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And right on cue, after exactly 2½ years on the road, here is the 8<sup>th</sup> newsletter from a couple of lazy cyclists relaxing in the little Mexican Village of San Blas.

While this month-long break, has resulted in statistics that aren't anywhere near as impressive as our previous records, we would like to say that, when we were cycling, we did pedal with fervour: Averaging 78 kilometres and 670 altimeters per day, we spent a total of 471 hours in the saddle. This means however, that we have actually cycled for only three out of the last six months. But in our defence, our trip isn't just about the figures, it's also about sitting back, taking in the ambience and enjoying the company of the great people we meet along the way.

### ***Starting off in Hope***

We started off in Hope in the middle of summer, heading along the British Columbian Kettle Valley Trail. It was holiday season and everywhere we went we had to compete with crowds, both in the campground and on the highway. Only when we turned off the well trodden path that encounters with uneducated, beer-swilling ATVer's ceased. On the other hand, this meant travelling along pine-lined forest service roads and they are hard work for any form of transport.

In between swatting through the blankets of mosquitoes, we occasionally stumbled upon tranquil perfection: iridescent blue dragon-flies kept us entertained at Chute Lake; as did Monti Philpott with some of the best story telling this side of Darley Springs. The clouds also performed some pretty amazing stunts around the mountains on the other side of Kootenay Lake during our stay at Fletcher Falls. And like the seagull that had given up his life at the ocean for one on these waters, we just paddled and pottered around enjoying the solitude and community spirit at this peaceful recreation park.

### ***See for yourself***

We weren't sure of what to expect from The States, and contrary to what media sensationalist's would have you believe, it's an amazingly diverse country with places to see that'll blow your mind and bring tears to your eyes all at the same time. That's one pretty nice high, I can tell you. Perfect strangers embraced us and our bike-tour with so much enthusiasm, it was humbling.

Lake Roosevelt National Park, Colville Indian Reservation and Steamboat Rock were our first introduction to the variety of landscapes America has on offer. Surprisingly enough, we also encountered some of our most extreme weather conditions to date as well: gale force winds at Vantage that had most campers lying on top of their tents instead of inside them; unexpected snow storms in Yosemite which not only closed Tioga Pass, but stranded us for a couple of days; and a long, hot, thirsty ride through the Mojave Desert, just south of Route 66 in California, that now means we know what it is like to crave for water.

### ***Coasting the coast***

These experiences may be well embedded in our memories, but by far the most reminiscent cycling moments were those spent travelling down the Oregon and Californian Coast. Even though Highway 101 is not the safe riding haven you'll be lead to believe it is, the 1300-odd kilometres does dish up some pretty stunning views: pristine beaches with snow-capped surf; contorted cliff faces; curious rocky protrusions; and luscious rain forest that effortlessly transforms into wind swept desert dunes. You will end up winding your way past historic milestones, through charming little towns, over legendary rivers with dramatic bridges and along some of the most picturesque coastal scenery you could ever imagine.

The near misses with logging trucks became a thing of the past as you pedalled into one of the communal camp areas set aside for hikers-bikers at the end of the day. For an exchange of just \$US4 per person, you have use of the hot showers and the chance to mingle with all the other cyclists on route. A group of us, with ages ranging from 20 through to 56 years, banded together for an unforgettable treasure of a journey.

### **Goodbye bagels, hello tortillas**

We spend time on the Californian Coast with friends before and after an inland trip to Vegas and as we draw nearer to Mexico, the warnings about the new frontier come loud and fast. Simple truth is: we hear these same cries of doom and gloom at every border we have crossed: the Greeks cautioned us about the Turks; the Turks were certain of our imminent death in Iran; the Iranians' gave talk of torturous Turkmen, who in turn had their doubts about the camaraderie of their Uzbek neighbours. Up until now, we have travelled through all of these countries trouble-free and despite numerous horror stories, the Mexican people have only shown us their warm and hospitable nature.

The biggest problems we faced were the multitude of punctures I receive after running over a tack-weed bush and trying to come to terms with ridiculously over-priced and poorly maintained campgrounds. It appeared that Baja has an identity crisis: there's too much influence from the US to create a real Mexican feel and no infrastructure to warrant it being remotely American. This rubbish strewn peninsula has been spoilt by good times and a few too many snow-birds with way too much money on their hands.

Of the 2000 kilometres we travelled, only a handful of spots remain worthy of a mention: the cacti fields heading into Cataviña; the welcomed and verdant nature of San Ignacio; sandstone formations of Cuesta del Inferno; Bahia Concepción; and the off-the-beaten-track surf beach at Playa San Pedrito. This is not to say that there aren't many more beautiful beaches and villages on Baja: it's just that you can't really reach them with anything less than a four-wheel drive; unless of course, you want to struggle down sandy tracks with several day's water and supplies strapped to your already laden bike.

### **The real McCoy**

Mainland Mexico has definitely been more travel-rewarding than Baja. Not only is the cost of living here more akin to its third world status, but there is an authenticity here that the US influenced region lacks. San Blas has been our home since New Year and we love it, although we have had to develop our sand-fly salute and scratching techniques. Besides the sea, surf and jungle boat rides, we have been ticking hard away at the keyboard endeavouring to get our site, a few others and some writing prospects in order.

Early February and we will be off again: cycling through Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama with our sights set on reaching Colombia before our 9<sup>th</sup> newsletter. So until that time, please keep visiting [www.tour.tk](http://www.tour.tk) for updates, photos and video from our Central American tour.

Adios Amigos

Sonya and Aldrik

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*Our thank you list just keeps getting bigger. In order of appearance: THANKYOU to [Monti Philpot](#) from Darley Springs for the great stories; [The Veenendaal's](#) from Vernon for their campsite at Mabel Lake; [Paula](#) for the salad and corn, firewood and chairs; [The Family from site 3](#) at Shelter Bay for the firewood; [Tiki](#) and [Brian](#) for the stroopwafel; [Rabobank](#) for sending a replacement random reader; [Helsport](#) for the new zippers and tent poles; [Brad](#), [Angie](#) and the boys for making us feel right at home; [Jim Vardell](#) for the beers, and breakfast; [All the people](#) we met and cycled with along the Oregon Californian coastline with extra special wishes to the band of merry cyclists: [Ben](#), [Jeffrey](#), [Brian](#), [Dani](#) and [Jim Abraham](#); [Molly](#) for putting us up in Oakland; [Adriaan](#): we are for ever in your debt; [Gregory](#) at Yosemite Valley Visitors Centre for teeing up a campsite for us; [All the Rangers](#) in The Wilderness Centre near Tioga Pass; [Eric](#) and [Crescent](#): for putting us up for two nights in Vegas. [Chris](#) for the Polar Insulated drink bottle ; [Jim Abraham](#) again for being such a wonderfully generous guy; [Deanna](#) at [NA Gear](#) for the new Primus stove and accessories; [Jim Abraham](#) yet again for the shuffle, ipod and lemon drops; [Jeffrey](#) for the soup mixes; [Brian](#) for the book: Middlesex; [Kelly](#) and [Tim](#) for having us over for a couple of nights and the lift to the Mexican border; [Steve](#) for the new tubes; [Hiro](#) for the travelling companionship on Baja; [Susan](#) and [Marcus](#) for the thoughtful Christmas present; and [Dennis Fuller](#) for the insight into Baja plant-life. [Arien](#) and [Jan](#) for the toothpaste, coffee and wonderful company in San Blas.*