

- FIRST EDITION -

From Bicycle commuting to SunTrip

AUTONOMOUS SOLAR-POWERED BICYCLE



Laurent SOUCHET

From Bicycle Commuting To SunTrip

Laurent Souchet

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Table of Contents

Promotion.....	1
Preface.....	2
From bicycle commuting	4
To The Sun Trip.....	9
The Sun Trip, what the hell is that?	9
Tell me, Florian, do you see me as a candidate?.....	12
Christel, what do you think?	14
Orange, colleagues, shall I go?	18
Hi folks! Guess?.....	22
What about me?	24
Preparations	26
The right questions	26
The passage through Kiev	27
Silky One	32
Where to sleep	45
What's in the trailer?.....	47
Did you say visas?	53
Currency and CB.....	55
Health, vaccines	56
Physical training.....	58
Preparation week-end.....	62
Lucas.....	63
<i>J'me Recycle</i> Association	64
The Sponsors	71
What's your phone number?	75

Culture	77
Will I arrive - Will I not arrive?	80
The Prologue	81
A few steps to warm up	82
Private partner seeks partner... ..	85
The trip	91
The real route	95
The numbers of the trip in summary	99
Geography	115
Weather, beware of surprises	118
Animals	121
Cities	123
A typical day	126
Ride alone or even in pairs	130
Meetings	133
Food	151
Stop, control!	157
Fear feeling	162
Never sick?	165
My favorite thing	166
Guangzhou the end of the trip	168
After The Sun Trip	172
The return to the family	172
The links with the Suntrippers	173
Friends' look	174
What adventure for the future?	176
If I left again, what would I change?	178

Should the association *J'me Recycle* recycle itself? 181

Acknowledgements 183

Postface 186

Promotion

From Bike Commuting To SunTrip

Independently solar-powered bicycle

This book is translated from the original French, *Du Vélotaf au Sun Trip*.

English version by **Elena Idone** [LinkedIn](#).

This is a J'me Recycle book. J'me Recycle association aims to promote the use of bicycles. J'me Recycle Publishing is the act of publishing an in-progress ebook using lightweight tools and many iterations to get readers' feedbacks in order to improve the book.

This book is for sale at <https://jmerecycle.fr>. You can give what you want.



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Preface

I received the almost final version of Laurent's book at the beginning of December 2019, fifteen months after the end of the Sun Trip 2018. It is the time to digest an extraordinary event. Time to put on paper the memories of the adventure of a lifetime.

This book is a beautiful gift for me. It reflects Laurent's unexpected and successful participation.

Fans of the Sun Trip will find a story in a direct tone, full of information and unpublished anecdotes. The adventure told from the inside, without filters and without prittle-prattle. There is nothing more true.

People tempted by the idea of one day taking up the challenge will find a lot of advice, to prepare themselves and to move forward into the unknown. There is no doubt that this book will be useful for many, that it will make dreams come true.

From Bicycle commuting to Sun Trip really sums up the image I have of Laurent and his participation. The Sun Trip came as an UFO in his life. And he *simply* caught the ball, to see what there was at the end of the road, at the end of himself. The Sun Trip as an alibi to take on the world. I think it's perfect. I couldn't have asked for better.

A morning in mid-August 2018, at the other end of Eurasia, which is very large, I found Laurent the day of arrival. If usually people are in state of exaltation, in tears, or elated by the events experienced, he was calm and peaceful. He had clear ideas, summarized in two sentences kept during the editing of the film

of the edition.

Leaving home has changed me. The Sun Trip has changed my vision of the world, in a positive way!

He had come a long way and was eager to find his people, certainly to tell them.

Thank you Laurent.

Florian Bailly

From bicycle commuting

January 2017



My bikes for commuting mountain biking especially the M5 for summer

— Go ahead and touch me some more! Don't you want to run me over while you're at it?

No, I'm not in China, I'm just in Lyon on the RN6 on a section of road that narrows from two to one lane, before approaching yet another roundabout! These brave motorists in such a hurry shouldn't be a bit forced to reduce their speed or else they'll take the roundabout in a straight line, shouldn't they!

I can say today that cycling in Lyon is a good training to ride to China. With one or two exceptions that we'll see later (see Almaty and Urumqi in the section on cities).

Is death to be expected when one travels seven thousand

kilometres a year on a *bike* in all weathers? The answer is yes. I always say that I'll have to get run over for there to be a development in place but I doubt it! I once saw a cyclist on Bron lying on the ground just a minute after impacting a car. I'm really not sure if she survived... And the pedestrian crossing has not had its signs reinforced to indicate the passage of a bicycle path on this shared pedestrian crossing!

Is the *bicycler commuting* a suicidal being or is he more aware of the interest of cycling for his physical and moral health on a daily basis?

I always have fun riding my bike to work, even when work isn't a pleasure...

Cycling, despite the stress it can cause through the vigilance it requires, brings an immediate physical benefit in the effort. And that feeling of knowing the weather intimately! In the morning I only have to open the window to know how to dress. As people from the north say, there is no bad weather, there is only bad clothes.

— One, two or three layers of clothes today?

— Shorts or pants?

My nose, my eyes, my body temperature sensors are here to tell me.

I live better when I ride my bike than when I go to work by car, by scooter 125 or even by bus. The only thing I miss is that I can't take anyone with me on the bikes I use and the volume of transportable shopping is more limited. But how many times did

I need to drive someone to work over the years? Maybe once!

The biker who is leaving the city, the five-seven kilometres zone around the heart of the city, at a glance, which I would call the little crown, is quickly taken for a fool! Or even a pain in the butt that fries the lights and slows down motorist at the roundabouts, narrowing, on single-track vehicle.

— You can't be seen when it's dark, it's too dangerous to ride a bike!

Yes, I have already done some one-way exchanges with my four-wheeled friends! I think it should be mandatory to pass the bike license at the same time as the car license, with for example five hundred kilometres to ride a bike in the city to get your car license. This would allow to balance discussions and will bring perhaps more understanding.

The weak is always wrong, same principle between the bicycle and the car.

A bicycler commuting is more than ridiculous from a motorist's point of view. Sometimes people tell you you're brave... It's not only in politics that words are mocked. I always hear crazy instead of brave, otherwise wouldn't they come to show their courage in turn and add to the flow of cyclists?

I sometimes get angry and bang on the hood of a car (it doesn't damage the vehicle but it makes enough noise to get the message across that I exist and I'm not happy) when I narrowly escaped an accident. As I get older I try to be more and more serene and to reduce these little indelicate gestures... but I also don't want to fall on a bad day.

In ten years I have seen increasing the number of cyclists in Lyon's inner suburbs. With the rise of electric bikes, bicycles are now accompanied by electric scooters, single-wheelers and skateboards. But outside the inner suburbs, very very little has changed, despite the price of fuel, which in my humble opinion is still not high enough to dissuade people from using their cars for the *Car commuting*.

Would I be taken more seriously if, instead of driving 7000 kilometres a year from home to work, I drove that distance to China?

The answer is yes, and that's strange! I must admit, however, that that many kilometres in a straight line (following the curve of the Earth) rather than going in circles in its microcosm remains a small personal adventure that is quite enriching in terms of human and geographical discovery. Enough to write a few pages of memory of this **sweet dream** that is the trip from Lyon to Canton on a solar bike.

Without this preparation as cyclist from Lyon for several years now, my little Lyon-Canton adventure would certainly not have been possible, due to a lack of sufficient physical training and experience to endure the roadsides frequented by trucks, buses and other vehicles with four or more wheels.

The daily bicycle commuting serves as basic training to survive on busy roads and to know how to cover oneself in all weathers.

It's as if I had prepared myself for this sweet dream of travelling

on a solar-powered bicycle without knowing it.

But then again, I had to know about [The Sun Trip](#) Lyon-Canton.



Logo of The Sun Trip

To The Sun Trip

March 2017

— What the hell is The Sun Trip?

The Sun Trip, what the hell is that?



Part of the Sun Trip 2018 organizers

The Sun Trip is, first of all, an idea germinated in the mind of Florian Bailly during a solo trip to Japan. He was able to rally people to his idea of organizing a collective solo trip inspired by what exists in sailing.

I'd like to take this opportunity to show you a part of the fine organization team for the Sun Trip 2018. Florian Bailly, Angélique Galvaing, Guillaume Devot, Cédric Vinatier, Anick-Marie Bouchard, Olivier Reginensi.

But before coming to this picture, I remember I came across the site [The Sun Trip](#) one day in March 2017, I can't say by what chance but what I remember is the shock it gave me. A shiver in my body. An accessible dream where I could apply?

— A solar bike as vehicle?

— Does it exist and did some already make a great trip with it?

— Unbelievable!

Departure from Lyon and this since 2013. A big trip every two or three years and I wasn't even aware of it! And I thought that with Twitter and Facebook we didn't miss anything anymore!

After the surprise and a moment of reflection, I saw a way to go further, faster with a bike powered by electricity. It was announced the start of a race in 2018, starting in Lyon, arriving in China in a city that I had not yet noticed.

That China where I never imagined I would go one day. And passing through Kazakhstan, which I didn't even know existed! I felt tinging of pleasure imagining myself registering, building a solar bike, leaving once again for a bivouac, after thirty-five years without having done it again since my little Paris-Holland-Paris trip, lasted one summer month, when I was young and reckless. And to leave at fifty-three years of age is not a big deal today, but it's not really being young anymore.

I quickly thought of the things that were not very clear or even stupid! Why using solar panels to recharge an electric battery? Wouldn't the weight of the panels and the material needed to carry and operate the panels be self defeating compared to just an electric bike that you would recharge as you went along on sockets? Do we really have to go through desert areas to justify

the use of an autonomous vehicle, as if we were in an end-of-the-world period where the use of electricity would no longer be assured? Or if the weight is not too much of a disadvantage, what impact will the weather have on recharging? What impact on the manoeuvrability of a two or three-wheeled bicycle if you take two to four photovoltaic panels with you? How to repair in case of breakdown?

As two editions had already taken place, in 2013 and then in 2015 with several dozen participants, who some came back for the third time in 2018, and that a professor of IUT had won the 2015 event, I thought that there was perhaps a way that the advantage of recharging by riding compensates for the overweight and that there was only one way to find it out: to try it!

My curiosity wasn't enough to explain my desire to try. I also wanted to get out of my comfort zone and out of my *bicycle commuting-work-asleep routine*. Even though I like most of the time these three things in my life, a repetitive job done for 25 years in the same company, push me to get some fresh air before I got too old or fragile. And a few key words in this trip were there to reinforce my decision to try the registration.

Photovoltaics first, in which I'm believing since 2007; ten years earlier I had installed a solar roof to produce electricity without having nothing else to do but check the electrical panel after a storm and read the meters once a month, or even once a year, to ask for payment for my production.

Then there's the **bicycle**, which I've always appreciated. The bicycle was my first vehicle (after the stroller). The autonomy and the freedom to ride around my neighbourhood, enlarging

the tour as I went along and I wasn't yet 10 years old. The bicycle was used during my adolescence, to go to school, to meet my family members, to go for a few rides alone or in a group. Then as an adult, the useful side of the bike I use to go to work and my main vehicle for almost 7000 kilometres a year. The term of the moment is *bicycle commuting* when used in this way, probably to distinguish it from the weekend sports cyclist.

Russia and other Russian-speaking countries such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan: countries to consider when you travel to China. This strengthened my choice to study Russian just I entered the 4th grade in French college, when I was a rather mediocre student. Russian had attracted me more than Spanish, which was considered easier for students like me! I have never regretted this choice, even if I am still so mediocre in foreign languages. The small group that we were, the teacher who was a good pedagogue and the trip to Russia that we had successfully arranged, left me with a good impression of the language, of the country and of its people.

But there were still some troubles: how could I manage the separation from my family for several weeks or even months, I hardly ever left? What would be the cost of the operation? How could I get away from work without problems? Am I credible for such an adventure?

Tell me, Florian, do you see me as a candidate?



Florian and I, invited by EDF to the Festival Lumière in 2018

The first step of the project was to be accepted by **Florian Bailly, the designer of the Sun Trip**, which was already in its third organization of solar bike trips from Lyon to Eastern Europe for the first two editions and for the first time in the depths of Asia.

How to approach it? Am I credible for such an adventure? Even though I hadn't made a bivouac for thirty-five years, even if I have a very poor command of foreign languages, that means I find difficult to ask even for help, in case I need to find an item in a store, even if I sleep badly at night, even if I often look forward to disastrous scenarios...

So I don't use a short text to present my application, writing is the means I master at the best, so I might use my favorite tool as well: the text message. A little text where I announce the colour, I'm a *bicyclist commuting* and I've done some bivouac and a main *solo* bike trip (the word is close to *solar* isn't it?) thirty-five years ago! And I added that I was working at Orange.

Florian's answer, didn't take long to come.

— **A big YES !**

So cool his answer in three words. First step passed successfully, even if I thought the word *Orange* might have been a big part of the immediate answer! We'll see later that I wouldn't succeed in getting the Orange company to join my little adventure, even if the hope had helped me to prefer the orange colour. Orange to be seen on the road and orange for which company I've been consecrating my working days for almost half of my life. That's why the bike, the trailer, the frames supporting the photovoltaic panels, the jacket and the neck warmer were orange.

Later on, in moments of doubt, I will have the opportunity to talk to Florian again.

Florian always knew how to find the right and necessary words to encourage me in this project.

Christel, what do you think?

April 2017

— *Cricri d'Amour*, would you see me leaving for a few days on my bike...to go to China?



Christel in June 2017

I had to speak to my wife about this project, at lunch or dinner, or even in the morning. I already don't remember. That means that there was no immediate reaction(s). It took a few explanations, arguing in favour of the Sun Trip and going smoothly. The main argument was that I could back out at any time, even if it meant being a wimp or someone inconsequential, a living room dreamer.

I was given the counter-arguments right from the start when I read the adventure rules.

— What's that? The organization is only present at the beginning and at the end? What do they do then?

— Yes, that's the principle of adventure, you're alone or in a team. The organization takes care of the promotion and the accommodation at the departure and arrival. A remote support can be given, but you have to plan your repatriation insurance.

— But is this thing a cult?

— Yes, and the guru is Florian, who puts money in his pockets and takes advantage of the faithful. By the way, look, there are some followers who are coming back for the second or third time starting in 2018. But don't worry, we'll have a preparatory weekend and I'll be able to see the degree of sectarianism that governs the group. In my opinion, it's no worse than the Tour de France sect. The question is rather what degree of competitiveness is needed? Do you need sponsors to be able to benefit from a solar vehicle worthy of this competition, do you have to be young and in great physical shape?

— And how are you going to manage your diet? I'm the one who prepares all the meals and does the shopping.

— Really...you'll have to come with me then! Are you ready to travel two hundred kilometres a day?

— And how can we stand this separation?

— That's a good question! Will you meet me in Almaty, before we enter China? There's no need for a visa, a passport is enough.

That's the initial exchange. The famous acceptance cycle of sorts. At the end, my wife followed and participated in all phases of the preparation. She accompanied me to the various important appointments that marked the preparation of the trip.

My wife, who knew how to talk about my project to Patrick Gouttenoire, a welder, who was my first fan and who supported me from the moment I announced my registration, without fail all along the way.

My wife, who knew how to support a guest Suntripper, with whom I had established a relationship of exchange for the joint preparation of the Sun Trip and which proved a little invasive, even imperative.

My wife, who accompanied me to the meetings of professionals with a well marked temperament like Céline Trousseau from the boutique [Cyclociel](#) in *Villeurbanne*, from Christian Touzé, designer of the [carbon trailer](#), the CTZ 100 litres, that we met in Vaumeilh near *Sisteron*, from Guillaume Devot from [Declic-Eco](#), great installer of the Sun Trip's solar vehicles, that we met in *Saint Mitre les Remparts*.

My wife with whom we tested the sharing of accommodation between cyclists with the help of the organization [Warmshowers](#).

And the trip to Italy, near Turin, to meet [Solbian](#) for the solar panel equipment.

I even made a video in English to explain my need to Tom Nostrant, creator of the [Click-Stand](#), the telescopic cane used to complement or replace the original stand which is often too small and too light to support a solar bike.

In short, even though my wife far prefers four-wheels vehicles, and has a bus driver's license, she knew how to let me live this adventure that was going to disrupt our daily lives a bit.

And our three children: Sylvain, Lucie and Aurélie followed their mother's example and the solar adventures closely. I was supported by my family from the beginning to the end. I had moments of doubt during the trip and I was able to call them on the phone and I was always encouraged.

Now that the trip went well, Christel, what do you think of the Sun Trip adventure?

— I'm proud of you my darling!

Orange, colleagues, shall I go?



Lyon, Tour Part-Dieu, my colleagues test Silky One

I'm an IT specialist at Orange, I spend my days coding IT management applications in back, front or mobile, as they say at the moment. We work on a set and everyone's life sweats a little on each one. If on top of that you like to talk about yourself, then your colleagues follow your life a little. That's how my colleagues quickly became aware of my registration and my preparation for the Sun Trip.

But above all, I had to inform my hierarchy and human resources of the need to be absent for three consecutive months from mid-June to mid-September. Could I be absent from work for three months without risks? The answer in a large company like Orange is rather yes. It's fairly easy to be absent for three months if you're not indispensable, but you still need to plan it well in advance to notify your line manager(s), the human resources department you report to.

How can you ask for about sixty days of leave? There are several possibilities, either to have set aside days of leave not consumed in previous years on a *time savings account* if your company allows it, or to deposit an *unpaid leave*.

With an unpaid leave you get plucked financially. For my part, I had planned something, a trip with my wife, some kind of adventure before I got too old, in for two or three years. By adding the current year's leave in 2018 and the leave from my time savings account, I was able to deposit the three months needed for the trip and a few extra days to cushion the return to work and spend time with my family after the long separation.

The organization of the Sun Trip allowed a maximum of 100 days to reach the final city in China, otherwise I would not be able to repatriate the bike. The adventure is a one-way trip, the return of our body is at our convenience and our charge, only the bike is taken care of by a return in a container on the train of the new Silk Roads. I wanted at all costs to be within this maximum limit of one hundred days. I looked at the score obtained by the first to arrive in Astana in 2013, Raf Van Hulle, who also came second in 2015. I told myself that given the sporting level of the winner, who was much more highly trained than I was, and given the evolution of the solar panels and batteries, I could consider to be at the same level than Raf in 2013, with two hundred kilometres per day on average. On a forecast route of 12000 kilometres and five days of surplus due to hazards breaks, customs, bad weather, illness, I was thus forecasting sixty-five days, which gave me time to recover and find the family before going back to work. Strangely enough, this is exactly the number of days it would take me to reach Canton.

In order not to risk on the return to work, in the department that we temporarily leaving, theoretically you should not exceed three months, otherwise they could very well offer you another service. And after a year's absence, it's definitely more restrictive in theory, since you could be offered another position in the geographical area. In practice, the IT department in which I work would not have been a problem. My proximity manager, my n+2 and n+3 once I was made aware of my rather crazy project, granted me permission to be out of office without difficulties, on condition that I finished the various work in progress before leaving and that I passed on the information for the maintenance of the rare applications for which I was not sharing the responsibility. One of the advantages of working in a team on a computer development and sharing information is that you can take a rest without compromising the smooth running of the project.

The closer the departure approached, the more nervous I became. I had to finish three applications, one I was maintaining alone, developed in AngularJs front-end and Node.js back-end, a second one in Java back-end and Android mobile and iOS back-end which had to evolve at the infrastructure level to follow the security evolutions around https exchanges. And a third one, a new mobile application with Java and Php back-end, which was developed by four people. A new mobile application, for our customers in the store, which had to be delivered quickly to participate in an internal competition, the Prime Zone Cup. It was a bit stressful, the days were a bit long but at the end the timing was respected. And I had the great surprise of receiving an SMS on my bike during the Lyon - Guangzhou trip of the successful participation in the Orange internal competition. We were in the top three and had won the Prime Zone Cup 2018! An individual

gift in the form of a study trip or computer equipment worth €3,000 each! And that's how, on my return from China, I was able to ask for a Mac Book Pro with which I wrote this book in particular.

Any news about a possible job promotion? There was nothing to the horizon but if not, you have to make a choice: to enjoy life inside or outside the company? And some losses on the individual bonus for the second half of 2018, yes it will be the case, but the impact is minimal.

There could also be a trouble on the atmosphere at work of colleagues who are left behind for a while before or after leaving. The relationship at work is something thin and delicate, especially when you work on a set of twenty people where intimate life is easily shared or contemplated. A little thing can put you on the side of the guy you want to avoid. This trip was more than an opportunity to be seen in a positive light. The crazy and questioned side was rather a positive element on the relational side, even if I really drove crazy my colleagues drunk with my preparation. It was rare at lunchtime in the canteen that I didn't address one element of the trip. On the way back, work resumes quickly and you have to know how to come back and show that you haven't lost any know-how, even if it means spending more hours at the beginning to get back to the niche of a new project, that requires you to regain knowledge of the functional and technical aspects of the project.

During the preparation period, I had more support from my colleagues than I expected. I was helped with the organization of the trip, because around me there were long-time travellers: cyclists, motorcyclists, walkers who have surveyed the land far

more than I would ever do and in unusual places. Their advice, the factual elements to prepare the trip and their encouragements have been a great help and a great help to me. It is about survival on the trip, first of all, and the ease with which the trip can be made. Preparation is important because you have to think from the small bandage to the identity papers. The mental projection of the trip as a whole that can be made by the stories you hear, read or discover on Internet is important to see what is still missing in the mental and physical preparation.

Without my colleagues I would have been less well prepared.

Hi folks! Guess?



Ophélie Brissaud at Ofée's kennel, just before the departure for the adventure

August 2017... June 2018

— Do you know what? I'm going to China with some other crazy solar-powered bicycle freaks!

First the surprise:

— Seriously?

Then the disbelief:

— But are you going for a year? With Christel?

No one was really surprised that I started this trip. It seemed to stick to me like a glove, to the outside view that friends wear on me.

It's true that I've frequented a bit the horse world thanks to my children. A world that understands passion.

And that's how I received encouragement and support from all sides.

I was surprised at the general interest that was generated. The culture of cycling and adventure in France is more important than I thought.



Benoit Pfister tests Silky One's sitting during a pre-departure invitation

What about me?

July 2017

— Now that I've told everyone that I'm going to Canton on a solar-powered bike, I have no choice or it's a lifetime of shame!

I envisioned the trip on an impulse that probably came from afar.

Telling everyone that we're going to make the trip is a way of persuading ourselves that we're going to do it, it becomes concrete from the moment you consider it out loud and not in a semi-dream in the evening in your bed.

I would go through periods of doubt about my ability to carry out

the preparation and the trip. But doubts are my life. I had doubts about having a stable job, I had doubts about having a family and being responsible enough, I had doubts about having a house one day...

Doubt doesn't prevent you from acting, it does, on the contrary, it brings you some restless nights!

I could write that I travelled Chamonix-Canton trip in sixty-five days on a solar bike, but sometimes I still doubt that I did it, I am obliged to look at my photos, and yes, it comes back to me, the meetings and the roads! Maybe one more reason to write this book, to keep a trace before forgetting.

Preparations

Tackling preparations is like managing a mini project. Cut and classify in order of priority and dependences. For this, I usually use a Kanban that I've been recommending for years, namely [Trello](#). The tool makes it easy to organize note cards by theme. A theme is represented by a column and each card has a note in which you can write a lot of information, so as one or more lists to check. Very practical with its web and mobile version that synchronize very quickly and can be read again even without a network, so easy to consult during your trip.

Manage the preparations like a mini project!

When you prepare an adventure trip every thirty-five years, you have to rediscover everything. I better understand that some people go back on a trip regularly: it allows you to pick up where you left off and do better the next time.

The right questions

- Will you go through Turkey?
- What are you riding with? How much does your car weigh?
- Are you bringing tools to fix it?
- How do you sleep?
- Do you take food with you?
- Do you need visas? And if you have an accident, how do you deal with it?
- Aren't you afraid of getting sick or being bitten by a dog?
- How do you pay?
- Do you take an international mobile plan or a SIM card to each

country?

- Are you sure you are physically able?
- Do you have a blog, do you have sponsors?
- Do you take a GPS, do you have a tag to follow you?
- Are you going to visit a bit?
- Are you sure you can speak English everywhere?
- Do you speak Chinese?
- Sincerely, it's not possible you can arrive!

The passage through Kiev

- Are you taking the north road or the south road?



Kiev in the rain on 2 July 2018

I quickly made the choice between the Northern or Southern route.

I did not see myself passing through Turkey, I was afraid of badly lit tunnels; the accident of 2013 are not playing in favour of this

route.

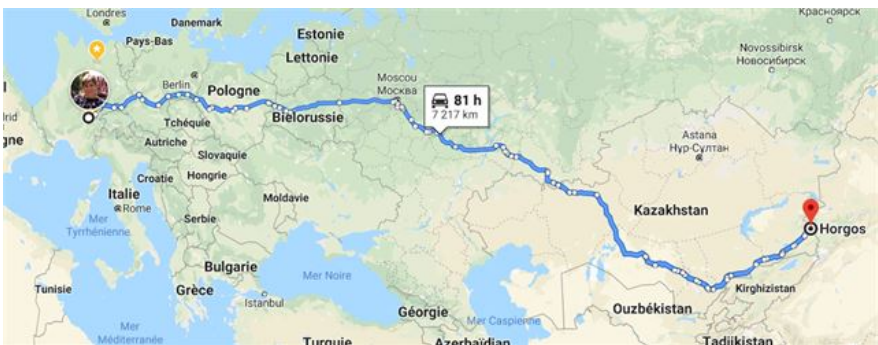
And then the fastest route is by the north. When you want to go fast and you don't want to go to visit the historic Silk Road, then you go north. This was the choice of a large number of Suntrippers.

As a reminder, the Earth is a globe and the straight line of a Google Maps map is not the shortest way. However one can find the vision of the globe of the Earth with Google Maps on computer by making a long zoom out until seeing the spherical planet.

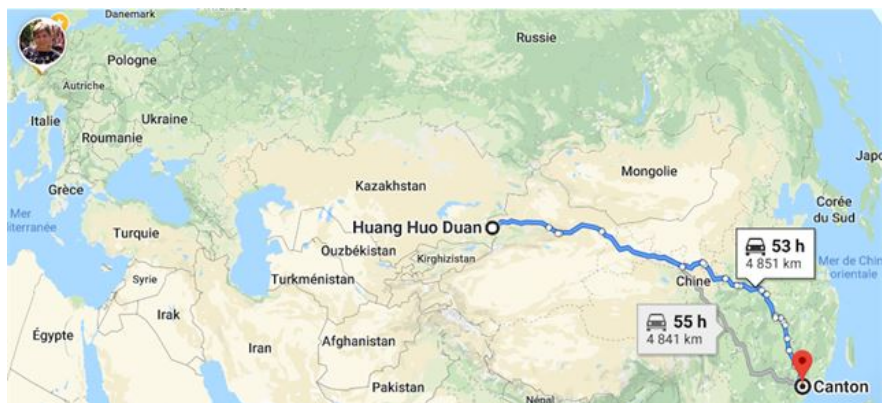
And to begin I invite you to test your favorite mapping software, Google Maps or other, and try to establish a route between Lyon and Canon (Guangzhou if you want to be up to date).

Bad luck, the Chinese borders are closed for Google Maps and other maps!

And there I was only thinking about the car ride, so the bike ride, so that you have to cut the trip in two parts at least.



Lyon-Khorgos in Kazakhstan



Khorgos-Guangzhou in China

Here is an essential element to prepare. You will be able to get a more precise idea of the trip from my actual route.

It is convenient and comforting to prepare your route in advance with several possible options but in detail it is clearly impossible to plan each stage in advance. Are we going to do 100, 200, 300 kilometres a day, every day? Impossible to predict.

The route in detail has never been finalised. We had to adapt during the trip.

Rather, I invite you to plan the main crossing points, cities, rivers (or mountains if you are a fan of mountains like Michael Polak) and especially border crossings. Typically, the crossing point to enter China by bike has been a point under discussion for a while before becoming the crossing to take, and so **Korghos has imposed itself**. Starting from there, if we do the same for the border crossings of Ukraine, which has war zones with Russia and similarly with Kazakhstan, we find ourselves with restricted choices of crossing. But between these points choices are

possible, except in Kazakhstan where we find ourselves with a single road to reach Almaty.

Once these border-crossing points have been set, it is important to estimate a range of dates when the visa is required. I am thinking in particular to Russia. For this we must estimate the number of kilometres that we think we will travel at the minimum and maximum per day in order to estimate the range of days when we will cross the border that requires the visa stamped on the right date.

For Russia, if you arrive at the border crossing earlier than your entry date, you will have to wait for the famous date indicated! And for the exit it is even worse: you have to leave before the exit date indicated on the visa, otherwise you will be sent to prison awaiting your judgment and you will not be able to return to Russia before five years. This is the experience of Romàn Neauport: he spent two days in prison awaiting his trial which was held with an English teacher, who translated!

For Russia take a thirty-day visa, even if fifteen days seems wide!

Romàn tested for you the fifteen-day visa. And he will not be back for the Sun Trip until 2023, if he wants to cross Russia! He has been banned from entering Russian territory for five years.

The bad weather caused delay. The beginning of the route surprised all the Suntrippers. Standing rain and cold for several days in a row forced us to reduce our daily distances and therefore the date of entry into Russia. And that's how we find us at the exit of Russia with one day delay compared to the date of

our visa. Rather than letting you out and advice you how to avoid mistakes again, it seems that in Russia keeping in prison for a few days is a norm. This is how Bernard and Yann Cauquil and I found Romàn on the road at the entrance of Kazakhstan, while he was well ahead of us.

To obtain a Russian visa in Lyon, I went through [Lyon visa](#). In their premises, there is an instant camera; a photo is necessary for the Russian visa but it must be different from the passport photo, so if you thought you could reuse the one from your brand new passport, you were wrong! I first pre-filled my information on the Lyon visa website following their tutorial and then I went there. In twenty minutes the formalities were done and a few weeks later I received the visa.

The route is therefore points of details of border crossings, and points with large mesh, a list of countries, then a list of cities and then you refine if you go by the river along, which allows you to consider a minimum difference in altitude, or through the mountains, if you are a fan of climbing like Michael Polka.

How to prepare your GPX routes? I could propose several sites but I think it's better to keep looking because I haven't found any site that can be a unique reference. On the other hand, in 2018 I strongly advise against using Google Maps for biking to create your route. At the very least you can use it in car version, but in bike version it's the best way to find yourself in passages impossible to cross.

Most of us used [OsmAnd on an Android phone](#) to view the day's route. Maps are downloadable in advance due to the size and are usable offline. Note that there is an extension that also allows you

to see the elevation difference but beware: the elevation differences are not completely reliable and you really need to zoom in to see the differences in elevation, otherwise you'll quickly be led to believe that there are none! It's John and the Colle brothers who let me discover this option on OsmAnd during the last days of the trip. The forecasts on the difference in altitude of the day are like the weather forecast in France! To be taken with a margin of error. That's how the young people were announcing me some flat zones which I found rather hilly!

I'd bought a second-hand Garmin, but the small size of the screen and the lack of freedom to choose maps outside Europe let me prefer the smartphone. But watch out for the choice of smartphone: I went for a Samsung Galaxy S8, I wasn't disappointed. It must be robust and visible in bright light, also hold as much water as possible.

Silky One

July 2017

- Where do you buy your solar bike?
- I take the mechanic option (option C) and I call my next travelling companion: **Silky One** like *The Silk Road* and *One* like the first one (you never know, there might be a second one).



Silky One - solar version

Waiting for Decathlon to release a solar model, the tracks are as follows:

Option A: the purchase of a used solar bike. Why not, if he hasn't suffered too much? But the solar bikes are not frequent, so the offer is limited.

Option B: the purchase (or rental?) of a [Sun Travel](#) trailer, which is first of all a trailer for the transport of its bivouac. But most of the time it is bought with solar panels on top. The trailer can also be equipped with a motor for the cyclist's propulsion (a so called push-up trailer), its battery and the steering system. A small advertisement passing by for Guillaume Devot and his company [Déclic-Eco](#), which has been the reference and technical pillar for many Suntrippers of the 2018 adventure and previous ones. Without him I would still be wondering how to ride my solar bike. The advantage of the Sun Travel: you don't change your cycling habits, you can keep the one you have if it is strong

enough for the Lyon-Canton adventure.

Option C: you can build your solar bike from existing elements. The field of possibilities becomes larger. What type of bike? Trailer or not? Number of solar panels? What type of engine? What type of battery?

Option D: you just build your bike and everything around it to become a solar bike! For option D I think about Bernard Cauquil, the one I call *Gyro Gearloose*, who invents a new bike a month (I'm barely exaggerating!).

For the bike, I wanted to take inspiration from Bernard Cauquil's bike, the one he designed to win the Sun Trip 2015, even though I suspected that the bike was only part of the equation as far as his score was concerned. I hadn't understood all of his tricks, but I kept the main idea of the two-wheeled recumbent bike with photovoltaic panels on the roof, despite the large number of three-wheeled bikes that we see during the Sun Trip (we say trike in the middle).



Christel weekend trike test

I already had a M5 20x20 eco recumbent bike that I didn't use much but I liked for its lightness and aerodynamics. I looked in Lyon to test other more enduring models and while I was at it I also tested a trike. In Lyon, there is Céline Trousseau from [Cyclociel](#), our passion in Lyon for this type of recumbent bike. I didn't like my weekend of trike testing. Céline directed me to two brands of recumbent bikes and I preferred [Azub](#).



Céline de Cyclociel, specialist in recumbent bikes and trikes

At the beginning I started with a 26 inch control on both wheels despite Celine's warning for a preference to use a 20 inch front wheel to put my feet on the ground more easily given my height of 1m75 and the Azub's fairly high ground clearance compared to other recumbent models.

She told me that her contact at Azub, Honza Galla, had participated in the Sun Trip 2013 with her friend and colleague Karel Sebela. They had encountered some difficulties, a dog bite among others and technical problems but they had reached the Astana goal in 4th position. I exchanged information with Honza who also advised me against the 26 inch front wheel. I listened to the advice and switched to the **Azub Six 26x20**. I will have the opportunity to meet them during the trip, in their new workshop-boutique space in Czech Republic. They will make a beautiful video that I proudly display on my website [J'me Recycle](#).

For the choice of the trailer and the motorization, I first followed

the stages of the Sun Trip Tour 2017 and especially the Facebook live feed held by Anick Marie Bouchard. She had the good idea to ask the Suntrippers about their equipment, their impression and that's how I decided to use a Christian Touzé trailer and involve [Décllic-Eco](#) for the motorization.

While I was waiting for the Azub Six to be built, I contacted Christian Touzé for his famous trailer. The trailer locks, so it's quite reassuring when you need to leave your bike to go shopping or spend the night in a hotel. The lock is really waterproof. The steel triangle that connects the trailer to the bike can be adjusted to the bike by gently forcing the gap.

With Christel we went to visit him in Vaumeilh, near Sisteron to take over the trailer.



The CTZ 100 litre trailer and its creator Christian Touzé

November 24, 2017

The Azub Six was delivered from the Czech Republic to

Guillaume, at *Saint Mitre les Remparts* to undergo the operation of adding engine, batteries, Cycle Analyst, controller, cabling and adaptation to continue hitching the CTZ trailer. And when Guillaume gave the go, once again Christel accompanied me to get Silky One back. I urgently had to buy a bike carrier with a rail to attach Silky One, which has a nice width and a significant weight armed with its motor and battery.



Guillaume Devot on Nov. 24, 2017, recovery an electrified Silky One

However, I didn't expect to have to find myself a storage box for the two 11 Ah batteries. After several searches I found on Aliexpress an airtight electrical box of the right size. I'd put some foam between the battery and the box and put the two boxes in a waterproof Ortlieb bag. The bag will be held under the seat with two ROK straps, which I find really practical to attach and detach quickly.

How many panels can we take along? The rules state a maximum of 2.5 m² while driving (double when stationary if you want to

unfold panels). This leaves the possibility to have two panels above the rider of a straight or recumbent bike and two panels above a trailer.

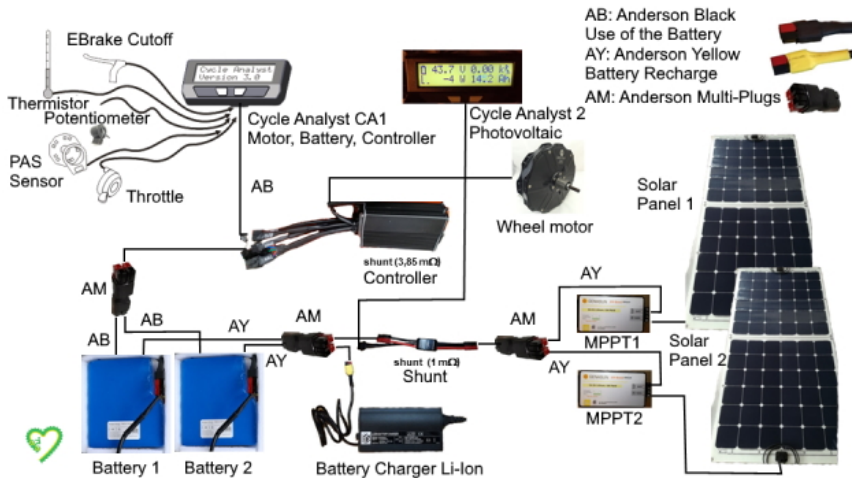
As I wanted to test the solar, I started on the maximum allowed even if I didn't have the most appropriate weight/surface combination. At first I thought I could benefit from the know-how in solar panel manufacturing close to home. But this did not happen and I was told Solbian, an Italian manufacturer, as a reliable but expensive manufacturer.



Zoom on Solbian photovoltaic panels

I had saved myself some work. The connections to the solar panels. For that a small diagram is necessary to better understand. There will be more work than expected; I had not anticipated well when I ordered the solar panels. The exit of the wires from the top, which resistance was boasted me as more efficient, was in fact a mistake because the wires, coming out from underneath, would have been more practical. I had to drill

inside the small black boxes, cut the cables, weld instead of to use flexible cables, put back some gel and finish with Anderson plugs. I will also make by myself two Anderson multi-plugs to parallel the arrival of the panels.



The electrical schematic

For the frame, my wife thought we could ask **Patrick Gouttenoire** from *Saint Bonnet de Mure*, our professional welder friend. He was thrilled with the idea and quickly found a solution based on hollow square steel tubes of small section. He preferred steel to aluminium in order to be more sure to be able to repair in case of breakage. The steel welder will not be missing on the Lyon-Canton road, for aluminium it is less safe. I will have the opportunity to meet a welder in Russia for an essential repair and another one in China for a small intervention. Indeed we meet steel welders all along the truckers' route, because they need it given of the kilometres they travel.



Silky One frame directed by Patrick Gouttenoire from PG Soudure

A recumbent bike like Silky One still surprises a lot of people because it's not so common to meet. It's an [Azub Six](#) with its 26 inch rear wheel and 20 inch front wheel.

I usually say it's a semi-recumbent bike because its seat is high enough for a recumbent bike. There are pros and cons as always.

Among the range of benefits, I can indicate that it is more visible on the road because of its height. If you add the orange colour, the photovoltaic support frame and the panels are even more visible. When I stop next to a driver, we can look at us at almost the same height, depending on the car model of course. On the motorways in China I could see over the safety barrier, which was not the case with the trike of my predecessor, Herman, which I never managed to catch up with. The seat is more comfortable for my arms than a mountain bike or a road bike, which I had problems with after an hour's ride; with Silky One I could ride for eight hours with little pain. The back is carried full-

length and a headrest allows you to relax even more. And the visibility is excellent, I could see in front of me quite far and with the two mirrors I could keep an eye on the arrival of the vehicles.

On the downside, the bike is heavier than a traditional bike and as it is rarer it is also more expensive. When you add two solar panels and the frame to support them, you unbalance the bike, which requires a support rod that reinforces, in fact rather replace, the original stand. The [Click-Stand](#) stand, made in the USA is welcome even if sometimes its soft side was slightly limited, a second one can be considered. I should have taken a second one because I lost the cane in Russia when the steel frame broke on one of the two uprights and I changed the position of the cane's attachment on the bike. For the trip, you have to plan two sizes of tyres and tubes. I hadn't brought spare tyres and not enough tubes. I had to learn how to find bike shops in China... it can take a bit of time if you are not from around here!

For the technical details of the bike, I let you visit Azub's excellent website. The site presents a configurator that allows you to enrich the basic model with many options that will make the bike more powerful and also more expensive. A compromise has to be found between the quality of the equipment and its financial limits. For my part, I've changed some options to have a better seating comfort, disc brakes and more resistant spokes. I kept the classic design with cable and not oil brakes, three chainrings in front and nine sprockets in the rear.

Silky One had no mechanical problems. I was able to cover 15000 kilometres (12000 of path + 3000 of drive) with the same transmission. I could have made a change to a new one before the start or made a replacement in Almaty probably for safety

reasons. Just the last three days I encountered a few jumping sprockets. I could participate once again to the Sun Trip 2020 with the same bike without any problem, I would just replace consumables spares, change the brake and gear shift cables for safety.

The Azub Six is a great bike and for the Sun Trip 2020 there will be several competitors with this model!

However, I have had tyre problems; I have had too many punctures on the truckers' roads, because the metal splinters from their exploded tyres went in mine like butter. And almost always on the hardest wheel to change, the one that carries the engine, the rear wheel. During the tube replacement phase, I didn't charge with the photovoltaic and I easily lost half an hour of driving time. When you die three times a day, it hurts the kilometres and the morale. My advice, plan a replacement tyre and several linear tubes that avoid removing the wheel while changing the tube easily. I invite you to search linear on [Increvable.com](https://www.increvable.com).



Truck tyres utilization until explosion

For the lighting, I stayed with what I use every day in my bicycle commuting, flashing red lights for the rear and fixed white lights for the front. All with a small battery that can last several hours and rechargeable in 5V. They were attached by velcro or rubber bands to Silky One. I even had a rear flashing light that could be manipulated by a remote control that I had fixed on the handlebars. This allowed me to trigger the light at the beginning of the tunnels without having to stop. But I had to count the clicks on the remote control because it lacked an indicator of the type of flashing that was in place or if I had come to a stop! The box also served as an alarm. Practical at night when we bivouac right next to, if there is no wind, otherwise the alarm is triggered too often and you are obliged to stop it, with consequence that is no longer useful.

Check well your lights in the evening before departure. Be sure that you can be seen well and that you can last several hours. Don't forget to place reflective strips all over the bike, at the back and on both sides.

Where to sleep



Aude Lévy, our first Warmshowers meeting

Sleeping in a home that you have been informed about in advance, is an option to share your trip and meet people. On the other hand, it requires preparing the meeting, spending time with people, not arriving too late and making detours.

It is also possible to sleep at the inhabitant's house by forcing a little hospitality, you can dare so much and obtain a lot, but this is not my typical behaviour.

Or you can sleep in the house of the host who invites you, that's my choice, and if I have something to give in exchange, I prefer. I usually leave the equivalent of what I would have spent in a hotel. Even if people refuse because of hospitality, we always manage to leave money on a table corner, because offering a bottle of wine or other French product is not really possible when you want to drive light.

However, on the advice of Thibaut Despoulain, a colleague who has travelled a lot, I brought a mini business card made on the website of [Moo](#). On the front, there was a photo of my family, very practical to show that one is not a savage without family life, or a photo of Silky One. And on the back, my name and website address. A hundred cards, if you don't hand out to all the winds, is enough and takes up very little space. If you think you're being fair, take two hundred.

I invite you to leave with your little personalized business cards. A real little souvenir of your passage. The ones given by the Sun Trip are good too, I would also use them until exhaustion, they are as big as a usual size.



Mini travel business cards

Whether homestay or bivouac, you have to take your bedding with you. I also had a small inflatable pillow that I really appreciated. As mattress under the duvet I took a very light air mattress version. At the end of the trip, the mattress leaked a little.

For the outside, a tent is needed. I took a two-seater tent on the advice of an inveterate cyclist of the trip alone in Russian-speaking countries and beyond that is Jean-Marc Bourdaret, a colleague.

I discovered the [Vieux Campeur](#) thanks to the Sun Trip (and lots of other stuff too!)

What's in the trailer?

— Is that the battery you got in the trailer?

— Uh, no! It's the bivouac, to get dressed, to sleep, to fix.

I've been asked several times about the battery in the trailer. In fact, the size has reduced well and the battery (or rather the two batteries of 11 Ah each) are placed under my buttocks. Minimum size but maximum weight with 6.6 kg. Hence the interest for the center of gravity to place them underneath, not in the trailer.

All the bivouac had to fit in the 100 litres trailer and be as light as possible. The two Ortlieb saddlebags that I had hung on the bike, had to be used only for the essential to have on hand, papers, rain clothes, food for the day. When I arrived in Poland, I would mail back a bag with a few useless items, such as the electronic gadgets I thought I would need to use to turn my mobile into a laptop.

I had a two-seater Huba Huba tent (A.) with its floor protector (C.). Two places to do a few gymnastic moves and to stow all stuff. The tent can be fit without pegs and can be set up and taken down fairly and quickly after a little practice. The air mattress (E.) was light and will hold almost to the end without deflating too much during the night. The inflation phase did not take too long. I had taken the slimmed down shape, I would have preferred a wider version. I sleep most of the time on my side. I had hip bones sticking out, with this model I couldn't feel the ground. The inflatable pillow (D.) was comfortable too, it had a pocket in which I could put my mobile phone or things I wanted to keep under surveillance during the nights I shared the room. The down will (H.), until -5°, be enough if you don't go through mountains. I would sometimes use only the sleeping bag liner (F.). Sometimes, I used K-Way with feathers (B.) when the weather was cold. I used the earplugs when I was out by the

roads (G.). The mosquito net (I.) has never been used.



Bivouac for sleeping

The tool bag, first aid for the bike (A.), is to be had on hand, in this case under my butt, right next to the batteries. It contains the type removal kit, a robust Decathlon version, patches, transmission oil, a rag, Allen wrenches, the multiple socket, screwdrivers of different sizes, flat wrenches most used on the bike. To hold everything, I used a transparent plastic zippered medicine bag. Very resistant and practical, I will still be using it at the end of 2019.

For the small padlock (B.), I have used it a few times but it is not easy to put it in place without getting dirty. Some nights I covered the seat to protect it (C.). A rag is always useful (D.). A soft cloth is essential for regular cleaning of the solar panels (E.). A spare controller in case of a problem (F.). Eventually, the battery

charger (G.), I didn't leave with it.



Essential tool bag to have on hand

There's bike mechanics, there's electrical wiring and some electronics. Enough to bring a large tool kit, especially since you have to be as autonomous as possible.

— How do I know what to bring? Usually I go to the mechanic for maintenance and repairs!

That's annoying! What's up with the guy who wants to go to the end of China and doesn't even know how to tinker with his bike?

Unbelievable but almost true. To be a little less stupid about mechanics, I signed up at [La P'tite Rustine](#) in Bron, a workshop to learn how to repair my bike and I went there several times but not many times. I received the help I wanted, Cyrielle was able to bring me some basic notions. Along the way, Bernard will show me how to adjust the disc brakes.

Choices are often contradictory between taking everything just in case and being as light as possible!

For the electrical part, as I had set up the electrical wiring of the Silky One solar panels I had trained myself, with the mistakes of a beginner.

I oversized the disc brake pads a little bit but I would make the same mistake again, too afraid of running out of brakes. On the other hand I should have brought spare tyres and many more tubes! I brought a small voltmeter that was used to check the connections of the solar panels. I had a few tightenings to take back. I'd even brought a small soldering iron in case of cables desoldering from the panels. When Silky One will come back home, I'll see that case. Was it in the return transport that it loosened up? I think so, but I'm not completely convinced.

During the trip, regularly check your connections to the battery and panels. Ask yourself the following question during the training period: how can I be sure that all the batteries (if you have two in parallel) and all the panels are working properly?



The extra hardware, in the vault

For electrical connections to charge your phone and other small devices, you do not need to bring a Chinese or other adapter.

For the clothes I had taken as light as possible but still in sufficient quantity by adding diapers in case of temperature drop. I discovered the existence of Merino wool by talking around me about the trip. Since then I've been a fan of it. It allows me to reduce considerably my body odours that follow the effort of pedaling. I had until then used cotton or nylon clothes. With such clothes my wife asked me quickly to have a the shower on my way to and from work. Whereas with Merino jerseys I can make the trip several days. *I spent without counting* (click of eye at Jurassic Parc) for socks, briefs, Merino jerseys. I'll take the customer card loyal to *Au Vieux Campeur*. It will be quickly refunded!

The first-aid kit will be made from the gifts I received. I should drastically reduce the volume. If I had listened to my wife I could have been a healer during the trip! Of the kit made up, which can be seen in the photo below, I will use almost nothing; sun creams, cream against rubbing, powders against diarrhea and the thermometer on a weak day. With my panel cover I could have reduced the number of sun creams. For this trip I discovered the cream to put on places subject to burn caused by friction. I have the impression that it was effective and that I should have brought more, mainly for the toes to reduce friction with the socks.



Pharmacy kit

Did you say visas?

— Do you need a lot of visas to make the trip?

The trip to the north only needed a passport and two visas. French people don't need a visa for Kazakhstan. Not all nations are so lucky to travel around the world so easily. I think in particular of the Moroccan Suntrippers Youssef El Haouass and Mohamed Said Jbari.

For the Russian visa I went through [Lyon visa](#) for a thirty day visa. Remember the anecdote from Român.

The Sun Trip team did the same intermediary work as Lyon visa with the Chinese visa. And since the operation took place in Lyon, on the corner from my work place, I was the first to receive the *magic card* for China when Florian left the Chinese consulate. For the anecdote, the Chinese visa was placed on page eight of the passport. Knowing that the number eight is a lucky number in China, I don't think it's a coincidence.

For insurance purposes, I left with the one that comes with the Old Camper's card plus the one taken from my usual insurer.



Chinese Visa

Currency and CB

- Did you leave with change for every country?
- No, I didn't but if your friends can provide you with some, why not?

First, find out which countries you can use euro and credit cards.

For Russia, Kazakhstan and China, prepare some local currency notes by taking some from your bank, so that you can do in the order you want the acquisition of the SIM card and the cash withdrawal from the ATM, once you arrive in the first city after the border crossing.

For 2018 the city to cross between Kazakhstan and China was Korghos.

I was able to pay in euros on my first night in Ukraine, fortunately because the establishment did not accept the bank card and I had no local currency. Don't expect to pay with your credit card for accommodation or restaurants in Russia, Kazakhstan and China. You will have to collect the change from the ATMs in the countries you will pass through. You can also ask your bank for currency before you leave and take it with you.

Do not hesitate to double your credit card. A Visa card is preferable.

In China I had the bad surprise to see me swallow a bank card, and not because of false manipulation. The story ended well but I lost a few hours. I was reassured to know that I could count on another bank card just in case.

For China there is a must-have mobile app to use there, WeChat. This application allows a Chinese person to pay almost anywhere in the country using a QRCode available to every merchant. I tried to get this option, but you need either a Chinese ID card number or a Chinese bank account. I have tried to open a bank account through HSBC. HSBC France sent me back via HSBC English speaking: I am still waiting for their answer! But if an opening was made, I think it would be worth it to be free to go often to Chinese ATMs or taking a packet of Chinese bills with. Especially since the withdrawal won't necessarily work at all ATMs.



Returned coins and banknotes

Health, vaccines

— You're not prepared enough for this kind of adventure, your heart might give out!

— Honestly, are you afraid of little beasts? What's it going to be like with dogs then?

Indeed, health is also a worrying matter. A sheet for the vaccines to be carried out, a sheet for the medicines to be taken. Be careful: neither too little nor too much, because you quickly get volume and weight. This last sentence is true for everything, for the bike, the luggage, your body. As we want to foresee a little bit of everything, we will bring sores, diarrhea, headaches, burns and anti-mosquito products - I met only two in hotels but I was eaten by dozens and dozens of nasty tiger mosquitoes when I returned to Lyon!

You can imagine twelve thousand kilometres over several weeks, even several months. Accidents are statistically possible. It is necessary to provide an insurance card, it is also requested by the organization of the Sun Trip. An insurance that covers multicountry distance and duration. What about me, I used the insurance linked to my newly acquired card at the Vieux Campeur. The Vieux Campeur, where I went to buy bivouac equipment and technical clothing for the first time in my life, I'm a loyal follower and I went elsewhere than to Decathlon; at the end I mixed between these two brands. And then I also wanted a second insurance taken out with Macif. Be careful with the duration which is often limited, that's the problem with insurance, there are always limits that you never hope to discover.

Once the repatriation insurance has been settled, the incident that is likely to be part of the trip should also be considered: a reparation theme to open, a sheet on the tools to take along, a sheet on the spare parts to be provided. I personally regretted not having brought a spare front and rear tyre, I lost time to find these two tyres in China. Today I would compensate the weight of the tyres with the gas stove I had brought and which didn't serve

me so much! Even if making a tea, a hot soup, a dish of pasta is still quite comfortable.

Don't hang around for vaccinations. The beginning of the year is probably the right time. We are experiencing more and more problems with the supply of vaccines in France.

I would take my precautions by bringing forward a visit to the dentist (and I did well because there was a deep hidden cavity) and to my ophthalmologist (the double punishment of the aging myopic, that must have a correction to see the road and the holes of a punctured tyre).



Stress test to Edouard Herriot

Physical training

— Hi, I'm here for a dietary check-up, I'd like to go to China by

bike.

— I'm going to take your weight, some measurements and your eating and exercise habits.

Once the operation's done

— In my opinion, with your habits and your 88 kg you won't make 5 km!

— Ah! Is there anything I can do?

— Yes, eat lots of protein, cut down on fat, carbohydrates and build muscle.

Well, as you can see, I didn't leave the interview very happy, as I walked through the weight room where the lady was practicing. And they recommended it to me! There's always someone out there who likes you.

For the weight (lucky 88 kg at the time of the training) I'll end up at 77 kg in Canton and I had eaten well all along the trip.

— In addition to cycling, how do to train?

Look at [Gregory Lewyllie's humorous video](#) in which he says that his training is based on physical efforts to fix up his house: it's understandable that he prefers to hit the road. For me the permanent DIY work at home has not the same level but just as existing. As a complement and to relax the muscles, I regularly go to the communal swimming pool of *Saint Laurent de Mure* where I don't go out within a thousand metres.

To prepare the Sun Trip I added bike outings at the weekends to test my limits and learn how to use the trailer, the electric recumbent bike and then the electro-solar recumbent bike with

solar trailer.

It's important to check that you are able to ride enough hours to reach your distance goals. If you set out on 200 kilometres per day, with the idea of an average of 20 km/hour, you should be able to ride for ten hours a day on the bike. If we can ride faster and longer then we can beat my sixty-five days. That's exactly what those who came before me did. For the record, it's forty-five days for Raf Van Hulle, which is a great performance. I have to admit that I would have liked to ride alongside him for a day or two to feel his rhythm and the way he organised his day. Raf is probably a good advice as it served Herman well, who arrived for his first Sun Trip in 5th position. He had been advised by Raf! You just have to find a way to communicate with him.

For training you have to set aside days, weekends or holidays to see if you can still set up/unset a tent in a reasonable time, get up early and go to bed late. For my part, I knew that getting up early would be a problem, it has been throughout the trip. Leaving at seven o'clock at the opening of the official schedule was a real difficulty for me, a computer specialist who is rather used to getting up at seven o'clock. And the evening of cogitation sometimes causes sleep to take its time to blossom and it is often in the early morning that we want to enjoy it. I think the Sun Trip is more for early risers who can fall asleep easily in the evening.

For training I would add mental preparation to zenitude and flexibility. I wasn't really zen and flexible on this trip. Zenitude is needed to manage separation, solitude. I think I managed to be zen the last two weeks of the trip. Before that, it was mostly the arrival of the evening when my Zen side of the day's pedaling crumbled. I was asking myself too many questions like where am

I going to sleep, what will be my next day's route, what should I publish? The solo trip took me out of my comfort zone and out of my usual assurances of finding a shower, a room, a hot meal without having to make any effort. I knew it, but between knowing it and experiencing it... It took me some time to acclimatize and reassure myself. Throughout the trip the smartphone has been a great help to keep in touch with my family - I probably asked a little too much, especially Christel, my wife, who did not sleep much more than me since I often contacted her with a few hours of difference on a time slot when she usually sleeps quietly.

And the flexibility to relax your body from muscular tension and bike positions that remain the same a good part of the day. The flexibility that I was forcing myself to practice, a little, but certainly not enough. Flexibility exercises are like speaking foreign languages, something I'd always find difficult to do. When I came back, not immediately, but in the following months, I can say that my body got a little received. The spine and the lower coccyx area for example. The particular position of the Azub Six, half sitting, half lying down, was causing me pain towards the coccyx that I could bear on an 8 hour day of cycling. Afterwards, it became more significant. If I had to do this kind of trip again I would take the time to make a seat to my morphology, custom-made like a Suntripper did.

For the record, I wanted to test a nice climb during a weekend outing, May 5 and 6, 2018, see my limits. I was not disappointed with the climb to reach the relay of Mont du Chat, towards Le Bourget du Lac. I should have warned myself why the engine stopped at certain times. If I had asked Guillaume the question in the following days, I probably wouldn't have been bitten during

the prologue! In short, a day that never ends and the return trip that will take me back to the night. As I had already driven at night, I didn't see the point of doing another session. I called my family Uber to transport Silky One and me. But how do you transport such a big team? How about a horse trailer then. Yes, but a two-seater van then! I was able to test the bends and the speed bumps from a van, it shakes.



Christel and Silvain to make taxi van for Silky One and me

Preparation week-end

February 10, 2018

The Sun Trip offers a preparation week-end a few months before departure. It is an opportunity to discover the other crazy people who hope to share the same adventure. Technical workshops, cultural aspects, administrative aspects will be declined in French and English. Everyone will choose their preferred language.

Silky One was ready and the road to get there gave me the opportunity for extra training. I didn't hesitate to face the rain, the cold. On the way back there will even be a moment of hail. Ten minutes to realize that I had nothing to cover the solar panels and until I found shelter, the hail had stopped.

Time will pass too quickly.



Sun Trip preparation week-end, © Sun Trip photo

Lucas

— Sometimes taking a trip out of the ordinary is an opportunity to help a cause.

Somebody put that idea in my head. Why not take advantage of the glances that would turn to me to pass on a message to the cause *Vaincre la Mucoviscidose* with the [association Grégory Lemarchal](#) (AGL)

I feel concerned about this cause. Lucas is part of my family. He lives in Saint-Chamond and fights daily against this disease, cystic fibrosis. A disease as unpronounceable as it is bearable. We hope to defeat the disease one day soon so that all Lucas can pursue their sweet dreams.

My call for donations has been echoed. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.



Lucas always with a big smile and full of life

J'me Recycle Association

- How will we follow you?
- On my Facebook account and the Sun Trip website.
- I don't have a Facebook account, will I miss something?
- Damn, yes it's possible!

To communicate or not to communicate about your expedition? That is the question. And if so, should we communicate before

and/or during, and/or after the trip?

I have a colleague who has been spending at least two months a year visiting the world by bike or otherwise for several years. He doesn't communicate at all, he keeps everything to himself and takes a few photos for his mother. He was a source of information during my preparation, but at the same time we didn't approach the trip in the same way or with the same technical means. For me it was the speed and the main roads with evenings at the hotel and him the exotic routes, the less populated ones and the very wild bivouacs.

We can very well not communicate but the organization of the Sun Trip strongly invites us to plan a communication time. It's a way to touch people and to be followed on the way. Knowing that there is no broom wagon, no helicopter and no drone to follow us during the daily route, some photos, videos, short sentences on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram are welcome.

I'm used to say that my objectives were a third race, a third meeting, a third communication.

I prefer to share. The question was rather what, how and how far to go.

The *what* depends mainly on the audience you are targeting and the message you want to get across. I wanted to explain to everyone who might be interested in a solar bike and an expedition to China with such a bike. And during the trip to show my successes, my difficulties and my encounters.

For the *how* I was inspired by what Bernard Cauquil had done,

which will be my guiding thread both on the bike and on communication and I contacted Jacky Demirdjian, an uncle of the family. His great pleasure is to write as a journalist about sporting events around Saint-Etienne. He put me in touch to benefit from an article in *Le Progrès* and a short report on France 3, the celebrity for me!

And I created the association **J'me Recycle** on August 1st, 2017 and related accounts on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) (for the last two it was more in case I needed it). The website, hosted at OVH, requires a learning curve to use the Wordpress tool. More time than publishing an article on Facebook. I think that having a site, allows to be seen from all over the world (in theory), because many people don't have an account on Facebook. And then you have to know that if by chance a Chinese tries to follow your adventure, he will not be able to go on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, because these social platforms are censured from Chinese Government.

To communicate in China as you do in the rest of the world with Facebook, you have to use the application **WeChat**.

For the logo I asked my colleague, Alexandre Driss, our team designer, to design it. He gave me a heart with sprocket teeth and a bike that runs through it. I love this logo.

I have another colleague who made the same logo for me with his little Chinese 3D printer. A beautiful precision work in multicolour, while the printer only heats up one wire at a time.



Denis Belmont with his 3D printing of the J'me Recycle logo

I fixed the logo on the front of the bike, like an amulet. It held up until the finish line.

The ideal if you want to reach the most people would be to write your story, with photos and videos at the best moment and broadcast it on different communication channels with a small translation in different languages. At least your mother tongue for your friends and English to be read all over the world (if you are English or write in English you will have the advantage of outreach without having to do a translation). If in addition the translation could be done in Chinese, Russian and in all the languages of the countries you are going to cross, it would be really nice for the natives who will have wanted to follow you for a while.

I tested the automatic translation, I took an additional subscription on the Wordpress site for that but the result of an automatic translation made by a robot is still not up to

expectations. I asked my Chinese teacher and a Chinese colleague in Beijing to tell me if the translation was understandable and the answer was: we can understand what it's about but it's not great! And in China, the display time of the site hosted in Europe was quite slow!

I was able to write a few articles on the website before and after the trip, but not during!

To write articles there is nothing better than a good little keyboard and a computer on which you can retrieve your photos and videos and retouch them, even if only superficially.

I didn't bring a computer with me, that's why I never wrote an article on the website during the trip and used Facebook and WeChat.

I'm divided on the answer to give if I'm asked:

A computer or not?

For what I can quote: a computer will allow a comfort to surf Internet, to write articles, to retouch pics and videos, to detail the trip of the next day and to export GPX file.

On the contrary, there is mainly the weight and space occupied in the luggage. It also has to hold the 12000 kilometres and therefore be strong enough and well packed.

I tried an intermediate approach from the Samsung Galaxy S8 mobile. I hoped to use a kit designed to connect the mobile to a TV set. All I had to do was to add a small Bluetooth keyboard and

a small mouse to have an almost office travel environment. It never worked. Either because there was no TV in the hotel or it was not accessible.

I regretted the comfort of the computer when I had to write an article that I wanted to detail and when I wanted to go deeper into the next day's trip.

Communication goes through the written and the visual, both. For the visual, I started with a lightweight Samsung S8 mobile phone, that served as a camera and video camera and a Go Pro camera for monitoring the road daily. I mainly used the Samsung for the evening publication. It was much more convenient, when you only have the mobile, to publish photos and videos on Facebook and WeChat. And WeChat because in China I published twice, once on Facebook, where I detailed the information, and once on WeChat, in a more succinct way, for those who followed me in China.

For the *until where to go* I asked myself the question of the drone. I had made a test with a loan drone, a drone a little too big drone for this type of trip. But I was afraid of wasting too much time taking videos and working on the video afterwards. I was also a little worried about going through customs or during shooting in China or Russia. I didn't want to look like a spy. And I was wrong, Jack Butler, who had carried a drone, managed to make some nice shots of the panorama and of some cyclists he was able to meet. In the same way, the Sun Trip organisation was also able to make some videos with drones on the meeting points, at the start, in Almaty and near Canton.

A drone that you know how to handle and that would not be too imposing is quite possible.

For post-trip communication if you're thinking to edit a video, you'll need a lot of video footage. Make sure you have enough space to store this media, which is taking up more and more space. But at the same time the storage media is taking up less and less space. I had planned a small box of micro SD card, it takes up a very small space and weighs very little.

For the record, thirty-five years ago on my bike ride from Sucy-en-Brie to Holland and back, there was no mobile phone. I still wanted to communicate on my trip. I had a good friend, Muriel Mielczarek, with whom I exchanged by mail via the remaining post office service. I was anticipating for a few days where I would go and where she could leave a letter on standby at the post office in the chosen city. Unbelievable, but it worked. At that time I travelled fifty kilometres a day maximum with an ordinary bicycle. And thirty-five years later, you can answer dozens of people live. She still follows me, I hope that her gaze as letters teacher will not judge too harshly my writings today. Since the college, despite periods when there was no work, we continue to keep in touch with each other. It seems to me that this relationship is rather rare.



Logo J'me Recycle, created by Alexandre Driss

The Sponsors

— Did you have Orange as sponsor?

— Uh, I couldn't sell the Sun Trip: Orange, except the Tour de France, it is not so much for cycling. However... (Chuckles)

April 24, 2018

I have an appointment for 9 a.m. with the boss of [Starterre](#), **Jean-Louis Brissaud**, for a possible sponsorship. I asked, why me? I know that the relational has played, anyway. I've never done an event before, I probably wouldn't be the first to arrive in Canton. Jean-Louis likes cycling and he's like that, he shares. The interview will be done on the double and I'll leave with my first big check for the association J'me Recycle.



The meeting with Starterre

A great day, right the same day but at 11 a.m., I have an appointment with the boss of **C2AI**, **Gilles Marchand**, for another possible sponsorship. I ask myself less questions, I almost feel like a star (just kidding!). Gilles is sponsoring me for personal reasons and photovoltaics is one of the many technological aspects that his company deals with.



The meeting with C2AI

The boss of PG Soudure, **Patrick Gouttenoire** in addition to making the frames to support the panels and painting the trailer, will sponsor me like a big company. Loyal from day one, without his help I would still be making a frame for myself!



Patrick Gouttenoire always in action

Some sponsors talk directly with the Sun Trip team. The distribution of the logos on the candidates is done in secret but Florian told us that a company from Lyon will sponsor a Lyonnais, that an ambitious company that wants to see its logo in the lead will choose a champion.

That's how I was able to wear the colours of [EDF Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes](#) and [Bel Air Camp](#). As EDF is also in the photovoltaic field with its company Photowatt, I placed the logo on one side of the trailer and Solbian on the other.

I even benefited from sponsors outside France!

As Honza Galla, from [Azub](#), in Czech Republic, who offered me additional options at Silky One.

[Solbian](#), in Italy, who gave me a substantial discount on the purchase of the panels.

As Tom Nostrant from [Click-Stand](#), Washington State, USA, who offered me a custom telescopic pole. He saw me arrive first.

Christel will do a big job around us to bring in some currency in euros or in kind (biscuits, stewed fruit...). Shopkeepers and friends will listen to her with attention and interest.

Everyone encouraged me to go as far as possible without putting pressure on Canton's objective. Thank you to all of you. I thought of you all along the trip.

What's your phone number?

First of all, know that the **mobile is indispensable**, it's like money, passport, glasses and health.

Until China I kept my usual mobile number. I was lucky to have a sponsor almost in spite of him. From China I took a local SIM card (indispensable). I juggled with the Chinese and French SIM card, changing the card because I didn't have dual access, I preferred the memory extension option.

Don't do like me, take a backup mobile, I had a few scares when several times I had a black screen. Sometimes just for a silly brightness setting when I went from the lowest level of the night to the morning sun, I couldn't find anything on the screen and I had to move the light slider to the right or left. But sometimes because of too much humidity, the electric recharge didn't take place and I could see the energy bars melting!

My mobile was and still is at the time of writing, the Samsung Galaxy S8 that I was able to buy thanks to the donations I received from the [Leetchi](#) kitty.

A small portable battery to plug in your mobile during the night, especially if you communicate fully in your tent at night, is not a luxury. And on the way back to the plane, don't put it in the hold luggage, it might be confiscated (I tested it for you).

The mobile phone allows you to stay in touch via the applications of exchange in two to two, small private group or big diffusion using WhatsApp, Facebook, everywhere on the planet or almost! In China there is a voluntary blocking of many applications, of

which these are a part. So the VPN becomes the unavoidable additional software to add, before entering China, it will be much simpler. They are sometimes paying like the one I used to use.

Contact by geolocation is also a feature your family will appreciate. The GPS integrated into your mobile phone allows you to position yourself in addition to the GPS box provided by the organization. The geolocation is written on your photos, very practical to remember where the photo was taken. WeChat also allows you to send each other GPS coordinates of your location.

Be careful with the format of the GPS coordinates. The Anglo-Saxon format works better than the French format.

When I got closer to Jack, I asked him to send me his GPS location via WeChat. It took me a long time to understand why I couldn't find the accommodation he had told me! In fact, he had his mobile in English and I had the French version. The format is different for the coordinates, and the transcription is incorrect by the software.

Comparison: a place in Xi'An, 34.2590616,108.6870206 (English format) = 34.2590616,108,6870206 (French format).

When I switched my mobile to English language version, the geolocation became correct!

To maintain it in landscape or portrait position I used a [Quad Lock](#) shell and its screwed fixing. I used to change the position of the mobile, unhook it and hang it up, even if it's still a bit tricky. Once fixed, nothing moves, even in case of a rough road.

In China, the number won't start with a 06 or a 07 like in France. I have the number still stuck on a label on the inside of the phone's casing. I kept it practical because at the police controls the number is systematically asked for. By curiosity I indicate it to you, it was 18609051297.



The place in Khorgos where I got my Chinese SIM card

Culture

— Will you go on a little sightseeing trip?

— No, actually. Nothing planned, I'm going to take the truckers' route and ride like a crazy cyclist to Canton. And if I find some nice things to see on the road or around the accommodations it will be nice.

I can't say I'm very cultured, I studied mostly technical. I like to read at times, but mostly detective stories. I don't master foreign languages, I still have difficulty with fluent English, whereas I'm a computer scientist and every day I'm confronted with written English, but specialized in computer science. Don't talk about

history and geography!

However, I tried some efforts for this trip. I registered for a Chinese course on Saturday morning and I asked the librarian in *Saint Laurent de Mure* for reading advice to get a little advance insight into China.

The passion of the teacher and the good atmosphere of the group didn't make me better in a foreign language, but I was less apprehensive about entering China, which seemed more understandable to me.

It is not only the language that is important, rather the culture, the habits are so much essential information to approach a country; even if I wanted to keep an open mind, a minimum of information seems to me indicated to avoid odd mistakes. For example: in China don't give flowers if they invite you to eat, because flowers are for mourning; eight is a lucky number, in effect it is not uncommon to have a Wi-Fi access code composed of eight digits eight; each hotel floor starts with an eight; for example the room numbered 101 in France, will be numbered 8201 in China (in addition to the eight you should know that level 1 in China is the ground floor in France). When I arrived in China, it was as if I hadn't taken a course, but it reassured me. The pronunciation of *I am French* (pronounce wo fa guoua) was probably not correct but apparently sufficient to say my age, fifty-three years old, (pronounce wou shi san niane), also allowed me to answer the common questions where are you from/how old are you?* The same questions that you will be asked in Kazakhstan but there I had not prepared and I already forgot. Don't worry, they will ask you so often that you'll know when we ask you. And the other question that follows is *Where are you going?*

I invite you on WeChat, to **write your name transliterated in Chinese**, next to your name in Latin script. For me it looked like this: *sū qí luó lǎng* - *Laurent Souchet* (note: I removed the Chinese characters due to a generation problem in pdf format).

My name transliterated in Chinese will be useful for meetings and hotel registrations. With a name understandable by a Chinese person, one exists more concretely. Note the inversion, in China they use surname-name, instead of the occidental name-surname.

Regarding the rare readings of impregnation, I remember two novels that I liked: Peter May's *The Runner* (a thriller) and Antonio Garrido's *The Corpse Reader*. Intrigues in China, nothing better to prepare for!



Mahjong lessons in Chinese Saturday morning class

Will I arrive - Will I not arrive?

I organized a little game between friends to see how they perceived the success of my project. A simple form made with Google and here we go.

The contest consisted in choosing an option from a list of possibilities:

- ☐ I give up before the start
- ☐ I'll give up in Europe.
- ☐ I'll give up in Kazakhstan
- ☐ I'll give up in China
- ☐ I'll finish the path between 90 and 100 days
- ☐ I'll finish the path between 80 and 90 days
- ☐ I'll finish the path between 70 and 80 days
- ☐ I'll finish the path between 60 and 70 days
- ☐ I'll finish the path between 40 and 50 days

To help the players in their choice, I announced my goal of 200 kilometres per day. Knowing that it was expected to be about 12000 kilometres to reach Canton, the calculation was quite simple $12000/200 = 60$ days. I specified that I was thinking of adding five days for repair, rest and border crossing times. There were more than I expected to finish. A few bet on my abandonment. Towards the end of the trip, I had a player who asked me to slow down to win the prize! I picked up some small gifts at Canton airport for the lucky winners.

The Prologue



Place des Terreaux in Lyon, departure day, Cathy and Eric

The prologue for 2018 started in Lyon, place des Terreaux, on 15 June 2018.

Except me, who lives in Lyon, the other Suntrippers were accommodated in a bivouac on the lawn of the *Domaine Saint Joseph* in Sainte-Foy-lès-Lyon, they arrived at their own pace either by car or by bike.

For someone it was the first meeting, the opportunity to meet the troop of Albi with whom I had exchanged by phone during the preparation, Cathy and Didier Pozzobon in the lead. And the second time for those I had met during the weekend of preparation.

I didn't feel very comfortable, was it necessary to adopt the behaviour of a competitor, each one for himself or on the contrary to try to integrate a small group?

I say small group because the whole group - as we were when we left Lyon - is too impressive and borderline dangerous with risk of collision between Suntrippers.

— And guys, we have the impression to see **the flying machines with Satanas and Diabolo !**

— And this vehicle doesn't it look like as made to shoot a new episode of **Mad Max**?

Yes, I've already had this thought about the flight of Silky One. Because moving forward is sometimes a bit laborious, so fly!

For the little story, when I was looking for information to help me to choose the bike, I asked for help to my brother-in-law, who works at Safran in the USA, for help. One of his colleagues suggested a way to make the solar bike lighter. Place one or more mini weather balloons filled with helium/hydrogen, between the bike and the panels and add a system to adjust the height.

If I had tried this track we would have been closer to the flying bike, like in the animated movie *Up*. I declined the idea.

While I was writing the chapter on sponsors, I discovered [a video of the departure from Lyon](#), made by the communication team of [Starterre](#). You will see all the solar bikes leaving Lyon.

A few steps to warm up

We'll spend five days doing small heating steps. Share with the other Suntrippers and make the final adjustments.



June 16, 2018, old and new participants gathered in Chambéry

The stopover in Chambéry will allow us to take a nice picture of the previous Suntrippers, of the solar bikes amateurs in general and of the 2018 vintage.

During a promotional rally in Chambéry, I was taken to task by a person on the non-ecological aspect of solar bikes. A little cold and not to get into endless debates I replied that for me it was not a criterion, that I had taken a comfortable bike to please me and try to go further, faster. So I calmed him down but he told me that the Suntrip site highlighted this ecological aspect of the trip.

Kind look

- Your Silky One is an eco-friendly vehicle
- Yeah, you're right. I like to think that instead of vacuuming (for a 1000 Watt vacuum cleaner) for an hour in your house (or car), you put the equivalent of that energy into a battery, you could travel a hundred to two hundred kilometres on an electric bicycle.

Annoying look

- Your Silky One is a non ecological vehicle, it's not a bicycle.
- Yeah, you're partly right. It takes more energy to build than a traditional bicycle. But it's still a bike because I bring my muscular energy all the time or almost all the time (to start I like to have assistance when I haven't yet pressed the pedals yet, it allows me to take off roundabouts and traffic lights with more safety).

Ecological for some, not ecological for others. I wasn't too interested in it, but the question remained in my mind. I'll have plenty of time to think about it during the trip. And it will start with my first accommodation at my hosts Warmshowers near Bern by Reto and Ursina. Reto's look at Silky One was kind but I could see that he was more on the way as more ecological as possible. The bike used during the holidays with his wife and two very young children will continue for him to be on without electric assistance. Even if his wife seemed to be wondering about his previous experiences where climbing with a child and bivouacking didn't seem to be a piece of cake.

At the end, the electric bicycle is criticized for being polluting, more than a traditional bicycle. Yes you can go around the world with a traditional bike, but you can also do it on horseback or on foot and it will probably be even more ecological. Or you can go around the world by car, truck, boat or plane. Most critics are right but the comparison with all these means of transport is never made, why? In my opinion, we are in a transitional period where we have to sort the true from the false. We know that the best ecology would be the one where there is no more humanity as in the famous story where a distant planet tells the Earth that it looks bad. And the Earth to answer, yes I've caught humanity but I'm better, I've eradicated the virus.

In my opinion, the real question to be asked is more about the carbon and/or other impact that one is entitled to have in one's life. With a follow-up of its impacts, if we know how to quantify all the human activities according to a shared figure, we will be able, according to our personal choices, to enjoy everything at leisure in a single trip by plane (or ten or twenty I don't know), or one hundred trips by solar bike and one thousand by traditional bike.

We mustn't get the wrong target. I would be curious to have an opinion from the [IPCC](#) on the impact of Suntrip on humanitarian issues and consequently the opinion of [Greta Thunberg](#). It would be cool if, after sailing across the Atlantic twice, she would come and participate in Suntrip.

Chamonix, the last stage of the prologue. Chamonix will be the place for final communications before the start. Please note that we took the funicular to take some nice pictures from the top of the hill with views on the snowy and luminous mountains. The presentation photo of the Sun Trip was taken up there.

Private partner seeks partner...

I went for a ride with Daniel Jenni, the only Swiss registered. He's a very friendly character and he'll surprise us all. His bike, which seemed fragile and no one would have bet that it would go all the way, will arrive in Canton in seventy-seven days and in solar mode.

This little stage allowed me to see a different kind of riding. I was going slowly uphill and downhill and he was going hard in both cases. The same goes for Eric Morel and Stéphane Bertrand, who

were having a blast going uphill and downhill, which I obviously didn't see but of course told their story in the evening at the meeting point. I was impressed by their complicity. They finished third and fourth.

In my case, I was happy to have a road to Canton without too much difference in altitude, from the first descent of Chamonix I had to burn a brake pad (I imagine too much the fall downhill!).



Daniel in prologue

If I was so slow uphill and downhill should I imagine doing the road with a slower Suntripper, like our dean Françoise Denel?

After sharing a meal and trying to share a road together, I quickly understood that her strong character and her incompressible need to talk would not suit me. She'll find her alter ego on the road and on a WeChat channel (which we'll almost have to devote to them) with Michael Polak.



Françoise, Christel, Anne

For culture and visits I should have gone on the road with the group composed of Cathy & Didier Pozzobon, François Médalle, Gilles Coural or the Viguiers brothers. But that was not my goal, I wanted to move forward quickly without necessarily being in the first ones.

Finally at the end of the prologue, I wouldn't be surprised to consider the solo route from the start in Chamonix. Even if my wife tried to persuade me that it would be better to set off in a group, I couldn't bring myself to face this ordeal otherwise than alone. We'll see afterwards that I'll do a bit of road with other Suntrippers, with pleasure.

The prologue is an important step to make sure he is motivated before the start and to finish some final adjustments to his machine.

During the prologue my obsession with dogs will be confirmed: I

will be bitten at the stop by a Malinois who considered that I was at his house (house without barrier) and who according to the owners had been afraid of Silky One! In spite of a warning bite which will leave me small marks, I will not complain after having seen the owners again in the evening with the help of Thomas Pollet from the organisation who will be the driver. The real apologies remained in my mind. This little disadvantage happened in *Les Déserts* (deserts), I winked for the rest of the trip with desert areas.

So obviously I was not more reassured about that for the rest of the trip. I'll have the opportunity, on several occasions until China, to make fixed using the accelerator to get out of it. Thirty-five an hour is not too much to outrun them and for a good while!

That said, this episode allowed me to discover that if I had stopped it was because the controller had said stop the engine due to overheating! After a small adjustment on the Cycle Analyst by Guillaume (increase of the stop temperature), I didn't encounter this kind of impromptu stop anymore!

Learn how to set your Cycle Analyst, at least your stop temperature value. It's not complicated, but you have to have done it at least once.

During a last technical exchange I learned that there is a risk of damaging an electrical element by overloading the current supply. This phenomenon can occur when you cumulate the current coming from the solar panels in good weather, and

regenerative braking during a nice descent. Conditions that were met at the exit of Chamonix! One minute top time before the official start, Guillaume, to avoid me this problem, changed the parameter of the Cycle Analyst so that I could be in control of the arrival of the current at the moment of the braking.

This meant that during braking I could, thanks to a double the manipulation - the action of the brakes and acceleration - recover the regeneration energy. It is necessary to be attentive and not to release the brakes before the accelerator lever, otherwise you will switch to acceleration mode on a descent possibly!

I must admit that I don't find this very practical and optimum. I would have and I would still like to have a system that knows how to optimise solar and braking recovery without breaking my head and without doing anything other than braking!

The last night in the lodge, before the solo departure was a moment of meditation for everyone, we asked ourselves for the last time, if the voyage was worth the risk. I was able to talk to Dirk Huyghe who was returning for a new edition. At a certain point I confided in him that I don't really know why I'm taking this trip; the answer surprised me when he confided in me in turn that he doesn't really know either and concluded by this must be the **search for adventure**.



Christel and Laurent, one last kiss in Chamonix

June 19, 2018

Christel will come and give me one last kiss in the departure square. She will spend a few days in a camper with her sister and her husband in the corner of Europe. I think she was expecting a possible call for help from me.

The next kiss will wait sixty-seven days!

A kiss every sixty-seven days... it's a long wait!

And there'll be a surprise when I'll be back!

The trip

— It didn't last long your trip!

— This is true when I compare it to the time it took me to prepare the trip. It is the magic of the solar electric bicycle that makes it possible to go at a reasonable speed while going quite fast.



July 10 in Kazakhstan

I like to present a synthetic vision of the trip. A framework that I think is common to every Suntrip traveller, knowing full well that there are an infinite number of details linked to the chance of the weather and encounters.

We started from Western Europe, from a comfortable area where running water is simply accessible to all taps, with abundant food. To go to areas where the comfort of modern life is gradually being reduced. We have time to adapt, the evolution take places over the kilometres. The typical case is the toilets where in western Europe you flush the toilet with drinking water and then

go to the hole in the hut or concrete shelter next to the bus stop in Kazakhstan, then end up in the field because the hut at the back of the garden has not even been built! We then gradually or intermittently return to more comfort and end up in the great comfort we knew at the beginning.



The cabin at the back of the garden in Kazakhstan

I remember the accommodation for the night, where they shew me the room, thinking that I couldn't spend the night there, that the comfort would be less than I could bear. But after a few isolated bivouacs that are not always reassuring, all-in-one showers, water basins to wash, you become less difficult, especially if the price is reasonable and the welcome is friendly.

During most of my trip, I wasn't very zen when the evening came. I had too many questions about how to sleep, what to eat, how to rest well and prepare for the next day. Until the last two weeks when I didn't have that apprehension anymore. I knew I could sleep anywhere, that I would always find a place, a refuge

in front of a house, a hotel, a police station.

During the day I had no problem, I walked one kilometre after the other or rather ten kilometres after ten kilometres, with my eyes fixed on my navigation instruments, my mirrors when there was traffic, the road and the landscape.

— But did you get bored in Kazakhstan or China on identical landscapes and flat reliefs?

— No, almost never! Calm moments are the best moments for reflection.

Every time the road offers a lot of micro relief to watch, the breath of heat or wind are not the same, your state of mind is changing. It has happened sometimes to launch my mailing list of music pieces I had planned for. But this list was quite short and I didn't put it on a loop. There are the breaks, the photos to take, the selfies to do when you are stopped on the road, a bit of communication to follow.

Frankly, no time to get bored. For proof, something that bothered me before the departure. I had asked a traveller used to travel alone on how he lived his sexual urges during these trips. As I hadn't really received an understandable answer, I was going to have to find out what it would be like for me. I thought I would have to sacrifice at least one roll of paper towel (like Sopalin) but to my great surprise it would only be half a pack of tissues (like Kleenex) that would be necessary and rather at the end of the trip when ordinary life would soon return. I do not explain anything except that there was not so much way for boredom. But on the side of the sexual drives, they were also felt towards the end of the trip. Maybe I would have been seduced by a nice

girl who would have hit on me but no, I wouldn't have to blush when I got home, I wouldn't have to worry about getting divorced, I wouldn't have to think about a new life as a couple in a new country on the horizon. This will not be the case for all Suntrippers, one will be left by his wife and the other will find a companion. The wheel also turns outside the bike.

In Lyon I had an ability to get carried away by car drivers, something that will not really leave me but will be reduced during the trip to amplify when the big cities arrive in China, with their share of car drivers, able to cutting you of road without warning. I would even be able to hold my brakes to gently hit the back of a car that had suddenly put itself in front of me. There followed a rather heated discussion on my part. Sorry if I left some bad memories of cyclists on solar bikes in some places! But China is like the USA, cities are spreading out, spaces are large. I wonder how they did before the bike.

Because indeed and this saddens me, I did not see many cyclists in China. Some sports cyclists or travellers and a few rare bicycles. On the other hand, there are a lot of electric scooters and cars. I am well aware that if we have beautiful roads for cycling, it is because they have been financed to keep trucks and cars moving. Without these last vehicles I think there would not be a road convenient enough for our bikes and that we would have to go back to the horse instead. In large cities there are back lanes which are sometimes a little crowded but which have the merit of existing, a lane for two-wheelers mainly but where cars can circulate.



Scooter in frequent use in China, photo August 11, 2018

The real route

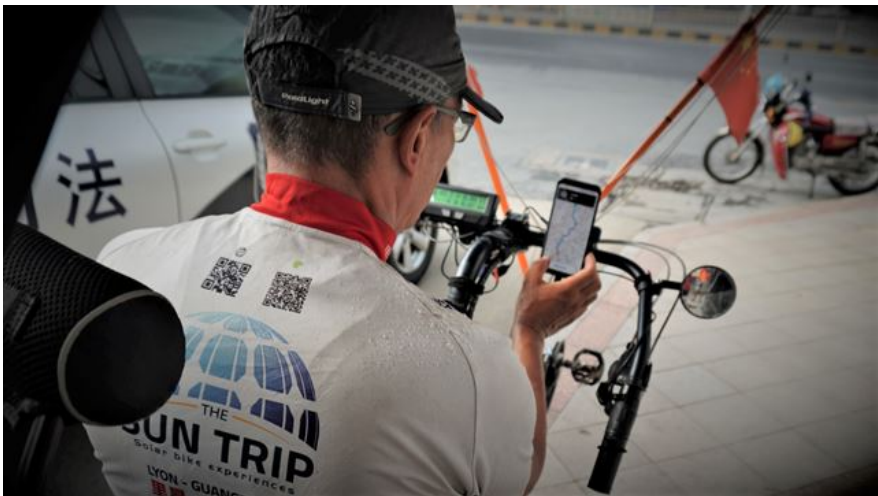
- Did you go through Turkey?
- Did you take the Silk Road?
- No, it was a bit like a race, so I took the shortest way, north, along a new silk road.

To go faster, the road from the north, of course.

If the link still works, here is [the route I took](#). I created this map on *My Maps*, when I came back from the GPS points recorded in the photos I took with my mobile phone. This route remains a good framework to start and find out your own route and possible bivouacs.

lose in finesse of watt adjustment.

About the OsmAnd navigation software, it was like a compass that reassured me, constantly on. I saw that we could do without it part of the time by comparing with Romàn. He would turn on his phone from time to time to check the road. It is true that there are many straight lines and that it is not mandatory to follow its progression kilometre by kilometre! Romàn had his cuddly toy, the stuffed sheep, I had my phone.



Navigation via mobile, I was a little too addicted

To note that several times I made a mistake after a roundabout, either because the GPS had a short adaptation time, or because I didn't read the map well, or both.

After important roundabouts that can lead you in the wrong direction, make sure you check your heading even if it means turning your GPS mobile back on!

I started using Baidu Maps quickly enough to check the routes I had pre-recorded on OsmAnd; the advantage of Baidu Maps is the quality because it is the local Google Maps. The downside is that it's all in Chinese! But it is a map like Google Maps and after a few tries, it indicates easily a city or the keywords *hotel* or *bicycle shop*, so you can follow a road to one of the points indicated on the map. However, it must be possible to indicate in Chinese characters and use an app to translate, copy and paste.

Prepare a list of keywords translated into Chinese (or other languages) before you leave and keep it handy. To keep it in numerical format in a Trello record, for example, allows you to make a copy-paste to search in Baidu Maps.

Baidu Maps has helped me several times. You can also get by with Google Maps but be careful to have your VPN active. So in the event of stop of the VPN do not count any more on Google Maps! A plan B with Baidu Maps is not without interest. But don't trust it completely either, just like Google Maps, it happens that the route it will indicate is really impracticable or not up to date.

For the last day, just before arriving in Canton, the road indicated by our respective GPS to the four cyclists that we were, was

impassable due to road works! The detour was not easy to find and I appreciated the fact that in the group Camille was able to find the diverted road as the rain and thunderstorm was coming.

The numbers of the trip in summary



Cycle Analyst, a photo of August 3, 2018

Several times I have been asked for synthetic data of the trip.

I carried out this work based on the measurements I noted on the Consumption Analyst Cycle. The Databox designed to collect the information, which I took to the end, did not work properly (I must admit that I did not try to find out if it worked or not).

There are limits to my synthesis. For example, when people ask me if I have camped a lot and how many times I was staying with the locals. In that case I don't know how to count by the unit because sometimes we are in bivouac in front of the house of the inhabitant, not really at the inhabitant's house but we exchange

all the same with the inhabitant without invading his intimacy too much. So it's a bivouac or a home stay or some other category? I counted this evening break in bivouac.

For the electro-solar data and kilometres covered I missed rigor. Sometimes I would start pedaling the next morning without taking the readings and without resetting the counter for the day. So for the daily values it is not necessary to be picky and look at the figures of the averages as a guide. For more details on the ability to produce electricity, the work done using the Databox provided by Justin de [Grin Technologies](#) is the reference. But I am quite proud of my data, which I think can give an idea. I hope you will do better, both in terms of kilometres per day and in terms of daily electricity production.

If you are interested in my data from the Consumption Analyst Cycle download the Excel table from the [J'me Recycle website](#).



Course synthesis

The route from Chamonix lasted 65 days, for 12650 kilometres covered. On the Suntrip site it is indicated 64 days, implied and a few hours, hence the beautiful sign with 64 indicated above. For the photo it suits me well, I was born in 1964 so a 64 as a reminder is good. I arrived in Canton 6th, at the same time as Jack, Auguste and Camille.

With more than 2000 kilometres covered during my preparation phase and the Sun Trip prologue, the original chain, sprockets and chain rings lasted 15000 kilometres.

A replacement of the entire transmission part will be necessary on the return to Lyon, derailleur rollers included.

The ten countries crossed correspond to France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan and China. In Europe, people sometimes move from one country to another without realizing it! For border photos it's a little annoying. And then you can enter from a country to enter the country again because of the historical intricacy of border areas.



Hosting synthesis

In Europe, I started with accommodation in a private home, using the [Warmshowers](#) network . If you want to meet people who are passionate about cycling and spend time talking about your trip and make detours to find accommodation, there's nothing better! However, it is not ideal to go fast. Too many constraints, after that first evening I stopped considering using this network. The same goes for the [couchsurfing](#) network that I had considered for a while after reading the book of the

[Suntrotteuse](#) written by Anick-Marie Bouchard, one of the first adventurers of the Sun Trip.



Warmshowers homestay on the Köniz side

Same punishment for campsites in Europe, it's handy if you don't have to make too many detours to find it! It's best to take accommodation on the roadside or just a little out of the way. I made the rookie mistake the first few days. In fact I wanted to save time by subcontracting the search for accommodation to my wife whom I contacted around 4 p.m. and told her within how many kilometres approximately I wanted to find a bivouac. That's how I found myself in campsites a little bit far away, [AirBnB](#) and hotels. As my requests were more precise, more annoying too and I ended up managing more and more by myself from Ukraine.

Finding a bivouac in the fields may be less problematic than finding accommodation, except in Europe where the city is present everywhere, then in China after the desert areas. It is a

compromise and a choice to be made. I know that Daniel Jenni is a fan of bivouacs, that he prefers a water source in the middle of nature to a hotel shower.

The bivouac will be indispensable anyway, so you have to plan for it.

For my part, I preferred breaks in hotels even if sometimes I sleep as badly as in bivouacs by the roadside. The hotel allows you to meet a minimum of local civilization other than through the windows of trucks or cars. The shower, washing clothes at the sink, the socket for my mobile phone and the Wi-Fi during my communication phases were still more comfortable. And to cross a country without spending anything on accommodation when you can afford to pay is almost petty.

There's no obligation to travel through China at a lower cost because you're on a bike even though you have a luxury bike.

Accommodations in local houses are, in fact, the first night the Warmshowers contact, another one in Kazakhstan in a small town where there was no hotel and the bivouac impossible. Another one on the first night in China where I was welcomed by the movement of a hand inviting me to come and sleep and eat, it's crazy how easy it is to understand each other by simple gestures. And right then I was on the highway, the battery almost dead and I didn't know that I could have bivouacked a little further after the lake. I accepted the invitation, I was able to share a convivial moment with what I thought were Uyghurs living by the side of the highway. Or rather the highway passed by their home, I don't know. You have to know how to adapt to the sanitary conditions, water and toilets to the version lost in the

countryside, but a warm welcome. Later, I was also accommodated in the police station when I couldn't find a hotel. If in the north of China there is a state of war with a roadblock every 50 kilometres or so, keep in mind that the police are your friends, especially with the little text written in Chinese that Angélique provided us. Even if they can't accommodate you, they can help you to find a place to stay for the night.

The text in Chinese, Russian and English introducing the Sun Trip was super useful to help us to be taken seriously and get help.

For the bivouacs I had planned a self-supporting tent, which didn't need pegs to hold. That's how I was able to bivouac by putting the tent on a concrete layer, at highway areas or in front of the house of a Kazakh or Chinese family.

When I say hotel, you have to see that there is a huge gap between the accommodation in a small room with several shared beds and a single tap that is used for cooking, laundry and washing oneself succinctly in a roadside restaurant and the Chinese luxury hotel at 45 euros with a copious breakfast (I let you calculate in Chinese currency). So by hotel, there is the hotel as we think in France and hotel with just walls and a roof, people, a meal, a bed, a hole or a field for small needs.

For hotels in China, I heard that we should go to hotels for foreigners. Actually I think there is a little more **subtility** than that and a **small trick** to know.

— What do you think about when you talk about subtlety?

By subtlety I think when I found myself in a drive-in where life was very concentrated. The leader of this people told me that she couldn't receive foreigners, a translation made through the intermediary of the wife of my contact in China, François Iffouzar, via WeChat, but I felt it was something else, like being afraid of being spied on. It was that evening, at the insistence of the matron, that I learned to knock on the door of the city's police officers to ask for accommodation with the help of our explanatory text written in Chinese, successfully. The policemen I met, live in modest buildings, an enclosure is usually present around the buildings.



Accommodation for municipal police

To find a hotel in China, for a long time I had difficulty recognizing the Chinese characters that indicated that it was indeed a place to stay. Geolocation is sometimes capricious on the last few metres or I'm not good at it. There are hotels with *hotel* in the name, there is no doubt about it. So the first thing I asked when I walked into the lobby was:

— Hello, is this a hotel?

I had a few words, key phrases that I kept on the phone for these occasions. And I remember a hotel where the hostess clearly told me that it wasn't a hotel! And I was convinced it was one because I had checked the characters to make sure it was. The doubt came back to me on my ability to memorize the few Chinese characters. I asked passers-by in the street to show me a hotel. A passer-by beckoned me to the hotel I had just left. I didn't want to look like an idiot, I managed to tell her that I had been told that it wasn't one! We went back there together, she wanted to show me that it was a hotel. And then the speech was different, there was no rooms more! In short, I understood that I didn't correspond to the hotel's standing, which was validated by my companion raising her eyebrows without saying it clearly. She found me a hotel just a little further away.



My companion and her child to find a hotel in Yongchang

— What do you think about when you talk about small trick?

I'm thinking about the history of tourist hotels. It's actually not really a requirement. You just have to know that the staff has to fill out a form that has about three columns. The name, your ID

and possibly, your phone number.

And that's where there's a difference between a tourist hotel and a non-tourist hotel. The ability to understand and translate your information because for most Chinese people our Latin letters are a real gibber. I have tested for you that by giving them this information clearly you can get into a larger number of hotels. For the name, you have to translate your first name to Chinese first name. My name on WeChat with as first part the Chinese version followed by the Latin version. All I had to do was show my WeChat so that the person could take the Chinese name and write it in the column of their notebook. The same for identification, as you don't have a Chinese identity card, some of them are lost; you just have to show your passport numbers to report on the form. And for the phone number, since most police checks ask you for it, the best thing to do is to have the number at hand. A Chinese number seems to me essential, a SIM card is to be bought preferably as soon as you enter China in Korghos.

Have your first name translated into Chinese and write it on your WeChat, the Chinese will then be able to call you. Note that the order in China is First-Name-Last Name.



A hotel in Da Jing Zhen



94

min



279

max



195

moy

Synthesis of kilometres per day

— Laurent, you'll have to come back and try the three hundred!

— I'll have to think about it!

Ok, my maximum will leave me on my hunger, I would have liked to reach 300 kilometres in one day or even 288 kilometres to have good luck numbers!

For the kilometres per day, it must be understood that in it we find errors of road, detours due to work or bad weather and turns in circles before finding the right address!

If I take the smallest day of 94 kilometres, maybe that day I had to

look for a type in a big city, make detours and in the end I advanced on the goal of Canton only 70 kilometres. A day like that is really frustrating when you're in a hurry to get there or when you want to reach the Suntriper which is a few hundred kilometres ahead of you. I think in this case to Herman whom I had the hope to reach at the beginning of China. Then at the end the young people who gave me a fishing trip because they did not give me a gift, as we decelerate to wait for you. On the contrary I had the impression that they were doing everything so that I couldn't make it. It's fair enough, it was the head Sun Trip and I was a bit old and not very *speaking english*.

For the average of 200 kilometres per day I was 5 kilometres wrong about my ambitions, am I really going to have to go back?



The number of hours of cycling per day

Five hours of cycling on the shortest days is typical of a day with problems. This was the case when my credit card was swallowed by the distributor and with help and time, the situation was unblocked. Or a day when you have to look for a type in the city.

Ten hours on the bike for the longest days, this has rarely happened to me. The 12th day on the Rivne side, where I was at the end of the battery with a voltage of 39 V at the arrival. Arrived without electrical assistance, in a rather shady hotel run by Russian speaking Kazakhs. The selection of the hotel had been

too optimistic probably. One day at 258 km. Ten hours also on the 29th day, with an arrival in Kyzylorda a huge city that deserves a visit where I had trouble finding accommodation. And my last day at 10:39 a.m.: it will be the 62th day of driving that will end on the night; all this to catch up with the young people who were in front of me: Jack, Auguste and Camille.



The meeting with Jack, Auguste and Camille

In general, I could bear quite well 8 hours of cycling a day, with a few breaks and some stretching. But 10 hours a day was a maximum a bit painful at the bottom of the spine, on the side of the coccyx.

For the race, it is allowed to ride during the day from 7 a.m. with a slightly flexible curfew of 9 p.m. A little flexible as long as you can continue if the weather conditions where the stop place requires it. The start of the next day will be delayed by the same amount.

From there to finish every day at 10pm because you don't leave before 8 a.m. every morning; it's up to you to see if it passes with the organization.

In pure theory we could drive 14 hours a day! If you don't communicate too much, that you are able to bivouac anywhere and that you eat quickly and sleep easily. I would say that at best you could ride 12 hours a day. If this is your case, with an average of 25 kilometres per hour, compared to the one who drives 8 hours, you will have covered 100 kilometres more during the day.

My average is 23 km/h over the whole route with a minimum at 17 km/h and a maximum at 31 km/h.

To surpass Raf Van Hulle's 45-day record, you will have to drive at least 12 hours a day at an average of 25 kilometres per hour. Or drive faster and for less time!

I've heard about velomobile on the Sun Trip 2020. Will they make a difference? Won't they be disturbed by road conditions or wind? I'm looking forward to the ST2020.



Synthese Wh per km

— Laurent, how do you do if there's no sun?

— I pedal because I'm in the solar autonomy trip, even if it means being a bit masochistic!

People often ask me how I do if there is no sun or if the weather

is rainy for several days. The answer could be that I recharge the batteries on the power socket, which frankly would be the most intelligent from an effort saving point of view. But when you've decided to try the adventure on your own then you're going all the way.

The worst day of solar recharging, with 141 Wh arrived on the 44th day, the same day I travelled the least kilometres in the day, the 94 kilometres of my board. The area towards Hami had been undergoing for a few days a very rainy and windy weather. The G312/G30 road had been damaged, so Herman and I, each in turn, had to take the northern bypass and switch to the G7. A modern highway but in abandoned mode because no highway area was open, even the natives were surprised. To relieve ourselves, we found ourselves behind the building! But to refuel and have a drink break... that's when you appreciate having someone to offer you food and drink, especially if you've been a bit light on the food stock!



Food offered on the G7 - it was good timing

— Laurent, how much do you travel with your 22 Ah battery in

48 V?

It's variable of course. To answer this question simply, I say that I travel 100 kilometres a day without the battery and 200 kilometres with it. But it all depends on the weather, the terrain, the type of environment city or countryside and the physical fitness of the moment.

You have to ride to know your own values. You can use the Wh/km. The lower the figure, the less battery is used and therefore in principle for the same amount of energy you have to cover more kilometres.

My *best value* (in brackets actually) is 1.4 Wh/km. This represents a day where I had to make more effort. This is the famous 42th day, the day when I travelled the least distance, with 94 kilometres. If the Wh/km figure goes down because your fitness improves, that's good! But it could be just because you are saving the battery!



Puncture on the 42nd day



Synthese Wh per day

Another power consumption meter is the display of the total Wh of the daily trip. This number includes solar production and regenerative recharging during downhill braking.

The lowest number of 141 Wh would indicate that I have almost divided my consumption by 10 compared to the average. Extraordinary, isn't it? Looking at the table I can see that it's still that famous 42th day!

Looking at all these elements I can say that it must have been a disastrous weather for the electric recharging or that the electrical system was faulty.

As I did not have big electrical problems it must have been a terrible weather from a solar point of view!

I've just looked at my photos from July 30, 2018 and that's the day I went to the hairdresser's, I had a flat type and there was a thick cloud cover. In the evening it rained a lot!

For the maximum at 2356 Wh, it was an excellent production day, with a regeneration rate close to 9% (as far as I can trust this number!). It was the 29th day, July 17, 2018, and I covered 258 kilometres. A nice day of riding.



A selfie of 17 July 2018

For purists, the display counters for Amperes (A) and Ampere-hour (Ah) are missing. Sorry, but I didn't see the point.

As for the displayed regeneration percentages, I did not find these values very reliable. Even if I remove the max of 55%, there are still several values above 20%. Very strange, so an average to be taken with tweezers.

Even if on average the regeneration brings only 5%, it's still good to take!

Geography

A big geography class, that's what the Sun Trip is all about.

Europe is very small compared to our Russian, Kazakh and Chinese neighbours. For Russia we don't realize it since we cross it on a small portion, but Kazakhstan and China we have plenty

of time to get used to them.

And yet in thirty-seven days I was at the gates of northern China, by bike!

The world is small and dependent on water.

In the geography classes that I had to take at school without being too interested, they talk about rivers and oceans. And that's what conditions life and therefore the big cities, the small towns, the villages and the lost holes.

In the steppes of Kazakhstan you can find water in places that I thought were deserted. That's how I was surprised when some Russians who work in Baikonur, who had taken me in affection and showed me around the city, also took me to see their parents in a place accessible only by 4x4 and that I would have thought devoid of life. A water point and poof a few houses with vegetable garden and above ground swimming pool! All that's left to do is to pull a power line and there's civilization.



Parents living in the middle of the steppes next to Baikonur

Water, source of life. I can't remember the water from (or before) Ukraine that we start drinking no more from the tap but bottled! The water that one should not neglect while crossing the desert areas.

Leaving Chamonix where I had burnt a brake pad that had arrived at the bottom because I don't like downhill, I wasn't fond of tackling other mountains and so my route was content to follow as much as possible the dishes that nature offers, follow the rivers.

A natural border, drawn by the Volga, separates us clearly between green Europe and desert Asia, that's how I felt crossing Saratov and then the Volga bridge on the E38. A huge bridge, more than five minutes by bike to cross it. Huge!

I saw an impressive number of car wash stations in Saratov. The sand must invade the daily life of the natives.



One of many laundries in Saratov

Weather, beware of surprises

The weather is to be watched closely. Surprises can happen right from the start, typically during the summer of 2018 it was a heat wave in France and rain and cold in Eastern Europe.

Each Suntriper had its own weather forecast. For some it was more rain, for others more wind and for the luckiest it was more backwind and sunshine.

Having a good application to follow the weather is a plus. Depending on the arrival of a strong wind or heavy rain, it might be worth going beyond the 9 p.m. schedule for two or three days to move on to a clearer area.

Plan the route we're going to take and adapt according to the bad weather. Over China, the strong wind has pushed Eric Morel back. And the submerged G312/G30 after a few days of rain made

it necessary for Herman and I to take the G7.



The G30 to G7 bifurcation

According to the translation given by Angélique after contact via WeChat, it is not said that it is forbidden to take the G30 but just that it is impracticable, an invitation to take the G7 follows the information. So nothing imposed if you want to swim across! I like this side, we don't impose anything on you.

Note that I asked Angelique for this confirmation because at the previous hotel and restaurant breaks I had frankly different bell sounds from one person to another.

Be careful with the advice of the choice of the route that we can give you.

Don't always rely on the road indications that someone can give you. I wasn't fooled on this one, but I was fooled on smaller sections if!

— Did you suffer from the heat?

Actually less than others, thanks to the panels above my head that avoid direct sunlight. On the other hand the toes, which in

addition to being crushed on the pedals, were locked in the shoes in the warmth and exposed to the direct sun! Ants will appear more and more as time goes by. It will take me six months to see this diffuse tingling in the big toes disappear after the return.

I put sun cream on my face but not much on the whole trip. I did, however, have a blue and black undershirt to alternate between, with merino and long sleeves to protect me from the cold as well as the heat.

— How many litres of water did you have with you?

For the big heat zones of Kazakhstan and northern China, saving weight on the water is in my opinion a big mistake (yes I have names!). And trusting the real help we get on the road would be very optimistic.

Taking 6-7 litres is not too much in risk areas.

To drink water regularly, I had a 2-litre water bag from which I regularly sucked up water with the hose, and often! I almost never suffered from thirst, even though I drank a lot during breaks.

I'm a computer scientist and a coffee addict, so it's amazing that I was able to do the Sun Trip with almost no coffee. However, in two months, I drank more Coca-Cola than the previous fifty years of my life! A simple and sweet pleasure. And after frequenting the Cauquil, a little more beer than usual, except in Muslim areas where beer is not present.

In the north of China, beer will have to be replaced by another pleasure, get ready.

— And were you cold?

Actually yes, it happened to me at the beginning of the trip with the rain and cold weather. Anyway I had four layers, two merino undershirts, a feathered K-way and a breathable Patagonia raincoat and gloves. Despite this, after a while the cold became persistent. In this case, a break in a restaurant with hot food like soup is welcome.

For the nights, my light down duvet with sometimes several layers of clothes was enough. For the passage through the mountains of China as the Sun Trip 2020 plans it, I think that in bivouac my down would have been too light.

Animals

— Did you meet a lot of animals?

For the animals, we all took pictures of camels and wild horses. They were close, even on the road in some open areas of the Kazakh steppes.

In Ukraine we also had roadside animals that fed by grazing and some farmyard animals. A bit like in Corsica. We also see some horses tied to a stake.

For the little story, once on the left lane a hen and her chicks already of beautiful size were walking around. A truck arrived in front of me, saw the animal and reduced its speed. The hen

passed in my lane, the truck kept going forward and at one point one of the chicks turned backwards! I heard a *ploc* and it was over. The truck went by and the hen looked for a while for her chick, which was now just a stain on the road. Then I wondered if my brain would do a block under the same circumstances. The *ploc* stayed in my memory for a while !



Camels and their smells to be discovered on the spot

My main obsession was dogs. I think I must have something that attracts them, fear or something. There's hundreds of cars going by and all you have to do is get on your little bike and they'll go crazy. But what the hell did we do to them? Do we remind them of an old-fashioned hunt? I only had the speed to get away from them, but you have to have the right road and not be too close to them. I didn't have pepper spray or pebbles or electric sticks. In China I had no problems with dogs, either they were free but small and not aggressive, or they were bigger but kept on a leash.

Be prepared for a confrontation with an aggressive dog, at least!

In Kazakhstan at a certain time I was entitled like others to episodic crossings of locusts (or grasshoppers). They crossed the road by leaping-flying-planing. I had to put on a scarf to protect my face because the impact of the insect whips lightly on the skin, better to protect your eyes too. It wasn't a big cloud and I didn't manage to make an interesting video or photo of the phenomenon. But it's apparently known and cars know that on some sections the colour of their car will change a little bit to green.

As for the mosquitoes I was dreading in the evening, I only met two of them! And in hotel rooms. My mosquito net tracksuit will not have been used during the whole trip. On the other hand when I came back to Lyon at the end of August and for several months I was assailed by tiger mosquitoes and others during my outings in the garden!



The Cavalcade, roadside sculptures

Cities

Clearly, without regret, I did not take the time for the visits. Another trip would be to Kazakhstan, taking the time to discover more in depth. The country would deserve it.

Atkobe, a city in Kazakhstan that I found beautiful, airy. An easy contact with the population. I found smiles and a nice welcome. I received several invitations to share a meal while I was just

passing through the city, an invitation during a break at the local supermarket, equivalent to a Carrefour from home, and another one by a driver who asked me to chat a little. I could see that I was offended by my refusals. I tried to justify by the race that I was chasing, I'm not sure I had convinced. It's on these occasions that I take out my little business card that I give as a gift when I give my explanations, with more or less happiness at the translation.

Kyzylorda, a city in Kazakhstan that I found immense, with beautiful modern statues. The city grew next to a big river whose name I didn't know (looking at Google Maps just now I can write that it was the Syr-Daria river, but for me it was just a huge river after desert areas), in which I made a detour to find a hotel and where I ended up invited, thanks to a professional cyclist who took care of me, made a phone call to his relations to find me a luxury hotel.

Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan (too close to China probably to remain the capital!). I would compare Almaty to Paris for the behavior, a city where everyone is in a hurry and where the driver is sure of himself. I tested for you from the inside of a car, on the front passenger seat of a taxi. I fastened the seatbelt and tightened the buttocks.

First of all for the little story, if you have to take a taxi in Almaty, don't look for the mobile app that works well. There's no need for it. However, you won't know the bill only when you take a taxi!

The rule of thumb is to stand at the side of the road and reach down and raise your arm up a little. Probably it will be your right arm because you will be watching the car coming. An arm away

from your body to make it clear that you are looking for a taxi, that any driver. The last you have to do, then, is to indicate the place and negotiate the price or not! If I took the taxi it is not because of a problem but because of an invitation to eat a traditional Kazakh meal in the evening. I'll talk about it in the chapter on meetings.

Be careful in Almaty

For the cyclist it is a city that stands out from the previous ones by the **increased vigilance that one must have**. The use of the accelerator is a plus to take off quickly.

Urumqi, in the north of China, is a large city with even more intense road traffic than the Kazak city of Almaty. And the more than aggressive behavior of motorists, it's like being surrounded by crazy cars, where the challenge is to crush you at all costs!

— You're exaggerating Laurent!

— I do not think so. Do you want to live *GTA Vice City*, the video game in real life? It's a good place to start (I guess there's much worse elsewhere but I didn't remain to see it).

As you can see, I don't have a good memory of my time in Urumqi (pronounced OuRoumTchi or something like that) that I **had to cut short, just to keep breathing**. I remember losing control of my route, OsmAnd couldn't point the way properly anymore, the multi-level expressways probably had something to do with it. Several times I stopped on the sidewalk to try to find my way, and I was quickly surrounded by the natives who didn't seem at all interested in me but only in Silky One. Touching him in all directions, discussing I don't know what about the

technique, maybe to reproduce him? At a certain time I asked for help from a policeman who was trying to do some traffic control. After indicating the direction of Guangzhou (pronounce GouangDjo or something like that) and not the intermediate cities that I was not supposed to pronounce correctly, he took his vehicle to open the way for me. And even he had difficulty to be respected, the motorists only let him pass with hesitation, or not at all!

Urumqi almost cracked me up. I came back to life on the outskirts of town, on the dusty road of the truckers.



A photo taken while passing through Atkobe, July 13, 2018

A typical day

— Did you get up get up at six o'clock to leave at seven o'clock?

— Huh! Do you want me to tell you about the optimal theoretical day or a typical day I've been following?

The objective is to optimize the driving time from seven to twenty-one hours. In theory we drive from seven o'clock. I know that the young people set out on this objective until their tandem broke.

I'm a computer scientist in life and I'm more used to being operational around nine o'clock. That's not good preparation for the Sun Trip. For the trip I'll try harder, but I'm not used to it, so I'll be up at around seven. The alarm clock will not ring often because I will often be up before it rings, always on the alert will be my cup of tea during the trip. Sleep lightly, getting up fairly easy, but not very quick to warm up. I need a lunch before being a cyclist for the day. A minimum of nutrition to fill my stomach. Cold or hot meal is not important but a consistent minimum (I appreciate the recumbent bike not to compress my belly, it's an advantage to be almost lying on the bike). Tidy up your clothes well, don't forget anything in the bathroom or in the tent. The departure is delayed when the tent, pillow and air mattress have to be folded. The first toilet break. Clean the solar panels before leaving. Reading the Cycle Analyst values and resetting it to zero, if I hadn't done so the night before. Being ready for me took at least an hour and a half.

My first pedals started at about 8:30.

Once I left I could ride for two hours without interruption unless I had to pee. For the record, since I was little I've known that my hose is too long. When I was young, I used to have fits of stomach aches, when I had to stay folded in half in my bed, when several foods were mixed together like beans, candies, ice cream. As I grew older the gut found room and no longer worried me. But it probably encroaches on my bladder. At night I have to pee twice,

three or even four times. For the bivouac and some accommodations I kept several small empty bottles to avoid going outside in the middle of the night. It is necessary to remain concentrated under penalty of overflowing!

During the day, I was afraid to take many breaks. It will not be the case and yet I drank with my pipette very often and regularly. I would meet more annoyed than months on the road. Yann was taking a break every thirty minutes!

I try to tell you about my typical day but in fact I had two periods, before and after the meeting with the Cauquil. For the survey, no change between the two periods, but on the course of the day, yes.

Before the meeting, I was in mode with as few breaks as possible. Stop peeing, relaxation, feeding, taking pictures as short as possible. I was holding up quite well until early evening when I had to take more and more breaks because of fatigue and coccyx pain. I think I felt guilty for not riding. I wanted to achieve my average of two hundred kilometres per day and as it was bad with the weather at the beginning of Europe, I was trying to raise the average.

Then came the meeting with Bernard and Yann. I modelled myself on their typical day. They were driving faster, I'd say around thirty-five kilometres an hour, whereas I was more like twenty-five. The difference was in the length of the breaks, which were longer, where we took the time to really rest, while the solar panels recharged the batteries. Breaks possibly at ten o'clock, lunch break and a four o'clock break. Snack time is also the time to look for the evening accommodation or a place for the

bivouac. Then in the evening, a good meal and a small ritual, a beer, when possible. I was better off in the evening with this typical day.

I think that knowing the typical day of each Suntriper would be enriching, especially if you want to achieve more kilometres per day. I would have liked to catch up with Hermann to spend some time with him and see what his typical day was like.

Once he had found his accommodation, there was still time to wash, eat, take care of the laundry, the next day's route and communicate about his day.

Around 11 p.m. I found the comfort of sheets or down, often with the mobile phone in my hand to continue communicating on social networks.

A typical day does not mean that all days are equal, quite the contrary. In some hotels you have to take into account the time of passage to pay for the room, you can't do it in the evening in advance. **A deposit is often required** which is returned on departure after checking the room. Take into account the opening time of the kitchen for breakfasts included in the accommodation. This service can be found in luxury hotels and the lunch break is worth losing half an hour.



ilky One still equipped with the Click-Stand rod

Ride alone or even in pairs



Bernard and Yann Cauquil at the entrance to Kazakhstan. Nice picture that invites to travel, but look for the error

— Were you in a group to go to China?

— A little during the prologue between Lyon and Chamonix, then it was up to each of us, even if many of us took almost the same route from the north.

Riding alone or even in two or even in x is a question we have to ask ourselves.

I preferred to ride alone because of my character. But after a while, meeting Suntrippers on the road and doing a bit of road together remains in the good memories.

We only go faster as long as we don't have any problems. And only you meet different people. If I was able to visit Baikonur, it's because I was alone.



Yann and Bernard on the side that shakes less but slips, and me on the road that shakes hard

But with a group of people it is frankly reassuring and we can be complementary. One can take care of choosing the route, another one can find the accommodation and a third one can choose the

lunch menu. I wanted to leave the Cauquil in Russia because I felt like I was growing wings and just a few kilometres after having distanced them the front frame broke. I appreciated Bernard's know-how and tranquility who held the frame with a long rope I had in the first aid kit. Time to find a next welder. The rope was put back after welding and it held until Canton.

Take some rope with you, it can really help in case of a problem.

Cyclists don't ride the same way, even more so with the solar strategy. Some prefer to ride at 40 km/h or more and take nice pauses to recharge, such as Herman who was riding at full speed between each break. Romàn and the Cauquil were also looking good. To keep up with them I had to increase the electric assistance compared to my habits of the previous days. **Maybe I was wrong to be thrifty.** We were meeting at a certain place. WeChat was our best trading friend. And for the Colle brothers who were on regular mountain bikes and went faster than Jack and I on solar bikes, incredible power and endurance.



Entering Kazakhstan, the road with Romàn, Bernard and Yann

In short, each to his own rhythm.

Riding alone and sometimes in groups at random is a good compromise.

Of course, the first one won't have a choice! Except to be in tandem!

Meetings

— I followed you on Facebook and saw that you'd made some nice connections.

— Yes, in addition to the unavoidable selfies of the road, I was lucky enough to be invited to spend the night at the inhabitant's house or in front of their house, to visit the Russian enclave of Baikonur in Kazakhstan, to be assisted during a credit card problem. I won't tell you everything, it would be too long, but

excerpts should be enough to make you want to travel.

I didn't leave necessarily gone to meet people, I left rather to make my trip as quickly as possible, take pictures, communicate. But I knew that meetings would take place, I had been warned, but I didn't know that I would have so many nice meetings.

When I was young I liked to visit my grandmothers, uncles and aunts on my bicycle. I liked to have a destination, a place to arrive, someone to meet, talk a little and come back to the starting point. For training I had the same need to visit someone I knew. For the Sun Trip I wondered if I had a friend or family in China to reproduce this pattern that makes me dig. As far as I know, no family on the horizon. At least my brother-in-law Daniel who goes to China from time to time for work.

During a discussion with some friends, we learn (Christel and I) that *François of the Jum* (it's a jargon that we have to say *La Jumenterie*, a horse club where my children and my wife used to ride horses) is now living in China. I contacted François by e-mail, who told me that he lived one hundred kilometres north of Guangzhou, that it would be almost possible that I would make a detour there, that he would invite me and even that he offered me help by phone, if needed, in China. For the record, François worked in France in the chemical industry. The company was bought by Chinese capital. He had to train Chinese personnel and after several trips, he saw a new life opening up for him in China. He is now in charge of the factory, married to a young Chinese woman and father of a young daughter.

So I had someone to see in China, a native with whom I could speak French! Too cool and I think I was the only one.



François on Silky One

I had planned two other meetings. The one I mentioned in the chapter on the *digits of the trip in synthesis*, the first evening's accommodation with a Warshomers host and Honza Galla from Azub in the Czech Republic.

The other meetings, it is **chance and smiles** that will be responsible for them.

A solar-powered vehicle, a European at the wheel, it's enough to arouse curiosity. A multitude of people, from their vehicle, will take photos or videos of us. An impressive number of people want us to stop for a selfie, parents who want to see their child next to the extraordinary machine (when sometimes the kid doesn't care).

At first, you feel a bit like a star! We stop for the selfie, sometimes we are rewarded with a gift, a drink, a piece of fruit. Then it happens that you don't want to stop, you just want to move forward on your trip, which you know is still long. Some people are very insistent, stopping several times in front of you on the side of the road. Sometimes it's with a bit of guilt that I didn't stop, other times it's the opposite, I blamed myself for having stopped, it compensates morally!

If you don't want to get stuck for a long time, when you see a busload of Chinese tourists, run away!

And over the last few days, I was frankly fed up with being targeted with their motive. I wanted to steal the super chick who was next to the guy in his super car and have a good time (sometimes I have flashes like that). I think it was about time I got there. I understand better now the feeling of the famous people and why they are leaving. Especially since the behavior in the big cities was different. The search for contact wasn't there, it was just the photo that seemed to interest the person, the curiosity to share and then you move on.

The trip in China may seem long, very long... too long?

Fortunately, I ended up meeting François, or rather it was François who came to meet us, with his driver! In fact, François is still considered as a European and as such (until further notice) he can't drive a car alone in China. As head of the factory in China, he is provided with a driver!

We tested something not to do, eating pizza at Pizza Hut. François had warned us, expensive and not good. But all four of us (Jack, Auguste, Camille and me) had dreamed of eating a pizza the day before. To say that it's expensive, after the order was taken, the waitress came back with the bill, to make sure that we had understood the price, before placing the order for real. And yes, it wasn't the taste we dreamed of (we had been warned).



Jack, Auguste, François, his driver, the waitress

But before I drank François' wine that he brought back from France to China, I would have had several opportunities to keep strong memories of this trip.

Meeting with the Azub team in the Czech Republic

A small hook for the cyclist but a big step for video promotion. Honza and his colleague from Azub made a great video of Silky One in action. It's the video I put on the homepage of [J'me Recycle](#).

It was a quick stopover, time to see their brand new premises, to observe a bit of Silky One on loan by Honza and his expert eye and to take some videos.

Honza gave me the benefit of his technical experience.

— Laurent, wouldn't you hear a *squeak-squeak* lately?

— Yes, I've been looking for three days to find out where the noise comes from.

At the top left corner above my head, a crack in the steel frame was growing, that I hadn't seen but I could hear it well. Honza installed me a riveted reinforcement that held all the way to Canton... and we could have done the same operation at the other three corners.

Any new noise that appears during your trip should alert you. Find the source of the noise before continuing...or pray!

On another tip, I left with a new mobile application to follow the weather, the [YR application](#) that I invite you to test.



Honza in the midst of Silky One reinforcement action, June 25, 2018

Meetings with the cyclists

Several times I would meet cyclists on the road. Sometimes it will only be a fast cross each other, each one wanting to continue his road without losing time. Without being frequent, we realize that we are not alone on the road by bike. And since we all use the same main road, or almost, the cyclist we meet has sometimes already approached other Suntrippers or will meet some again.

The first meeting took place at the Polish-Ukrainian border on June 29, 2018. A small team of cyclists were going to Ukraine for their ride. We crossed the border together, through the pedestrian crossing, because the other important crossing by road was forbidden to bicycles even though the bicycle is solar. The passage through the gates was borderline.

The day of July 17 will be a great day for the meeting of cyclists, after a good period without meeting. In the morning, lightning meeting of a cyclist who had spent the night at the same hotel as

me. It was in the morning that we met. He had already met other Suntrippers and will have the opportunity to meet others.

And in the evening in Kyzylorda, I would be taken care of by a champion of the [Astana cycling team](#).

Then I'll have to wait until 29 July in China for another meeting. I had thought that there would be a lot of cyclists in China, but it is not the case. In the cities electric scooters are replacing bicycles. So we are being overtaken by everyone in the cities.

Time after time we meet sporty cyclists outside the city. That's how I came across the father and son on August 5th while riding their bikes. The thumbs-up is a great classic, I would meet it often, it replaces the V that can be found elsewhere. You can feel the influence of social networks.



A cyclist well protected from the sun

The meeting with the Russian welder

To support your solar panels, either you make a rigid frame that is fixed to the bike - Guillaume's method -, or you make a flexible frame that can move with silent blocks, cables - Bernard's method -.

I had gone for the flexible version with silent blocks under the uprights, except that I hadn't put any cable. In compression mode the silent blocks worked well, but in extension mode the stretching was too important and could break. I made the mistake of removing the front silent blocks to avoid stretching. That's why the front jamb broke on July 9th. I was lucky enough to be on Bernard and Yann's road. Bernard helped me out with the rope I had brought as a rescue.

In the evening we found a local welder who took me in emergency. Then I put back in place the silent blocks at the front and the rope. The whole thing held until Canton.

Choose an all rigid frame or an all flexible frame. Don't mix the two options, I tested for you!



Welding in Russia

I will have the opportunity to bring a welder to China on the trailer on July 29th. The weld won't make it to Canton, but it won't have an impact.

Meeting with the Russian family and visiting Baikonur

— Baikonur, this looks familiar. Aren't there any rockets around here?

I wasn't expecting to visit the city of Baikonur. In fact, I thought the site was closed! When I tell you I lack culture!

One evening of July 13th in Kramtau, a Russian family, Elena, her husband and their daughter, engage in conversation via their daughter who translates English-Russian around Silky One and the Sun Trip. As we had the time as we were at the same hotel, we take the opportunity to tame each other. We keep in touch for an apparent meeting on the Baikonur side where they seem to live. I didn't really believe it but the kilometres passed by and

there I was at the gates of the meeting on July 16th and the meeting took place.

That's the big game, I almost feel like a star. I have the right to meet the grandparents and share a soup with the patriarch. I never imagined there would be houses where I was taken. It was outside Baikonur and you needed a 4x4 to get there. Then visit Baikonur, with a little trick to get in, because apparently you have to book in advance and even so it's not a sure thing. The visit will be a little shortened because I didn't want to visit a museum and I started to get tired. I was shown rockets and the statue of Yuri Gagarin, the great Russian hero of the Soviet space program. I had the impression that I was taken for a kind of hero of the cycling era - I was a little ashamed to inspire so much respect. And to top it all off, the family invited me to a restaurant.

And I had nothing to offer in return but my smile. I appreciated this exchange and I hope that one day I will have the opportunity to return the same welcome I received.

So Baikonur is still active, even if we feel that life is no longer so overflowing. It's a Russian enclave where all the ATMs deliver Russian currency and not Kazakhs. Within a few years, this enclave will have to be handed over to the Kazakh authorities. Perhaps the cause of the sadness I was feeling, or maybe it's the Russian temperament. On the other hand the girl was full of life.



Elena and her daughter on private visit to Baikonur

**Kazakhe accommodation and ladle shower **

July 20, 2018, on the Shakpakbaba side

Small country town, nothing on the map that looks like a hotel. People selling fruits and vegetables on the side of the road.

— Hi, I'm looking for a hotel or a place to sleep...

A short moment of reflection, an exchange between two people and I receive the invitation to follow the host into the house next door, his house. I would be warmly welcomed by the whole family, from granddaughters to grandmother. Except apparently by the grandfather, whom I would hear grumbling and who they would dismiss in a room.

A welcoming house, the young Muslim owner will slip away in the evening for a moment of prayer. In spite of the difficulties of translation I would learn that he has just learned that he is the

father of a child that he cannot go and see, his wife left him recently because of a stepmother, who turned his wife against him. Either the translation software is very good or I made it all up! But I really feel like that was it. He's offering me room and board. The room in which I would sleep could have accommodated about twenty cyclists! A room apparently intended to offer shelter, a carpet on the floor and that's it.

At one point I ask him if I can wash myself. There, big surprise, he takes me outside, starts to break a crate to start a fire that will heat a large basin of water. He makes me wait until the temperature rises. Then he makes me enter the room, badly lit, the finishing touches leaving something to be desired, but what a pleasure to enter this room filled with humid heat. I washed myself with a ladle with a water temperature that did me immense good. I think it was the best shower I've taken in the whole trip. Unlikely, fast but so much appreciated. It's unbelievable.



Preparing the fire to heat the water basin

The traditional Kazak meal in Almaty

July 23, 2018

— Did you eat horse?

— Shh, if my daughters find out, they'll take my head off!

No, I wasn't lost in the Kazakh steppes, hungry in the stomach and threw myself on a wild horse.

I had left the Cauquil family to continue the road with Romàn. Then I had continued solo on the same road as my predecessors while Romàn tried another way.

And there surprise on the road, the Cauquil family who make me a joke of which I keep a good memory. Issatay and his nephew who pretend to be Suntrippers with Bernard and Yann's jerseys. Once the surprise is over, they invite me to join them in Almaty to share a traditional meal...based on horse meat!

But why were the Cauquil's on their tandem trike in a car and no longer on a bike?

For a silly rear wheel, but an unusual model, whose spokes were breaking one after the other. They could have left after receiving a new wheel ordered in express delivery, if the wheel had arrived on time and not one month later! The Cauquil team will have to abandon the adventure at the gates of China, hence the few days spent in Almaty and the invitation I received to share a traditional meal organized by a friend of the Sun Trip, Issatay Birmanov.

To join them from the hotel (outside Almaty, ready to leave the

next morning) to the apartment, I would have to use the local taxi, i.e. reach out my arm to indicate that I'm looking for a driver (in fact it's the person from the hotel who will do it for me because I was convinced that I should call a taxi or use a mobile application. As I didn't understand anything, she went out in the street to show me). Issatay had planned everything, writing down the address and the number to call her in order to discuss the price and not to get scammed.

For the return to the hotel, the system M, as mutual aid, apparently in force in Kazakhstan, will be set up. During the meal a leak of a water radiator, important, will lead us to meet the owner of the accommodation, after some basins of water recovered. Issatay will manage to persuade him to take me back to the hotel in exchange for the help we had given him.



An evening with friends in Almaty, Issatay on the left of the photo

The Uighur encounter on entering China

July 25, 2018

- How's it going to get into China?
- Good, but you need to know.

Leaving Kazakhstan requires going through several customs, so much so that one wonders when it will end. But a very simple check.

On the Chinese border, there is a first electronic control that you should not forget to carry out, even if nobody is there to tell you. Otherwise, at the next exit checkpoint, you will be asked to go back to the previous passage.

In my case, I lost time on the understanding of the system. Namely, leaving your vehicle in a giant scanner. In fact a hangar big enough to accommodate the longest trucks or a bike like Silky One, the scanner must certainly move. As I had lost my cane to stand Silky One, I had to find a way. And it's the good old Chinese wheelbarrow, square and heavy, that will be used to support Silky One.

Once the border is crossed, it is recommended to take local currency if you do not have it in advance and get a SIM card. Again, I didn't understand the system right away. Apparently the big official operators can't take care of travellers like us too much. They go through an intermediary who picks you up to go to his office via a taxi and sends you back by the same means once the transaction is done. I was waiting in the shop for someone to take care of me, I didn't understand that I had to follow the intermediary outside the agency! Second waste of time.

The next bivouac was planned towards Lake Sayram, high up. A brand new highway allows to reach it via an impressive bridge.

The climb takes quite a long time, the battery is getting thinner. With all the errors of comprehension that I had made I found myself in front of the lake, still on the highway, at nightfall and the battery almost empty.

It is at this moment of anxiety that I saw a woman, on the edge of the highway, from her cinder block house give me two signs, the sign to eat and the sign to sleep. I hesitated for two seconds and accepted the invitation. The family offered me a place to stay and for food I took out my ingredients that I tried to share and they offered me a soup and a piece of freshly butchered mutton.

Their house on the side of the highway seems an incongruity, the fence is deliberately omitted at their level. I would see other houses laid out in the same way. You live without running water, on the edge of a modern motorway. The family breathed happiness. I found it difficult to communicate, but I felt a humanity about basic needs, a common understanding that didn't need words.

My entry into China was starting strong!



Host family on entering China

The help me get my credit card back

*August 4, 2018, Yumen, China, *a Saturday**

— Shit, what's this ATM machine that's holding my credit card?

I wasn't completely blocked, because I had another credit card in reserve. But I didn't want to leave a card that I didn't know what would happen to it. I appealed to my joker via WeChat, namely François' wife, who had advised me not to trust anyone. But remotely it's not easy, even if video sharing worked well enough to see the information displayed in the bank room.

After several attempts to explain to the people who were going to the ATMs, I came across a young girl accompanied by her parents, she had a good English knowledge, even too good because at one point she asked me if I knew English. Her parents and I managed to reach the support number and to convince someone to come and unblock the situation.

I learned that it was some kind of a feat because it was Saturday,

the day the agency closed. It would've had to wait until Monday in a normal case. Since I was an abnormal case, the women's team from the bank showed up. The bank card was recovered and we ended up in a benevolent selfie after having taken a copy of my passport, just in case.

The city was big, I found another ATM (I'm a player, isn't it!) which this time gave me the tickets I needed to continue the trip.



My saviour, the first on the left and the bankers

Food

- Did you enjoy it? Did you eat typical food?
- Did you bring your own food?

I'm pretty simple when it comes to food. A sandwich, pasta or rice, cheese, a piece of fruit or two, preferably sparkling water and that's it.

I left with a couple of tuna tins that I used to refill on the road in the mini-markets. Until Russia I found some, then I didn't.

I had been offered small tubes containing an energy paste. I used them in the evening when I had a slack, until the end of the stock. I don't know if it's good for the influx of energy, but psychologically it helps. However, it is not practical, I took it with one hand while rolling, then I had the fingers of the hand all sticky, and in general also the pocket in which I had placed a bag to use as trash. I don't recommend it.

For pasta and rice I would have my dose until saturation. For sandwiches and even bread in general, it will become rare. I wouldn't be able to find bread in China. And that's why when I happened to be on a road, I discovered a welcoming corner that made something like sandwiches. I cracked into taking two portions. There was also a friendly atmosphere, the dream.



Equivalent for sandwiches accompanied by a bowl of sweet soup, a party

Sixty-five days on the road, that's quite a large number of meals. If we start with three meals to be eaten while taking our time, plus two for the intermediate snacks, we arrive at three hundred and twenty-five meals! So you have to take breaks after selecting the place where you are going to order food or buy and make yourself something to eat.

In Europe, I have mostly bought tuna, bread, cheese, fruit, dried fruit in supermarkets. And a meal at a restaurant in the evening if I was in a hotel. Then because there was no usual food store, I had to remove the tuna, cheese, bread. For the drink it will be the same. I would quickly give up coffee in favour of tea and especially soft drinks, first water, then Coke or Pepsi. It's quite funny to see that the market is splitted between the two brands.

We will have to adapt to the food found. I'll miss fruit, I'll miss cheese too and the cakes I'm not even telling you. I've experienced Gruyere cheese in hot weather, even in the trailer it's unbearable. Cheese to be eaten must be prepared differently. I discovered Kazak cheese when Isatay offered me some before I left for China. It has the same shape like big peanuts. It is hard because it is dry and very salty. I kept some for ten days. I ate one or two pieces a day. That's how you can have cheese. If I had known I would have stocked up in Kazakhstan but you have to know that it exists and where to find it.



The only cheeses that hold by 40°

I would eat Russian biscuits the time of the crossing of Russia and part of Kazakhstan, remembering the words of Jean-Marc who told me that it was his sweet sin. Cheap, sweet, handy...well no, handy if you have pockets on your jersey.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind the Sun Trip organisers that when we're asked if we want front or back pockets for the jersey. Let's answer in front, because on a recumbent bike it's really more practical! It would be nice to honor the order! I would have lost less cookies on the road trying to make a pocket with a plastic bag.

Suntripers, have a handy container to reach for food like raisins, peanuts, cookies while you ride, even if the road shakes hard.

For water I would have anticipated with my two and a half litre water pocket, fixed behind my seat. I could drink easily. I could

improve the attachment, the high scratch works well as long as the road doesn't shake too much. The water receives the sun's rays and heats up quickly. To keep a little freshness I had made a cover from my cleaning cloth for the photovoltaic panels. One evening I sewed the two edges together to make a cover that I soaked in water when I left the hotel and put around the water pocket. I would lose the cover near the end of the trip, another thing I would lose on the road.

Before the departure, I was asked about the bottle to filter the water. Clément Roussillon had offered me one. I hesitated to take it for because it is heavy and takes up space. As I found bottled water all the time I don't regret leaving it at home. I did bring some pills to treat the water... which I wouldn't use, but it's light and doesn't take up any space.

For restaurants, I got used to ask for the same thing over and over again. A pasta dish with eggs. Once I got this dish, I kept a picture of it to show to the next restaurant. Or according to the dishes that were present (you can't find pasta everywhere), I would take what was there after going around the tables and taking a picture of a dish that I liked, because saying what you want looking at the board or on the menu, all written in Cyrillic or in ideograms. Now you're thinking you should have worked harder on your lessons!

of eating when I return to my usual life. I've been eating almost no meat for the past few days but still some canned tuna and sausage. Everyone has their limits. I know one who used to crunch several boxes of Chinese Oreo a day.



Box of Oreo that I promised Jack, if he would let me catch up with him!

I could still put a lot of pictures up, but I wouldn't. I remember that the meals are affordable, that taking them in open-air restaurants on the road allows me to save time and to meet rather welcoming and curious natives. In Kazakhstan, a driver will even pay me for my evening meal.

In Kazakhstan, a driver will even pay for my evening meal, and sometimes you have to find a street vendor to buy fruit.

Stop, control!

— Your papers please! (*message spoken in English or just understood by gestures*)

The report to the police, in addition to border crossings, will be unavoidable in China, especially in the northern area as far as Urumqi, to mark the end of frequent checks.

For the small story, the customs officers are sometimes

accompanied by curious and very friendly customs officers of the Suntrippers. If that can help you to apprehend less the border posts, It is nevertheless preferable to avoid taking pictures, I tested for you !

As soon as you enter the city of Khorgos, China, once you pass the surprise of the modernity of the city, you were surprised by the military and police omnipresence. Armored vehicles, police cars everywhere, access to the barricaded petrol pumps, the trucks queue up and pass one after the other after vehicle control. This goes as far as the entrances to hotels where, as in airports, one must pass one's belongings on the scanner carpet. One person in the hotel scans you with his handheld device. He is wearing a bullet-proof vest, which he will remove once his security period has expired and pass it on to the replacement. I imagine employees have to go through training to get that role.

On the road, a check-up every fifty kilometres is not abnormal. The length of time you have to stop to check your information about where you've come from, where you're going is very variable and very elastic. A glance in the best case up to several hours in the worst case. The police are courteous and offer you a drink when the waiting session lasts.

And if they ask you to park your solar vehicle? Better to expose its panels to the sun, so you don't lose everything on the day of pedaling. I wouldn't have the chance to take advantage of these moments to recharge following the loss of my telescopic cane in Russia, because I had to lean on a pole or a wall and there is usually always a shadowy area nearby.



A policeman I continued to chat with via WeChat

Police dress is not what we prefer to see on the road, as it often slows us down. Even more so if a story like mine happens to you. One evening, on my way back from the restaurant, the hotel manager tells me that some friends of mine (that's what the translator says) want to see me. I go back up to the room, wondering which Suntrippers might have caught me, Romàn perhaps if his GPS beacon was no longer working and that on the map the indication was wrong, or a whole group, or someone from the organization? In fact no, I was brought down to meet these famous friends who were none other than an impressive group of policemen. A policeman from the group asks me if he can access my smartphone. I don't see why, but I immediately think of the application to launch the VPN, it's not active at the moment and is present in an application group, so it's not visible at first glance. Is that what he's looking for? I unlock it with my finger or I have nothing to do, I don't know anymore, because on the road, to avoid retyping the code, I've gotten used to removing the security. I usually put it back on when I get to a dwelling. I

take this safety precaution because I have several times forgotten my phone on the bike when I went shopping, or on the desk or bedside table when I went out for shopping. In general, I realized it quickly and went back to quickly to get my indispensable electronic companion.

Checklist before going out for a walk: bring identity papers, money, locked smartphone and memorize the location of the place for the return trip.

The policeman actually wants to see the photos. He starts looking at the first ones and then scrolls through the history. He replayed the trip in reverse, saw my life in France; fortunately I do not have this smartphone for fifty years otherwise he had went back to my early childhood! Apparently he hasn't found anything and gave the device over to another policeman, who seemed to take a look at the installed applications, and there were many of them. He zapped and returned the device to me with a message like "Sorry for the inconvenience, good luck. »

I'll talk to François who'll tell me that for him it was just for show.

What will surprise me most? The hotelkeeper's behavior. When I arrive, she's very happy to have a client, a foreigner; it spices a bit. Then the policemen arrive and there I become the naughty potential terrorist; the respect I had for them disappears, only to return to the slightly hypocritical smile when I become the nice tourist when the police leave. Perhaps a natural behavior, but accompanied by a strange curiosity, she was looking at the pictures at the same time as the policeman asked her to go and

look elsewhere (it's not the envy that I missed, but in this tense context I preferred to keep a low profile!)

I would learn to rub shoulders with the policemen and I would have no scruples about asking them for help, either to be accommodated in the vicinity of their premises, or to help me find accommodation in an area without a hotel. I was able to find a welder more easily in China when I was accompanied by a policeman. They live in simple accommodation with Turkish toilets. After an identity check, who I was and what I was doing, I received help.

The Chinese policeman can be your friend

I have several policemen with whom I've been keeping in touch all the way through WeChat.



Highway agents who welcomed me for the night in their offices

Fear feeling

— Laurent, were you scared?

Have you ever been in a forest at night? Alone? The fear that only comes from the ideas you have of yourself? One little noise and it's the end of the world? That's what I call the fear of the little child.

Another fear sometimes comes after an unfortunate experience, a fall for example. Fear occurs when we feel or sense that the same misfortune will happen again.

Those are two types of fears I've had.

The first one when the evening came and I was scaring myself wondering if I was going to find a place to live.

— And if I couldn't find anything and I slept on the side of the road, wouldn't there be some jerks to come and heckle me?

With my long vehicle, which is not very easy to drive through the woods (when there are any), it's hard to go unnoticed. It's a little boy's fear based like the one I felt in the forest during my only [dahu hunt](#). The hunt for the imaginary animal (only the hunter is not aware that it doesn't exist) where a group of friends took the time during the day to make you believe in its rarity and therefore in the possible money to whom it catches. To do this, you have to go into the forest at night with a canvas bag. The animal loves the dark and should be lured into the trap, which will have to be closed again as soon as it enters and that's when you are relied on. The imaginary fear in the dark, I know and have learnt to be wary of it, to try to control it through reasoning

and controlled breathing. But that doesn't stop the brain from having bursts of the same type of fears that occur in the evening on a lost road in the depths of Kazakhstan.

The other fear, the stupid one of having a wheel that breaks again. The unfortunate experience that is repeated several times during the day! A little bit of slack felt in the tyre and it was the doubt about the occurrence of a new puncture. After a puncture, I would stop several times for nothing, afraid that the tyre would deflate again. This little fear, that can make you laugh, becomes much greater when there is no more room on the road to stop in case of a flat.

I remember one stretch of road where I squeezed my buttocks and maybe even said a prayer (which is not a good sign for me, I am an atheist, a Christian influence from my ancestors). Imagine the solar bike on a two-lane road with no hard shoulder. Not very comfortable but playable, in case of a stop the vehicles will be able to continue to overtake. But now, due to road works, the road is changed into two two-lane two-way. The traffic is heavy with many trucks and still no space to stand in case of a puncture. The vehicles in front of you are running ahead and those behind you are stuck to your trailer because they cannot overtake. The puncture at a time like this is a nightmare! It didn't happen, but I was afraid it would happen all along the stretch.

Some tunnels bring the same sense of fear. Poorly lit and without an emergency track, you have to rely on your lights, not to hang around and not to die.

Now that I think back on the feeling of fear, I need to tell you about a city that gave me fear. It happened in Kazakhstan, just

when I was starting to get my bearings, to be comfortable. I arrive in the city, I begin to cross it to find a hotel. Homes first. They make a strange impression on me. There are sumptuous ones and right next to the dilapidated ones, as if abandoned. The city is all in length, a little out of the way of the fast road. The city made me think of the movie *Once upon a time in the West* which shows the arrival of the train in civilization. Cities that were once prosperous are in decline while others are born. I had the impression that this city was in decline, that it was no longer traversed by the flow of traffic. This feeling was reinforced by the contact with the natives. Some of them responded to me with excessive enthusiasm and others ran away from me. Never seen before or after this city.

— Yes, there's a hotel nearby, we'll take you there.

A team to escort me? Laurent is not trustful. And the hotel won't be in service anymore. I would look in vain for a hotel. To sleep, I wouldn't go out of town because there was nothing to shelter. Given the state of some houses, I would put the tent behind a dilapidated, uninhabited house. In the night I would hear the muezzin say his prayer, not very loud but the only one I would hear on my trip. I wondered if, in addition to an economic downturn, there was not also a change in culture. The road signs had three scripts: Cyrillic, Latin and Arabic and that was quite rare. The Russophiles versus the Kazakhophiles?

I was happy to leave the city in the early morning.



An evening look at rising stress

Never sick?

It's true I don't get sick very often in life. But on such a trip it is better to consider the little bellyache related to environment changes. To make up for the problems as much as possible, from the moment I switched to bottled water, I drank Coca-Cola or equivalent. I would find it everywhere and would often manage to drink some very fresh.

I was a bit heckled in the stomach for about ten days but very slightly. But on the evening when I was graciously accommodated in the hotel in Kyzylorda, I spent almost a sleepless night. Sometimes sitting on the toilet, sometimes in front of it, with my head in the watch out, it's going to come out position. The next day will be really difficult, the worst physically on the whole route. I found that day that the sun was hitting harder than usual, I was advancing with difficulty. I had to find refuge in a Muslim grave to rest for an hour. There was no shade anywhere

else and I could not move forward. I'm sorry if I broke a rule.

Another problem that looked a lot like the same problem Yann had, a tendonitis. I followed his advice to relax as much as possible during breaks, by rolling a bottle under my calf. And I bent the heel of the shoe, which bothered me for several days, until I got back to normal.

The big toes will cause me to have tingling sensations that will persist for six months after the end of the trip.

On my return, I will go on an escape with Christel to Portugal. I would find it difficult to keep up with her walking while the muscles for this activity are getting back into function.

And a few months later I noticed an increase of tinnitus in my left ear, the one on the road side. I lost on frequencies above four thousand hertz. I can't say that this is related to the volume of the horns, I just have a doubt. I therefore recommend an ear plug for the ear most exposed to the horns. You have to be able to keep your hearing alert, so putting some on both ears would be dangerous.

My favorite thing

— What did you like most of all about your trip?

— Good question... let me think a little more!

What I liked best was to have been part of a crazy project, to have stuck to it and to have gone all the way. It's a very personal pleasure that I know I owe in part to a multitude of people. I'm proud and indebted to them.

Then comes the pleasure of confronting the elements, feeling the earth as it is at the moment I cross it. The invitation to reflect on flat paths, to take the time to rethink one's past, one's actions, one's future. The moments of solitude that sometimes lead to crying alone, especially when a sad music is playing in his music list, or on the contrary to take a speed shot with a good rock that breaks. One can be anything in these moments, to take oneself for a secret agent who brings a crucial information with the help of his car after the end of the world, in autonomy imposed by the destruction of the power lines. You can go crazy if you're alone too much, can't you?!

The pleasure of meeting people, which is always a little scary at first but often leaves a good memory. The confrontation with humanity outside its borders and without going through a tourist agency. This feeling of being an inhabitant of the world, that we could live anywhere if we wanted to... (It's just an impression because the administrative reality would soon return).

I liked the egg pasta dishes that I devoured in the evening after a hard day.

To situate more concrete moments, like a place that you could put in a tourist guide, I can quote the crossing of the Volga by the bridge that seemed immense to me. For me it represents the crossing from Europe to Asia. A change of climate.

I can also indicate the Kazakhstan-China border at Korghos, on one side the archaism of the controls and on the other the modernity with scanner to check the inside of the trucks (and don't forget to scan the bike otherwise you won't be able to pass the exit station)! The passage from a small town to a modern city.

Two different worlds side by side.

And maybe in an egocentric way, the pleasure of having been followed on Facebook or on the Sun Trip website by a group of people, some of whom told me I made them dream.



Kids, too happy to see Silky One and a cyclist

Guangzhou the end of the trip

August 22, 2018

— We can see that you're happy to have arrived in Guangzhou (Canton)!



The joy to be finally arrived and to have completed the whole trip (my wife loves this picture)

Yeah, I was glad I came. The last day had been longer than expected. I'd end up with a flat battery at the meeting place in a climbing city park.

Don't expect to rest the last few days near Canton. Save until the last kilometre.

The rest will be in a luxury hotel. Single room and breakfast, graciously offered by Lingnan Hotel, with a glass of fruit in the room! Too good for the final.

I could have taken the opportunity to visit Guangzhou with my wife, if she had come to join me. Or to stay a few days with the Sun Trip team and the Suntrippers always present to introduce our trip during organized ceremonies. In spite of Florian's request to see me stay a few more days, I didn't take long to leave again.



The last hotel

On the 66th day I spent the day packing Silky One. It didn't seem, but it gave me a lot of job. Starting with sorting out the stuff to be flown back or left in the trailer. Then the dismantling and packing of Silky One. And don't forget to **recharge the battery before leaving** so that it conserves some energy during its long storage period before returning home.

— And how did you recharge your battery since you didn't bring your charger?

Herman lent me his charger since I didn't have my battery charger, to reduce the weight and not be tempted to use it during the trip.

In order to reduce the size of the bike and thus the package, the photovoltaic panels, steel frames, handlebars and wheel had to be removed. One package for the bike, another for the trailer and a last one for the photovoltaic frames and panels. I left a part of the frame that was on the bike, the Y-arms were partly broken, I

finally finished the welds that were still holding. The best would have been to provide a hook between the uprights and the frames in order to be able to dismantle cleanly and have a flat package. The photovoltaic panels were protected in sandwich mode, the panels in the middle followed by a first layer of the steel frames to finish with the cardboard and the elastic plastic.

A few months later, after the trip by train-truck I found the three packages well packed and intact.

On the 67th day, the flood was falling, the monsoon was starting and I was very happy to have finished the trip. I pitied the Suntrippers who were still on the road. In the evening, I was able to say a last goodbye to Florian, Angeliq and all the Suntrippers still present.



Silky One, a well-deserved rest at the Lingnan Hotel, after a little cleaning

After The Sun Trip

August 23, 2018 in the evening

— I'm alone again!

Yes, but not for long and in a plane with destination Istanbul, Turkey, not in the spirit of completing the Silk Road, but more pragmatically for the cost of transport. Four times cheaper than other more direct flights, I would be entitled to a few hours break at Istanbul airport.

A few hours during which I would try to sleep a little on chairs that are quite difficult to find. Instead, we invite you to enjoy the commercial spaces, the restaurant spaces that I began to frequent with a certain voluptuousness. The beginning of the return to excess food! In two months I would have regained my Chinese lucky weight.

The return to the family

August 24, 2018 in the evening

At Lyon Saint-Exupéry airport, a small group came to welcome me, my wife, my mother, my children and some friends with banners to mark the occasion.

I had no gifts to offer from my trip, just souvenirs to share and things purchased urgently at Canton Airport.

I was able to regain the calm and comfort of the house. The complicity of a couple and the warmth of a close family. A small

shadow on the board, however, and it may be a small price to pay for leaving his wife such a long period of time: a newcomer came to enlarge the family during my absence, it seems to fill it. Jingle, a big black dog, recovered from the S.P.A., who will now share the house with Mocka and with whom I should learn to live. I love dogs!



Welcoming Committee at Saint-Exupéry Airport

The links with the Suntrippers

Living near Lyon was an advantage to get to the starting point of the adventure. The same goes for Silky One, which I was looking forward to.

As I was twenty minutes by car from the Bel Air Camp site in Villeurbanne, where the bicycles were stored, I could help Florian to unload the bicycles from the trucks to store them on the site and leave within one hour with my adventure companion.

In the following days, my wife and I were able to offer board and lodging to the Suntrippers who came to pick up their bicycles. It was with great pleasure that we could continue sharing around the Sun Trip with Bernard Cauquil at first, then the fine team of Cathy Pozzobon, François Médalle and Gilles Coural. I was also able to see again on Lyon Eric Morel just the time moment of a meal.



Eric Morel in Lyon to pick up his trophy

The flow passed with the Albigenes, and our trip to Albi to attend the screening of Jean-Claude Viguié's film on his Sun Trip trip, was an opportunity to enjoy their hospitality as well.

Friends' look

I presented the Suntrip's trip during a Local Talent Weekend, where local crafts meet their audience. I had a stand and I met people. People I already knew and others who discovered me for the first time.

For people who knew me, the return to my wife was like:

Your husband is more open, he is transformed!

This type of trip is transformative. Thirty-five years ago, this was already the case, when I made my one-month solo bike trip on a Paris-Holland-Paris route. But here, the duration and the areas crossed brought a little more transformation. And it was only a 65-day trip!

I can imagine very well that a traveller, as there are some and that I am from far away, who leave for several years, can no longer return to their old habits, to their work that they had left.

In my case, the return was possible, even if a slight detachment took place, the recovery was not difficult. In fact, it is quite the opposite. I appreciate the comfort of the routine, the setting and the type of work I do. Cogitating on lines of code gives me a lot of satisfaction. If in addition the project is useful is even better!

It is a real opportunity to be able to leave for three months and return to your job, with colleagues waiting for you, an office in abeyance. I agree with the time savings account.

I feel stronger, less stressed about work, more confident. It was about time, wasn't it? When I made the last trips with the young people, Auguste & Camille the Belgians and Jack the English, I thought to myself that they were mature and that the future was opening up for them! A word of advice therefore, do not wait to be fifty years old or older to discover the world! But if you couldn't, don't hesitate to do it later!

As I always say, we only have one life.



Martine Mass, big smile

What adventure for the future?

— So, Laurent, will you leave once again on 2020?

— What's your next trip?

I have had these questions several times.

I don't feel the need to do this route again, nor to do a solo trip to another destination.

On the other hand, I would be willing to go on a trip with a partner or several people, take the time to visit during the trip. Be able to spend more time interacting with the people you meet. Be able to accept more invitations to discuss and share. Like the couple of [Cyclomigrators](#) who travel the world by bike and discover their travels with an impressive amount of information

and photos.

For that I started to prepare the ground. My wife and I found a second-hand trike on which we added an electric pedal motor, a Bafang. I added one of Silky One's two batteries and the solar frame (with the new frame rebuilt by Patrick).

But the trip as a couple is not for now. A big surprise came at Christmas 2018. Lucie, our first daughter, has announced **the arrival of twins** for the end of July 2019!

By the time I take up these lines, Jade and Lou are now several months old and the organization has focused on them. **Grandma and Grandpa's bike adventure will wait a little while.** Another more family and intimate adventure is underway. We can imagine very well, in a few years, riding a cargo bike with which we can ride the little girls. Small ballads in perspective for lack of big trips.



Lou and Jade, pre-registered for the Sun Trip 2040 ☺

If I left again, what would I change?

— Suppose you leave again, what would you change?

If I were to go back to the Sun Trip 2020 or 20xx, I would see to be even lighter and more robust at the same time. And I would like to see better communication.

Even today, I am still impressed by the number of people who followed me, but also the Sun Trip experience as a whole. Not necessarily on a daily basis, but by following the main lines of this crazy trip. And there are also those who could almost follow you 24 hours a day if we had the means to do so. With the gradual introduction of 5G and the unlimited packages that may follow, it is not impossible that the Sun Trip 20xx may be able to take advantage of it.

But it is difficult to prepare your trip for the next day, to eat, wash and communicate with quality before going to bed. Not completely impossible either, but I would have preferred to have an intermediary who would have retouched my photos and videos. And the publication of the articles, I would have preferred that they be published on the website [J'me Recycle](#) in order to reach even more people. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WeChat would act as relays by placing the link to the article. I had brought the Wordpress version on my mobile to try this approach to editing the site, but with a mobile it's really too difficult.

Retouching communication is the work that the Suntrip team does throughout the trip. But sometimes we would like to do the same thing with our point of view. So being able to count on a

friend or a communication department during his trip is in my opinion a plus in the enhancement of his trip.

Looking at what Jack was able to do in 2018 with the drone videos, it leaves a margin of expression between the text, the photos and the videos seen from the sky.

If you want to communicate effectively with tools you will have with you, on a mobile phone or laptop (or other), practice before the start, after the time runs out.

For the bike, I'd stay on the same model as Silky One. I don't see myself leaving with a trike, nor in mountain bike position even if I had really enjoyed Eric's cargo bike. However, I will have to either rework my back flexibility or revise the seat of the Azub Six for the lower back.

I would take fewer solar panels and rework the connectors to be more secure in my connections. The Anderson connectors and my soldering on the photovoltaic panels could be more robust in my humble opinion.

I would save a little more battery power in the evening by turning off the Databox and the Analyst Cycle by adding a global switch (I was too lazy to open the case to unhook the cable... or fear of damaging the connections).

I would also review the frame to be able to tilt the panels while driving, in the morning we can save hundreds of watts.

I would take a backup mobile because I was afraid when once or

twice I couldn't see anything on the screen of the mobile. It's just the *Swiss Digital Knife*, I wouldn't see myself making the trip without it. When it was impossible to get from the network for several hours... it was quite stressful.

I would also bring a replacement front and rear type and a good set of linear tubes.

I would take a bomb to repel the dogs or something else to test beforehand. The problem is that you have to find an aggressive dog in the neighbourhood and be mean enough to test - not yet tested, until now.

To reduce the weight I wouldn't take a gas stove like I had, too heavy to carry lightly used gas.

Above all, I'd like to be accompanied by Christel, even if it means arriving last.



Christel and Laurent, accomplices

Should the association *J'me Recycle* recycle itself?

January 2019

— What do I do now with the *J'me Recycle* association?

Now that we know that I won't be going back to the Sun Trip 2020, or any other type of trip for maybe thirty-five years as I like to say, so what should I do with the association under the 1901 Act *J'me Recycle*?

Do I close the association or do I move on to something else in continuity?

During the preparation I was seduced by the self-repair workshop of the *P'tite Rustine de Bron*. Why not try to offer the same activity in my turn?

That's how I tried to set up a workshop to help with bicycle self-repair on *Saint-Bonnet de Mure*. First at home, then under a kiosk in the city centre to come home when the bad season arrives.

In the autumn of 2019, I don't know if I will continue on this activity on *Saint Bonnet de Mure*.

And yet I feel the urgency to help people get back on the bike, to get out of trouble quickly with a few tools and maybe go further for some, even very far.

To be continued...



Christel with the J'me Recycle Atelier banner

Acknowledgements

Since the beginning

— Thank you all for encouraging, supporting and following me

When I ride my bike to work, how many times a day do I swear?
How many times do I get the hatred that comes up in my face?
Too often that's for sure.

That's how I started my trip, but it's on the way of thanks that I would like to finish.

First of all, thanks you to Florian and his team, who allowed to a few dozen crazy people to go from dream to Lyon-Canton trip in less than 100 days in autonomous mode without assistance. My sweet dream would not have been fulfilled without them.

Thanks you to my wife and my close family, who have always been able to reinforce my motivation when I was in doubt, doubt before and doubt during. An eternal thanks to Christel, who kept the WeChat link going even when I was at 4 a.m., French time, asking her for help on a route or looking for a place to stay; Yes I haven't always been very cool!

A big thanks you to Patrick Gouttenoire, who from the beginning believed in me (more than me), who reassured me about the continuation of the project through his talent as a welder and who supported me until the end.

Thanks you to all friends who believed in this bet and who wanted to be in their own way, with encouragement and support of all kinds. Friends I discovered for the occasion and it turns out

that my vision was too restrictive in this matter. These are the opportunities that are probably lacking to trigger the desire to help or share. This trip was an opportunity for them to express their friendship and assistance that I never imagined I could exist. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Thanks also to my colleagues whom I have drunk during a year of preparation. They told me that they had turned on the office computer every morning at coffee time to follow the progress of my trip on the Suntrip map. I can imagine the exchanges very well:

- What the hell is he doing?
- Is he picking up? Why isn't it moving forward?
- Great, he's gaining a place!
- Wow, he caught up with the kids!
- Not bad, he managed to finish sixth with Jack

More than two months to follow a course, you can get tired, go on holiday, but it is also a good opportunity to exchange on geography, the time that passes and perseverance! Perseverance of those who make the trip but also perseverance of those who follow. And there were more followers than I thought, I discovered more a year later!

Thanks to all the strangers, those I met on my way, who supported me with a look or help. They will recognize each other if they come across this thank-you text.

And of course [I don't forget all my sponsors](#)

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Up to Canton I took care to clean the trailer

Postface

A persistent rain falls on Kiev this day of July 2, 2018, the sky is grey and low in the image of our morale of the day. The day before with Romain we broke our distance record with more than 300 kilometres covered but this morning when Yann woke up, felt a sharp pain in his Achilles tendon, his tendinitis woke up.

The decision to take a day off to heal the pain is necessary in order not to compromise the rest of our adventure. With a tight heart, we let Romain continue on his way to Russia imagining that maybe one of these next days we will meet again on the road.

Around 5 p.m. on our way to our hotel it seems to me that I can see Laurent's silhouette on his Silky One in the distance.

— Yann, Yann, look over there just before the traffic lights, it's Laurent Souchet.

We cross the counter-aisle, self-selfishly and in vain.

— Laurent, Laurent, Laurent !!!!

Unperturbed even by the call of his first name, faithful to the image we had of him, with his eyes fixed on the horizon, he continues his trip without even noticing us and disappears into the damp mists of Ukrainian twilight.

24 hours later, after swallowing a pack of miles in the hope of making up our delay, not a single room available at curfew time in the village where we stopped. A glimmer of hope animates us

when we saw an orange solar harness on the parking lot of the already full hostel. The decision to pay Laurent a little visit with the secret hope of sharing his room is quickly taken. When we open his door, I don't know which one of us was happier.

In compensation, for the *disorder* we have just put in his organization, we offer him his first pint of beer of the course. But how could he manage to keep going to the borders of Ukraine without any *essential amino acid* since the beginning?

The next day, everyone continues to follow their own path while keeping their habits, our tandem is slowed down by the 20 kilometres of track and we let Laurent go before the border post to Russia. The history of our trio is gradually taking shape as we hunt and cross over daily. Opportunities for all three of us to discover each other, to measure our differences and to appreciate our complementarities.

We then find ourselves driving together to cross the Volga River and switch from Europe to Asia. At the end of the day, deep bonds were forged between the three of us: a new daily distance record for Laurent, followed by an unforgettable bivouac at the bottom of a tiny village not far from Saratov.

In the evening at the wake, we often talk about life and *remake the world*, sometimes asking ourselves what we have come to seek in this adventure.

Our mechanical problems will cut short the human epic of our trio just a few hundred kilometres after our entry into Kazakhstan.

With Yann we were sure that despite all the doubts expressed by

Laurent, he would rally Canton faithful to his timetable: 200 kilometres per day. Did he have any other choice? We had given him power of attorney to represent us in Canton.

Here you will find the touching account of a man of heart on this extraordinary adventure. This adventure allowed us to meet and share these precious moments that will remain engraved in our minds. Thank you Laurent for all these memories on paper.

The [EcoSunRiders](#), Yann and Bernard Cauquil

Laurent, an ordinary bicycle commuter and Silky One, a solar-powered bike that's out of the ordinary, invite you to the preparation of the next Lyon-Canton Sun Trip.

Laurent tells you about his two months of adventure, summer vacation time, summaries by theme with anecdotes. Time to get out of your comfort zone and reach out to humanity.

This digital book is a guide, written in a straightforward style. The author's hope is that it's your turn to check that the Earth is small and accessible by solar bike!



I am cyclist for the practical side of the vehicle.

Software developer by passion.

A bit of a handyman.

Husband of a loving wife and father of three children.

That's what I am in a nutshell.