

Biking from CH to NL 2006

Following the Water by Bike from Home to the Sea

30. July to 23. August 2006



Background

It has been a dream of ours for 30 years to do a big river trip by bicycle. This year we decided to go ahead because I start to feel 'getting old' slowly. We had never done a bike tour beyond our lake Biel area before but we had experience with 'adventure travelling' in China. So we just left without any special preparations to see how it goes.

Goals and Strategy

- **The Way is the Target – To experience a good Time on the Bike!**
- Just start from home and follow the rivers as near as possible to end up at the sea in Nederland.
- Maximum freedom regarding time spent and progressing.
- Minimum luggage and equipment to survive and avoid unnecessary cost.
- Using our everyday bikes (Peggy's children mini we bought in Beijing last year – she feels safe).

Results

We covered the entire itinerary from Ipsach via Hoek van Holland, followed by a leisurely loop to Amsterdam Schiphol Airport in 25 days.

The challenge was not pedal for more than 1500km; the real challenge was to survive **and enjoy** the spartan gypsy life under prevailing weather conditions. **We really enjoyed the trip!**

Lasting impressions

- Just feeling free when sitting on the bike and pedalling, passing slowly through uncounted beautiful sceneries while being so close to nature and exciting wildlife most of the time.
- Mostly camping with our old small tent and managing to live with minimum equipment.
- Living and riding along the ever changing rivers! Biking on the dikes for whole days!
- Experiencing the Bikers' Paradise in Holland – the Dunes along the coast
- **It was one of the great experiences of our life!**

Facts

- Total trip: 25 days 1568km
- Ipsach to North Sea (Hoek v. Holland): 18 days 1292km 72km/day (10 km/h)
- Deviations from straight way (guess) 10% (sightseeing, way to shop/sleep, wrong way etc)
- Nights spent (24 nights at 22 locations) tent: 18 cabins in campings: 3 Hotel: 3
- Cost (CHF) Total: 1755.-
Accommodation: 720.- Food/Restaurant: 660.- Transport home: 375.-
- Weather: 1st day was hot, then varying between rain/cold/windy and fair/cool (50/50)
Almost every day some rain and the sky more often than not threatening with rain.
- Health: Fine, except for cracks in my dry skin and the usual bikers' pains:-)
- Equipment: Igloo tent, 2 sleeping bags, 1 mat (for our heads/shoulders), large plastic bags.
One small backpack for (summer) clothes, no rain equipment!
Bike-basket for toilet bag, eating equipment (no cooking) and up to a day's food.
- Maps Just road map extracts from internet on four A4 pages.
Biking trails were generally indicated but signs were often misleading or missing.
Had to ask people for way here and there. Bikers with maps often got lost too:-).
- Itinerary 90% near rivers, 60% on dikes, 90% on biking paths, 50% on unsealed paths.

Accommodation

We were very happy that we had taken the tent along (for just in case). Quite soon we realised that sleeping in the tent would become the rule, because the unstable and cool weather would often not permit accurate time planning and finding a suitable hotel with free rooms within bike's reach would be a hazard. In the best case hotel rooms would cost 40.- to 60.- Euro but then prices of 90.- Euro and more would not be unusual if there would be any at all when needed. We guess that we experienced one of the coldest and wettest Augusts (Awgust = awful and disgusting) and camping was often not too pleasant in the rain. Fortunately we found hotel rooms or cabins at campings just the few times when badly needed! Surprisingly we very rarely came accross casual accommodation for bikers or backpackers. The many 'Bed and Bike Hotel' in Germany usually meant 'luxury hotel where you may rent a bike'!

Bad Weather

The weather was unstable at best, cool to cold and it rained almost every day at least once! This did not prevent us to really enjoy the trip, especially the time spent on the bike and to make good headway! But the rain stole us a lot of time when we had to wait under shelter and the cold prevented us often from enjoying a stopover here and there to sit outside and relax. Also evenings were usually too cool to enjoy the long daylight. More often than not we wrapped up our soggy old leaking tent in the mornings and in the end it was so grey of mould that we threw it away. We are still very glad we did the trip, as we had no health problems, not even a little sneeze!

Bikers Life

Fortunately we did not experience any severe incidents! In the following just a few events or aspects which stand out in our memory (some of them are described in more detail in the diary):

- Only once we experienced a punctured tire. It was a tricky case with rear tire of Peggy's bike, made worse because I did not take any pump along. How negligent of me! Later on the way I had a pump but no water to find the leak!
- We both fell over one time but we did not seriously get injured. I had a few nasty scratches which did not heal for a long time. Since I do not hear well I was often frightened when overtaking racing bikers almost collided with me while I was unintentionally swaying to the left hand side of the path.
- In Ijmuiden on the coast we had a series of heavy thunderstorms for several hours after 5am. As the ground around us started to flood and hooks came loose we managed to find refuge with locals living in a mobile home, who had asked us in for coffee the evening before!
- One evening, just before dark we were surprised by sustained heavy rain before reaching a small lonely camping. We were soaked to the bones and there was no way to think about putting the tent up. Fortunately and unexpectedly there was a cabin available.
- In the area of Rotterdam we wanted to cross the Oude Maas (last stretch of Rhine) from South to North. After long doubts regarding the way to take, we got to a lonely building with a lift and an escalator to the underground to a very long tunnel (Eurotunnel), just dedicated to bikes and pedestrians. On the other side we found the same for getting back to the surface.
- Biking in Holland is a paradise. The bike network is very developed (similar to hiking in CH), bike paths (fietsers pad) are usually comfortable and bike traffic has generally a high priority.
- We chose to fly back to Basle by EasyJet because the internet gave the impression that bike transport is straight forward. So we just turned up at Schiphol with our bikes but at check-in we were told that bikes must be packed in boxes. Boxes were to be had at 17 Euro each. So Peggy decided that we put both bikes in one box. No tools for taking pedals off, not enough sticky cello tape, the box rather too small..... after one hour we turned up with the heavy box at the check-in again. The supervisor of the supervisor was called..... and finally took pity on us! The bikes arrived in Basle ok:-)
- Since we usually did not know where we would end up in the evening, we did our food shopping during the day and so we had cold dinner most days at the tent on the floor, inside or outside. We enjoyed these leisurely outdoor meals consisting of great and often exquisite varieties of meat, sausage, fish, cheese, beans of any kind, bread (eg. NL-Batavenbrot aahh!), vegetables (once we ate a 50 cm long white radish in one go), all accompanied with wine and/or beer.
- Spartan sleeping on the floor was perhaps not too healthy for our old limbs. But we usually slept quite well just lying on an open sleeping bag and covered with a second open sleeping bag. We used the thin foam mat for the head and shoulders. The reserve clothes, wrapped in a bag served me as pillow. My biggest problem at night was the many excursions to the distant waters (sometimes trough mud and rain).

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my gratitude to Peggy who with her small bike had to pedal twice as hard than I and who did wonders in managing our household logistics!

DIARY

Day 1 30th July Start: **Ipsach**

End: 83km - **Stüsslingen** (near Aarau)

Today: 83km

Start at 06.37 – Beautiful early morning! From our garage (left pic) we reached the Aare at Nidau within 1 km from where we followed the national Aare Bike Trail to the Rhine.

We spent an excellent but long and the only hot day on the bikes mostly along the Aare passing Büren, Alttreu (with the Storks), Solothurn, Wangen (1st stop, pic right), Aarwangen, Aarburg to Olten stopping here and there.

Patrick who had joined us this 1st day and who was shooting lots of nice pictures, once in a while jumped into the Aare to cool off. After Olten we branched off to ascend to Stüsslingen, near where we reached the Gugenhof on the slope of the Jura (address from internet) at 4pm. Here we put up our old igloo tent (pic) and had dinner while enjoying a great view to the plain.

After dinner Patrick left us to move on back to work in Zürich. Thanks Padi, that was very nice of you!



Day 2 31st July Start: **Stüsslingen** End: 155km - **Luttingen** (near Laufenburg) Today: 72km

Cloudy morning! Took us only 1h to pack and we left before 7am. Nice downhill ride to Aarau where we went to town center to have coffee and shop for picnic.

Nice path along Aare to Brugg. Then a bit of a nuisance along the left shore to get around Beznau nuclear power station but then again very nice scenery along the Aare before meeting the Rhine. We reached the junction of Rhine and Aare at 12 and were very DISAPPOINTED that there is not one suitable spot along the water to have picnic. (pic: Aare at the end).

We continued along the Rhine on Swiss side until we reached the first bridge to Germany over to Albruck where we were surprised by a heavy thunderstorm (temperature dropped from 30 to 20 degrees within 30 minutes while we waited under a shelter).

Driving all around town to find a room but the only Hotel was booked out. So after a long wait we continued in the drizzle and got a room in Luttingen just when we started to get really wet. As we did not fancy eating in the Hotel, we walked a long way in the rain to do shopping at Aldi and then we had a feast in our room.



Day 3 1. August Start: **Luttingen** End: 233km - **Bamlach** (near Bad Bellingen) Today: 78km

Nice drive to Rheinfelden through Laufenburg (pic) and Bad Säckingen, with a few rain breaks however!

We had lunch in Rheinfelden just while it rained for over an hour.

The way to by-pass Basel was quite difficult to find, but finally after Grenzach and over a small forest path we reached Riehen back in CH, without noticing that we had crossed the border! Then we continued to Weil where we started looking for somewhere to sleep (room prices!). In the end we got back to the Rhine at Maerkt where we had the feeling that our real Rhine path started!

We drove on the dike to Rheinweiler where we turned off from the river and up a steep hill to a 5* camping in Bamlach (Lug ins Land). We again enjoyed a relaxed picnic in front of our tent with view over to the Vosges.

Now we realised that the rain may prevent us from inserting stops to enjoy places at will, as we would not get anywhere far with our low speed of 10km/h.



Day 4 2. August Start: **Bamlach** End: 308km – **Schoenau/F** near Marckolsheim Today: 75km

Very nice dike drive along natural Rhine to Breisach (left pic) where we enjoyed a Turkish lunch:-)

Later I fell over badly when making a U-turn in deep gravel. Nothing serious but a few bad scratches all over. Peggy had fallen over just before but she did not fall from very high:-). These were our only accidents!!

Passing many nice places but too early to stop for the night. So we crossed to France near Marckolsheim (right pic)



As we had missed the camping near the dam we went shopping in Marckolsheim and then drove on to Schoenau (9km on D-road) to a simple camping. Just before we put the last nails to fix the tent we had to throw our luggage and ourselves into the tent because of a sudden heavy shower. Instead of having our picnic at the shore of the camping's beautiful pond we had to eat, sitting in the tent. Peggy had expected a short day of 50km today but in the end we did 75km again. We realised here that this may be the usual tariff and that camping would become the rule. We did not really mind:-)

Day 5 3.August Start: **Schoenau** End: 358km - **Kehl** (D near Strassbourg) Today: 50km

In spite of some rain we slept quite well but the tent was very soggy in the morning and it was rather cool.

Again 12km on French D-type road with racing cars until Rhinau (pic) where we crossed the Rhine by ferry back to Germany preferring the dike rides on that side. Had to stop here and there again because of rain (once 30min under the entrance of a closed Gasthaus (again no Biergarten) but the drive on the dikes was very nice in spite of deep gravel at times. At 3pm we reached Kehl under a threatening sky and with the wet tent we decided to move to a Hotel for a change and have fun in town (nothing to see and beautiful recreation area beside river was no use under the rain). So we had a sumptuous Turkish dinner.

Before going to sleep, Peggy did a surgical operation to my swollen and festering finger.



Day 6 4.August Start: **Kehl** End: 429km - **Plittersdorf** (near Rastatt) Today: 71km

This morning we enjoyed the compulsory breakfast and then went to see the nice international Euro footbridge (pic) over the Rhine.

Then we continued along the river through a harbour area until we got to a dead end and we had to backtrack for 3km. Later we reached the river again, 200m further on the other side of the harbour.

Near Freistatt we had to leave the dike and then we missed a turn and involuntarily got to Plittersdorf where we found out that the ferry we wanted to take was out of service. Coming across a 5* camping we decided to stay there after we had done our shopping (got slowly used to Dornfelder dry red wine at 1.99 Euro). Before going to sleep Peggy did her 88 Tai Chi in the setting sun beside the beautiful pond.



Day 7 5.August Start: **Plittersdorf** End: 492km - **Germersheim** (before Speyer) Today: 63km

Because of a loose hook the tent leaked badly and we got up at 6am, wrapped-up our soggy belongings and were ready to leave when we discovered that Peggy's bike had a flat rear tire. Was it a puncture or someone having played a jest on us? Catastrophe: I had no pump to find out and everybody else still slept or had no pump. In the end I dismantled the wheel and also got a pump and with the wheel under water there appeared to be no leak. So we managed to leave at 9am (in the mean-time some nice French had given me a small (quite inefficient) pump as a present:-). One hour later the pressure was gone again but no water in sight to find the leak.

We just somehow kept 'pumping' back to the Rhine where I managed to fix the leak (pic).

Had an arabesque ride through the Karlsruhe port area; the bike path even led us via a long steep stair over the huge port gate. A bit later we crossed the Rhine to the Pfalz (Palatine) then continued nicely along the water until we reached a simple camping (no hot water / only 5 Euro) at Germersheim. Too late for shopping – but we managed to get a dish of the workers dinner with a beer (pic) at the camping enjoying the view of the pond in the sunset....



Day 8 6.August Start: **Germersheim** End: 579km - **Worms**

..... soon after going to sleep it started raining heavily non-stop until 3am. Somehow there was not too much water leaking in but we did not have a sound sleep either. After packing our soggy tent in the cold morning we left at 9am but were compelled to stop soon to find shelter in the coffee shop of a petrol station. Here we met a young couple from Appenzell whom we were to meet here and there again for the next few days. They drove quicker, but slept longer in the mornings.....

When the rain stopped we went to visit Speyer with its impressive Kaiserdom and a nice old town center (pic).

After a nice drive (but losing 8km because a missed turn) we reached Ludwigshafen (Sunday) which we tried to cross quickly. As often there were no useful bike indicators in town to show the way out and to move on. In the end a local biker took the pain to come along to send us the right way. Thanks.

Today: 87km



In fact we had intended to stop before Worms but did not find a place to sleep. So we reached Worms quite late and Peggy was very tired after 87km and there still appeared to be no camping. We had noticed a Yachtklub with a Yugo restaurant along the river and a very nice meadow within the compound. The manager allowed us to put the tent up there in compensation for a meal in the restaurant. We thanked him by having the TREAT of our trip with the Rhine flowing just below us like on a cruise ship. I had an enormous Balkan Platte (bad picture).



Day 9 7. August Start: **Worms** End: 643km - **Wiesbaden** (vis à vis **Mainz**) Today: 64km

Had a good sleep. No rain(!) and the humming of the passing ships was even having a dozing effect on us!

Woke up in nice weather for once. After visiting Worms (nothing special to see except the for the dome which was closed) we continued over sometimes very bad paths, rather suited for mountain bikes. On the way we had our lunch stop (pic) at beautiful Nierstein before we reached Mainz at 2pm.



The dome of Mainz is very interesting and there are some nice buildings here and there but as for most German towns in this area, the wars have destroyed much of the cultural heritage. After the visit we crossed the bridge to a camping on Wiesbaden side just overlooking the Rhine with the dome of Mainz opposite (pic from inside the tent with the Dome above the cars). Here we enjoyed a beautiful evening after nice at-tent picnic with red moon over the Rhine.....



Day 10 8. August Start: **Wiesbaden** End: 704km - **Oberwesel** (near Loreley) Today: 61km

... already around mid-night it rained again. We left at 9am and 1 km later we had to find shelter again under a bridge where we were joined by a postman who marvelled at Peggy's bike. 'That would be something for the newspaper' he said).

The bike track to Rudesheim was quite rough and wet and so we tried to follow an alternative bike track which we gave up after having been lead to a dead end (up a steep hill even). Rudesheim (pic) is a real tourist trap of the worst sort as all cruise ships stop at this small place. We just strolled through a bit and then escaped quickly by ferry to the left side again to start the highlight of the biking route of the Rhine, from Bingen to Koblenz.

Nice drive in good weather through valley with beautiful vineyards on steep slopes and castles and forts in every direction. At Oberwesel just before Loreley we stopped at a small camping and put the tent up a couple of meters from the river. Paid a short visit to the town renowned for its dozens of towers but then rain and cold wind caught up with us and so we went shopping for our in-tent picnic instead of enjoying the Biergarten of the camping along the river (sh..).



Day 11 9. August Start: **Oberwesel** End: 788km - **Bad Breisig** Today: 84km

Dry and good night, then sunrise over the Rhine.. whaw! The simple camping was very romantic (really) with ships passing all night at 10 to 20 meters distance and also goods trains passing every few minutes on both sides of river, squeezed in between steep slopes. Great drive to Koblenz passing several nice scenic spots and of course the well-known Loreley. Hords of bikers (mostly short excursion) and busy river traffic with goods, cruise and tour ships.

Got to the Deutsches Eck (pic with statue of Wilhelm 1st who united Germany into a national state) where the Mosel joins the Rhine and then walked through Koblenz. There was a beautiful camping right at the river junction inviting us in the sunshine but we thought that at 2pm this would be a bit early to stop. Only after 32km (with ups and downs) we got to the next camping in Bad Breisig which we reached under an already dribbling sky.

Just managed to put the tent up in a hurry before it poured down again. Walked to town under umbrella and went to eat on the terrace of a restaurant (a bit posh) beside the miserable Rhine in the cold rain. When we got back, everything was soggy but inside the tent was ok and after a warm shower we slept well.



Day 12 10. August Start: **Bad Breisig** End: 855km - **Cologne** Today: 67km

Soggy night but got up under rising sun. Very nice and easy ride first past the bridge of Remagen (left pic), well-known from a world-war 2 film, then past Schloss Drachenfels near Königswinter (right pic) to Bonn with nice parks along the Rhine. Easy in, easy out. Overcast catching up and 10km before Cologne it started to rain again with a very cold wind.



Standing in the shelter here and there (also under the big bridge - pic) as we slowly approached the city while I shivered, feeling cold to the bones.

We reached the dome (pic) at 4pm – what an experience to get there by bike! No doubt, there would be no camping tonight. We found a cheap room in an old hotel just behind the railway station, 600m from the dome. The weather was so awful that we did not even feel like going the short way back to the city and instead we went shopping close-by to have picnic in the room after a hot shower. We really enjoyed to slip into a warm bed that evening!



Day 13 11. August Start: **Cologne** End: 916km - **after Düsseldorf** Today: 61km

The old Rosser hotel is a bijou, surely worth the 43 Euro incl. breakfast. Not much comfort and a bit run down but a great atmosphere of past aristocracy with all sorts of old paintings and furniture. The small breakfast room with a very high ceiling was a poetry of a salon!

It had still been raining during breakfast but when we walked to town the rain stopped and we managed to stroll around in the dry. The great dome is really the only visible left-over from the past. The whole city around had been bombed to rubble in world-war 2.

At 11am we drove off again, a slalom between rain showers and we had to go to shelter (pic) a few times. As Peggy said, sometimes we fought with the rain for every 100m! Finally the rain stopped at 4pm so we decided to stay at a camping after crossing the suburbs of Düsseldorf. Under menacing clouds we put up the tent and had our regular picnic (lentils today, haha).



Day 14 12. August Start: **after Düsseldorf** End: 989km – **Grayinsel near Wesel** Today: 73km

Today was not a very enjoyable day. The weather was unpleasant but so was most of the itinerary through industrial suburbs of Krefeld and Duisburg which had obviously seen better times in the past. In Uerdingen we seem to have lost the bike way for a while (around BASF compound) but we got back to the Rhine about 20km later in Homberg. The way to Wesel crossing the river just before was ok but nothing special. In the drizzle we wanted to stay in Wesel in a Hotel but since a local bike driver who we had asked for a camping before on the bridge took pains to drive a few km's to the dike leading to a camping we drove on 5 km until we reached this Holiday City Grayinsel. The site was absolutely soggy (wäähh) and it was cold. 200m to toilets..... Well, we started to get used to that and had our in-tent picnic in good spirits! Suddenly we realised that this was our last stop in Germany and still we had not even visited one of the many tempting Biergartens.....too cold, too wet, no time, sorry!

Day 15 13. August Start: **Grayinsel** End: 1071km - **Groesbeek near Nijmegen** Today: 82km

After more rain in cold night, then moonlight, we woke up in bright morning sun! The camping is at the heart of a huge holiday park with all sorts of attractions. One can rent a 100sqm lot for 650.-Euro per year. Modern sanitary equipment with 24h piped music:-). We got back to the dike and drove through lovely sunny river landscapes (right pic) with lovely Dutch type house with straw roofs along the way. From now on we noticed a very rich bird population. We crossed to the left shore again in Rees.



Somewhere Peggy then made an abrupt stop and drove down from the dike right into a Biergarten (left pic)– the last opportunity!

After crossing the border (pic middle) we felt really welcome to be bikers. Biking had simply moved up in priority regarding the mobility network. Got to Nijmegen when it was time to look for a place to sleep. Wasted a lot of time for that as it was Sunday and so just had a quick look of the nice town (right pic) here and there. In the end we realised (the only visible hotel in town looked posh and was very expensive) that we have to drive about 8km sideward to Groesbeek to reach a camping in useful distance.



We were delighted when we got to a small farm camping (De Hog) on top of a hill with beautiful view over the plains. We had picnic on a bench and some lady even treated us with 2 pancakes fresh from the pan. Again: Today we had wanted to take it easy and in the end we were ready to settle for dinner at 8pm only when it was getting very cool already!

Day 16 14. August Start: **Groesbeek** End: 1142km - **Bruchem** near Zaltbommel Today: 71km

It had rained at night and when we got up we saw that the prospects for the day would not be good. We were offered a coffee when we paid and when we left the drizzling started already. Driving back and through Nijmegen again we managed 28km until we started to get really wet. As we just passed a fast food in the middle of nowhere we just stepped in and had a bite. There we stayed for 2h after which we drove back to the exposed dikes passing by a nice windmill (pic). We then managed again 30km when intermittent rain started again! So we looked for bed and B'fast: 2 were fully booked, a room in a Hotel: 95.- Euro, a price for which we were not desperate enough.



Someone then told us about a camping at the small village Bruchem (10km to go) and after many rain stops and asking for the way we got to Bruchem at 7.30pm when the non-stop downpour started. We waited for 30 minutes under a tree (houses in NL offer no shelter) and as it started to get late we decided to look for the camping under the rain. Soaked to the bones we reached the small camping at 8pm and asked desperately for a dry bed!! Fortunately they had a free trekking hut (pic) which we took with great gratitude (only 20 Euro)! No shopping, no restaurant, so we had to live on what was left of bread and sausage from Duisburg shopping. But we were happy all the same!



Day 17 15. August Start: **Bruchem** End: 1214km - **Dordrecht** Today: 72km

Since sky was very grey and clothes still humid we decided to use the hut and its cooking facilities. So we drove 4km to Zaltbommel and back to do shopping for brunch. We really enjoyed the fried steak and bacon with brown beans. At 12 we left under a spitting sky and slalomed again through the rain until we got to a bridge over to Groninchem. Local students had told us that we would be better off on the other side – so we crossed as I had not seen any map showing clearly how to get to Dordrecht following the river. On the other side we were told that there are no campings and no hotels till Pappendrecht so we continued the rain slalom through not very attractive urban and industrial areas. Long story - short conclusion: In Pappendrecht there was no suitable hotel and so we took ferry (pic) to Dordrecht on left side again and had to backtrack 6 km to a camping (1h before we could have crossed a bridge leading right to the camping).



As it was still raining we accepted the offer to stay the night in a caravan although it was a bit dirty and shabby (18.50 Euro) but we could have our dinner (2nd part of morning brunch) at a dry table and sleep comfortably.

Day 18 16. August Start: **Dordrecht** End: 1296km - **Coast at Hoek van Holland** Today: 82km

We started in sunshine!!! A fair and relatively warm day for once. Although we seemed to turn around circles at times, we had an exciting drive on the Maas Delta. We crossed rivers via 2 tunnels and one Ferry. First we crossed a canal via the Kilt Tunnel to s'Gravendeel then a small river arm by Ferry at Oud Beijerland. Here we got into the never ending harbour areas of Rotterdam where it was difficult to find the bike way to the Rotterdam side without going to Rotterdam. In the end we reached the Oude Maas (pic), the bike track leading into a building with a lift and an escalator going deep down into a dedicated bike tunnel (part of the Eurotunnel). After crossing, the same thing again, back up to the surface! Eventually we got to Maasluis where a local biker showed us the way to the dike after a little turn through the nice town center.



The last 8km on the dike to the sea in the evening sun were just great. We saw the estuary of our great river!

WE HAD DONE IT - 1292Km



We found a camping close to the beach and put the tent up with thunder accompanying our at-tent picnic we took in a festive mood of course!

Then Peggy said that what she enjoyed most of the trip so far, was riding her bike and enjoying the freedom under the open sky. So we decided to add a week for an easy tour to Amsterdam, while hoping for better weather!

Day 19 17. August Start: **Hoek van Holland** End: 1320km - **Hoek van Holland** Today: 24km

After a good night (with rain) we get up slowly (no rush today) and enjoy coffee with hot water from young neighbour. Then we drove along the coast to Monster and then back via the centre of Hoek van Holland. Both towns are nothing special but we loved driving through the dunes.

At 3pm, after a beer (3.50 Euro / 50cl) and an unexciting 'crocket' on a terrace we got back to the camping and enjoyed being lazy and enjoying dry weather. After at-tent picnic we went for a stroll on the beautiful beach at low tide (pic).



Day 20 18. August Start: **Hoek van Holland** End: 1379km - **Katwijk** Today: 59km

Had a very wet night with tent leaking after 3am and at 6.30 half the tent floor was wet. So we got up in a rush and left at 8.30 into a soggy and cold morning through the dunes for a while then turning off to Delft seeking shelter here and there. Delft (left pic) is a very nice small town with many canals and 2 cathedrals we did not enter as they were turned into museums. We just enjoyed strolling around for a while and had an excellent piece of fried fish at a stall. Strange enough, although fish is generally available, we did not come across many dedicated and attractive fish eating places in NL. Later we crossed Den Haag's center, tried a frickandel from a stall and went on through Scheveningen.

Then we were happy to get back to the beautiful dunes (pic middle) until we reached Katwijk where we stayed at a camping near the marvellous beach (pic right) with dozens of flying Kites and Kite surfers.

In the evening we enjoyed our at-tent picnic with food on the floor of entrance, Peggy sitting outside in sunset and me inside feeling too cold outside.



Day 21 19. August Start: **Katwijk** End: 1429km - **Ijmuiden** Today: 50km

Got up in nice weather and enjoyed driving the whole day slowly through the dunes which form a belt along the coast of 5 to 10 km. The dunes are strictly kept as a natural reserve with bush land alternating with grass and forest with a beautiful flora and great bird population. The dunes are only interrupted by a few coastal towns (e.g. Zandvoort - pic) but otherwise are only crossed by hiking and biking paths (usually separated) and represent a fantastic recreation space for the nearby densely populated areas. We reached the camping at the beach of Ijmuiden still in nice weather (we even had a beer on the way). But as soon as we got to the beach to enjoy the evening the sky started grumbling and we had to find shelter before getting back to the tent.

We had at-tent picnic the usual way accompanied by rain mixed with sunset and cold wind. Before going to sleep we were invited for coffee in a mobile home by a very kind local couple who spend most of their summers at the campsite.



Day 22 20. August Start: **Ijmuiden** End: 1476km - **Alkmaar** Today: 47km

We woke up at 5am under intensive thunderstorm with very heavy rain. Got back to sleep again after half hour. 7am same thing again, but this time it did not stop. At 8 we had to pack in a rush and at 9 we left the tent alone and took refuge with our hosts of last evening (left pic). I am sure we disturbed their Sunday morning with their grand-daughter but they kept us until the rain became sporadic after 11am until 4pm.



We left at 12pm only and managed to slalom through the showers first through a very interesting harbour area, crossing a series of gates and then driving a last time through the dunes to Egmond. Again we marvelled at the way the Dutch care about each square meter of land to look tidy and well used (pic middle). Having been held up in the morning for so long we decided to stay in Alkmaar for the night and stopped at the nearby camping when we saw that there was a trekking hut available. We had no fun thinking about staying in the tent that night!

Right away we went to the nice town center of Alkmaar (right pic) where we strolled around the canals in the cold evening sun. There was even a big fish eating event with dozens of stalls with all sorts of seafood and beer but there were so many people queuing everywhere and we felt too cold such that we left and had dinner at a Turkish place. What a shame!

Day 23 21. August Start: **Alkmaar** End: 1544km - **Amsterdam (Nieuwendam)** Today: 68km

After a good night sleep in the trekking hut (almost only night it did not rain!) we crossed Alkmaar again to head across flat land (pic left) to reach the IJsselmeer.



After following the dikes for some time we reached the nice little town Edam (pic middle) and then paid a visit to very touristic Volendam (pic above right) which we had visited with our old friend Cliff Gardner in 1974! We did not even have time there for a beer in the nice weather, because having lost time yesterday, we had to press on to Amsterdam, not knowing how long it would take us to reach a camping.

Got to Vliegenbos Camping in North Amsterdam at 4pm. Put up our good old leaking and mouldy tent for the last time and went shopping for dinner. Until everything was fixed and we were ready to eat it was 7pm and it already got cold and dark grey and unfriendly so we did not feel like going out.

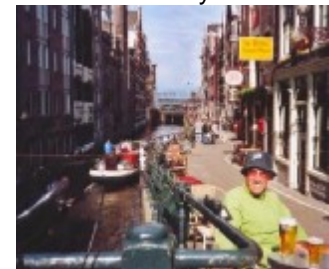
Sumptuous at-tent picnic for our compensation and consolation!



Day 24 22. August Start: **Amsterdam** End: 1544km - **Amsterdam**

Today: 0km

The camping was very densely packed with small tents of young people (I seemed to be oldest by far) who mostly came by train or plane to visit Amsterdam. At night it had rained for solid 3h and the soil was muddy. Never mind we left at 9.30 am on foot!!!! It took us half hour only to the ferry doing the crossing to central station free of charge for pedestrians and bikers.



We enjoyed strolling around the whole day without any specific plans although it rained here and there until after lunch time. We then had a simple Chinese meal in a old style roast duck and BBQ-ed pork place reminding us of Hongkong in the 70-ies. Before we went back we had a last chance (expensive) beer along a Gracht with a glimpse of sunshine. Last at-tent picnic in tent's windy entrance and Peggy said 'never mind, instead of draught beer we had a lot of draught wind'.

Day 25 23.August Start: **Amsterdam** End: 1568km - **Home (Ipsach)**

Today: 24km

After a very noisy (young people) and cold night we left at 9am after disposal of our leaking and mouldy tent in a waste bin. It was quite an interesting drive through the suburbs until we got to model bike paths again leading us right into the airport terminal building.

But once we got inside the airport the last adventure started.

We had booked an EasyJet flight with 2 bicycles and had turned up at Schiphol 'as we were' at 12.30. Check-in start time was 15.10 so we waited so long and then went to the counter when time was up. Immediately we were told that the bikes must be packed in boxes and that boxes may be available 'round the corner'. So we went to look for boxes and there were 2 huge unfolded boxes to be had for 17 Euro each (Peggy's bike had cost 268 Yuan – 28 Euro). So Peggy decided that we should put the 2 bikes in 1 box! I did not believe my ears!

After 1 hour we had managed somehow (they had not enough sticky paper and no tools to take off the pedals) and we were sweating and at the end of our nerves when we got back to the check-in where the clerk made big eyes at the heavy bulged box with a few strings around and 2 bikes inside. After the supervisor of the supervisor had come to inspect they took pity on us and let the box go. The super-supervisor herself helped pushing the box to the 'odd size baggage' inlet:-)

Believe me, after a relaxing flight I was still gaga when we got to Basle and I was super-happy that Padi had come to help us with the transfer from airport to the train home and then accompanied us home like closing a bracket he had opened at the start . **Of course we biked the last 2.5 km from Biel to Ipsach to get a last enjoyment of the trip!!!!**



THE END