

# Wild Dogs And Nutters

## Buggering Around Travel Series

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smashwords edition

\*

*Also by Laura Tong*

*The Great Success Swindle*

*The Great Motivation Swindle*

*The Bollocks People Tell You*

*More Bollocks People Tell You*

*Buggering Around Travel Series:*

*The Dog's Rollocks*

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*Thanks – Mark & Laura*

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## Thanks

Thanks to the all the great unwashed who had the pleasure of meeting us and playing a part in our Quixotic Exploits, however small and insignificant that part may have been. Without you all. The trip would never have been possible if you hadn't made up in numbers what we lacked in the trouser department, having only the one pair between us. In case you're wondering, Mark was the pie.

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## Preface

This journey was undertaken in a time without mobile phones, without the Internet, without digital cameras and wireless connections. Without blue tooth and denture whitening, skype, hype and lipo-suction. In a time when a blackberry was a fruit, an Apple a vegetable and a nasty rash and boils, incurable. Indeed without the aid of most of the critical inventions of the past 15 years. That such a monumental odyssey was possible at all in such primitive times may be the cause of disbelief in some younger readers still trapped in the excessive masturbation years – but it has to be remembered that we were purveyors of Old Skool Adventuring where, when teetering on the edge of a 3000ft precipice pursued by yetis and the inland revenue, you had to rely on your own metal rather than call up Buck Rogers or the Mountain rescue on your iPhone. Steel belted underpants were the order of the day. True, we still regularly soiled ourselves (in fear mostly) but at least there was no unseemly seepage to betray us.

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## Chapter 1 England – Guinness & World Records

A wave of a hundred years of fags, chip grease and bullshit stung the nostrils as the door swung back hard, taking another bit of the wall with it. Inside, the vomit-inducing carpet swirled its way among the arse-numbing chairs, stopping short of the bar by about three feet, just enough to ensure that a full runway of sticky beer could encircle the tongue and groove barrier between punter and barman.

The Slug & Leotard, our local, (well, one of several ‘locals’) stood for everything we intended to escape from over the next year and a half: crap beer, crap food, crap conversation and crap Friday nights (and even crapper Saturday mornings). Tonight however, was our official leaving do and if we were to succumb to one last Great British, (sorry Irish) Pub drubbing then we were going to go down heroically, drinking way more than we could handle and reducing ourselves from the fine, upstanding, homosapheads that we were to a dribbling human slurry with the coordination and conversational skills of a Mongol jellyfish operating a bandsaw.

“And have one yourself, Bill.”

A tenner floated onto the soggy bar towel. Bill the Barman, or 'Sweaty Bill' as he was fondly known, put down the cloth he'd been wiping the pickle jars with and picked it up. The row of pickles now stood no less disarranged and no cleaner either, as Bill's fingerprints covered the glass and obscured their already greying labels.

"No thanks, Laura, touch of dodgy guts. I think it's the all Bismarck herrings and sauerkraut."

"Why are you eating all that Teutonic toss anyway, you're not German are you? Not with a name like Bill Mandy, that doesn't sound a bit German to me."

"'Appen that sounds a bit gay does that." Murph offered.

A Mexican wave of wanking actions ran through the pub. It was an old joke and only raised a titter really, and the odd eyebrow, and the even odder letter to the brewery by a mad old bag in the corner eeking out half a stout and a packet of pork scratchings. But it was tradition and that's what The Slug & Leotard stood for - traditional Anglo-Irish pub culture.

"A Northerner down South - now that's a bit gay!"

Murphy, our best friend and cycling buddy of many a year took his face out of his Guinness long enough to reply,

"'Mebe, but I comes from t' Peoples Republic of Yorkshire. You lot down here need passport t' visit."

"Piss off, Murphy, your dad was born in Lancaster!" Mark reminded him.

"Ay, but we don't talk about it now we lives over border in Bentham, took twenty year to be accepted as was. You'se would never be accepted - half Irish, half, what was it - Basket?"

"Basque, you duffer!"

I joined this riveting conversation "So what does that make me seeing as I'm half Irish as well - in fact we must be..."

"The shortest wankers in history?" John hazarded a guess. John was in the same age bracket as us, 24-29, but had been educated at public school and it showed. To be fair we had too, but Mark had been asked to leave after a misunderstanding with a box of matches and the school chapel, and had then spent the rest of his education oscillating between comprehensives and pseduo-grammar schools, while I oscillated between morose and dyspeptically comatose.

"Maybe, but we'll soon be the shortest wankers in the Guinness Book of Records."

"How are you going to fund this poor man's Grand Tour anyway? It must be costing a few

quid?”

“True, we’re not exactly flush with cash, but we’ve been saving up on the QT and we’ve resigned ourselves to selling Coati Mundi.”

“You mean that rotting hulk you two spent three years pissing about with in that boatyard?”

Mark had indeed bought me a ‘rotting hulk’ as John described it three years ago as a ‘surprise’ birthday present and we had rebuilt it from the ground up into a 30 ft Broads Cruiser cum luxury houseboat – or that’s how we saw it. Now however, needs must and all that – we were forced to sell it to part fund the trip – and in truth we were bored with it being modern kids with the attention span of a cocker spaniel.

John took a sip of Campari, “I reckon you two should form yourself into a company, ‘London to Sydney Tandems’, you could list yourselves on the markets – I’d invest in you, after all, my other investments are all hopeless causes.”

“But this one wouldn’t be,” I butted in, “because we are going to get there. *Team Sydney*’ will whip across Europe…”

“West and East.\*” Mark interjected.

“Yep, West and East, then through Iran and Pakistan…or India and one of the ‘Stans’…”

“Get real! You are going to DIE!” This time it was John interrupting.

“Piss off! Then China, Malaysia, Thailand…”

Mark coughed, “Thailand then Malaysia.”

“Whatever! Details, details!” I was on a roll, “Then Indonesia, fly across to Australia, cycle down the centre and hey presto, eighteen months later we roll into Sydney for my birthday. Job done!”

\*Europe at that time was divided into West Europe (Germany & France) and East Europe (Everyone else)

“Ay, mebe” (Murphy’s bosses had once had a secret bet to see how many times he said ‘appen’ and ‘mebe’ in a meeting, but they had lost count and interest long before the coffee arrived). “Might have a tad o’ bother in Himalayas like, tandems aren’t much designed to go uphill and they’re quite high, int they?”

“What training have you actually done for this then?” John asked.

“Well, we did that Audax last month.” Mark defended.



“What’s that then?” Bill’s stomach lent across the bar, ears flapping “an Audax – Isn’t that some kind of goat-thing. I’m sure Richard Attenborough did a program on...hang on now I think of it, I think it was actually some kind of pigeon, or tree?”

I tutted at his ignorance of all things sporting “An Audax, It’s a non-stop long distance kind of cycle race...but you’re not allowed to go above a certain speed and there’s er, no real winner, you just have to finish the distance in a set time.”

“And did they have a special category for midgets?” John enquired, “Because it’d be unfair otherwise, what with your stumpy little legs.”

I ignored him, for the moment. “The thing was they’d purposely made the route go over as many hills as they could and they were all really steep bastards.”

“And really high, like the Alps or Himalayas?” John inquired innocently

“Well not quite.” Mark confessed, “but Murphy’s right, tandems struggle up hills, it puts huge amounts of strain on the chains and cranks. Murph and I managed to break a crank on t’ tandem last month, didn’t we Murph?”

“’Appen!”

John held up his hand, “Would someone once and for all explain to me whether that means yes or no in the strange dialect Murph speaks.

“It means yes. Doesn’t it, Murphy?”

“Mebe.”

John threw a beer mat at him. “So you finished this Autistic thing in time?”

“Well, when we finally got to the finishing line, everyone had packed up and gone home.”

“Great, that sounds like you’ll have no problems over a few little mountains.”

Sarcastic public school git!

“Did you do anymore?” he goaded.

“Not exactly but we did borrow Murphy’s tandem and do some training in Belgium...well sort of training.”

John turned to Murphy, “I didn’t know you had a tandem as well. Mind you I should have guessed, being a flat cap.”

“And he’s got a jack Russell and lives in a cave.” I added helpfully.

“Ah, dat’ll be yer man Murphy, you’re tarkin’ about der.”

The new arrival was Dermott\*, a genuine leprechaun, through and through, content to be

the stereotypical, drunken paddy of folklore and to be fair, he did a good job, almost being indistinguishable from the real thing (he even had a pig under his arm). We shared a flat with him and most of Ireland round the corner.

*\*pronounced dermott, rhymes with ~ott*

“So ye wents to Belgium to practice for getting’ over de Himalayas, did ye? Many big mountains are dere in Belgium?”

“Piss off!” I greeted, “Anyway it was just as well there weren’ t as Murph’ s tandem was made from cast iron in the 1930’ s and weighs more than Bill.” I turned to the bar “No offence”

“None taken” Bill smiled, his shirt front now sodden and completely opaque from the bar top beer lake he leant in.

“Aye,” Murph pulled himself out of his pint long enough to speak, “ And they failed t’ mention that they’ d never ridden tandem before.”

“True!” I owned up, “We did forget to mention that to you Murphy, but then you might not have lent it to us. Now shut up Dermott. Point is John, We set off in the rush hour with no idea how to ride the thing, but every idea how to fall off – mostly in front of irate drivers trying to get to work. Apart from that it was plain sailing – Laura on pain killers on day one, crashed on day two, pneumonia on day three, fucked the bike and ourselves totally by day four.

Dermott stopped spilling his pint long enough to speak, “So how comes yer goin’ around de world now after such a giant cock-up?”

“Oh, because we’ re crazy-arsed danger merchants– that and fucking stupid! The minute we got back we started looking to buy our own tandem, preferably one that weighed less than the Forth bridge and you could actually stop downhill!”

Murph laughed mid-pint, taking most of it up his nose and back out again into the glass – no wastage!

“I forgot t’ mention that it don’ t stop on downhill, especially in wet like.”

“Well how de fuck is dat gonna work in de Himalayas den – you’ re going to die!?” Dermott demanded.

“ Because we’ ve bought one that does, Brain of Britain!” Mark retorted.

“All this fuss about the Hima-bloody-layas, it’ s just a bunch of sodding rocks!” John interrupted, not being one much for nature.

“It’ s only the tallest bloody bunch of rocks on the friggin’ planet and it’ d better go uphill

and stop downhill as we're going over the highest road pass in the world."

"Dat sounds a bit hair-brained." Dermott sniggered.

"Well, when you are the King and Queen of mad-arsed plans, that probably makes sense".

Mark replied, making no sense and liberally spilling his pint of cider onto his cream chinos and striped blue shirt, worn casually as befitted a man about pub. This was partly due to being unable to hold his drink, literally, but also due to all the rabies, tetanus, yellow swamp fever and sheep tick jabs that had been introduced into our bloodstreams for the forthcoming.

I took over the baton as Mark and Murph was noisily engaged in trying to suck the cider off his shirt. Waste not, want not being our credo; but then, we had a lot of credos.

"Exactly, we intend to follow in the footsteps of the great explorers, such as ... such as..."

I elbowed Mark

"Oh yeah, Phileus Fogg and that other geezer with the silly name."

Even though I had been with Mark since before I could remember, sometimes I mostly had no clue what he was on about.

"Phileus Fogg? Wasn't he a fictional character?"

Mark's grasp of the difference between fiction and reality was always tenuous at best.

"Could be, but those curly things that look like prawn crackers with lemon grass go down a treat with cider. I wonder if Bill's got any?"

Mark stood up and turned to the bar, leaving me in an exposed position, conversationally speaking - the bastard!

John parried first "What bloke with a silly name? Gordon Zola?"

Murphy, uncharacteristically, stirred into life, "Rick Shaw?"

This scintillating repartee was too much for them as they disintegrated into fits of alcohol-induced merriment, followed by high-fives; but they can be tricky to master with five pints of rancid hops sloshing around your escutcheon canals as John and Murphy found, missing palms a few times and looking like right twats.

"What a pair of right twats!" said Mark returning minus his desired snack, "He only had three flavours of crisps and one of them was out of date. That old bird in the corner has eaten all the scratchings, greedy cow."

"I was just telling them about the great explorers we are going to emulate." I lied just a little, "Who are they again, you know the guy with the silly name and, and the other one?"

“Lawrence of Arabia and Clive of India” Mark obliged, obviously the trip to the bar having refreshed his memory.

“That’s not really a silly bloody name is it?” John complained, “I mean, Sodol Hexetol, that’s a stupid name.”

“Well if you were called John of Hounslow, or Murphy was called Murphy of Maidenhead…”

The thought of Murphy’s maidenhead was too much for John and he collapsed into another fit of giggles.

“Have Friday nights always been this crap?” I asked Bill as he crunched his way past.

“No!” he replied with unexpected vigour, “They used to be a lot worse before Dermott had that great idea of bring-your-own music nights.”

As if on cue the entire remaining ex-pat Irish community shambled through the doors, distressingly, most of them were afflicted with some sort of Gaelic instrument of musical torture. My pithy and frankly hilarious reply was drowned out as the ‘band’ lost no time in tuning up – a complete waste of time as what usually followed was indistinguishable and less musical. After a shaky start, they congealed into an amorphous lump of strumming, hitting, blowing and scraping. The formula was always the same: one of them would tentatively start off murdering a well-known Irish ballad and slowly the others would join in once they’d worked out which of the five it was and help kick it to death. By the time more dripping pints were set down among the empties with no attempt made to clear them away, Fields of Athenry was being dutifully butchered, which is what it deserved, in our opinion.

Taking a sip of his sixth Guinness and trying to make it look like it was his eighth, Murphy shouted above the cacophony,

“Fucking great song int it!”

“Amazing!” Bill volunteered from the bar.

“Fucking depressing” Mark yelled back,

“What the fuck is it?” John swayed imperceptibly before half stepping from his stool, “Sounds like the sort of thing you’d sing at the funeral of someone you’d murdered.”

One thing Mark, John and I were united on was that folk music is a merciless virus, Irish folk being a particularly virulent strain.

“Pleb!” Murphy’s eyes didn’t move from the musicians.

I lobbed a handful of peanuts at him, a poor substitute for Phileus Fogg's finest.

"Are you concentrating Murphy? We're supposed to be talking about the trip. You're our link-man, the lynch-pin! We need you to send on any emergency spares we might not be able to find outside of Europe. It's a big responsibility; the whole success of the adventure could be down to you! You'll just have to give up booze and ritual self-abuse until we return; what's the point of us being in a dire emergency ten-thousand miles away and all you can do is dribble down the phone and say, 'appen, mebe, someone crapped in me mouth'?"

John shook his head "What do you want to go through Asia for anyway? What do you expect to discover? The same shit as we've got here, that's what: jobs, rain, taxation, suicidally depressing day time TV."

"Don't be forgettin' the fucked-up infrastructure." Dermott added, returning for a slurp of peat.

"Ah, no Dermott" John corrected him, "that's where you're wrong actually! There is no infrastructure in most of Asia, everyone knows that.\*"

*\*They're probably making the same joke about Europe nowadays.*

Dermott finished pouring most of his pint down his front and looked up.

"Ah, ye can't go, I just remembered they're having a jelly wrestling contest in two weeks time\*, are you up for it, although hang on, maybe you'll be in Mongolia!"

*\*The jelly invariably won*

"Might be!" I retorted

"No girls" Dermott continued "except you of course Laura, you're more of an honorary bloke really."

I took this as the compliment it was meant to be. (I'd set fire to him to him back at the flat later.)

The cider and Guinness flowed, mostly all over the floor, the bar and Mark's chinos again, but this was Friday night and the night was young yet with plenty of time for another half dozen renditions of Whisky in the bastard jar and Bleedin' Christmas in New York - it was only bloody May!

However the playing and singing that had seemed so unmelodic initially was now a jangling mess of drunken one-upmanship. With all the musicality of a paddy of penguins on sprouts, the pub rang with clapping, stomping and Irish fucking jigs, reels and Riverdance moves all up

and down the room,

“Get dat fuckin’ dart out of Sean’s eye will ye, Dermott.” someone shouted from the other side of the pub during one of the merciful intervals when the players pissed out the beer they had ingested to get pissed in the first place.

The lads were on a mission now. Friday night had become Saturday morning. The non-regulars shoo-ed out and the door bolted, Bill set about removing glass and peanuts from his face with a plastic fork, while Dermott continued helping to remove his darts from various people.

Things were starting to swim and sway. The truth was, neither Mark nor I could hold our drink. Despite our Irish roots neither of us could get a pint of Guinness down for all the untreated sewage in the Liffy.

Dermott tacked back over as the peanuts flew, smacking him like a shower of peanuts thrown by a drunken moron.

“Are you sure Friday nights haven’t always been this crap?” I asked Bill again as he kicked his way through the debris littering the floor.

“Absolutely!”

“Fuck! There must be more!”

Bill paused, “Well, Laura, that’s why you’re off on this adventure, isn’t it?”

“Absolutely Bill, thanks for reminding us!”

Bill ambled back to the bar to pull some more pints, while Murphy, now near paralytic as he was at this stage every Friday night, started wailing Dirty Old Town

‘I met my girl by the factory wall

Dirty Old Town,

Dirty Old Town’

Whatever unspeakable dangers, whatever life-threatening situations awaited us in the next year and a half, life really could only improve...

\*

The following morning we woke up – Me, Mark and Murph – all fully clothed (thank god!) in Murph’s bed with a large cooking pot full of the remains of last night’s chilli. Murph, unphased, helped himself to some as, already dressed for work, he dragged himself to the door,

“Best o’ luck folks, send us postcard from t’other side o’ world. Jammy bastards! Let

yerselves out and take chilli will yer!” and he was gone.

Mark and I, already dressed for coffee, lost no time in dragging ourselves to the nearest bean joint for we had one pressing matter to sort before we left these shores – well two actually – we had no sponsorship and no wheels, the latter being a little more pressing.

The trip as a whole had suffered a severe body blow dangerously late in the day, due to a chicken-livered stab in the balls from the WWF. We had originally managed to mix up the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) and WWWF (World Wide Wrestling Federation) who organise tag matches where endangered species fight it out in the ring: the Undertaker giving Yang Yang the panda the smackdown in The Cage is an experience not easily wiped from the memory or clothes. The WWF however had turned turncoat: as we planned to machete our way through areas choked full of endangered critters, they had originally deemed it a one-off opportunity to jump in bed with *Team Sydney* and ride the coat tails of the inevitable media maelstrom that would follow us across the world. With panache and a Guatemalan camera crew, we put together a short video promo kindly narrated by the late Richard Briers while many other star celebrities of the time were crushed in the rush not to endorse our endeavour.

Unfortunately whereas we perceived our Pan-Global Panda-Kicking International profiles as a positive asset, at 11.23am on the Friday before we were due to leave and after we had made all our promo videos, etc, the entire WWF staff had a psychotic episode and decided that we were in truth the notorious Tamel Tiger Tandem Terroist Twins\* intent on putting the 'endangered' back into endangered-species and comprehensively announced that if we used their name in conjunction with our now apparently infamous attempt to cross the world on a bicycle made entirely from the bones and horns of endangered species, they would sue us to buggery, which seemed a slight overreaction.

*\*All terroist names illiterate – it's a psychological game winner.*

We had put a huge amount of time and effort, (and a fair bit of our already stretched cash) into this area of the trip and their lame-arse reason that given the sensitive areas we were going through, they feared with such human powder kegs as us on the loose, an International Incident was only a bear skin rug away. I mean, what exactly were they worried about - that we'd get to the Wolong Reserve in China and barbecue a Panda? Or pass the Orang-utan Sanctuary in Sumatra and run up a fetching orang-utan quilt? Mind you...

Truth was, we were having trouble with our image in other quarters as well. Dawes, the

makers of our tandem, had curtly informed us that they were not keen to get involved with 'round the world types', which amazed us. Perhaps they had less confidence in their products than we did? Which was a rather worrying thought as we were about to literally entrust our lives to it in the next year and a half. But a pattern had been emerging. Even before the Dawes / WWF incidents similar Machiavellian machinations had been afoot. The mountain bike people (not named for their own shame\*), had agreed to give us bikes, or not, or a tandem, or not, or come to our factory and help yourselves, or maybe..not?. Then the guy we were 'arranging' things with mysteriously 'left' the company in a body bag and we were informed by the suited gorilla who replaced him that the deal was off. We began to wonder if we were the victims of a tandem slur campaign on the part of envious rivals: when you are at the top of your game, the old green-eyed what-do-you-call-it of professional jealousy is never far away. At this rate, before approaching anyone else for sponsorship, we'd have to get hold of a bell to warn them we were coming.

#### *\*Muddy Fox*

Thankfully two companies were capable of thinking outside of the box\* and bucked the trend: Nokia and Karrimor. Nokia offered us tyres, and as, in our opinion, they made the best natural rubber products for road and bedroom use, we accepted with only one proviso: if they were vulcanised, Mark wouldn't have to wear those stupid pointy ears except for publicity shots.

*\* A meaningless expression, but nevertheless handy to drop into business meetings to look like a knob.*

Karrimor came up trumps with two sets of base layer clothing, each with built in climactic control, and a unisex opening allowing Eskimo-style copulation. On top of this, as they were trying to get into the cycle market, they begged us to road test their set of top secret, prototype panniers - the cutting edge of carrier technology! These capacious beauties (in, by chance, the same purple as the tandem!) were heat welded together at the seams at temperatures approaching that of the surface of the sun, thereby removing the need for stitching and making them entirely waterproof, to the extent Karrimor boldly boasted, with the onboard canoe-bag closure system, we could fill them full of air and paddle the whole bastard shabang to Sydney.

Even though one could hide Lord Lucan, Bismarck\* and Orson Wells in just one of the ginormous rear panniers, it was still a tight squeeze cramming in a year and a half's worth of



gear for two people along with the shed load of associated tools and spares for the tandem, into the two. This left the front panniers to carry out the dual roles of housing enough food and water to see us across vast areas of uninhabited deserts, swamps, polar ice caps and B roads.

Therefore, reducing unnecessary weight and bulk was as crucial to the success of the Mission and our survival as Elvis' Comeback Tour was crucial to the future of modern marquetry. To this end, our tent, an old Saunders Jetpacker was pressed into service. Capable of accommodating one adult or an unspecified number of midgets not exceeding the whole integer, this was no problem for a weekend's bar mitzvah but a year and a half would either weld us together; or we'd buy a bigger one. On the plus side, it only weighed 1.5 kg and we both figured we'd slim down after a month in Asia what with the constant diahorrea and dysentery so enjoyed by Brits abroad.

*\*The battleship, not the politician*

The other rather minor problem was that the indestructible, iron rimmed, monster wheels we had ordered had failed to arrive despite repeated promises from the company building them for us. Bespoke tandem wheels were not something one just picked up in Woolworths\*, the problem being off-road tandems really didn't exist at this stage – we were as ever, pioneers – and with the extra weight of two people on two wheels over the kind of rough, never-seen-tarmac-before trails we were going to be cruising on, normal wheels would crumble in a matter of days.

"Sod that! When the going gets tough and all that..." Mark rose magnificiently to the occasion

"Well, we haven't really got going yet, have we?" I corrected

"Listen wench, if we don't get on that bloody bike and get going right now, right this minute, we'll never get this adventure of the ground – we've been planning and provaricating for a year now!"

"Hang on, Captain Codface, that's my line! "

"Agreed then, bugger getting any more sponsorship and bugger the wheels – we'll go with the ones we've got and sort it out as we roll."

We 'yeeehaaaed' and made tracks.

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