



Henderson wanted to cycle the globe.

ONE WOMAN TWO WHEELS

Loretta Henderson

by Lisa Evans



Pitching her tent anywhere, Henderson was amazed at the kindness she found on the road.



photos: courtesy of Loretta Henderson

The bicycle is a wonderful way to meet people.

Three years ago, Cobourg, Ont. native Loretta Henderson didn't even own a bike. "I had a home, career and a boyfriend. All the things you think you want in your thirties," she says. But something was lacking. She wanted to cycle, but not the recreational cycling she saw people doing in parks. Henderson wanted to cycle the globe, and she wanted to do it alone. "I came across a photo of a man who had tied an empty milk jug full of water to the back of his bicycle rack. I figured that I didn't know if I could cycle anywhere, but I know I can tie a milk jug to a bicycle rack," says Henderson. She flew from Canada to England, purchased a bicycle and set off on a world-wide journey that's taken her to New Zealand, Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Pitching her tent anywhere — in farmer's fields and dried-up riverbeds — Henderson lives a frugal lifestyle while cycling solo. "Camping for free in the wilds of Africa has kept my budget to less than \$10 (US) a day," she says.

Finding free resting places has become an indispensable skill. Her favourite place to pitch her tent was underneath some prayer flags at the top of the mountains in Nepal, and her highest-altitude camping location was at 17,400 feet at the top of a Himalayan mountain pass in India. So how does this solo cyclist who sleeps in the desert keep from smelling like an armpit? Henderson jokes that thanks to an Ortlieb water bag, she can shower just about anywhere.

Flexibility is key to making Henderson's long-term bicycle expedition work. Life as a solo cyclist certainly has its challenges. Henderson has been nearly blown off a bridge in New Zealand and has found herself in the middle of desert sandstorms, but she says the amazing experiences she's had on the road more than make up for the hardships.

"As a solo female, I am always getting adopted. Thanks to people who read my website, Facebook and Twitter, I am often welcomed into people's homes. I'm always blown away by all the kindness on the road all over the world," she says.

While the idea of cycling through the desert alone is enough to terrify most women, Henderson says security issues have been minimal, although she admits she attracts quite a bit of attention from men. "It's not every day that you get the opportunity to be mistaken for a porn star, as I was in the Himalayas of India," she says. To keep her bike secure, Henderson parks it outside her tent and attaches it to a long string tied to her arm at night as an impromptu security alarm.

Henderson is a firm believer in low-tech travel. While you may think traveling the globe on a bike requires specialty gear, Henderson says, "People all over the world pedal one-speed bikes up mountain roads wearing nothing but flip-flops." The one thing she will indulge in is good-quality tires.

To encourage other women to follow in her tracks, Henderson started the WOW (Women On Wheels) wall for solo female cyclists to post photos and commentary about their adventures. "I became convinced despite only having met one other solo female traveling by bicycle that there must be more of us," she says.

WOW has become a premier resource for tips, advice and encouragement about solo female adventure cycling. "The bicycle is a wonderful way to budget-travel to meet people and experience different cultures," she says.

Follow Loretta Henderson's solo cycling journey at www.skalatititude.com.

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