

EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT



From the editor.....

So here I sit at the airport again having just returned from one of the best rides of my life with nine other adventurers. This time I'm again heading Nor'east to Nha Trang to meet up with the outfit who will be providing MLA with more lifetime memories in August 2019.... the Vietnam Discovery Tour. And fortunately my bride's birthday happens to fall right in the middle of this tax deductible recon trip!!

Arriving early to get to the front of the queue and a chance of the exit row seats was a fruitless exercise as in front of me stood no less than 100 trollies laden with more baby formula than I have seen on the shelves of Cosco and enough appliances to stock a Harvey Norman store. 30 kg limits are treated with disdain as the belts whirled under the weight of 2kilo tins glad wrapped together in absence of pallets. Our 15kg cases were insignificant and were treated accordingly.

The unhappy look on the traveller's faces was telling a tale of airline delays... 4 hours in fact. Never mind, Qantas Club will fill the void.

" what do you mean we can't come in? I'm in the club and a club is a club." "Sorry sir,

you are not flying Qantas today so you are not allowed to use the facilities that you paid \$385 a year for". Dejected and rejected, it was back into the arena with the bulls to find a suitable eatery to utilise the \$14.50 food vouchers complements of Vietnam Airlines and sit it out.

Thus is the plight of the airline traveller. As I say to MLA's adventurers to India, Mongolia and Thailand "it is what it is and all the whinging in the world will not miraculously change things."

MLA is about to embark on another adventure to the Himalayan peaks. This is a sensational tour as clocks are wound back decades and every corner provides a new experience.

This year 19 riders will share that experience most not knowing each other. Our youngest is 40 and one of our oldest close to 73 who has specially got his bike licence to do this adventure. That's commitment! Treat every day like it's your last I say and now this saying is being adopted by others who are sharing the passion with me.



The Winter Edition of MLA Newspaper is dedicated to the recent Temujin Trans Mongolia Ride as I can't wait to spread the word of what an unbelievable ride this was.



With 3 days in Beijing, the highlight was undoubtedly clambering up and along the old unrestored section of the Wall which had such an effect on my calves that I struggled for 3 days to walk let alone climb a stair. So much for pre ride training on the stair walker! If Bob could have



caught up with me on the ascent to the wall face, I don't think I would be here to write this editorial. Even young Rob showed early signs of emphysema vowing to never touch another 'gasper'. Siggie, the wirey Austrian who last

year walked Base Camp treated the 600 metre ascent like a flat track while busting to yodel through the valleys. Despite early fog and mist, 'The Wall' is everything it's touted to be.



Another item ticked off!

So let's get it to the serious stuff.... tell us about Mongolia!

The route to Ulaanbaatar passes directly through China's north and having never been to Australia's reliant trading partner and acquirers of our land, industry, mining rights and everything else expect taxi's which are left to the Indians and Pakistanis, the idea of a pre tour tour in Beijing had a lot of appeal not only to me but to the nine other riders. With a flurry of emails to a number of tour operators on mainland China, the tender went to China Tours and a delightful representative Sunny met every condition of the 3 day Best of Beijing brief with all conditions covered.

The aim was to see as much as we could in the available time including a full day hike along the unrestored Great Wall of China from Jiainkou and finishing on the restored section at Mutianyu Mountain with a run down the mountain on the well-known toboggan.

Thrown in for good measure was a Tai Chi class within the grounds of the Temple of Heaven. Which was a worthy addition to the itinerary. Not often do you (nor had the locals!) see 10 uncoordinated non-nationals attempting to be as graceful in mind and body as the Tai Chi master taking the class.



Even with 3 solid days being tourists, it was always going to be difficult to cover all that a city with 3000 years of history has to offer but our guide Peter, did an admirable job in filling any void where knowledge was sought. In fact he was a walking Google right down to the finest detail and at times Bob had to 'speed up the process' to keep to the timetable.

The Hutong Tour in historical Xicheng District aboard rickshaws showed us the only part of Beijing where land ownership is available and the walk

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through the Art District and a farewell 'pint' on day 4 was a great way to finish off this great Best of Beijing tour. It was time to head to Mongolia.



Plus ça change...! the more things change, the more things stay the same. Since I started adventure riding nearly 22 years ago, the world has changed significantly yet preparing for this trip across Mongolia and the experience gained would be exactly as it was when Genghis Khan ruled the nation. I have little doubt that if we were to make the same journey in 20 years, the difference would be that the showers would work and the toilet would not be a hole in the ground in the middle of the steepes....and we would be riding electric bikes not young Austrian fire breathing KTM's and Husky's.

Mongolia is on the move and the capital city Ulaanbaatar is starting to become a city of skyscrapers as the Chinese infiltrate from the east with treasury loads of Yuan to establish a foothold as they are doing in many other nations.



Outside of the city though, the nomadic way of life will remain the domain of humble welcoming families who treat Mother Earth with dignity and respect.



This is the Mongolia we ten adventurers have come to see and before long the eager young Austrian ponies were on the dirt heading south west across the steepes, past platoons and armoury of the United Nations who use the steepes as training grounds to the overnight camp at Elsen Tasarkhai which is part of the Mongol ELS Sand dunes early evening to a welcomed 'warm' thirst quencher, a great meal in the dining ger and a hot shower.



It's only day 6 of the tour and day 2 of the ride and we all feel as though we have been away from our

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loved ones for a month. Straight in to the sand dunes echoed the sound of rev limited EXC's particularly from one Austrian, on an Austrian, who pursued the 'unusual' noise from his engine whilst the rest of us waited for the 'pop'.



Passing through the ancient city of Kharkhorum after a photoshoot with hunting eagles and a banquet lunch at a local pub, soon had us in deep green valley's testing out just how good the electrics on modern machinery is as the incoming rain filled the creeks which crossed our route. Fortunately the rain skirted our camp allowing for the 'slaughter of the lamb' (our dinner) to be the main event for the evening followed by an incredible light show in the western sky. Some chose to cast a line in the river rather than watch the butchery but with little success.



The stopover on day 7 at the Ulaan Tsutgalan Waterfall on the Orkhan River, a UNESCO World Heritage site well attended by tourists, gave Buddhi the opportunity to show his piloting skills as his DJ4 Phantom drone buzzed above and within spray distance of the descending water. The previous evening storm added a new dimension to the ride as sandy tracks and grassy

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fields became skid pans and trickling brooks became raging torrents, one fierce enough to dislodge Tony and cause instant death to his Austrian mate.



While the 'crew' attempted to revive the dead, the rest of us sat in the hot springs enjoying not the medicinal herb tea of the area but rather hops and Cuban cigars....a fitting way to end the day!

As the skies transformed from deep shades of grey to brilliant blue, the riding style changed becoming more aggressive as the two tracks dried. Dan, as usual, was determined to equalize the wear on his knobby tyres and Ben found just the right black muddy puddle to launch in a premeditated move into the middle roosting the black porridge metres in to the air and landing on your truly who was following behind.

An early stop in a local town where black market traders trade from shipping containers gave us a chance to stock up on treats before we lunched, again on 'fatty' meats at the

Serpent head Rock, a tourist hot spot where the riders attempted archery with incapable bows and arrows, a 'yonnie' throwing contest won by tour operator Buddhi and a

'tame' jaunt on two of the more attractive bovines proudly led by their herder.





Arrival at the White Lake late afternoon allowed time to climb the adjacent rocky lookout which provided a magnificent view over the camp and the lake as the sun settled down for the evening.

With showers crowded with early rising German tourists travelling in tough Russian Kombi like 4WD's of a past era, 'Goldie' hit the lake for a scrub but I don't think the soap even touched his skin before he turned brittle with the cold.

This was a 'transport' day and the knobby tyres did not make for a comfortable ride so we were glad at any opportunity to get off the tar and into the deep sand surrounding Telmena Lake, our overnight camp where the image of Dan's head sticking out from the 'remote' dunny still brings a laugh.



Our guide Buddhi who had clearly been 'working out' in preparation for the Nadaam Games threw down the challenge of a wrestling match which was quickly taken up by WA gentle giant Nev and lead rider Boggie only to be declared a draw after several rounds of competitive grasping, gasping and groaning like two wounded sumo wrestlers.

The effect of the 12% Bear beer quickly kicked in, on some faster than others and the wrestling matches concluded as combatants stumbled and fell with little assistance.



Tomorrow, our biggest day of 400 kilometres with an early start meant lights out early...if there were lights! Fortunately the summer days in Mongolia are long with the sunrise around 5am and the sunset after 9.30pm which is just as well as the next day Nev's bike refused to co-operate providing inconsistent fire to the belly of his KTM and the rocky ground took its toll on the Cruisers tyres.



With the spark problem traced to a loose terminal (after mechanic Boggie dismantled half the engine) and the tyres repaired, it was full steam ahead through the deep sand to Khyargas lake, the biggest in Mongolia and as we quickly found out, a home for many species of Pisces, some which ended up on our breakfast plates after a successful 15 minutes with a spinner.

Day 9 and everyone was feeling great as we headed back through the sand dunes around the lake pointing towards our final destination of Ulgii 350, kilometres to the south tucked away between the borders of China, Russia and Kazakhstan. Everything was going along smoothly until I realised that my tethered Olympus was no longer tethered so it meant either forget 2100 photos of the trip history

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and move on, or backtrack 10 k's to the likely spot where the last photos were taken. Elation is an appropriate word to describe how I felt seeing the red case of the camera glittering in the sunshine. The backtracking in sand meant excess fuel usage and engine expiry causing a 40 minute delay and a late arrival in to the Eagles Nest Hotel and a warm beer. A better name for the hotel would be the Mosquitos Nest as the suckers waited for feeding time at the door as a blanket. We were dinner!

The plan for the 'rest' day in Ulgii was to take a short ride in to the nearby valley to locate the female star, Aisholban, of the Documentary 'The Eagle Hunter', the story of a young girl who rescued and trained a young chick eagle to hunt. We found her and



nomadic family late afternoon much further up in the valley with the help of another Nomad only to leave us with a tough ride through bone jarring rock for 30 kilometres. Had we not stayed in Ulgii's own version of the

Nadaam Festival earlier in the day, we would have returned to Ulgii 4 hours earlier at a comfortable pace rather than throwing caution to the wind as riders slalomed skilfully but recklessly over and

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around the rocks in a triumph of temperament over common sense.

The unexpected banquets in the valley first with the directing nomad and second with Aisholban's family almost put an end to Bob's birthday celebratory dinner complete with birthday cake which was pre-arranged in the Gur of a Ulgiarian native and more than one would have been content instead to drink the warm beer at the hotel amongst swarming mozzies.

But a team is a team not a collection of individuals and off we went to engage in banquet #3 for the arvo.



This day marked the end of the ride component of the adventure but not the end of the tour as the early two hour flight back to the capital had us at the gates of Ulaanbaatar Stadium for the Nadaam festival – *The three games of men*. The games are Mongolian wrestling, archery and horse riding and are held throughout the country during midsummer. From a distant past the Nadaam festival gathered the nomadic and local people not just for competition and but also to barter, sell



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goods and gossip. The activity is in and all around the central stadium and it is embraced by the whole nation.

Whilst we were all keen to be part of the festivities, the drawn out pace and crammed seating arrangements was enough to limit our attendance to 30 minutes and we decided to forfeit our second day entry ticket favouring for some the opportunity to prepare for homeward bound flights and for others the chance to visit the city's oldest monastery.

We had achieved what we had set out to do and that was to experience the Best of Beijing, to cross Mongolia east to west from the capital city of Ulaanbaatar to the city of Ulgii and to attend the second oldest games in history, The Nadaam festival.



During the course of our adventure across Mongolia's north, we were welcomed wherever we stopped by the Mongolian people who were helpful, friendly and as warm hearted as their vast valleys.

Land locked Mongolia is a fascinating country to experience and the motherland of the great Genghis Khan who built the mighty Mongol Empire back in the 13th century. It is a vast and historical land with thousands of years of ancient culture. It has existed and thrived thanks to its heroic and patriotic ancestors who lived in this harsh and extreme land which we have had the pleasure of travelling across for the past 10 days. Today's Mongolia sits on a considerable size of territory which includes an array of pristine landscape and nomadic people whose lives in many ways are unchanged from the past. Here, the nomadic herders still depend on nature for survival and the wide open spaces, untouched wilderness, fresh air and water are

cherished dearly by the nomadic Mongols.



Tony Anderson summed up his adventure under the title **'The Hidden Treasure of my Mongolia Ride'**

On an MLA Tour, it goes without saying that you are going to witness an abundance of amazing scenery and experience some very special moments.

There is an endless feast of scenic beauty from wide open valleys, back dropped by spectacular mountain ranges ever-changing in their beauty by the movement of light reflecting off their rugged surfaces.

Incredible inland lakes that seem to go forever, majestic rivers, streams and waterfalls at times lined by century old pine trees.

The nightly accommodation in quaint, cosy, gers is only surpassed by being embraced with open arms into the homes and lives of authentic Mongolian nomads.

You will ride yak, shoot arrows, handle a giant eagle, even toboggan off the great wall of China, and so much more.

This brings me to the Hidden Treasure. The thing that self generates and permeates the entire group. There is an early comradeship that soon develops into a feeling of true mateship, knowing someone always has your back makes the whole experience worth it on this alone.

A huge thanks to Mike and Bob for inviting me on this amazing adventure. This is my third adventure with MLA. I love what you do and how you do it and I can't wait for both the 2019 adventures to Nepal's Lost Kingdom of Upper Mustang and Vietnam Discovery.

The ride across Mongolia was like nothing we have done before. From the vastness of the desert, across the ever reaching plains, around the beautiful lakes in the north-west and mid-west to spend time with the nomadic tribes and eagle hunters, this adventure ride had it all.

Mongolia is a dream for an adventure rider and one which I don't want to wake up from.


It can be a challenge to ride through, but for us who made the effort both time wise and monetary, it was an adventure of a lifetime.

Whilst MLA has a full ride calendar for 2019, the Trans Mongolian Adventure is a very special event and if after reading the above journal you would like to experience Mongolia with us in 2020 either on KTM's, on less serious Royal Enfield Himalayans or as a passenger in one of the Hummer backup vehicles, contact Mike@midlifeadventures.com.au or Bob@midlifeadventures.com.au

So rather than pollute this brief overview with the usual MLA Newspaper articles, I have decided to leave you with just this one message to conclude this seasons Newspaper, ***Life is very short but you never appreciate how short until you don't have much of it left. Live every day like it's your last!***

In a week MLA embarks on another adventure and that is to take 18 riders on the adventure of their lives...in to the mighty yet spiritual Himalayas. They will return different people realising

just how blessed they are. Each and every day they will step back in time as they weave their way from sea level up to 5400 metres over 13 days.



Himalayan Adventure Ride 2018

Travel with Mid Life Adventures to the hustle and bustle of vibrant Delhi where after an exciting two day tour including a rickshaw race through the spice markets, we travel through the lush plains of India on local train to the summer capital of Shimla where your journey begins. Fourteen days on Royal Enfield 'Himalayan' motorcycles through the astounding Himalayas staying in local accommodation, visiting 1000 year old temples and Tibetan monasteries. After reaching the peak of the highest motorable road in the world, we stay in magnificent royal houseboats in the ancient city of Srinagar before departing by air to Delhi for our final night together in the magnificent Leela Palace.

"It's now your time to enjoy"

Be part of this fascinating adventure back in time and through the most remote mountain range on the planet.

Tour date 29th August - 15th September 2018 (18 days). Cost US \$3480 (land content only)

For bookings contact Mike Burton: mike@midlifeadventures.com.au or call on 0409-512546

The visuals of the Himalayas are simply astounding and can never really be captured on SD cards. Every day you will enjoy the gentle thud of your Royal Enfield as it chugs along mountain cuttings, through snow melts and snow-capped peaks and into environs where westerners are rarely seen.


We look forward to bringing you the story in the Spring Edition of the MLA Newspaper.

Ride calendar....

February 23rd – March 7 2019

Kings of the Mekong Tour

Fully booked



VIETNAM DISCOVERY RIDE

Join Mid Life Adventures on Lifan 'Cruisers' for a 15 day discovery tour starting from the beautiful beachside city of Nha Trang heading along the coast before riding through some of Vietnam's wildest and most diverse highland areas.

As we ride north along the spine of Vietnam bordering Laos, we pass remote villages and farming districts where little has changed for centuries. We will be travelling at a relaxed pace through provinces where tourists don't venture staying in local hotels and guesthouses.

After weaving our way along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, visiting historic war sites, coffee regions, gold mines, thundering waterfalls and the world's largest cave plus more spectacular sites, we end our tour in Hanoi where after a full day tour you may choose to extend your adventure to one or many of Vietnam's 'hot spots'. This is a perfect ride to share your experience with a pillion.

"It's now your time to enjoy"

Tour date to be advised. Cost Rider USD \$3800 Pillion USD \$1600 (land content only)

For bookings contact Mike Burton mike@midlifeadventures.com.au or call 0409-512546

Early August 2019 15 days

Vietnam Discovery Ride

Open for booking

Early November 2019 13 days

The Lost Kingdom of Upper Mustang

Open only to experienced riders

5 spots remaining - email for information

'It's now your time to enjoy'

