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USA – From Wyoming to Los Angeles

Wild, Wild West

The surrounding hills shimmer in red light, it is 4:30 p.m. and the sun goes down in Death Valley. We haven't seen a car for a long time. A small sandy path leaves our still hot asphalt road and we just follow it into the wilderness. After a few minutes the road cannot be seen any more and we begin to set up our tent in the fading light. No snake, no scorpions and no nasty spiders in sight, it is totally calm and quiet. We hear each other breathing and every small sound. Soon our stove is burning and then it is dark. The clear view of the stars is breathtaking. At 7:30 p.m. Julia goes to sleep. The party animal!

Stefan still reads and a strong, hot wind starts howling. It gets stronger, so we have to put the storm lines on our tent. Sand is in the air, and the stars disappear. It is totally dark and, though it doesn't really matter, we feel strange that the next people are 70 kilometers away – at the official campground. We hurry back into the tent, which is under attack by the fierce storm. Sleeping is not possible. The storm pours sand through the tent, sand everywhere: in our teeth, in our ears and in our clothes. We are holding hands and hope that it doesn't start to rain, because then flash floods might rush through the valley. We have chosen a slightly uphill place for camping, but the storm seems so strong and mighty that we fear anything might happen. At half past midnight the storm weakens, our orange MSR tent has stood strong and we finally fall peacefully asleep.

The sun rises at 5:30 a.m. and when we get out of our tent, there are no clouds in the sky and there is no hint of what happened last night. This is the wilderness, incalculable and absolutely beautiful. What remains is the memory of a romantic evening that was one of our most memorable of the whole tour. And a lot of sand in our ears.



Cycling through the desert

Isn't that boring? No, not at all, the west of the U.S. has been one of the most exciting parts of our trip. Driving through it in a car is different - the landscape just rushes by. You can't see the coyote at the side of the road and no lizards cross the road. Well, they might cross but then they end up as road kill.

The hot wind, the taste of sand are exchanged for air-condition and a scented tree. While cycling through the desert our thoughts go wandering, both of us are in his or her own world, often in the same one. If there is bad weather, we experience without respite. The singing of the Colorado River and the whistling of the wind accompany us - sometimes it is absolutely silent. Then we listen to the constant humming of our tires. Through desert cycling we become one with our environment, undisturbed traveling in a perfect flow.

Only uphill our extra water gets in our way, sometimes we carry up to 20 additional liters up the passes. Edward Abbey, one of the great writers of the west, has reckoned, that one has to discover the desert as completely as possible and has put his opinion quite dramatically (please refer to this month's quote on the next page). We feel he is somehow right, only by walking (or, of course) cycling the desert shows it's hidden secrets and beauty.

Our route

Snow! Do you remember our last newsletter? Luckily we are finished with that! From Jackson, Wyoming we cycled as fast as possible southwards and soon arrived in the country of arches, slick rock and strange stone hills. All the time there was blue sky and extreme dryness – in a nutshell: the desert that was named Utah by the Mormons. Then we took a short side trip to Colorado and then we arrived in Moab, the mountain bike capital of the world. Here we successfully tested the off-road capacity of our full suspension Koga tandem. After Moab one great national park followed the next – Arches, Capitol Reef, Bryce and finally Zion. Stefan proposed to Julia here five years ago. Therefore we had to come here again.

After the quietness of the desert, Sin City, Las Vegas, was waiting for us. Our faultless winning system had to be optimized so we left the city soon and we went to Death Valley where we experienced the loneliness and sometimes brutal beauty of the west. After that we went to Los Angeles. Two people a day are murdered in the city of angels. Luckily we had our own angel – our new friend Sherry saved us and drove us in her pick-up into the city before we could get ourselves into trouble. We spent perfect days with her and had a great time in Hollywood at the Walk of Fame and the Universal Studios.





Angels Landing

In the Zion National park we went on a hiking trip to Angels Landing, a 400 meter high standing monolith offering astonishing 360 degree views of the surroundings. The uphill hike was breathtaking as well. At the beginning the path followed easily through a canyon but the last kilometer went steeply uphill and we had to climb along a slope. To our right and left there was only the abyss. A fear of heights wouldn't come in handy here. At the top we remembered back to the day of Stefan's proposal. We should have brought sparkling wine this time or five years ago but because of the crazy climbing we preferred water. But we celebrated later with beer, a barbecue and – of course - roasting marshmallows.



Las Vegas

We were overwhelmed! All those blinking lights and all those sounds. For the first time of our tour we were in a traffic jam. On our fully loaded tandem right in the middle of the legendary "Strip" of Las Vegas. To our right three lanes separated us from the Casinos, to our left two more lanes of traffic tried to escape the chaos on a turn-off. We see the Cantina Diablo, where two days ago we celebrated Halloween with our friends Wiebke and Ralf who accompanied us ten days in their campervan. In Las Vegas Halloween doesn't mean small kids dressing in funny costumes and collecting sweets. A Las Vegas Halloween party means showing as much flesh as you can in your costume and getting drunk as hell. We liked that! But after all that city life the call of the wild was getting stronger. Three more traffic lights to go!



What's next?

After finishing the northern part of the Pan-Americana in Los Angeles and a short Stop-Over in Toronto we found ourselves in the Caribbean and enjoying the last three weeks of this year's tour. The tandem was set up again and, for the joy of the Bajans, we have already cycled on the streets of Barbados. On the 16th of December we return to Frankfurt to spend Christmas in Germany. We are very much looking forward to seeing our family and friends again. But by the end of January we shall return to L.A. to continue our route to Mexico and eventually Argentina.

We wish you a happy Christmas season,

**Sunny greetings
Julia and Stefan**



"In the first place you can't see anything from a car; you've got to get out of the goddamned contraption and walk, better yet crawl, on hands and knees, over the sandstone and through the...cactus. When traces of blood begin to mark your trail you'll see something, maybe." (Edward Abbey)

Our Sponsor of the Month:



The total weight of our bicycle, including ourselves, sums up to 250kg and we are glad to have the Magura hydraulic brake. Even at very high speeds our HS 33 brake works immediately and decisively. There is also another bonus: the brake is easy to maintain - a brake for the long run. Magura also manufactures nice disc brakes. We have these brakes on our mountain bikes back home. Check out their website – it is always worth a visit, the accessories for cycling are also quite "sweet", like the guys in the bike shops here would say.

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