

WORLD TRAVELLERS

Aaldrik Mulder and Sonya Spry travel by bike around the world. The first four years and 49,000 kilometres are done. It is now time for a break in their former home town of Zevenaar.

401.401 metres

The statistics show that Aaldrik and Sonya have some tough cycling behind them. This is the amount of metres they climbed.

48 borders

Aaldrik and Sonya are regular customers at border controls. In the first four years of their world trip they passed 48 border posts.

World cyclists are always welcome everywhere

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Cycling around the world isn't that unusual, say Sonya Spry and Aaldrik Mulder. Just about everywhere the two world travellers meet fellow cyclists.

by Kees Verschuuren

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The big moment this week: two Americans acquaintances start their long prepared cycle trip through their home country in the USA. "They are sixty years of age and they have made the step."

The somewhat younger Aaldrik Mulder (43), understands the decision completely. It is exactly four years ago that he and his partner Sonya Spry (46), left Arnhem in the direction of Emmerich and beyond. "It's the freedom that you achieve through cycling. Everything you own is in your panniers. We can cook, sleep and wash ourselves. You don't need much more."

The former resident of Zevenaar lets us know that cycling around the world is not as unique as it may seem. Everywhere on earth the couple meets other, like minded and adventurous cyclists. "Sometimes we schedule a meeting. Thanks to internet, everyone has their own website and you know where they are. Like the German cyclist, who has been cycling around the world for 43 years. Unfortunately, we just missed him in India."



Sonya Spry and Aaldrik Mulder with their faithful friends: two fifteen year old bikes. All parts have been replaced a few times.

photo Henk Rodrigo

If you go on a two week holiday in a luxury hotel every year, it is probably hard to comprehend the choices of Aaldrik and Sonya. On their fat-tyre bicycles they drag around 40 kilos of luggage. They cycle in wind, in rain, up mountains, down mountains, often on surfaces that aren't deserving of the name 'road'. Sometimes the trip is exhausting and they don't do more than 25 kilometres. Worn and weary, they crawl into the tent in the evening: a trusted companion for the last 4 years.

Aaldrik and Sonya stopped calling their trip a holiday a long time ago. It has become a way of living, where cycling is an instrument to discover countries and meet people. "The first 3 months felt like a holiday, you are constantly surprised by things. And then you realise you still have 5 years and nine months to go. Cycle touring has become

our life. And sure, we don't feel like pedalling sometimes. We are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week together. That also causes tensions," says Aaldrik.

But those little difficulties are nothing compared to all the positive experiences. Aaldrik and Sonya move from country to country like adding charms to a bracelet. From Iran to Bolivia, from Brazil to India. Often they are warned to avoid a neighbouring country: robbers and bandits always live on the other side of the border. "Then you actually arrive there and you only find friendly, hospitable people. That's how it mostly goes. The locals see we are making an effort, that we are interested in their way of living. Then you are always welcome." Dangers lurk in other corners. The busy traffic is the biggest threat in a lot of places. That's why the couple left India sooner than expected, says Sonya.



Sonya climbs one of the 35 switchbacks on the Cristo Redentor Pass in Chile near Argentina.
photo A.Mulder

World travel in a nutshell

- Aaldrik Mulder & Sonya Spry started their world trip in 2006. Their trip will take six years with two years to go. The finish line being in Melbourne Australia.
- On their way there they will visit Egypt, Jordan, China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and western Europe.
- Aaldrik & Sonya live off approx. 30 Euro a day. That is for all expenses, including insurance.
- The sale of the car, fridge & other furniture raised part of the money to pay for the trip; plus for 3 years they put aside one salary to boost their bank account.
- During the trip Aaldrik & Sonya earn money in a modern way: they maintain and design websites for customers. Therefore, they carry two small laptops in their panniers.
- Aaldrik and Sonya cycle on frames they bought in 1995 and 1996. All other parts have been replaced a few times during the trip. A tally of flat tyres has been documented: to date it is 111.
- gelderlander.nl/wereldreis Aaldrik & Sonya maintain an English language website about their trip, including tips for adventurers who want to make their own bicycle tour.

Traffic is a calculated risk, which won't stop them from climbing in the saddle again in a few weeks, this time among other destinations: Egypt, China, Vietnam and the end point Australia. In 2012 the six year trip will come to an end. "What we'll do then, we don't know. Maybe we'll cycle around Australia. A journey of 10,000 kilometres," adds Aaldrik laughing.