

Zero-emission trekkers finish their gruelling trip to Moscow

Threesome elated to be in Red Square after 12-month bike trip

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We made it! From cycling through B.C. to rowing across the Bering Sea to cycling across Siberia, where Russian Yulia Kudryavtseva joined the team, we finally arrived in Moscow on Thursday.

It was June of 2004 when Colin Angus and I set off on a trip which was meant as both an expedition and a way to draw attention to our dependence on fossil fuels in this age of global warming. This was to be a zero-emissions journey. Although Colin chose to take a different route than Yulia and I on the journey, we both completed the long and gruelling adventure.

As Yulia and I pushed our bikes through Red Square, her expression changed from concern -- our press conference was now just five minutes away -- to elation at hearing my joyful cheers. For me, this was it -- the long-sought climax of a year's intensive planning, and five seasons of tough slog on land and sea.

The jingle of kopeks in my pocket carried a special meaning just then. Each coin was imprinted with a small knight and dragon -- Russia's patron saint, St. George, the Saint of Victory.

With an international press conference scheduled for noon, a flat tire at city limits had pushed us into desperation mode. The air grew dark with diesel exhaust, trucks shook the earth, and our heads ached from the ruckus. Traffic spilled from the streets and sped along sidewalks in full view of police. It felt like a war zone.

The last part of our trip had been a tough one. Yulia, who, unlike Colin and me did not complete the entire trip by human power alone, had travelled ahead by train to Moscow, but she backtracked and joined me in the city of Vladimir, 180 kilometres from the Russian capital, for the final push into the city. Traffic was thick and unfriendly; one trucker even poured a beer on my head, then targeted me with the can. As night fell we cycled with flashlights taped to our handlebars, then slept in the last pocket of forest outside Moscow.

The streets grew civilized as we entered Moscow's ancient core. Ornate brickwork rose on all sides, classic towers soared above the Moscow River, and we spied the colourful onion-capped spires of Russia's famous cathedral, St. Basil's, right beside the Kremlin and Lenin's tomb.

I was awed by the city. I had imagined arriving in Moscow for so long that the city seemed surreal when it finally appeared before me. After many months in the wilderness and in small villages the energy of the place was palpable.

Julia had spent her time in Moscow working with a Russian animal-rights organization, Vita, regarding bear cubs cruelly mistreated in Siberia. I learned Mishka, an exploited cub we encountered a month before, had been transferred by authorities to a zoo in the

town of Arknira-Osipovka. The vets who received Mishka reported the transfer saved her life.

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My own winter prospects had also undergone a reversal. My plans had been simple, stable and appealing: return to Vancouver by air to create a documentary film, write a book, and take then on the road in Canada. At some level, I was troubled by burning jet fuel on a return trip from an expedition designed to inspire action against climate change, but with no sponsors, plans or teammates beyond Russia, I saw no other option.

Then suddenly, quite by surprise, I had one.

Erden Eruc is a world-class adventurer pursuing a dream to cycle the earth's continents, row its oceans, and climb its tallest mountains -- the Around-n-Over expedition (www.around-n-over.com). From his home in Seattle, Erden heard Colin Angus on Canadian radio, talking about rowing the Atlantic with a Canadian woman en route to becoming the first person to circumnavigate the planet by human power. What concerned Erden was that Colin, now, had a new expedition partner -- and where did that leave me? Erden made a tremendous offer: he would ship his own high-end offshore rowboat to Portugal. After I cycled west through Europe, Erden and I would meet in Lisbon, and launch a boat loaded with food for 120 days at sea.

I faced the heart-wrenching decision of postponing a reunion with family and friends, a weekend of music and group kayaking at Galiano Island's premier resort, Whaler Bay Lodge. The lodge's owners offered an all-inclusive weekend, and after a year of tent life in Siberia, what could be more appealing?

And there was more to lure me to Canada than a relaxing kayaking weekend. During the long expedition Yulia and I became close -- we always had to be there for each other, to help each other through.

It was hard not to fall in love with someone as dependable and honest and loving as Yulia. She will soon be on her way to Canada for her own adventure, a new life in a country she has never before visited -- as my fiancée.

I know Yulia will be there when I'm back, after four months in a rowboat on the Atlantic Ocean, with a teammate who, at 43, packs twice as much horsepower as me. I accepted Erden's offer and mentally reconfigured my life to include crossing Europe and North America by bicycle, and a winter row from Lisbon to Miami. It would be an exciting adventure and another chance to promote human power.

And as I closed the distance to Moscow, I knew it wasn't a race that propelled me. Adventure is about embracing challenge, which when accomplished, becomes a rite of passage to wisdom. This is from Erden's website, and it touches the life's central journey of growth and learning, the true fruits of adventure.

vancouvertomoscow.com

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