

Why Don't You Fly? Back Door to Beijing - by Bicycle

by Christopher J. A. Smith.

There are some bike odyssey books that make me want to emulate the rider, and there are some that make me glad the writer did it for me, thank you very much. Christopher Smith's account of his 16,500 mile ride across Europe and Asia is one of the latter, leaving me in awe of those who do this kind of trip.

This is an account of a trip prompted by relationship break-up and redundancy – which could have made the book a little too self-absorbed, but didn't. The author swaps his commute for the open road, with the intention of completely crossing the Eurasian landmass. The story skims fairly swiftly across Europe, which puts this relatively tiny continent into perspective, before starting the long haul across Asia, taking in the Indian subcontinent, a couple of mountain ranges and the Gobi Desert.

He captures nicely the scenery and atmosphere of the places he passes though, the characters of the temporary companions he picks up along the way and the minor and not-so minor irritations and setbacks he encounters – for example his joy at entering India dissolves as he travels, worn away by the terrifying Indian driving style and the legions of people who want to practise their English, or simply stare as he fixes a puncture.

I thought this was a good read – if you are adventurous you might think of doing the same (there is a handy equipment list in the back), and if you're like me, you'll enjoy the book and thank your lucky stars you are sitting at home with a nice cup of tea instead!

The book has maps but no photos – these are instead hosted on a webpage, which allows more pictures than the book alone might, and presumably keeps the price down. On the other hand, I like to have photos to look at as I read, and it is a shame not to have some for those without internet access.

Sue Archer



To see the pictures, read more, or to order the book (ISBN 1-905203-25-X £9.99), see www.cycleuktochina.com