobe...Every girl should have more than 3 sets of clothes to choose from.”

Helen Lloyd <http://helenstakeon.com>

“Shoes that don't go “click click” when you walk.”

Guy Moodie www.abikejourney.com

“Chairman Meow, the coolest cat in Canada.”

Mike Boles <http://mikeonbike.wordpress.com>

“The comfort of my own toilet.”

Dennis Koomen
www.toko-op-fietsvakantie.nl

“Not having to put on frozen shoes in the morning.”

Thomas Riley
www.aroundtheworldforwater.co.uk

“Knowing the name of the place I'm headed to when asked where I'm going..”

Emma Philpott www.rolling-tales.com

“A loud stereo - to drown out the sound of big trucks and noisy cars!”

Dave Conroy www.tiredofit.ca

“Nadda, nil, nix, zippo, zilch, zip.”

Loretta Henderson www.skalatititude.com

“Not being able to go pee barefoot in the middle of the night.”

Alicia Urrea www.rodadas.net

“Monday morning tube ride into London's Rat Race.”

Henry Brydon www.theblazingsaddles.com

“Sitting on the coach watching movies with my family.”

Dustin Orrick www.work2ride.com

“Clearly marked prices when shopping.”

Fred Spengler
www.crazyguyonabike.com/onrbikes

“Facebook, as I do not take a smartphone on my trips.”

Dirk van Hulle
www.facebook.com/#!/dirkvanhulle

“My kitchen - as a hungry cyclist I dream about it.”

Tom Kevill-Davies www.hungrycyclist.com

“Anything that casts a shadow... resting in the shade.”

David Gregory www.boomersonbikes.com

“Twitter - it is difficult to cycle and tweet.”

Simon Stewart www.silk-wheels.com

“Always the visitor, never the visited.”

Marc Freedman
www.facebook.com/#!/marc.freedman

“Pick up soccer and scented soap.”

Katie Tibbetts
www.breakawaykatie.com

“Deodorant. I was dreadfully lonely.”

Scott Stoll www.theArgonauts.com

“The dartboard in my village pub.”

David Piper www.tra-velo-gue.co.uk

“Bluebird salt & vinegar chips. I miss them anywhere that isn't New Zealand.”

Jared Mitchell www.brakingboundaries.org

“A ready supply of tofu.”

Janyis Watson
<http://farewellburt.wordpress.com>

“Stout Black Ale.
It just doesn't travel well.”

Jack Moore <http://velohobo.com>

“My mother's cakes. Has anyone invented a pocket mum yet?”

Leonardo Corradini www.lifeintravel.it

“Time to contemplate what the hell I'm actually doing.”

Aaldrik Mulder www.tour.tk

“Roads where motorists heading in the same direction self-segregate.”

Amaya Williams www.worldbiking.info

“Fresh brown bread with a slice of cheese on top.”

Harry Wagenaar <http://fietsenaar.reismee.nl>

“A dictaphone; I have so many (now forgotten) good thoughts as I cycle.”

Andrew Sykes <http://cyclingeurope.org>

“Full English. Breakfast.
And proper beer - preferably together.”

Dean Clementson
<http://aroundtheworldbyaccident.blogspot.com>

“Potholes, Trees, Trucks....
Hopefully it will stay that way.”

Mirjam Wouters
<http://cyclingdutchgirl.waarbenjij.nu>

“Naked sunday mornings with my (ex)girlfriend.”

Shane Little www.shanecycles.com

“A long soak in a hot bath and my rubber ducky.”

Henrik Risager www.woollypigs.com

“Not being told by police to get a wash.”

Rob Lucas
www.aroundtheworldforwater.co.uk

“Showering barefoot.”

Rachel Hugens
www.facebook.com/#!/rachel.hugens

“Some friends.”

Alvaro Neil www.biciclown.com

“Road signs that don't need deciphering!”

Liz Wilton www.bikeabout.co.uk



The *SPEEDSTERS*

By: STEVE FABES

Chances are you have met one.

Perhaps you even are one. Head low, back almost horizontal, maximum two panniers and eyes scanning the trailing asphalt, nervously stealing fleeting glances at the odometer. It's the Speedster.

During my journey I've met many cyclists striving to ride the length of Africa in just four months, many others are chasing world records and several organized tours have sprouted up in recent years making The Speedster as ubiquitous in this world as drunk



British nineteen year olds on Gap Years.

This entity seems to exist only on busy highways and dreary, uninspiring parts of the world, never on rough roads, never in those wild places. When we do cross paths the conversation follows a predictable pattern, often beginning with "So how many kilometres have you come?" Followed swiftly by "And how long did that take?"

Cue furrowed brow, mental arithmetic is in progress as The Speedster tries to calculate exactly how many more kilometres they cover per month than you do.

It's a shame that we've entered an era of fast and furious bike adventures. I can't

help but wonder whether people are forgetting what for me is the ultimate high of traveling by bicycle - the slow transition. The bicycle is simply one of the best mediums to explore a country in detail. As one place slowly merges with another bicycle travelers watch the

world evolve. Why race through? To see a lot but to experience little? By setting a time limit you beef up the challenge but sacrifice something that to me at least, is far more important - the adventure. The times I have felt most alive have been on those dusty tracks at the very edge of civilization. The times I've relished more than any other have been when I've taken up offers of hospitality from local people, offers which I presume would often be declined by the speed freaks all in the name of a few more miles before sunset.

Perhaps I'm verging on being one of those conceited know-it-alls, the type of irritating traveler who seems convinced

Photo: STEVE FABES

they are exploring the world in a superior way than most, but why not take more time to look around? Constantly dwelling on distance and on time and on the future means you forget to be surprised by the present. Why not resist always taking the shortest or the easiest path? Loops are prettier than straight lines. Shrug off that addiction to asphalt. Take time to banter with passersby and every once in a while take a detour through a town or village just because it has a funny sounding name on the map.

And to The Speedsters out there I have a few suggestions to make life easier. First off - a urinary catheter, to obliterate the need for all those time wasting toilet stops. A straw into your mouth connected to a huge hat containing carbo-rich liquidized mush, the kind of stuff NASA gives to its astronauts. And lastly, a tiny video camera on the handlebars recording everything that occurs outside your twenty degree visual field. That way if something interesting happens to your left or right there's no need to turn your head, creating drag and sacrificing velocity. Just watch it on tape afterwards in the comfort of your own home whilst you tell your friends and family how amazing the experience was, although you wish that puncture on the N2 hadn't dented your November average. And next time we meet - have some empathy, please. We're not all like you, so let's not talk in numbers. Tell me a good story instead. **BT**

Dr. Steve Fabes aims to cycle the length of the 6 continents while raising money for the U.K. health charity Merlin. You can follow Steve at: www.cyclingthe6.blogspot.com.

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Parting shot



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