



***We're late for a very important date...***

Sixteen days ago and our little home was set up on a green, grassy patch in what Argentinean locals of Barrancas call a municipal campsite. It had no toilet and no running water, so there was little chance of piggy-backing a wifi connection to send out newsletter #10: marking our three and a half years on the road. Besides, pen hadn't touched paper at that stage...

***We're still smitten***

...but since we figured you were all waiting with baited breath for news of our last six months of travel, a little tardiness on our behalf is no excuse for no comment at all.

Just to budge the memory cells, our last correspondence was from Colombia, where we were totally smitten with the place. We still are. In truth, it is going to take some spot quite phenomenal to tip this country from number one ranking on our "favourite places to cycle in" list. I'm sure if we had taken salsa dance classes, we'd still be there now, swivelling the hips; grinning like cheshires; and downing the rum and lime shots as expertly as the locals; in between thigh crunching pedalling trips of course!

***We're humbled***

Sad as it was to leave, we moved on. Through Ecuador and into Peru, which overwhelmed us so much, it undeniably earned a very close second position to Colombia. South America was certainly touching us in a way we never thought possible. Besides the beginning of long term affairs with our granny wheels, people smiled at us in such a manner that we began to question exactly what it is in life that's makes one happy. Here we were in the middle of a wild and woolly nothingness, where locals had little more than a few farmyard animals, a plot of land, a hoe and plenty of potatoes and yet they shined with a cheerfulness that would warm you for the length of the day.

***We're rolling up and down***

Ecuador also taught me in particular that there are two ways of getting your loaded bike to the top of a mountain. The first one and the much preferred method is to sit on your saddle and push the pedals around. The second is to walk by the side of your loaded bike and steer the handlebars up the steep rubble inclines. I have never indulged myself in more of the latter technique before than in this country. And it stands to reason since Ecuador is basically one mass of volcanoes: cycling becomes quite the repetitive up and down experience.

The nicest memories had absolutely nothing to do with the plagues of sand flies that attacked us every time we stopped, nor the surprisingly affluent status of Ecuadorians in the bigger cities. Staying in one of the indigenous townships was much more culture-fuelled and cycling with Karsten for roughly a month way more entertaining. While I was mesmerised with vibrant velvet skirts swaying sequins and gold embroidery to and fro, Aaldrik had at long last found himself a drinking mate of equal calibre.

***We're diversified***

The diversity in Peru was quite amazing. From one week to the next we went from sweating out the humid temperatures in jungle green landscapes to gasping for air at dizzy heights on close to zero-celsius mountain tops. And when we had recovered from the demands of cycling in extreme conditions; being side-swiped by a car door in La Oroya; plenty of bouts of stomach problems; and repetitive sand fly attacks: we found enough time to relax, laugh and reminisce over a beer and pizza with two other cycling adventurers: Kevin and James. We in fact bumped into them five times before cycling the stretch from Cusco to the Bolivian border together.

***We're broken***

Bolivia is also a mixed bag. From the bustle and colour of La Paz to the howling winds in the middle of sand tracked oblivion: We witnessed the national election with cars being banned from use of the road; we found ourselves pushing our loaded rigs for kilometres in boggy, blustery conditions; and we experienced one of Bolivia's biggest tourism draw cards - the world's largest salt flat: the Salar de Uyuni. It was like nothing else we have felt before: what a powerfully charged sensation to be eternally surrounded by blinding white honeycomb impressions; to hear the crack and feel the crunch of salt beneath your wheel; have the shavings fly up and hit you in the face as you rocket along at unbelievable speeds on an imaginary path due south.

But our intentions to continue south through to Laguna Verde were soon reassessed when the state of the road became almost impossible to cycle. The thought of ten days plus of constant muscle against headwinds; dust storms; bicycle dragging; washboard surfaces; altitudes of above 4500 metres in an environment where little food is available and you also had the added pressure of searching for water, felt more like an endurance test than cycle touring. We opted to head straight to the west to the promise of bitumen and comfort-culture in Chile.

***We're at home***

Though roads and circumstances in the north of Chile were little better than in Bolivia, it was a shorter route to San Pedro de Atacama, where James was recuperating from the 10 day stamina ordeal. Consequently, the lead up to and after Christmas was deservedly spent lazing away the days in hammocks, sleeping, reading, eating some fine food and toasting the festive season at any moment we saw fit.

First cycling impressions of Chile were not good: crazy traffic on skinny roads, lots of desert highway and barbed-off land making wild camping almost impossible: New Year was celebrated in a ditch alongside Ruta 5. Thoughts changed though as we made our way into Santiago. The city itself is not particularly impressive, but chance meetings with cycling friends, get-togethers with other travellers and the warm welcome from Chileans changed our mind about the place instantly. We spent a couple of wonderful evenings with Benja and Natalia, who we met three years ago in Istanbul and who prompted major alterations to initial plans to head straight into Argentina and on to Buenos Aires. They surprised us with an invitation to their wedding in the Lake District of Chile.

***We're blown away***

I could feel a Malbec coming on and due reason to cycle to Mendoza. Another incredible Andes mountain pass: Cristo Redentor and then slowly into a very dry and desolate Argentina. Traffic was horrendous on the first stretches of highway as was the wind and if we thought that sand flies were the nastiest little insects on earth that's because we hadn't yet been acquainted with the horse fly. Imagine a sand fly itch crossed with a mosquito welt from something the size of a small moth. Quite a number of new rhythmic dance steps were developed by Aaldrik, since they liked him the most. But camping is part of the Argentinean culture, so bugs or no bugs, we stumbled upon a couple of wonderful spots: both wild and urban. People were curious and welcoming everywhere we went. Argentina has a very strong feeling of freedom.

All my life I have wanted to go to Patagonia. Not sure exactly why, but the desire was there. However, as soon as we got there, I was wishing as much as the wind was blowing to be elsewhere. It is the most powerful we have ever experienced. Ali added a special form of circle-cycling to his repertoire, which was artistically remarkable, but hardly productive. I, on the other hand, learned how to fly with my bike at 90 degree angles across the road. Also impressive, though on two instances I actually performed a stunt that didn't work out too well and had me lying spread eagle in the gravel. I was pleased to cross back into the calm of the Chilean Lake District, but that along with reports on one of the most well celebrated weddings in the history of matrimony is for the next newsletter.

***We're following our instincts and not the well travelled path***

For those of you who like the statistical side of things the last six months have been demanding, even though we only cycled an average of 17 days each month. On each of those days we did an average of 76 kilometres and 925 alti-metres of climbing. Considering the month on flatter sandy Bolivian roads slowed us down considerably, the altitude measurements are quite staggering. The 29 flat tyres, mostly in Ecuador and Peru, is also an astounding accomplishment. Unfortunately, I couldn't find any decent replacements for the Cheng Shin tyres that we bought in Santiago Ixcuintla in Mexico. They had done an amazing 19,034 kilometres between the two of them and were on their last legs, but for 4 euros each that's what we definitely call 'good value for money'. We have found some more in Santiago and will keep you posted on their performance.

Other breakdowns included a broken eyelet on Ali's back rack and both of our laptops crashing within a week of each other. Needless to say everything else is falling apart: from clothing to tent zippers; cameras to a thread worn tea-towel; holes in our Ortlieb bags and in the bottom of our tent where Bolivian ants had a feast trying to get at the bread we stored inside one night. We don't do that anymore! Other than that we are still fighting fit and more than ready to move on.

But it is time to venture elsewhere. We decided the hardships of travelling and predominantly camping in wind, rain and the cold all the way to Ushuaia were just a bit too much for our warm-weather cycling dispositions. Besides, the beaches in Brazil are a beckoning. And since we are not bound to any particular route: why not follow our instincts? We've been doing it so far and I guess we'll continue to do so.

Cheers until July 31 this year...  
Son and Ali

*There are always so many people to thank along the way and in general we try to remember you all. So, should you be forgotten on this page, please don't worry, you are remembered in our thoughts...*

*Luigi, Alba, Valentina and Donatella for letting us stay at their place, for the food, the great conversations and the tour to Salento; Hermes for offering us a place to stay in Tuluá; José Oscar, his family and Baptiste Roux for showing such generous hospitality, how to salsa and for taking us on tour around 'recycling' Cali; Jonathan and his girlfriend for the pineapple; the motorcycle 'gang' for inviting us to have a drink in El Pedregal; [Karsten](#) for accompanying us on the road, keeping us entertained and being Ali's beer drinking mate for a whole month; All the drivers, especially the truckies that have given us the 'thumbs up' along the way; The welder in Loja for removing a broken bolt at no cost; Rosa and Faustino from [Hostal Sol de Selva](#) in Tarapoto for inviting us for breakfast, letting us use their WiFi and taking us out on daytrips around the region; [Kevin](#) and [James](#) for waiting for us all that time in Mayoc, having to drink all those beers and in the end we never showed up; [Kevin](#) and [James](#) again for a great time cycling from Cuzco to Copacabana, all the pizza diners and pub time; John Denson at [Serfas](#) for replacing Sonya's bike gloves and sending them to an address in Chile at no cost; Sibylle Mueller at [Katadyn](#) for sending a replacement pump handle for our water filter to La Paz free of charge; Christian and Luisa at [Chuquiago Cafe](#) in La Paz for receiving our mail for us; All well-wishers via [e-mail](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) & [Hyves](#); [Kevin](#) for his [Schwalbe](#) Marathon XR gift; Gustavo at [Gravity Bolivia](#) La Paz for fixing our bicycles and finding the parts we needed; [James](#) for the excellent company over the well-earned Chrissie break; Carlos and Carlos for the great night out at Belle Vista in Santiago; the staff for their knowledge and friendliness at [Hostal Forestal](#); Gustavo for his kind and heart-felt words; [Benja and Natalia](#) for the great couple of nights in Santiago and for the surprise invitation to their amazing wedding at Panguipulli; and even though this thanks should be in our next letter: the entire Garcia Family at Panguipulli for the warmest hospitality you could imagine and not to forget Carmen Gloria for the best tiramisu this side of Italy.*