

PEOPLE

Heike Pirngruber

Occupation: Camera woman and photographer

Nationality: German

Age: 42

There are no barriers and borders for Heike, just the determination to go and do. At an early age, she already knew she wanted to see the world, hence, this epic solo cycling from Germany to Australia. Follow her two-wheel traverse on www.pushbikegirl.com.

What attracted you to the great outdoors?

All my life I enjoyed being outdoor – camping with a wonderful campfire, silence, wildlife, stars and just enjoying the fresh air and great smell in the morning waking up in a beautiful forest or in a nice setting in the mountains.

Why decide to cycle from Germany to Australia?

I always dreamt about cycling around the world. And finally after many years dreaming about it, it was the right time to start. I chose Australia because I love it; it is my favourite country and since I am a child I wanted to explore it. I have been there four times so far. In 2011, I crossed the desert with my pushbike.

Before embarking on this cycle trip, what were you doing?

I quit my job in 2011 before I flew to Australia cycling and hiking through Tasmania and the desert. After Australia I spent time cycling in Europe and South East Asia before I finally started my trip "Let's go east." Before 2011, I worked for German's biggest TV station ZDF as a freelance camera woman. I am also a professional photographer.

How did you prepare for such an epic journey?

Well, to be honest I decided about six weeks before I started that I am actually heading off. I have done so many other trips in my life, I had all my gear and I knew where I want to go and what I will expect. It might sound weird, but that's how it was.

What were your main concerns with this adventure?

Well, the biggest step was to say good bye to family and friends not knowing when I will return.



I was attacked by two motorbike riders in Turkey, so afterwards each time I hear a motorbike coming closer I turn around and watch them carefully. But these worries are over. I was also worried about Iran. Going to Iran as a single woman, didn't seem to be the cleverest thing to do, but as most people on this planet, I was totally wrong. I met the friendliest people on the planet. The planet is full of very nice people and most of them want to help and protect me. It is really unbelievable how much they welcome me; it doesn't matter where I am going.

What bike are you using?

A simple mountain bike. Old and worn out, but I still believe it is best for travelling. It doesn't look so expensive anymore, it is simple to fix and most of the parts I can get somewhere on the way.

What are the best moments you had so far in this cycle tour?

I stayed with locals in a yurt in Albania and had a special "candle light dinner" in the mountains, I camped in sight of the Grand Canyon of Oman and had a wonderful camp spot for myself, I had a lot of good moments in Iran, which was on one side the toughest country so far, because of being the centre of attention all the time. But on the other hand, I experienced some special moments while they were remembering a few deaths of some imams and the "celebration" was something really special to see.

What are the worst?

To say good bye to my mum. The attack in Turkey, kids threw stones at me in nearly every small town in the Turkish part of Kurdistan, the icy weather and the snow in Armenia and Northern Iran. The wind which blew quite a lot in the last two months, of course, most of the time as a headwind.

What do you think of the region as a cycling destination?

Oman is superb as a cycling destination. One of the best places I have cycled in.

What lessons have you learned from this cycle tour?

I learned a lot about myself, cultures, people and food. Lesson number one was probably slow down for a bit, otherwise you might not be able to enjoy it anymore, because it is all too much in one go. And I learned the goodness of people, when others warned me about all the bad people out there and I always said most people are very friendly, but they are even more than that, they are gorgeous everywhere.

Where is your next stop?

I am currently in Samarqand/Uzbekistan and heading off to Kyrgyzstan soon. From there I will either go to China or to Russia and Mongolia it all depends on which visa I can get.

When do you think you will arrive in Australia?

Good question. I have no idea. There is so much to see before arriving to Australia. It could take at least another 1.5 years or as long as three years. Open end. I can also imagine extending the trip, but I will decide this in a later stage.

What's your advice to those who are planning their long distance cycle adventure?

Don't worry. Don't plan too much; things you have planned half year ago will no longer be relevant by the time you will reach this place. Either not relevant anymore because your interest have changed or the climate might be a barrier or even the bureaucracy will kill your plans. Just go and enjoy.

