

Himalayan Freeriders – Hans, Richie and Wade

Nepalese MOUNTAIN Bike Adventure

April 7th 2007



Whilst sitting on another plane, I have time to reflect and write about the epic two weeks of adventure biking on freeride mountain bikes in Nepal, shredding some of the best trekking routes in the world; with none other than freeride legends Richie Schley and Wade Simmons.

Joining us on bikes were photographer Blake Jorgenson (please contact him for photo requests: blake@blakejorgenson.com) and our english film-crew with cameraman Rob Summers and his assistant Seb Rogers who documented this trip for a new TV series by ProActive TV.



Unlike the usual Himalaya bike tourist, we choose alternative ways to gain altitude by helicopter, aeroplane or shuttle. We all brought 5 - 7 inch bikes, I choose my GT ID 5

with a Fox 36 and my new Kenda Telonix tires.



After several long and gruelling flights we all managed to meet at the Kathmandu Guest House, where we joined our guides from Dawn till Dusk Mountain Bike Trekking Ltd., who helped us with their local knowledge and logistics.

Kathmandu is one crazy city, it seemed like Tijuana on steroids, traffic and air pollution are off the chart.



The three of us had been talking about a trip together for many years, so it was no coincidence that at last, after much talking, mailing and planning we managed to plan this adventure, surrounded by the highest mountains and some of the most awesome scenery in the world. Anybody who knows a bit about trekking trails, knows that they can be fun for bikes too, but more than often they are totally demanding and super technical. Nepal was no exception, in fact it gives the terms demanding and technical a new meaning. Part of our mission was to also give away 30 bikes through my charity Wheels 4 Life (www.wheels4life.org), it was very touching to present these bikes to the recipients and to see the smiles and sheer joy in their faces. The local welder, who received one of the

bikes, was later seen with his wife around the corner, crying with happiness, for it was the first time he had ever been given anything.



The first few days we spent around Kathmandu (KTM), which lies in the foothills of the Himalayas, surrounded by hills and mountains we found some decent trails and sampled the local culture. The climate was super hot and humid, this was contrary to our expectations, inevitably we were stoked to leave the area to fly to Pokhara a gateway town to the Annapurna massif, before we flew up to Jomsom at 2700m. Our flight to the windy mountain village was delayed by one day this was due to high winds and our flight had to be cancelled. The flight itself was adventurous, since we were flanked by giant mountains left and right, it became a reality to us that the real trip, riding and our adventure was about to begin. This was confirmed upon arrival in the remote village along the Annapurna Circuit Trail, which can only be reached by foot or air. Due to heavy snowfall in recent weeks, we had to change our planned route slightly and therefore we couldn't cross the 5400m Thorung La Pass, which meant that instead we would climb as high as possible and then ride the Jomsom Trail with an adventurous detour via the remote "Tibetan" village of Lupka, which has never been ridden on bikes before.



This day was our shortest day, all we had to do was ride the relatively flat river trail uphill to Kagbeni, the boarder-town to the until recently forbidden Mustang Kingdom. We rode an incredibly gnarly suspension bridge, this was one of the scariest things I have ever done, the wind was blowing so hard, with such force, I was afraid of being swept over the railing.

Wade felt very sick upon arrival and went straight to bed, while Richie and I explored the medieval looking village. That next day we had to climb 1000m vertical to Muktinath, and now it was my turn to be sick. I had absolutely no energy and with such fatigue I had a hellish time making it to our 3850m high destination. The landscape was extremely dry and desert like. We encounters a few trekkers along the way and a bunch of pilgrims, many of them from India, who were on their way to the holy temple and the eternal flame in Muktinath that burns from a natural gas source.



The downhillling was about to start on our third day in the Annapurna mountains, my strength was slowly coming back, only to then encounter something else called diarrhea and unfortunately I wasn't alone in our team. But nothing could hold us back now, nor

did we have a choice. We climbed to 4000m, the high-point of our trip, with great views of Dhaulagiri and other 8,000 meter peaks, nearby.



We passed some Yak herds, which graze on the high-altitude plateau's, they look like a mix of a Scottish Highland Cow and a water buffalo. It proved to be a good decision on our part, to choose this previously unriden and little travelled route via the off the beaten path village of Lupra, where black magic and human scarify (on already dead bodies) are part of the local rituals. The town had neither souvenir vendors nor restaurants and we were lucky to pursue a family to cook us a simple noodle soup and brew us some nepalese tea to sustain us. The trails were incredibly steep and technical, we crossed a river and ascended up through a pine forest, before heading down a super rocky riverbed for several miles. I even found a cool fossil, a nice souvenir of our trip. During mid afternoon we arrived back at Jomsom, where we had flown in a few days prior, from there we had another 2 days of hard-core downhill trails ahead of us. We spent the night at Marpha (2600m), a picturesque community known for its apple orchards (the tree-line in the Himalayas is much higher than in the Alps).



The next day started with a 10-km jeep road descent (they have only very few tractors in

this cut off and remote valley, which have been brought in by air, since there is no access by road). By lunchtime, Blake looked sick as a dog and none of us had any real idea of either how long a day or how challenging a trail still awaited us. Luckily Blake got a second wind that afternoon, but he was still suffering from some sort of heat stroke. By now the trail was about as technical as it gets, even though we primarily went down, there were constantly short technical uphill, which required pushing and carrying our bikes. Often the trails were just carved into the side of the hill or it was covered by recent landslides. Donkey caravans didn't make it any easier, trying to tackle the slow going stair-like trail, plus the heavy loaded animals wouldn't give us an inch of space to pass them. After 8 hours on route, we realised that we still had 3 hours to go and not much daylight left, with no time to loose we put the cameras away and started to charge, soon it was dark and our group was split in three. Not only were we out of water, light and energy - but we ran out of trail as well and we had to hike a steep and sketchy detour at twilight. Physically exhausted, dehydrated and disorientated from lack of light, we began to wonder about the insanity of this; at the same time I knew the adventure had started. We passed a few remote settlements, where candlelight and firelight silhouetted the faces of kids and farm animals staring at us in utter disbelief. A few times that day I was chased by a pack of dogs, each time with them snapping at my heels and wheels, I was sprinting for my life, praying for no uphill or flat tire.

It felt so good when we finally arrived in Tatopani (1200m), where a 12 hour day ended with a hot meal and a cold shower. The next day was much of the same, more insane trails, I don't know too many people who would have enjoyed them or have the skills to ride them.



Every inch of our suspension was appreciated and the bikes were put through the wringer more than once. We descended further down the deepest gorge in the world, always along the Kali Gandaki river all the way to Beni at 800m elevation.

Beni, was the end for this part of our trip, before we drove back to Pokhara on a dusty dirt road, we had a chance to award 10 locals with bikes for transportation purposes through Wheels 4 Life. Amongst the recipients were a milkman, a welder, a vegetable farmer, 4 students and 2 local newspaper writers. The people in the countryside live very

harsh and hard lives, we witnessed it first hand and saw it etched into their faces, it made us feel that much better to help out in a small way. Seeing people lugging 200 pound loads on their backs up these trails put our accomplishments in perspective.



Back in KTM we reorganised ourselves, washed some laundry and had a local press conference, followed by a trials show from me for the local bike community and more bike handouts to the workers at the local Kidney Health Centre, who make less than \$ 60.- per month and use the bikes to get to work and in the field. That night we stayed at a monastery at the outskirts of town.

The following morning we found ourselves in front of a sketchy looking, gigantic, old russian helicopter, with oil spilling out of the side and a russian pilot watching the petrol truck in action with a cigarette in his mouth; our confidence was diminishing by the second and our anxiety mounting.



We all had sweaty palms as we choppered into the Langtang mountains to Kyanjin Gomba at 3800m altitude. Not only was it a relief to land and get out of the heli, but this place was everything I had imagined about the Himalayas. The coolest little Tibetan/Alpine village at the base of several majestic glaciers. The whole town came to greet us before we started our 2 day ride. Langtang is another famous, but remote trekking region. With the help of some porters we brought some tents, as we had decided to skip the teahouses along the way.

This trail flowed much more than the previous trail and we had a blast cruising the alpine. We camped not far from the village of Langtang, the temperature dropped near to freezing at night. The next morning greeted us with beautiful sunshine and another incredibly long day of endlessly technical trails with an ever changing landscape. Soon we entered the forest, first with beautiful blooming Rhododendron trees, then later it became more and more like a jungle and rain-forest with monkeys in the trees. The riding was awesome, I was stoked to see Wade having fun on all the technical sections, its a lot of fun to see him ride with his gracious style and skills. I usually find myself to be the last to get off the bike when it gets technical and trialsy, but he gave me a run for my money, especially on one particular staircase which I found a bit too exposed.



Richie, had a strong comeback from his recent hand injury, he also proved why he is considered one of the best riders out there and how he earned his name. We had a lot of fun and the trails were definitely pushing our limits in more ways than one. After another 12 hour day of charging hard, I have to give props to our cameramen who not only carried their equipment but also documented our ride.



From here it was a 10 hour bus ride on bumpy dirt roads, which jarred every bone in our already exhausted bodies. However my long journey home was only just beginning. Next came a flight from KTM to Bangkok to Kuala Lumpur, a 16 hour layover, then on to Taipei and Los Angeles and finally an hour and a half shuttle to my casa in Laguna Beach, home at last!

Overall, we had a blast - it was some of the most hard-core riding I had done on any of my trips, its for sure not for the faint hearted, but the memories and impressions make it well worth doing it all again.

Namaste

Hans Rey

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More info on biking in the Himalayas: www.nepalbiking.com













