



Worldwind TOUR

Crossing the globe Triumphantly

Words: As told to Gabi Pasztor. Images: Dutchie D'Pirate

You'd either be extremely mad or extremely brave to attempt riding from London to Sydney. But that's what one Aussie, known only as 'Dutchie', is doing.

In early 2016 I set off from Europe to ride a sponsored BMW GS700 through Morocco and the Atlas Mountains for two months. Travelling overland on a bike became my passion. After roosting among the red sand dunes of the Sahara, ideas of greater overland adventures began to grow.

I was sick of travelling on buses and planes, waiting in long queues and being restricted with what I could see. I wanted to travel freely and backpacking wasn't giving me that option. I decided to cross the globe, from London to Sydney, on a motorbike.

London

After some financial advice on renting versus buying a bike, I found and bought 'Trumpet', a second-hand 2014 Triumph Tiger 800 XC with 15,000km on the clock.

Then came the nitty-gritty details. Planning this trip was no easy feat. There were visas, insurance, carnet de passage (a permit to take a vehicle into countries temporarily) and driving permits to think about. England became a sea of paperwork in which I fought to stay afloat.

Without achieving much, I crossed the



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Above: Reunited with the bike outside Tehran Central Station in Iran.

English Channel to France with no more than green card insurance and a carnet de passage for the bike. The rest I decided I'd figure out on the way.

Europe

I rode through old cobblestone streets and small villages in coastal France, rural, narrow farming roads in Belgium, over winding floodbanks and past windmills in the Netherlands and, of course, the stunning Swiss Alps. No matter how many twists and turns you take, the Alps will never bore you.

Northern Italy was dotted with tiny churches. Pizza, pasta, gelato, coffee, seafood, Lambrusco, salami...the world's best food hands down, along with marvellous mountains too: the Dolomites.

The feast continued in Hungary with some pork knuckle, cabbage rolls and cucumber salad. Oh, and beer. Lots of cheap beer.

Although I made plenty of friends along the way, I enjoyed the solo travel. Being alone allowed me more time to process my thoughts and analyse myself. It encouraged independence and self-reliance over time and tempted new adventures. It's socially liberating.

I continued through the farmland and lush, green hills of Slovenia and slept in a hostel that was actually a school. ▶



Above: Dutchie wanted to travel freely and backpacking wasn't giving him that option.

Or was it a school that was actually a hostel? Through the Balkans I rode until I arrived in Thessaloniki, Greece, which became home for three weeks.

Asia and the Middle East

So there I was in Greece, waiting for my passport to arrive from the Pakistan embassy in Sydney. You can only apply for a Pakistan visa from your country of origin, so I couriered my passport and papers home, and being without a passport left me feeling somewhat naked in yet another foreign land.

Although it feels strange, I don't believe it's necessary to be overly organised to travel these days. You can sort it out along the way, especially as the overland travel community, and most people around the world, are helpful and full of information. As long as you have the

right attitude, you can worry less and ride more.

With the 'riding more' part being at the top of my list, I took the opportunity to ride through Epirus, known for its classic Ottoman arched bridges, deep gorges and bears. Days in Thessaloniki were spent eating gyros and calamari, making new mates and awaiting my passport.

Riding a Triumph was always going to make searching for spare parts interesting. Greece was the end of seeking specific parts for my bike unless I wanted to pay huge amounts for shipping, so before I left I secured another sponsorship and some 'just in case' spare parts.

Foreign aid

Having finally received my passport, I left for Istanbul.

It's true what they say about drivers in Turkey: they go where they want, when they want, how they want. Mosques towered over the dark Bosphorus Strait, separating Europe from Asia, and after some pistachio-filled treats and a confusing visa application for Iran, I was off towards Georgia along the Black Sea coast. ▶



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Above: Admiring the Dolomites in Italy. Top right: Bet these guys wish they each had a bike.
Below: Mountain passes covered the entire route.

The bike was heavily searched by officials on arrival at the Georgian border. The curious Georgians even wanted to strip down the minimal fairing left on the bike.

I continued my ride through rainy Georgia with green mountains on either side of me. My rear tyre slid around on the muddy trails and within minutes I was off. Some farmers quickly came to my aid, welcoming me to Georgia in broken English. After a few minor repairs I was invited into their home for a hot cup of coffee and a song.

I'd broken a few things in the middle of nowhere, but fortunately nothing major enough that couldn't be held together with a spare strap, cable tie or duct tape...and an adjustable wrench.

A wrong turn

Once in Iran, the first thing I achieved was an unspectacular off-road crash.



With the front end hanging off miserably, I turned to cable ties and duct tape. Six hours later, limping into the heart of peak-hour Tehran, my clutch plates decided to roast themselves. A long, drawn-out series of unfortunate events ensued.

The following week in Tehran was spent looking for new clutch plates (the last set had turned a peculiar shade of rusty brown), which a mechanic managed to source. It was meant for a Suzuki, but when there's no other low-cost option, you use what works to keep going forward. We welded the front end back together (tacho, fairing, mounting brackets, windscreen).

My visa to enter Turkmenistan had been denied, and that meant I missed out on riding through all the 'Stans, the Pamir and the Wakhan Corridor. Instead I decided to go through Russia and China, so I had to spend another week in Georgia awaiting my Russian visa. Soon after, I ran into some more frustration when a Chinese tour I'd booked and paid for was cancelled. The company also decided returning my money was optional – an option it didn't take. I was on my way to the Russian border in icy temps of four degrees below zero when I received the message.

At that point I was ready to call it quits. I'd already gone all the way to Iran, failed to get a visa for Turkmenistan, crashed the bike and backtracked 1500km in two days to Georgia, waited out two weeks of constant rain for a \$100 transit visa for Russia, and then lost \$400 on the Chinese tour.

I spent three days riding back to Greece to replace my non-adjustable cam-chain tensioner and find a heavy-duty cam chain to replace the stock one that was rattling like a monsoon of maracas. It was much quicker and cheaper than having it shipped to Georgia. With time so short, I couldn't organise a new tensioner, so I had it repaired instead.

Getting to Pakistan

I'm glad I didn't call it a day after all the drama. Pakistan is really something else and holds a special place in my heart. The Karakoram Highway stretches for hundreds of kilometres across Pakistan and China and is an absolutely incredible ride.

I'd planned on entering through the south of Pakistan with the usual dire warnings of safety directed my way. However, the more I heard, the more I wanted to see this ▶

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corner of the world for what it really was. I wanted to prove to people you could still travel safely into these parts of the world.

After crossing notorious Balochistan, I switched direction and headed north towards the mighty Karakoram, Himalayas and Hindu Kush. The weather was frosty. I often couldn't feel my toes and riding through ice and snow was happening much too often for my liking. Luckily, local teahouses and hot soups were the saviours of my extremities. Pakistanis are overwhelmingly friendly, accommodating and make a mean milk tea.

Despite warnings of being robbed, murdered or kidnapped in Pakistan, it was quite the contrary – I actually had trouble

getting the locals to accept money for their services and hospitality. They are just too kind, too giving and too humble.

Another Pakistani trait that rings true is resilience. I was saddened to hear about a bomb that had exploded a few hundred metres from my hostel and killed 15 people. Unfortunately it's a reality in Pakistan, and it briefly made me question my safety. I wondered if I should leave, but decided to do what the locals do – stay put and carry on.

The spirit of the locals and the unparalleled scenery (not to mention the pistachio kulfi) has quickly made Pakistan my favourite country.

Where to next?

I expect to arrive in Australia in late

Above: Well worth stopping and enjoying the views of Attabad.

Right: A mosque in Iran. Typical architecture along the Silk Road.

November, but that's just an estimate. I'm currently working on sponsorships, a short-film series and writing work so I can keep on going.

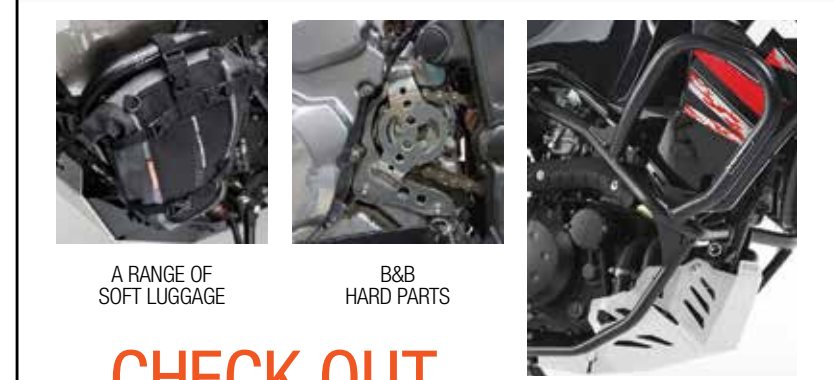
Travelling overland is exhilarating. The opportunities to interact with the real locals, the ones that aren't surrounded by tourists, are heavily increased. Areas you get to see when you aren't on a train or plane are the most prized moments of the ride, and this is where you get to discover the real country firsthand.



Keep up to date with Dutchie's adventures by logging on to <http://atthehandlebars.com/>



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