



Dipping their wheels in the Pacific on Day 1

Setting Off

“And the eye cannot say to the hand: I need not thy help: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” 1 Corinthians 12:21

When brothers Andrew and Randall Leese set off from their homes near Seattle on 3rd April, 2009 to bicycle around the world, they were crossing the threshold where dreams become reality; but it was a reality not of effortless coasting and comfort. Long days in the saddle, storms, and oppressive desert heat – the life of the pilgrim, in short – took its toll. With the element of hardship endured there were rewards, however, and always one sustaining thread to keep them on their way: the thought of the waiting orphan children was a last bulwark of the will, lending strength when weariness and fatigue might otherwise have had their way.

Their route has taken them 32,040km (19,909mi) through 22 countries and across 14 timezones. After the USA they made their way to France, the British Isles, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Turkey, with a detours into Morocco and the Holy Land. From Turkey they visited the Caucasus and boated overnight into Central Asia, where they made the 'Tyranny Tour' through a number of dictatorships, into China and the over the world's highest paved highway into Pakistan and finally



Chance meeting with Fr. Couture in Los Gatos



Calling on the gods of Greasy Chains and Broken Spokes in Sedona, Arizona

India. “Still, the trip and our efforts to help are far from over,” Randall added.

The idea to cycle in support of the orphans was first seeded by the stories of friends and priests returning home from the Indian missions. Articles in the Apostle also fueled the imagination: “We had been following Sister Maria Immaculata's progress with the children first in the state of Andra Pradesh, and then together with the SSPX in Palayamkottai. We wanted to lend a hand – or a foot, rather” said Andrew, as he wiped the beaded perspiration from his brow after a day's long cycle. *How to help* was the question. With two sets of strong legs and an and a passion for cycling, the answer was simple.

Their wish to help therefore reclined on the generosity of their fellow human beings. The brothers first appealed to the goodwill of their communities and local parishes, and then to the faithful after Mass on Sundays as they cycled across the United States and through Europe—particularly in France, Ireland, and the U.K.. “The bulk of the money was raised in the U.S. and Ireland,” Andrew mentioned, “because of the language barrier in other countries (France,



Friends shared the first of many pedal strokes to come on Day 1 from Bellingham, WA



Flat tire #6 of 91 and counting

Spain, and Portugal), it was difficult to reach the same level of trust and make needs known.”

Generosity has indeed proved to be profound. Although it's still short of the brothers' ultimate goal and the orphans' ongoing needs, the \$30,000+ raised so far is a great and humbling amount. Truly, so much money will go a long way in India. “Meanwhile, the trip,” Andrew remarked, “is still far from over.”

The Route

The first thing was to plan a route. “We knew from prior rambles through foreign lands that trying to stick to a detailed itinerary is the shortest way not to the end, but

frayed nerves and headache. Travel, and especially bicycle travel, requires great flexibility.”

In the USA and Europe, the route changed almost daily, but in Asia things became a little trickier. Because the brothers were barred--as American Citizens--from entering Iran, they would have to take a northerly route that entered India through some of the world's highest mountain ranges. They could only be crossed comfortably in Summer, so the pace thence had to be measured accordingly. In fact, it determined the time frame for the entire trip.

“Because our departure date had been pushed back several months, and Andrew was eager



Approaching the Mont-Saint-Michel at dusk, luggage and baguettes in tow



The inimitable and enchanting MSM



Conditions for cycling aren't always ideal



Porto, Portugal — around Christmas, 2009. They would arrive at the Orphanage a year later



Cabo de Gata National Park in Southern Spain: not a single car for miles and miles!



The Orphan Ride route in rough, 2009-2012.
For a detailed plan, see www.orphanride.org



Following the signs to Santiago de Compostela on El Camino Frances. Autumn, 2009



Staying dry in Ireland often has its price, such as an overnight in the ladies' public lavatory

to see the Tour de France, we pedaled across the U.S. (~5000 miles (8000+ km)) in only three months—which translates into lots of 100 mile (160km) days, and even one knee-buckling 150mile (260km) 12-hour marathon to San Francisco, to arrive in time for retreat at Los Gatos the following day.” If nothing else, the brothers have proved to be tenacious and even ‘downright stubborn’ in attaining their goals.

Their whirlwind tour took them through Oregon, California, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas (chiefly to visit St. Marys), Minnesota (for ordinations), Wisconsin, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and thence by air to Paris. When they tired of camping, they asked hotel proprietors, often with success, to sponsor them for a night with a free room. Other nights they spent staying with families they had contacted in advance, either via web-based hospitality networks such as www.warmshowers.org, or through Traddy friends. Statistics for the U.S. leg included one broken rear wheel and ‘enough flat tires to try the patience of a saint.’

They arrived in Paris on Bastille Day, and caught several stages of Le Tour before exploring Northern France, including visits to Lisieux and Mont-Saint-Michel, before finishing off the season in England and Ireland. France with its vast network of peaceful, paved lanes, and its delectable culinary traditions, was a cycle-tourists' paradise. Southern England wasn't so appealing with its busy roads and inconsiderate drivers, however, so they hightailed it to Wales and Ireland where the faithful welcomed them warmly. “It was good craic, Ireland, and as beautiful as they say,” Randall said. They were even blessed with several days of sunshine.

The brothers pursued warmer Autumn weather down the frigid west coast of France whilst enjoying the regional wines and superb *fruits de mer*, prepared by hosts and new friends. The European segment of the trip would prove to be a fortification against the more physically demanding roads to come.

A two week pilgrimage along the Camino Frances, followed by the Camino Portugués in reverse to Fatima and Lisbon—with a month's respite over



Portugal is a lovely country. Not only does it appear to be more pious than the rest of Europe, but it has pastries with names like Bacon from Heaven, and great cycling, too



An unlikely melon stand and its charming attendants in the Kazakh Desert. Life is full of surprises



An Armenian Christian friend and benefactor of Aleppo, Syria

the Holidays in Sintra--was a major highlight for both. From Lisbon they continued southeast to Gibraltar and made a short loop through the exotic, former French protectorate of Morocco before continuing along the coast of the Mediterranean to Rome in time for Holy Week and Easter. They spent three weeks touring the Eternal City before the next leg began.

Greece was their next destination, after a relatively short spin across the Apennines to the coastal town of Bari, where they went by boat to Patras, and thence to Athens, "A largely unpleasant city where people were rude and prices were high." But neighboring Turkey was altogether delightful: "The Turks view hospitality as a quasi-sacred responsibility, and seem to derive a great deal of satisfaction from entertaining their guests." Cosmopolitan Istanbul was a brief stopping-off point before a short detour through Syria, Jordan, and Israel – "Another major highlight of the trip!" Where they slept in the ruins of St. Simon Stylites' Cathedral (the

enormous base is still intact), and made a wheeled pilgrimage through the Holy Land.

They returned to Istanbul by air, and did penance on the beautiful but steep hills of the Black Sea Region in the height of summer. Turkey gave way to the Russian-speaking Caucasus: first Christian Georgia, where the food and hospitality were sublime, and then to Muslim Azerbaijan, which, 'though the scenery was beautiful, "is a horrible little hole of an oil country."

From Baku they crossed the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan and Central Asia in an old Russian freighter. Through the Kazakh desert, past the lazy camels and droves of galloping horses to Uzbekistan and along the old Silk Road, through the ancient cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, over vast deserts, at last to the Uzbek capital, Tashkent. "Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were remarkable not for the landscape, although the simplicity of the bleak scenery has its attractions, but the beauty of the inhabitants, whose features are formed in noble harmony. Also, their cultures are still largely untainted by the Materialism of the West." Randall also enjoyed the food: "A



Uzbek Woman, Bukhara. Traditions remain strong on the old Central Asian Silk Routes.



The Registan of Samarkand, an ancient Silk Road stopover, is famous for turquoise domes and tasty naan bread



Tooling through Pakistan on the World's highest Highway, the Karakorum



The Kalyan Minaret of Bukhara, Uzbekistan, an ancient Silk Road city.



“When I was your age...” Muttered the old Uyghur man of Kashgar, China



“Welcome to India!” At the Wagah border between Pakistan and India in December, 2010

tantalizing combination of Mutton, bread, and onion—baked, boiled, steamed, or fried. The *kymys* (fermented mares' milk) was also tasty.”

Chinese visas had to be obtained in Tashkent for \$210 before the brothers could leave for Kyrgyzstan. But with the recent Summer ethnic riots, the borders between the two countries were apparently closed to foreigners. “Our options were thinning quickly as our thirty-day Uzbekistan visas ran out, and the Kazakh Embassy failed to supply visas in time for us to detour though their country after repeated trips to the embassy,” said Andrew. “With only 24

hours left, I managed to get a last-minute visa to Tajikistan, while Randall, against all hope, found a flight to Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan,” where he hoped to fix his latest broken rim, since a suitable replacement was utterly unavailable in Tashkent.

The brothers left the country with mere hours to spare; Kyrgyzstan was “a remarkably beautiful country, with great hospitality,” and the Pamir Highway, known as the Roof of the World, was altogether “spectacular”.

The brothers met up again in southern Kyrgyzstan before grinding Eastward over a snowy 3,700m pass into the cold and barren mountains of the Taklamakan Desert and the delightful, frenetic city of Kashgar, China. This is where the Karakorum Highway—the world's highest—makes its daring beginning.

One of the brothers recalled of the ride from Kashgar to Tashkurgen in southern China, where travel into Pakistan is only by Government-operated bus: “A forceful sandstorm caught us as we left Kashgar, tearing our



Turkish girl of the Black Sea Region. The kitten was a roadside waif picked up outside of Istanbul



Plastic bags served as gloves on the 3650m Taldyk Pass in Kyrgyzstan, the adventure's chilliest day.



A long-anticipated meeting between the Brothers and Sister Maria Immaculata after their arrival

throats and sinuses, just before we cycled up to 3000m-4000m elevation again, where the intense, arid cold ripped them still further and made us concerned for our health.”

They made it safely through beautiful, hospitable, and perilous Pakistan and crossed over into India in late November. In order to arrive in Palayamkottai in time for Christmas, it was necessary to go south by train from Delhi.

On 18th December they cycled through the gates of the orphanage under faithful escort of their guardian angels: the children were there with colored signs and bright smiles of welcome.

After several months off the cycles in Palayamkottai Andrew and Randall intend to continue cycling through Southeast Asia, China, and Japan before returning to the United States where they will make a short victory tour and continue raising money for the orphanage. Ω

For anecdotes, photos, ride statistics, and all the practical details of the odyssey, visit www.orphanride.org



“Thanks for your generosity!” Anna Maria, Jacinta and Mary Magdalene show their gratitude (and their holiday henna)



The Sikh Golden Temple of Amritsar, the Riders’ first stop in India, located on a tank called “The Holy Pool of Nectar”



From vagabonds to honored guests! When they asked to camp in this Punjabi family’s enclosure, the brothers were lavished with good hospitality



The Brothers reached their goal on December 18th, 2010, when they pedaled through the gates of the waiting Servi Domini Orphanage



Travelers beware! Cycle Gangs like these now roam the roads of Tamil Nadu