



Adventure Motorcycling HANDBOOK

CHRIS SCOTT



TRAILBLAZER PUBLICATIONS



CHRIS SCOTT's first motorcycle adventure got him half-way to North Wales on a moped. A long affair with bikes ensued, including a dozen years as a despatch rider in London, riding anything from IT250s to a 900SS (with one especially productive week on a nitrous-oxide injected XS750). Most winters were spent exploring the Sahara on trail bikes. Two self-published memoirs recall this era: *Desert Travels* (1996) and *The Street Riding Years* (2015) which was *Ride* magazine's 'Book of the Year'.

In the early '90s he went on to write *Desert Biking, a Guide to Independent Motorcycling in the Sahara* which evolved into AMH (see p10). At this time he also worked for Rough Guides, specifically their Australia title, and in the pre-YouTube era produced DVDs which saw his films from the Sahara and the Yukon featured on National Geographic Channel. His other books for Trailblazer include *Sahara Overland*, *Overlanders' Handbook* and *Morocco Overland*.



Adventure Motorcycling HANDBOOK

**A ROUTE & PLANNING GUIDE
ASIA, AFRICA & LATIN AMERICA**

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Contributions from riders all over the world help make *AMH* what it is, a collection of guidelines for adventurous travel by motorcycle, in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Without them *AMH-8* would have been a pretty thin book, so a big thank you to the three dozen contributors listed on the previous page as well the many more who supplied photographs and additional information.

Some of their biogs appear on p422. Thanks also to the team at Trailblazer.

A request

The author and the publisher have tried to ensure that the information in this book is as up to date as possible. Nevertheless, things are certain to change even before the ink is dry. If you notice any changes or omissions that you think should be included in the next edition or have any other feedback, please email the author at the website below or via Trailblazer (address above).

Warning

Overseas travel by motorcycle is unpredictable and can be dangerous.

Efforts have been made by the author, contributors and the publisher to ensure that the information contained herein is as accurate as possible. However, they are unable to accept responsibility for any inconvenience, loss or injury sustained by anyone as a result of the advice and information given in this book – so be careful and check the latest news.

Updates and a whole lot more at:

☒ adventure-motorcycling.com

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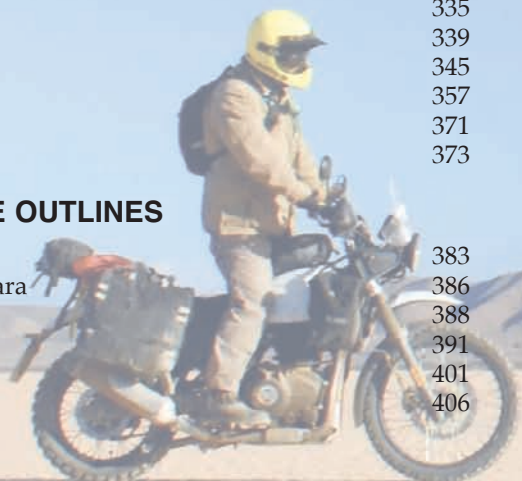
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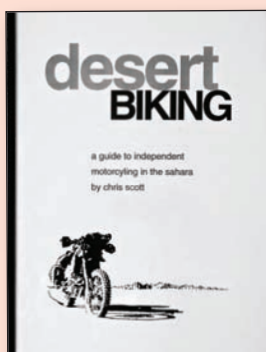
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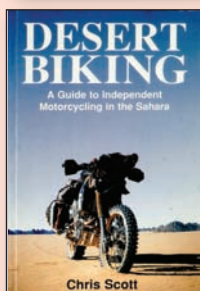
30 YEARS OF THE ADVENTURE MOTORCYCLING HANDBOOK



In the summer of 1991 I was dishwashing in a Mexican restaurant, recovering from a broken leg and another costly Saharan fiasco. The job was not too intellectually taxing so I thought I'd get into writing, having enjoyed describing my travels for motorcycle magazines in the 1980s.

I decided to compose a short report on what I'd learned the hard way in the previous decade's biking in the Sahara. Many riders, myself included, had trouble-strewn first trips, partly due to the lack of hard information on all aspects of what's now become known as 'adventure motorcycling'.

I bought myself an Amstrad, worked out how to turn it on and after a lot of wasted paper, dropped off a 30-page report entitled *Desert Biking: A Guide to Independent Motorcycling in the Sahara* at the Royal Geographical Society in London. For all I know the original is still tucked away in the Map Room's archives today.

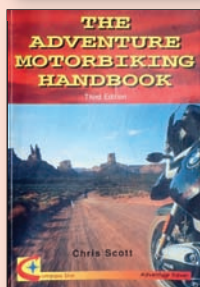


Rather pleased with the end result, I figured the report might have some faint commercial value and proposed this idea to what was then the Travellers Bookshop off London's Charing Cross Road. It was good timing as they were considering publishing niche travel guides and an expanded version of *DB* fitted the bill.

I spent a couple of months padding out the RGS report into a 100-page edition of *Desert Biking* which was published in late 1993. It didn't exactly hit the bookshops. Instead, as the pre-internet word somehow got around and requests trickled in, batches were Xeroxed and stapled in a copy shop in Notting Hill and then sent out.

Following the moderate success of this hand-made version, a revised and suitably expanded paperback edition of *Desert Biking* was published in September 1995. The updated format included the addition of 'travellers' tales' in the back.

With nothing similar around in English and seeing promise in the concept, Compass Star picked up the idea and took it a big step further with the publication of the retitled *The Adventure Motorbiking Handbook* ('AMH') in November 1997. It featured the practicalities and yarns of *Desert Biking* but brought in a network of two-wheeling contributors from around the globe to add expertise and help fill the gaps. It's a collaborative formula which still helps make the AMH what it is today.



Around that time I created adventure-motorcycling.com and got to grips with Claris Home Page. The website went on to feature over a thousand moto travellers' trip reports, similar to the ones scattered through this edition. Compass Star in turn

passed the rights on to **Trailblazer Guides** which, nearly 30 years down the line, brings us to the eight edition of the AMH.

In recent years the range of gear, bikes, know-how and tours has become greater than ever, but I believe the fundamentals of trip planning and bike preparation remain much as they did in the original *Desert Biking* report.

Enjoy the ride.



PLANNING & PREPARATION

Prepare. That's still the first word of the first chapter of this edition. The motorcycle adventure you're about to take on is going to be expensive, demanding and maybe even dangerous. Preparation doesn't mean the most expensive bike with all the latest accessories or booking lodgings months in advance; it means having a good understanding of what you're taking on and being equipped, literally and figuratively, to deal with it.

The decision to set off on a long motorcycle journey can germinate from a moment's inspiration, a wish to take on the 'Big Trip' after a succession of easier tours, or just the plain old desire to cut loose and have a big adventure.

You may not think so yet, but within a few pages you'll appreciate the mushroom effect of taking on such a venture. Choosing and preparing your bike might take up the lion's share of your time and the budget, but realigning your dream itinerary with the reality of visa acquisition, open borders and a realistic route also takes a huge amount of research. Post Covid, the situation will have changed since this was written and that won't end once you're on the road, so the planning is never really over until you stop.

The more you learn the more there is to consider, until you get to a magical point where, however briefly, you're ahead of the game. If you're lucky, that moment of overlanding nirvana coincides with your departure.

The extent of preparation varies greatly between individuals. Some will want secured accommodation linked by a string of GPS waypoints. Others will be satisfied with a rough idea and a loose schedule for any visa applications that must be made en route. **All plans are speculative** but you want to reach a level of preparation giving enough confidence in a venture that's always unpredictable.

Acquiring the correct **paperwork and visas** and sorting out your **money** arrangements is tedious but essential. It's also common to worry about carrying half a year's cash, acquiring visas on

You can get away without too much planning, but it's hard to avoid some level of preparation

Opposite: Two bikers, a map and a track. What the picture doesn't show is the months of planning and bike preparation to get to that stage.



THE BIG IDEA



WHERE

Language?

Asia

Africa

Latin America

Round the world

WHEN

Season

Time

Preparation

Duration

Money

Sponsorship

INFORMATION

Online

Guidebooks

Other travellers

ROUTE

Season

Security

Reconnaissance
trip?

Provisional
departure date

DOCUMENTS

Motoring docs

Vehicle ownership papers

TVIP / Carnet de Passages

Passport

Visas

Visas in advance –
home country?

E-Visa

Visa on arrival

MOTORCYCLE

Equip

Modify

Airfreight?

Shipping?



D-DAY

Money

Cash

Credit and debit cards

Insurance

Health

Vehicle



Travelling companions

Most of us instinctively know whether we want to set off alone, with a partner sitting snugly behind them, their mate in the mirror, or in a group, perhaps as part of an organised tour. Nevertheless, below are some considerations to mull over when considering travelling companions.

Alone

The perils and rewards of **going solo** are clear cut. On the debit side there's no one to help you in times of difficulty and no friendly face with whom to share your experiences. There's no one to help fix the bike or guard it while you nip into a store in a dodgy neighbourhood and worse still, no one to shoot cool video of you, mid-adventure. All this will make your trip tougher and inevitably introspective. This may be because you don't know anyone who's got the nerve or commitment to set off on a trip such as yours, or you're independent minded and like the idea of doing it alone.

It all sounds miserable until you consider the many rewards of solitary travel. Riding solo, your social exposure can be more acute; unless you're a real hardcore loner you're forced to commune with strangers who'll often make up the richest (and occasionally the most frustrating!) aspect of your trip; you have to look *out* at the world instead of being protected by the bubble of companionship. And unless you're going somewhere outlandish, you're bound to meet up with other riders and in most cases be glad of it.



MOTORCYCLE CHOICE

2

It's easy to buy a powerful bike. It's fairly easy to find a bike that's comfortable and economical. It's less common for that machine to have great suspension and be light enough to easily manage bad or unmade roads. What you're looking for is a hard-working utility bike, like the millions of 125s which scurry across the cities of the global south, but one which will also be enjoyable to ride to those places and beyond.

Big trips have been done on everything from step-thru scooters to full-dress cruisers, covering vast distances from a fortnight to a lifetime. Any machine that starts, turns and stops will do the job, but ask yourself would you like to chug across the Bolivian altiplano flat out on a moped while llamas trot past, struggle through the Gobi on a tourer weighing a third of a ton, or ride a bike they stopped making before you were born? Probably not because most of us narrow it down to a machine that will be versatile, trouble-free and enjoyable to ride.

Between a Kawasaki ZZR 1400 and a Chinese knock-off Monkey Bike there's something that ticks your boxes – but being undaunted by the prospect of the vast, desolate steppe, and especially in taking spontaneous gravel road excursions is just about the biggest guarantee of having a real adventure in terms of the wild places you'll see and the people you'll encounter. That long sentence summarises this book in a nutshell.

In the end a **do-it-all mid-weight bike** with some off-road ability fits the bill. The alternative is touring the world's highways from one border to the next – not as dull as it sounds – or riding an unconventional or inappropriate machine with a fixed grin just to prove a point or attract attention.



CB500X: does it all but does it do it for you?

***There are
'adventure
motorcycles'
and there are
'travel bikes'***

* * * * * SMALL SINGLES * * * * *

ROYAL ENFIELD HIMALAYAN

**Manufactured** BS4 model from 2018**Engine** 411cc air-cooled single**Kerb weight** 192kg/423lb**Seat height** 800mm/31.5"**Fuel capacity** 15 ltr/3.9 US gal**Riders like** Image, torque, off-road handling, low seat**Don't like** Dashboard, valve adjustment intervals, brakes**Might also like** A Bullet? In India they outsell Himalayans 40:1

The power of a 250 with the weight of a mid-sized twin. How's that going to work? Surprisingly it did, once they sorted out the many issues on the original BS3 carb model, which is still sold into some Western markets. Everyone else gets an EFI.

Part of the Himalayan's success was down to nothing more profound than a keen price which briefly saw demand exceed supply. And you do get a lot for your money: an OK screen and bashplate, centre stand, small tail rack, a good range and those nifty tank racks. Some couldn't shake off condensation in the clocks; a month in the desert cleared mine. The head bearings also got notchy but were replaced on warranty. Stick with the 5000km oil changes, but valve checks can be pushed to twice that once it's all bedded in. Other than that, the Him had fewer maddening issues than many better established marques.

Puffing out just 24hp on a good day, you'd hope it's over-engineered and under stressed. It's really not worth meddling with fuel-remapping black boxes. It's not that sort of bike – accept it or get something else. Stock suspension is surprisingly firm; many Japanese bikes come sprung far worse out of the crate.

On backroads and trails you'll be amazed how easily it rides; the low seat, low-revving engine and low centre of gravity dash low expectations to give a sure-footed ride, despite the weight. Like the 310GS, there's plenty of steel in the subframe to support luggage systems, too. Look up AMH8 contributor Noraly (p351) who rode hers over 35,000km across Asia. A Himalayan is not like other bikes, but it's not some faux-retro Bullet either. Try one before committing: you may get it, you may not.

* * * * * M I D - S I Z E D T W I N S * * * * *

KTM 790 ADVENTURE [R]



Manufactured From 2019

Engine 798cc water-cooled parallel twin

Kerb weight 205kg/452lb [207/444]

Seat height 830mm/32.6" [880/34.6]

Fuel capacity 20 ltr/5.3 US gal

Riders like Suspension, weight, 21/18 wheels, service intervals, quickshifter

Don't like Seat, looks, economy, scant torque, orange annoyances

Alternatives KTM V-twins, Husqvarna Norden 901, XT700

KTM's 790 Adventures shared a detuned Duke engine, with fully adjusted WP suspension as standard, and 40mm more on the R. All sorts of electronic aids and modes light up the TFT dash though returning more than 23kpl (54 US) is a struggle. Tubeless spoked wheels are an option, too.

The Adventure gets a two-piece seat which can be lowered right down to 830mm but the 'Comfort' version (**top**) is a plank. The R's one-piece perch is substantially higher but gives more room to slide about. The innovative 20-litre pannier tank keeps the engine nice and warm.



Not everyone gets the KTM thing; probably more talked about than actually travelled. Stepping off an XT700 onto a 790 on a off-road course, I was put off by the hot, raucous engine and not that struck by a low centre of gravity. Later, after a quick blast in Morocco I was won over by the smooth engine and quickshifter.

As with so many new bikes, early adopters suffer trivial warranty issues. Lengthy 15,000 kilometre service intervals help sweeten the pill. There's a place for the 690/701 singles but the 790 Adventure's appeal is less obvious, with many already distracted by the seemingly better-equipped **Husky 901 (left)**.

MODIFICATIONS & EQUIPMENT

3

There's a difference between a fortnight's touring holiday or ticking off a BDR in the western US, and setting off across Asia, Africa or Latin America. In other words, heading out into the AM Zone – this book's definition of adventure motorcycling. Assuming that most readers don't live in the heart of these three continents, riding there can be summed up as 'exposure'. Among other things we'll get to later, you'll be a long way from the familiar support networks of motorcycle dealers, warranty claims, insurance, formal vehicle recovery and clinical repairs. Of course some of those things can be tracked down, but you may still be in a place where you don't speak the language so well, have the clock ticking on your visa or be under other pressures.

Because ordinary problems can become complications in the AMZ, it helps to simplify things and be ready for the worst. It's not as simple as having piles of money because a trouble-free ride is not guaranteed by buying the most expensive bike and festooning it with the most expensive kit. What counts is some experience running your machine with as fool-proof a set-up as you can manage, and a positive attitude which includes the ability to deal with issues as they arise.

Whether you're buying at home or abroad, **thorough preparation** of your machine is just about the best insurance you can get for setting out on a mechanically trouble-free trip. And because a travel bike requires modifications, the more time you spend riding your modified machine before you leave, the better.

The great thing is that in the past few years, both the range of bikes and equipment has expanded greatly. What counts hasn't changed and **what follows is what works for most people**, backed up by experience. It's not a tablet brought down from the mountainside. You may well have your own creative solutions because coming up with them and crafting your bike over weeks and months is all part of the adventure.

***What follows is
what works for
most people... it's
not a tablet brought
down from the
mountainside.
You may well have
your own solutions***



Top left: Strap-on seat pad on a TTR250; fine as long as the legs are long enough.

Top right: PR7 with an AirHawk variable pressure air cushion, another strap-on solution.

Left: Wider Seat Concepts perch on a 690. Compare with the Selle Dalla Valle **right**, though to be fair, unlike Seat Concepts or Corbin, Selle specialise in competition saddles.

‘Bottom’ line, no matter what you ride you’ll be doing a lot of it so addressing saddle soreness is crucial if you’re to enjoy your ride. The dynamic elements of your bike – power, braking, handling and looks – will appeal to a broad range of users, but comfort is subjective. If you think you need a better seat, don’t wait. Addressing your **comfort is vital** because once you’re fatigued due to discomfort or pain, you’re much more prone to making mistakes or can be slower to react to hazards.

WINDSHIELDS

However slow your bike, consider some sort of windshield or improving what you might already have. Out in the open all day, the relief at anything over 80kph will greatly reduce fatigue without detracting from the thrill. The trick is finding the **right screen height and angle** for your height and helmet style to eliminate turbulence.



Off-road speeds are lower and visibility more important, so small screens are better.

Others concede that riding motorcycles generates the phenomenon of wind rushing past. The key is to find a level between zero and eleven that’s tolerable to you



Left: Footrest-mounted KTM rackangle. Note rusting brace added from the tail rack.



Right: Solid On the Road rack from Germany. Adapted to tow a caravan.

MYO racks

Here are some other points to consider if making your own rack.

- With tubes, use easily re-weldable and sourced **steel**, not aluminium.
- **Round tube** is stronger than same-sized square section, but square is easier to weld and right-angle even easier. Minimise curved sections.
- Solidly **bolt** the rack in **three** or more places per side.
- Homogenise **bolt** sizes and check tightness in the early days, or after rough stages. Carry spare bolts in case they shear.
- Where applicable, make sure there's **enough room** for wheel removal, easy chain adjustment, full suspension compression (and kickstart).
- A **brace across the back** eliminates inward flexing to create a much more rigid 'cube'. Straight or 'V', the lower the brace the better. Some soft luggage racks dodge this, but can end up being heavier than a regular rackangle.
- With cut tube ends, don't crush, drill and bolt. Weld on a **tab** and drill it as this point is often prone to failure.
- Don't expect total rigidity. Fully loaded, **it will wobble side-to-side** but you'll get used to it. It's better than bending or snapping.

Because of the complex forces coming from all directions and which weren't necessarily anticipated when the bike was designed, the simplest way to ensure a rack – home-made or otherwise – doesn't lead to problems down the road is to **keep your payload light**.



Left: Another unbraced bag support, this one's from SW Motech to suit their 32-litre Dakars.



Right: MYO 'ear rack' weighed a fraction of the 5kg Enfield rackangle. Used with Kriega OS22s.



Left: Well-known Oxford Hot Grips. Does what it says on the control box.

Right: Down puffa; a third of the weight and bulk of a heated jacket and works off the bike, too.

You'll get the usual claims from waterproof membranes as well as ruffy-tuffy, carbon-fibre-look knuckle armour. Better to leave pelting rain to either some muffs, big hand guards or the screen. Bear in mind that **heated grips** work best with thin-palmed gloves.

Cold-weather clothing

It can't all be one long summer holiday, especially for genuine round-the-worlders who'll expect to face a cold season or sustained high altitude at some point. Retaining and maintaining **body heat** is what counts; when the ambient temperature drops to a typical, mid-winter's 41°F (5°C) on a bike the wind chill index corresponds to 26°F or -3°C. Fairings, windshields and handlebar muffs – bodged from roadside rubbish if necessary – are the first line of defence. Keeping warm also means **regular stops** to stimulate circulation as well as taking on hot food and drinks (or when bursting for a slash). When under-dressed the body involuntarily tenses up and shivers to try and generate heat, and old hands will know that a stiff, chilled rider loses the suppleness needed to control a motorcycle proficiently. Add in a chilly night's added hazards and warmth becomes imperative for safety.

Insulation is the next step: it's the trapped, still air heated by your body that keeps you snug, not bulky materials per se. Use a merino base layer with a thick fleece or compact down jacket under your shell, plus a neck tube and a balaclava. Seal off all draughts. **One-piece** fleece, base layers or even riding suits like Aerostich's Roadcrafter are comfier as they eliminate the gap (or compressed waistbands) in the vital kidney area where core body heat is easily lost. The one-piece payback comes when things warm up or nature rings the double bell, so that combination is best left to dedicated sub-Arctic rides.

Your engine produces a surplus of electrical power; capitalise on it with **heated grips and clothing**. As your body chills blood is drawn from the limbs back to the core to sustain the vital organs. By externally heating your trunk warm blood can be redirected back towards frigid limbs. Heated grips are brilliant – you will never go back – but even above freezing, heated jackets don't exactly replicate dozing in front of a roaring fire, they merely take the edge off. That's until you switch them off and notice how cold it really is. New technologies using carbon fibre, woven heat pads or nano-ceramic infrared microwire are leaving conventional heated wire elements

**Turn on,
plug in
but don't
chill out**

Wild camping

I can guarantee it'll be the nights spent wild camping out in the mountains or deserts ... that'll make up the best memories of your adventure

On the road it's surprising how rarely you actually need to camp; with a bit of planning and internet, lodgings are easy to find. The truth is, disregarding the savings and autonomy, camping wild is part of the big adventure and unlike hotels, the choice is infinite. There'll come a day when you either have to, or want to park up in a nice spot and enjoy a night out.

Sure it means a whole lot of extra gear, but that should really add up to no more than 6–7kg or 14lbs, plus food. In return you get the autonomy to not only ride where you like but also stay where you like.

Sleeping, cooking and eating are the basic elements of camping (washing too, I suppose). The greater the comfort and efficiency of these elements, the better your camping experience, and on a long ride it needs to be. As with all biking gear, it all depends how committed you are to saving space and weight.

It's worth taking the camping clobber because I can guarantee you it'll be the nights spent wild camping out in the mountains or deserts, or the occasions when you're invited in by the rural locals that'll make up the best memories of your moto adventure, not a crummy hotel listening to scuttling cockroaches, dripping taps and barking dogs.



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Summer 2020 is too soon to know how Covid-19 will affect global travel, but we're assured that, like malaria, it's here for a while and also, in a year or two a vaccine will exist.

One thing's clear from websites like worldometers.info/coronavirus, the impact of the virus has been disproportionately huge in Western Europe and the US. Mid-2020, just a **dozen countries** accounted for three-quarters of cases. And even with global attempts at massaging official figures, it does seem that **sub-Saharan Africa** was barely affected.

Current explanations include a young population and quickly enacting procedures learned from previous lethal epidemics.

What that means is that AMH readers – most probably from those dozen countries – may have to carry a **Covid-19 vaccination certificate** (when it becomes available), as well as possibly submitting to additional tests and even quarantines at some borders. Whether needed or effective, **face masks** must now be part of your personal kit.

Typhoid	Oral or injection. Common in all developing countries.
Yellow Fever	Single dose.
Diphtheria,	(BCG) Vaccinations are routinely given in childhood in
Polio &	developed countries. If you think you may not have had
Tuberculosis	them, ask your doctor about a booster dose.

With all these conditions it is worth remembering that having a vaccination does not make you immune and it is always best to avoid coming into contact with the source of the disease in the first place. Having said that it is important to keep in perspective that all these conditions are incredibly rare and it would be a shame to let paranoia about contracting some exotic condition dissuade you.

There are many sources of information about travel vaccinations and other health issues on the internet:

Medical Advisory Service for Travellers Abroad masta-travel-health.com
 World Health Organisation who.int
 Travel Health Online tripprep.com
 Travel Doctor traveldoctor.co.uk

Diarrhoea

Loose bowel movements occurs in up to 80% of travellers, usually simply from an altered diet or the stresses of an upset body clock, while infective diarrhoea is caused by contaminated food or water. It follows that the latter may be avoided by taking food handling and preparation precautions:

- Prepare your own food
- Wash hands frequently and use hand sanitiser if you can't
- Protect food from insects and rodents
- Keep food preparation surfaces spotless
- Cook food thoroughly and eat immediately

In addition be particularly cautious with:

- **Shellfish and crustaceans** As filter feeders they tend to concentrate whatever organisms may be in the local sewage outfall which may also contain poisonous biotoxins.

PICKING UP HEAVY MOTORCYCLES ALONE

The hardest big bikes to lift are tall, slim twins like big V-Stroms, KTM Vs or an AT, especially with full tanks. GS12s or bikes with wide baggage fall less flat, making lifting much easier. Practise at home, **lift with the legs** and a straight back and **don't rush** or you'll do yourself an injury.

A Dead lift. Grab bar and rack, get close and lift with legs. Or lift bar only, angled forward (as in picture). More leverage; helps to be tall.

B Back crawl. Push butt against the seat as you crawl backwards. Work best with GS12s.

C Kneeling wedge. Arms under bike, edge forward and lift. Best for shorter riders.



GOING COMMANDO

You're in the wilds with a dead bike or injured partner and no signal. Use your **GPS tracker** (p184) then follow the '3 Ps' below.



Protection (shelter)

With no **tent**, shelter extends your ability to survive, be it shade (**above**) a windbreak or a rain tarp. It includes **headwear** to minimise heat loss or sunstroke. With some sort of shelter secured, turn your attention to either recovering your bike, rescuing a partner or preparing to walk out.

Position

If you've kept track your position should be easy to pinpoint. It may be just a short walk back to the last village or miles to a minor road. If no one will come you must walk back to the last sign of human presence. Look on the **map** or climb to **high ground** to see if there's somewhere to get help. Consider torching a smoky component your bike like a spare tyre, *but only if there's someone who will see it.*

Provisions

You can survive ten times as long without food provided you have **water**. Staying put obviously uses less energy but may not be an option so if there's a water source, use or follow it. Rivers often lead to settlements or human activity.

Dos and don'ts

- **Know your limits.** There's no rescue service.
- **Don't go alone** into remote areas in bad weather.
- **Avoid known danger areas** with bandits, terrorists, conflicts or landmines.
- **Avoid deserts in summer or high mountains in winter.** Survival margins shrink drastically, especially in deserts.
- **Know where you're going.** Avoid cross-country short-cuts, have adequate route information, navigational aids and comms.
- **Stop when lost.** Acknowledge your error and, if necessary, turn back.
- **Carry enough fuel and water** for your stage. Difficult terrain and physical activity greatly increase consumption.
- **Don't waste water.** Get in the habit of being frugal with washing and cleaning.
- **Carry essential spares and tools.** At least be familiar with tyre repairs and fault diagnosis (see p233).
- In a group **stay together** or tell others what you're doing, both when riding or taking an evening stroll.
- **Avoid riding at night** unless unavoidable.





Puerto Montt, a turn west leads to misty Chiloé island, while taking the ferry south takes you onto the initial stretches of Ruta 7 – the **Carretera Austral** – which ends at O'Higgins (you can exit into Argentina at Cochrane, or sooner).

The Carretera links formerly isolated towns and wilderness areas over 1200km south from Puerto Montt, via two **ferries**. To get to Chaitén from Puerto Montt take a half-hour ferry crossing from Caleta la Arena to Caleta Puelche, then a four-hour ferry from Río Negro to Caleta Gonzalo. Or it's also possible to take a ferry to Chaitén from Quellón on Chiloé Island.

South of Chaitén, the Carretera consists of a mix of pavement and gravel amid stunning scenery which generally trounces Argentina's Ruta 40 equivalent (and without the lashing gales). Services are available in Coyhaique and, to a lesser extent, in Cochrane. Small hotels and campgrounds are widely scattered and wild camping is aptly named as the views are fantastic and the streams and lakes are pure and clean.

The riding's outstanding but there are more impressive roads to explore, including toward the coast at Puerto Aisén and Puerto Cisnes. The easiest **exit to Argentina** hereabouts is via Chile Chico after riding around the spectacular blue Lago General Carrera (or ferrying across to shorten the journey). You may also want to check out the lake's marble caves from Puerto Río Tranquilo.

Another picturesque crossing into Argentina that's a bit more difficult than Chile Chico is the X-83 through Patagonia National Park. It's also one of the few places in South America where you might spot a puma. Be aware that



a bed. If you end up in this situation, since setting up a tent on the side of the road is difficult when it's so windy, look for little *refugios* that are popular with cyclists for overnight stops. They're free to use and may even have running water inside.

From either ferry it's still about 100km to the Argentine border with **no fuel stations**, so fill up in Punta Arenas or Rio Gallegos, or at Rio Grande 230km north of Ushuaia. Major roads will be sealed, except for a gravel bit to the King Penguin colony on the Chilean side (**photo p299**). If you haven't had your fill the mountains around Ushuaia can provide some gravel roads but at this lowly latitude expect snow and rain, even in high summer.

Ushuaia is a surprisingly bustling place, with a lively pub scene and a surfeit of penguin-themed souvenirage. There are quite a few hostels, hotels and vast numbers of guesthouses, but only the crowded hostels come cheap. There's a municipal campground about 9km west of town at -54.832300, -68.421940.

Your obligatory end-of-the-road shot by the Ushuaia sign can be done in two ways: you can simply go to the centre of town in Ushuaia by the docks and get a picture of the colourfully-painted 'Ushuaia: Fin del Mundo' sign (-54.807303, -68.302517; but you won't be able to get your bike in front of it).

Alternatively, 24km to the west, within the Tierra del Fuego NP is the famous 'Bahia la Pataia' wooden signboard at the absolute end of Ruta 3 (-54.855198, -68.576669). You'll have to pay a park entrance fee, but only a peso-pinching few begrudge that expense after all those hard-won miles. Wherever you've come from to get here, it's been a long ride and it's not over yet.

Wherever you've come from ... it's been a long ride and it's not over yet

\$0.92 a litre, but quality drops off in the sticks. The same goes for **drinking water** so fill up regularly or plan to filter. **ATMs** work in congested Ulaanbaatar (UB) where half of Mongolia's 3 million population lives, but ATMs dish out relatively small amounts so out in the countryside, although living is cheap, carry plenty of **dollars** or local *tugriks*.

If not riding to Mongolia, consider putting your bike on the Trans-Siberian in Moscow and maybe riding back. Direct trains to UB leave weekly, take five days but cost at least \$800.

Mongolia's 'extreme continental' **climate** means two out of three days are sunny and rain is rare. Because the country is relatively high, UB's average annual temperature is actually a couple of degrees *below* freezing so don't expect to break out in a sweat. Snowy sub-zero episodes are likely even if the aridity makes deep snowfall rare, but at least that means you need carry less water. Up in the Mongolian Altai it can be freezing at any time of year.

Visas and borders

Nearly two dozen nationalities, including Canadians, Germans and Americans **don't need visas** for 30- to 90-day visits. (Full list at consul.mn/eng). Otherwise visit the nearby Russian consulates (below) which do 30-day visas for \$70 next day or \$30 in 3 days; it's valid for 90 days.

Irkutsk
11 Lapina ul.
52.280000, 104.285000

Ulan Ude
Near corner of Prostsoyuzaya and
Lenina ul; look for a large domed roof.
51.832091, 107.581541



**Main overland routes
across Mongolia**

Central Asia

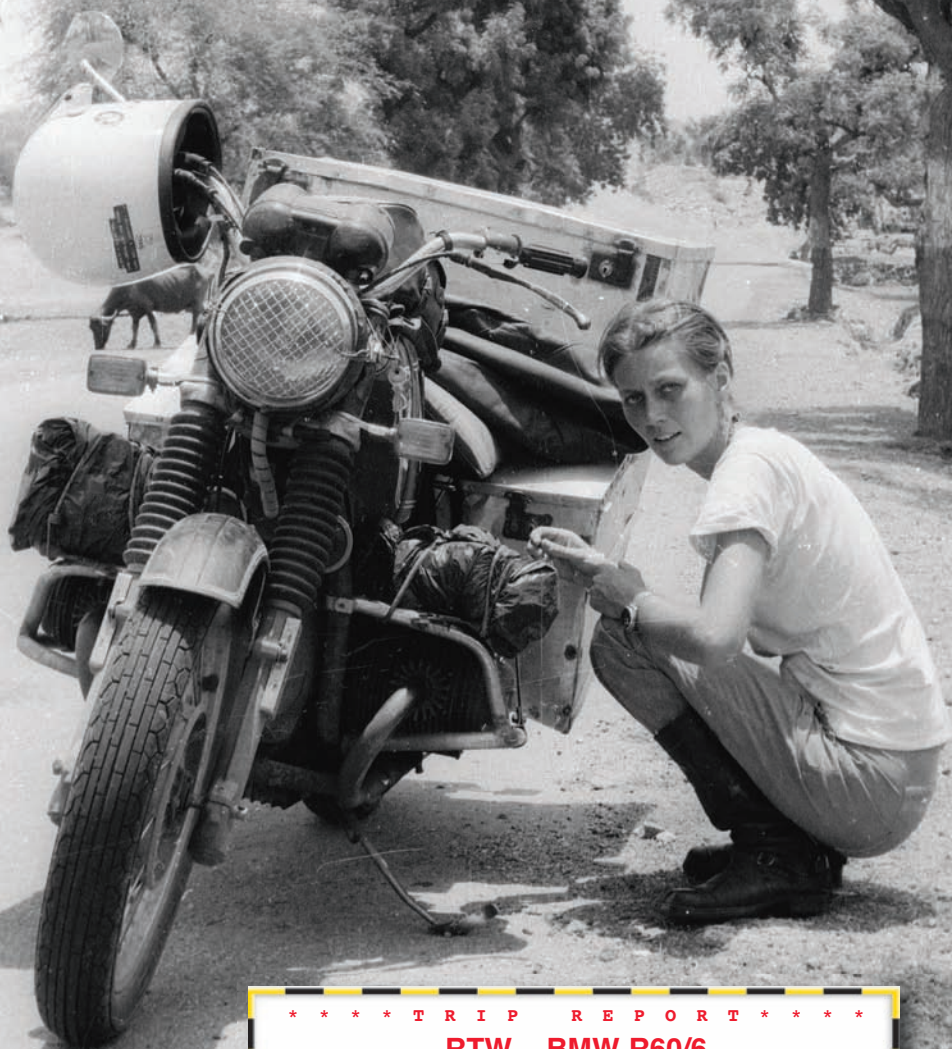
Assuming some must take the high route to the north side of Afghanistan (most probably because of Iran), the four smaller 'stans of Central Asia offer a much more satisfying alternative to hauling along the Trans-Siberian Highway, as well as the interminable Kazakh steppe away from its far eastern corner. The highlights are wild camping in the yurt-dappled pastures and mountains of **Kyrgyzstan** (opposite) and the stunning Pamirs of **Tajikistan** (pictured p343). The fiery deserts and sheer oddness of **Turkmenistan** and fabled Silk Route cities of **Uzbekistan** cap off a rich cultural experience.

Central Asian people – be they Kazakh or Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Uzbek or Tajik – are famously hospitable (below) and better still, there's been an easing up on **visa regimes**, other regulations and petty hassle or sneaky bribe-generating tricks at borders. Plus if the thought of riding all the way there or back is a bit much, there are outfitters (usually Polish) who run vans and trailers between Kyrgyzstan and Poland and it's even possible to **leave your bike** in ECU member countries for up to a year.

Language, maps and money

Although **Uzbekistan** and **Turkmenistan** are slowly moving to modified Roman alphabets, learn the **Cyrillic alphabet** (see p323) so you can read the road signs. **Russian** remains the lingua franca throughout the 'stans but the





* * * * * T R I P R E P O R T * * * * *

RTW – BMW R60/6

Name, YoB, Job Elspeth Beard, 1959, Architect
Duration, distance, cost Two years (1982-4), 35,000m, £6000
Modifications Alloy boxes in Sydney
Bike's strong point Robust, easy to fix, 65mpg, comfortable
Bike problems Electrical, largely due to age and mileage
Biggest headache Bad roads, terrible drivers, bureaucracy, illness
Biggest surprise How small the world was, people incredibly kind
Favourite places New Zealand, Thailand, Nepal and Ladakh
Next trip Tajikistan

Photo Rajasthan, India

Main overland routes across Southeast Asia



AFRICA

ROUTE OUTLINES

Africa is the **original overland adventure**, established a century ago in the midst of the colonial era when orderly British possessions spanned the equator from Cairo to Cape.

Now, of the three continents covered in this book, for a full transit, Africa is the most challenging – not so much from the perceived danger or poor infrastructure but for the tedious and expensive **paperwork**. Many intrepid riders have travelled the world and the seven seas, but have never bothered with Africa. As always, you get the hang of it and the Chinese bitumen party has nearly sealed the main routes making a road-oriented machine less of a liability. But don't count on it. It remains to be seen how these rapidly built roads will handle a few monsoons or Saharan summers under the wheels of the typically overloaded local transportation.

Regional conflicts, road conditions, climate and petty corruption are not unique to Africa, but **visa acquisition** constrains your freedom to linger or roam. Some places insist on visas from your home country, while on the road consulates in adjacent countries now demand hotel reservations along with the **eye-watering tariffs**. Much depends on your nationality, where you apply and, not



The Nile Route

In terms of terrain, climate and fiery visa hoops to jump through, the 'Cairo to Cape' run down the east side of Africa is the classic route and less of a challenge. But don't forget, this is still Africa so it won't be like popping down to IKEA for some funky pillow covers. Composed largely of former British colonies, **English** is widely spoken but, with tempting lodges and fees at some borders, it all adds up. Africa is not cheap. On this side a carefully used Visa card is handy and the **US dollar** is the hard currency of choice; further south the **South African rand** may be acceptable in countries which border RSA.

South of the equator those from Commonwealth nationalities usually get **visas** at the border but Brits pay higher prices although **TIPs** are often free. And now with the main routes in northern Sudan and northern Kenya **sealed**, for the moment you can probably ride all the way on some sort of tarmac. This means the right **season** is less critical, though as you near the equator the increase in **elevation** creates a more equable climate, with a lushness to the scenery that makes places like Uganda well worth the diversion. Away from expensive game parks, mile-for-mile the lowland plains or *veldt* of Tanzania and Botswana can get a bit dull.

***As few as seven
English-speaking
borders separate
Cairo from
Cape Town***



East and Southern Africa

Coming from the north with the worst presumably over, most riders take a breather and get repairs done in **Kenya**, sub-Saharan Africa's most visited and touristy country after South Africa. Along with a dramatic improvement in the road and tourist infrastructure, you also start **riding on the left** from here all the way down to the Cape, **English** is spoken and, depending on your nationality, **visa hassles** should be greatly reduced.

But the human psyche being what it is, it can all become a bit of a parade or extended *safari* (the Swahili word for 'journey') as you hop from one rowdy backpacker haunt to the next, or bounce off overland truck groups. Suddenly, it's like Southeast Asia with endless choices and a cold beer in every fridge. After too much of this some profess a nostalgia for the rough days of Ethiopia and Sudan, places you may have rushed through early in your African experience before anything went terribly wrong. In East Africa most riders **carry on camping** from around \$10 per person as, along with national park entry fees (where accessible), **fuel prices** and tempting shopping malls (remember them?), things can get **expensive**. For lodging recommendations, **online** is clearly the place to be looking from here on.

INTO KENYA VIA MARSABIT

This once notorious track – with the added thrill of being shot at or turned over by *shifty* bandits – is now sealed and so another legendary African suspension wrecker got tamed. **Kenya visas** are online at ecitizen.go.ke with 90 days validity and duration for \$51.

From Moyale the 500km run down through Kenya goes via Marsabit to Isiolo. Halfway down the road, **Marsabit** doesn't offer much in the way of first class accommodation, but many overlanders choose *Henry's Camp* (ask for 'Henry the Swiss') west of town (2.345833, 37.966667). After the final 250km from Marsabit to **Isiolo** you can legitimately beat your chest and make Tarzan noises: you've arrived in East Africa.

From **Isiolo** you'll no doubt stop at Nanyuki's **equator sign** where guys demonstrate the water-down-a-plughole trick. Watching the GPS count down will be an event you're unlikely to have to yourself, though it's a good excuse to get off and stretch your legs before you reach Mount Kenya.

Nairobi

As you near Nairobi the road deteriorates, as does the quality of the driving. Hey ho, it's another crazy African capital. Passing Thika you'll be entering the city from the northeast so be prepared for several large, chaotic roundabouts. If Touratech still make 'Ben Hur' wheel spikes, now's the time to fit them. One roundabout is where the A2 road filters down to Forrest Road; another is at the junction of Forrest and Ngara Roads. Try to avoid the rush hours, especially on the Uhuru and Mombasa Roads.

Main overland routes across Southern Africa



WEST TO UGANDA AND RWANDA

Depending on the season, the lush highlands and cool lakes of **Uganda** are a tonic after Sudan and Ethiopia. Many travellers are taken aback by this 'Jurassic Park' verdure as there's no shortage of arid savannah and desert further north or south.

On top of that, many find that Uganda lacks Kenya's overt commercialism and prices found further south. **Gorilla spotting** in the rainforests (**below**) is an exception, so is rafting on the Nile or you could just chill by a lake for free. Despite what is now expensive fuel, for overlanders Uganda is an East African favourite. An East African **visa** (📧 eastafrican-visa.com; \$100; 90 days) covers Kenya and Rwanda. A carnet won't be needed but a Yellow Card will, or buy insurance at the border. You'll also pay a vehicle tax adding up to about \$20.

The road out of Nairobi passes through the **Rift Valley** with inexpensive camping on Lake Naivasha at a cool 1890m, and 25km west at Lake Nakuru. Crossing the **equator**, there are more lakes before reaching Eldoret.

In **Uganda**, the main road takes a turn towards Lake Victoria and Jinja, a popular place for white water **rafting** which may well have the same colouring effect on your hair. If you decide to raft with them, *Nile River Explorers* at Bujagali Falls are recommended as well as offering inexpensive camping.

If coming up from the south, not least Kenya, travellers find **Kampala** a relaxed and inexpensive city. The established *Red Chilli Hideaway* has moved 10km east of the city centre (0.315000, 32.663500); they also run a place at Murchison's Falls, 250km north of Kampala; a good base for visiting Murchison Falls National Park.

Along with the vast expanse of **Lake Victoria**, Uganda shares smaller lakes with its neighbours, including Lake Albert and Lake Edward. Along the south shore of Lake Albert visit the Kibale Forest National Park and the Kibale Forest Primate Reserve.

The road to Kisoro is now a serpentine causeway of asphalt towards the **Rwenzori Mountains**, Bwindi National Park, the Virunga Mountains and Rwanda's Parc des Volcans with the famous silverback gorillas.

Enter **Rwanda** near the Parc with your East African visa. This is another lush country but uninterested in tourism. **Camping** is less common; **missions** offer an alternative. Add pricier **fuel** as well as national parks fees and it all gets costly again so arrive with plenty of dollars.

Burundi needs a visa from Kigali (-1.941510, 30.086655) but the cost and wait is discouraging so most leave for Tanzania at Rusumo (\$50; 90 days or £30 for a 7-day transit visa). Show the CdP; a TIP is free.



MOZAMBIQUE

If running out of time, passport pages, money or willpower, the typical 2500km transit from Tanzania to the RSA or Eswatini (Swazi) border may sound like the solution.

This is one of Africa's oldest former colonies but was never the jewel in Portugal's crown and ended up more exploited and less developed than most. As elsewhere, independence led to a ruinous civil war (stirred by neighbouring countries) from which the place is still recovering.

Short cuts apart, on a bike the country's sole attraction is its undeveloped coastline although, compared to some of the wealthier neighbours, you may find it a bit rough rounds the edges and with associated driving standards. So you'll be thrilled to hear that, like much of the region, the police have a reputation for zeal; observe the speed limits or pay the price.

Along with a visit to Ilha de Mozambique, if you've not yet had your statutory week of Indian Ocean R&R, then the resorts opposite the Bazaruto Islands near Vilanculos in the far south may be what you're after.

Inland, it's just a hot arid plain until you rise into the mountains bordering the east shore of Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi). Few people venture here so it's bound to be an adventure.

Officially, you need a **visa** from your home country; in practice you get 30 days at most non-Tanzanian land borders from \$50.

Otherwise, try Dar es Salaam (-6.813832, 39.290450) or more easily, Lilongwe (-13.963346, 33.787977) or Eswatini.

The infrastructure in Mozambique may not have got quite as trashed as Angola's, but


it has recovered more slowly, and both these countries share the menace of landmines. It's why most overlanders still view Mozambique as a short transit rather than a place to explore.

About 115km from Masasi and 250km from the

coast (regular ferry) is the **Negomano** bridge (-11.41697, 38.495820) across the Rovuma border river. On the Moz side the bitumen soon ends, with talk in 2019 of extending it 170km to Mueda.

There's an even more remote border bridge much further inland, 120km from Songea (-11.578333, 35.428333) – at either spot expect border formalities to be informal so bring plenty of dollars and fuel. Aim for Lichinga, back on the main road network. You can now strike out for Malawi at Mandimba by Lake Nyasa, or cross at Milange further south, for Zimbabwe via the road from Zimbabwe to Malawi via the Zambezi bridge at Tete.


Otherwise cross into South Africa at Ressano-Garcia for Kotmatipoort, near the famous Kruger Park.

The once-active  mozguide.com is another forum that's become a busier but less useable Facebook page.



Victoria Falls, Hwange and Bulawayo

Victoria Falls is the name of both the waterfall and the small Zimbabwean resort. Accommodation ranges from five-star hotels to basic camping or national park lodges.

Food and fuel are plentiful at the Falls, although for spare parts you'll need to get to Hwange, 100km south. Hwange lends its name to Zimbabwe's largest national park ( zimparks.org). Carrying on east from Hwange leads to Lake Kariba bordering Zambia and the small resort of Mlibizi, the lake's southwestern terminal for the ferry. **Bulawayo** is a lovely quiet city with wide open streets and a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. You're now ready for quite possibly your last African border crossing into South Africa.

CONTRIBUTORS

July Behl's travels are interlinked between food, photography and writing. A partnerships director based in London, his recent bimbles were from Alaska to Argentina, after Asia, Europe and Madagascar. July writes for travel magazines and on thebigmotoadventure.com where a book launch is imminent.

thebigmotoadventure.com

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David Smith set off on a DR650 to see Australia in 2014, and although he had a ball, he found it didn't quite scratch the itch. A year later, he geared up and rode from Sydney to London with girlfriend, Ghigi.

Ken Thomas started riding and racing in 1964. Thirty years later he rode a Ducati to Ukraine with daughter Caroline before backpacking around the world then cycling from Canada to Mexico along the Rockies.

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Danielle (**Dan**) **Ward** and **Dave King** have been travelling together on bikes for thirty-five years and still get a buzz out of finding new places to go. They have an almost fanatical love of 690s and 701s and use them for travelling abroad and trail riding in the UK.

Dylan Wickrama ran a small car repair workshop in Switzerland but packed it all in 2010 to embark on a journey around the world on his motorcycle. It was the journey which turned him into an author, speaker and a film maker on the world's adventure stage.

ride2xplore.com



8
EDN

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