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written by Marcus | 8 August, 2023

On 16th August 2014 the two of us set out on one bicycle from Bristol in the south west of England with a rough idea of a route that would take us on a less than direct journey around the world. Along the way there were mountains, deserts, forests and cities with a long and winding road to ride along between them. A daunting prospect!

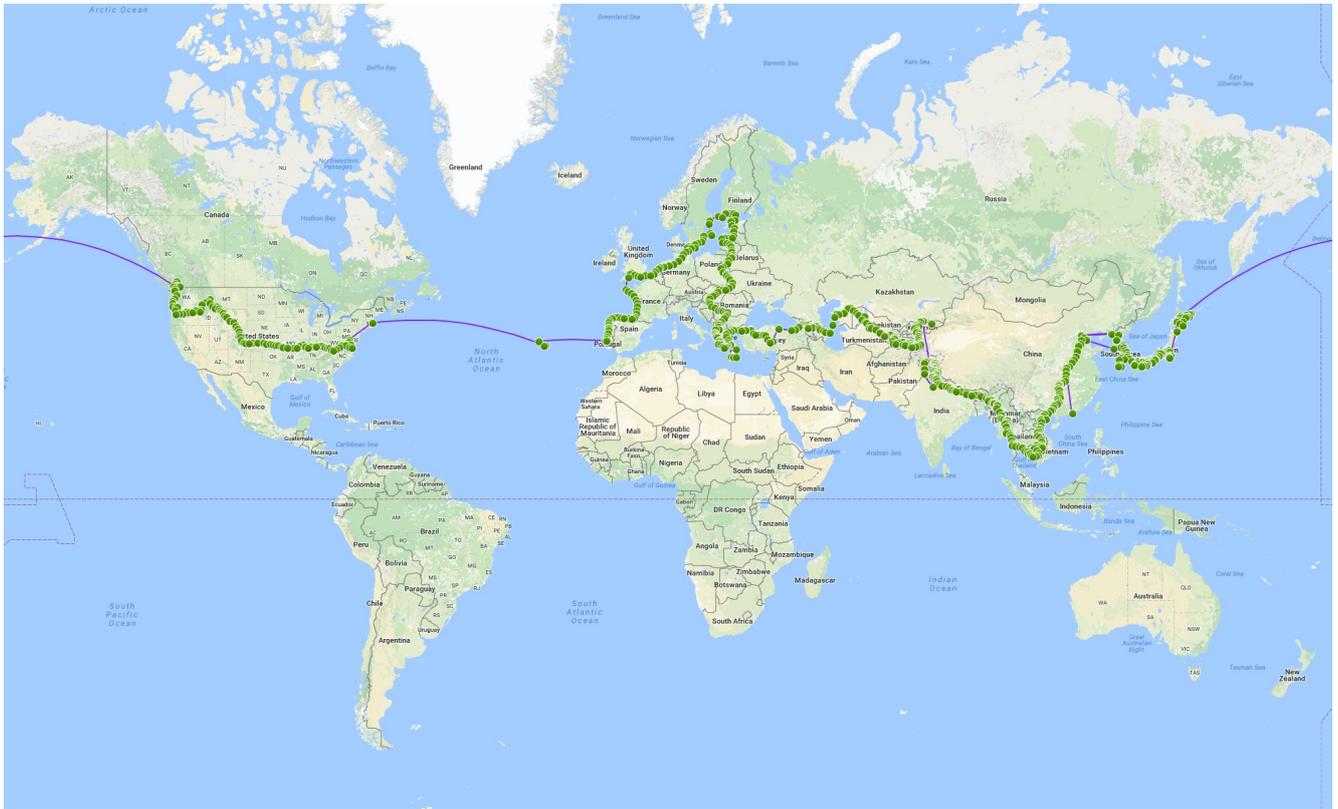
In the end we travelled for 851 days on our tandem bike returning home to Bristol on 13th December 2016. Behind us was a trip that took us through 46 countries, covering 47,062km by pedal power and along the way we experienced a world full of wonder and kindness.

Please explore this site to discover more about our adventure.

The blog archive contains many stories about the people and places that we visited, from sub zero camping in Poland to seeking shade from the 47 degree heat in Tajikistan, losing the bike in Kyrgyzstan to running a half marathon in North Korea.

You might also like to look at the 'Route' page which contains a map and locations where we stayed for the entire route, along with the routes of some of the other trips we've done since.

Please contact us if you'd like to ask any questions about the trip, riding a tandem, cycle touring in general or just to say hi. We're also available for speaking if you'd like to hear our story in person.



Our convoluted route from Bristol to Bristol



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Cycle touring around the globe on bikes made for one or two

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Worcester to Brussels 5 trains, 1 ferry and 5 bike rides have taken us from Worcester to Belgium's capital with @letsgoanddofunstuff. Land of waffles, frites with mayo and for some reason statues of peeing children. We're hoping the infamous Flandrian wind will be kind to us for the return ride along Eurovelo 5. #calais #ghent #brussels #flanders #cycletouringbelgium #orangebikes
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A @hilleberg_the_tentmaker tent is a big investment but at the same time they are remarkably good value. Ours has given us nearly 500 cozy nights in all weathers, landscapes and altitudes and is still going strong. Things do sometimes wear out but the team in Sweden are always happy to help and get replacements sent out immediately without question and without cost. We've just changed a few pole sections, shock cords and zippers and it's ready for another adventure whenever we are! #hillebergthetentmaker #cycletouring #getwhatyoupayfor #homeiswherethehillebergis #campinglife #5millionstarhotel

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Davin to Manila, Luzon, Philippines It's nearly time to go. It's by no means the end of the archipeligo but we need to get a ferry from Cebu in 2 days time. It's tempting at the port in Dumaguete to look at the boat to the island of Mindinao in the south that has been recommended to us by a few people but not by the foreign office. Instead we board the boat to Bohol and ride towards the middle of the island to find a sanctuary for the world's smallest primate: The Tarsier. Sleepy from a night of foraging we find them nestled under the leaves and clinging to trees surprisingly close to our eye level. I have to hold Kirsty back from trying to smuggle one into her barbag. The road across Bohol is about as pleasant as they come. Sweeping through the forest with little traffic and few hills we're taking it easy knowing this is the last full day of riding of the trip. There's a slight detour to swim at a waterfall before we drop down to another ferry to Cebu city. There's just one last slice of Filipino culture that we need to sample and I hand over 5 pesos at a small cafe, scribble a number on a piece of paper and wait my turn. Karaoke is bigger here than even Taiwan and Japan. All too soon the opening bars of Wonderwall blast out and I take to the stage to give it my best shot. It's a very supportive crowd and when it's over I thank them all for humouring me. The 16th and final ferry journey of the trip is a long one. 30 hours on board the MV Masigla to return us back to Manila gives us more time to read, rest and watch the islands that have taken us 3 weeks to ride down pass gently by. In a call to my mum she says the time has flown by but for us the start of the trip seems an age away. A lot of road has passed under our wheels since the streets of Tokyo, the volcanoes on Kyushu, the string of Japanese islands, busy Taipei, coast and mountains of Taiwan before the smiles, colour & heat of the Philippines. 10 weeks jam-packed with ups, downs, surprises, challenges and wonder. Checking the bikes in at the airport the curious airline staff ask "Where have you been?". We both take a deep breath and begin "Well.....".

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Bacolod to Dauin, Negros, Philippines Our ferry arrives on Negros in the middle of a torrential tropical rain storm. Unlike the cold rain we'd endured in Taiwan this a welcome relief. The only drawback is that the roads quickly flood which hides all the pot holes. We get to dry off at the home of Edi and Emma, more wonderful Warmshowers hosts. Edi has already been a great help in advising our route down from Manila having spent a few years and many thousand km exploring the area by bike. This is on top of two laps of the globe. We spend the evening pouring over maps to plan the last leg of our journey and learning a bit more about life in the Philippines. Negros is a sugar cane island and although the route Edi sends us on is relatively quiet, there are occasional horn honks as enormous trucks chug past with sugar cane stacked so high that they barely fit under the trees. Between the fields are cockerel farms with hundreds of prize birds being bread for fighting. This is not somewhere that you need an alarm clock. After Kabankalan we turn onto a smaller mountain road and the living gets more basic and the views more rural. Buffalo take the strain lugging the harvested cane and ploughing. The road gets rough but climbs at a comfortable 5%. Edi had promised this would be the best riding on the island and it's hard to disagree. As we drop back down to the coast the sky looks ominous & the rumble of thunder gets closer. We just make it to Sipalay before the storm hits us and the evening is spent sheltering and watching the storm flash all around us. We work down the coast through noticeably poorer areas. The villages have hand pumps for water and the only paved road is the main one that we're riding on. Supplies are harder to find except for the ever present Sari Sari stores that stock the basics in single serving sizes from behind a mesh window. The final stretch into Dauin is fast with wind assistance but in the middle of town we pull on the brakes. We're stopping here to do some more diving ' the break feels well timed with fatigue from the heat & hills sitting in our legs like a lead weight. It'll be nice to have a rest before the last few days of the trip.

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Caticlan to Iloilo, Panay, Philippines We sit next to a cargo ship helmsman on our ferry across to Panay and he describes some fantastic journeys to all corners of the world delivering goods like coal and grain. This is a nation that is at home on the sea and apparently 25-30% of all merchant sailors are Filipino. Us land lubbers are happier on dry land and this island immediately feels different to Mindoro with a tree lined road giving some very welcome shade. The design of the motorbike side cars has changed too and they now have chrome plated bodies, snazzy alloy wheels and unnecessary spoilers. Riding over to the west side of the island we enter Antique province where the mountains squeeze the road up against the coast. Villagers live along the beach with their boats on the sand and roadside stalls display the catch of the day. With a bit more green space available we try camping and although it's possible to hide ourselves away, the heat in the tent is almost unbearable. Even cooling off in a nearby river only helps for a short while. After a couple of nights without much sleep we revert to bargain hotels with at least a bucket shower and a fan. The hills and the coastline converge at the southern end of the island so we haul ourselves up and over the ridge-line and drop down the other side. The road sweeps through dense jungle with simple, tin huts nestled amongst the trees. Our final destination on Panay is Iloilio City and the approach gets increasingly busy. This was once an important trading town during the Spanish occupation and they left a legacy of grand cathedrals and colonial houses. We've noticed more Spanish words being used in the local languages too. Entering the port we're just in time to catch the next ferry which will take us to Negros. It feels like we're spending nearly as much time at sea as the locals!

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Sabang to Bulalacao, Mindoro, Philippines It would have been very tempting to ditch the bikes and spend the rest of our time here in the ocean instead. Warm, clear waters, a kaleidoscope of fish and coral and practicing our new love of scuba diving compared to the dusty, steep, rough road we find ourselves on instead. Leaving Sabang was difficult in all respects. It would have been a tough ride under normal conditions but with the added test of the 40°C heat Kirsty makes the sensible call to hitch and takes a ride in a van that's more used to carrying imported zebra. I find her 10km later sipping a cold drink and we carry on with smooth tarmac under our wheels. Mindoro has high but largely uninhabited mountains running down its centre so everyone lives along the coast. We're on the west coast where there's only one road and we share it with a fun assortment of overloaded vehicles with smiles and waves everywhere. The Philippines is by far the friendliest of the countries we've been to on this trip helped in no small part by abundance of English speakers. Progress is good for the next few days on the wide, exposed plains and we find a different, deserted beach each night. We bivvy at the 1st which is a mistake and stay in a bamboo hut at the 2nd which is much more pleasant. Drinking enough water is a challenge so we top up whenever we can. We only get caught out once when the road winds through some hills for a few km without any of the roadside stalls we'd got used to seeing. Luckily some children help us out when they find us resting at the top of a climb and give us enough to get us to the next town. The island ends in the same way it started by chucking a hot, challenging climb at us. On the last day a long ridge stands in our way with the only way over being a 2km climb with gradients of over 20% in places. Ride what we can, push what we can't and wring out my shirt at the top. After one last seaside sleep we catch our next ferry that will take us to Panay. We've learnt a lot from Mindoro and with our newly acquired Open Water diving cards in our sweaty palms we'll be looking ahead for more diving opportunities! #arkipelagodiveresort #sabang

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Manilla to Sabang, Philippines "There are two seasons in the Philippines: Hot and hotter!" explains our host Carlos after we walk into his beautiful, air-conditioned flat 47 floors above a smart district of Manilla. As well as the temperature ramping up a few notches, this is a country that is a few steps further back on the development scale than Taiwan. Not that we'd know it from this lofty vantage point. It's holy week and we explore the packed streets of the Intramuros old town where crowds are queuing up to visit the austere cathedral and surrounding churches. A very different sight to the colourful temples we'd left behind. Leaving Carlos with all of our cold weather gear, we head south. Being Good Friday means the streets are quieter than usual, but we still have to contend with tuktuks, motorbikes, trikes and the ferocious Jeepney buses. They're loud, brightly painted and completely unpredictable. Soon we're out into smaller towns with lots of decorations for Easter as well as election posters and sometimes Easter decorations sponsored by election candidates. The road climbs gently all day until we reach a ridge that overlooks Lake Taal. Below us a volcanic island sits in the middle of a lake and we have to stop several times on the drop down into the caldera to take in the view. The first few days in a new country require some orientation and experimentation to see where and if we can camp. We spot a likely beach on the lakeshore and when we get there we find we're sharing it with a family having a barbecue. They soon invite us to join them and when they hear that we plan to sleep in a tent, we're invited to stay at their home nearby instead. Once again we're humbled by the kindness of strangers as Gerry and his family treat us like one of their own. After continuing down to Batangas it's time to hop on a ferry to the next island of Mindoro. The water is crystal clear we're interested to see what's underneath so make our way to Sabang where we'll be stepping off the bikes and into the sea for a few days to learn how to scuba dive. With the temperature topping out at 41°C already, we've timed this excursion perfectly. Happy Easter everyone!

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Sun Moon Lake to Taoyuan, Taiwan The climb to Wuling Pass is notorious and was described by Alain when we first arrived in Taipei as being 'Taiwan's Mount Ventoux'. After the first afternoon we've winched up to 1500m and refuel on fried chicken. The bulk of the ascent stands before us the next day and we begin with blue sky overhead and clouds in the valley below. The road is a bit narrow, a bit steep and too busy, questions are asked as to whether this is such a good idea. But the traffic subsides at the next junction while the gradient eases slightly so we continue. As we tick off each set of hairpins the views get ever more spectacular and there's still lots going on with farms and terraces and villages all the way up to 2000m. But once we pass the last 7-11 we know that from here on things will be more remote. Heart rates climb and breathing become heavier as we pass 3000m. The clouds close in around us and there's no way of knowing how much further to the top. Ride what we can, push what we can't. Take each km at a time until we round the last corner and a small brown sign announces our arrival at the highest road on the island, 3275m above sea level. Elation and relief wash over us. On day 1 of Cycle Touring School everyone learns that they should carry a spare gear mech hanger with them. I curse myself when I break this essential component the next morning and don't have another one. The safe option is to get a bus off the mountain back to civilization & bike shops. A riskier option is to bodge the bike as a singlespeed. If I'd watched this stretch of road pass me by from the seat of a bus I would have been bitterly disappointed. Riding with only one gear makes things trickier but gravity is on our side with a glorious descent into a valley then down and down towards the coast. The bike and my legs hold up and we catch a train back to Taipei. If I can't find the parts I need here then I can't find them anywhere and sure enough after a couple of days we're fully rested, the bikes are fully operational again and we're ready to catch our next flight to our next country.

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Cape Eluanbi to Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan On one of the busiest stretches of dual carriageway running down the east coast we met several pairs of cyclists coming the other way. We told them that this was the worst stretch so far for us but they all said that compared to the west coast this was the best. No one had anything good to say about the densely populated industrial heartland of the west so we decided to skip a bit by train to give us time to then head into the central mountains instead. On the train we realise that we'd be passing through the huge city of Kaohsiung so make a hasty decision to hop out and take a look. Riding round the Lotus Pond in the middle of town it's non-stop colourful temples and statues and pagodas with a dash of karaoke and kids theme park rides thrown in for good measure. Despite making a very last minute request, we get to stay with Warmshowers superhost Eric who shows us round his neighbourhood. It's just the rest and change of tempo we need before we head for the hills. After another short train ride we're back on two wheels for a surprising stretch into the countryside. Villages of low houses sit amongst palm groves and we pass through sleepy towns at the foothills of the mountains. Eventually the road steepens and we zig zag our way up to Sun Moon Lake, the largest freshwater lake in Taiwan and a very popular tourist destination. Eric had told us about a challenge that requires us to ride the 30km circuit of the lake and take selfies at various iconic landmarks so we have to give it a go. Our reward at the visitor centre is a keyring that features a cyclist on one side and several fireflies on the other. Very appropriate as our camp spot the night before had been a magical scene with dozens of the glowing insects surrounding us. So far our decision to come this way appears to be the right one. However the road ahead has an almighty challenge standing in our way in the form of Taiwan's highest road. My excitement to climb over it is only matched by Kirsty's trepidation. #cyclingtaiwan #cycletouring #cycletouringasia

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Hualien to Cape Eluanbi Either we were too smug after Taroko Gorge or we'd offended one of the gods in the huge temple we stayed at in Hualien but either way our luck was about to change. Staying inland we enter the rift valley. It's a wide plain between the huge central mountains and a smaller coastal range. On the flat road we speed past endless rice fields, then ducks, pigs, fish, pineapples, bananas. Anything and everything is being farmed. This area has a large indigenous population and there are lots of monuments celebrating their culture. The vast majority of the population of Taiwan are now Han Chinese and like many other parts of the world it looks like the original inhabitants are having a hard time. The villages are noticeably more run down and less developed. A big climb and sweeping descent takes us back over to the coast and straight away we revert back to wealthier towns. After stopping at a posh bakery in Taitung I set off into the road again and then BANG! I'm on the deck before I know what's hit me. Alongside me a blue scooter is also on its side. I jump up and somehow seem to be unharmed. Thankfully the scooter rider is also soon on her feet with the front of my bike being the worst casualty. A large part of a day is then spent in the police station and then finding someone to bend my forks back into shape (thank goodness for steel) and buying a new front wheel. Where Taroko gorge had reminded us why we love cycle touring, incidents like this make us question why we do it and it will take a couple of days to get our mojo back. Although frustrating at the time, and a huge shock we have to be thankful that the gods weren't harder on me, the whole episode could have been much worse. The roads are now very busy due to a 4 day national holiday so we ride with extreme care and attention all the way down to the southern tip of the island. Here we find another lighthouse to match the one we'd seen in the north. Taiwan end to end is done and next we'll be turning north again to get back to Taipei. The smell of incense drifts out as we pass another small temple, I give three short bows and ask that our journey be safe for the west half of the island.

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