



**100
DAYS
TO THE
SOUTH**

100 DAYS TO THE SOUTH

„Don't ask about the consequences if you want to do something. Otherwise, you'll never do it.“

Erich Maria Remarque, Arch of Triumph



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PROLOGUE

The northernmost point in North America, where you can get as a civilian by a motorised vehicle, is Deadhorse settlement in Alaska. It is located at the latitude of 70°12' N, at the end of Dalton Highway, and inhabited by people engaged in service at Prudhoe Bay oil fields. For the record, at the end of 2017, it became possible to reach the Arctic Ocean from Canada, by the Dempster Highway from Yukon to Tuktoyaktuk town in Northwest Territories. Though, it is located a bit lower — at 69°30' N.

The farthest reachable point on the opposite side of the planet is a town named Ushuaia in Argentina with the latitude of 54°30' S. It is a total contrast to its northern brother, surrounded by deserted Tundra. Here, it is forest and mountains. 1000 km across the Strait of Drake is Antarctica. Perhaps, that is why the place is called Fin del Mundo¹.

I started planning. I went to India for my ten-days leave. There, I rent Royal Enfield motorcycle and drove from Delhi to Lower Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh state, covering almost 3000 km. That experience gave me an idea of what a motorcycle road trip looks like — average daily mileage, expenses, planning, etc.

¹ Fin del Mundo — (fr. Spanish) The End of the World.

The length of the Pan-American Highway constitutes nearly 22,000 km. With some detour, I reckoned to cover 30,000. And if doing 300 km per day, I would finish in 100 days. As for the budget, I felt \$10,000 should be enough. Accommodation — \$30 per day — \$3000. Moreover, I hoped to save by camping in a tent. Food — \$20 daily — \$2000. Fuel (with possible consumption of 5L/100 km, or 48 miles per gallon, and the average price of \$1.3) — \$2000. Miscellaneous — \$10 per day — \$1000. The rest, \$2000, was meant to cover vehicle servicing and my ticket home. Then, other expenses came into view.

Motorcycle. South America was not a place to look for it — I spoke no Spanish. Naturally, I referred to the northern end of the route — Canada and the US. There I could ask people questions and get answers. After inquiring in various Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and other corresponding institutions, I concluded that the most foreigner-friendly places to purchase a vehicle were Alaska, British Columbia, and Yukon. Because of the simplified Registration and Licensing procedure, a person could *buy and drive* it the same day.

But what kind of a motorcycle? I just knew I liked Honda CB from the 70-s. By some reason, the perspective of driving

30,000 km on a rarity bike from distant past didn't bother me. But this indifference didn't last long.

„It is a small bike for such a long trip,“ said one Canadian upon my inquiry to purchase his CB550 (1974). „The biggest concern is that it is 42 years old, and it is getting quite difficult to get parts. I would really feel bad if you got stranded somewhere and couldn't find the parts you needed. A Kawasaki KLR650 can be picked up for about the same amount. It's an easy-to-work-on-and-maintain bike that is great on any road conditions.“

Alaska had few KLRs to offer. Through the Craigslist website, I contacted the seller — Stefan from Fairbanks. For a deposit of \$200, I asked him to hold the motorcycle for a month, until I arrived in August 2018. The 2008 bike cost \$2750 and had 10,000 miles (16,000 km) on its odometer.

And last but not least, as Ukrainian, I needed visas to the US, Canada, Colombia, and Bolivia. First two I arranged well beforehand. The others I planned to obtain on the way.

Diary. August the 3rd. *My flight to Alaska is scheduled for tomorrow at 15:10. I have \$10,260 with me. I don't know what expect me there, but I am sure that the next 100 days of my life will be different.*

DAY 61

CENTRAL MEXICO

I woke up to the sound of a car that drove into my camp by a creek. Without having breakfast, I started packing. The tent had developed the smell of mould. It remained damp because of the constant wet weather.

I continued my journey. If not considering numerous humps, I was enjoying the ride — the sun, eventually, showed up. I was 40 km away from Oaxaca when I had stopped for lunch at an accidental pull-out along road 190. I fired my portable stove and put the rice to boil. The weather cheered me up. But soon, it frowned again. *These clouds. I think I have to hurry up.* But it was too late. No, it was not the rain — it was something I feared more — robbery.

The white car stopped nearby, dropping off one person. After 200 m, past me, it stopped again, and another person got off. When two men had met, they headed towards me. One pulled out a weapon, pointed the gun at me and said, „Cash.“

PART I

START

DAY 1

ALASKA

Behind my back was 40-litres backpack, fully loaded. The most of its content was clothes: hat, woollen scarf, my favourite woollen sweater, 1 pair of underpants (not favourite), 6 pairs of socks (2 were warm), 1 woollen shirt, 4 t-shirts, 4 pairs of underwear (not woollen), 1 down jacket, 2 pairs of shorts, 2 pairs of trousers, 1 hoodie, 1 leather jacket, 1 denim jacket, and 1 pair of leather high top Converse shoes. I had no motorcycle outfit whatsoever.

The gadgets I was bringing were a laptop, iPhone 6S, Go-Pro Hero 6, DJI Mavic Air drone with two batteries, Kindle, and one power bank. First Aid Kit, rope, knife, carabiners, and some other small necessities were in the rucksack as well. And there was a book — „Antarctica. Hell and Heaven“ by Reinhold Messner.

The US Immigration officer stamped my passport in, and the count down of 100 days to the South began.

Alaska. What did I expect from you? — Cold weather, at least. Holding my breath to prepare to withstand the blow of

chilly air, I opened the door out of the airport. Instead, I was met by a gentle, mild summer breeze. Yes, Alaskans have summer too, even though the latitude here, in Anchorage, is 61° N. The weather in this region is affected by the warm oceanic current of the same name, Alaska, that originates in warm Equatorial waters of Western Oceania.

The chance to experience Alaskan hospitality did not make me wait long. Local elder lady, who was volunteering at the Information desk in the International Airport, offered me a ride to my hostel. I could have taken the bus, but I had only \$20 note on me, from which, as Sida said, the bus driver wouldn't have any change.

Sida was born in Germany but from 1965, by some personal reasons, lives in Alaska. On the way to the city, she told me that recently, nearby, one man got killed by a bear.

„One must carry a bear spray,“ she concluded.

I could not process it. I knew about spray from mosquitos.

„But how using a spray should I protect myself from a bear?“ I asked.

„You spray it into a bear's face,“ she replied calmly.

I swear, I could not imagine this being practised in real life. *By the time I lift my hand to spray, the bear will be finishing chewing my forearm.*

“One must not run from it and keep food away,” — she continued. — Bears can randomly walk into the city from time to time, especially in winter, when there is a limited amount of food for them.“

When we had arrived, I was dropped off by the Bent Prop Inn Hostel. As I came to know a moment later, there were two hostels in the city with the same name. And, of course, mine was not the one I had arrived at, so I had to have a walk.

On the way, in Walmart, I bought shoes for riding North, to the Arctic Ocean, where the weather would differ from local. For \$32, boots looked good, though, it wasn't waterproof.

Tomorrow, at 7.45 AM, is the \$99 bus¹ to Fairbanks, where I have my steel horse waiting for me. I hope it would not be Rocinante but Bucephalus.

Hostel	30
Food	25
Extras	144
Budget	\$10,061

Hostel
„Bent Prop Inn“

¹ The shuttle can be booked through Alaska/Yukon Trails Company. Link to its web-site is given in USEFUL WEB-LINKS chapter at the end of the book.

DAY 2

FAIRBANKS

The rain hid all the view. After 7 hours and 577 km, I checked in to Billie's Backpacker Hostel in Fairbanks.

Billie is an older woman, who converted her home into a 2-storey guest house. Here, I was expecting two packages to be delivered from Amazon: a sleeping bag and a tent. While the first one was already here, the latter had disappeared — the box was empty. Billie assumed somebody took it. She was very sorry and even offered me to compensate for my loss, but I objected — after all, it was not her fault.

What preoccupied my thoughts was a motorcycle. I felt excited and nervous at the same time. I knew the bike had a high seat, so I worried whether I would be able to reach the ground with my toes.

My first ever motorcycle experience occurred when I was 10. My uncle decided to teach me how to drive his 125 cc

Minsk¹. My first ever ride terminated in few seconds in a haystack. But we did not give up, and later I was able to ride decently. My toes then hung much higher above the ground. This fact was reassuring me now. The bike, though, had broken down the same month, and my motorcycle adventures finished.

Not until I was 22, I rode a motorcycle again, when getting my category B driving license. But I had just one practical lesson as it was cheaper and easier to pay a bribe and get it all sorted within a day rather than attend the whole course.

Nice small wooden 2-storey house. Stefan has built it by himself. There is no running water — they (he lives with his wife) take it from a creek nearby. For cooking, they use an electric 1-burner stove. A massive Mac computer is on the table, along with piles of papers. Aside, there is a big stand reaching to the ceiling with shelves full of books. A simple ladder leads to the 2nd floor where a bed is the only furniture. In 2005, Stefan moved to Alaska from New York, where he worked as a government reporter.

He met me outside of the house, and right away, took off the rain cover to reveal a blueish-grey clean and shiny motorcycle.

¹ Minsk is the Belarusian brand of motorcycles, scooters, ATVs and snowmobiles, founded in 1951.

„Yes, it is tall,“ were my first thoughts.

The bike came with two saddlebags, two tank-side bags, one tank-top bag, a used helmet, and kevlar gloves as a bonus. I took it for a short ride. And yes, I had to lean on one or another side to reach the ground with my toes. But I felt the beast. „We are going to get along with each other,“ I concluded.

We had started the paperwork when it turned out that the bike’s registration expired two months ago. Stefan expressed his belief that there should be no issue to renew it, even by a new *foreign* owner.

„In case of any difficulties, call me,“ he reassured me while writing down my name into the ownership document, called the *title*, which we both then signed. Then we shook hands, and the deal was over.

Hostel	35
Extras	24
Budget	10,002

Hostel
„Billie’s Backpacker“

DAY 3

I LOVE ALASKA

Magic is real! Within 20 minutes, after I paid \$60 for new registration and \$15 for a change of the ownership, I went out of the Department of Motor Vehicles as a happy holder of new Alaskan license plates with a bear pictured on it.

Insurance. It is illegal in the US to drive without one. Stefan suggested inquiring at Geico Insurance Company. The office I dealt with was located in Anchorage. However, over the phone, the lady, agent, obtained all needful information from me, and within 10 minutes, I got the insurance policy in my email box. It covered the state of Alaska, Canada, and lower 48¹ for one year. *I love Alaska with its acceptable level of bureaucracy.* Though the price of \$250 bit me a little, I felt happy, as everything was ready for me to depart.

Hostel	35
Bike	325
Budget	9642

Hostel
„Billie’s Backpacker“

¹ Lower 48 is a term to name the continental 48 states of the US.

Arctic Ocean

Beaufort Sea



- ① camp
- ⊙ city
- ▲ Mt Denali, 6190 m
- route
- Ⓐ Arctic Circle
- Ⓜ windy area
- Ⓚ Kenai Peninsula

NOW I DRIVE INTO THE WILD

DAY 4

DEPARTURE

My tent returned to the world. It had been left on a bench in the backyard when Billie spotted it in the morning. Whoever took it, at the end of the day, was a conscientious person.

Portable stove¹, propane gas, camping pot, torch, another rope, raincoat, bear spray, fuel canister, water canisters, wrench keys, screwdrivers, air pump — I had to have all the necessary things before heading into nothingness. Such was 666 km of the Dalton Highway on the way to the Arctic Ocean.

The road was built in 1974 to support the construction of Trans-Alaska Pipeline — one of the world's largest pipeline systems. It has the length of almost 1300 km and pumps the oil directly from Prudhoe Bay oil fields in the north to Valdez city on the southern coast. It takes around twelve days for the oil to run all the way across the entire state. I intended to do it in four days.

¹ MSR (Mountain Safety Research) is American producer of camping, hiking, and mountaineering equipment, such as portable stoves, water filters, snowshoes, tents, etc.

I planned to have two camps¹ going and two (same ones) coming back. Camp 2 was meant to be used for two consecutive nights with a day run to the Arctic coast.

I was ready. The bike was loaded to the extent that not only toes but both feet firmly touched the ground. I turned on the ignition, and there came the sound that was to follow me for months ahead. Anxiety and excitement were raving in me.

„What expects me there? What challenges am I to face? What people am I to meet and what places am I to see?“ I could not know. I knew only that for the next few days, I would be passing through one of the most isolated, wild and uninhabited forests on Earth. Strangely, I felt it was the right way, the way to turn my life on.

* * *

Who could have ever thought? I'm sitting on a bench, having a nice egg sandwich with tomato and hot tea, 100 km away from Arctic Circle in Alaska. How did it all even happen?

When I was 13, I went on a school trip to the Crimea Peninsula. I remember the moment when I noticed a grey wall

¹ Camps' locations are taken from websites, provided at the end of the book.

of clouds above the horizon, far away. There was something unusual in it. As closer we drove as less it resembled a wall — it was the Crimean Mountains. So high in the sky! So powerful and massive! That was the first *call*.

In 2006, at the age of 18, I graduated from a maritime college. I went to work at sea. My dream had come true — I had a job that let me see the world. Two years later, I quit — I was in love. With time, love had vanished, but not the passion for travelling.

Travelling was like a fresh breeze into my head. By offering a new experience in smelling, tasting, seeing, touching, feeling, and of course, thinking, it affected me. And I didn't want to stop. I wanted to see more. I wanted to feel the air of the mountains *out there*, the smell of oceans and jungles, the taste of food. I wanted to see people, the way they look, behave, smile, laugh, think. I wanted to talk to them, look at their eyes. I wanted to experience it all, to feel it all, for real.

When I had become a flight attendant, my travel mania reached its peak. I got to see new places, new people, new cultures. Three years passed by real quick. Still, I wasn't getting enough. I saw places but in a blink of an eye; I had met people but said goodbye the same day; I had made friends but never

saw them again. I needed to go deeper, to grab and hold on something for longer, to submerge myself entirely in a place or a culture or, as a matter of fact, in my own adventure. I wanted to go far and for long. With full dedication, I wanted to explore the world. But whether it would be the world we call Earth or my inner one, I was about to find out.

* * *

The first stretch of the Dalton Highway proved to be passable. This unpaved road was not that bad as I expected. *It gets messy only when it's wet.* Fortunately, after three days of constant drizzle in Fairbanks, the sun showed up.

Dense forest enveloped the highway from both sides.

„Bears are around. Hurry up, man,“ I kept telling myself, wearing a down jacket in this tunnel of spruce trees, while a bear spray was hanging on my belt.

On the north bank of the Yukon River, I stopped the second time — to refill the tank. Here, one gallon¹ of fuel cost \$5.46, whence back in Fairbanks, it was \$3.50.

¹ US gallon = 3.8 litres.

Five Miles campground was my camp number 1. It was clean, open, with picnic tables, toilet, trash container¹ and one RV² already parked for the night. *Thank God, I'm not alone.*

Food	40			
Fuel	40			Camp 1
Extras	160	KM	235	Elevation: 124 m
Budget	9402	Distance	235	65°55'07" N; 149°49'39" W

* * *

BEAR SAFETY. CODE OF CONDUCT

BEAR ETIQUETTE

Make your presence known; avoid surprises. Sing, talk, wear a bell. Avoid thick bushes. Give bears plenty of room. Watch and photograph from a safe distance. Be on the watch for bear kills. A bear will defend its food. Detour areas where you see or smell dead animals or fish. Cook away from your tent. Keep a clean camp. Store your food in airtight containers away from the tent site.

¹ Toilets are well maintained, regularly cleaned, with lots of toilet paper rolls inside. Trash containers have a peculiar latch to prevent bears from accessing its content.

² RV (recreational vehicle) is a motor vehicle, or a trailer, which includes living quarters, designed for accommodation. Travelling by RV is very common among Americans.

BEAR BEHAVIOUR

A bear, standing on its hind legs, usually only wants a better view and more information. On four legs — a bear may show agitation by swaying its head from side to side, making huffing noises, and clacking its teeth. Flattened ears and raised hairs on the back of the neck can be an indication of aggressive intent. If a bear runs with a stiff, bouncing gait, it may be false charging. Direct eye contact is often interpreted by a bear as a challenge or a threat.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

If you do encounter a bear at close distance, remain calm. Remember, bear attacks are rare. Identify Yourself. Talk to the bear in a normal voice. Wave your arms to help the bear recognize you as a human being. The bear may come closer or stand to get a better look or smell. Back away slowly in a diagonal direction, but if the bear follows, stop and hold your ground. Resist the urge to run. You cannot outrun a bear. Like dogs, a bear will instinctively chase a fleeing animal. Bears often make bluff charges within 10 feet. Continue to wave your arms and talk to the bear. If the bear gets too close, raise your voice and be more aggressive. Bang pots and pans. Never imi-

tate bear sounds or make squealing noises. If a bear actually makes contact, fall to the ground and play dead. Lie flat on your stomach or curl up in a ball with your hands behind your neck. Remain motionless as long as possible. In rare instances, particularly with black bears, a bear may perceive a person as food. If the bear continues to bite long after you have assumed a defensive posture, fight back vigorously.

* * *

DAY 5

ARCTIC CIRCLE

Coldfoot was the next place to refill the tank. It stands on the southern slopes of Brooks Range Mountains. I was told that once I cross after Atigun Pass (1415 m), there would be no trees at all.

There, the temperature dropped to nearly 0°C.

The landscape transformed drastically — the world of moss stood in front of me. I was within Northern Arctic Circle now.

I feel more comfortable here. If there is any wild beast around, I can spot it beforehand, from a distance, and run.

				Camp 2
Fuel	11		360	Elevation: 850 m
Budget	9391	Distance	595	68°27'22" N; 149°28'51" W

DAY 6

MY LUXURY

„What is this place about?“ I asked a white-haired man who had just offered me peanut butter cookies and was making a big cup of hot coffee in a trailer by the road on an open cleared area.

„Happy Valley Camp,“ he said. „It’s a hunting base. I’m waiting for my friends to bring clients from Anchorage. Then, from here, we will fly a small aeroplane over the Brooks Range in search of sheep, caribou, grizzly bears, wolves or moose for a trophy, predominantly, or to have a nice dinner,“ he laughed. „There are huts in the forest. We stay there.“

The last stretch of the Dalton Highway was fine gravel. Here, I encountered my first wild animals — reindeers.

Deadhorse has a gas station too and a small grocery store. Otherwise, it's bare vastness. To signify the start of the trip, I swam in cold, shallow waters of the Arctic.

„People must be drinking heavily here, “I said out loud sitting in a warm shuttle¹ bus.

„Actually, the alcohol is outlawed here, in the northern part of Alaska,“ a white, tall, freshly shaved driver responded. „In such harsh conditions, it is better to put it away, to avoid any unwanted accidents.“

„Oh, I see. But how...,“ I paused, looking around out of the window.

„Most of the people that are coming here for work stay only for two weeks. Every 14 days, the plane arrives to take them back home, to lower 48, and brings another set of crew. Such a schedule is long enough to keep the focus sharp on your duties and short enough not to get depressed in this no-man land.“

When it was still 30 km before the shelter at Galbraith Lake, I stopped. I didn't feel safe to continue. The road is a

¹ A 15-minutes shuttle to the Arctic Ocean should be booked 24 hours prior planned arrival into Deadhorse. The cost is \$60 (see USEFUL WEB-LINKS chapter).

stew of mud. It is down the slope there. First gear — too fast. If braking — the bike is sliding. 250 kg of weight is too much for the tires to make a solid grip with this puree. It was raining. It still is. My waterproof suit was trying to prove something else, but not its purpose. Gloves got wet. Every 30 seconds or so, I had to wipe the helmet visor to see the road. Fingers were getting numb too.

When I had finally reached the camp, I realised how hungry I was as I hadn't had anything for lunch. *Good, I have a Snickers bar with me.* This thought cheered me up, and inside the tent, I put water to boil to get myself warm with the evening tea. Such was my luxury.

Camp 3

Fuel	30	475	Elevation: 850 m
Budget	9361	Distance 1070	68°27'22" N; 149°28'51" W

SOUTH

DAY 7

UNDESIRED INFO

Over the Brooks Range Mountains back to the human-friendly environment. It was a beautiful sunny day. I couldn't miss the opportunity to launch the drone and get the footage of the Alaskan wilderness.

50 km before and 140 km after Coldfoot, in southern direction, is the only prolonged part of the Dalton Highway with an asphalt surface.

At Five Miles camp, Forest Service car drove in and informed me that for the last week, a black bear was spotted here a few times. As for me, I would prefer not knowing it at all.

				Camp 4
Fuel	21		360	Elevation: 124 m
Budget	9340	Distance	1430	65°55'07" N; 149°49'39" W

DAY 8

HAN

The bike proved reliable. I had no complaints. I worried a bit about the tires though — they were quite worn out — but I made it back to Fairbanks, on the fifth day since I had started the trip. I might call it a successful start. I gained more confidence for the journey ahead.

At the workshop, I picked the Dunlop brand of the rear tire suggested by the KLR650 manual. Only labour cost \$100. *It is a damn fortune! I should learn myself how to do such essential but needful service.*

At Billie's hostel, on the backyard, I saw a familiar man with a bicycle, turned upside down. I met Han at Coldfoot, where he had to give up on the ocean because of the broken spokes.

Han was the most positive and smiling person I had met for a long time. His travel plans were not fixed.

„I have time as long as all is good back home in China. I might get a call and fly there right away. If not, I'll keep on pedalling. Who knows, maybe I'll follow you till Argentina.“ And we both laughed. „For now, I'm heading towards Canada, but not sure yet which way to take¹.“

¹ Han reached Las Vegas when, ultimately, he had to fly back to China. Then, he returned, and as of December 2019, he was in El Salvador.

Two roads connect Yukon and Alaska. One has gentle slopes; another offers beautiful scenery. First and the most used one is called Alcan or Alaskan Highway. It starts in Fairbanks and goes through Whitehorse, crossing Yukon and British Columbia. Second is the Klondike Loop, which goes up through Dawson City. It is often called The Top of the World Highway and is open only during summer months. Such a peculiar name it earned because it skirts the crest of the hilly mountains, besides being one of the world's northernmost highways. Motorcyclist gave it another name — 100 Miles of Hell. Not that I wanted to see how the hell looks like, but I knew which route I would take on my way to Canada. But before, I wanted to explore a bit more of Alaska.

Hostel	35			
Food	30			
Fuel	20			
Bike	288			
Extras	30		256	Hostel
Budget	8937	Distance	1686	„Billie's Backpacker“

DAY 9

ISABEL PASS

Around 30 km after Delta Junction along the Richardson Highway, I encountered sudden gusts of the wind of great force. *It is a scenic road, indeed. But nobody mentioned it is one of the most windier too.* The strength of the wind overwhelmed me. It was new to me and my driving experience. The tablet by the road read, „The most windier place in inner Alaska.“ But what caused this phenomenon?

Isabel Pass of the Clearwater Mountains. With an elevation of 1000 m, it runs in between two peaks: Mt. Hayes, 4205 m (13832 ft), and Mt. Kimball, 3131 m (10300 ft). The cold masses of air rush from above them down the much warmer valley and through the narrow gap with tremendous force blow on flatlands, where I stood.

I leaned on the fuel tank, grabbed the handlebar firmly, lowered the speed down to 4th gear, and headed ahead. Thus, I counted on the potential horsepower of the bike. In case of a sudden blow, I could balance the vector of the wind's force from abeam with a sudden jerk straight ahead. As I continued, the wind kept throwing me on the opposite lane.

Camp 5

Fuel	20		336	Elevation: 959 m
Budget	8917	Distance	2022	63°04'18" N; 146°06'37" W

DAY 10

DRY AND WARM

My acquaintance with Mt. Denali¹ was scheduled for today. But it rained, so I saw nothing.

The first thing that gets wet is your feet. Then, when water drops down from the jacket, the seat gets wet too. Now, you have a wet butt. And when your butt is wet, any sense of comfort disappears, and you start feeling cold.

By the evening, I reached Anchorage and checked into the hostel. *What a pleasure it is to feel dry and warm.*

Hostel	35			
Fuel	15		520	Hostel
Budget	8867	Distance	2542	„Bent Prop Downtown“

¹ Mount Denali, 6190 m, is also known by its former official name McKinley. In 1975, it was renamed in favour of native Koyukon people, inhabiting the area, who have called it Denali for centuries.

DAY 11

KENAI

Kenai Peninsula sits on the top of every travel booklet list of places to visit in the US 49th state.

Fascinating beauty! White mountain caps, deep green forest, and sky blue waters of the charming Kenai River. It could have been a flag of Alaska — three horizontal stripes from top to bottom: white, green, blue. However, the flag was designed long before and now consists of eight gold stars forming the Big Dipper and Polaris on a dark blue field. The Big Dipper is an asterism in the constellation Ursa Major symbolising a bear, an animal indigenous to the state.

I stayed at Staritski SRS¹ Campground, located on a 60-meter cliff overlooking snow-peak Chigmit Mountains on the Alaskan mainland.

Camp	15
Food	14

Camp 6

¹ SRS — State Recreation Site. Such campgrounds are maintained by Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in the state of Alaska. Usage Fee applies.

Fuel	33		563	Elevation: 60 m
Budget	8805	Distance	3105	59°50'37" N; 151°48'41" W

DAY 12

DISASTER

Matanuska Glacier, with 43 km of length and 6 km of width, is the largest glacier in the US, accessible by car. Having seen it from the road, I came up with a tempting idea, „Instead of going towards the glacier myself, why don't I send my drone and get it video-recorded?“

Once it had reached the foot of Matanuska icy formations, 3 km away, I heard a female voice, „Battery level is low. The aircraft will go to the home point in 10 seconds“. When it was still 300 m away from me, the warning message popped up again, „Critically low battery. The aircraft is landing.“

„What do you mean 'it's landing'?“ I started panicking. Meanwhile, the drone landed somewhere in the forest.

I found it intact, in the middle of a meadow, 50 m away from the river. *So happy to have my birdie back and alive.*

But disaster still happened. In the evening, while cooking, I dropped two eggs. Those were the last ones. *Luxury dinner got cancelled.*

Food	11			
Fuel	12			Camp 7
Extras	10	520		Elevation: 579 m
Budget	8772	Distance	3625	61°47'31" N; 147°40'00" W

DAY 13

CHECKLIST

There was 543 km between me and the Canadian border. On 126th km, I got a flat tire. *At least it's not in the middle of the forest.*

It happened 2 km away from Glennallen town. The front tire got worn out to a *hole* condition. „I should be more attentive to my buddy. After all, it does all the work on this trip,“ I

said to myself and started pulling the bike towards the nearest gas station, that had a tire shop adjacent to it.

„We don't have motorcycle tires here,“ said a young man, maybe even teenager. Though he radiated confidence. „By here, I mean Glennallen. But our guy is in Anchorage now. Tomorrow morning he's coming back. I can ask him to buy one. You pay only its price. What is the size?“ And he took out his phone to make a call. His hands were black from the oil. We had a deal.

„Is there any campsite nearby?“ I asked.

„It's behind the town, 10 km away,“ said a lady-cashier.

„You can stay on the backyard,“ said the young mechanic.

„Thank you.“

„Alright. See you tomorrow at 9.“ And he left.

Behind the workshop, I met an old man, who's van had a puncture too. It was a retired ambulance car. Richard made a pretty much decent RV out of it, with a couch, with a stove. He was 71 and travelled alone. He had never been to Alaska, but he never thought it was too late to change it.

The rest of the day I spent studying the manual. By the evening, I had everything prepared for the next day — I took off the front wheel and removed the tire from the rim. I was

confused to find the drive chain loosen and the engine oil level lower than required. *Since now, I should go through the bike checklist every day, as well as have a spare tire on me.*

Camp 8

			128	Elevation: 425 m
Budget	8772	Distance	3753	62°02'26" N; 145°32'05" W

* * *

BIKE CHECKLIST

Fuel — no leaks; keep track of mileage.

Engine oil — no leaks; the level within limits.

Coolant — no leaks; the level within limits.

Tires pressure — front tire is 21 psi, rear — 28.

Brakes — serviceable; no leaks.

Choke lever¹ — serviceable.

Drive chain — lubricated; slack is permissible.

Steering — not loose; turns smoothly.

Throttle grip play — within 2-3 mm.

Clutch lever play — within 8-12 mm; operates smoothly.

¹ By pulling the choke lever, a carburettor provides a rich starting mixture that is necessary to enable the easy start of the engine, especially when it's cold.

Lights — in working condition.

Nuts/bolts — not loose.

* * *

DAY 14

LARGER THAN LIFE

At 09:00, the tire has come. Fixed! Chain slack adjusted, oil refilled; chain lubricated — everything is done by manual. At noon, I was ready to depart. It could have been earlier, but I punctured the tube while putting a new tire on the rim.

Any road in Alaska offers a stunning view. At one of the numerous watching points, I stopped for a rest. A large RV drove in. Yesterday, Richard told me that such a recreational bus could cost up to \$300,000.

The door opened, and two cheerful Husky dogs ran out, followed by an old man.

„It’s been my tenth month on the road,“ he said, „since I had left from Florida. And I’ll keep on travelling until I find a place I fall in love with and settle down eventually.“

The world is truly amazing. I can't imagine this happening in Ukraine.

I reached the border at 6 PM. The clearance took 5 minutes — I was the only person there, except the officer. It is in the middle of nowhere — on top of the hills — The Top of the World Highway. I was only asked who I am, from where to where I am going and who's bike it is. No papers were checked, no luggage either. The officer put the Canadian entry stamp in my passport and wished me a safe trip. There were no US officers, no exit stamps. My first ever land border crossing went smooth. Good start. Eighteen more to go.

Right after I drove into Canada, there stood a significant monument that read, „Yukon. Larger than life.“ In fact, it is the smallest federal territory and smaller than many provinces in the country. However, it is one of the wildest, isolated, and the least inhabited among all. Indeed, the entire life might not be enough to explore it.

From here, a dirt road runs for many miles ahead. When it's raining, it becomes 100 Miles of Hell — mud, gusts of the wind, and steep slopes on both sides. I got lucky to drive through in dry weather.

* * *

I stayed in Dawson City¹ River Hostel today. To describe it in one word, I would say, „It’s different.“ It is different from any other hostel I have visited before. That is why, perhaps, certain misunderstanding arises among guests, and, consequently, negative feedback appears. Here is one of the most meticulous I came across.

„The place deserves a minus stars rating if it was possible. Instead of staying here, you may as well find a leaky dead tree in the woods and sleep in it. This place is an absolute dive. The owner is a German guy who is one of the rudest people I have ever met. The rest of the staff are no better. The cabins are run down, cold and poorly maintained. Just using a washroom is a horrific adventure, and the facilities are smelly and dirty. If you want the experience of sleeping in an old mining camp, this is it.“

As for me, I liked the hostel or, more precisely, I liked the story behind it, even though it was an unpleasant surprise to

¹ Dawson City was a centre of Klondike Gold Rush. Founded as a camp, by 1898 it has grown to the city of 40,000 people. Now, it has a population of only 1500, and still, it is the second-largest town in Yukon after Whitehorse.

find no running water and no electricity. But I could only blame my high expectations.

When I had arrived, I found free parking on a site. I followed the direction indicated on tablets that hung around. It led me to a separate wooden house — reception. Inside, I found a lot of small and big things that stood and hung everywhere: souvenirs, books, statues, clothes, flags, and many, many other elements of what I had no idea. I waited for my turn to check-in, studying one of the corners. My eyes moved slowly up the wall until it stopped on the ceiling. There was a world map there, with black markings on it.

„What is it about?“ I said out loud.

„It is an itinerary of my travels,“ the man behind the desk responded. He had long light-coloured hair till shoulders and slightly unshaven face. It was Dieter Reinmuth. „Do you have a reservation?“

„Yes, my name is Maksym Ukrainets. I booked a dormitory room for one night.“

„Oh, it's you! You made a reservation for the female dormitory, do you know that? And I don't have any available bunks at the male dorms right now. Let me serve the lady behind you first and see what we can do about it.“ And he asked

her whether or not she minds having one man in her dorm. Jessica didn't care. But there was one more lady in the room who's consent was needed.

„I will drop my bags and come by to tell you her opinion. Anyway, I am going to the city now,“ said Jessica. Meanwhile, I could ask Dieter about his travel past.

In 1968, on a pre-mountain style bicycle, he set out from home, Germany, to travel the world. He returned after 15 years only. He worked on the road. In Japan, he was a model. In Argentina, he fell in love with a girl and stayed for six months. Eventually, he moved to Yukon, to work at a gold mine.

Now, alone, he runs the hostel, from May till September, during a summer season. For the rest of the year, Dieter travels. Winter of 2018 he spent in Ukraine.

„It is a fascinating country“ — he looked at me — „in a sad way.“

„True.“ But his story still held me. „Do you have a book about your travels?“

„No.“

„Fifteen years! It's a lot of time.“

„It is. Once, in Mexico, I was invited to a wedding. They celebrated the whole week. You see, you need time to under-

stand the people, the culture. Here, every week or so, I have guests who drive motorcycles from Alaska to Ushuaia in two-three months. And what would be their experience? It's like drinking a glass of good old wine with a single shot.“

„Good comparison,“ I said, smiling. „I am too, driving a motorcycle to Ushuaia“ — and here I laughed — „but in a hundred days. Indeed, it's a short time. But my point is different.“ Here, Jessica opened the door. She had good news — I was welcome to stay with girls tonight. Dieter handed me keys and gave instructions on using the hostel facilities.

Solar panels batteries provide the electricity. Drinking water is brought in by truck. Water for the kitchen is pumped from the creek nearby. A *shower* is located in a separate wooden house. In it, there are two barrels and firewood to heat the water. The toilet is another wooden building with its own instructions.

The yard forefront area is for camping. Here, at night, people gather by a bonfire. In the morning, they enjoy the view of the town located on the opposite side of the Yukon River.

Room amenities are simple to the basic: table, chair, and beds. Many thick blankets are stored here as well — it gets cold, even in August.

Giving the fact that the place has no electricity, water and sewage communication, I must say that a tremendous amount of work has been done here. Everything is planned and thought of thoroughly.

Hostel	23			
Fuel	30			
Bike	131		520	Hostel
Budget	8588	Distance	4273	„Dawson City River“



- actual route
- planned route
- city
- ▲** Mt Logan, 5959 m
- ⑨** camp
- Ⓣ** Tombstone NP
- Ⓢ** Salmon Glacier
- Ⓜ** Moraine Lake



DAY 15

A BEAR

Dawson City stands on the fork of two rivers: the Yukon and Klondike. The latter had given the name to the infamous Gold Rush, as the metal was found near it on the 16th of August 1896. And the Klondike Highway, that runs from here to Whitehorse, the capital of Yukon, previously was a trail by which thousands of people were rushing here with dreams to make a fortune.

Today was the 18th of August. Hence, a big celebration took place. It is called the Discovery Day — a public holiday in Yukon. People came from all over the country to celebrate its anniversary. All ten pubs of Dawson were full, from Friday throughout the weekend.

I visited the Tourist Centre. Right from the threshold, my eyes froze on a big print of the landscape of astonishing beauty that hung on the wall.

„It is Tombstone Territorial Park,“ the gentleman in a white shirt and a green vest behind the desk told me. In this way, I got to know my next destination.

In the hostel, I found Dieter behind reading. In his little office, piles of books were reaching the ceiling. He studied constantly. Perhaps, he was acquainting himself with another country and its culture. I asked him whether he could give me any advice on my travel in Central and Latin America.

„You will figure it out by yourself,“ he said. „You need to find your way and to understand why you travel. Be open and“ — he handed me his business card — „don’t forget to write to me your own *why*.“

* * *

I turned on the Dempster Highway. In 75 km, I reached the park. The road offers an astonishing view of the magnificent Tombstone Mountains. Its sharp edges and peaks resemble a graveyard. Thus the park obtained its unique name.

It was so wild and remote here, so I couldn’t help but stopped to launch the drone to capture the beauty. It was interesting to notice that my fear of potential bears around had dulled a bit. I felt totally comfortable walking in this wilderness far from the bike. Ironically, this was the day when one of

those potentially existent bears made its *real* appearance to me. Luckily, I was on the road.

It was getting late, and I was rushing to my campsite still some hundred kilometres away when, suddenly, a black bear appeared from behind the bushes and came out on the driveway a few hundred meters ahead. It caught me off guard. I didn't know whether to slow down or to pull more on the throttle. Meanwhile, the bear was the first one to make up the mind. Once he saw me flying in his direction, he charged in the woods immediately. Thanks to the bear's quick manoeuvre, the collision was avoided. My heart was beating loud. *I saw a bear! Wild real bear!* I don't know why, but I felt happy.

Food	23			
Fuel	29			Camp 9
Extras	3		410	Elevation: 467 m
Budget	8533	Distance	4683	62°49'36" N; 136°34'54" W

DAY 16

THE LAKE

Canadian hospitality offered itself immediately. In the morning, while packing to leave Pelly Crossing Campground, which is maintained by the local government but has no fee, the car drove up. The smiling couple appeared to be camp watchers. They offered me to have a look at their small garden behind the campsite.

„There are vegetables there. You might want some. Nobody eats it anyway,“ the man said.

„Hell, yeah!“ I thought to myself, but instead, I answered, „Thank you. I might have a look.“ *I got a salad, carrots, and green peas! I love green peas!*

In Whitehorse, I stayed in the only hostel. During the dinner, I had a conversation with two Canadians who came to the Yukon for the weekend because of „the wilderness it offers“. Next moment, as to prove their words, a bald eagle flew over the house high up in the sky.

„This is what I am talking about. You won't see this in Toronto,“ said Antoine, still following the bird with his eyes.

„So, what is your itinerary further on in Canada?“ the girl next to him asked.

„I want to visit this lake,“ I paused, „though, I don't know its name. The water in it is incredibly blue.“

„Lake Louise. Or maybe, Moraine Lake?“ Antoine presumed.

„It always appears among images any time you hit the *enter* button after typing *Canada* in the Google search bar. Its most popular photo shows sharp peaks of seven mountains on the background.“

„Ah! It must be Moraine Lake then. And,“ Antoine added, „there are ten peaks, I think. But, yeah, it is truly beautiful. It’s in the Alberta Province, though.“

„But it is not far from the British Columbia boundary,“ the girl said. „However, you should be careful of wildfires going on this time there and over the BC¹ in general. I was planning to visit that area too. It is Banff National Park. But the amount of smoke there I heard about made me change my plans and come here instead. You can’t appreciate the beauty when you don’t really see it, right?“

„Wow, I didn’t hear anything about fires.“ I was surprised. „Thank you for the information, though.“

* * *

¹ BC — British Columbia.

Two roads cross British Columbia from north to south. The first one is Highway 37, or Stewart-Cassiar road. It runs through the western part of the province to Kitwanga village, from where Yellowhead Highway 16 continues through Prince George town. Second is Alcan Highway that goes along the east of the BC to Dawson Creek town. The latter one offers a shorter way to Moraine Lake, which I was still determined to visit. I couldn't skip it. Its beauty is inconceivable. According to statistics, in a season of 2017-2018, 4.2 million people visited Banff. When it was first discovered in 1899 by Walter Wilcox, an early explorer of Canadian Rockies¹, he exclaimed, „No scene has given me an equal impression of inspiring solitude and rugged grandeur.“

Hostel	27			
Fuel	14			
Bike	16		296	Hostel
Budget	8476	Distance	4979	„Beez Kneez Backpackers“

DAY 17

¹ The Rockies, the Rocky Mountains, are a major mountain range in western North America, stretching for 4800 km from British Columbia in Canada to New Mexico in the US. The highest point is Mt Elbert, 4401 m, located in the state of Colorado, USA.

FIRE BAN

At 2 PM, I hit the road. I visited Miles Canyon and Emerald Lake before I entered BC. The placard on a roadside read, „Super, Natural British Columbia welcomes you“.

My camp for tonight was Morley Lake Recreational Campsite. It was free of charge. At the entrance, I saw a Fire Ban notice hanging on the information stand that read, „Wildfires!“

Food	8			Camp 10
Fuel	33		290	Elevation: 810 m
Budget	8175	Distance	5269	60°00'00" N; 132°06'25" W

DAY 18

THE ROAD IS BLOCKED, GO THAT WAY

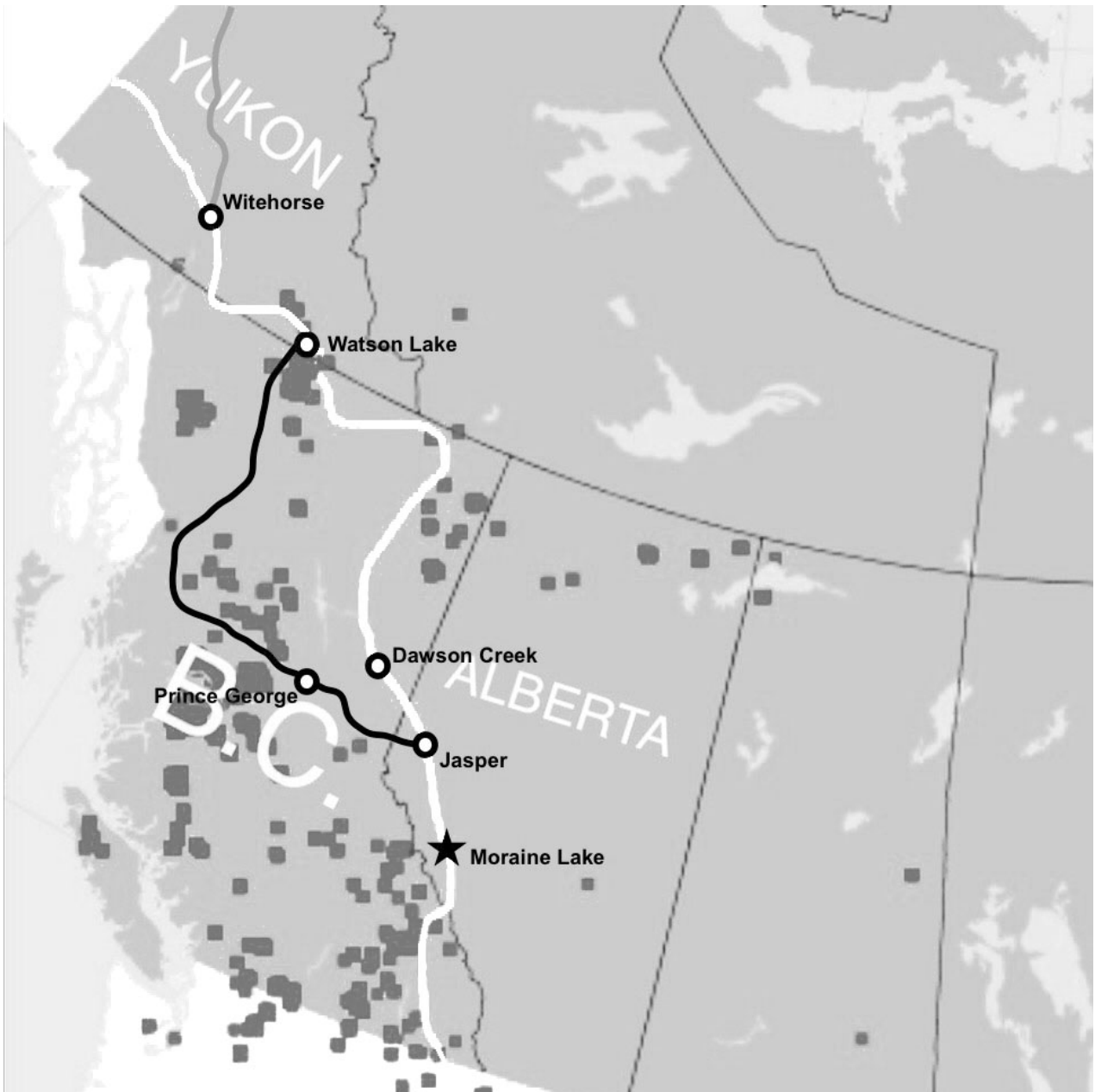
By midday, I arrived at Watson Lake Visitor Centre. Two reasons made me stop here. Firstly, I needed info on wildfires¹, its locations, forecast, and road conditions. Secondly, I wanted to visit the Sign Post Forest.

There are more than 80,000 road signs here representing different destinations around the world. The first post was erected in 1942 by a soldier of the US Army. It read, „Danville, Ill. 2835 miles.“ Since then, visitors started placing their home signs too. I did hang mine. It reads, „СКАДОВСК², UA. 8099 km.“

¹ A total of 2,092 fires were registered in British Columbia in 2018. The year surpassed the historic 2017 wildfire season by the amount of burned area and constituted 1,351,314 hectares — an area of the size of Qatar. Wildfires caused severe smoke to cover much of the province. It has impacted tourism and cancelled flights. The smoke spread across Canada and as far as Ireland across the Atlantic Ocean.

² СКАДОВСК — (fr. Ukrainian) Skadovsk, a small coastal town in Ukraine.

Sources of wildfires as of the 21st of August 2018.



White road — Alcan Highway. Black road — BC Highway 37.

Grey square dots — sources of the most prominent fires.

Not far did I drive, when I was turned around by the police. The Alcan Highway was blocked 15 km away from the Visitor Center.

„The vast and intense fire has just started nearby,“ said a policeman, behind whom a massive white-yellow-brownish cloud of smoke was rapidly rising in the sky.

Thus, I turned on Highway 37, determined to go as far as the road would permit, as I was not too fond of the idea of being stuck for an unknown amount of time if another fire blazed up and cut the only way to the South that was left.

Farther I went, worse it became. By 21:00 it was pitch dark, what was unusually early. The smoke was so dense that it cut the sunlight. At 21:15, it was bright again. What a confusing feeling it was to be back at the day.

At half-past midnight, I pitched the tent under the motorcycle's headlight at some free campsite marked on MAPS.ME¹. The visibility was less than a meter. I barely had any idea where I was. I could feel the breath of the dense forest surrounding me. It was a creepy feeling. I started citing a verse out loud to let whatever creatures around me to be aware of my

¹ MAPS.ME — free offline GPS maps.

presence so that they could keep away. Without dinner, I jumped inside the tent and fell into a deep sleep.

Food	11			Camp 11
Fuel	11		571	Elevation: 914 m
Budget	8413	Distance	5840	57°59'04" N; 130°04'35" W

DAY 19

SALMON GLACIER

Its status of the largest glacier in the world accessible by road lured me, though it required a detour of 170 km, which was, basically, one extra day for me.

The rough gravel road led me up along the glacier tongue until I reached the vast ice field that stretched into a white horizon as far as I could see.

Astonishing! I have no words. One of the most beautiful and breathtaking views I have ever seen!

Fuel	37			Camp 12
Extras	4		424	Elevation: 107 m
Budget	8372	Distance	6264	56°02'54" N; 129°54'08" W

DAY 20

UNEXPECTED EXPENSES

Clements Lake Recreation Site. My neighbour camp fellows are still asleep, while I am floating on a picnic table. It's placed on a handmade pontoon, attached to a tree on a shore by a rope. It is very quiet here. I am having breakfast. It consists of bread, fresh cucumber, green onion, dry salami stick, and, of course, tea. I am thinking about the rear tire. It's almost bald after having only 5000 km on it. I did simple math. If every 5000 km I change the tires, after 30,000 km I will be short of \$1200. Unexpected expenses! Another concern is the drive chain — I need to adjust the slack every other day. It's getting worn-out too.

On the road, I was overtaken by an old orange camper van, Volkswagen from the 60-s. On the back of it, the big sticker read, „Montréal-Alaska-Argentina.“ It was cool to realise I was not the only *weirdo* on this planet.

At the gas station, I bumped into another motorcyclist, Den — a white man in his 50-s from San Diego, California. He was driving from Fairbanks back home. He's got a BMW R1200 RT, a twice more powerful machine than mine.

„I will never do that again,“, said Den about his experience on the 100 Miles of Hell highway. I told him about my adventure too, and he shook my hand. A total stranger expressed his respect for what I did. It felt great and encouraging.

It had been the 20th day of my journey. Not a single day passed by without a need to figure out something. I always had to stay focused to keep things in order, to be on track. And I liked it.

I moved on. Suddenly, I spotted the familiar orange van, parked on one of the Vista points¹. They were a couple from Montreal, Quebec Province, Canada. Their journey started four months ago and was planned to be extended for another eighteen months or so.

Catherine and David beamed with friendliness and kindness. They invited me to share their lunch. We were talking about some specifics of the journey: civil unrests in

¹ Vista point is a watching area that offers a beautiful view. Along with Rest area, it is widespread along the roads all over the US and Canada. Some have facilities such as toilets, picnic tables, and trash bins. As a rule, no camping is allowed.

Nicaragua¹, Darien Gap² crossing, etc. Pleased as I was with their company, I allowed myself a joke, „Having started as a couple, you might finish as a trio³.“ We laughed. They seemed to be very happy and in love with each other. I was looking at them and thinking, „The only thing that is better than travelling is travelling with the one you love.“

They shared with me some useful web-links and travel apps. The first one was the PanAmerican Travel Association Facebook page. There, one can find most of the information related to a trip like that. The second one was an iOverLander application. With it, you can find campgrounds, free or paid, its prices, facilities and feedback, parking lots, laundries, visitor centres, drinking water and free internet spots, hostels and guesthouses, gas stations, technical service, and much more. That was exactly what I needed.

Food	6			Camp 13
Fuel	30		595	Elevation: 637 m
Budget	8336	Distance	6859	54°00'42" N; 124°01'58" W

¹ Nicaragua was under the waves of protests which started in April 2018, when the president, Daniel Ortega, had proclaimed social security reforms that increased taxes and decreased benefits.

² Darien Gap is a real obstacle for overland travellers. It is a dense jungle on the border between Panama and Colombia, where there are no roads. The area is reported to be a bulwark of guerrilla battalions and narco-traffic gangs.

³ As of December 2019, Catherine and David were in Peru. By then, they were a trio indeed. But it a dog named Osso. Instagram: *destination.aventure*.

REPORT 1

	D 1-20
Camp, qty (paid)	13 (1)
Roof, qty (paid)	7 (7)
Total C - R, qty	13 (1) - 7 (7)
Stay, \$ (\$/day)	235 (12)
Food, \$ (\$/day)	168 (8)
Fuel, \$ (km/1\$)	386 (18)
Bike, \$	760
Extras, \$ (\$/day)	375 (19)
Expenses, \$	1,924
Total, \$	1,924
Budget, \$	8,336
Dist., km (km/day)	6,859 (343)
Dist. True, km (%)	3,200 (15)
Dist. True Left, %	85
Dist. Total, km	6,859

1. D 1-20 — 20-day period.
2. Camp — the number of free and paid (in the brackets) nights spent in the tent.

3. Roof — the number of nights spent under the roof in the hostels, hotels, guest houses, through Couchsurfing¹, Airbnb, etc.
4. Stay — money spent on paid Camps and Roofs. The number in the brackets shows an average daily cost.
5. Food — the amount spent on food and drinks.
6. Fuel — the cost of fuel only. The number in the brackets shows how many kilometres I covered for every US dollar spent.
7. Bike — all expenses related to the bike (except fuel): service, spare parts, parking, paperwork, insurance, toll roads, ferry, etc.
8. Extras — all other miscellaneous expenses: toiletries, clothes, entrance fees (parks, museums), camping items, cooking utensils, souvenirs, etc.
9. Expenses — the total amount of money spent in a 20-day period.
10. Total — the amount of money spent up to date.
11. Budget — the remaining amount of money.

¹ Couchsurfing is a social network community of over 15 million travellers and 400,000 hosts around the world who offer a free homestay. Sharing a travel experience is its central core.

12. Dist. — distance covered in a 20-day period. The brackets show an average daily distance.

13. Dist. True. — a part of the *true distance* covered. The true distance is the shortest route from Prudhoe Bay to Ushuaia, which is 22,000 km.

14. Dist. True Left — a part of the *true distance* left, in percentage.

15. Dist. Total — an overall mileage covered.

DAY 21

PRINCE GEORGE

Today I lost the covers for the sleeping bag and the tent. Last night I hung it on a tree, 50 m away from my camp, with the food inside — *Bear Safety* precaution. When I woke up, it had gone. Now I had to improvise with packing.

Upon arrival in Prince George, I went to Laundromat¹ right away. Afterwards, I visited a moto shop and purchased a chain lubricant, two spark plugs, and a rear tire, Mitas-E07. This Czech brand has a good reputation. Also, on Amazon, I ordered new drive chain with sprockets as well as a set of four oil filters and one gallon of engine oil to be delivered to Bozeman, Montana, where I intended to arrive in a few days.

I have to take care of my bike. It is the key to a successful trip.

Camp	19			
Food	117			
Bike	266			Camp 14
Extras	11	144		Elevation: 752 m
Budget	7923	Distance	7003	53°51'29" N; 122°49'16" W

¹ Laundromat is a building or a room where a self-service laundry is provided. There are washing and drying machines there. Usually, there is a person to assist too.

DAY 22

HASHTAG BOARD

Damn! Engine oil! I keep refilling it every 5-7 days with 0.5 litres or so! Where does it go? As far as I know, the oil level should remain unchanged, and only in a certain period, based on mileage, you have to change it. If the level drops, it means there is something wrong.

In fact, it appeared to be one of the two most common issues with the Kawasaki KLR650 models. *It can be fixed by replacing some gaskets inside the engine, but who is going to do that? Not me, definitely. So I will just keep an eye on the oil level and refill accordingly.*

The second issue is a defective doohickey, which is responsible for the tension of the Counter Balance Chain. Many experienced riders suggest replacing the original one. „It is cheap insurance for the long life of the engine,“ they say. So far, I had no problems with that.

Today, I hung a white board on my bike, where, with a black marker, I wrote *#100daystotheSouth. Day 22*. Now, people could get to know about me, if interested.

Fuel	24			Camp 15
Extras	15		280	Elevation: 740 m
Budget	7884	Distance	7283	52°57'47" N; 119°27'24" W

DAY 23

RAIN BREAK

It's been raining all night. If the weather remains the same, I won't make it to the lake today.

After 75 km from Jasper town down the Icefield Parkway road, I had to pull off and set up the tent. It was waterproof, but from the top and not the bottom. As the rain continued, water was coming from under the footprint¹, wetting the sleeping bag. Luckily, there were still some dry clothes in my wet rucksack. After I changed, I went jogging to warm myself up.

Camp	12			Camp 16
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¹ A footprint is ground cloths placed under a camping tent to prevent its wear and tear.

Extras	11		184	Elevation: 1595 m
Budget	7861	Distance	7467	52°25'00" N; 117°23'46" W

DAY 24

UNCOMFORTABLE NIGHT

Finally, I arrived. *It's 10/10 as per my Beauty scale! No words to describe.* The picture that had unfolded in front of me was unreal. I have not seen the water bluer than that in the lake. I could feel a lump in my throat. It was hard to resist such beauty, but I had to keep going.

In the darkness, at the camp, I was struggling with the tent, which was not the case before. The thing was that I could not find the poles. I checked everywhere, twice, but they were gone. Then I realised that I left them on the bench at the previous campground. I could not believe it. How silly it was not to take a last look before leaving, as I always did. In Prince George, I had almost forgotten my phone on the picnic table, but that last look saved it. Now I could not erect the tent.

I used my paracord¹ rope and trees around to stretch tight the four top ends of it. It was not the best set up, but it was better than sleeping *open-air*. Normally, I didn't even reach the ceiling while sitting; now, lying, I had it touching my face.

Food	3			
Fuel	34			Camp 17
Extras	8	384		Elevation: 966 m
Budget	7816	Distance	7851	50°08'08" N; 115°51'53" W

DAY 25

BORDER

I reached the Roseville Border Crossing. The officer asked me basic questions. There were some interesting ones too.

„Do you work or currently employed?“ he started.

„Unemployed.“

„Do you have any property or house?“

„Back in Ukraine, yes.“

„How long are you going to stay in the US?“

¹ Paracord is a lightweight nylon kernmantle rope originally used in the suspension lines of parachutes.

„Around two weeks.“

„Have you ever been arrested?“

„No.“

„Are you sure?“ He looked at me through his funny black glasses that reminded me of the „Matrix“ movie.

„Yeah, I am sure.“

„When are you flying back home?“

„Oh, boy!“ I thought to myself. „These guardians of Heaven.“ I pointed at the hashtag board hanging in front of him, which read „Day 25“ and said, „In 75 days.“

No papers or documents, except passport, were asked. No physical check-up of personal belongings took place either. There was a little queue there, so it took around 20 minutes. Bozeman was 586 km away.

Shortly, I camped at the West Shore/Flathead Lake State Park campsite. This place had bear containers, so I didn't need to worry about hiding my food far in the forest. They are 1 m³ metal boxes that can't be opened inadvertently. Still, it was advised to keep the food sealed — to cut the smell.

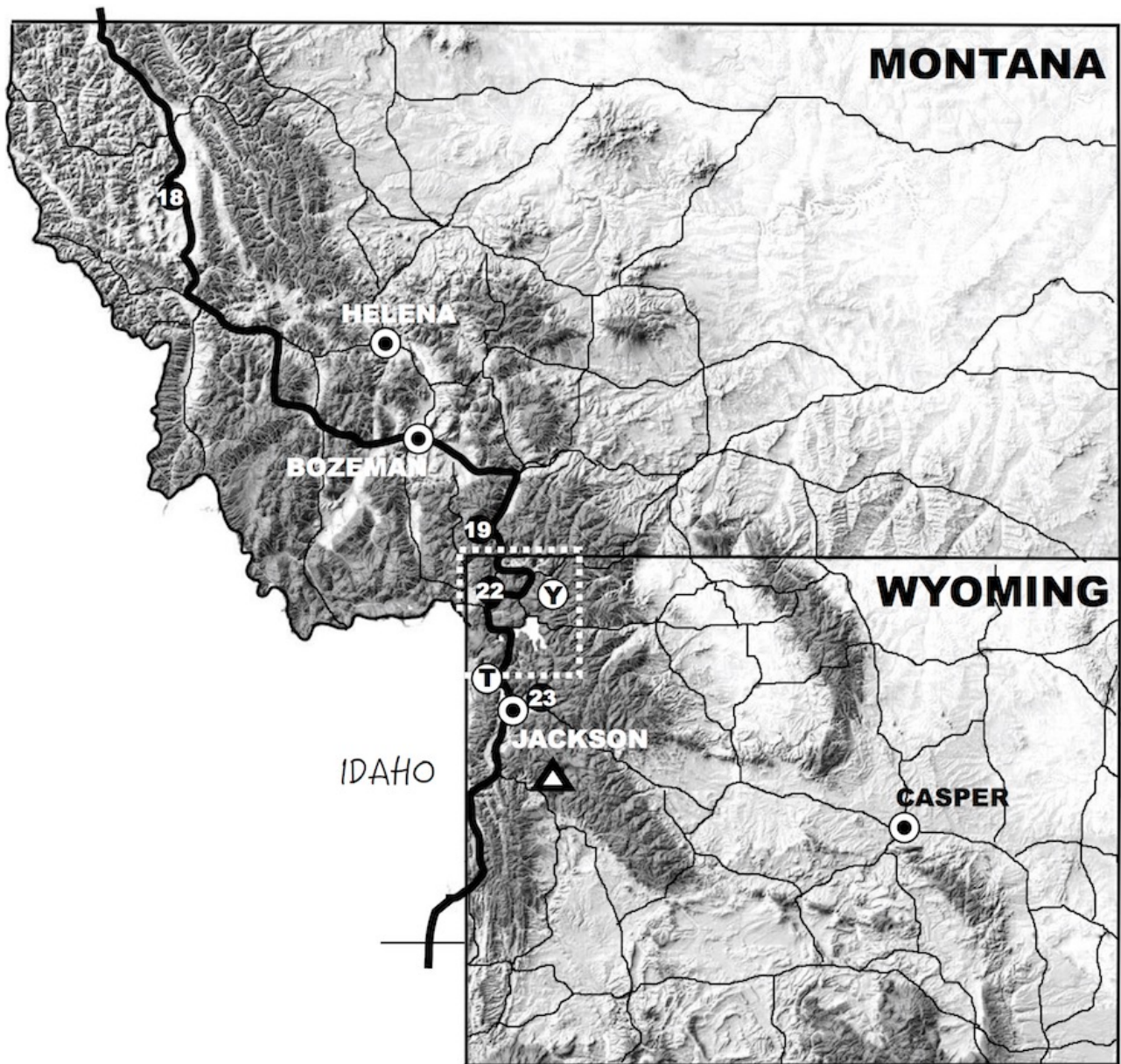
This campsite provided personal and collective drinking water points and electricity access. One could use a generator

instead, but there was a time restriction for that — 8 to 22 o'clock. The maximum length of stay was limited to 14 days.

Camp	18			Camp 18
Fuel	13		360	Elevation: 899 m
Budget	7785	Distance	8211	47°56'57" N; 114°11'28" W

LOWER 48





-  route
-  states' border
-  town
-  camp
-  Yellowstone NP
-  Grand Teton NP
-  Mt Gannett Peak, 4210 m



DAY 26

MONTANA

The terrain is vast hilly farming flats with mountains on the horizon in every direction.

My priority, as usual, was laundry — my sleeping bag needed a good wash. Perhaps, I should have performed my *hygiene code of conduct* before going to bed. By now, it was as follows: every morning I wiped myself with fresh towels and put on clean underwear and t-shirt. As I had only four items of each, the 5th day was preferred to be a *laundry day*.

The place I chose for the night was the Treasure State Hostel. As for the parking, I was told that the street would be a safe place.

Hostel	30			
Fuel	12			
Extras	13		512	
Budget	7730	Distance	8723	„Treasure State Hostel“

DAY 27

BIG PLAN

For this, I might need two or three days.

1. Engine oil and oil filter change.
2. Break fluid change. Owner's Manual states it should be done after 24,000 km. Now, the odometer showed 16,000 miles (25,600 km).
3. Coolant change. Though, the manual says to do it after 36,000 km.
4. Drive chain, front and rear sprockets change. I downloaded the Youtube video, which explained the process in detail. Plus, I could always refer to the manual.
5. Air filter. If it's not damaged, it can be reused. However, it should be cleaned whenever it gets dirty.
6. Spark plug change.
7. Connecting the Power Inverter (12V to 110V), which came with the bike.
8. Rear tire change.
9. Carburettor cleaning.
10. Valve clearance adjustment. Manual states to do it after 24,000 km.

I spent the day reading manuals and watching tutorials. I bought some extra tools too. The maintenance would be carried 100 km away, at a free campsite.

Hostel	30			
Food	8			
Bike	80			
Extras	64		24	
Budget	7548	Distance	8747	„Treasure State Hostel“

DAY 28

THE ENCOURAGEMENT

Today morning, on a street parking, I've found a note with a 5-dollar bill in it, wedged in the seat of the bike, saying, "Good luck, be safe." I was impressed. Thank you, the stranger!

This is really encouraging. I realised that there always will be people who support what you are doing, your ideas; people with the same way of thinking, understanding, who accept your right for opinion and respect it.

* * *

I arrived at Carbelle Recreational Campsite. It had no picnic tables or even toilets, but it had beautiful nature around. On one side I had the Yellowstone River, on another — hilly mountains. The place was free to camp. And it was all that mattered, as I was to stay here for quite some time.

Fuel	16			
Bike	30			Camp 19
Extras	20		112	Elevation: 1523 m
Budget	7482	Distance	8859	45°12'39" N; 110°54'05" W

DAY 29

MAKING PROGRESS

The work was not flawless at all.

Brake fluid change took some time as I couldn't entirely figure out the process, therefore, kept letting air seeping into

the system, which required to perform a *brake bleeding*¹ a few times until I got it right.

Chain and sprockets change. Well, it turned out that I didn't have a proper tool to do it — I needed a 27 mm socket key to loosen the nut in the front. I went around the camp asking people and, fortunately, found it. Next was cutting the chain. It was a miracle that I happened to have a small hack saw with me. At last, I put a new O-ring chain² that had a *master link*, which makes your life much easier.

Tire change. It took me a very long time, indeed, even though this time I didn't damage the tube. The issue was that the tire bead didn't want to sit on the rim properly, so I had to put it in and out several times, mistakenly thinking the problem was a wheel balancing.

Camp 20

Elevation: 1523 m

Budget 7482 Distance 8859 45°12'39" N; 110°54'05" W

¹ Brake bleeding is a procedure performed on hydraulic brake system whereby the brake lines (the pipes and hoses containing the brake fluid) are purged of any air bubbles.

² The O-ring chain is named for the rubber O-rings (O-shaped) built into the space between the outside link plate and the inside roller link plates. Such design improves the chain's lubrication, as its rubber fixtures form a barrier that holds applied lubricating grease inside the pin and bush wear areas. And the master link allows easy and fast removal of the chain.

DAY 30

BACK ON TRACK

Having spent three days at the camp, I decided to move on. The carburettor cleaning and valve clearance adjustment needed more investigation — it is a quite delicate job.

By the evening, I assembled the motorcycle. It was a very nervous moment to start and drive it after all this maintenance. From the morning until the late evening, I worked on it, sacrificing my lunchtime. Nevertheless, all seemed working.

It is a beautiful night, with shiny million stars and Milky Way, that splits the sky in half. I am excited to be back on track.

				Camp 21
	0		0	Elevation: 1523 m
Budget	7482	Distance	8859	45°12'39" N; 110°54'05" W

DAY 31

SUPER VOLCANO

A new object of expenditure — visiting US National Parks. I wish I knew I could purchase the annual pass for just \$80, which would allow me to visit most of them.

The first one was Yellowstone. The area dedicated to the park, around 100 by 85 km, is a giant active super volcano with its geothermal sources. It contains the world's largest active geyser called Steamboat, capable of throwing boiling water up to 90 meters. Though, you have to be truly lucky to witness it as the geyser erupts unpredictably. There is another famous one here, called the Old Faithful geyser. In contrary to its bigger brother, it is highly predictable — it erupts every 90 minutes or so and shoots up to 50 metres. But what impressed me most was the Grand Prismatic Spring. It is the world's third-largest hot spring but, without doubts, the most beautiful one. Its rainbow colours enchant the observer.

Yellowstone is the first National Park of the US and considered to be the first in the world, being established in 1872. The park is located within the Rocky Mountains on a plateau with an average altitude of 2400 m above sea level. To enjoy

its beauty to the fullest, one must visit it during all four seasons for days at a time. Unfortunately, I dedicated 24 hours only.

Camp	20			Camp 22
Extras	35		128	Elevation: 2307 m
Budget	7427	Distance	8987	44°44'20" N; 110°41'34" W

DAY 32

UNEXPECTED BEAUTY

100 km south of Yellowstone, I encountered another national park — Grand Teton Mountains. It became clear that I wouldn't make it to Salt Lake City today, where I had my Couchsurfing stay request confirmed. *There is so much beauty around. I just can't miss it. For these two days on the wheels, I progressed only for 300 km, beautiful 300 kilometres!*

Camp	15			Camp 23
Fuel	15		241	Elevation: 2162 m
Budget	7397	Distance	9228	43°30'45" N; 110°39'38" W

DAY 33

DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAINS

It is getting hot. For the first time since the trip began, I was wearing a t-shirt while driving. I was leaving the Rockies and descending to the Salt Lake Valley. On the stretch of 450 km, the Bear Lake is worth to mention — beautiful scenery.

I reached Abhishek's house at 21:00.







An Indian guy from Mumbai. A few years ago, he came to Baltimore, the state of Maryland, to study. Now he is doing his second Master's degree in SLC¹. He is gay. His boyfriend is a quarter Ukrainian and, perhaps, is a really smart guy, as so many books we had to shelve today. Yes, the apartment was a mess — he and his boyfriend have just moved in. Altogether, with his South Korean female friend, Yun, we were unpacking stuff and moving furniture till 1 o'clock. We had a good time talking anyway. At 2, we went to bed, separately.

Food 38

¹ SLC — Salt Lake City.

Fuel	15			
Bike	11			
Extras	7		464	
Budget	7326	Distance	9692	Couchsurfing



-  route
-  states' border
-  town
-  camp
-  Bonneville Salt Flats
-  Lake Tahoe
-  Kings Peak, 4125 m



DAY 34

HOSTEL

Everything is in order, available and easy to be used. Details are thought over. The beds in the room do not squeak and have all the necessary things: a shelf, light, socket, deposit locker. Toilets are clean and tidy, with paper and soap. There was no fridge but a whole refrigerating room. The kitchen is big and permits several people to cook at a time, with numerous tables you can sit behind. The same area serves as a living room — it is very spacious. And last but not least — I was treated not as a guest, but a friend.

The day I spent building my itinerary across the US. *Here, I turn towards the Pacific Ocean.*

Hostel	35			
Food	10			
Bike	20			
Extras	8		80	
Budget	7253	Distance	9772	„Park City Hostel“

DAY 35

SPEED RECORD

Bonneville Salt Flats. It is well known for its Bonneville Speedway — a place for speed record-breaking attempts. The area is 20 km long and 8 km wide. The salt is densely packed here, making the surface extremely flat. At some spots, the salt crust can reach up to 1.5 metres of thickness. It is public land, and access to it is free, so anyone can try to set their own speed record. I tried. *150 km/h with full saddlebags is not bad for the first time, I think.*

For the record, the maximum speed achieved by the motorcycle with the engine capacity under 1000 cc is 295 km/h. It was Herbert James *Burt* Munro from New Zealand with his Indian Scout V-Twin motorcycle, who's efforts and success are the basis of the movie „The World's Fastest Indian“ (2005). Burt was 68 years old and was riding 47 years old bike when he set the world record on August 26, 1968, which remains unbeaten ever since.

The record for the world's fastest motorcycle with no engine limitation is held by Ack Attack — specially constructed

land-speed record streamliner motorcycle¹. It has two turbocharged inline-four 1299 cc engines with over 1000 horsepower. Its dry weight constitutes 733 kg with a length of 6.2 metres. It is not the motorcycle we used to picture, but it holds the land-speed record of 634 km/h, which is twice faster than a helicopter.

* * *

In Wendover, I washed the bike.

This town is split in half by a border between states of Utah and Nevada. It was very symbolic to see a huge casino hotel on Nevada side right behind the line drawn on the road to indicate the administrative division.

Nevada is mostly a desert and one of the least populated states in the country. Here, it is hot in summer and cold in winter. The extreme temperatures recorded are +52°C and -47°C. But what this state is most known for is gambling and instant marriages, what transformed the place into a major tourist des-

¹ Streamliner motorcycle is a motorcycle with a special fairing to form an aerodynamic shell to minimise the drag. Such a design helps to attain higher top speed. Often, it is a feet-forward motorcycle or has a rider in a prone position, rather than upright, to reduce the frontal area exposed to the headwind.

mination. Nevada is the only US state where prostitution is legal, though, not in Las Vegas.

The endless road goes to the very horizon, crossing the empty vastness. Regardless of how fast you drive, the landscape does not change for hours. In fact, before 1974, Nevada, along with Montana, had no speed limits. Now, only 80 mph (130 km/h) is allowed, and the traffic police strictly enforce its adherence. By the end of the day, I set another personal record — the longest daily drive so far — 664 km.

Fuel	38			Camp 24
Bike	4		664	Elevation: 1658 m
Budget	7211	Distance	10,436	40°55'47" N; 117°40'27" W

DAY 36

WITH THE FLOW

„This is great what you are doing.“ A man approached me on a gas station at Carson City and shook my hand. Since I had hung the hashtag board on the bike, people approached me occasionally to express their genuine interest.

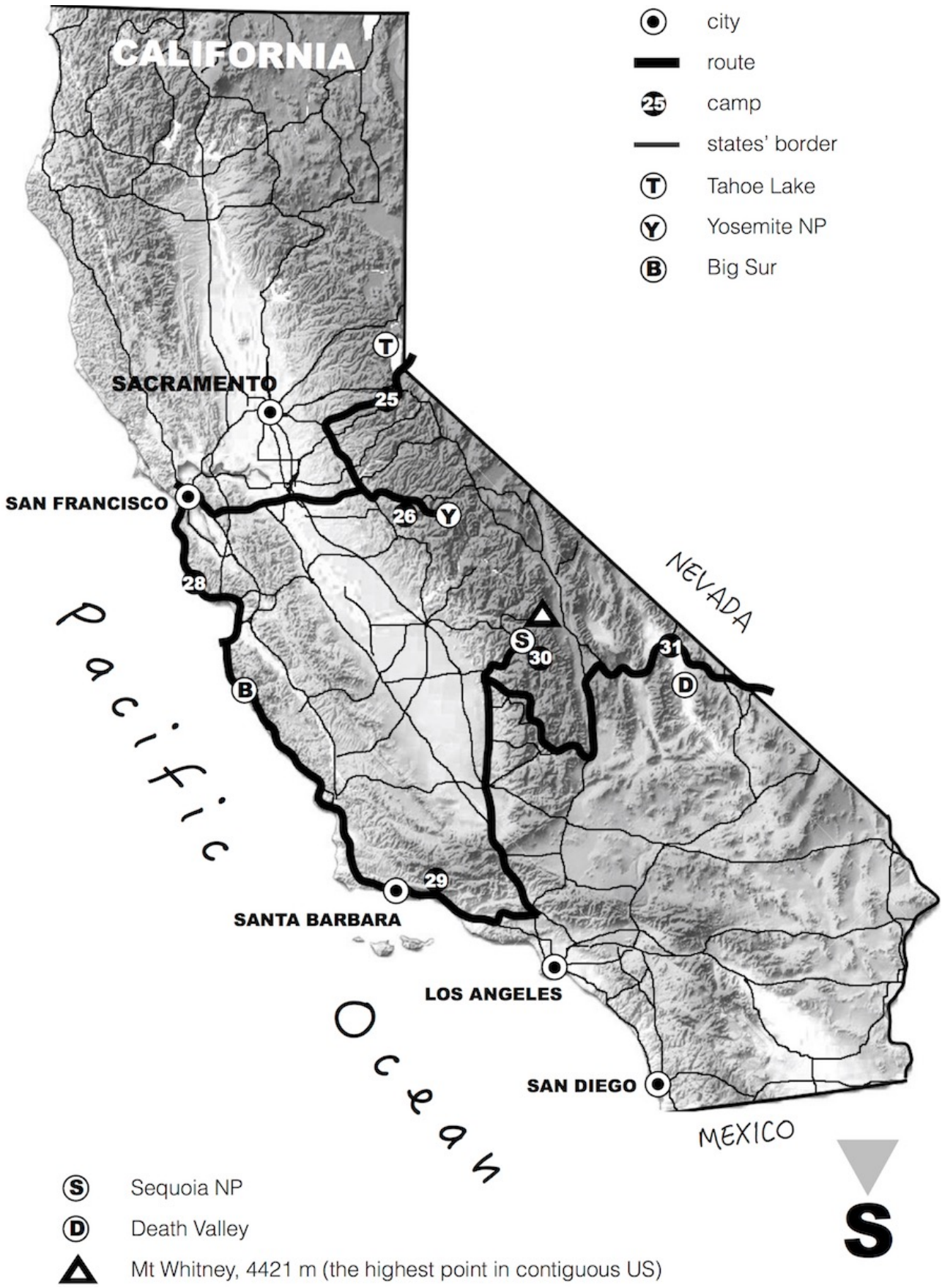
„That’s a cool thing. I have loved watching your progress. Stay safe, brother,“ read a message on Facebook from a stranger.

These random encounters with people recharged me. *I am not going against the flow as I thought. With the same-minded people, we form our own strong current.*

In the afternoon, I paid a visit to Lake Tahoe. Located at 1897 metres above sea level, with 35 by 19 km of size, it is the largest alpine lake in North America. And it is quite deep too — 500 m.

„The higher you go, the farther north you become.“ I was thinking out loud, taking a sunbath on one of the boulders along the lake’s shore after a chilly swim. It is interesting to observe a similar climate transformation with a change of latitude and altitude. Going from north to south is like descending a mountain: moss, bushes, pine trees, larch trees.

				Camp 25
Fuel	13		456	Elevation: 2259 m
Budget	7198	Distance	10,892	38°37’52“ N; 120°12’37“ W



DAY 37

YOSEMITE

El Capitan was the main reason to visit Yosemite National Park. This 914 m high granite monolith, with its vertical wall, was once considered unclimbable. Today it attracts rock climbers from all over the world. To try conquering it, you don't have to pay a penny, but you have to be an experienced climber and bring professional equipment.

95% of the park is designated wilderness. Drive to the Glacier Point. The view won't leave you indifferent, I promise.

Food	9			
Fuel	11			Camp 26
Extras	30		448	Elevation: 849 m
Budget	7148	Distance	11,340	37°47'14" N; 120°03'56" W

DAY 38

VALVE CLEARANCE

Finally, I decided to open the cylinder head cover and check the valve clearance¹.

It is a matter of tens of a millimetre. If the gap is smaller than permitted, it may result in extra wear of the valve and, consequently, the engine. If it's bigger, it is a loss of performance.

With wear and tear of the components, the clearance gets changed. Therefore, it has to be checked periodically and adjusted accordingly, which is made by replacing the shims² of different size.

It was a very fragile job to do. The operation lasted five hours. *I think now I know how a surgeon feels at work.* The result was that all four shims would have to be replaced.

I am glad to leave tomorrow. It's been my second night here — on an open meadow, 8 km deep in the forest — quite a creepy place to stay, especially when it gets dark. There is some noise coming from the outside (of my tent), some branches are cracking. I guess, I'm going to finish (writing my diary), switch off the light (the torch), and make myself quiet.

Camp 27

¹ Valve clearance is a gap between the top of the valve and the cam.

² Shim is a disc of hardened metal of precisely calibrated height (around 2.5 mm) that sits on top of each valve (there are two intake and two exhaust valves in a cylinder with four-stroke cycle).

Elevation: 849 m

Budget 7148 Distance 11,340 37°47'14" N; 120°03'56" W

DAY 39

SAN FRANCISCO

The city of the morning fog stands on fifty hills. The slope angle of some streets can reach up to 17°. It was a new and anxious driving experience.

I stayed at Marin Headlands Hostel, which is located in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area on the other side of the well-known bridge. With \$37 per night, it was the cheapest accommodation in the area. The average hostel within the city limits cost at least \$70.

Hostel	37		
Fuel	15		
Bike	17		
Extras	13	256	
Budget	7066	Distance 11,596	„Marin Headlands Hostel“

DAY 40

TERIMA KASIH

Having got the shims, I headed back out of the city. Red Ford Focus picked me up. A lady of Southeast Asian look named Latifah, with a jilbab¹, was my Uber driver. It was interesting watching her cursing passing cars. But she wasn't rude at all. Those were innocent expressions of an irritated driver. When we had arrived, I thanked her, saying, „Terima Kasih².“ It induced a good deal of surprise in her, followed by a smile.

The valve job went well until... I stripped the thread in one of the holes in the cylinder body, where bolts go to tighten the head-cover, which now could not be adequately secured. *This is not ok, especially when you are driving thousands of miles.* Thus, having one issue fixed, I created another. The solution could be a Heli-Coil kit³. But that required drilling. *The fact*

¹ jilbab — the name for hijab in Indonesia.

² Terima Kasih — (fr. Malay and Indonesian) thank you.

³ Heli-Coil kit is a coiled-wire type of *thread repair insert* used to create internal screw threads to accommodate standard-sized fasteners.

that I have to drill a hole in the cylinder head freaks me out! It seems a relatively easy but sensitive job. What if I fail?

I bought the kit anyway, along with a portable drill, but didn't touch anything yet. *We'll see how it goes. At least, the valve clearance has been adjusted.*

Overall, the entire day went not very well. I lost my tooth or rather part of it. Back in the days, my front teeth were partially knocked off. Now, time to times, I have to put an extension fill when the old one falls off. This one had lasted two years, until today, when I bit a chicken bone during the dinner. Now I have a hole in my smile. Of course, here, in the US, I am not going to fix it — too expensive. Only Uber cost me \$95.

Hostel	34		
Food	24		
Bike	127		
Extras	95	32	
Budget	6786	Distance	11,628
			„Marin Headlands Hostel“

REPORT 2

	D 1-20	D 21-40
Camp, qty (paid)	13 (1)	14 (5)
Roof, qty (paid)	7 (7)	6 (5)
Total C - R, qty	27 (6) - 13 (12)	
Stay, \$ (\$/day)	235 (12)	250 (12.5)
Food, \$ (\$/day)	168 (8)	209 (10.5)
Fuel, \$ (km/1\$)	386 (18)	206 (23)
Bike, \$	760	555
Extras, \$ (\$/day)	375 (19)	330 (16.5)
Expenses, \$	1924	1550
Total, \$	3474	
Budget, \$	6786	
Dist., km (km/day)	6859 (343)	4769 (238)
Dist. True, km (%)	3200 (15)	1734 (8)
Dist. True Left, %	77	
Dist. Total, km	11,628	

DAY 41

PACIFIC OCEAN

I visited Mavericks Beach. It is a winter destination for some of the world's best big-wave surfers. After a strong winter storm in the northern Pacific Ocean, wave's crest can reach 8 to 15 metres high. I was there out of season. The water was calm as on the lake. Nevertheless, there was a sign „Danger. Deadly Waves at Any Time“ to remind about numerous lives of notable surfers that were lost here.

The night was approaching, and I still had no place to camp.

In the US, around 30% of the land is public¹. The rest is private property. In the state of California, the ratio is somewhat 50/50. However, the coastline is almost entirely sold. All pullouts along the road have „No Parking 22 - 6“ sign. All turnouts and dirt pathways have „No Trespassing. Private Land“ sign. It was a joyful drive watching beautiful houses and villas along the road hanging on the cliffs above the majes-

¹ Public land — a portion of land held by central or local governments.

tic waters. But the sun doesn't wait. It was slowly approaching a distant horizon.

Eventually, with the help of iOverLander, I found the place. A hundred metres away from the road, the land broke from a 40-metre cliff into the ocean. I camped right on its edge and fell asleep under the *pacific* sound of breaking waves.

Food	7			Camp 28
Fuel	15		160	Elevation: 42 m
Budget	6764	Distance	11,788	37°03'49" N; 122°15'14" W

DAY 42

SHARING IS CARING

After a beautiful ride through Big Sur¹, I arrived in Santa Barbara. It was dark. All potential camping places turned out to be suitable only for overnight car parking and not the biker with a tent. At last, I found some spot in Los Padres National Forest.

¹ Big Sur is a rugged and mountainous section of the Central Coast of California, where the Santa Lucia Mountains rise abruptly from the Pacific Ocean. It is frequently praised for its dramatic scenery.

In complete darkness, I pitched my tent. When I had almost finished my evening tea ceremony, a car drove in. Two young guys got off from SUV. They were German tourists travelling on rented Hyundai from San Francisco to Las Vegas. They were looking for a place to camp too.

„We got tired of expensive overnight stays in motels and for a break want to be with nature,“ one of them spoke after we greeted each other. „Do you mind if we stay here?“

There was plenty of space, but I didn't expect them to come that close — they set up their brand new tent literary two metres away from mine. *Well, I guess, sharing is caring.*

Fuel	22			
Bike	15			Camp 29
Extras	54	512		Elevation: 840 m
Budget	6673	Distance	12,300	34°30'54" N; 119°48'05" W

DAY 43

SIERRA NEVADA

I woke up early, which was quite usual for me. But not always I got up right away. Normally, it was very cold outside if the sun was not yet up, but not today. Since yesterday evening, upon approaching Santa Barbara, I felt a sudden change in the temperature. Warm evening breeze from the South enveloped me, and the cold blow from the Pacific was left behind. For its mild climate, this place is referred to as the American Riviera.

Once I got off from the tent, I was pleased not only by the weather but the view as well. Standing on the top of the mountain, I could see nothing but a thick white blanket of clouds below.

The morning magic vanished when I dropped the bike with a helmet attached to it, cracking its wind glass. On top of it, I cut my finger with the drone's propellers.

Santa Barbara — *fancy people in fancy cars live fancy lives*. Here I bought sunglasses — a temporary substitution for my broken visor until I would come up with a better solution. Then followed 400 km to the Sierra Nevada¹.

The fact that my face was dirty, and nose filled with dust, was bearable. But catching insects was a very painful and not fun experience at all. Back then, in Alaska or Yukon, when dri-

¹ The Sierra Nevada is a mountain range in the Western United States between the Central Valley of California and the Great Basin.

ving through a large forested area, I could learn of local fauna just by the helmet's windshield. By the end of the day, there were many different bugs and flies stuck on it. Some of them were unrecognisable as they smashed with a force that left just a slurry spot.

Here, on Interstate Highway 5, the insects were small hard particles, stones, that were thrown from under the wheels of passing trucks.

Camp	22			
Food	15			
Fuel	27			Camp 30
Extras	70		440	Elevation: 2059 m
Budget	6539	Distance	12,740	36°36'22" N; 118°43'30" W

DAY 44

THOUGHTS

I feel very tired after struggling to set up the tent in a strong wind. My torch is dead. I am in Death Valley.

The day started with a pleasant sunny morning. I had fun in Sequoia National Park, flying my drone among giant trees¹. Then things went differently. Three times I took a wrong turn. It resulted in an extra 60 km. In such mountainous terrain, it meant two hours of time. It isn't much, but it was annoying being so inattentive.

One of the turns brought me to a dead end. The road continued, but there was a sign that read, „No Trespassing. Indian Tribal Land“. I didn't want to be speared by an arrow, so I turned back.

Mountain Highway 99 brought me to Isabella Lake. It seemed to be the last oasis before a vast dry area of the Mojave Desert with its endemic Joshua Trees.

By 6 PM, I still had 280 km to cover. It was getting dark and windy. My eyes hurt as the dust rushed from under the sunglasses. I had to keep them on even though its polaroid lens worsened visibility significantly.

The mood is low, so is the budget. I'm not sure if it's going to be enough. It is obvious now that I won't make it in 100 days. Hopefully, Central and South America will be cheaper.

Fuel 15

Camn 31

¹ Sequoia tree is the most massive individual tree on Earth, which grows to an average height of 50-85 m with a trunk diameter of 6-8 m. The biggest discovered sequoia tree is 94 m high and over 15 m wide. It is taller than a 25-storey building.

Fuel	15			Camp 31
Extras	11		560	Elevation: 663 m
Budget	6513	Distance	13,300	36°29'47" N; 117°13'40" W

DAY 45

FAMILIAR TOWN

Death Valley is one of the hottest places on the planet. It is located 86 metres below sea level, which makes it the lowest point in North America. The highest ambient air temperature ever recorded at the surface of the Earth belongs to this place. It was observed in 1913 and showed 56.7°C above zero.

* * *

Today, on the 17th, I arrived in Las Vegas as planned, and in the evening, I went out.

This enormous, expensive city stands in the middle of a desert. Everything is shiny, fancy and luxurious there. To me, it was something new but at the same time very familiar. Some-

how, it reminded me of Dubai. Though, in Dubai, you won't see open cabriolet with half-naked girls dancing to the loud music.

Hostel	31			
Food	36			
Fuel	24			
Extras	13		320	Hostel
Budget	6409	Distance	13,620	„Cat Las Vegas“

DAY 46

DAVID

It turned out that a new visor for the helmet that I had, Arai, cost \$100. As expected, I went out of the moto shop empty-handed and headed to Home Depot¹ instead, where I bought a protective safety glasses for \$11. *It worked! No more of wind blowing my eyes away.*

On the way to St. George, I met a guy from Hungary.

¹ Home Depot is the largest home improvement retailer in the United States, supplying tools, construction products, and services.

David was reconnoitring the area for his upcoming hiking adventure — to walk from St. George to Los Angeles — 650 km in 30 days. In his small backpack, he would carry three t-shirts, three pairs of underwear, and 4 litres of water per day, walking mostly at night and early morning. If he would need more water (and he would), he thought of creeks and springs (he had got a special water filter). If he didn't find them, he would walk to the highway for a search of shops, gas stations and passings cars¹.

I entered Arizona. *Red rocky mountains are around* — pretty much the description of the state, one might think. But by the end of the day, I camped *in a pine tree forest at an altitude of 2400 metres*.

Food	3			
Fuel	8			Camp 32
Bike	19	400		Elevation: 2422 m
Budget	6379	Distance	14,020	36°42'29" N; 112°14'09" W

¹ David (#ElDavido) had reached LA successfully. In fact, it was the last stretch of his foot-hike across the US from New York to Los Angeles, which took him around six months.

DAY 47

DANGEROUS BEAUTY

Grand Canyon! It holds your breath. Never have I ever seen anything like that. It's massive. It is said that South Ridge offers an even more stunning view. But I could not sacrifice the peace of solitude you find here — there were very fewer tourists on the North Ridge.

I sat and enjoyed the silence. Meanwhile, enormous dark clouds were forming above this deep giant maze of land, soon enveloping the entire dome of the sky. Two forces of nature were about to collide. *How can I describe what I saw? Have you ever felt like crying when looking at something?*

The Arizona landscape kept fascinating me. The road went as far as my eye could reach, vanishing in red infinity.

Horseshoe¹ — impressive! I didn't plan to visit it. I didn't even know about the place. But then I saw a sign and dozens of cars parked beside the state road 89. I gave it a shot, and wow — another breathtaking view! One must be careful, though. The viewpoint is on top of the cliff, and its edge has no rails or

¹ Horseshoe Bend is a naturally-occurred horseshoe-shaped curve of red rock around the Colorado River, located in Page, Arizona.

fence, so there is nothing to catch you if you fall. And unfortunately, people do — dangerous beauty.

Fuel	18			Camp 33
Extras	35		488	Elevation: 2227 m
Budget	6326	Distance	14,508	36°41'14" N; 110°32'29" W

DAY 48

LUXURY TIME

The Monument Valley is another unique landscape formation. At that point, I was only 600 km from Salt Lake City, which I left 13 days and 4700 km ago. I did not regret any single mile. At last, I turned to the South.

At 17:00, I was at the camp, which was unusually early to settle for the day. But I was glad. *The sun is still up. I can make dinner and enjoy the food, or I can take my time and do whatever stuff I need to do. Maybe, I can even read today. A luxury time, like a day off.*

I focused on cooking. Here is what I had.

Instant rice. It is raw rice in a portioned sachet of around 100 grams with flavoured spices in it. It required 5-10 min to cook. An average price was \$1 per pack.

Among all culinary vegetables, I preferred tomatoes — \$1.5 for a kilo.

Snack meat sticks. It is kind of dry, thin sausage that could be found in big supermarkets or outdoor goods stores. It did not require refrigerating and lasted for days — \$5-7 per package with 10-15 sticks in it.

Also, I had canned noodles and creamy soup. Before consuming, it required merely warming — \$1-2 per can of 150-200 g.

I did buy chocolate bars too. I felt my body required it. And of course, my priority was bread.

Fuel	24			Camp 34
Extras	2		536	Elevation: 2034 m
Budget	6300	Distance	15,044	35°10'44" N; 111°29'58" W

DAY 49

NO INGLES

I got troubles — the backfire effect of the recent maintenance. *The oil eventually exploded, like lava from a volcano that was asleep since San Francisco and finally erupted. Not in the Death Valley or during 100 miles of a burning drive from Sedona to Phoenix, while descending from Colorado Plateau to the Valley of The Sun, but in the city, where I got into heavy traffic, the oil fountained through cylinder head cover and spread all over the right side of the bike. It was everywhere: on the seat, saddlebags, even on a rear tire, because of what brakes became of no use.*

With MAPS.ME, I found the nearest NAPA¹ store. I didn't know how much oil I had left. Therefore, it was a slow and excitingly anxious drive there. After, I headed to the Airbnb stay booked earlier, which luckily happened to be a few blocks away.

Sevan, a contact person from the host, understood my need. On behalf of the owner of the house, he was very kind to offer the backyard to work on. „It will be safer this way,“ he said, „rather than on the street.“

¹ NAPA stands for National Automotive Parts Association, also known as NAPA Auto Parts. It is an American retailers' cooperative that distributes automotive replacement parts, accessories and service items in North America.

I finished working late in the evening. All went successfully. The drill and the Heli-Coil kit came into use. I made a new thread and finally tightened all four bolts of the cylinder head cover properly. Now, I felt relieved but hungry.

A few blocks away, there was a grocery market. After I couldn't find bread, I asked a young guy for assistance.

„No Ingles¹,“ he replied, shrugging his shoulders, and kept shelving the goods. *Mexico is close.*

Airbnb	23			
Food	17			
Fuel	10			
Extras	25		272	
Budget	6225	Distance	15,316	Airbnb

DAY 50

THE LAST NIGHT IN THE US

„It is safe and beautiful,“ said Bojana.

¹ (from Spanish) No English.

„We were there last month,“ added Nikola about their vacation in Mexico, „in Puerto Vallarta.“

This Serbian couple were running the laundry. They moved to the US in 1992, after Yugoslavia had broken apart, and the war between Bosnia and Serbia commenced.

On the parking, when I was packing my clothes, I heard, „What is the bike that you have?“ I turned around and saw an Indian guy standing next to me.

„Kawasaki KLR650,“ I replied.

„And how is it?“

„It’s pretty good. I like it. Eats a bit of oil, though. But with proper in-time maintenance, there should be no issues,“ I said.

„I used to have BMW dual-sport back in 80-s in St. Petersburg.“

„In St. Petersburg?“ I repeated surprisingly. „So, you must be speaking Russian then? I am from Ukraine.“

„Da, nemnogo,“ he replied with an accent, which meant *yes, a little bit*. „I used to study there. After graduation, I went on a road trip. I drove to Siberia.“

„Wow! It must have been a truly unique experience“ I was impressed.

„Yeah, it was beautiful. And what about you? Where are you heading to?“

„Mexico.“

„Oh! Be careful there. Try to avoid the central part of the country. Better drive along the coast, Gulf of California. The place has more tourists and, therefore, more police. It is much safer.“

„Thank you. I appreciate. I will keep it in mind.“ We shook hands, and I went off.

I headed to a moto shop to buy a front tire. After 11,500 km, it still looked good. *I better have a spare one before crossing into an unknown land.*

I met two Canadians there, a father and a son from Vancouver, driving two BMW across the US.

„It is hot as hell“, the man in his 40-s exclaimed, unzipping his moto jacket and revealing a completely wet t-shirt.

„Yeah, tell me about that“, I thought to myself.

Nothing was holding me in the big city any longer, so I decided to save some money and camp.

It was a nice warm evening drive. Suddenly, when being overtaken by a truck, I heard a loud bang. At the very moment, among the shadows of dusk, I saw the ruptured tire came out

from under the vehicle and moved fast towards me. I had no time to manoeuvre, so I grabbed the handlebar as hard as I could. In a blink of an eye, it had got under my wheels. The bike had shaken but stayed upright. As soon as I regained the control, I pulled over. Thankfully, everything was fine.

In a few hours, I arrived at the settlement called Ajo. My campsite was supposed to be somewhere nearby. I turned off from the main road and drove farther, following the map, by a now dusty pathway. In 10-15 km, I arrived at the spot that presumably, was to be the place. I got off, switched off the light and looked around. All I could discern in the darkness were cactuses under the moonlight. There was nothing around that could have represented the area for camping, until I walked further and found an open, clear space a few hundred metres away on top of the hill. From there, Mexico laid 50 km to the South.

Food	43		
Fuel	18		
Bike	125		Camp 35
Extras	15	256	Elevation: 616 m
Budget	6024	Distance	15,572
			32°20'55" N; 112°53'37" W

PART II

BENVENIDO A LATINOAMERICA¹

I don't know how do I feel — whether it is fear or excitement. Even though it is half of my journey, it feels like it's starting just now.

¹ Bienvenido a Latinoamérica — (from Spanish) welcome to Latin America.

DAY 51

MEXICAN BORDER

I was at the northern edge of the Sonoran Desert. Through the maze of dirt roads and 4-metre high cactuses, it took me some time to figure out the way to the highway.

„Travel Caution. Smuggling and illegal immigration may be encountered in this area,“ was a sign I came across there.

Soon, I arrived at the Lukeville-Sonoyta border crossing. To exit the US, all I had to do was to move slowly through the heavily fenced corridor until I pass the last and highest gates. I was excited and nervous at the same time. I knew it was going to be different *out there*: the culture, the language, not mentioning the stereotypes.

* * *

Numerous street sellers and windshield washers were jumping on passing cars, forcefully offering goods and services; beggars were roaming around. One of them was a white American.

“Don’t trust white people in Mexico,” he said when I had given him \$5. Then a Mexican one came, and another dollar went off. Maybe I was not prepared mentally, but I was armed bureaucracy-wise.

I knew I would be permitted to enter the country based on my valid US visa. I knew I had to purchase the Temporary Import Permit¹ (TIP) and Insurance. What I didn’t know was the sequence of the border crossing procedure here and where and whom to approach. I thought it would be intuitively understood though — I would go through the border corridor until an Immigration officer would stop me, ask questions and guide. Well, not in Mexico.

As I drove, there were no gates, no barriers, no people in uniform. Not until after I had entered some village, I understood that things were a bit different here than on the other side of the border, and I turned around. The Immigration Office turned to be a small concrete house hidden in the trees.

After stamping the visa in my passport, the attractive female officer asked 533 pesos (\$28) in cash. I had no local money, therefore, had to pay \$33. I thought of it in advance,

¹ Temporary Import Permit (TIP) is a document obtained from the Customs upon crossing the international border that temporarily allows a foreigner to enter the country on his/her own vehicle.

but in Phoenix, it wasn't a simple task to get Mexican currency unless illegally from hands on the street if knowing where. The exchange could only be requested in the bank beforehand.

Next was the Customs, called Aduana, located 27 km down road MEX-02. There, for \$59, I got the TIP, issued for the duration of my visa, which was 180 days. Then I was asked to pay a deposit, the amount of which was based on the vehicle's manufacture year (\$200 or \$400 — before or after 2007). The deposit was to be given back at the border upon exiting the country and cancelling the TIP. It would be returned either in cash or on a credit card — the same way it was paid.

It is worth to notice that customs officer went with me outside to check the motorcycle's VIN (Vehicle Identification Number), engraved on the frame, to compare it with the one stated in the *title* and registration document. Such a procedure would be followed almost at all international border-crossing control points on my way to the South.

Everything was sorted, but insurance.

When I had reached Caborca, I started looking for *seguro*¹. It was the first Spanish word I learned. But I found all the offices closed. Then I met Pedro.

¹ Seguro — (fr. Spanish) an insurance, safe.

„Of course!“ he exclaimed in English, „It’s *Domingo*¹.“

Eventually, I purchased it online². For \$52, I got the cheapest option I could find. It was valid for ten days only. Thus I had to leave Mexico on the 3rd of October at the latest.













For the night, I used the Airbnb again. The apartment was within a private residential area in Hermosillo, the capital of the state of Sonora. David and Maria were my hosts. She is local, and he is El Salvadorian. For \$20, I got a nice private room with a bathroom.

Airbnb	20			
Food	4			
Fuel	11			
Bike	112			
Extras	47		528	
Budget	5830	Distance	16,100	Airbnb

¹ Domingo — (fr. Spanish) Sunday.

² Web-link is provided.



-  route
-  international border
-  city
-  camp
-  Cascada de Basaseachi (waterfall)
-  Cascada de Micos (waterfall)
-  Cascada de Tamul (waterfall)
-  Sotana de Golondrinas (Cave of Swallows)
-  Wind Tehuantepecer
-  Cañon del Sumidero (canyon)
-  Chichen Itza
-  Pico de Orizaba, 5636 m



DAY 52

SEBASTIAN

I planned to drive along the Gulf of California, as suggested, until Puerto Vallarta through Guadalajara to Mexico City. But David warned me of the nasty weather down south on the coast. „The flooding hit the Sinaloa State,“ he said.

Bad news — there are heavy rains in central, east, and west parts of the country, so basically, everywhere on my way. But if every country costs so much to enter, I will be screwed anyway.

Walking out of the door, I froze on the spot. The front tire was flat. „What the hell? A cactus spine?“

My bike had only a side stand. In that position, both wheels touched the ground. To remove one, I needed to lift it. Previously, I used stones or chunks of wood to put underneath the engine guard. Now, it turned out to be a problem to find those. Everything around was meticulously clean — not even a cigarette but.

To see how bad it was, I inflated the tire. And it held. Surprised as I was, I got ready to leave. There was 100 km ahead

before the coast, where I thought to find a proper spot and work it out. I thanked my hosts and left for good.

At San Carlos, near Guaymas town, I stopped. It was a good stretch of a white sandy public beach with some trees for shade. Under one, I found Sebastian, a 40 years old Argentinian, from Cordoba. He had been travelling the Americas by bicycle for two years now and had almost arrived. The US border was his finish line, which ironically, he wouldn't be able to cross.

I was interested in bicycle-travelling too, but what excited me most was Sebastian's experience with the Darien Gap. Somehow he did cross it, and I was eager to know *how*.

„Hopping on and off the small boats,“ he said in Spanish, trying hard explaining with his hands so I could understand. His expenses amounted to \$150, which was impossible for me unless I went without the motorcycle.

After I had installed the new tire and swum in warm waters of the Gulf of California, I went where Sebastian suggested — Mirador¹ San Carlos, where I camped on Piedras Pintas beach.

Food	1			Camp 36
Fuel	17		144	Elevation: 8 m
Budget	5812	Distance	16,244	27°56'23" N; 111°05'08" W

¹ Mirador — (from Sp.) a viewpoint; a spot with a beautiful view.

DAY 53

RED GRASSHOPPERS

Because of the limited insurance period, I was determined to use the daylight time productively, which by now, within the Tropic of Cancer, was lesser. Therefore, I departed at 06:35, of which I was very proud. I headed towards what is said to be the highest single-drop waterfall in North America — Cascada¹ de Basaseachi (246 m).

Road 117 looked abandoned. On a stretch of 170 km, I met no cars. The bushes on its side invaded a good part of the driveway. Hundreds of red grasshoppers of a size of a half of my palm were everywhere. Inevitably, we collided.

From north to south, Mexico is crossed by two mountain ranges: Sierra Madre Oriental (east) and Sierra Madre Occidental (west). At the centre, it is traversed by the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt. Hence, most of the country's territory is

¹ Cascada — (from Spanish) waterfall.

landlocked at high altitudes and represents hilly terrain. It took me 10 hours to cover 480 km.

I camped on a small pull-out along road 16, hidden by thin pine trees. Neither MAPS.ME nor iOverLander had anything to offer.

Food	3			
Fuel	26			Camp 37
Extras	4		491	Elevation: 1813 m
Budget	5779	Distance	16,735	28°20'30" N; 108°16'10" W

DAY 54

MEXICAN RAIN

I arrived at the waterfall. To enjoy its beauty to the fullest, one should hike one of the numerous trails in the park. The landscape reminded me of scenes from the „Avatar“ movie — vertical limestone cliffs covered with dense vegetation.

Soon, I got caught in the rain. There is no much fun driving a motorcycle at the altitude of 2000 m being wet, even in trop-

ics, even if it is Mexican rain. *At least, my chocolate bars won't melt.*

The sky was solid grey, under which there was no place to hide, except trees. There, I camped.

Food	5			Camp 38
Fuel	14		272	Elevation: 2306 m
Budget	5760	Distance	17,007	27°02'41" N; 107°10'20" W

DAY 55

CARRETERA¹

There are two types of roads in Mexico: *cuota* and *libre carreteras*. *Cuota carretera*, also called *autopista*, is a toll highway of exceptional quality with wide driveways and divider in between. The toll booths are placed every 75-100 km, where each time I paid \$3-4 to pass.

Soon, I became a *libre carrreteras* chaser — a free but longer alternative to highway. Their condition varies. Mostly, they are paved but go through every inhabited settlement, have

¹ Carretera — (from. Spanish) a road.

one lane and many humps, which was the most annoying thing about it.

La Casa de Bruno in Durango had my award for being the friendliest hostel. Bruno, a young guy with Korean roots — the owner, and concurrently, the manager — waited for my arrival till midnight, offered to park the bike on the backyard and allowed me to stay in the living room as long as I needed — to cook dinner, work on the computer, etc. Next day, upon checking out, his girlfriend, Alejandra, invited me for a barbecue with the hostel’s staff and its guests, that was to take place on the weekend. I was pleased but could not afford to stay two more days.

Hostel	14			
Food	18			
Fuel	31			
Extras	4		656	Hostel
Budget	5693	Distance	17,663	„La Casa de Bruno“

DAY 56

PLACE

I headed towards San Luis Potosi, where I stayed in Sukha Hostel. Again, I was allowed to bring my bike inside. There, right beside the reception desk, I found another adventure motorcycle — a BMW R1200 — a real monster that is twice bigger than mine.

„German guy... Travelling around Latin America for three years now,“ a cute female receptionist told me, guessing my thoughts. „Third months in Potosi — love affairs.“

„And... Where are you from?“ I asked the girl who didn't look local at all.

„I am not sure, but born in Germany too,“ she laughed.

She couldn't relate herself to a place from her past. As for me, I couldn't relate myself to a place in my future. *What do I do next? Where this will bring me to?*

Hostel	9			
Food	4			
Fuel	29		496	
Budget	5651	Distance	18,159	„Sukha Hostel“

DAY 57

DESPACITO

Cascada de Micos, Cascada de Tamul, and Sotano de las Golondrinas¹ were the places to visit today. But there is a saying, „Man proposes, and God disposes.“

I found myself amid hilly terrain covered in clouds. The road was an endless snake going up and down. The asphalt was wet. *That feeling when the bike is falling, and you're realising — you are fucked.*

When I had applied brakes, approaching the turn, the rear tire skid, and next moment I was sliding on my butt with the bike ahead of me. We got separated. Thanks to the engine guard, I didn't get squeezed between the road and the motorcycle. Thanks to inertia, my more massive friend went ahead, turning its front towards me. And so we were looking at each other, drifting in the middle of the road, unable to do anything.

I stopped after 15 metres. The bike — after another 50 metres, on the lane of the opposite traffic. After I gained control over my body, I ran towards the motorcycle to move it out of the way but to no avail — it was too heavy. I ran behind the

¹ Sotano de las Golondrinas — (from Sp.) The Cave of Swallows.

curve and put the helmet on the driveway to indicate the hazard to approaching vehicles. Then, I started unloading the bags. Several cars passed by until one finally stopped. With Diego, we pulled the bike to the sideway.

„Despacito!“ he said before leaving, rising his open palms in front of his chest and moving them slowly in the outward direction.

„What an irony!“ I thought to myself, standing beside the bike, still shocked, but smiling like an idiot. „It has been almost two years since the famous song *Despacito* became viral, and I still had no idea what it was about. Until today.“ In Spanish, *despacito* means *slowly*.

The front left foot-peg got deformed, and the hashtag board got grounded down to the extent that it couldn't be used anymore. But I could continue, and that was all that mattered.

Camp	1.5			
Food	4			
Fuel	16			Camp 39
Extras	1.5	280		Elevation: 144 m
Budget	5628	Distance	18,439	22°06'00" N; 99°09'05" W

DAY 58

ART OF NATURE

I left Cascada de Micos and headed towards the Tamul Waterfall. To get there, I, along with Hungarian guy and two local girls, took a 4x4 ride with the guide Phelix. Slowly, we progressed to the Rio¹ Gallinas, crossed its swift currents in a canoe, went through the dense forest by muddy paths with hastily made handrails, through water pools until, eventually, reached the edge of the cliff, where thousands of tonnes of water dash down with an intense roar.

Sunset I spent by the cave. It is a natural air hole in the landmass 62 m wide and 370 m deep, where swallows live. At this time of the day, the birds return home. At first, they circle above, descending slowly, until at last, like bullets, they rush down through the hole and disappear in the darkness.

I was in tropical lowlands by now. It was hot and humid. At night, after dinner, under the rattle of jungles, I was watching the fireflies drawing lines in complete darkness — *the real art of nature*.

Camn 4

¹ Rio — (from Spanish) a river.

Camp	4			
Food	2			Camp 40
Extras	17		112	Elevation: 91 m
Budget	5605	Distance	18,551	21°37'30" N; 99°01'22" W

DAY 59

MEXICO CITY

During the descent to Pachuca, on the last stretch of the mountain road 105, the rear brakes refused to work. From the intense and continuous usage, the brake fluid got boiled. Not until I bled the lines and refilled the system, I could continue.

At the city gas station, sitting on concrete stairs leading to the cashier booth, an old *Mexicano*¹ man with white long mustache was reading a newspaper.

„De donde eres²?“ he asked.

„Viajando desde Alaska hasta Argentina³,“ I replied.

¹ (from Spanish) Mexican.

² (from Sp.) Where are you from?

³ (from Sp.) Travelling from Alaska to Argentina.

„No, tu, que pais¹?“ he asked again, pointing his finger at me.

„Oh, Ukrania,“ I said, smiling.

„Ukrania?“ He looked surprised. Then he said something, out of which I could pick up only two words: *peligro*² and *narcotrafico*. Nevertheless, it was enough to understand his point — the old man was worried about me.

* * *

Mexico City. What did I expect from it? I think the word *chaos* was the one I associated this place with, any time before in my life. But it wasn't so now. With its public transport, clean streets, at least in the centre, everything looked organised. What did meet my expectations, though, was an overall feeling of insecurity.

„If you leave the bike on the street, with all these bags, it will be gone by morning,“ answered the hostel receptionist to my naive question to park the motorcycle outside.

¹ (from Sp.) No, you, what country?

² (from. Sp.) a danger. *Curva peligroso* is a common road sign in Mexico. It means *dangerous curve*.

Here, as in most capital cities, the *parking issue* is one of the top concerns. Though, while in some world's metropolitan areas you can afford to leave a vehicle right on the street, if there is a spot available, in Mexico City, it is out of the question, at least for a foreigner. If you do so, upon returning, you might lack some parts or accessories if not the vehicle itself. Few *parkings* even refused to accept the bike for the night. It took me a while to find a stay for my buddy.

I felt I need a smoke. It was the first cigarette on the trip. *Did I feel better? I don't know. I think I am getting tired, mentally.*

Hostel	9			
Food	3			
Fuel	30			
Bike	4		448	Hostel
Budget	5559	Distance	18,999	„Selina Mexico City Downtown“

DAY 60

MEXICAN DRAMA

„Why is it so hard to find it, even in the capital?“ holding propane gas canister in my hands, I asked a salesman in the store that sells outdoor activity goods. „You have such a beautiful country. Don't people go camping?“

„True. But the thing is that people don't consider it safe. The rate of crime here is not reassuring,“ was the answer.

On the way to get my laundry, I was pulled over by the motorcycle police. The reason for stopping was unsecured helmet strap. I couldn't believe it. But the officer showed some booklet, where, in Spanish, such a requirement, apparently, was written. And he asked me to pay the penalty. In my return, I asked for a *factura*, receipt. He said he doesn't have one and added that otherwise, we would proceed to a police station.

Meanwhile, random pedestrians started showing an interest — why did the police stop the tourist? When they had been told the reason, they started arguing with the officer, demanding to let me go. There were at least three active speakers from the crowd. They condemned such legislative practice against foreign visitors, while the real crime remained unpunished. Eventually, after half an hour, I was free to go, for what I was genuinely grateful to the Mexican people.

Today was the 60th day of my journey, and it was the first time when I was asked to show any documents for inspection. Fortunately, I had my insurance still valid. It was expiring tomorrow, on the 3rd of October.

Soon, I headed out of the city — I wanted to escape the crowd as quickly as possible. At Puebla, I turned on *libre carretera* 190 and went in the south-westerly direction towards Oaxaca.

Food	13			
Fuel	13			
Bike	9			Camp 41
Extras	13		320	Elevation: 1316 m
Budget	5511	Distance	19,319	18°13'45" N; 98°10'01" W

REPORT 3

	D 1-20	D 21-40	D 41-60
Camp, qty (paid)	13 (1)	14 (5)	14 (3)
Roof, qty (paid)	7 (7)	6 (5)	6 (6)
Total C - R, qty	41 (9) - 19 (18)		
Stay, \$ (\$/day)	235 (12)	250 (12.5)	134 (6.7)
Food, \$ (\$/day)	168 (8)	209 (10.5)	178 (8.9)
Fuel, \$ (km/1\$)	386 (18)	206 (23)	368 (21)
Bike, \$	760	555	284
Extras, \$ (\$/day)	375 (19)	330 (16.5)	311 (15.6)
Expenses, \$	1924	1550	1275
Total, \$	4749		
Budget, \$	5511		
Dist., km (km/day)	6859 (343)	4769 (238)	7691 (385)
Dist. True, km (%)	3200 (15)	1734 (8)	3687 (17)
Dist. True Left, %	60		
Dist. Total, km	19,319		

DAY 61

„CASH“

It was the only word he delivered, pointing the gun at me. Instinctively, I raised my hands, holding the phone, which was taken right away. He started searching my pockets. My tiny wallet with a credit card and a bit of cash went unnoticed. But my side pocket on a knee level was full. There, in a zip-lock bag, I carried all my documents. In between the pages of my International Driving License, \$1100 were hidden. He grabbed the bag.

„Documentos!“ I uttered.

In the meantime, the second guy was searching through my bags. He started with the small black backpack. Normally, in it, I carried all my gadgets. But now, my GoPro was attached to the helmet that hung on the handlebar, the drone was in the tank bag, and the laptop — hidden between the clothes in the 40-litre rucksack. None of it was found. Irritated as he was, the man started yelling at me, pointing with his hands to the bushes. He wanted me to go away from the road, away from the view.

„No comprendo¹,“ all I could say, standing still.

At this very moment, the sound of an approaching car came from behind the hill. The couple immediately made off. On the run, they dropped my documents bag. When I had come to pick it up, the bank-notes were sticking out from the driving license book. My hands were shaking. Only now I realised what had happened. If the bag were gone, my trip would have been over. If the car didn't show up... Who knows what could have happened. I packed everything as fast as I could and went off.

What was I to do next? My first wish was to get out of this pace and drive the farthest I could go. But without the phone, I was disarmed. It was my guide — all applications and information were there. I couldn't go anywhere simply because I couldn't navigate.

In Oaxaca, I bought a new phone, and using blessed free Walmart Wi-Fi, I downloaded all the essential apps.

My stolen iPhone had photos of my docs and credit card. What it didn't have was a password to access it. So anyone could browse through it freely, and if smart enough, could use

¹ (from Sp.) I don't understand.

the credit card details to make internet transactions, using a security code he would receive through SMS.

Therefore, I temporarily blocked my MasterCard and permanently deactivated my financial Ukrainian telephone number. I could have just lowered my internet transaction limit to zero, but for that, again, I would need my phone number to access online banking.

From now on, things had to be re-arranged. First, I would stop only at places with people around. Second, I would not carry documents and big money on me but hide them properly. At the same time, it had to be easily accessible when needed. And last but not least — no camping, unless secured.

In the evening, I arrived at San Isidro Roaguia, where I planned to visit Hierve el Agua¹, also known as Frozen waterfall. I still had to figure out where to sleep tonight. I needed to ask someone. But *I am not that open towards strangers any more, at least not here. I suspect people now. I feel vulnerable.*

When I had stopped on the empty street to look at the map, the car drove up, and three young guys got off. My heart went to the heels. „Again?“ But the men were friendly fellows with good intentions. They asked if I need any help. One of them

¹ Hierve el Agua is a set of natural rock formations of white colour that resemble cascades of water. That is why it is called the Frozen Waterfall.

was a security guard of the park where the waterfall is. He offered me to camp inside, provided I pay \$1 for the entrance and \$2 for camping. I happily accepted that, but my suspicions stayed with me throughout the night.

I set up the tent on a concrete floor in a pavilion. Then, I stood in front of the bike's headlight, recording my video dairy on camera, complaining about the day. Next moment, the dog suddenly appeared from the darkness and jumped on me, placing his front paws on my hip, and started whining. I sat down and palmed him, and he licked my nose. Any support would have been a balm to my soul. That moment, it came from a dog.

Camp	3			
Food	6			
Fuel	14			Camp 42
Extras	170		360	Elevation: 1777 m
Budget	5318	Distance	19,679	16°52'04" N; 96°16'34" W

DAY 62

TEHUANTEPECER

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec represents the shortest distance (200 km) between the Mexican Gulf and the Pacific Ocean. Before opening the Panama Canal, it was a major shipping route with its 308 km of railway.

Also, it is a gap between the Mexican and Guatemalan Mountains, through which the trade winds blow. From October to February it is known as Tehuantepecer, which force can reach 80 km/h with gusts as high as 190 km/h. It explains the abundance of windmills here, on a 50 km stretch of road 190.

The number 7 grade of Beaufort Scale states that it is „hard to walk against the wind“. The number 8 grade says that it is „very hard to walk against the wind“. The 9th (wind speed of 75-88 km/h) — doesn't mention walking at all. Instead, it reads, „Slight structural damages occur (chimney pots and slate removed).“

I wasn't walking. Perhaps, I could have not if tried. The driving itself was a constant struggle to keep the balance and not being blown away.

Airbnb	10	
Food	5	
Fuel	27	
Bike	7	520

Budget 5269

Distance 20,199

„Casa De Zeferina“

DAY 63

OCTOBER THE 5TH

My insurance expired two days ago. I was an illegal driver now. Was it worth the risk to have troubles with police? *In case I am asked for it, I can always pretend I don't understand.*

It was silly, I know. My real excuse was that I could bribe a policeman with even less sum of money than needed for the cheapest insurance policy, which was \$52.

I came to Tuxtla Gutiérrez to visit Sumidero Canyon. It is a narrow gap between 1000-metre high vertical walls of rocks, covered with dense vegetation, where down below the quiet green El Sumidero River flows. The park's infrastructure is well maintained. For \$6, the perfect road will lead you to the main watching points.

After crossing the Sierra Madre de Chiapas Mountain Range, I descended to the tropical flatlands on the coast of the

Gulf of Mexico. Opposite to my expectations, there were no *easy-to-camp* places along the shore. Many villages and farms claimed the land here. The solution came from iOverlander.

It was the small resort on the road 180, Cabañas Ah Caray. The kid named Pedro worked there as a security guard and for 100 pesos (\$5) could allow camping outside the gates until 07:00 the next day.

Camp	5			
Food	1			
Fuel	31			Camp 43
Bike	8		520	Elevation: 1 m
Budget	5224	Distance	20,719	18°47'58" N; 91°28'52" W

DAY 64

BEST 10 MINUTES

I was in the state of Yucatan by now, looking for any *not-so-crowded* cenote¹. It happened to be Yokdzonot, where I ar-

¹ Cenote is a natural pit, sinkhole, resulting from the collapse of limestone bedrock that exposes groundwater underneath. There are nearly 6000 cenotes only in Yucatan Peninsula. They can be public or privately owned.

rived at 17:50, ten minutes before closing. It was awesomely refreshing after a hot sticky day drive to jump in clear, cool underground waters.

For \$8 in total, I was offered to camp on the premises. In a small wooden pavilion, amid dozens of hanging life-jackets, I placed my tent.

The mood is slowly coming back. I love what I'm doing, even if it gets hard sometimes. Here, I feel myself; I am myself; I'm free. And now, at this very moment, I'm happy, with all the memories of my life.

Camp	8			
Food	4			
Fuel	27			Camp 44
Bike	2	474		Elevation: 28 m
Budget	5183	Distance	21,193	20°42'22" N; 88°43'51" W

DAY 65

CHAIN

Finally, I narrowed my morning preparations down to one and a half hours — hygiene matters, short exercise session, breakfast, and packing. At 8 AM, I was on the road.

It is tropical lowlands here. *Rain gets you suddenly when you don't even expect it. The sky is clear and then — Boom! — everything is wet.*

Waiting out under the roof of a bus station by the road, I saw some guy tinkering his bike under the shower. I offered assistance, but he said the help was on the way. His drive chain broke and consequently, messed up the rear tire. „Damn it!“ I whispered, going back to make sure my chain is lubricated and tightened adequately.

Chichen Itza — famous Mayan ruins — is a very crowded place. What impressed me the most was peculiar toys sold here by locals. It is carved out of the wood and can produce a sound of a jaguar, provided you blow into the hole in it.

Speaking of the cats, I was very eager to see one and, preferably, not in the wild. Therefore, I planned to visit the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary¹ in Belize.

Hostel	10
Food	12

¹ The reserve was established in 1986 as the first protected area for jaguars and regarded as a premier site for jaguar preservation in the world.

Fuel	26			
Extras	18		392	Hostel
Budget	5117	Distance	21,585	„Manic“

DAY 66

BELIZE

Santa Elena border crossing, 11 AM.

At first, you go to the Mexican Aduana office (Customs) to cancel the TIP (Temporarily Import Permit). Next, with the cancellation paper and the receipt of the deposit made earlier, you address an adjacent window — Banjersito bank¹ — to get your money back. After stamping your passport at the Immigration, you are good to go.

The only road will lead you across the Hondo River. You need to stop in front of the first building you see on your right side. That is a fumigation² station. The procedure cost around \$3 and is obligatory to enter Belize. Here, all road signs are in

¹ Banjercito — national bank of Mexico.

² Fumigation is a pest control method. A fumigated area is being filled with gaseous pesticides, fumigants, to suffocate or poison the pests within.

English, as it is an official language of the country, which gained its independence from Great Britain in 1981. Before, it was known as British Honduras.

The procedure goes in the opposite order now — you approach Immigration counter to stamp your passport in, then you proceed to the Customs. There, I paid the Vehicle Transfer Fee (Foreign Vehicle Border Processing Fee), which was \$8, and got my newly issued TIP, represented in Belize by another stamp in the passport. The last thing was to get the insurance. The corresponding building was pointed out to me by a Customs officer. It cost \$10 for 30 days. And so, at 2 PM, I was officially and legally in the 4th country on my way to the South.

* * *

The main attractions here are on or under the water — beautiful lagoons along the coastal line, atolls, the world's second-longest barrier reef (after Australia), and the famous Great Blue Hole (70 km away from the shore). *I need a boat, not the bike, to explore that.*

Nevertheless, I came up with a 2-day itinerary. Along with the Jaguar Reserve Nature Center, I wanted to visit Placencia

Peninsula with its beautiful beaches. However, during the day, the plan changed, when at the crossroads La Democracia, I found out that the road I intended to take, Coastal Highway, was a dirt track, recently flooded by heavy rains. *What am I going to see there? Tropical forest, which is plenty of on my way South? Beach? Same. I can't go everywhere and do everything. I've been deviating too much by now.* So I gave up on jaguars and turned towards Guatemala.

* * *

At the border, I was approached by a person with a broad smile. He was a helper. Those are people who assist you in going through a border-crossing process faster, as they lead you, translate for you, and tell where to go. All is being done for symbolic gratitude — tips. They are not officials or any employees and often friendly but intrusive.

Enrique was no difference, but his genuine smile disarmed me, and I neither accepted nor refused his service. After all, it was nice to talk to someone in English after two weeks of constant struggle in Spanish.

The border crossing procedure was the same: Belize Aduana (Customs) — TIP cancellation, Immigration — stamp out, Guatemala Immigration — stamp in, Aduana — new TIP (\$21). Additionally, to leave Belize, I paid the Departure Fee (\$4). Overall, the flow of bureaucracy here went faster, as everything was located within one building, except fumigation.

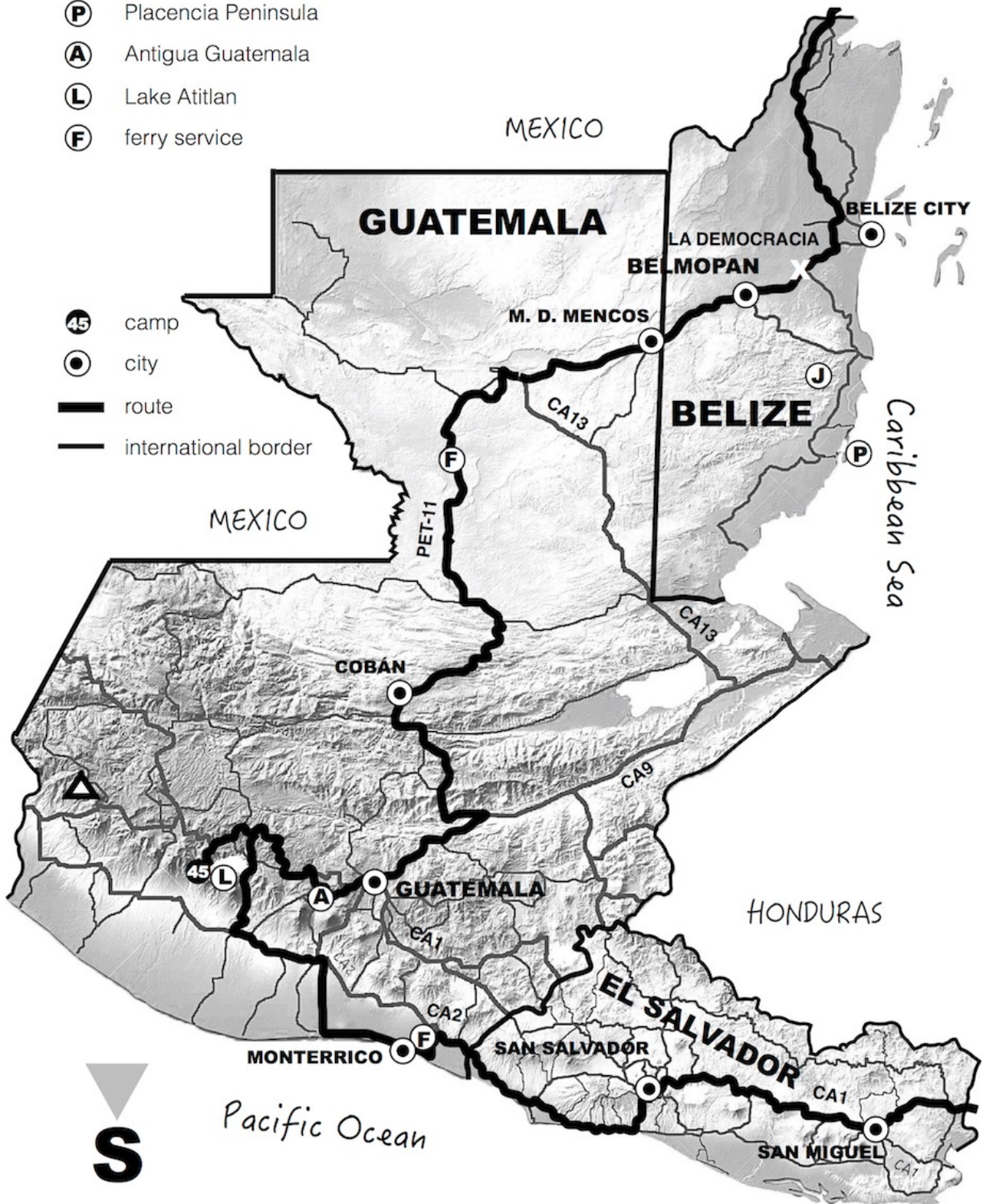
Rodrigo, Aduana officer and a passionate motorcyclist, while processing my TIP, advised me on the country roads to avoid. On the map, he identified the ones that are unpaved and hard to drive, as they go through mountainous terrain, where monsoon rains make them even dangerous. I thanked him, gave 10 quetzals¹ to Enrique, and entered Central America.

Hotel	5			
Food	3			
Bike	43			
Extras	15		272	
Budget	5051	Distance	21,857	Hotel Central

¹ Quetzal — Guatemalan national currency. 1 USD = 7.7 GTQ.

- ▲ Volcan Tajumulco, 4202 m
- Ⓝ Jaguar Reserve Natural Centre
- Ⓟ Placencia Peninsula
- Ⓐ Antigua Guatemala
- Ⓛ Lake Atitlan
- ⓕ ferry service

- 45 camp
- Ⓞ city
- route
- international border



DAY 67

GUATEMALA CITY

The shortest distance from Prudhoe Bay to Ushuaia is 22,000 km. I was just a hundred kilometres short and yet only in Guatemala.

Melchor de Mencos is a small frontier town. For \$5, my 6 m² room had a bed, fan (working), window (with no glass), trash bin, and written on the wall telephone number.

Having had a soup with a big chicken thigh, tortillas¹, and Pepsi on aside, I hit the road.

At the San Antonio Las Cuevas gas station, I had the most pleasant fuelling experience — pretty young girls nicely handled my fuel gun.

Passing by panoramic scenery on the road 5, I tried to launch the drone, but it didn't take off. Something caused a short circuit that generated extreme heat and melted the Electronic Power Board. But I had no time for drama — it was getting dark.

¹ A tortilla is a type of thin, unleavened flatbread, made from maize.

Night, rain, and heavy traffic is not the best mixture when a low beam light is out of order (the bulb gave up yesterday evening). To see the road, I tried to take off my goggles, but the dust, caused passing cars, had no mercy on my eyes. On the approach to Guatemala City, extensive road works were taking place.

I was looking at the pool through the window of my room. There were eight beds and no guests except me. I looked at the mirror and saw a tired man with a smoke-black face as if covered with soot. For a moment, I thought that Gabriel, a receptionist, gave me an empty room deliberately. I was grateful for that as I was exhausted. I sat on my bunk and took a deep breath. It was not until I cursed the drone that broke, the front wheel that was still wobbling¹ after 6000 km, the ATMs that charge \$4-6 commission for a single transaction, and the low beam light when I finally fell asleep.

Hostel	10			
Food	16			
Fuel	31			
Extras	4		560	Hostel
Budget	4730	Distance	22,417	„Central 10“

¹ Since I had changed the tire in Guaymas, Mexico, the tire's bead could not take its place on the rim.

DAY 68

WARNING! ROBBERY!

A local Kawasaki dealer had a bulb I needed.

After lunch, I headed to Antigua, the former capital of Guatemala. In 1776, the Spanish Government ordered to relocate it to a safer place after numerous earthquakes and eruptions of Volcán de Fuego¹. With its Spanish Baroque-influenced architecture, it is now a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the main tourist attraction. I was lured by the volcano instead. Guatemala has dozens of them, and only a few are active. There is a spot on Cerro de la Cruz mountain (accessible by car) from where you can see the entire city and, on a clear day, the breathing Volcano of Fire.

The night I spent at Atitlan Lake. With a maximum depth of 340 m, it is the deepest lake in Central America. As its basin is volcanic in origin, it fills an enormous caldera, 8 to 18 km of size, formed by an eruption. To descent to its shore, one must

¹ Fuego — (from Sp.) fire.

take a nerve-strenuous road down. Within the length of 4 km, I took seventeen 180° turns, driving down the slopes with an angle gradient reaching 30% — another driving test. Once arrived, I was awarded by a view, which Alexandr von Humboldt, famous geographer, naturalist, and explorer referred to as the most beautiful (lake) in the world.

Tomorrow I would be heading to the Pacific coast. The shortest way was to continue skirting the shore and drive south. But on iOverLander, that road was labelled with an exclamation mark. The message read, „Warning! Robbery! 15 km stretch between San Pedro La Laguna and Santiago Atitlan has a 3 km dirt road, where you have to drive very slowly (because of the road condition). We drove there on 30th Jan 2016 and got robbed by two armed and masked people at 14:00 on Sunday. We heard of another attempt at the end of the month. If you want to cross, ask local police to escort you (they did it for us when we went back on the same road).“ I asked a few locals as well as the hostel staff — everybody confirmed the unstable situation in the area and advised to address San Pedro police if I was to follow that direction.

Camp	5
Food	5
Fuel	12

Bike	16			Camp 45
Extras	3		200	Elevation: 1663 m
Budget	4949	Distance	22,617	14°41'19" N; 91°17'18" W

DAY 69

LOVE HOTEL

I turned around and went along a safer road.

Once on the *carretera* CA2, at the gas station, I met a local guy named Ernesto, who in perfect English offered me a beer.

„No, thanks. I am driving,“ I refused politely.

„That’s alright. In Guatemala it’s normal. It’s just a beer,“ he insisted, but I was solid on that.

Ernesto confessed that he was very hateful of gringos¹. „Back in the 90-s,“ he started, „when I was younger, now I’m 46, I walked illegally to the US, New York. I worked there for five years, and nobody, nobody helped me in that country. But

¹ The word was initially used by locals to refer to any foreigner in Latin America. Nowadays, it is narrowed down to name only white people from the US.

in Guatemala, it is different. People are nice here, and it is safe now.“

„I heard differently. But I hope for the good, of course.“

Montericco was flooded. On some parts of the road, the water level was up to the cylinder head cover. A bit higher — and my spark plug would have drowned. But the bike managed, though I was half wet.

I went swimming. It was my first close acquaintance with the Pacific ocean. The sea was rough, so the beach was empty. I sat on the sand, thinking. *You will not make yourself happy, trying to make yourself happy. You will make yourself happy if you make happy somebody else.*

* * *

The procedure on the border was the same, though, it took much longer than expected. The Guatemalan Customs could not cancel my TIP simply because there was no such a document on my name in the system. Three days ago, Rodrigo, the friendly talkative motorcyclist, aka Aduana officer, forgot to add it.

Eventually, after two and a half hours, I was cleared, and I entered the land I was looking forward to visiting. My former colleague and good friend, Tito, lived in El Salvador. I was excited to meet him. It meant drinking a lot of beer, and I missed beer. I felt I need a beer, and perhaps, few more cigarettes. Sixty-nine days went by. I could feel the weight of the trip, and now I wanted to shake it off a little.

The Salvadorian bureaucracy turned out to be very friendly — I paid nothing. All the paperwork was done efficiently in a matter of 15 minutes. It felt like a very warm welcome.

It was near midnight by now. Numerous attempts to find any accommodation on the coast failed. Everything was closed due to the end of a season. Then, it began to rain, as to prove it. At last, I was advised to go to Puerto Escondido Auto Hotel. It was a peculiar place to stay since it had a slightly different purpose.

Once on the premises, you look for any open garage. In it, there is a door to your room. You do not see anybody in person — total privacy and confidentiality. You pay per hour. Once in the room, there is a window in the wall. You open it up — there is a shelf — you place the money for the desired time of your stay. The shelf disappears and reappears with a receipt

and two condoms, despite the fact that I was alone. The interior is made accordingly — a pole, disco lights, and a king-size bed. For 8 hours, I paid \$12, the official currency of the country since 2001, when it replaced Salvadorian colón.

Hotel	12		
Food	5		
Fuel	14		
Bike	10		392
Budget	4908	Distance	23,009

DAY 70

SALVADORIAN STYLE

My priority for today was the Colombian visa. Everything was going smooth until I met a Colombian representative in the embassy.

„Sorry, no Ingles,“ the lady replied.

Well, at least I received a list of the documents to be submitted. So I left, determined to apply again in Costa Rica.

Tito picked me up in the afternoon, and we drove to the most popular attraction in the capital — Volcan de San Salvador. On its slopes, at the cafe with a panoramic view of the city, I had my beer. A juicy steak accompanied it. It was the first time I allowed myself such a luxury on this trip.

The evening found me with our hostel gang — Malcolm (the owner), Walter (his local assist), and Jo-Jo (a guest from the Philippines) — in a rooftop bar, having \$1 beer and watching half-naked girls dancing twerk close-up on the TV. We were having fun in a Salvadorian style.

Hostel	16			
Fuel	16			
Extras	35		128	Hostel
Budget	4841	Distance	23,137	„Cumbres del Volcan Flor Blanca“

DAY 71

ANOTHER SHORT CIRCUIT

How little I knew about this country, imagining it as tropical heaven filled with happy tourists. In fact, it is another

country in our modern world who struggles with high rates of poverty, inequality, and crime. According to the UNODC¹ statistics, El Salvador has the highest homicide rate in the world, with 61 murders per 100,000 population per year. To compare, the rate in the US is 5, Ukraine — 6, Afghanistan — 7. Also, El Salvador is considered to be an epicentre of a gang crisis, along with Guatemala and Honduras.

While returning from a washing station, the motorcycle shut down — all the power had suddenly gone. Luckily, the hostel was a few blocks away. After the bike died out, I tried to start it again — nothing worked. I checked the main fuse and found it blown up. Then I bought a new one, placed it, turned on the ignition — *click* — it blew up too. The circuit was still shortened, and the water was not the cause. I was puzzled.

Meanwhile, I changed the oil and filter, as well as removed the front wheel and took it to the nearest gas station, where I pumped it up with high-pressure air. The tire's bead slipped out from under the rim's edge and took its right position. It appeared to be so easy to fix — stupid me.

Food 5

¹ UNODC — United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime.

Bike	27			
Extras	7		30	Hostel
Budget	4802	Distance	23,167	„Cumbres del Volcan Flor Blanca“

DAY 72

PUPUSA

By the afternoon, the bike was assembled, and the problem solved. A wire had got rubbed off against the metal frame and caused the electric circuit to shorten. I was extremely happy to see the ignition indicator light illuminating green again. Here I thought what if it had happened somewhere on the road, at night. The wire could have got exposed at any moment. Some people do not believe in luck. But there is a concourse of circumstances that play handy or against you. It's just a name you give it to it.

I met Tito again, and we went to a local bar to try pupusa, a purely Salvadorian thing. It is a flatbread made of cornmeal or rice flour that can be stuffed with vegetables or meat. One-dollar beer made it even more delicious.

Food	2			
Extras	3			Hostel
Budget	4797	Distance	23,167	„Cumbres del Volcan Flor Blanca“

DAY 73

PLANNING AHEAD

I spent it behind the computer. My next prolonged stop would be in San Jose, Costa Rica. There I was to finalise the Colombian visa issue, inject a Yellow Fever Vaccine, visit a dentist, fix the drone¹, and change the brakes on my Kawasaki.

South America is a place with a high risk of Yellow Fever. It is a matter of health to get vaccinated. Besides, some countries might ask for a corresponding certificate before allowing you to enter, like Bolivia. According to the World Health Organisation website, a person, visiting the country, is required to have one if coming from Yellow Fever risk countries. In my case, it was Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

¹ From Amazon, I ordered a new Electronic Power Board to be shipped in San Jose.

The brake pads were getting worn out. More than that, the fluid level in the front brakes container was below the *low* mark. And I couldn't refill it as I failed to open the lid — the bolts had been overtightened, so I stripped the heads. Thus, remembering the ability of the rear brakes to boil, and having front brakes fluid level insufficient, I had a reason to worry before I reach San Jose, which was 1100 km away.

Hostel	14			
Food	33			
Bike	5			
Extras	95			Hostel
Budget	4650	Distance	23,167	„Cumbres del Volcan Flor Blanca“

DAY 74

NO NORTH

I crossed El Amarillo border quite fast. Everything was straight forward. The only peculiar thing was the abundance of helpers that literally, were jumping at me, offering their assistance.

320 km to Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, was a waterproof test. Trice, I got soaking wet and twice — dried out. In the hostel, I shared my annoyance about the weather. With a smile on their faces, the staff gave me a piece of advice.

„From 7 to 11 AM is the best time of the day — it is sunny and dry. Afterwards, you never know, but most likely it will shower again. It is a rainy season here, in Central America. It will last until November.“

„It is good to know“ — I smiled back — „on the 16th of October. What about the north of the country? Is it worth visiting?“

„Hm, road conditions are not the best there. Besides, there is a risk to get into troubles, as north is a dense jungle, where narco-traffic gangs do their business, and law enforcement is negligent.“

„I got it — no north.“

Hostel	10			
Fuel	12			
Bike	32			
Extras	3		328	Hostel
Budget	4593	Distance	23,495	„Mision Catracha“



DAY 75

NICARAGUA

At Las Manos border crossing, I got stuck for three hours. It was not the bureaucracy, which flow was slow, but rather my carelessness. I was asked to submit some form¹ that I didn't have. It had been implemented in winter 2018 and called the Application Form to the Ministry of Government for the safe and organised entrance and exit to Nicaragua of visitors of other nationalities. A foreigner had to fill it up and send via email to Nicaraguan Immigration Department 7 days prior to arrival.

Nobody screened or physically checked any of my bags. Hence, the drone went unnoticed, while Nicaragua national aviation authority banned these devices. By the way, Belize had the same policy.

The etymology of the word *nicaragua* has several origins. The common one is that it's a combination of two words: *nicarao* — the chieftain of the local indigenous tribe, and *agua* — a Spanish word for water. It points on to the fact that there

¹ See USEFUL WEB-LINKS chapter.

are large bodies of water within the country: Lake Managua and Lake Nicaragua. The latter one drains through San Juan River into the Caribbean Basin. With its elevation of 32 m above sea level, 26 m of depth, and proximity to the Pacific coast (20 km), the Nicaragua Canal was once considered to be dug to connect two oceans.

Today, the largest country in Central American Isthmus was under waves of protests. As mentioned earlier, it started in April 2018 when the president, Daniel Ortega, unconstitutionally re-elected for the third consecutive time in 2016, proclaimed social security reforms that increased taxes and decreased benefits. After five days of unrests and 30 deaths, Ortega cancelled the reforms, but the crowd demanded his resignation. Since then, the scale of the conflict had grown tremendously. By now, media reported that 400 people were killed and hundreds of others taken for interrogation and tortures. In fact, it was the deadliest civil conflict since the time of the Nicaraguan Revolution, that took place in the 70-s, and whose leader was the same Daniel Ortega.

In 2014, something similar happened in Ukraine. Then, around 100 civilians died, the president fled the country, Crimea Peninsula was annexed, and Eastern Territories fell

under military invasion from the Russian Federation. But the rest of the country kept on living a normal life — people were waking up in the morning, walking children to kindergartens, going to work, cooking dinner, and going to bed at night. Of course, everybody was concerned and worried, but the point here is that for a passing traveller, there was no real danger going around as long as he or she did not visit affected areas of the country. So was I, determined to avoid the capital, Managua.

It was 4 PM when dark greyness enveloped the sky. And as predicted, it rained in the afternoon. *If it's not raining, I'm not in Centra America. The only good thing is that it is 25°C, so I'm not freezing my ass out, even when I'm wet. But there is no pleasure in driving, being wet. Sometimes I do, but only when I have to, or there is no place to hide, or I'm just stupid because I don't have a proper motorcycle outfit.*

In Esteli, I found a hostel. There was no hot shower, but at least, it was a dry place, even though the roof was leaking. *There is no bad weather. The bad is the level of my preparation.*

Hostel	7
Fuel	11
Bike	15

Extras	13		232		Hostel
Budget	4547	Distance	23,727		„Casa Hogar Esteli"

DAY 76

DEVELOPED COUNTRY

By noon, I reached the border with Costa Rica at Peñas Blancas. Right there, for 600 Costa Rican colón (\$27), I purchased the obligatory insurance.

Having read that it is a well-developed country with a long-standing and stable democracy, I felt much safer and relieved.

In Hostel Doderó, in Liberia, I was acquainted with the owner — an old American grumbler, complaining about thieves.

„Yes, it is a developed country, but poverty is still here, and migrants are coming in constantly.“ Then he looked at my bike, parked right behind the railed fence that divides the street and the hostel’s premises, and added, „So take off all your bags

and bring them in, if you still want to have them by tomorrow morning.“

Hostel	8			
Food	14			
Fuel	15			
Bike	27			
Extras	3		344	Hostel
Budget	4480	Distance	24,071	„Dodero“

DAY 77

SOLDIER

„Normally, we require a return airline ticket,“ said the consul, a young man, sitting behind the glass shield on the other side of the visitor’s desk in the small hall of the Colombian Embassy.

„But I am passing through by a motorcycle. Why would I need...?“

„I understand. But this is the procedure. However, taking your case in consideration, having all the stamps in your passport, your bank account history statement, and cover letter

with a full itinerary and hotel bookings, it is most likely that you will be granted the visa. Come on Monday at 10:00.“

Having paid \$134, I left.

The hostel I chose was located in the city centre. I paid for three nights ahead. Here, on the parking, right in front of the building's facade on the main street, I replaced the brake pads and clutch cable. The former got so worn out that there was no friction material left, and the brake disc was rubbing off against the pads' plating. As for the cable, the old one almost broke free at the clutch lever end. And at the Kawasaki store, I was lucky to find Paul, a manager, who, having had no such in stock, offered to remove one from the same motorcycle model they had on sale. More than that, the guys helped me to open the front brake fluid container too.

In the evening, I found a new and only flatmate in my dorm — a chubby Asian-looking guy in his 30-s. When he saw me, he asked whether I would agree to swap my bunk with his. I took a look around the room. There were four other beds available. Maybe there was something I was missing? But no. The only difference between my and his bunks was that mine stood in the far-left corner, and his — far-right. Besides, all my

clothes were spread all over my place and hung around. And bags, which I had seven, were here too.

„Why would you want to change it? It is exactly the same as yours, just on the opposite side.“ I was baffled.

„But I would feel really good if I can occupy this bed.“ He pointed on my bunk with his finger.

„Yeah, but, man, look, I have all my stuff around and, honestly saying, I see no point in swapping beds. They are the same.“ I could not believe he wasn't joking.

„I would really feel better staying on this bed,“ he repeated and pointed again at my bunk, looking aside.

I sensed something weird. The guy sounded like a child, asking for something over and over again. He looked vulnerable, and I kept looking at him for some time.

„Alright, not a problem. I can move everything to another bed, and you can sleep here,“ I said eventually.

„Thank you, sir. I really appreciate it, sir. I am David. I was a US soldier,“ he said unexpectedly. „I got injured in my head while serving in the army. I became mentally ill. Were you a soldier? he asked.

„No, David, I was not,“ I replied.

„Why? I liked being in the army. I had many friends there. But after 14 months, I got discharged with a \$1000 monthly pension.“

I didn't know what to say. I was a bit shocked to have such a room-mate in the first place. I was wondering whether they, the hostel's staff, knew about his illness.

„Do you like Muslims?“ he asked all of a sudden.

„I am ok with them. Why do you ask?“

„I..., I hate Muslims“ — he paused — „and Jews.“

It was late, time to sleep, and I lay down. David had just finished telling me about how he admires fascism, national-socialism, and Hitler. He told me they all are hiding in Antarctica, waiting for the day to revenge.

Hostel	24			
Food	2			
Fuel	15			
Bike	147			
Extras	134		224	Hostel
Budget	4158	Distance	24,295	„Del Paseo“

DAY 78

DARIEN GAP

I got my smile back. Now I can laugh on the streets again.

For \$85, my tooth was fixed. It was quite expensive for me, but it looked gorgeous. The rest of the day I dedicated to the Darien Gap issue.

The Pan-American Highway ends in Yavitza¹, Panama, and resumes either in Turbo or Cartagena, Colombia. Everything in between, overland travellers call Darien Gap. It is a real obstacle. The first difficulty confines in managing to get a vehicle from point *A* in North America to point *B* in South America or vice versa. The second — its high cost.

There was no scheduled ferry service between these two countries. Therefore, the traveller had to arrange the shipping on his/her own. In the case with a motorcycle, there were four options² to do that.

1. Air cargo shipping. It fell out of my consideration as the most expensive one — \$1100-1500. By the national air-carrier of either Panama or Colombia, or through DHL Company, a motorcycle is delivered to Bogota or Medellin, Colombia.

¹ Yaritza is a village in the Deri n Province of Panama. Further on is an impenetrable jungle.

² See USEFUL WEB-LINKS chapter.

2. Through Boris, a port agent, who works with Container Shipping Company, which operates between two countries. The container's freight costs around \$1500-2100, depending on the container's size. The expenses can be shared if you happen to have some other traveller, doing the same thing at the same time. Additionally, \$150 has to be paid to the agent as a service fee.

3. Container Buddies application. It works pretty easy. You submit a request online and, if the system finds the match (if someone else is going to ship cargo on the same leg within the same time frame) you will get his/her contact email, and then you can cooperate to freight a container and share the expenses. It was, by far, the cheapest way. For instance, if you share a 40-foot container with two cars, you will pay around \$400, as the bike will occupy very little space. Unfortunately, I found out about this app too late — here, in San Jose. Nevertheless, I sent my request and was waiting for the match.

4. This last option was the most popular and the second cheapest one. You ship your bike with a sailing yacht. One is called Stahlratte (Carti-Turbo route), another is Wild Card (Colón-Cartagena route). In the case with Stahlratte,

the bike is loaded onto the yacht at the sea-port Carti, and after 3-5 days it arrives at the sea-port Turbo. The cost is \$680. Additionally, for \$520, you can stay on board too. You will be fed trice a day with an abundance of food and be able to visit the beautiful San Blas Islands on the way to Colombia. As for me, I wrote captain Ludwig of Stahlratte.

Food	19			
Bike	23			
Extras	98			Hostel
Budget	4018	Distance	24,295	„Del Paseo“

DAY 79

PURA VIDA

Yellow Fever Vaccine is in my blood, and the certificate is in my hands. It is very expensive, but it is very important too. A foreigner can get an injection in San Jose for \$101.

I received a response from Ludwig. The earliest trip from Panama to Colombia was scheduled on the 3rd of November, ten days from now. *What am I going to do all this time?* I still

had hope for Container Buddies app, but time was running out, and the captain of Stahlratte needed a deposit of \$200 to secure a spot for me.

In the evening, I went to see my former colleague, Diego, who happened to visit his home for vacation. We headed to a bar to meet his friends over some drinks. „Pura Vida!“ they were saying, banging the glasses of beer in cheers. It means *pure life*.

Extras	138			Hostel
Budget	3880	Distance	24,295	„Del Paseo“

DAY 80

BEST NEWS

Today was Monday, so I got my visa! It was *the best news for a long time!* Now, the road was open all the way to the South.

I could have left already, but I was waiting for the drone's part to arrive. There was no point to rush too, but I couldn't

just sit and do nothing. Explore Costa Rica? There is so much beauty here: waterfalls, volcanos, beaches, national parks, etc. But I had to be rational and keep the budget for the most need-ful matters.

Food	18			
Extras	6		16	Hostel
Budget	3856	Distance	24,311	„Del Paseo“

REPORT 4

	D 1-20	D 21-40	D 41-60	D 61-80
Camp, qty (paid)	13 (1)	14 (5)	14 (3)	4 (4)
Roof, qty (paid)	7 (7)	6 (5)	6 (6)	16 (16)
Total C - R, qty	45 (13) - 35 (34)			
Stay, \$ (\$/day)	235 (12)	250 (12.5)	134 (6.7)	155 (7.8)
Food, \$ (\$/day)	168 (8)	209 (10.5)	178 (8.9)	150 (7.5)
Fuel, \$ (km/1\$)	386 (18)	206 (23)	368 (21)	251 (20)
Bike, \$	760	555	284	362
Extras, \$ (\$/day)	375 (19)	330 (16.5)	311 (15.6)	735 (37)
Expenses, \$	1924	1550	1275	1655
Total, \$	6402			
Budget, \$	3856			
Dist., km (km/day)	6859 (343)	4769 (238)	7691 (385)	4992 (250)
Dist. True, km (%)	3200 (15)	1734 (8)	3687 (17)	2201 (10)
Dist. True Left, %	50			
Dist. Total, km	24,311			

DAY 81

BRIDGE

I couldn't wait any longer. Stahlratte became my bridge to the South. Though, I wasn't going with the yacht — too expensive. I thought of using Sebastian way, partially — hopping on and off the small boats.

I managed to get a seat in a plane from Panama City to Puerto Obaldía, a small coastal village near the Colombian border in the Darien region. It flew there only three times a week and could take only ten passengers at a time. Thus, leaving on the 4th of November, the next day after my bike was to sail, I had only two days to make it to Turbo. Everything was planned. *But things go wrong sometimes. I just hope this time it won't.*

Hostel	8			
Bike	200			
Extras	110			Hostel
Budget	3538	Distance	24,311	„Del Paseo“

DAY 82

WONDERFUL DAY

I was so eager to get back on the road, so I asked the seller to ship the drone's part to Panama City instead. Having got my new *anti-rain* ammunition¹, I left San Jose.

I am on the Caribbean coast, camping on the black sandy beach. Palm coconut trees provide me with drinks, and the warm shallow sea gives me a bath. Nobody is around. At least, I want to believe so. The bike is with me. I let him on the sand too. Who knows, we might need this experience later.

What a wonderful day — there was no rain!

Camp 46

Fuel	14	184	Elevation: 1 m
Budget	3524	Distance 24,495	9°50'18" N; 82°55'45" W

DAY 83

PANAMA

¹ New goggles, industrial raincoat, and rubber boots.

It could have been nice to stay longer in this paradise. But after having had only a coconut with tomato for breakfast, I decided to go.

At the Sixaola border crossing, there were very lesser tourists; still, I spent three hours dealing with bureaucracy. As I was going eventually to take the bike out of the country by sea, I had to make sure that all the papers contained accurate information, and they didn't.

Hostel	10			
Food	12			
Bike	28			
Extras	12		144	Hostel
Budget	3462	Distance	24,639	„Cristobal Colón“

Caribbean Sea



Pacific Ocean

- camp
- ⊙ city
- route
- international border
- ▲ Volcano Barú, 3475 m
- Ⓟ Panama Canal
- Ⓟ Bocas del Toro



DAY 84

DRY DAY

Santa Catalina is a small touristic village on the Pacific Coast, a budget place for surfers. These days it was even cheaper, as the raining season kept the place empty of visitors. For \$10, you could rent a surfboard for a whole day.

Without my anti-rain ammunition, I wouldn't have reached this far. It was raining for the last 200 km with an occasional heavy shower. Surprisingly, I didn't get wet. It is a success.

From Almirante, the road over the Tabasara Mountains was full of potholes but paved. Pan-American Highway, though, was in perfect condition.

Camp	7			
Food	10			Camp 47
Fuel	24		378	Elevation: 15 m
Budget	3421	Distance	25,017	7°37'42" N; 81°14'51" W

DAY 85

SKILLS

There were few guests in the Ocean Hostal. One was a Norwegian student, studying the impact of drug consumption on tourism development in Panama. Others were surfers-beginners, like me.

Yes, I tried to surf. With the board, happy, I ran to conquer the waves, hoping that some of my instincts would tell me what to do. *It didn't work. Whatever I tried didn't resemble surfing in a way I imagined it.* My chest was in pain. First advice — wear a t-shirt. I was cold too because it was raining all day long.

The evening I spent in an empty local bar, chatting with a barman and trying Panamanian beer. At least in this, I was very skilful.

Camp	7			Camp 48
Extras	10			Elevation: 15 m
Budget	3404	Distance	25,017	7°37'42" N; 81°14'51" W

DAY 86

LAZY DAY

The day started with breakfast: six eggs, two tomatoes, three sausages, bread, and a cup of tea. In the morning, I was determined to leave for Panama City. Now, I couldn't move and so decided to stay for a while. Thus, another lazy day began.

Later, I went testing my ability to surf once again. This time, I succeeded to catch a few waves and even stand on a board. The feeling is truly encouraging. Afternoon rain, though, left me no choice but to visit my friend at the bar.

Camp	7			Camp 49
Extras	20			Elevation: 15 m
Budget	3377	Distance	25,017	7°37'42" N; 81°14'51" W

DAY 87

MOVING ON

Panama City became a real discovery for me. Located in the tropics, with its skyscrapers, huge port, hundreds of ships

anchored on the horizon, and diverse population, it appeared to me as another Hong Kong or Singapore.

I checked in to Nomad Hostal. There, I found my drone package waiting for me. The spare part had finally arrived, and I was already picturing my bird flying again.

I was thinking what to occupy myself with for five days being here. Couchsurfing became a solution. I was going to meet people to kill time. First was Luis, a surfer in life and a marketing manager at work. He showed me the old town — the place with the architecture of colonial times, which beauty we better appreciated with a glass of cold beer.

Hostel	18			
Food	23			
Fuel	11			
Extras	20		384	
Budget	3305	Distance	25,401	„Nomad Hostal“

DAY 88

INTERESTING PEOPLE

It was a delicate job to solder in the new Electronic Power Board. Eventually, I succeeded — all wires were connected to the plate. I switched the drone on. It wasn't burning, there was no smoke, but it didn't fly either. The light indication was weird; there was no response to commands via the application or by physical touch. I opened it up again, checked and cleaned everything inside, hard reset it, and installed the software anew. Still, it didn't fly. Since now, the drone became just an extra weight in my bag.

My second Couchsurfing friend was Magdalena from Poland. She lived here with her Panamanian boyfriend, a commercial airline pilot. The way she got to Central America mesmerised me — she sailed across the Atlantic. Nowadays, it is a quite popular way of travelling cheap between the continents. Numerous websites are dedicated either to find a boat or a crew. One of them is findacrew.com. The mutual obligations on board are narrowed down to a basic supportive necessity, as it appeared to be with Magdalena. She was allowed to travel as a crew for free, provided she kept the watch, cooked, and assisted with boat's maintenance.

Back in the hostel, I met Sawang, a Thai cyclist, who had just flown from Quito, Ecuador. He had been on the road for

seven months now, having had started in Argentina. His goal was Mexico, and perhaps, the US and Canada, if only he would manage to get the visas. For now, he planned to get hold in Panama for a while by securing a job at a local coffee plantation to gain more knowledge about his favourite plant. Coffee, like cycling, was his passion. He was travelling the world and writing articles about it. By now, Sawang has his own coffee brand for sale¹.

Extras	8		8	
Budget	3297	Distance	25,409	„Nomad Hostal“

DAY 89

THIRD COUCHSURFER

I went up the Ancon Hill, where the entire city can be seen from. Then, I walked along Balboa Avenue, the place with the best view of the skyscrapers. It is named after Vasco de Balboa, a Spanish conquistador, known for being the first Eu-

¹ Sawang Thongdee — @nomad.bicycle.coffee (Instagram).

ropean who crossed the Panama Isthmus and reached the Pacific in 1513. The country's national currency bears his name too and constitutes the 1:1 ratio with the US dollar, which is also widely used here.

In the evening, I hung out with Jose. He is local, studied in the US to become an attorney, and is such a person you get along with right away. We had a nice time drinking beer during happy hours in a random cafe.

Hostel	40			
Extras	20		24	Hostel
Budget	3237	Distance	25,433	„Casa Nativa“

DAY 90

FELLOW BIKERS

I changed the hostel to be closer to the airport. There, in the backyard, I saw three motorcycles. Those were Suzuki DR650 — an eternal rival of Kawasaki KLR650. The main differences are weight (30 kg less), an air cooling system in

comparison to a radiator, and an almost twice smaller tank than that in Kawasaki.

The three riders were, undoubtedly, long way travellers. It appeared that they were driving from north to south too, from Alaska to Argentina. Yun and Taylor (both Americans) met in California, and later, in Central America, they were joined by the Irish guy, Ian, who shipped his Bessie (the name he called his motorcycle by) from Ireland to Nova Scotia and drove across the whole width of Canada. We all were going to ship our bikes with Stahlratte. Though, the fellows were to go on the boat too.

Food	20			
Extras	15			Hostel
Budget	3202	Distance	25,433	„Casa Nativa“

DAY 91

BEHIND THE TABLE

Today I was preparing myself for South American leg.

Once again, I went through borders crossing protocols and reminded myself of the Bolivian visa, which was still an open question.

On the PanAmerican Travelers Association Facebook page, I posted an advertisement to sell the bike as well as an inquiry about where and how to do it after the trip. So far, one person responded. It was Luis from Punta Arenas, Chile. We agreed to stay in touch.

Extras	6			Hostel
Budget	3196	Distance	25,433	„Casa Nativa“

DAY 92

SHIPPING DAY

At 07:30, under the drizzle, I departed. Before I even left the gates, I lost the balance and dropped the bike — days spent as a pedestrian showed its effect. Ian and guys helped me to get up. And so at last, I went off, hoping to see them again only in South America.

After 100 km of a smooth ride, I turned from the Pan-American Highway to Carretera Hacia San Blas and soon encountered a long queue of cars waiting at the point of access to the Guna Yala Province — the home to the indigenous Guna people. To enter their territory, a visitor must pay a \$23 fee. Everybody was going to Puerto de Carti, a starting point to San Blas Islands. Many people refer to the place as heaven on Earth because of its pristine environment — there are no parties, no civilisation, but pure, untouched nature.

The heavy traffic was due to Separation Day — a national holiday in Panama, representing the celebration of Independence from Colombia, when in 1903 it seized to be a part of Gran Colombia, which it joined in 1821, after partitioning from Spain.

I quickly slipped off the queue — the advantage of having a motorcycle. In the port, the Stahlratte crew met me. All my bags were loaded onboard right away. My bike's turn was scheduled to be in the afternoon when the mooring would be permitted. Meanwhile, the yacht anchored nearby.

I paid the rest \$480 in cash, handed over the keys, all necessary papers, and agreed to meet the boat in Turbo on 6th at 6 AM.

„Why don't you come with us, as other bikers do?“ the captain Ludwig asked.

„It is too expensive for me.“

„I have known people like you,“ he grinned. „When they meet me in Turbo, they express their regret of not coming with us.“

„We'll see,“ I replied, smiling.

„The flight, the hotel, and the food for these days will eventually constitute the same cost as we ask. But here, you will be fed abundantly trice a day, rest, and visit beautiful islands.“

I nodded but said nothing. I had a budget to rely on. I had a plan to follow. Being stuffed and rested, but then terminating the journey somewhere on the way was against it. I was willing to sacrifice my comfort to reach the goal. It was important to me.

I arrived back at the hostel by taxi. Other guests inhabited the place by now. There was another bike too — BMW R1200 GS with a sidecar. It belonged to American from Tok, Alaska. A year ago, with his Thai wife and 4-year-old daughter, he drove all the way here. Now, having his family with him,

David wanted to ride it back home. *Is it crazy, or is it beautiful? I don't know.*

Niels, a guy from Holland, was the other guest. His visit to Panama was a visa-run journey from Colombia. He worked there for three years on a farm, occasionally assisting local beekeepers. Now he had a small bar and his own little beehive too, in Santa Marta, a town on the Caribbean coast. He referred to it as follows, „You are among the palm trees on a white sandy beach, blue warm Caribbean waters are in front of you, and high snow-peak mountains — behind.“

All the guests gathered in the evening to chat. *Everybody was sharing bad stories about Colombia, having had a crazy, scary, creepy experience there. But then, in the end, they would say, „You will love it.“*

Fuel	9			
Bike	480			
Extras	48		140	Hostel
Budget	2659	Distance	25,573	„Casa Nativa“

DAY 93

LEAVING

Finally, the day had come. I could hardly believe that I was leaving North America. I never thought it would take 93 days. Only in Central America alone, I spent seventeen *non-riding* days: four — in San Salvador, five — in San Jose, three — in Santa Catalina, and another five days in Panama City. It could have been avoided if planned better.

After one hour, small propeller aircraft landed in Puerto Obaldia. The celebration was taking place here too. I went to the Immigration office right away to stamp my passport out, out of Panama, out of North America, and out of the first long leg of my trip. It was a meaningful moment, indeed.

From there, I took a small motor-boat taxi for \$14 to Capurgana, a small village on the Colombian side. It had the only Immigration office in the area as well as the ferry service across the Gulf of Urabá to the *continent*.

I wasn't expecting to see many tourists in such a remote, as I thought, place. Numerous hostels, budget hotels and cafes were packed with people. Nevertheless, I managed to secure a dorm bed in Pirata Express Hostel. As it was not officially open yet, I was the only guest. I shared a spacious room with

the cat, after whom the place was named. She had no eye, and that is why she was called Pirata.

At the Immigration, there was a surprise waiting for me.

„Está cerrado por vacaciones. Ven mañana a las 9¹,“ the security guard told me.

„At 9? The ferry to Turbo leaves at 8!“ I started to argue. But what he could do? At the end of the day, the guy was just doing his job. And I went to the port.

At the pier, I found out that there were two ferry agencies here. One of them organised trips from Turbo, another — from Necocli. The first one became irrelevant now. Without having my passport stamped, I couldn't claim my bike the day it arrives. So I focused on the second option.

Necocli is another small port across the gulf. From there, I was reassured, the bus would take me to Turbo at any time of the day. And, what was more important, ferry to Necocli was to leave tomorrow at 11:00. That was good news indeed, and for \$27 I bought my ticket to South America.

Hostel	10			
Food	6			
Extras	48			Hostel
Budget	2595	Distance	25,573	„Pirata Express“

¹ (Fr. Spanish) It is closed for the holiday. Come tomorrow at 9.



- city
- international border
- route
- roads
- Ⓢ San Blas Islands



PART III

SOUTH AMERICA

DAY 94

ROBAR

„What a creepy place,“ I thought, entering slums of Turbo. In the port, I was told that ships from Panama do not enter the city harbour and go to the Coast Guard area instead, where, using maps, I was heading.

„Dirección hasta Guardacostas¹?“ I asked the first person I met. The lady, dressed in rags, holding a baby, said nothing but kept looking at me. Then, she raised her right hand to her face and moved the fingers as if scratching her cheek. The old man, sitting next to her on a bench, wearing only trousers, nodded, as to confirm what she meant to say. I frowned.

„Robar²,“ the woman uttered.

I turned around, determined to find a taxi.

The driver took me around the area, confirming its insecure status in the town. Eventually, we came to the barrier, behind which the military base was located. I don't know if soldiers understood me, but they said to come tomorrow morning. At least, now I knew where.

¹ (from Sp.) Direction to Coast Guard?

² (from Sp.) robbery.

Hotel	8			
Food	4			
Extras	8			Hotel
Budget	2575	Distance	25,573	„Yesban“

DAY 95

EVERYTHING IS COMING BACK

At 6 AM sharp, I was back at the barrier, but only at 07:45, when Stahlratte had moored, I was permitted to enter. There were eight bikes and seven passengers on board.

„So, how much did you spend eventually?“ asked captain slyly.

„200 dollars in total.“ And I told him about my itinerary. He looked surprised that I figured out such a route at all. I thanked him and got my keys back. The bike started right away. It was the sound of freedom.

At once, the motorcycles were unloaded by a small deck crane using ropes, and Stahlratte was getting ready to leave. Aduana was also located on the military premises. When we

were let inside and asked for papers, I realised my silly mistake — I had forgotten to get back the original Panamanian Temporary Import Permit from the captain. This document was a must to be able to process a Colombian permit. I ran towards the pier, but the yacht wasn't there anymore.

„She moved for bunkering,“ said the soldier on watch, seeing me running around. „Over there,“ he pointed his hand towards tall green trees, where I rushed immediately.

„What a charge of adrenalin right from the morning,“ I said to myself, walking back with the paper in hands.

One by one, we cleared the Customs, paying nothing. Colombian insurance was to be sent to us via e-mail by the captain shortly. From now, everybody would go different ways. But the ultimate goal for all of us was the South. We wished each other safe roads and parted¹.

* * *

¹ Yun — @brakethecycles — met a girl in Colombia and arrived in Ushuaia in late February 2019. Taylor — @windham_t — arrived at the end of February too. Ian — @ianhoranphotography — having had crossed into Argentina, also in February, acquired mechanical issues with Bessy, who by far carried him over 100,000 km through 41 countries. He had to terminate his trip. In 2020, Ian would ride Australia.

Long ago, during Pablo Escobar times, Medellin was the most dangerous city in the world. In 1991, the homicide rate reached 266 murders per 100,000 population. Now, it is down to 23.

It was Friday evening. It took me hours to get through the biggest traffic jam I had ever encountered. Nevertheless, it felt good. *Problems, challenges — everything is coming back.*

Hostel	8			
Food	14			
Fuel	13			
Extras	4		352	
Budget	2536	Distance	25,925	„Yolo Hostel Medellin“



DAY 96

WHAT I NEED

Colombia has dozens of unique places to offer to a random traveller. One of them is The Rock of Guatapé — a 200-meter monolith worshipped by indigenous people. Its 740 curved steps lead to the viewpoint on top, overlooking the artificial lake — Peñól-Guatapé Reservoir.

Nice, but I'm bored. I'm bored in hostels; I'm bored in towns; I'm bored with people too. I wanted nature, more of it.

I made a plan. Tomorrow, on the way to the Cocora Valley, I would go through Los Nevados National Natural Park, from Murillo village to La Tribuna. This 50-kilometre unpaved track at 4000 m is considered to be one of the most scenic roads of the country. Later, I would write — *four hours of stones and puddles. Wet and cold, but rewarding — incredibly remote, quiet, and beautiful place.* That was what I needed.

Hostel	6			
Extras	10		96	Hostel
Budget	2520	Distance	26,021	„Happy Buddha“

DAY 97

COLOMBIAN ROLLERCOASTER

The Andes Mountains cross Colombia on the West and are represented there by three mountain ranges: the Cordillera Occidental, Central, and Oriental. All main traffic arteries are entangled among them. Hence, driving here is like a rollercoaster. I started my day at 2000 m above sea level at Guatapé, went down to 200 m at the Magdalena River Valley, then up again, to 4000 m at Los Nevados Park, and down to 2000 m at Salento.

Here, I was to visit the valley of Quindio wax palms, the symbol and the national tree of Colombia. With the height reaching up to 45 m, it is the tallest flowering plant on Earth.

I stayed in Casa La Eliana hostel. The owner was an amiable Italian guy who lived in Colombia for the last nine years. There was no place for the bike, but Jesus said he would sort it out. And indeed, in 5 minutes, he was back with a broad smile on his face.

„5000 pesos,“ he said upon returning from the cafe’s parking next door.

„Perfect!“ \$2 was a good deal indeed.

„They told me 10,000 at first, but I said, ‘I might look like a gringo, but I am not a gringo’.“

Hostel	6				
Food	5				
Fuel	24				
Bike	2		534		Hostel
Budget	2483	Distance	26,555		„Casa La Eliana“

DAY 98

INVINCIBLE

I left for Ibaque.

I was at the Alto de La Línea Mountain Pass, at 3000 m of altitude, amid the fog, where dozens, if not hundreds of buses and heavy trucks blocked the road. This stretch of the national highway 40 has notorious fame because of the number of accidents that happens here, which is four times bigger than the

average around the country. Today was no different — soon I saw a capsized truck in the middle of the driveway.

Having had wasted hours of time, I started taking blind corners one by one, overtaking everyone on my way. All turns were cleared well, but one.

I found myself in between two heavy vehicles moving on opposite directions. The truck that had just jumped out of the corner was too close. I pressed on the brakes. The TIR on my right hit my handle-bar, crashing the mirror and pushing me away. As the car from my left had already passed, I hit the concrete fence on the roadside.

Everything happened in a blink of an eye. I checked on myself — nothing hurt, and I could move all my limbs. Next was the bike — engine guard on the left side was bent significantly, the fairing was cracked in pieces, and the front turn light indicator was hanging on the wires. The radiator had got pressed inside and dislocated the fuel tank slightly. I looked at the watch. It was 17:30 — maximum of another hour of daylight left.

I loosened the engine guard, removed what was left from the fairing, and collected all its pieces I could find. I tried to straighten the radiator and the fuel tank and put the turn indica-

tor light back in place. Surprisingly, it wasn't damaged. Then I turned on the ignition. The sound of the engine was like a lullaby to my ears. And so I drove away, slowly and carefully, overtaking nobody.

Hostel	9			
Food	10			
Fuel	11			
Bike	3			
Extras	2		136	
Budget	2448	Distance	26,691	„Bahareque Hostal“

DAY 99

KINDNESS

Early morning I went to the city to find someone who would bend my engine guard straight. Eventually, I did it myself, in the workshop of a kind man, Pedro, who allowed me to use it unconditionally. Then I bought mirrors and all the bolts that needed to be changed.

I fixed the fairing with the packing tape. It looked awful but held pretty good. With straightened engine guard, I could

position the radiator properly, which let the fuel tank sit in its place too. Fortunately, after all, there was no severe damage caused, and I could resume my journey.

Tatacoa desert was the next point of interest, where I arrived late in the evening. For \$2, I placed the tent *open-air*, at Hostal Laberinto El Cusco. I made my evening tea, lit the cigarette, and tried to pierce the darkness with my eyes but could see nothing. The desert was asleep.

Camp	2			
Food	5			
Bike	11			Camp 50
Extras	2		192	Elevation: 447 m
Budget	2428	Distance	26,883	3°14'01" N; 75°10'07" W

DAY 100

DESPACITO 2

I peered out of the tent, and here it was — the rusty desert — labyrinths in a clay crust, formed by erosion. Shortly, it started to rain, transforming everything around into the mud.

Today, I was supposed to finish my journey. It was a strange feeling. I had come through 100 days, and yet, the goal was still far. *The days have ended, but the trip is going on.*

In such weather conditions, I gave up on the dirt road and decided to take a short cut to the highway 45. It meant crossing the Magdalena River by the ferry to Aipe village. It was a 5-meter long and 1-meter wide flat-bottom steel boat with a hanging motor.

In order to keep the balance, I remained sitting on the bike. *I just hoped we were not going to turn over.* With such allocation of the load, our point of gravity had risen, which shortened the metacentric height, and as a result, worsened the vessel's stability. I knew the theory, but real understanding comes with practical experience. I felt the boat's swing with all my guts. There were just me, motorcycle, and amigo at the rudder. During our 5 minutes ride, *I have got the dose of adrenaline for the entire trip.* I kept shouting out loud the already familiar word, „Despacito!“

Hostel	8		
Food	5		
Fuel	22		
Bike	5		
Extras	11	464	
Budget	2377	Distance	27,347
			„Ayawaska Hostal“

REPORT 5

	D 1-20	D 21-40	D 41-60	D 61-80	D 81-100
Camp, qty (paid)	13 (1)	14 (5)	14 (3)	4 (4)	5 (4)
Roof, qty (paid)	7 (7)	6 (5)	6 (6)	16 (16)	15 (15)
Total C - R, qty	50 (17) - 50 (49)				
Stay, \$ (\$/day)	235 (12)	250 (12.5)	134 (6.7)	155 (7.8)	154 (7.7)
Food, \$ (\$/day)	168 (8)	209 (10.5)	178 (8.9)	150 (7.5)	114 (5.7)
Fuel, \$ (km/1\$)	386 (18)	206 (23)	368 (21)	251 (20)	128 (24)
Bike, \$	760	555	284	362	729
Extras, \$ (\$/day)	375 (19)	330 (16.5)	311 (15.6)	735 (37)	354 (17.7)
Expenses, \$	1924	1550	1275	1655	1479
Total, \$	7881				
Budget, \$ (%)	2377				
Dist., km (km/day)	6859 (343)	4769 (238)	7691 (385)	4992 (250)	3036 (152)
Dist. True, km (%)	3200 (15)	1734 (8)	3687 (17)	2201 (10)	2369 (11)
Dist. True Left, %	39				
Dist. Total, km	27,347				

COLOMBIA

The guys were right — I liked the place. Girls are beautiful, and the people are kind and friendly. What else do you need?

I decided to take a rest and stay in Puerto Asis one more day. Locals call it the Gateway to Amazonia. It was tropically hot here, with a corresponding level of humidity.

Ecuador lay 114 km away. *It seems it's going to be another high and cold drive. The weather forecast is not promising. I'm not surprised. Since I have crossed into Guatemala, I am chasing the sun, and the rain is chasing me. So far, the rain wins.*

Hostel 8

Food 6

Budget 2363 Distance 27,347 „Ayawaska Hostal"

GENERAL FARFÁN

So far, it is the easiest border crossing since the US. Everything is located in the same building. All services are free. No helpers. Though there are few points to mention.

„Why didn't you register your visa upon arrival?“ the Colombian Immigration officer asked me.

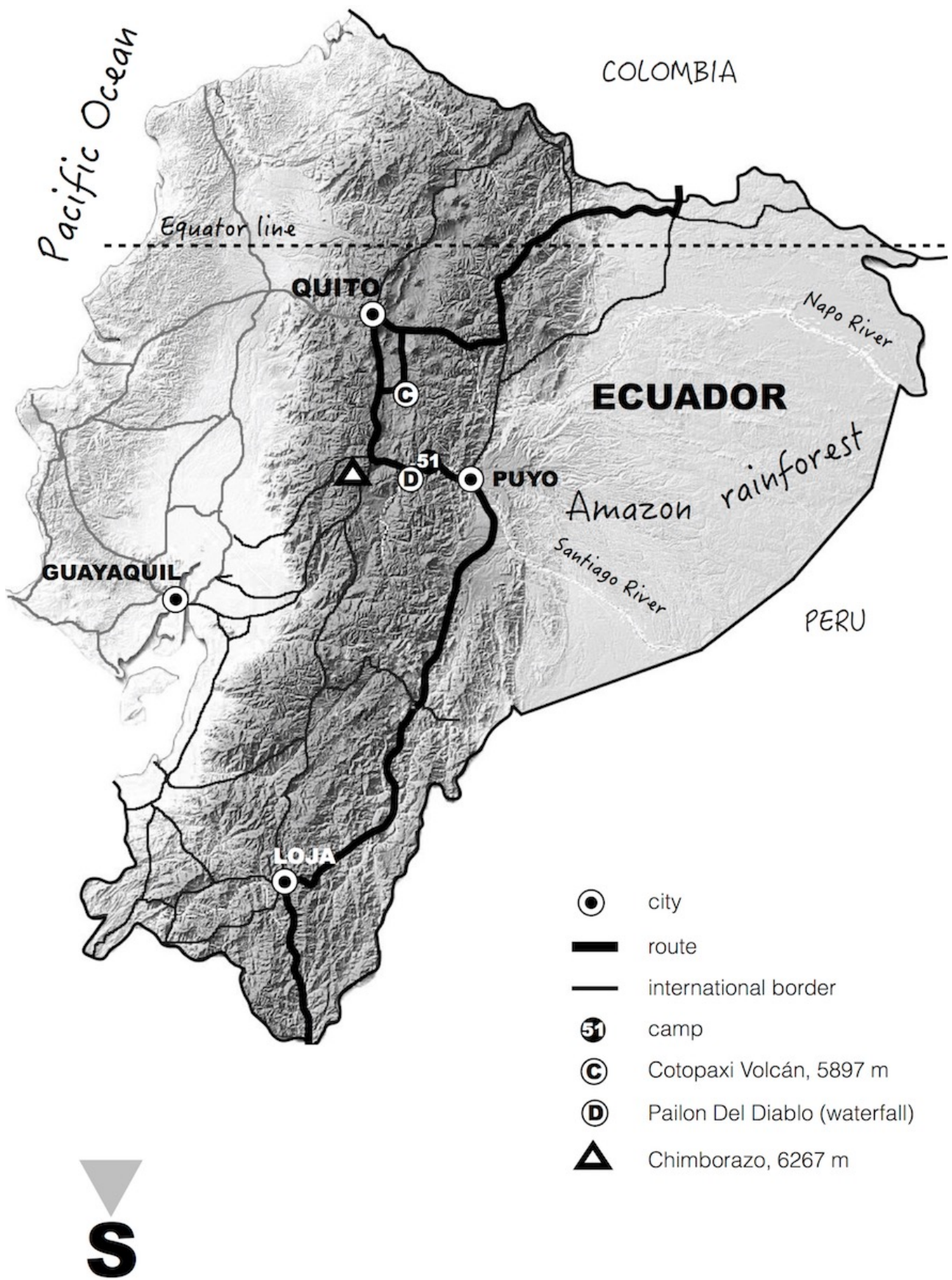
„Why would you ask this when I am leaving the country?“ I answered, questioning him too. „Nobody informed me before, neither when I was applying for the visa, nor when I entered the country.“ The officer said nothing, perhaps understanding the pointlessness to continue¹.

Another curious situation occurred at the Ecuadorian Customs desk. The officer took his time. Since I paid nothing, I didn't rush him. He asked how many days I was planning to spend in Ecuador, and I said, „Around six“. Then he handed me a newly issued TIP, with only 6-day validity. Fortunately, it is not a big country, and I could make it in time to Peru.

To get to Quito, the capital, I needed to go up the Andes again. As I was preoccupied in keeping my ass warm, the crossing of the 0° parallel, Equator, went unnoticed.

Hostel	5			
Food	5			
Fuel	13		416	Hostel
Budget	2340	Distance	27,763	„Secret Garden“

¹ If the duration of your Colombian visa is more than three months, upon arrival, within 15 days, you need to register it at one of the Immigration Offices or online. Otherwise, there could be a penalty applied.



DEVIL'S BOWL

I wanted to explore Cotopaxi — one of the world's highest active volcano and famous attraction among tourists. Not far did I drive when at the entrance to the national park, I was turned away, as motorcycles weren't allowed. To have a guide was an obligation. And for that, I needed a car, as nobody would agree to ride on the back of my seat at an altitude of 4000 m. „Anyway, nothing can be seen,“ I came up with an excuse, looking at the thick grey blanket of clouds that hid the volcano from the view. „I need something lower than that.“

Pailon Del Diablo, or The Devil's Bowl, was the place. Here, the waters of Rio¹ Verde rush through narrow gorges and shoot from a height of 80 meters down into the pool with tremendous force, accompanied by a roar that shook my body. It seems as the water there is boiling, and only the devil can take a bath in that bowl.

Food	7		
Fuel	12		Camp 51
Extras	9	240	Elevation: 1199 m
Budget	2312	Distance 28,003	1°24'41" S; 78°11'18" W

¹ (from Sp.) a river.

THE WORST COMBINATION

I continued by the road E45, to Loja, then down to Vilcabamba village, where I wanted to visit Cerro Mandango Mountain, a local attraction.

On the approach, I got into what I call *the worst combination for driving a motorcycle* — it was dark, high, and wet.

Hostel	6			
Food	17			
Fuel	13		587	Hostel
Budget	2276	Distance	28,590	„Crucita Backpackers Lodging“

FIRST SPARK

Today, I planned to enter Peru. The shortest way was to proceed down the road 682 to La Balza frontier. However, as I read from the internet, the last 90 km of it was in bad condition, which could turn into terrible under the rain. Nobody rec-

commended it. But another feedback read, „Breathtaking scenery.“ And all my doubts vanished at once.

After Podocarpus National Park, I arrived at Valladolid, where asphalt finished. Surprisingly, the sun was up, so the road was dry. Nevertheless, it took me 4 hours to reach the border.

Again, I paid nothing. Travelling in South America was getting more and more pleasant. On the Peruvian side, even the Yellow Fever vaccine had been given for free. *If only I knew!*

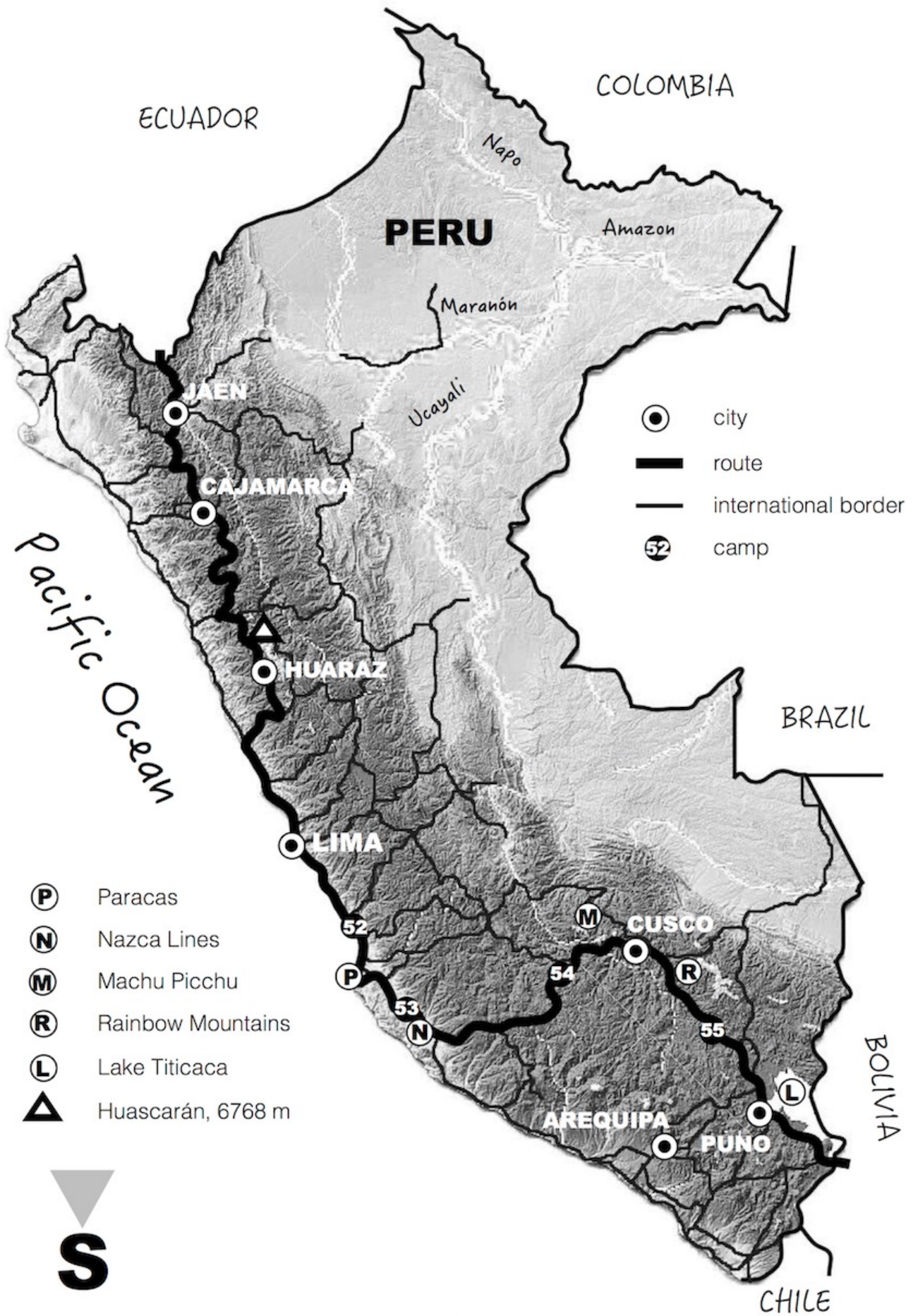
How happy I was to feel the asphalt under the wheels again. Moreover, the weather remained beautiful, as well as the view around. I felt a warm welcome from Peru. It was the first spark that would later ignite in big love towards this country.

Everything went as planned, except for one thing. It was obligatory to have the insurance.

In San Ignacio town, 50 km away from the border, I was offered a year-long policy for \$70. In Jaen town, after another 110 km, I was asked to pay \$60 for three months. I tried to negotiate it down to one month to get it cheaper, but an Insurance Company representative said it was the minimum possible term as it could not be less than the validity of my TIP. Indeed, at the border, having had the experience with Ecuadorian Cus-

toms, I claimed three months as a planned duration of stay in Peru, thinking I was smart. But it turned out to be opposite now.

Hostel	9			
Fuel	9		320	Hostel
Budget	2258	Distance	28,910	„Villa Real“



PE-3N

A Cock-A-Doodle-Do cry from out of the window was my wake-up call this morning. I felt rested.

I don't know at what point I lost track of the road, but I found myself in a remote mountain village driving on a beaten, overgrown with grass path. It appeared to be the stretch between Cutervo and Chota settlements, marked as PE-3NC, meaning the Peruvian road number 3 in the north (norte) of the country. Whatever the letter *C* stands for, stay on PE-3N instead.

After 10 hours in a saddle, I arrived at Cajamarca. My host was Miguel. He owned the Tetem Backpackers hostel, located near Baños del Inca¹, natural hot springs which this city is famous for.

The hostel had its own hot spring in the backyard. The bad news was that Miguel had just drained the water to clean the pool.

I went for a walk. It was crowded — everybody came to take a bath on the weekend. The queue was long, so I took the pleasure of enjoying the street food instead.

Hostel 7

¹ (from Sp.) Baths of the Inca.

Hostel	7			
Food	4			
Fuel	29		313	Hostel
Budget	2218	Distance	29,223	„Tetem Backpackers“

LOCAL FASHION

„It is quite a long journey over the mountains,“ said Miguel about Huaraz, a gateway to the Peruvian snow-peak mountains and a very touristic town, where he said there should be many Insurance offices. „Besides, the rainy season has just started.“

„What a surprise!“ I answered sarcastically.

The road PE-3N was mostly unpaved. At least the weather pleased me.

I stopped on top of the hill, overlooking deep green valleys from a height of 3600 m. It was a perfect place for a lunch break. The moment I lit the portable stove, the wind came and brought dark clouds along. In 10 minutes, the hail rushed down. I had no shelter to hide. All I could do was to turn my back to it and wait.

Then, the road went even higher, into the clouds. My feet were cold, fingers got numb, but the view distracted me. It was similar to Iceland — no trees and only green-yellowish moss is around.

In Angasmarca, I found a *hospedaje*¹. The only food I had was two eggs, other two got smashed during the ride, two bananas, smashed as well, and bread. I took a cold shower, had my evening cup of tea and cuddled under four layers of blankets with a peculiar pattern — women in skirts and tall hats — the local fashion of peasant ladies in Peru.

Hotel	6			
Food	2			
Fuel	18		312	Hotel
Budget	2192	Distance	29,535	„Villa Azul“

FUCKED UP DAY

Fucked up day! It was the first sentence in my diary for the 19th of November.

¹ (from Sp.) lodging.

At 08:00, I was on the road, or better to say — off-road. To cover 75 km, it took me 3 to 4 hours. Then a paved stretch of around 50 km followed — zig-zag descend, Rio Tablachaca crossing, and immediate ascent to Pallasca village, where I got lost. I found myself on the steep, narrow beaten sloppy path, contained between stone walls. Trying to escape, I fell several times — left mirror cracked, clutch lever broke in half, saddle-bag secure strap torn off, and one rubber boot lost. But I must say it was the most scenic drive in my life. The amount of beauty went off the scale. To shake me off from this fairy tale, it rained for the remainder of the day. To top it off, I hit a tuc-tuc (auto-rickshaw), but nobody got hurt.

Hotel	9			
Food	5			
Fuel	17		376	Hotel
Budget	2161	Distance	29,911	„Punta Olimpica“

SURPRISE

After Huaraz, without the insurance, I turned towards Lima.

The road was paved all the way. Descending from the Andes, I thought of tropical beaches. How surprised I was when I had reached the coast. Desert, sand dunes, dry grey mountains — it all reminded me of the United Arab Emirates, where I once lived. But instead of the warm breeze from the sea, I got chilly blows from the Pacific ocean. I was astonished. „This country has it all.“

Hostel	13			
Food	32			
Fuel	15		424	Hostel
Budget	2101	Distance	30,335	„Condor’s House“

WORKING DAY

I went to the Bolivian Embassy and submitted a standard package of documents. I was said to come tomorrow. I could have got the visa upon arrival, but then I would have to pay. Here, it was free.

I bought a set of tires (MOTOZ) for \$250. The front tire was almost bald with 13,500 km on it. The rear one, my

favourite Mitaz E-07, by now ran nearly 21,000 km and still looked like it could do a few thousand more.

The rest of the day I spent in the garage, which was kindly offered to me by the hostel. Not flawlessly, but the work progressed. I changed oil and filter and even removed the carburettor but still didn't know what to do with it.

Bike	306			
Extras	20		16	Hostel
Budget	1775	Distance	30,351	„Condor's House“

BIGGEST MISTAKE

The valve clearance adjusted; the front tire changed. This time I used a liquid soap to apply on the bead, so, upon inflating, it perfectly sat on the rim. *Magic!* I found this trick on the internet. The method of cleaning the carburettor was also from there.

Here is why it is important to pay attention during Chemistry classes in school. I bought a household acid and submerged the carburettor in it. For a moment, it appeared like a

smart idea — the acid would dissolve all the silt and dirt, and the carburettor would become clean as new.

The chemical reaction took place — the acid started boiling. The foam raised immediately, poured down from the bucket, and flowed over the floor, where all the bolts and stripped spare parts were. It was a disaster. I grabbed the bucket with my shirt and rushed straight to the toilet to flush it all with water. The carburettor body's walls got oxidised and now were peeling badly.

Things look screwed. But whatever is done — is done.

Hostel	7			
Food	8			
Bike	59			Hostel
Budget	1701	Distance	30,351	„Condor's House“

JUDGEMENT DAY

I took the carb to the random moto service shop. The mechanic tried to clean it with benzine and metal brush. But it wasn't getting better, so I returned to the hostel and assembled everything back. I wanted to leave. I knew it was silly of me to

hope it would work and be of a good service till the end of my journey.

The engine roared. I tried the choke¹ — it didn't work. I had to face reality — the bike needed professional care.

By coincidence, yesterday, at the Kawasaki store, I met the owner of the Documoto workshop, specialised on KLR models.

„We'll try to find a used carburettor as soon as possible and call you,“ said Peter.

Hostel	9				
Food	7				
Extras	10		8		Hostel
Budget	1675	Distance	30,359		„Cosy Wazi“

NEW DAY, NEW HOPE, NEW ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LIFE

Yesterday, I changed the hostel. It wasn't better but closer to the workshop, where I left my bike. And they did delicious pancakes for breakfast.

¹ By pulling the choke lever, carburettor provides a rich starting mixture that is necessary to enable easy starting when the engine is cold.

In the evening, I went for a walk. On the cliff, in Miraflores, many people gathered to watch the orange disk slowly disappearing into the Pacific Ocean. *Lima is one of the most beautiful capitals indeed.*

Hostel	7			
Food	3			Hostel
Budget	1405	Distance	30,359	„Cosy Wazi“

BUDGET

New carburettor cost \$300. Tomorrow, on Monday, it would be installed.

With \$1300, I have to finish the trip. Not much, but if nothing else happens, I can manage. What's next? I don't know. I might be able to sell my bike that would be just enough for the ticket home. And then, what's next? I don't know.

Hostel	7			
Food	12			Hostel
Budget	1646	Distance	30,359	„Cosy Wazi“

RESERVE MODE

„Ready!“ I heard the mechanic shouted.

After around 50 km, the bike started coughing all of a sudden. My heart went to the heels. I couldn't believe it's happening. Cursing everything in this world, I turned back to Lima. Soon, the motorcycle stopped at all.

I took a closer look of the carburettor and checked once again if all tubes and hoses were connected correctly. And here, I felt my heart is coming back. I found the fuel tank valve in the *Open* mode¹. „It could be a deficiency of fuel only,“ I thought with hope. Indeed, when I had cranked it to the *Reserve* position, the bike went smoothly. Perhaps, never in my life, I felt so happy from realising how stupid I was. I refilled the tank and turned out of Lima for the last time.

After 180 km, when it was already 10 PM, I pulled over by some cafe along the road 1S. There was nobody in it except a chubby elder woman.

¹ Some motorcycles have a valve under a fuel tank. By changing its position, you can open the fuel flow towards a carburettor, close it, or choose to turn the valve to the *Reserve* mode. In the *Open* mode, the fuel goes out of the tank through the outlet, located somewhat above the tank's bottom. In the *Reserve* mode, it flows right from the bottom. With *Open* mode, you run out of the fuel prematurely, but there will be a litre or two of *reserved* fuel left.

„Hola, señora. Posible acampamento la playa,¹“ I asked in my broken Spanish, gesturing with my hands towards the ocean behind.

„Si²,“ she said, smiling.

Happy and hungry, I asked for a comida³.

For \$3, I got a huge plate. *It could have lasted the entire day. But I ate everything. The cup of tea itself was bigger than my head. Peruvian generosity. Ah! So good to be back on the road, I swear.*

Food	6			
Fuel	22			Camp 52
Bike	440		184	Elevation: 1 m
Budget	1178	Distance	30,543	≈13°19'39" S; 76°14'29" W

ANOTHER DRIVING TEST

My next point of interest was Paracas, a National Reserve, created to protect the region's ecosystem.

¹ (from Sp.) Hello, Ma'am. Possible camping a beach?

² (from Sp.) Yes.

³ (from Sp.) food, meal.

Here, at the museum, I got to know the following — *Peruvian flag's design was inspired by pink flamingos. It is different from other flags, where red colour often represents the blood of a nation. Here, it represents nature. I like it this way. It's beautiful.* „But then, why is it red, when flamingo is pink?“ Later, I would find out.

It is a desert here. Yellow rocky cliffs and tall white sand dunes meet the majestic ocean. It was one of those places when I had difficulties in breathing because of the lump in my throat. I didn't want to leave. But I had no enough water to stay for the night.

By the road IC-108, I reached the top of the sandy hill overlooking Playa El Chuco beach. Here, I was taken aback by the steepness of the slope down ahead. iOverLander said the following, „Extreme steep descend. Inclination on the side more than 25 degrees. Descent about 100 m to a salt flat. Absolutely not safe to pass with MAN 4x4 truck. Only possible with vehicles with a low mass centre such as pickups and SUV.“ I hesitated. It was scary, indeed. The only thing that kept me from turning around was the unwillingness to take a long way back and lose time. But when were my ideas smart?

So I went ahead, slowly — one foot on the foot-peg, another — deep in the sand, trying to keep the balance.

After, I came to the Playa Charuas beach, from where road IC-105 led to Ica town — another 57 km of unknown. But dozen of small dunes blocked the way. I went around by the deep sand. It was another driving test. I got stuck and fell; I stood up and dug up to continue. When I reached the asphalt, I felt like the happiest person in the world. It was a tough ride, but the beauty of Paracas would remain in my heart forever.

Food	2			
Fuel	17			Camp 53
Extras	2	307		Elevation: 359 m
Budget	1157	Distance	30,850	14°29'56" S; 75°12'38" W

IS IT WORTH IT?

Nazca Lines constitute hundreds of different geometrical shapes, simple designs of various animals, trees and flowers on the ground's surface. The largest one is around 370 m long. It is believed to be created by Nazca culture that flourished from

100 BCE to 800 CE. The area's climate — dry, windy desert — preserved the lines for many centuries.

For a budget traveller, there is a watching tower that stands along highway 15. Its height is around 10 m. From it, you can see two shapes: the Tree and the Hands. The construction of the second and higher tower was in process.

I took highway 30A and headed towards Altiplano¹. Here, llamas came into view. *They are like sheep, but longer legs and long neck, and also fearful.*

My place for the night was a sandy riverbank in one of the canyons here. A cold refreshing wash and hot soup ended my day.

Now it is 00:30. I woke up to pee and to drink some water. The moon has just come out of the mountain with the clouds around it. Orion constellation is above me. Very bright night. Tomorrow, I will try to get as close to Machu Picchu as possible. It is 400 km away and 150 km off the course. 300 km loop is quite a deviation. I don't know if I should. Yeah, it's a famous spot, but... So many tourists... Is it worth it?

Food	4
Fuel	16

Camp 54

¹ Altiplano (Andean Plateau) is the area, where the Andes Mountains are the widest. It is the most extensive area of high plateau on Earth outside Tibet. The bulk of the Altiplano lies in Bolivia but its northern part — in Peru.

Extras	1		464	Elevation: 2187 m
Budget	1136	Distance	31,314	13°56'41" S; 73°07'27" W

THIS IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

I made myself to wake up early as it was very important now to use the day efficiently and cover at least 400 km. I couldn't afford myself hanging around. More days meant more food meant more money. *If nothing goes wrong with the bike, I might be just within my budget to finish.*

At 13:00, I passed Cusco, skipping Machu Picchu and Rainbow Mountain. I reunited with my beloved road — PE-3N. But here, it was marked as PE-3S. *S* stands for *sur*, meaning south. It differed not only by a letter but condition too, which was perfect. The landscape here — green hills and lawns of Altiplano — left me speechless. *The place is a resemblance of freedom in nature. I wanna cry, I swear. This is what it's all about. This is my why?*

Food	8			Camp 55
Fuel	26		485	Elevation: 3922 m
Budget	1102	Distance	31,799	14°45'25" S; 70°44'29" W

WARM WELCOMING

At 14:00, I was at the Bolivian border, in Desaguadero town, located along the Lake Titicaca. The crossing was very straight forward and, again, totally free.

The first surprise was that bank card payment was not accepted¹ at the gas station — only cash. But the price of 3.74 bolivianos² put the smile back on my face. „What a warm welcoming, Bolivia!“ I thought then.

„It must be a mistake,“ I said to the lady-operator, looking at the receipt she gave me.

„All is correct, 18 litres for 8.75 bolivianos per litre,“ she answered, pointing on the screen by the pump, where such price was displayed, indeed.

„Wait. Isn't the price is 3.74 as shown on the stand along the road?“ Confused, I pointed in its direction.

¹ In Latin America, Visa card is more prevalent than MasterCard — in ATMs, cafes, shops, etc.

² The boliviano, BOB, is the currency of Bolivia. 1 USD \approx 7 BOB.

„That price is for local cars. You have a foreign license plate. Therefore, you must pay 8.75.“

I was astonished. „That is not welcoming at all!“ I changed my mind now.

„I will not pay this price,“ I said, thinking I was being fooled.

„Okay, then we will pour off the gasoline back from your tank,“ was her simple answer.

„Alright.“ I laughed, hardly believing it.

However, she wasn't joking. In a moment, her supervisor showed up and asked me to pull aside. Having brought a hose and a bucket, ladies started to suck off the benzine out of the fuel tank, but it didn't work. At one point, I felt bad for them. After all, they were just doing their job, apparently. Thank God, they called their male colleague for help. He managed, and I left empty.

Hostel	7			
Food	3			
Fuel	13		440	Hostel
Budget	1079	Distance	32,239	„Paititi“



- city
- route
- international border
- 56 camp

- Ⓢ Salar de Uyuni (salt flats)
- Ⓡ Andean Fauna National Reserve
- Ⓛ Lake Titicaca
- ▲ Nevado Sajama, 6542 m



TRICKS

Bolivia is rich for oil. The lowered fuel price is subsidising policy for its citizens. Thus, it was not us, foreigners, who were overpriced, but locals who paid less. I didn't know it then, therefore behaved inadequately.

I went through the feedback of experienced travellers and found out about some tricks.

First, as a foreigner, you might not be served at a gas station at all. It happened to me today. A man said that he does not have a *factura* (receipt) for a foreign vehicle. Even though I said that I don't need one, he refused. I was genuinely pissed off.

Second, if you want to get the cheaper fuel (who doesn't?), you should go to a gas station, located on the outskirts of the city. Those, most likely, wouldn't have CCTV. Therefore, you could negotiate the price with an operator. So I did today, paying 5 bolivianos per litre — a much better deal.

Having done laundry, bought some tools for the bike, replenished my food supplies, I left happily, thinking that *I'm not going to deal with this bureaucracy, at least for the time being.*

Fuel 15

Bike 10

Extras 6

Budget 1030

187

Distance 32,426

Camp 56

Elevation: 3803 m

17°30'08" S; 68°21'01" W

REPORT 6

	D 21-40	D 41-60	D 61-80	D 81-100	D 101-120
Camp, qty (paid)	14 (5)	14 (3)	4 (4)	5 (4)	6 (0)
Roof, qty (paid)	6 (5)	6 (6)	16 (16)	15 (15)	14 (14)
Total C - R, qty	56 (17) - 64 (63)				
Stay, \$ (\$/day)	250 (12.5)	134 (6.7)	155 (7.8)	154 (7.7)	100 (5)
Food, \$ (\$/day)	209 (10.5)	178 (8.9)	150 (7.5)	114 (5.7)	149 (7.5)
Fuel, \$ (km/1\$)	206 (23)	368 (21)	251 (20)	128 (24)	235 (22)
Bike, \$	555	284	362	729	815
Extras, \$ (\$/day)	330 (16.5)	311 (15.6)	735 (37)	354 (17.7)	48 (2.4)
Expenses, \$	1550	1275	1655	1479	1347
Total, \$	9228				
Budget, \$	1030				
Dist., km (km/day)	4769 (238)	7691 (385)	4992 (250)	3036 (152)	5079 (254)
Dist. True, km (%)	1734 (8)	3687 (17)	2201 (10)	2369 (11)	3482 (16)
Dist. True Left, %	24				
Dist. Total, km	32,426				

ALONE IN THE ENTIRE WORLD

„Winter,“ I would have said, being at home. But in Southern Hemisphere, the summer had just started — yesterday was the 1st of December. Though, at this altitude, it wasn't warm at all. The last night was the coldest by far. In the morning, I found pieces of ice in the drinking water canister. My breakfast was a real feast, though. I bought a whole grilled chicken yesterday. With such low temperatures, it could last a few days.

I found the front chain sprocket nut loosen. The manual said that when changing it, what I did in Montana, the washer under the nut has to be changed too, what I did not do. Perhaps, now it backfired. The nearest place I could possibly find a replacement was Santiago, Chile, which was 4000 km away. Another option was turning back to La Paz, which I didn't even consider.

Nevado Sajama is an extinct stratovolcano and the highest peak in Bolivia. It is a single standing conical mountain. Its height doesn't really impress as it should when you think of its 6542 meters, as you, yourself, is almost above 4000 m. But my ultimate destination for today was planned to be Salar de Uyuni.

There were several lakes along new highway 27. In one of them, I spotted pink flamingos — apparently, these birds like such remote places. I parked the bike and walked slowly towards them. When they had spread their massive wings and taken off, I stood with my mouth open — there were five Peruvian flags in the air — the body is pink but the back of the wings — red.

Since Cusco, four days and 1500 km ago, I didn't go lower than 3000 m. I expected to make slow progress in such elevation due to zig-zag mountainous roads I thought of. Instead, I could drive for hours, maintaining the same speed of 100 km/h on a flat surface. Such is the Altiplano.

Salar de Uyuni is the world's largest salt flat. The place is also called the world's largest mirror because of perfectly flat ground here. When the rain falls, the water reflects the sky — the horizon disappears, and you get lost. But it wasn't raining today, for what I was very grateful. Here, alone in the entire world, I camped.

Camp 57

Fuel	23	579	Elevation: 3663 m
Budget	1007	Distance 33,005	20°21'02" S; 67°02'59" W

BACK TO CIVILISATION

I noticed the rear chain sprocket was getting worn out — its teeth were rounded significantly — not the best perspective for a remote drive. And indeed, such it was, through Eduardo Avaroa Andean Fauna National Reserve.

Deep sand lanes represented the road here. As usual, I hoped it would improve behind next hill or next turn, but it remained such for 200 km, that took me 8 hours to complete.

I would repeat if I call this place remote. But I can't find any other word to describe the surroundings. It is empty vastness at 4500 m, with cold gusty wind and no place to hide. At Dalton Highway in Alaska, there were, at least, trucks passing from time to time. Here, I saw nobody. Every time I dropped the bike, I worried if I could start it again. It was scary to think of any break down at all.

In the middle of the day, I came to a barrier. It was the entrance to the reserve, where I paid almost \$20. If I knew what the road looked like, I wouldn't come here even if I got paid. But the lady in a small building said that guests were a quite frequent event. It was true — according to statistic, the reserve

was the most visited one in the country. Though, it was hard to believe so. „Maybe, it is some special day today, when suddenly, everyone in the whole world decided not to come,“ I thought to myself.

After another few hours, I arrived at the crossroads, where the „Aduana“ sign pointed to the right. It was the most discouraging wrong turn I had taken during the trip. The wind had no mercy — my two layers of trousers and I-don't-know-how-many layers of other clothes on my body weren't of much use.

The border I arrived at after 15 km was for import-export goods carrying trucks only. I knocked on the door of the building at the end of the road. It opened, and I entered the warm, nicely furnished room, where Customs officer delivered bad news to me. Disappointed, I went out and saw a tablet hanging on a wall. I read, „Altura 5033 m.s.n.m¹,“ and felt even colder.

The Aduana office I needed was located in the opposite direction. There, I met a very friendly person, although I had just wakened him up. Then, I arrived at the border itself. The only indication of it in the middle of this rusty mountain desert was a small concrete grey house with a dusty board on it that read, „Migración Bolivia“. Inside, I found a man wrapped in layers

¹ (fr. Spanish) Altitude 5033 m above sea level.

of ponchos. I was truly happy to see him. He stamped my passport, and finally, I left Bolivia for good.

Yet, the day adventures were not over. The same road brought me to another building, but much more sophisticated. There were no signs or identification around, but a barrier. „It has to be the Chilean border, nothing else,“ I thought. But there was nobody there; the place looked like it was closed.

I walked back and forth, shouting out loud *hola*¹. Nothing, quiet. I was angry. „So much of struggles just to come to a dead-end?“ I started thinking about where to pitch my tent, so to hide from the chilly wind and wait through the night, when suddenly, I heard somebody speaking in Spanish. It turned out to be a security guard. He told me that Immigration and Customs officers went out for some time.

Soon, they were back — two young guys and a girl in their 20-s. I drove in the garage, adjacent to the office. Inside was warm. For the first time during the day, I could relax. For the first time during this trip, I was asked to open my bags for inspection. All procedures took around 30 minutes and were free of charge.

¹ (fr. Spanish) Hello.

When all was over, I passed through the gates to exit on the other side of the building — I was on the Chilean land. „Asphalt!“ I almost cried, seeing it again. „Back to civilisation.“

Hostel	13			
Fuel	45			
Extras	22		467	
Budget	927	Distance	33,472	„Hostal Matty“

- city
- route
- international border
- 57 camp
- ▲ Aconcagua, 6961m



GOOD NEWS

After a short sleep in San Pedro de Atacama, I moved on.

At Calama town, I stopped for groceries. On the parking lot, I dropped the bike on a car and scratched its right rear door a bit. It's a shame, but I moved off. I should have left my phone number, at least, which I had just purchased. „Hopefully, the insurance will cover everything,“ I tried to comfort myself. „It is mandatory in Chile.“ I got mine already for \$18 online.

The weather was getting warmer, though it was still windy. Another good news was that I crossed the Tropic of Capricorn, 23.5° latitude. From now on, the sun would set later every next day of my progress to the South. Even now, the day ended at around 8 PM. It was because Chile set its clock 2 hours ahead of its Time zone. More daylight meant more driving time. But sooner or later, the night comes. Today, it found me camping in the Atacama Desert.

Food	13			
Fuel	22			
Bike	4			Camp 58
Extras	11	360		Elevation: 931 m
Budget	877	Distance	33,832	24°03'22" S; 70°16'31" W

DOWN THERE

The descent from the Andes offered a magnificent view over one of the driest deserts on Earth. Here, on one of the watching points, I saw a man with a mate¹ cup in his hand. Raul was from Uruguay, driving an old red pickup from Montevideo to the South and back via Argentina. He was around 50 years old. His face bore a wide smile, and his eyes were shining — for him, the journey had just started.

„It is beautiful down there, incredibly beautiful,“ he said, looking at the blue horizon of the Pacific. „I’ve been there, a long time ago.“

Food	4			Camp 59
Fuel	11		448	Elevation: 6 m
Budget	862	Distance	34,280	27°18’39“ S; 70°55’49“ W

¹ Mate is a traditional South American caffeine-rich infused drink, the national beverage in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

SIMPLE GOODIES OF LIFE

Among all the countries in Latin America that I have driven through, Mexico, Costa Rica and Chile are the only ones where motorcyclists are charged at the toll roads. Everywhere else, there is a separate narrow lane for us to pass.

By the end of the day, I covered 667 km. *The driving in Chile is very boring — just straight perfect road.* How fast we, people, stop to appreciate simple goodies of life — asphalt, for instance.

Fuel	60			Camp 60
Bike	8	667		Elevation: 26 m
Budget	794	Distance	35,947	32°07'41" S; 71°30'34" W

SANTIAGO

I bought the rear sprocket as well as the front sprocket washer and changed it right away. I wanted to put on a new rear tire too, but I failed to break the bead on the old one.

I always imagined Santiago as a concrete forest with the massive snow peaks on the background. But these days, because of the heat, the mountains were hidden in the city smog.

Here, my former colleague, Adam, lived, and I was happy to see someone I knew, someone I could speak out to.

Bike	44			
Extras	16		240	
Budget	734	Distance	35,187	Adam's home

SIGNATURE FOOD

We went on exploring the capital — climbed on a couple of hills with panoramic view; tried *empanadas*, baked turnover with cheese and shrimps; *completo Italiano*, a hot dog with a lot of avocado, or *palta*, as locals called it here; and *once*, bread toasts with ham and cheese.

The remainder of the day we spent enjoying a cold beer, as I was to leave the next day for my last stretch of the trip — 4000 km to Ushuaia.

Extras	15			
Budget	719	Distance	35,187	Adam's home

HOME VIBES

As more closer to the finish, as more anxious I become, and more scared of what is next. I'm tired too. It doesn't give me joy as much as I expected.

After a short visit to Valparaiso and its vineyards, I linked back to the toll road 5 — the Chilean part of Pan-American Highway. By the Rio Ñuble, I camped. *Nature here is similar to that in Ukraine — the trees, the grass, even air smell the same.*

Food	21			
Fuel	37			Camp 61
Bike	4		640	Elevation: 112 m
Budget	657	Distance	35,827	36°32'54" S; 72°05'48" W

CARRETERA AUSTRAL

The environment was changing again. It was getting colder now, and more trees appeared. The rain was back too, after a short break since I left Huaraz in Peru.

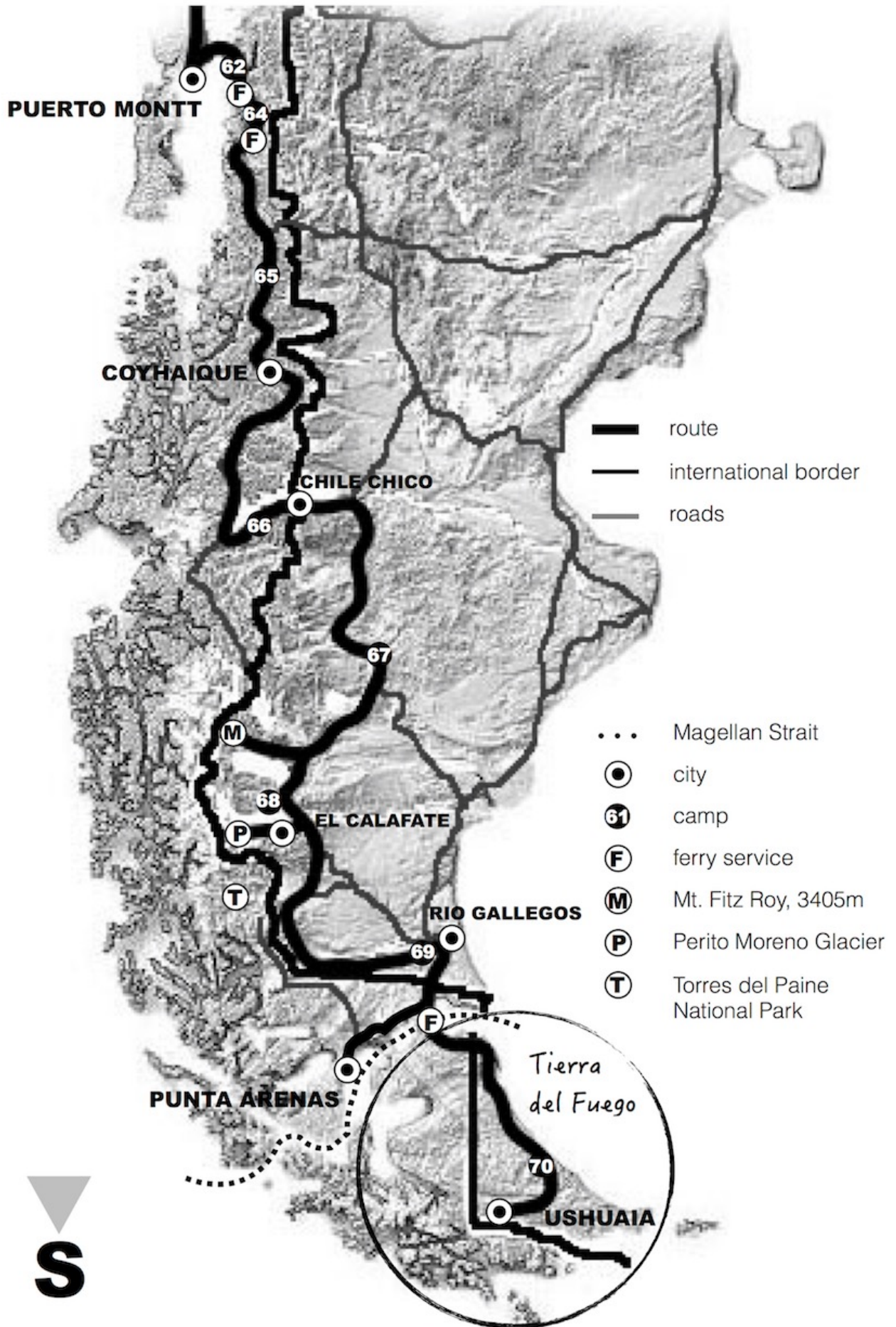
I reached Puerto Montt, where Pan-American Highway finishes. *The feeling is like I am very, very far. Getting more remote feels even better.*

Having replenished the supplies, I drove onto Carretera Austral. This State Road 7 is considered to be the most scenic in the country, as it runs through Chilean Patagonia for more than 1200 km.

Food	34			
Fuel	43			
Bike	51			Camp 62
Extras	1	675		Elevation: 5 m
Budget	528	Distance	36,502	41°36'29" S; 72°41'26" W

PART IV

PATAGONIA



DESPAIR

Before immersing myself in Patagonia, I needed to prepare my buddy. After breakfast, I started to work. As usual, I changed the engine oil and filter, cleaned the air filter, and again, tried to put on a new tire. I tried but did not succeed. I just couldn't break the bead. I jumped on it, hit with boulders, levered with the tire mounting tools, but all my efforts went in vain.

In a while, some pick up drove in. We tried to run the tire over — still no result. The driver suggested bringing it to the local workshop. At first, the idea didn't seem attractive at all. But when *I lost all my physical power and was on the verge of losing my moral will*, I took my backpack with all the valuables and left the camp as it was.

I came back in an hour. At last, the bike was assembled. At 8 PM, after a quick river bath, I had my first meal for the day.

Camp 63

Elevation: 5 m

Budget 528 Distance 36,502 41°36'29" S; 72°41'26" W

FERRY TIME

The first ferry was easy. It runs daily, every 15 to 30 minutes, from Caleta La Arena to Caleta Puelche. The price for the bike was \$11. Next leg was 70 km of partially paved road to Hornopirén, where another ferry had to be arranged in advance, which I didn't know, therefore had to wait an extra day.

There are two companies: Somarco-Barcazas and Transporters Austral. The former one is cheaper. But instead of going directly and around Llancahue Island, as other ferry does, Somarco goes to Leptepu first. There, all vehicles roll out, drive 10 km across Ayacara Peninsula, and roll into another ferry of the same company to get eventually to Caleta Gonzalo. The entire journey takes around 6 hours.

Fuel	28			Camp 64
Bike	23		80	Elevation: 6 m
Budget	477	Distance	36,582	41°57'40" S; 72°27'39" W

GOOD RESULT

From Caleta Gonzalo, Carretera Austral is uninterrupted. The landscape is beautiful. It reminded me of Canadian Rockies. It was even raining as it was there. Nevertheless, I managed to cover more than 200 km — *good result, if considering the weather.*

iOverLander suggested some abandoned campground for the night. I found the place quite a luxurious as for the facilities — dining tables under the roof, water facets. But the overall feeling was mixed. The forest itself kept reminding me of Northern America, and developed fear of bears kicked in. Even though there is no oso¹ in this part of the world.

Food	1			Camp 65
Fuel	16		248	Elevation: 153 m
Budget	460	Distance	36,830	44°13'59" S; 72°30'24" W

ANOTHER DAMAGE

It had happened. This time it was the drive chain. When I heard the noise, I thought it was the front sprocket nut that got loose again. When I had had a closer look, I found that one

¹ (from Sp.) a bear.

link of the chain was almost broke free. Good, I was near Coy-haique. With 50,000 population, it is the largest town on the entire stretch of Carretera Austral. What was more amazing is that the local moto shop had the drive chain of the right size in stock. There were even options to choose from — either made in Japan or Taiwan. I picked the latter one. \$65 sounded much better than \$100. After all, Taiwan is not China.

Having replaced the chain, at 6 PM, I was back on the road. Not until 1 AM, I found a place to camp and had my first meal. *Very, very long day. It is getting colder and windier. I hope for the better, as always.*

Food	20			
Fuel	31			Camp 66
Bike	66	584		Elevation: 460 m
Budget	343	Distance	37,414	46°38'16" S; 72°21'40" W

RUTA 40

Chile Chico is a tiny frontier village with warm cafes, hostels, and beautiful nature around. Having got the insurance, I bid my farewell to the majestic Andes, behind which lay an-

other Patagonia — vast wild expanses of flatlands. For me, it would start with the infamous *Ruta Quarenta*¹. *According to reviews, the road is bad for motorcyclists — gravel. I just hope it is not going to rain. Rain makes everything worse.*

The border crossing went smooth and was free of charge. Of course, I needed local currency, and of course, I lost on a commission again — six precious dollars. *I am officially and legally in Argentina — my last country on this trip to the South.*

The first stretch of the Ruta 40 was perfect asphalt. But there was another obstacle there — the wind. It rushed down from the cold Andes to warmer lowlands and hit me with its full force from my right. There is plenty of space for it to gain pace. The place became one of the top 3 windiest locations on this journey, along with Isabel Pass in Alaska and Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico.

At last, the road turned left, and I was saved in the flow of the tailwind.

Food	8			
Bike	22			Camp 67
Extras	6	424		Elevation: 443 m
Budget	307	Distance	37,838	48°24'34" S; 70°32'37" W

¹ Ruta 40 — (fr. Spanish) route (road) number forty.

UNREAL LANDSCAPE

Thank God, it is quiet.

The road condition changed. From this point, it was unpaved but solid. And the last 70 km before Tres Lagos village was gravel. Occasionally, it was deep to the extent that the bike was wiggling. Slow driving is advised here.

I turned towards El Chaltén, a touristic village and the gateway to Fitz Roy and Cero Torre Mountains, which once enchanted me from various pictures. The road led me through green lawns toward the massive grey wall of rocks, sharp as a predator's teeth.

Food	1			Camp 68
Fuel	25		520	Elevation: 187 m
Budget	281	Distance	38,358	50°07'34" S; 72°08'23" W

HOPE

Perito Moreno Glacier — impressive, huge, beautiful. It is the most visited place in Argentinian Patagonia. It bears the name of Francisco Moreno, an explorer, who discovered the Lake Argentino, where the glacier empties. It's funny, but he had never seen the glacier itself.

Today I stayed in El Calafate. I needed laundry and a hot shower, and my bike — a new front tire. The local moto shop had Pirelli brand for \$104. Here, in the garage, I saw a crashed BMW Adventure motorcycle.

„The accident at Tres Lagos,“ a mechanic said, catching my sight.

„Deep-gravel road,“ I recalled in my mind. „And how is the driver?“ I asked.

„Few broken bones. But overall, he's fine. Flew back home to England.“

All my thoughts were about finishing now. I had \$100 and 1000 km left. *Hopefully, it's going to be enough to get to Ushuaia, and then, hopefully, it's going to be enough to reach Punta Arenas, where, hopefully, I'm going to sell my bike. So in truth, the hope is all I got. And I am scared, scared of failing. As I'm so close.*

Food	1			
Fuel	22			
Bike	104			
Extras	40		224	Hostel
Budget	100	Distance	38,582	„Nakel Yenu"

CHAMOMILE FLOWERS

The drive chain was getting loose. Day by day, I had to adjust the tension. *Taiwan, don't disappoint me, not now.*

Back to Ruta 40.

I'm camping at a nice open grassy flat area by the Rio Gallegos among chamomile flowers that remind me of home. The weather is very quiet, with a bit of drizzle, but no wind. 600 km to Ushuaia.

				Camp 69
Fuel	9		464	Elevation: 12 m
Budget	91	Distance	39,046	51°39'54" S; 69°38'34" W

I FEEL IT

Tierra del Fuego. Isn't it supposed to be the most remote place on Earth? It's so crowded here — people, cars are everywhere, the roads are paved. Only by looking at the map, I am reminded that I am far away.

The landscape remained the same as in continental Southern Argentina. Only after I had crossed the Rio Grande, it changed. Random trees went over into dense forest, and snow-peak mountains emerged on the horizon.

Ushuaia was still 160 km away when I drove into a nice campground by the road 3. Its exclusive feature was that there was a guardian here, a former Falklands War veteran. As it often happens, the country has forgotten how important its citizen was once. Fernando lived on a negligible pension, in an abandoned wagon and voluntarily watched over the area, maintaining the place tidy and clean. He treated me with some tobacco and even rolled one cigarette for me. He was a nice fellow, and I decided to give him a present that he might like — a binocular — a gift, once given to me on my 30th birthday by my friends, through which lenses I observed so much beauty on this long way to the South. Now, my journey was over. *Almost there, almost there. I feel it.*

Fuel	9		472	Elevation: 35 m
Budget	82	Distance	39,518	54°12'22" S; 67°13'26" W

DAY 139

The road is finished. Further south was only Antarctica, which is 1000 km away. But there was one more thing to do.

Ushuaia was infested with tourists. People arrive here by land, air, and cruise ships. It was not the way I imagined the *End of the World* to look like, many times picturing this day sitting in the tent. I wanted to arrive at a quiet place, enter a small bar where a few locals were, maybe a few more random travellers like me, order one beer for myself, treat the rest, and *Cheers!* to the end of the trip. Then, I would excuse myself and leave to do one more thing that was left — to swim in the Southern Ocean. But this place was different, and I had neither money nor desire to go to a bar.

At the Tourist Centre, I asked the direction to the public beach, and a quick swim signified the end of my journey.

I returned to the quiet camp, where having had a bottle of beer and the rolled-up cigarette from Fernando, I celebrated.

So what do I think about this trip? Well, it is not Everest. No guide is needed, no training, no specialised knowledge, not even language. All you need is passion, dream, obsession, that strong feeling of determination to fulfil your dream. It will drive you ahead, push you further, make you get back on the road when you slipped. Yes, for me, it was important to get to the end, as if I was trying to prove something to myself. But what really matters is your first step. The rest will follow in a spirit. The start and the finish are just an imaginary frame, boundary that we set in order to give it some look and structure. In this way, it is easier to explain to the world what you are doing. It works better than trying to deliver your philosophy of call of adventure that you can't stop hearing.

What can I say? It was hard. There was no comfort here, no security. But here was my life — 139 days that I LIVED through.

Food	6			Camp 71
Fuel	10	296		Elevation: 35 m
Budget	66	Distance	39,813	54°12'22" S; 67°13'26" W

REPORT 7

	D 41-60	D 61-80	D 81-100	D 101-120	D 121-139
Camp, qty (paid)	14 (3)	4 (4)	5 (4)	6 (0)	15 (0)
Roof, qty (paid)	6 (6)	16 (16)	15 (15)	14 (14)	4 (2)
Total C - R, qty	71 (17) - 68 (65)				
Stay, \$ (\$/day)	134 (6.7)	155 (7.8)	154 (7.7)	100 (5)	27 (1.4)
Food, \$ (\$/day)	178 (8.9)	150 (7.5)	114 (5.7)	149 (7.5)	101 (5.3)
Fuel, \$ (km/1\$)	368 (21)	251 (20)	128 (24)	235 (22)	399 (18.5)
Bike, \$	284	362	729	815	326
Extras, \$ (\$/day)	311 (15.6)	735 (37)	354 (17.7)	48 (2.4)	111 (5.8)
Expenses, \$	1275	1655	1479	1347	964
Total, \$	10,192				
Budget, \$	66				
Dist., km (km/day)	7691 (385)	4992 (250)	3036 (152)	5079 (254)	7388(389)
Dist. True, km (%)	3687 (17)	2201 (10)	2369 (11)	3482 (16)	5202 (24)
Dist. True Left, %	0				
Dist. Total, km	39,814				

EPILOGUE

Next day, on December 21st, I made it to Punta Arenas only to get to know that Luis turned down the deal. The only good news was that I found an extra \$30 in one of my hide-outs. Having pulled the waist belt tighter, I went camping in Chabunco Park, 20 km from the city.

Posting the sale advertisement on Overlanding Buy and Sell - Americas Facebook page attracted new potential buyers. Luke's intentions sounded more promising. He came to South America recently and, with his girlfriend, wanted to go for a road trip. On the 30th, he had flown from Peru, and we had a deal.

Next day, we went to a notary office to get a *poder* — a power of attorney for a 3rd person that entitled Luke to dispose of the motorcycle at his own will, including further resale. Having had it apostilled, we ran to Customs, in the port, where my Chilean TIP was cancelled, and the new one, for Luke, issued. All took no more than 30 minutes and \$30. Selling of a foreign vehicle to a foreigner on the territory of Chile was possible only because we were located in Zona Franca¹.

Now, Luke had to transfer the ownership on his name. As the bike was registered in the US, the process had to be done

¹ Punta Arenas is one of two Free Trade Zones in Chile, with another one being in Iquique, Northern Chile.

there too. Alex Smith, a very well known person among Americas Overland travellers, could assist with it, doing it remotely, charging around \$250, and then sending all necessary papers and license plate over the post service. Meanwhile, having had the power of attorney and valid TIP, Luke could legally drive the bike and even cross international borders within South America.

I handed over the keys. Now, my trip was over, indeed.

In the evening, we all went to the Magellan Strait, where at midnight, the fireworks signified the end of 2018.

Tomorrow is the New Year. Tomorrow, the new chapter of my life begins.

Budget 1400

AFTERMATH

BUREAUCRACY

USA, \$485	CANADA, \$80
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visa, \$160 - bike registration, \$60 - title, \$15 - insurance, \$250 (covering the entire US and Canada) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visa, \$80
MEXICO, \$145	BELIZE, \$24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visa, \$33 - Temporary Import Permit (TIP), \$60 - insurance, \$52 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - vehicle fumigation, \$2.5 - Vehicle Transfer Fee, \$7.5 - insurance, \$10 - Departure Fee, \$4
GUATEMALA, \$23	EL SALVADOR, \$3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fumigation, \$2 - TIP, \$21 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Salvadorian Immigration Fee, \$3
HONDURAS, \$32	NICARAGUA, \$31
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TIP, \$32 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fumigation, \$3 - Immigration Fee, \$1 - Entry Fee, \$12 - insurance, \$12 - Exit Fee, \$3
COSTA RICA, \$34	PANAMA, \$28
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insurance, \$27 - Exit Fee, \$7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fumigation, \$3 - insurance, \$25
COLOMBIA, \$134	ECUADOR, \$0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visa, \$134 	
PERU, \$0	BOLIVIA, \$0
CHILE, \$0	ARGENTINA, \$0
TOTAL, \$1019	

MOTORCYCLE

Valve clearance adjustment — done 2 times.

4 front tires, 3 rear tires — \$820.

2 drive chains, 2 rear sprockets, 1 front sprocket, 1 front sprocket washer — \$203.

5 oil filters (oil changed 5 times) — \$134.

1 clutch lever, 1 clutch cable — \$43.

1 set of front and rear brake pads and brake fluid (changed 1 time, at the front and rear) — \$120.

Coolant (changed 1 time) — \$20.

1 carburettor — \$300.

1 choke cable — \$83.

1 low beam light bulb, pair of mirrors, 1 spark plug — \$30.

Supplementary parts, accessories and maintenance product — \$150.

Tools — \$260.

Bike washing — \$43.

Bike parking — \$32.

Labour, workshop services — \$161.

Toll roads — \$44.

Total — \$2443.

OVERALL

\$1058 — Accommodation (\$8 per day).

\$1069 — Food (\$8 per day).

\$2264 — Extras (\$16 per 1 day).

\$3831 — Bike (including Darien Gap crossing, ferry services and all bureaucracy matters related).

\$1973 — Fuel. With the consumption of 5L per 100 km (48 miles per gallon), 1 dollar bought 20 km of a distance.

\$10,192 — total expenses for 139 days.

The sum does not include the cost of the US and Canadian visas, motorcycle, and plane tickets.

USEFUL WEB-LINKS

1. <http://blog.ioverlander.com/iphone-app/> — iOverLander application.
2. MAPS.ME — off-line GPS Navigation application.
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_of_Motor_Vehicles — reference to the Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMV and its analogues) in all US states and Canada (registering, licensing the vehicle).
4. <https://www.dmv.org> — general non-official website about all DMV around the Unites States.
5. <http://doa.alaska.gov/dmv/> — DMV of Alaska
6. <https://www.dmv.org/ak-alaska/motorcycle-registration.php> — DMV of Alaska (non-official website).
7. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html> — information on US visa.
8. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/transit.html> — visa info on Canada.
9. https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/tramites_servicios/visa — Colombian visa.
10. <http://www.rree.gob.bo/formvisas/> — Bolivian visa.
11. <https://alaskashuttle.com> — shuttle from Anchorage to Fairbanks.

12. <http://www.deadhorsecamp.com/arctic-ocean-shuttle/> — Arctic Ocean Shuttle in Deadhorse (24 hours prior booking).
13. <https://www.couchsurfing.com> — Couchsurfing platform.
14. <https://freecampsites.net> — free campsites in the US and Canada.
15. <http://www.ultimatecampgrounds.com> — campsites in the US and Canada.
16. *PanAmerican Travelers Association* page on Facebook.
17. *Overlanding Buy and Sell Americas* page on Facebook.
18. http://wikioverland.org/Pan_American_Highway — information on traveling PanAmerican Highway.
19. <https://www.sanborns.com> — Insurance for Mexico.
20. <https://geo-mexico.com/?p=12955> — map of toll and free roads in Mexico.
21. <https://www.who.int/ith/ith-country-list-new.pdf?ua> — World Health Organisation website. Yellow Fever vaccine requirements by country.
22. <https://www.migob.gob.ni/migracion/tramites/solicitud-de-ingreso-ordenado-y-seguro-de-visitantes-invitados-por-motivos-diferentes-al-turismo/> — special Immigration Form for Nicaragua (to be sent 7 days before arrival).

23. <https://wildcardsailing.com/motorcycle-shipping-to-colombia/> — shipping of the bike with Wild Card boat.
24. https://www.stahlratte.org/?page_id=754 — shipping of the bike with Stahlratte boat.
25. boris_jaramillo@hotmail.com — Boris' e-mail, a port agent; to freight the container over the Darien Gap.
26. <https://containerbuddies.bubbleapps.io> — container sharing for overlanders.
27. <https://airpanama.com> — AirPanama airlines website to book a ticket to Puerto Obaldia.
28. <http://consorcio.com> — insurance for Chile.
29. <http://www.taustral.cl> — ferry service in Chilean Patagonia, Carretera Austral.
30. <http://www.barcazas.cl/barcazas/web/hornopiren-caleta-gonzalo/?lang=en#descripcion-ruta> — another ferry service on Carretera Austral.
31. <https://www.overlandtitles.com> — Alex Smith, ownership (title) transfer agent.

THE END

