

Week 1 on Paros

By popular demand here are a few stats from the journey so far:

Total distance ridden: 8554km

Number of countries visited: 23

Nights in the tent: 83/141

Coldest night in tent: -6c

Highest altitude: 1,233m

Longest day: 121km (Brighton to Felixstowe)

Number of ferry journeys: 24

Favourite country for biscuits: Latvia

Favourite country for pastries: Poland

Favourite country for bread: Serbia

Most expensive coffee: €4 Turku, Finland

Cheapest coffee: 50 dinar (32p) Pančevo, Serbia

Surprisingly useful bits of kit: Zefal spy rear view mirror, Click-Stand and Grabber inc. Space Blanket (used to line the tent and for picnics)

Lost kit:

Zefal spy rear view mirror (somewhere in Lithuania)

1 tent peg (somewhere in Sweden)

And finally the current score in the worlds longest game of 'Horse':

Kirsty: 1009

Marcus: 1008



So here we are in our wonderful winter accommodation on Paros in the middle of the Aegean Sea. Somewhere for us to sit tight while the worst of the winter passes with time to give the bike a thorough clean, rest cycling muscles and build up gardening muscles.



Jim and Irini have lived here for something like 40 years and in that time they have built themselves a home, a huge garden and several smaller houses for rental to artists, sculptors or anyone who wants somewhere peaceful to retreat to. They have also hosted numerous [W00Fers](#) in that time and a lot of the construction work and garden upkeep has been carried out by the volunteers. In return the W00Fers (including us) get room

and board during their stay. It's an arrangement that works really well for all concerned.



It's been particularly well timed for us as the cold days in Athens were followed by even colder days once we sailed into Paros with the unexpected arrival of a few centimetres of snow. Our surprise was matched by Jim as this is the first snowfall for 10 years and unwelcome by most of the islanders, apart from the children who get to enjoy what is probably their first ever snowball fight.





As well as Jim and Irini the house has several other occupants with 2 dogs and 3 cats with inside privileges and 1 dog and 2 cats who are not supposed to come indoors (occasionally Paco the dog gets a taste of how the other half live). The outside animals are lucky strays who have found their way to the house and been adopted but not fully integrated into the family (yet). There are also nearly 30 Muscovy ducks that provide the occasional egg...or Sunday roast.







The snow that turned to sleet that turned to rain has hampered our progress in the garden at the beginning of the week. Disappointingly it also meant that the traditional Epiphany ceremony whereby the priest throws a cross into the harbour at Alyki to be rescued by some hardy local swimmers didn't happen. I was stood on the harbourside with my speedos and goggles, ready to dive in only to find it wasn't going to happen this year.



But as we've already found, the weather in Greece changes rapidly so by Wednesday the sun was starting to make an appearance and the island was able to thaw. A bit of work shifting bales, digging out rocks and pulling up weeds helped keep us warm.



The main project for the week was the construction of two compost silos out of the bales we had gathered up. Building the silos didn't take too long but they then needed to be filled. That meant harvesting a huge pile of green stuff and learning the fine art of wielding a scythe. It's a surprisingly satisfying tool to use when you get a good swing with it but we may need a bit more practice before we take on a field of corn.



Composting is much like baking a cake, only not as tasty. It needs the right ingredients, mixed the right way and plenty of heat and moisture to get it going. There are also plenty of different recipes and advocates for a variety of techniques but we stuck with the traditional 3:1 straw to green ratio plus some special additions. We hope to see some signs that the clever little bugs and grubs have started breaking it down by next week.





There are hills all around us so lot of walking to be done. On the way back from one particular stroll we were ambushed by a small and noisy kitten who then clung to our heels and followed us home. Jim had seen this little animal before and was not happy to see it again. It had turned up with some other guests last week and had been taken back down the valley but this time it seemed determined to stay. And stay she did after a half hearted attempt not to encourage her and being

chased up a tree by the dogs a few times before they began to accept her. So Mississippi is now the 6th cat to join the family.



Apologies if you logged on to read a cycling blog but found

Gardeners World and Pets at Home instead. The bike has been used for a short ride down to the village for supplies but has mostly been left neglected. Hopefully we'll get out on it for a ride round the island soon.

