



From Bewdley **TO BEIJING**

"We are defined in the material West by the careers we follow, the homes in which we live, the cars we drive, the clothes we wear, the belongings with which we choose to surround ourselves and the company we keep, but I have left almost all of these distinguishing marks behind along with the music I love. So who am I?"

TAKEN FROM WHY DON'T YOU FLY, BACK DOOR TO BEIJING BY BICYCLE, BY CHRISTOPHER J A SMITH.

Redundancy and the end of a long-term relationship may seem like the end of the world to some people but Chris Smith managed to turn this situation into a golden opportunity and a chance to do something really amazing. Chris has always been a fan of cycling and would bike from his home to his work every day, so he decided that what he really wanted to do was cycle from his home in Bewdley across

the world to the Far East.

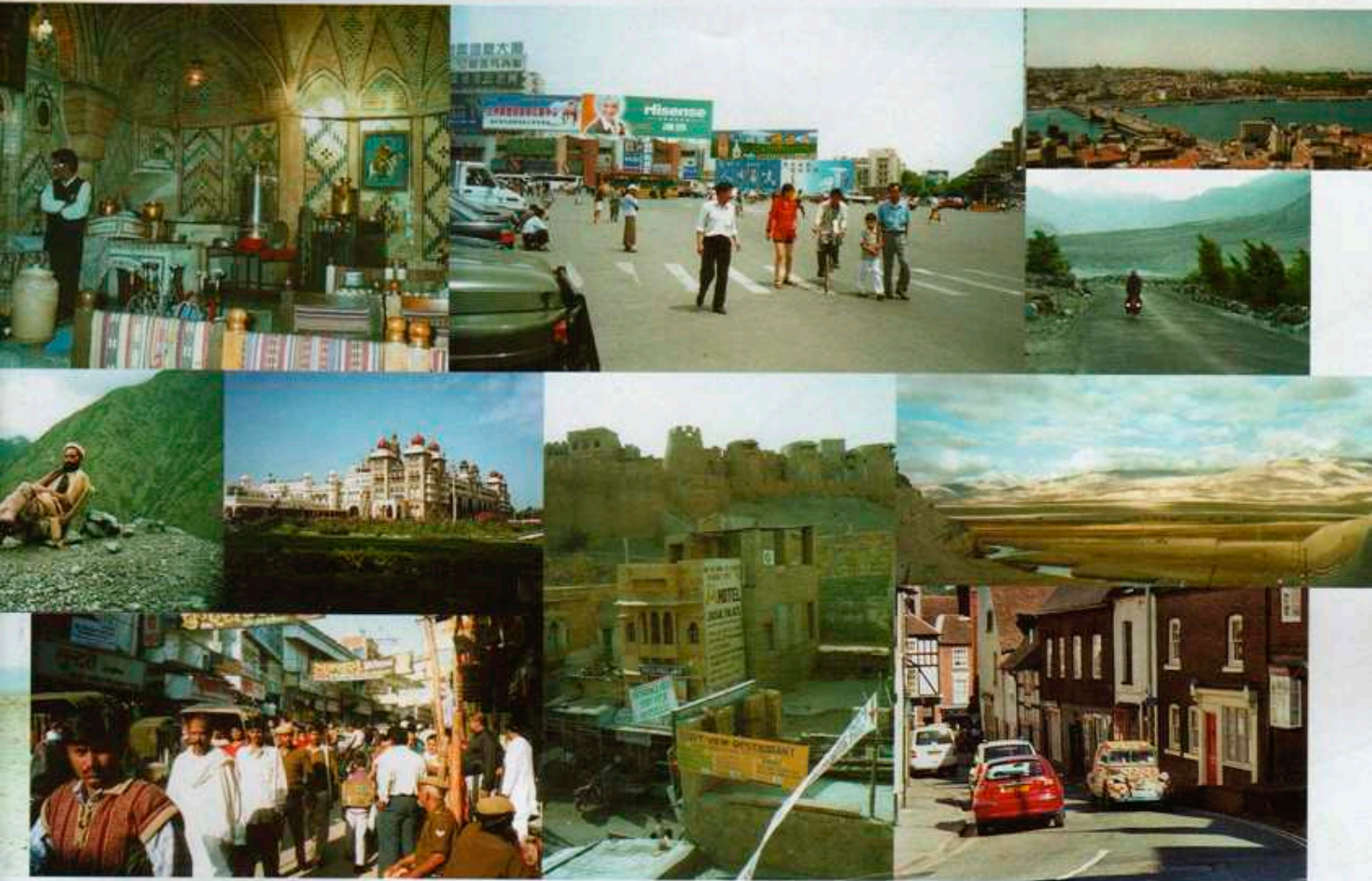
As Chris was made redundant in July 1999, it was too late in the year for him to begin his trip right away.

"Trips like this have to be planned very carefully around the climate," he told me. "At that time of year, places that I was heading for like Iran and Turkey would have been much too hot. You would just fry." Chris decided to set off the following year

and got a job as a truck driver in the meantime. "The job was perfect for me as it was some distance from my home. This allowed me to cycle to work and back every working day. I would do about 26 miles in a day."

But this mere 26 miles was nothing compared to the 80 miles a day Chris was going to be aiming for on his trip. In the 10 months Chris worked at this job he set about planning his route and





getting all the kit together that he would need and purchasing a suitable bike for the trip.

"When you are heading off on a journey of this magnitude, everything has to be as light as possible."

Eventually he set off in May 2000 and cycled from Bewdley to Dover where he crossed the channel to Calais and made his way through France. His journey continued through Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, where he had his 40th birthday, Iran and then into India. Chris was then faced with the decision of whether he should head for Austria or China. If he decided to go to Australia the plan was to fly back from there to Moscow and cycle home through Russia. But Chris' mind was made up for him when the Russians refused to give him a visa to travel through the country. Instead he headed off for China and cycled across the country that had fascinated him for year to the city of Beijing.

"The plan was to go further but by the time I reached Beijing I was exhausted and the bike was a virtual wreck. Throughout my journey I had gone

through three chains, three pair of tyres and three pairs of boots. Every time something ran out I would have to email back to the UK and get the part shipped out to wherever I was. Needless to say that by the time I got to Beijing I had pretty much run out of money."

The whole journey took Chris 13 months and by the end of it he was ready for a rest. So he flew back from Beijing to Frankfurt where he met back up with some German cyclists that he had met on the way. But not only had the trip given Chris some of the best experiences of his life but it also inspired him to write a book.

'Why Don't You Fly Back Door to Beijing - By Bicycle' accounts this epic adventure as Chris set out to find his own sense of identity. The book tells of Chris' many adventures along with his triumphs, disappointments, discomfort, exhaustion and exhilaration. This fascinating book has had me hooked from the very start. I received it in the post only two days ago and as I flicked through its pages I read a few short excerpts. Each one made me laugh out loud and prompted me to read them out

loud to my colleagues. That night I took the book home and settled in the sun to read it properly. I'm not much of a non-fiction fan so this must be good. Definitely a good read for the summer. ■

"A DRINKS STOP AT A RESTAURANT IN KAMPTA IS MEMORABLE FOR THE FOLLOWING EXCHANGE:

WAITER: Foot odour?
ME: I beg your pardon?
WAITER: You have foot odour?
ME (playing for time): I'm sorry I don't understand. (This is getting embarrassing! Is he about to offer me talcum powder or a fresh pair of socks? I know my feet are sweaty and might pong a little when I take off my boots at the end of the day (after all, this is the tropics) but surely they aren't so offensive that he can smell them with my boots still on?)
WAITER (empassively): Some people first take drinks and then odour foot.
ME (mightily relieved): Oh! No, I'm not hungry. Just thirsty thank you!"
 Taken from Why Don't You Fly, Back Door To Beijing By Bicycle, by Christopher J A Smith.