



ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS

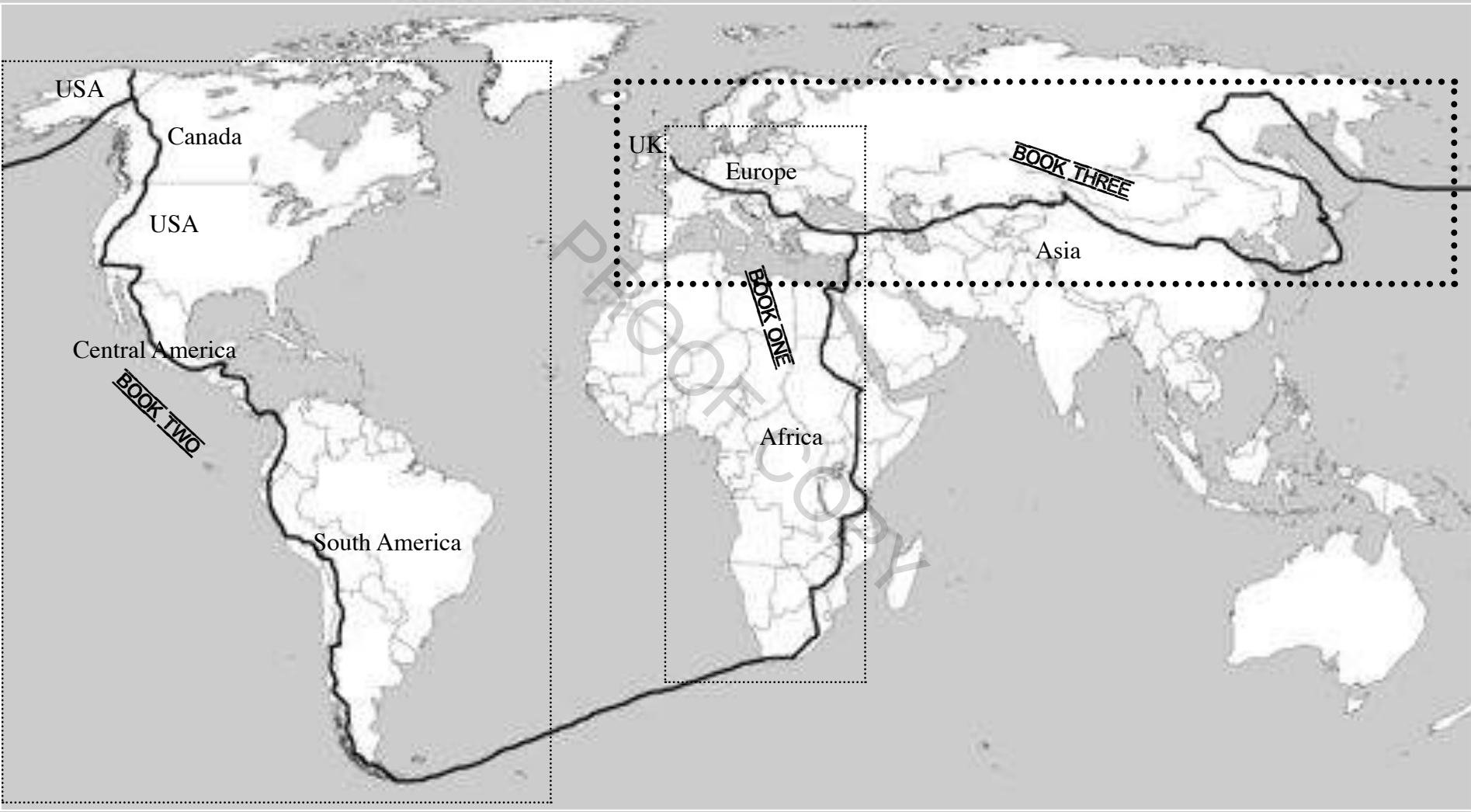
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Tom's Route Round the World





Battling Snow in Siberia

Tom was cold. He was shivering. And he was frightened. He was going faster and faster. Trees passed in a blur. He couldn't stop. This was going to end badly. But it was supposed to have been fun! Riding your bike downhill is fun. In fact, it was one of Tom's favourite things to do. But this was not fun. This was no fun at all.

Tom was about to crash. He was flying down a big hill at top speed – in deep snow. His brakes could not stop him. Tom loved sledging, but this was ridiculous. All he could do was hang on tight! Waiting for the crash was almost worse than the crash itself was going to feel.

It was time for Tom's last option. To scream.

"Aaaaagggghhhhhhhh! Help!"

But nobody could help. Nobody even heard him scream. Tom was alone. He was hundreds of miles from the nearest human. Siberia is one of the emptiest places in the world. And, in winter, it is one of the coldest, too. Nobody was bonkers enough to be outside in this weather. Nobody except Tom.

Siberia is a huge region of Russia famous for its ferocious winters. Tom was trying to cycle across Siberia in the middle

of winter. Everyone had told him it was a crazy idea. Maybe they were right after all...

CRASH!

SPLAT!

Tom landed face down in a snowdrift. For a minute or two, he did not move. He was not sure if he was broken or not. Then, ever so slowly, Tom wiggled his toes. Then his fingers. Then his nose. Everything seemed to be in place. The snow had cushioned his fall. Tom was OK. But lying face down in freezing snow is not a nice feeling, so Tom slowly pulled himself upright.

Falling off your bike is horrible. Getting a load of snow down the back of your neck isn't nice either. But Tom was lucky this time and was not injured. As he stood up he left behind in the snowdrift a splatted-Tom-shaped hole that made him chuckle.

"Maybe I really am crazy," Tom said to himself. "Everyone says I am. I'm out here, in the middle of nowhere, on my own, on a bike, in the middle of winter. I've crashed on every hill I've ridden down today. This is stupid. It's stupid, but it's brilliant!"

Tom smiled as he hauled his crashed bike from the snowdrift, struggling as it was really heavy. Tom was carrying all the equipment he needed to cycle round the world. And in winter, in Siberia, that meant a lot of gear.

The young cyclist stamped his feet and whirled his arms like a windmill. It's the best way to warm your hands when they are freezing cold. Then he climbed back onto his bike.

This was tricky too, as the multiple layers of clothes – now soggy and damp – weighed a ton.

Here is what Tom was wearing:

- 2 pairs of long thermal underwear, like pyjamas
- Trousers
- 2 fleeces
- Windproof jacket and trousers to keep off the wind. Wind chill is what makes you the coldest
- A big puffy duvet jacket for when not pedalling
- A thin balaclava
- A woolly hat
- Thin gloves for fiddly jobs to stop fingers sticking to frozen metal
- Thicker gloves
- Huge mittens
- A big Russian fur hat
- Thin socks
- Two pairs of thick socks
- Warm Russian felt boots called *valenki*

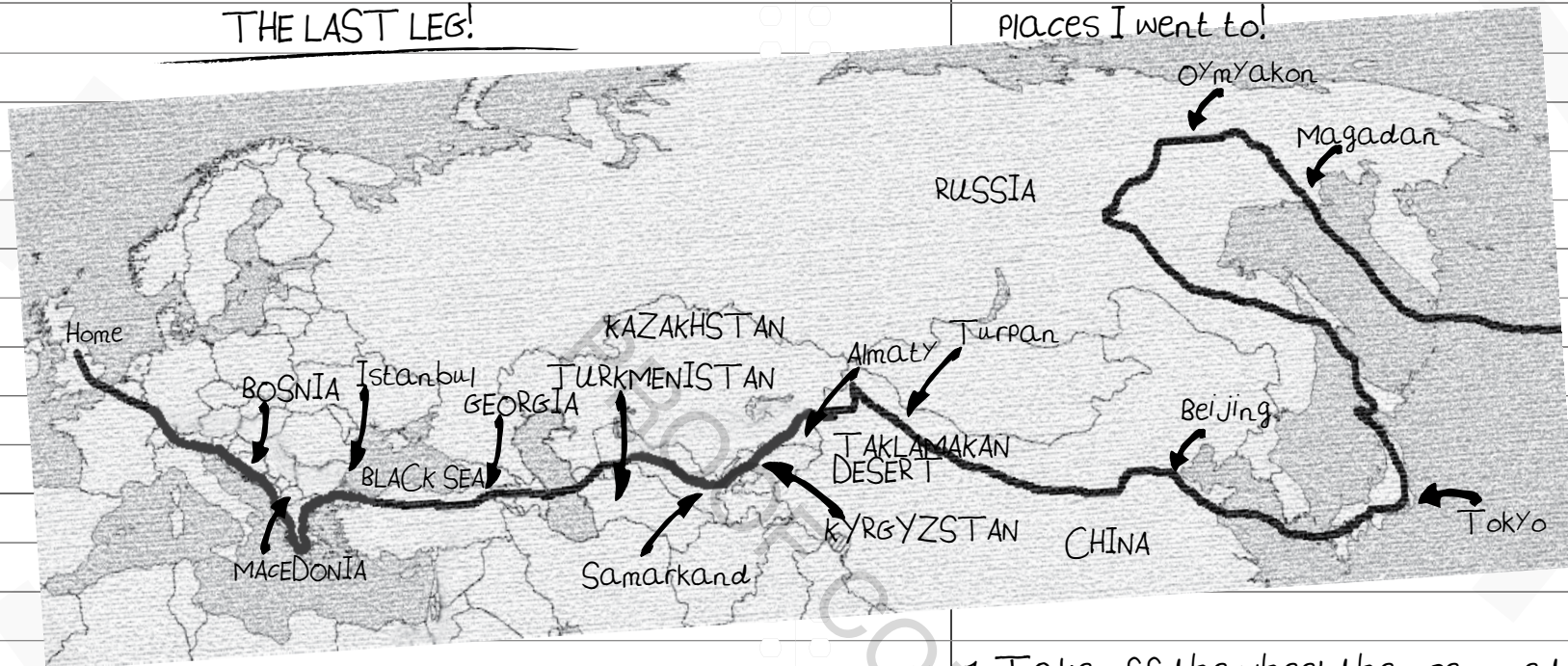
Tom had also covered the saddle of his bike with a layer of reindeer fur to keep his bottom warm! One advantage of wearing so many clothes was that they cushioned him each time he skidded and crashed on the snow and ice.

But nobody said that cycling round the world was going to be easy. In fact, most people said it would be impossible. Tom knew that if he was going to become the boy who biked the world then he'd have to make it through a lot of hard times like this.

And as he pedalled away down that long, silent, empty road through the snowy forest, Tom began to whistle a cheerful tune.

RIDING HOME THROUGH ASIA - THE LAST LEG!

Map to give you an idea of some of the places I went to!



Punctures - MUST KNOW HOW TO REPAIR!!

Punctures are annoying. But they are easy to mend and you're bound to get at least one on a bike adventure. So it's definitely worth learning how to fix one.

You'll need:

- Two tyre levers
- A puncture repair kit
- A pump

Here's what to do:

- 1 Take off the wheel, then remove the tyre with your tyre levers.
- 2 Take out the punctured tube.
- 3 Pump up the tube, then listen for a hiss of air. If you can't find it, dunk it in water and look for the bubbles.
- 4 Clean and dry the tube. Pop a dollop of glue from the repair kit on the hole.
- 5 When the glue is nearly dry, stick on a patch and squeeze it tight.
- 6 Pop the tube back in the tyre, pump it up and re-attach the wheel. Carry on biking!



Half a World Away

Tom had been riding round the world for a long, long time now. Sometimes he thought back to the very beginning, back to his school classroom on a hot, sleepy afternoon. Back to the moment when he'd blurted out to everyone that he was going to cycle all the way round the planet. Even today, Tom was surprised he had actually said that out loud. He usually kept his daydreams to himself. Everyone had laughed, circling around him in the playground and telling him that he had no chance of succeeding.

Tom had blushed and felt a bit of a fool – he was just a boy daydreaming in a boring lesson at school. Cycling round the world was the sort of adventure people liked dreaming about, but not the sort of thing they would actually go on to do. It was too hard for a normal boy like Tom.

But once he'd spoken his dream out loud and the other boys and girls laughed at him, something inside Tom made him determined to give the trip a try. He didn't know if he could do it, but he would never find out if he didn't begin. It's exciting to try things when you don't know how they will turn out.

So Tom began.

He packed his camping kit, waved goodbye to his Mum, Dad and sister Lucy, and pedalled away down his street.

Step outside your house. Or look out of the window where you are reading this book right now. And just imagine for a minute... If you cycled down that road you can see, turned left at the end, then turned right past the shops, up the hill, left at the traffic lights and just kept riding, you could get to anywhere on Earth. Anywhere at all! The street that you live on is the road to Siberia, or to Africa or to anywhere that you dream of.

Where do you dream of going when you are older? All of us dream of adventure, but not many act on those dreams. Tom was brave enough to get on his bike and go. And he just kept on going!

Tom rode across England. He cycled across Europe. Along the way he learned how to put up a tent, to fix a puncture, to read a map and to ask for directions in different languages. He didn't know much before he began, but he learned a lot along the way. Tom pedalled into Africa, marvelling at elephants and deserts and Maasai tribesmen.

Africa had been exciting, but it was just the beginning. Tom hitched a lift on a boat and sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. When he landed in South America a signpost showed it was 12,000 miles to Alaska. Tom climbed on his bike and started riding again. He rode over the colossal Andes mountains, sleeping in a tent and living off the cheapest food he could find. This was usually banana sandwiches (Tom's

favourite food), though he did once eat a guinea pig, much to the annoyance of his sister Lucy who had a pet guinea pig!

Tom kept going – up through Mexico and into America, passing Hollywood with its movie stars and famous sign to arrive at a redwood tree so enormous that a car or a bike could pass through a hole in its trunk. Which he did immediately, of course. Can you imagine how big a tree needs to be for a car to be able to drive through it?

In Canada, forest fires blocked Tom's route and he was forced to build a raft and paddle for hundreds of miles down the Yukon River, through thick forests and past big, scary bears.

Reaching Alaska at last, Tom crossed the Pacific Ocean to Asia on a boat. Before he returned home again, back to his family and his comfy bed, he was going to ride thousands of miles through Russia, Japan, China and right the way across Asia and Europe.

Home was still half a world away.



Tom began this third and final leg of his journey in Magadan, on the shore of the Sea of Okhotsk, a tucked-away, little-visited corner of Russia. Magadan is the sort of town that Tom really loved; towns in the middle of nowhere, without tourists, towns he had never heard of and would probably never visit again.

He enjoyed seeing how normal people lived in normal little towns all over the world. In some ways their lives were just the same as his had been: going to school, helping with chores, playing with friends. But the details were different, and this was what made travel so interesting.

Tom met children in Africa who had to walk miles to collect water and carry it in buckets balanced on their heads. He met a boy in Peru who looked after his family's llamas. He met girls in California who went surfing before school. And now in Siberia, Tom met children whose school wouldn't give them a day off from lessons until the temperature dropped below -50°C!

Magadan looked like every other Russian town Tom would ride through. Old cars rattled down bumpy roads, crashing through potholes as their engines spluttered. Clouds of exhaust fumes billowed into the air. People lived in small flats above shops. The shops sold everything you could imagine – bread, sausages, balls of string. But they never had very much of any item so everything was spread out carefully on the shelves to make the shops look fuller.

Some Russians are very rich, but many are poor. Old ladies – known as *babushka* or “grandma” – sat on pavements trying to sell small piles of vegetables from their gardens, or jars of homemade jam, or a few eggs laid by their chickens.

“*Zdrastvoojte!*” they said to Tom.

“*Zdrastvoojte!*” smiled Tom. “Hello!”

Tom bought bread, jam, noodles and fat salami sausages.

He was preparing for the wilderness ahead. To his disappointment, there were no bananas in any of the shops.

In Siberia, the land is frozen solid. Even in summertime the earth does not completely thaw. This is called permafrost. You cannot dig deep into permafrost to lay foundations, so buildings are built a little way off the ground on stilts. Water pipes and sewage pipes cannot be buried underground either, so they run overground, zig-zagging round street corners and crossing pavements. Sometimes on the pavement there is a stile to cross over the pipes, like when you climb into a field on a footpath.

The town of Magadan was built in 1930 by prisoners. They arrived in this empty area by ship, then were put to work chopping down trees and building a town. They built the only road that leads away from Magadan to reach the wealthy gold mines that are dotted across Siberia. This was the road that Tom was going to ride.

It was a cruel and harsh life back then, and Tom thought sadly of the prisoners as he cycled out of town and into the wild. A cold wind blew. Winter was on its way. Tom shivered and pedalled a little faster.

AMAZING FACTS ABOUT RUSSIA

Russia is the biggest country in the world, (70 times) bigger than Britain and twice as big as America. Russia is so big that when it is one time on one side of the country, it is 11 hours different on the other side! You could be having your breakfast in Russia whilst someone else thousands of miles away in Russia is tucked up and fast asleep in the middle of the night.

SIBERIAN TIGERS don't hibernate, but I'm unlikely to have to worry about them: today, there are fewer than 500 in the wild.



They can weigh up to 300kg and sadly nearly all of them have been killed for their beautiful fur. The same problem faces the AMUR LEOPARD: there are

only around (45) still alive in the entire world. If we do not make massive efforts to save these beautiful big cats, they will soon be extinct.

The enormous shaggy Russian bears will be sleeping by now, thankfully. They hibernate throughout the long winter, curling up in cozy caves and sleeping for months on end! They live off the fat reserves in their bodies, so when they eventually wake up they are skinny and very hungry.

Lake Baikal in Siberia is 400 miles long, 50 miles wide and a mile deep. It is the world's largest freshwater lake and contains 20% of the world's non-frozen fresh water.



The Trans-Siberian train from Moscow to Vladivostok takes a week to complete its journey. It's the longest train journey in the world, running for nearly 6,000 miles. It has been running for 100 years.



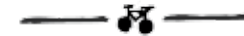
Pancakes and Reindeer

After Magadan, there were no road signs. At times the road was only a dirt track. Often there was not any road at all. Sometimes the rivers were bridged, but often the bridges were uncared for and had collapsed.

On occasion, Tom could carefully tiptoe across a broken bridge and look down through big holes at the scary drop into the current below. But usually the only option was to take off his shoes and socks, roll up his trousers, and wade through the icy water, gasping at the cold and making a noise that sounded quite a lot like a monkey!

When this happened, his feet turned blue with cold. It was like an ice-cream brain freeze for his feet, but without the good bit of first enjoying the ice cream.

The temperature was low, but it was not yet viciously cold. Soon though, the temperature was going to plummet and even the rivers would freeze solid.



Winter arrived silently in the night. Big flakes of snow, millions of them, covered Tom's little tent and all of Siberia



About the Author

Alastair Humphreys is an adventurer, blogger, author and motivational speaker. He regularly visits schools to talk about his adventures.

Alastair's quest for adventure began young. Aged eight, he completed the Yorkshire Three Peaks challenge and at 13 he did the National Three Peaks in 24 hours! At 14 he cycled off-road across England.

At university, Alastair trained to become a teacher. But adventure took over! Alastair has now cycled round the world, raced a yacht across the Atlantic Ocean, canoed 500 miles down the Yukon River and walked the length of the holy Kaveri river in India. He has run the Marathon des Sables, crossed Iceland by foot and packraft, rowed across the Atlantic Ocean, and walked across the Empty Quarter desert.

More recently Alastair has been encouraging people to seek out adventure close to home. The 'microadventures' idea saw Alastair named as one of National Geographic's Adventurers of the Year.

Alastair is always blogging and tweeting about his adventures, big and small. Visit his website www.alastairhumphreys.com to see what he is up to and follow him on social media.