

David Brandenberger

Solatrike

English edition

How an idea turned into an
inspiring 40000 km under the sun
- so far...



Swiss- born David Brandenberger doesn't have a clue about electrical engineering, solar systems and long-distance cycling, but he does have an idea. A project emerges from this and becomes, unplanned, one of the longest expeditions ever undertaken on a solar-powered pedelec recumbent trike, solo and out of a race.

He cycles his "Solatrike" across the Silk Road from Europe through Asia and on and on despite all odds. An inspiring story that encourages you to put your idea into action and go your own way. Exactly what David wants to convey.

Very big on this trip are the encounters with the locals and the breathtaking nature, which at times makes him sweat quite a bit.

Breakdowns are part of the cyclist's life, as well as hair-raising bureaucracy, so emotions can sometimes ride a roller coaster with him. How do you explain a Solatrike to an official that doesn't fall into any category?

David's flexibility is challenged, as he often has to change and adapt his plan.

True to his motto,

"If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans."

Five years he is on the road on his pioneer journey through 22 countries, when after 40000 km there is a shocking turn of events and his adventure is at stake...

David Brandenberger, born 1970 in Urdorf, Switzerland, is an optician, photographer, painter, musician and founder of the Solatrike project. He rode the Solatrike 40000 km from Europe to New Zealand / Aotearoa.

As an optician, he first worked in Zurich and the surrounding area then in Flims and Klosters in Graubünden. In between, he travelled once for three months through New Zealand / Aotearoa and Australia, and another time for a year around South America and to Antarctica.

He started his solo journeys with many city trips by Interrail around Europe. His camera was always with him. Travelling and photography have at all times belonged together for him - he has travelled and photographed across all the continents.

Although he is an amateur, he can take photographs at a professional level, which are central to his extraordinary multimedia shows. These he has already performed numerous times at home and abroad.

As an author, he is especially active in his blog about this journey. His self-directed and extensive website presents everything:

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Foreword:

This is a true story, partly unbelievable, partly surprising, partly unknown, but everything really happened. The story about a solar-powered, electrically assisted recumbent pedelec trike, from the idea to its path to legend and its involuntary stopover in New Zealand / Aotearoa.

It is at the same time my own story with unbelievable twists and turns, surprising puzzle pieces and unknowable factors, but it is all true. The honest story of a Swiss man who was born to be anything but an adventurer and a legend.

I don't give myself these attributes at all, and I find it difficult to describe myself in this way. I tell the story from my perspective, as I experienced it. They are my thoughts that flow into it, my conclusions that I draw from it and my political and religious convictions that I express. It is a travel story interwoven with "cyclobiographical" elements.

I am neither the Messiah, nor a prophet, nor perfect, nor do I want to save and teach the world. Furthermore, with this journey I don't have to prove anything to anyone. Additionally, I don't need admiration, although I admit that I would like to be a rock star, but more on that later.

Even at the tender age of ten, I was interested in environmental protection and was fascinated when, a few years later, I saw a photo of a solar-powered vehicle on the Gotthard Pass in a magazine. I had no idea that one day I would travel from Europe to New Zealand / Aotearoa with a similar vehicle and

additional muscle power. The thought was initially to undertake a long journey with a vehicle that needed energy but generated it itself, independent of the grid, with the help of solar modules.

“I just don’t want to talk about alternative energies, I want to do something myself and maybe make a contribution that way” I wrote on my website and set off, aiming to be on the road as long as and as far as I could get with it.

As I suffer from an incurable disease, I don’t know how long I will be able to travel before the sickness forces me to stop or wipes me out completely.

Since my childhood, I have never made a secret of my Christian, reformed faith, based on the Swiss reformed Church (similar to the Presbyterians). This was and still is natural and self-evident for me, even though I was occasionally bullied for it as a teenager.

I have never shied away from the consequences and have always chosen my faith. What comes out when you put your life at God’s disposal and entrust yourself completely to His guidance is told with this story.

“40000 km, which could be considered as one of the longest expeditions on an electric bike and maybe the longest ever on a solar-powered bike.” (Quote Honza [1])

I may not be the first to cycle around the world.

I may not be the first to use solar panels to power the bike.

But I may be the first who had no idea about anything and did it anyway!



Czech Republic. Uherský Brod. Start of the journey.

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14 pages with 28 color photos

75 black and white photos

17 sketches from the journey

1 double page with the marked travel route

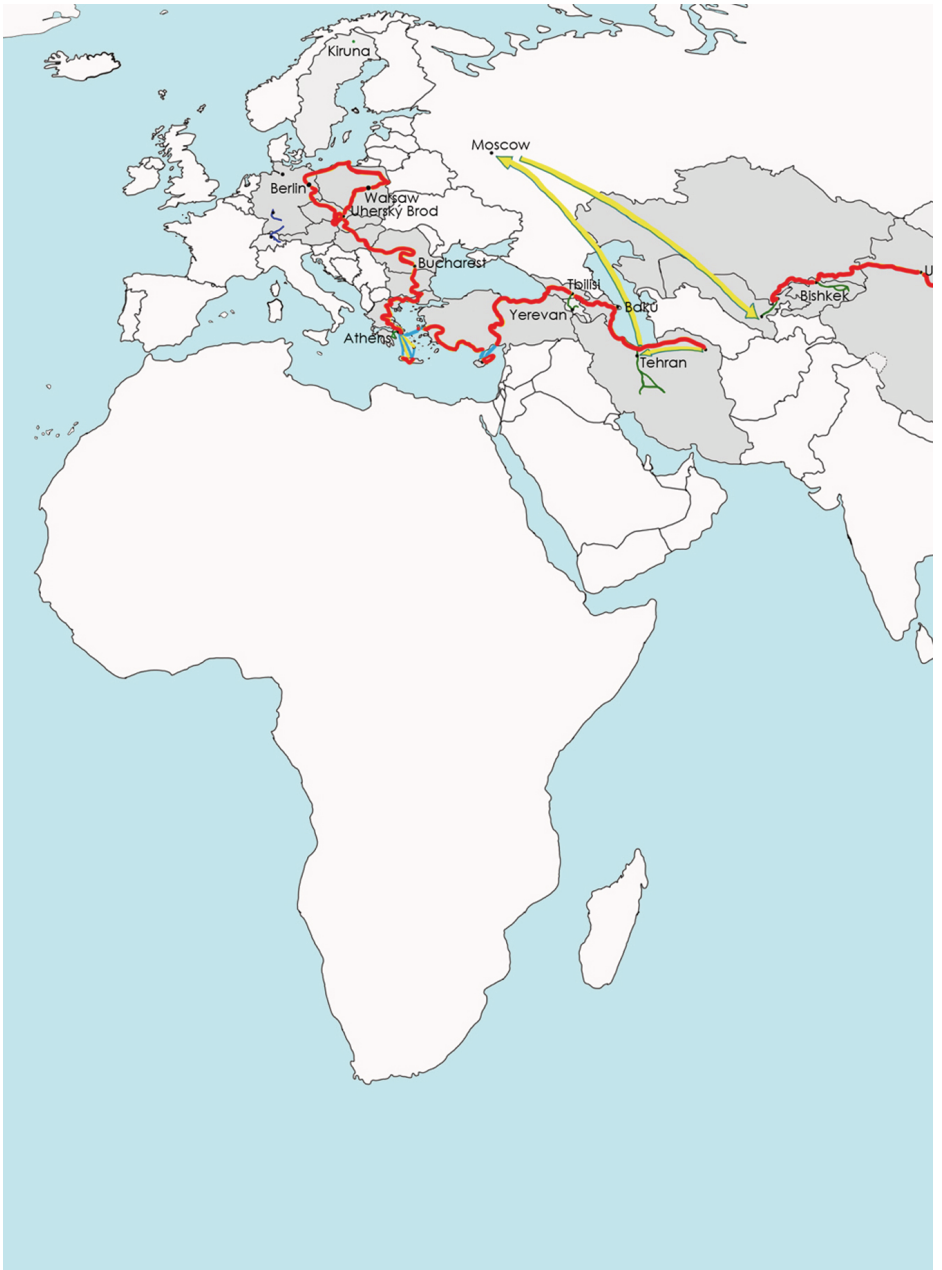
56 exciting chapters

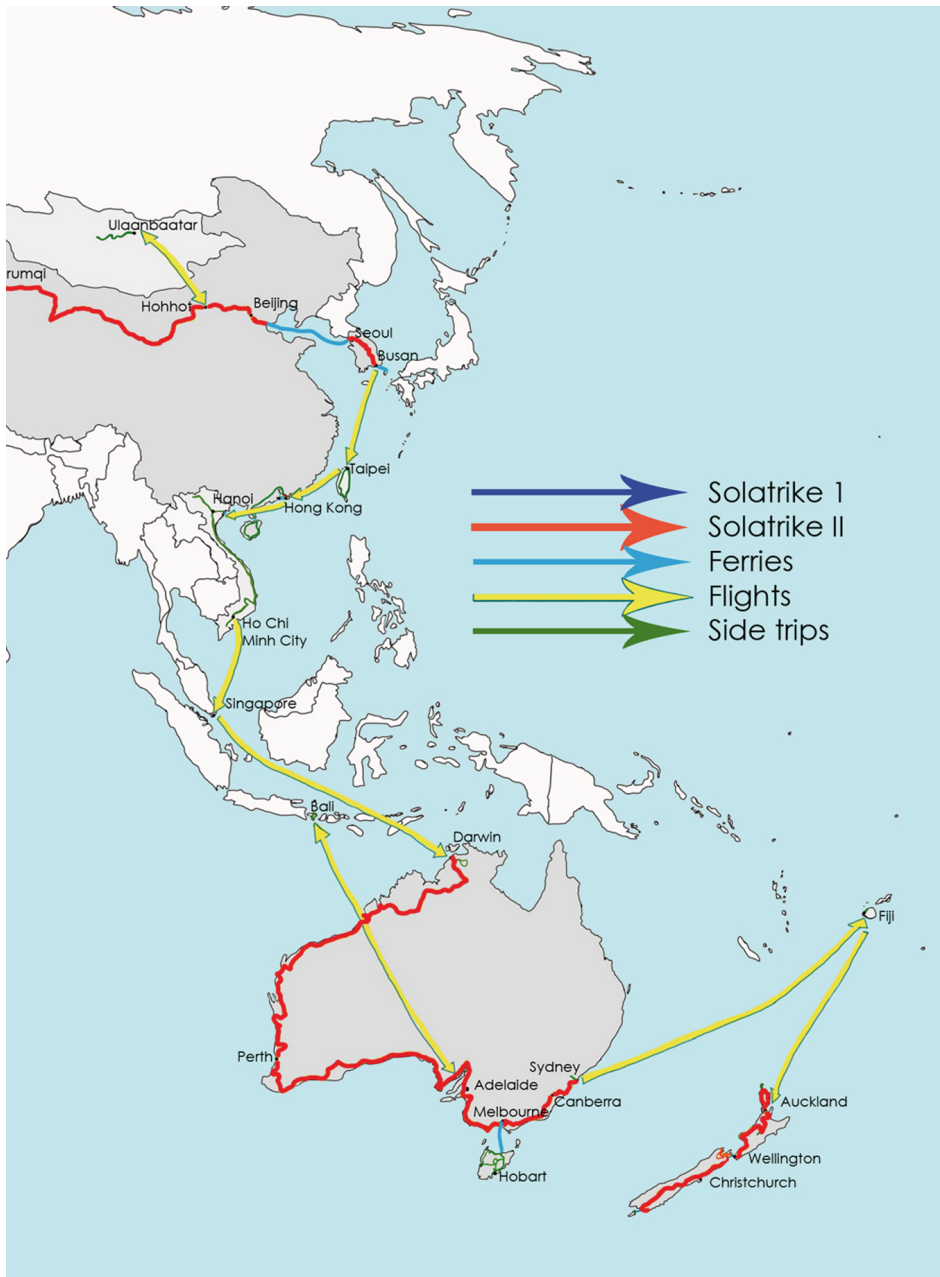
2 ways to read the book

Only in the English version:

Aussie-Slang in the Australian Chapters

Kiwi-Slang in the Aotearoa Chapters





1. New Zealand / Aotearoa 5

1. Hideout in Christchurch:

Lockdown was imposed today because of the virus that is forcing the whole world to come to a standstill. I am also affected and it has made me to take a break from travelling in Christchurch, New Zealand. After almost five years on the road, I am stranded once again. This is not the first time and probably won't be the last if it continues like this. If the journey is going to carry on, that is, because at the moment the situation is uncertain and has once again thrown my plans into disarray. I'm getting used to having to make new schedules, work out route changes and get involved in other circumstances. This one is of a bigger kind, though, because the whole world is being hit by the virus.

From my improvised office, I follow current events. My laptop is perched on a small bookcase that serves as my desk and, lacking a chair, I sit on the edge of the bed.

At the last moment, on the very day of the lockdown, I get an excellent offer to rent a cheap room. This way I don't have to spend the whole time in the youth hostel.

Christchurch is in itself a huge suburb with a tiny centre, and is located in the flattest part of New Zealand. There are two flat areas in Aotearoa: The Firth of Thames on the North Island and, on the South Island, the Canterbury Plains, of which Christchurch is a part. Otherwise, everything is rugged with steep roads - the steepest in the world. But right in the middle of the flattest region it forced me into lockdown. The next hill is

an hour's walk away; from there I can see the surrounding Alps of New Zealand at least on one occasion. Otherwise, I'm submerged in a sea of small family homes, and I persevere. If I don't see any mountains for a long time, I get a tantrum. As a "homesick for Graubünden" person, I probably couldn't possibly live in the Netherlands.

It is war on Facebook. One conspiracy theory follows the next, there is only black or white and everyone against everyone. People would be well advised to use the time to look inside themselves, to reflect and consider whether things should go on like this or if a change of heart might be useful. But instead, guns are brought out, nonsensical arguments are thrown around, half-truths and lies are spread every second. The political right wing is seizing the opportunity by shamelessly using the same semi-truths and falsehoods to pursue its goals.

The truth is secondary, it's all about the 'clicks' with which they rake in money. Fear has to be stirred up, sentiment has to be raised and resentment has to be fanned. Unicorns are sent dancing on the rainbow and people want to believe such things rather than science and serious sources. They demand to be lied to by politicians, YouTubers and influencers, they only want to hear what fits into their world view, logic and truth don't stand a chance. In these times, empathy is being overrun by egoism as if by tanks weighing tons.

The phenomenon is not new, it is already written in the Bible: "You remove the smallest insect from your food. But you swallow a whole camel!". (Matthew. 23.24). I resignedly close the lid of my laptop and turn my back on Facebook.

Do I really have to do this to myself? 56.1

2. Ludwigshafen, Germany + Uherský Brod, Czech Republic

1. The birth of Solatrike II:

My fingers scroll over the images on my laptop screen. The pen on my graphics pad glides up and down in a rhythm. Photos of various tricycles whiz along before my eyes. Except that these tricycles look different.

So-called “tadpoles” with two wheels in the front and one in the back - recumbents. I rarely see such things here and I haven't heard much about them, let alone seen them. The search box says: “Solar Trike”. I changed the query and a completely new field opens.

I'm in my first big forced break that I have to take on my journey. My maiden project has just been shipwrecked and so I have no desire to travel any further at all. It has cost me too much nerves and money, but I don't intend to give up. Something new has to be found and I am strangely confident that I will find the solution soon. I can literally feel the hand of God resting on my shoulders. I have fixated too much on a rickshaw, but a trike includes not only “delta” but also “tadpoles” and new hope rises in me. The combination with solar is not so common and that's why I find many photos of self-built vehicles and curiosities. As for me, though, I need something for long-distance travel that's solidly built.

Stop! What is that? A digital 3D drawing shows a recumbent bike with solar modules mounted overhead and a small trailer. Has this already been built, or is it just planned?

My curiosity is piqued, that would be something. Without a doubt, it looks more professional than anything I had considered so far. On the website [2], (which was under construction at the time), it says that this model has covered an impressive distance of 7800 km, so it must already have rolled long ranges and be solidly built.

What is the Sun Trip? [3] Never heard of it. The Czech Solar Team travelled with it from France to Kazakhstan as part of the Sun Trip. A race of solar-powered e-bikes and e-trikes that takes place every two years across long distances with participants from all over the world. Oh, I see, this was developed for a competition - and is now just standing around. A trike without a rider and me a rider without a trike. That should be possible to bring together.

My eyes start to glaze over and I try to find out more information about this vehicle. These are the people I need to contact.

"I think I've found it!", I exclaim! I earn a decidedly dismayed look from my counterpart. Ludwigshafen on the Rhine, in Germany, is home to a chemical giant and in a nice corner lives my travelling acquaintance Robert. He generously grants me shelter until I can resume my project. "Don't give me that look, or do you want me to hang around with you forever?", I counter his non-verbal reaction.

Following the disaster of my first project, which he had witnessed point blank moments before, he understandably advises me to be careful, lest I slip into another catastrophe. A real friend, after all. He continues to sift through his sheet music and heads off to orchestra rehearsal. I immediately write an email to the people in Czech Republic and explain my situation.

2.2

2. Uherský Brod, Czech Republic:

A few days later I'm already on the train to Uherský Brod in the east of the Czech Republic on the border with Slovakia. Here I meet Honza and Karel, the aforementioned Czech solar team that completed the inaugural Sun Trip in 2013. Honza works at AZUB [4], which specialises in making custom-made recumbents and recumbent trikes. The first damper comes when they tell me that the suspension in one of the vehicles broke during the race and has only been provisionally repaired, and that the second vehicle is practically sold. However, I am allowed to do a test lap with the trike that is still intact (without the solar roof).

I get used to it quickly and I already feel at home on the trike, so I don't let up after I return. They have over 7000 km of experience and instead of letting it go to waste, they integrate it into my project.

Honza makes me a proposal based on their rich experience. We use a new trike without suspension, take over the rear wheel with the motor, the Cycle Analyst (digital dashboard and battery monitor) and the batteries of the defective trike. Instead of the solar panels overhead and the small carriage, we use a bigger trailer for all the solar panels and the luggage.

He takes me to a barn where an aluminium construction is dangling from the roof, which is then used as a trailer. I have to make a compromise there, as I originally wanted to transport everything on three wheels. Anyway, the trailer offers enough space to carry all my junk. I just have to think of a way to store it all. Honza has a solution right away, because as the general importer of Ortlieb bags in the Czech Republic, he is excellently equipped. Curious, though, I ask why they don't want to mount

the solar panels overhead anymore. "We had constructed our superstructures as light as possible using slender aluminium profiles. Because of stability, however, we had to shore everything up with ropes. We had to crawl in and out laboriously each time. If we had an accident, nobody would get us out. We want to save you from that" Honza explains to me with a wink.

My fingers scroll over the information on the screen. I am looking for a suitable mid-drive motor. Honza and Karel have only taken the bare essentials for the race and divided up the luggage, whereas I intend to take a leisurely long trip. My extensive photo equipment alone weighs 30 kg. So, I will have to lug quite a bit more weight and the hub motor won't run below 10 km/h, which is quickly undercut on the uphill. That's why Honza suggests fitting a mid-drive motor in front of the pedals and use it on slow climbs below 10 km/h.

Easier said than done. E-bikes are in their early days at the moment and some companies have already filed for bankruptcy. Unfortunately, the internet never forgets their offers, and they continue to bustle in there.

I have no idea about the subject, collect all the results and in the evening consult with Honza to see whether this or that motor would be suitable. In the end we agree on an offer from Canada, the motor is made in China anyway. Luckily for us, this company still exists and I order the engine to be sent to the Czech Republic to be installed on the bike. The complete work will take a few weeks until it all arrives, is mounted and adjusted. They also have to reinstall all the electronics. When everything is ready, they will send me a message and I may pick it up in Uherský Brod. It might be enough to drive to the north of Sweden after all, I reckon. [3.3](#)

12. Czech Republic 1

1. Maiden voyage of the Solatrike II:

I don't believe it, on the very first day on the road a TV crew flags me down for an interview.

On 6 July 2015, I start my journey, have set the odometer to zero and cycle off through the persistent heat, exactly one year after I had received the promise from Honza that he would build me a suitable vehicle. In Zlín, a television crew is doing a survey on what people think of the heat. "For me the weather is ideal, I need the sun". That's roughly how it is translated in the programme, and my brand-new Solatrike can be seen for five seconds.

At the beginning of July, I travel from Switzerland to Uherský Brod in the Czech Republic to see the final product at AZUB. It came out splendidly and only a little work is needed before I set off for the test drive. The rear-view mirrors are moved to the handlebars, the sprockets are exchanged for smaller ones, flags and side panels are mounted, reflectors are glued and the luggage net is tightened.

After two days, I pack all the baggage into the trike and ride a first test lap up to the highest peak of the White Carpathians with an AZUB employee. I am curious to see whether I can get up the mountain with all the luggage or not. It's not easy, but with breathers I make it, land overjoyed at 970 metres altitude and enjoy the view from up there.

The trial by fire is passed, and the day after next, I set off on my extended test route. I plan to do a 3000 km loop through

Poland, eastern Germany and back across the Czech Republic, and then decide whether and how to continue. I am confident and I reset the odometer to zero.

My first Warmshowers host is called Martin, who has already cycled several thousand kilometres and organises bike events with lectures. He is a modest but very inspiring person. At the moment, he and his friends are renovating a 100-year-old mountain hut “Chata Prašivá” - on a recreational mountain in the north-east of the Czech Republic.

The way there leads up a steep road through the forest. It's too rough, too shady and my motors would overheat. I get towed for the first time, but it works out fine.

On the way to Poland, I get my first fan. Antonin catches up with me on his racing bike and tells me that there is a heated discussion on Facebook about what kind of strange bicycle is on the road. He quickly calculates where I am, rides off to intercept me and wishes me good luck for my journey. Something like this has never happened to me on any of my previous trips and it reinforces my conviction that cycling is the best form of travel.

It has changed over the years, of course, and with Couchsurfing and Warmshowers, more opportunities are opening up. It will continue to change over the next few years and who knows, I may even be on a pioneering journey with my Solatrike II. [13.1](#)



Czech Republic. Church at Chata Prašivá

20. Greek Islands

1. Crete:

Gasping and sweating, I crawl up the road. Now I have skipped the Peloponnese because of the hills and have taken the ferry to Crete. In fact, it's no better here. I have to work hard to earn every view, as everything is at altitude and I whiz back down to the sea.

From Chania with its Venetian flair, I curve on to the small town of Georgioupolis, from where I first do a detour to Lake Kournas. The next excursion takes me a few hundred metres up to Argioupoli. Unfortunately, the famous mosaic is covered up and I finally find the old gate after a long search. Only to have the gate tell me: "Everything in the world is nothing".

To get from Rethimno on the north coast to the south coast, I have to cross a high mountain saddle. The weather even plays along at the beginning and when I arrive at the pass, I snap a photo and put on the rain gear before it starts to pour. In Spili I wait for the next downpour. As I don't find any accommodation in the village, I cycle on spontaneously. Unfortunately, in the middle of the route a construction site gets in my way and I have to cross a very steep pass.

In Agia Galini I find a place to stay for the night. The next morning, I first climb a 10% uphill slope to reach the Messara plain. Of course, the archaeological site of Agia Triada is on top of a hill, towards which the street gets nastier and steeper. "I'll never make it!" goes through my helmeted head. Relieved, I nevertheless arrive at the top. The advantage of the winter season is that I am usually alone to enjoy the ruins. However, I am

30. Kyrgyzstan 1

1. Journey to Bishkek:

I am cycling somewhere in the middle of Turkiye when I receive a tip from my comrade Tobias. He has read a newspaper report by the Swiss cyclist Maria-Theresia [39] that she did not get a visa for China in Kyrgyzstan and almost got stuck. I then get in touch with Maria-Theresia for an exchange of information and find another small but nice piece of the puzzle for my trip.

I confess that I don't know if I will even make it to Kyrgyzstan, let alone the route I intend to take. In the course of time, I plan to rattle through Tajikistan, because I find a pretty and only slowly ascending road there. Conquering the Pamir Highway is not possible with my vehicle, I need a way around.

I get the visa for Tajikistan quickly and easily, only to find out that I am not allowed to take this route, because this border crossing is only open to residents of the two countries. I change my plans again and pedal from Uzbekistan via Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan and make it to Kyrgyzstan in the end. Finally, after 15000 kilometres, I cross the border and enter the Central Asian state.

The two Belgian women cycling gave me a contact address for the first town, but I can't reach the guy. I spend the night in a hotel, which I find in a run-down, dingy and unheated Soviet bunker. The room temperature doesn't rise above 6°C. I might as well have camped there. Even with all my clothes on and every blanket at my disposal, I can only manage to warm up to a limited extent. I might have a fever.

At least the weather is kind to me the next day and I finally catch sight of the mountain range I have been driving along the whole time. The freshly snow-covered mountains of the Kyrgyz Ala-Too are a magnificent view! Nevertheless, the ride is chilly, the road surface quite bumpy and with many holes.

I neither reach nor find my contact in Bishkek. Many of the hostels mentioned in the guidebook no longer exist. I cannot afford the hotels or they have no parking space for the trike. It is getting dark and I still haven't found a place to stay. I am almost in despair. When I once again ask locals for directions, suddenly and unexpectedly Andi and Steffi are standing next to me. After several months, we meet here by chance one more time. Unfortunately, we have a short and last reunion. After a long time of wandering around, I finally find a hostel for the first few days. There I first cure myself and look for a more permanent place to stay, where I can leave my Solatrike for the winter. In Tashkent, travellers had already given me a tip and it turns out to be a direct hit. The Tunduk Hostel is a little outside the city and I first need to organise a map to find my way there.

Here I have the agreement to store my Solatrike over the winter. The trailer is covered and put on the veranda and the trike is wrapped and put on a rack. So, it waits until I come back in spring.

I choose Kyrgyzstan as a stopover and break for many reasons. Firstly, it's winter and I can't make any progress on the trike in the snow - it's also too cold for me and I don't get enough energy from the sun. I furthermore have to apply for a visa for China at home and I don't have a second passport yet. The country of Kyrgyzstan is also called "Bikers Heaven" because

33. China 1

1. Xinjiang:

Oh, how I love border crossings. The Chinese undoubtedly invented bureaucracy, and everything works according to the motto: "Why make it simple? - if it can be done in a complicated way, and in a completely complicated way."

From the Kazakh border, a huge loop leads first six boring kilometres to the south and then six again to the north. At the complex, the officials are a little perplexed at first, not knowing what they are obliged to do with the Solatrike. They disinfect the tyres, for whatever reason. I park in front of the faceless border building and hand over my passport to the official at the counter, who studies everything thoroughly. After a few minutes my documents are duly stamped and I get my identity papers back. I walk two steps and she asks for the passport again for another ten minutes. I am then allowed through a security check with a body scanner, like at the airport, and I am obliged to move out to the other side of the building. Oh, but my bicycle is waiting on the other side, how do I get to my vehicle?

Another official takes care of it for the next twenty minutes and I have to write my autograph in a book. I am ordered to drive the Solatrike through a building where it is x-rayed and I am taken to a further office to wait for the procedure. Finally, I am allowed to enter the country. That's why I always plan a whole day for border crossings.

In Korgas on the Chinese side, a Kazakh takes good care of me, organises a Chinese SIM card for my flip phone and makes sure that I keep my trike safely behind the hotel.

43. Australia 2, West Coast

1. Across the Great Sandy Desert:

I am quite disappointed with Broome. I had imagined a more monumental town, but Broome has only about 5000 inhabitants and all the larger communities in N.T. and W.A. look somewhat similar. Since there is no shortage of space in Australia, everyone puts their house next to the other, builds a high fence around it to seal it off and so they are already building up a lot in terms of area. I discover the "old town" in the former Chinatown, where the tourist life takes place, or on the other side at Cable Beach. I circle around once with the trike and visit the most attractive viewpoints for half a day and that's it.

The landscape south of Broome changes abruptly: The boab trees are missing and other trees I see only rarely. At the edge of the Great Sandy Desert, bushland dominates and the wind blows across the plain. The Rest Areas consist solely of sand tracks and I pull my Solatrike in through the sand. For this I am alone here.

Whirlwinds are the order of the day. I see one from a distance and speed past it. The leaves whirl around my ears and as I look in the rear-view mirror, it crosses the road. The Whirly-whirly almost hit me.

Moreover, the wind is giving me a hard time. Theoretically, it blows counter clockwise around Australia at this time - so I should have a tailwind. That's the theory. As a cyclist, however, I always have a headwind. This is the reality. Thus, I need plenty of energy from the motor and my poor legs, so the last

kilometres to the rest area stretch on like chewing gum. Nevertheless, I am quite surprised that I can steadily increase my average speed these days, despite the huge effort. I am literally fighting my way through the windy wasteland.

In the middle of the sandy desert, where only low bushes make up the vegetation and dried-up salt lakes dominate the landscape, I pass the 25000 km mark. I have reached another milestone on my journey. Still, I don't celebrate it pompously in the wind, because the next campsite is miles away. The sun is sinking and so is the power of the battery. The final three kilometres become torture, the road leads endlessly straight ahead and uphill. The battery is almost flat and with the last of my strength I push the Solatrike into the safe harbor of the roadhouse.

There I am in the middle of the fierce wind; another spoke is broken and the pump is busted again. Luckily, I'm at a service station and pump up with the compressed air. The next rest area, where I intend to spend the night, is closed and I keep looking for a campsite. A track leads behind a hill and there I find a nice place for my tent. Ted and his wife had chosen the same spot with their caravan. In the distance, mountain formations rise up that remind me of Lappporten in Kiruna, Sweden, and at night, the Milky Way stretches across the tent. In the cone of light from my torch, a dingo makes a run for it.

On the day trip to Port Hedland, I meet Richard & Denise once more by chance, my camp neighbours from Litchfield N.P. Apart from monstrous cargo ships, I find very little worth seeing here, so I leave the place as well and buy a small air pump for

45. Australia 4, Through the Nullarbor

1. Almost 150 km straight ahead:

I stare blankly as only the strap of my pocket camera dangles from my wrist. It has fallen off with the whole holder. Thank God I find the camera again, but the screen is defective and remains black from now on. I have no idea what I am photographing or filming with it. Bad timing as the next place I could buy a new one is so far away.

The whole day is typical southern Australian weather for me: it is exceptionally cloudy and, in the arvo, there is a thunderstorm. I turn into the caravan park just in time and wait out the violent thunderstorm in the “wash + kitchen” before I pitch my tent on the grass patch at Grass Patch.

The weather remains unchanged, only the rain stays away until I arrive in Norseman and stock up on food. The nearest shop is 1194 km away, but I still can't take too much. The supermarket IGA in Norseman operates a delivery service, twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays. The latter even offers refrigerated goods. The package up to 50 kg costs \$9 per order plus the value of the items (as of 2018) and can be submitted by phone until noon the day before. They deliver to any Roadhouse as far as Ceduna. I could fall back on this in an emergency and have fresh fruit and vegetables shipped.

The sun shines and fills my battery, so that I fly over the first long hill. During my lunch break, there is an unexpected grunt in the bushes and I get a visit from two emus. Yet when I reach

for the camera, they flee. In the evening, I flee from the many flies and horseflies into my tent to eat. In addition to the millions of annoying flies, there are also horseflies which refuse to be killed. Where do they come from? My theory on the countless flies has to do with the many roadkill. The flies breed wonderfully in these mass carcasses.

The famous "90 Mile Straight Road" is 146.6 km long and has no bends. This is the name of the longest straight road in Australia. It only goes up and down a little, but neither to the right nor to the left - everything is straight as a die. The trees slowly become sparser, but still I haven't reached the Nullarbor. On the way, I turn off into the undergrowth for another night in the forest. At the Rest Areas, I follow the dirt tracks to the furthest end so that I am as far away as possible from the road and any other camping neighbours so I can have my well-deserved peace and quiet. I am looking for solitude, I can handle it and if I am already in seclusion, then I also like to enjoy it.

The next day I continue where I left off: with cycling straight ahead. Meanwhile, the temperature rises above 40°C at noon, from then on, I brave the wind and clouds start to gather at Caihuna Roadhouse, where I spend the night. "Don't steal our water!" is written on countless signs at this roadhouse. When every caravan fills up its tank, I can understand that, but we cyclists are not able to carry 40 litres of water.

Not only does the weather deteriorate, but also the road. It resembles a washboard track with a bitumen surface, which shakes me and the Solatrike, slows me down enormously and with the wind I feel as if I am constantly going uphill. I crawl along this lumpy section at 15 km/h.

50. Australia 8, Melbourne - Sydney

1. Onward journey with new solar panels:

A large package is leaning against the entrance to my friend's house with my name written on it. These must be the solar modules [94]. Though before I change them, I have an idea to better stabilise the panels so that they don't bend again in the heat. I drive through the outskirts of Melbourne to take the trike and trailer to the aluminium welder. In one day, he installs six diagonal supports in the lid of the trailer and repairs two fractures in it. Before I mount the new solar modules, I drill a hole in each of them to lead the wires through. This way I don't have to run the cables around the outside anymore and they don't have to withstand any pulls as they can't get caught. In addition, I make further improvements and in one day pretty solar panels are shining on my trailer again.

Recumbent trikes carry the risk of the feet slipping off the pedals and then the leg being run over by one's own trike. Serious injuries can result. Friends of mine have experienced this and photos of other cases look terrible. Fortunately, it never happened to me, but better safe than sorry. My solution seems tinkered with the straps and velcro I found in the hardware store but nevertheless it works. In addition, I am able to pull up the pedals, as with clipless pedals.

Shortly before I continue my journey, I meet up again with Stefan, who has meanwhile arrived in Melbourne, and we visit a bike polo tournament together. I have never seen anything like it and was not even aware that it existed.

I am extremely grateful to Frank for letting me stay at his place and park my Solatrike until I was back from Tasmania and could finish all the repairs.

I set off in good spirits and try to use the front motor on a short uphill slope, but it doesn't move. Not again! I thought I had fixed it. Over the next few days, I check everything again from front to back and try every trick in the book, but I can't find the fault. I am almost in despair and the steep mountains are getting closer and closer...

I am constantly surprised by my hosts. So, it happens that I find myself in the middle of the annual meeting of the "Girl Guides" (girls version of the scouts). Michael and Kath's daughter, Mave, is actively involved. After a rich buffet dinner, some members are honoured for their activities with badges and at the end they present me with a colourful bike badge.

Another long stretch lies ahead of me and I almost fly over the pavement. Wonderful, I could whiz like this for hours. A couple waves me off. Oh, is that necessary? I would love to fly on, but I oblige them. They introduce themselves as journalists from Radio ABC Gippsland. Completely baffled, I try to answer their questions. Till now, the media in Australia have actively ignored me when I told them my story. Now that I have lost hope, a miracle is happening.

In the evening I drive to Stratford to my hosts today, Iain and Sue... or rather; I get stuck in their steep driveway. The wheel slips in the gravel. Before I go nuts, Iain pulls me up by the rope with the car. They live out in the bush in a beautiful house with an even more wonderful view. Sue, a gifted artist, is currently preparing for an exhibition. [50.2](#)

52. New Zealand / Aotearoa 1, Northland Loop

The New Zealand / Aotearoa chapters contain New Zealand slang words. These are explained in the appendix: “[Kiwi Slang](#)”.

1. First visit to New Zealand / Aotearoa:

“Which way do I have to go? Right or left?” I ask desperately. “I don’t know, pull out to the right” says my travelling companion Andreas. “You mean left?” I remark. I operate the windscreen wipers to indicate my change of direction. Oh bugger, that’s the wrong way round here too. I bang on the door out of sheer habit of having the gear lever on this side as well. It’s a topsy-turvy world down here.

We gain our first experience of left-hand traffic in the middle of Auckland on the way back to the hostel. Andreas tries to guide me through using the new road map, and I struggle with the windscreen wipers.

He asked me a few months ago in 1997 if I wanted to accompany him on a trip to Australia. “Australia? That’s trendy at the moment and everyone’s going there” I say at first dismissively. Andreas adds: “I also intend to go to New Zealand”. “New Zealand? Why didn’t you say so before? That sounds better already!” comes my delighted reply.

To remain independent, we rent a car. Since Andreas does not have a driving licence at the moment, I am responsible for driving and he for navigating by means of a road map. All in a time before navigation device. [49.1](#)

2. Weird reception:

My second visit to New Zealand / Aotearoa begins just as bizarrely: The lady at passport control asks me a few detailed questions. She demands that I tell her exactly where I am cycling. I list a few cities, but she is not satisfied with that. She's probably never been on a bike tour.

The next bummer comes when I want to buy a New Zealand SIM card for my phone. This is not possible because my mobile phone is calibrated for the Australian telephone network and is blocked, they say. Although I explained clearly in Australia when I bought it that I have to change the SIM card in other countries. The Ozzie's probably don't care, the main thing is to sell something. I have no choice but to buy a brand new mobile phone. Do I have to buy a new phone in every country? That's pretty expensive. These things are dear as eh.

In a French backpacker, I book a bed in a six-person suite for a week. I feel like I'm in an insane asylum there. My flat-mates are a Portuguese man who babbles about Nostradamus and rebirth and an older New Zealander woman who blathers on even crazier. I don't get anywhere with them with counter-arguments. It is to the gnashing of teeth.

No wonder my teeth have been hurting for a long time and I have them examined. The X-rays show no cavities - so the dentist in Vietnam was wrong when he said I had about six cavities. Only the roots of the teeth are somewhat exposed and a new protective layer is brushed over them. [52.3](#)

Reviews from the original German edition:

Bruno Brandenberger

Read your great book - no - devoured it! Could not stop reading! Am a fan of expedition reports and your way of traveling.... ...Your philanthropy and your enigmatic mischievousness and humor come across well in the book. Just a great, exciting book you have written.

Sandra Mosimann

Super exciting and varied read! Merci David.

Sebastian Hachenberger

Hello David, I am currently reading your book and am very captivated and enthusiastic (I am currently on your first winter break). Your adventures, experiences and stamina is truly remarkable!!!! My absolute respect!

It is really a great pleasure to read the book! Thank you so much for writing the book. I will definitely order more.

Bernard Thurnheer (Swiss TV legend).

It reads smoothly and is interesting. Rating: good.

Daniel Tobler

I really enjoyed it - well written.

Philippe Chretien

I have just finished reading your fascinating book.

I was able to accompany you through storms, headwinds, breakdowns, red tape and all kinds of unforeseen events, but also through many highlights.

I congratulate you on your adventure and the immeasurable wealth of experience you have gained and thank you for sharing it.

Maximum respect!

Nicole Schumacher-Velder (Author of: „Das Tabu“)

I like your writing style and your humour ! But I think it's a great piece of work ♥

Daniela von Ow

When tinkers travel: The Solatrike that David Brandenberger designed and assembled with the help of numerous experts was to take him around the globe. David, an experienced traveller, put an infinite amount of time and meticulousness into getting a vehicle that would not let him down and, if it did, could be repaired quickly and easily on the spot. But many things turned out differently, and the journey proved to be a real challenge, both from a logistical and a technical point of view. And when not only the driver but also the Solatrike runs out of breath in the endless expanse, the emotions are close enough and „uncensored“. The book takes us very closely into these spheres of a person's confrontation with technology and, even more so, with nature. Moments of happiness were more recognisable in the encounters with numerous people on site than in „the way is the goal“. It is also exciting to read about all the

obstacles caused by local bureaucracy and the definition of a Solatrike. What „detours“ are involved - that needs strong nerves and openness for alternative goals. In part, we learn this from David unfiltered. And yet, the great fascination, „the fever“ of travelling is always strong enough despite setbacks - and it therefore goes on and on. Travelling to countries where people don't want to talk about their society or their politics, but where the hospitality is enormous and even the smallest room is filled with warmth and joy of encounter - only those who set out experience something like that. In the end, it was not a total loss that ended the trip, but the Covid pandemic. David returned, the Solatrike has been wintering in New Zealand ever since. I am already curious how the journey will continue after the pandemic. Good luck and above all, many happy moments.

Five star Book review at Orell Füssli Book Distribution.

Captivating until the last line

Rating 14.11.2021

Rated Book (Paperback)

Exciting, informative, humorous and humanely written =masterpiece=. Written by a humble, helpful and open-minded young man who brings readers closer to our diverse world. Without prejudice, he approaches people all over the world and masters even the most difficult situations of his unique way of travelling with a twinkle in his eye.