

RECREATION: SPORT

ARNHEM COUPLE TO CYCLE THE WORLD BY BIKE IN FIVE YEARS

You only live once. That's Aaldrik Mulder's and Sonya Spry's philosophy. What's more they have a passion for bike-riding. So, on 31 July 2006, they will begin their trip around the world. Arrival Date: 31 July 2011 in Melbourne, Australia.

by LEO HEUS
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The maps are spread out on the table. The route can be found on the already launched internet site. Simply follow the red-green line; red is for biking and green for the unavoidable boat trips.

The Arnhem couple has informed the neighbours that early in the morning on July 31, they can witness a special event. Mulder and Spry will be jumping on their bikes to embark on their world journey of five years. Incidentally, there's still an opening for anyone interested in firing the starters' gun. By the time they arrive in Melbourne, Australia, they will have expected to have covered between 80 and 100 thousand kilometres.



The preparations are underway. On 31 July, Sonya Spry and Aaldrik Mulder emgaark on their world trip of five years. They expect to travel 80 to a 100 thousand kilometres by bike. Photo: Marc Pluim

Why begin on July 31? "As from August 1 our rental contract will be terminated. Therefore we have to leave."

In August 1994, Mulder (39) and Spry (41) met each other in the Boomerang Bar in San Francisco. She had just left Australia and was looking for the newest bike equipment in the USA. Mulder, from The Netherlands and also bitten by the travel bug, was by chance in San Francisco. It wasn't love at first sight but they did exchange addresses. Two months later they met each again and through Spry, the love of cycling became their favourite activity. "In Adelaide in the past, I cycled everyday."

Mulder: "I'm actually not 'into sports'. I have to have a reason for doing it. For instance, I wouldn't just cycle three times up and down the Postbank." Nonetheless, long bike vacations seem to have had their effect on Mulder. In 1996, they both lived together in London. "We rode all the time; because it's good for your health and in London it's by far the easiest way to get around."

That year they planned a three month bike vacation in Thailand and Malaysia. A few years later, they rode with ease through Belgium and France. And in Australia, while visiting Spry's parents, they chose not to take their bikes. But they found themselves pining for them. "We've also travelled Thailand with backpacks but in contrast it was nothing in comparison to a cycling holiday."

Don't you have to be really fit to make a five year bike trip? Mulder shrugged his shoulders. "After two weeks there's no more saddle pain and your condition just keeps improving." Over a beer in Malaysia the rough draft of the large-scale journey was first sketched. "We will ride approximately 100 to 150 kilometres per day; the perfect speed to see and take everything in. You experience the culture; the true country; the nature; the villages; and the people. You end up stopping in the strangest of places. No, we have never had any problems. Wherever we landed, the people were always really friendly towards us. Probably because we seemed relaxed."

However during the world trip the couple will have to cross through a few uncertain countries. "We aren't going into Iraq or Afghanistan, for example, but Iran is definitely on the cards. There aren't that many alternatives routes through Asia.

Bush can say that Iran is a unsafe country but we know better. Iranians are welcoming and friendly. Besides, it's got more to do with your own conduct than anything else. You'd be an idiot if you paraded around as a wealthy westerner."

And wealthy these two are not. They have been adjusting their lives in the last years in order to avoid having to wash dishes in a restaurant while travelling. Mulder: "You are also forced to be creative. For example, bike parts aren't available everywhere. We will take certain bits with us but we are also used to improvising. I rode around for two years on tyres that I picked up for 3 euros a piece. In first world countries, we'll camp as much as we can. In other places that is totally unnecessary. In Thailand, you can find a hotel room for 2 euros a night. We are able to survive easily on 25 euros per day."

The trip is planned as efficiently as possible. "As warm weather cyclists, we want to try and steer clear of the winter periods."

On their well documented website you can find everything: the route that they will follow and even, where you can find them in the spring of 2009. The answer to that question: On their way from Cambodia to Vietnam. The site also has detailed information about their bikes and equipment and an 'about us' section tells you who Sonya Spry and Aaldrik Mulder are. During their travels they will keep an updated diary on the site.

There are no shortages of preparations either. "A year and a half ago we had already begun with the necessary vaccinations. However, planning everything to a tee is not realistic. In the beginning of 2011, we will be riding through Southern Africa and through countries that are prone to change. Who knows where the next civil war will break out?"

Mulder has bought a sophisticated, feather-light laptop: for the diary, the updating of the site and communication with family and friends. The countdown is on. "We want to do it now. If you wait until you are 65, maybe you will miss your chance."

website: www.tour.tk